

SAVA PRESS

Credits to the original edition
"Vojska" News and Publishing Centre

Publisher Representatives
Stanoje Jovanović, Colonel
Prof. Dr. Miloje Pršić, Colonel

Editor-in-Chief:
Slavoljub Ranđelović, Colonel

Scientific Editor:
Prof. Dr. Miloje Pršić, Colonel

Reviewers:
Academician Vlado Strugar
Prof. Dr. Ljubodrag Dimić

Photo selection from the archive of the Military Museum:
Pavle Ljumović, Senior Curator

Art and Technical Editor, Digital Processing:
Aleksandar Švedić

Language Editor:
Mila Barjaktarević

Text Input, Indexing, Proofreading and Corrections:
Slađana Bojković

Printed by:
Military Printing House, Belgrade

Special Editions — Book 57
October 2001

IVAN MATOVIĆ

COMMANDER WITH A HALO OF A MARTYR

The Story of General Arso R. Jovanović, Chief of the Supreme Headquarters of the Yugoslav National Liberation Army and His Tragic Fate



Арсо Р. Јовановић

Publisher's Note

The following book, *Commander with a Halo of a Martyr,* was translated into English by Sava Press from the original *Vojskovođa s oreolom mučenika,* published by the "Vojska" News and Publishing Centre, Belgrade 2001.

ISBN: 978-1-997536-08-6

SAVA PRESS
TORONTO 2025

CONTENTS

FOREWORD 13

Part One

FROM WAR TO WAR 21
- *Homeland* 21
- *Roots* 23
- *Education* 25
- *Service* 27
- *General Staff Officer* 37
- *Politics* 42
- *The April War* 46

Part Two

COMMANDER OF THE INSURGENT ARMY 51
- *Occupation* 51
- *The Concept of a People's Army* 55
- *The Uprising* 58
- *The July Offensive Operation* 60
- *Commander of the Insurgent Troops* 66
- *Exhaustion* 76
- *Member of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia* 79
- *Chief of the General Staff* 86
- *In Užice (October 19-25, 1941)* 91

Part Three

THE EPIC OF THE SANDŽAK 101
- *The Battle of Pljevlja (December 1, 1941)* 101
- *Controversial Assessments of the Battle* 120
- *The Commander's Thorough Analysis* 127

Part Four

CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF OF THE NATIONAL LIBERATION ARMY OF YUGOSLAVIA 133
- *Drenova (December 12, 1941)* 133
- *Rudo (December 17-25, 1941)* 136

Čevljanovići (January 1-14, 1942) 145
Foča (January 25-May 10, 1942) 153
Piva (May 10-June 16, 1942) 194

Part Five
THE OFFENSIVE OF THE PROLETARIANS TO THE WEST 203
Over the Balkan Ridge to Cincar (June 24-July 26, 1942) 203
Livno Falls (August 4-7, 1942) 217
Assaults on Kupres (August 11-14, 1942) 224
Glamoč (August 17-September 14, 1942) 228
The Liberation of Bihać (November 1-5, 1942) 245
On Oštrelj (November 5-17, 1942) 248

Part Six
FIRST MISSION IN SLOVENIA *(November 17, 1942-July 5, 1943)* 259

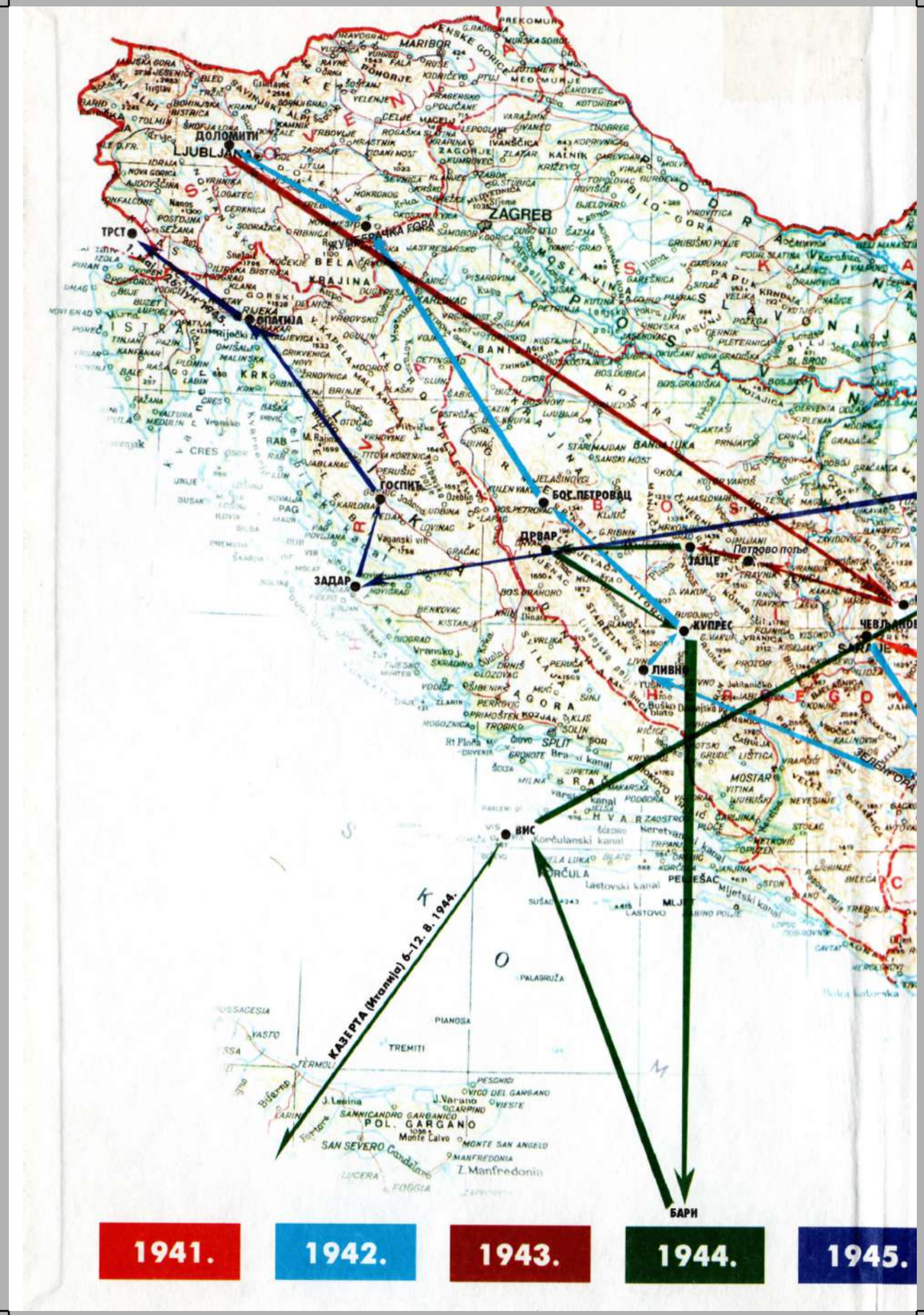
Part Seven
THE GENERAL AND THE DEPUTY 319
Petrovo polje (August 4-25, 1943) 319
Jajce (August 25, 1943-January 7, 1944) 331
Potoci (January 7-27, 1944) 363

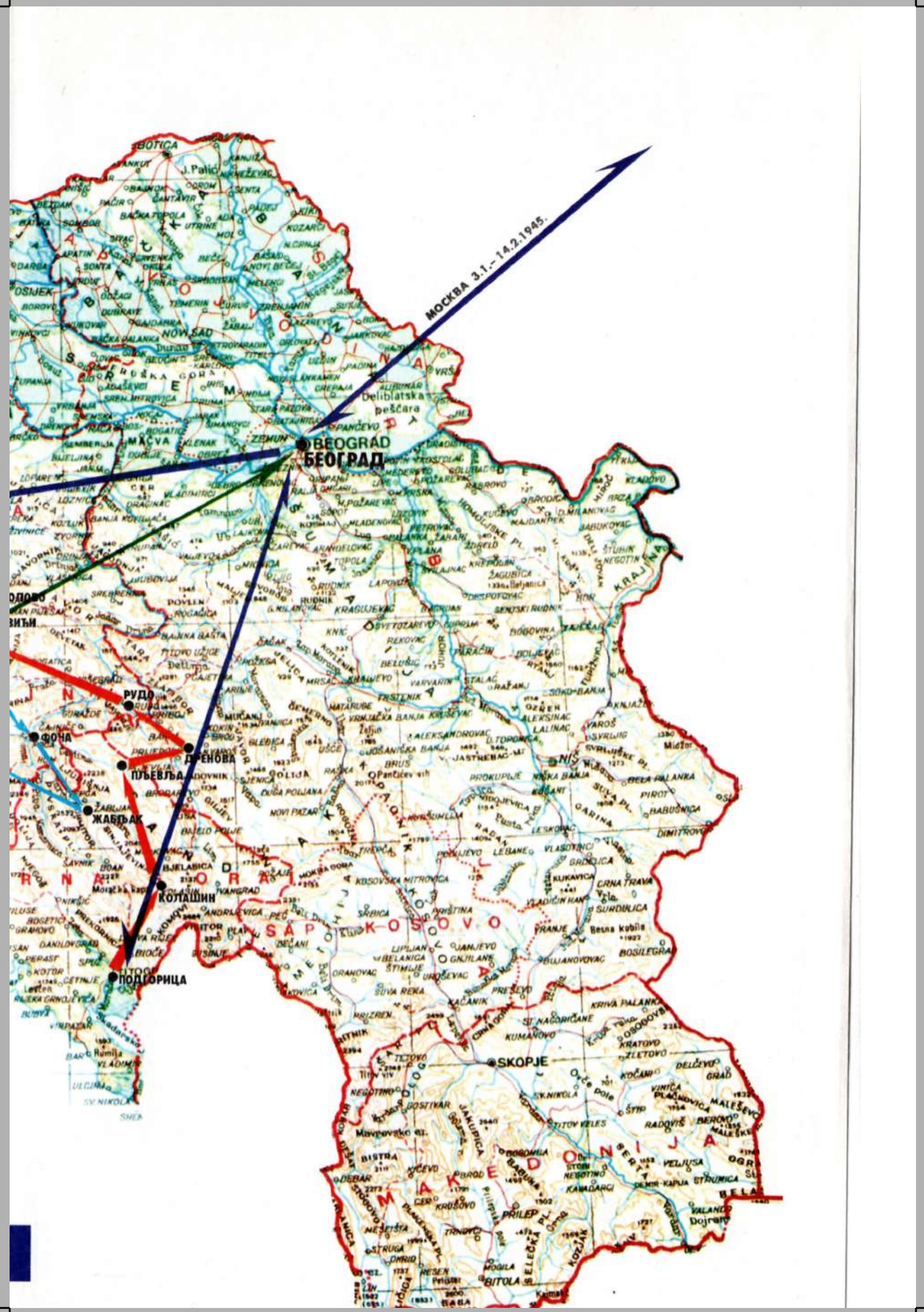
Part Eight
SACRIFICE FOR THE MARSHAL 373
Drvar (January 28-May 25, 1944) 373
The Landing (May 25, 1944) 428
Potoci-Bari, via Kupreško polje (May 25-June 6, 1944) 434

Part Nine
PARTNER OF THE ALLIED COMMAND 445
Vis (June 7-October 18, 1944) 445
The Arrival of Dr. Šubašić (June 14-18) 451
Directive for the Advance into Serbia 455
Caserta (August 6-12) 473
The Battle for the Wounded under Durmitor 491
Breakthrough to the Strategic Ridge 500
Ispit-Šumadija Division (September 27-October 6, 1944) 523

Part Ten
FROM LIBERATED BELGRADE 543
Intensification of the Fronts 543
Formation of Armies 559
Conversations with Stalin (January 7-February 14, 1945) 567
Discussions with Field Marshal Alexander (February 21-28, 1945) 601
Agreements of Army Commanders in the General Staff 613
Discussion with General Ira Eaker (March 11-12, 1945) 617
The Eve of the Strategic Offensive (March 15-April 12, 1945) 618
Historically, April 12, 1945 629
To Trieste and Freedom (April 12-May 9, 1945) 632

Part Eleven
THE YEARS OF DECEPTIVE PEACE 649
Fifty Days of "War After War" (May 9-June 28) 649
Return to the Book (June 26, 1945-March 15, 1946) 674
"Voroshilovist" (March 15, 1946-May 31, 1948) 690
Facing Death (June 1-August 12, 1948) 704
BASIC BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION 750
WRITTEN LEGACY 752
ABBREVIATIONS 753
SOURCES AND LITERATURE 755
ABOUT THE AUTHOR 762


ДОЛОМИТИ
LJUBLJANA
ТРСТ
ZAGREB
СПЛИТ
РИЈЕКА
ГОСПИЋ
БОС. ПЕТРОВАЦ
ПРВАР
ЗАДАР
ЈАЈЦЕ
КУПРЕС
ЛИВНО
ВИС
БАРИ
КАЗЕРТА (Мраморје) 6–12. 8. 1944.
1941.
1942.
1943.
1944.
1945.


МОСКВА 3.1.–14.2.1945.
BEOGRAD
БЕОГРАД
РУДО
ФОЧА
ДЕРВЕНТА
ПЉЕВЉА
ЖАБЉАК
КОЛАШИН
ПОДГОРИЦА
SKOPJE

To my grandsons
Stefan and Luka

FOREWORD

In the spring of 1950, as a student at the Podgorica secondary school, I wrote an essay on a personal role model from the National Liberation War (NOB). I chose a fellow native from my hometown, the renowned General Arso Jovanović. I gave three reasons for my choice: first — the only son of a blinded veteran from the Battle of Mojkovac, born into rural poverty, who rose to become "Tito's famous general." That alone stirred dreams and awakened hope in a young peasant boy setting out on life's adventure. Second — I personally owed him my life. Third — I saw a tear in the eye of this warlord, crowned with glory and immortalized in verse, for fallen comrades from Piperi. Others, as expected, mostly wrote about Tito, with a few choosing Sava Kovačević, Budo Tomović or Lola, "the leader of the communist youth." I, however, "broke from the system" with "my General." I presented my choice in a way that evidently made an impression on the noble man and unforgettable teacher, Blažo Popović. What I share here is just a brief and somewhat prosaic summary.

The idea of a peasant boy, through hard work and courage, overcoming obstacles and becoming a hero of song and legend — needs no explanation.

In August 1941, during a horrific bombing of the barren Radovče plateau, the seat of the Montenegrin Main Staff, a tall man caught up with me mid-run, dodging bombs from a "Savoya" plane. He grabbed me by the neck and threw me against a large isolated stone, then shielded me with his body. After the explosion, he brushed off the dirt and pebbles, then silently rushed toward the Staff again. My uncle told me the name of the lanky and overly serious man in an unmarked officer's uniform. It pleased my youthful pride to learn that he was "Captain Arso Radivojev, commander of all Montenegrin forces." I never forgot those words.

In mid-March 1945, visibly shaken by the horrific sight of a completely destroyed Podgorica — the city of his student youth — and after visiting the homes of two fallen generals from Piperi, Ivan Milutinović and Vlado Ćetković, he stopped by our school at his own request. It was the same school where he had once "conquered the city with an ABC book." He found us "around the cauldron," and although persistently urged by the teacher and local councillor, he shared our meagre meal — a portion of stew and a piece of coarse cornbread — "too much to die on, too little to live on." He looked at us, a flock of rain-soaked crows, mostly in black, mourning parents, brothers — often both — and seeing in us the war-torn fate of the Piperi people, the emotion overcame him. Even in his new general's uniform and arriving in Blažo Jovanović's car, a tear slipped from his eye — and he didn't hide it.

Moved by this, I titled my essay "A Tear in the General's Eye," mentioning his name in a burst of local patriotic pride, forgetting — in my political ignorance and youthful naivety — the caution necessary at the time. It had been officially declared to the people of Piperi, gathered at Brojalovica on the Feast of the Transfiguration (August 19) in 1948, that our most celebrated clansman, General Arso, had "fallen at the border with Romania while attempting to flee the country — as nothing more than a horse thief." From that moment, mourning him was forbidden, and the all-powerful State Security Administration (UDBA) enforced that over the coming days, months and decades. Yet, as a faithful son of my tribe, I knew not a single soul who believed the story of his attempted escape. I was deeply

offended — even as a boy — by the association of "my General" with a horse thief. It was then — and for that reason — that I made a promise to myself, which I still hold to today: to someday discover the truth and publicly tell the full story of that hero of my childhood. That essay was the first, certainly clumsy and naive, attempt to do so — a reflection of the confusion felt by a young peasant student, caught between the demands of truth and the expectations of a patriarchal moral code.

Praised by liberal-minded professors, my essay was read aloud in class, then in the faculty lounge, and eventually at a meeting of the school's top literary circle. How the all-knowing UDBA found out — thanks to its "moles" — I still don't know. In any case, everyone played their part: above all, I was protected from harsher punishment by my neighbour Luka Marković, head of the local UDBA office, who defended me on the grounds of youth and ignorance — although one of his associates did give me two hard slaps "for the lesson." The school principal gave both me and my homeroom teacher a stern talking-to, though our fellow clansman Pavić Đukić was completely blameless. The Communist Party cell postponed my membership, and Professor Popović, sharply reprimanded for his (political) lack of vigilance, advised me to "go through life with my eyes open." That advice still rings in my ears today — as both recognition and warning, as counsel and as a vow worthy of a descendant of the great Marko Miljanov.

Punishment for my continued engagement with this topic came three decades later, after it was discovered — the very next day — that I had spoken again about General Arso with the exiled Aleksandar Ranković. A formal order was issued to reassign me — then the editor of Narodna armija and a lieutenant on the verge of promotion to major — to the garrison in Berovo, to serve as "commissar" of a border unit on the Bulgarian frontier. I admit, I'd never even heard of that town and barely found it on a detailed map, only then realizing the gravity of my "crime and punishment." I was spared that "disciplinary measure" thanks to General Mirko Jovanović, a highly influential veteran of the 1st Proletarian Brigade, who had known the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters from Rudo, across Bosnia and Srem, to the Karavanks. He held a personal view of him that differed greatly from the official one. A former student in Kragujevac, he had managed to preserve "a bit of soul" and the instinct to protect the weak — particularly in clashes with military counterintelligence (KOS). With the help of another powerful General, Ivica Kukoč, he arranged for me to stay in Belgrade. Caught off guard by the decision of two general-colonels, those who fancied themselves the masters of the fates of both the living and the dead did what they could — they confiscated all the material I had collected on Arso and cut short my journalistic ascent. My refuge — thanks to the steadfast intellectual Colonel Slobodan Brajović — became the military publishing sector. It was there I learned that Marshal Tito had, in the mid-sixties, ordered General Milinko Đurović that Arso Jovanović's name — along with those of Milovan Đilas and Petko Miletić — must not be mentioned in any publications of the Military Publishing Institute, whose political integrity he personally guaranteed with his signature.

Nevertheless, after a year or two of lying low, I cautiously resumed discussions about Arso — but only with people I trusted. Even that could not remain unnoticed. My new superior at the institution, the astute General Nikola "Nikica" Pejinović, told me privately

that "they know everything" (about what I was doing), and advised me to continue — "but smartly." I did continue, only under what appeared to be slightly more favourable circumstances. Even the late 1980s — when the phrase "after Tito, Tito" was still in force — were not conducive to this or similar topics, which had been anathematized for decades. Two examples speak to that: a formal request, which went all the way to "the very top — the Central Committee (CC) of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia," seeking access to Arso's file, was denied. The "top of Serbia," when approached with a similar request through the mediation of a respected academic, responded that "the time is not right for stirring the waters."

Feeling rather discouraged, it wasn't until the early 1990s (just before and after retirement) that I undertook a more intensive effort to "dig" through the memories of Arso's comrades — whose numbers were rapidly shrinking — and especially through Allied and enemy archives. I was encouraged and guided by respected historians, among whom I remember with the greatest respect the names of Vlado Strugar, Branko Petranović, Zdravko Antonić and Petar Kačavenda. Within my modest means, I travelled to various sources, but I more often relied on the generosity and resourcefulness of others — especially colleagues — who frequently, sometimes at my request and sometimes on their own initiative, secured key documents. I often paid dearly for what I considered crucial.

Only from Victory Day (May 9) in 1995 onward did I begin presenting findings on this subject at academic conferences organized by the Montenegrin and Serbian Academies of Sciences and Arts, the Military History Institute and the Institute for Contemporary History. These institutions published my contributions in collections of papers and in special reprints. In addition, at the beginning of 1999, I published a biographical sketch of General Arso R. Jovanović in the prestigious journal Military Historical Herald. These were the first more extensive texts about that military leader. The complete result of years of research is finally before the reader — with a list of archival sources and literature I relied upon. This is evidenced by over 1,000 footnotes. Beyond this, a true wealth of researched material remains — enough, I believe, for at least two more interesting books. One of them could certainly be about the "former officers" — active members of the Yugoslav Army — who, like General Staff Captain 1st Class Arso R. Jovanović, joined the armed uprising in 1941 and, within the ranks of the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia, held high command and staff positions and rose to the rank of wartime generals. From Montenegro alone, there were fifteen such men. At the same time, I must regret two facts: first, that the release of this book to the public was unacceptably delayed, mostly due to influences I could not significantly affect; second, that I was unable — with the support of institutions and individuals — to fulfil the firm personal promise I made to myself: to reveal, by the 50th anniversary of his liquidation, the location of the grave holding the remains of that military leader and the names of his killers. In the meantime, life cured me of the illusion that a monument to him might one day rise in the heart of his hometown of Podgorica. Still, I take heart in the knowledge that the numerous facts I have presented in this book — primarily in a publicist's manner — will be of use to a new generation: a younger, certainly more gifted and successful historian, who will, among the thirty or so possibilities presented, discover and professionally formulate the true version of the final chapter in the life of General Arso

Jovanović — a man of firm character and dignity, an exceptional intellectual and a devotee of the most esteemed profession in our society. He believed that it was a matter of military honour and personal morality to speak the full truth, at the right place, about the things he knew best — without fear of the dangerous vanity of his superiors. It was, indeed, a military act, but in difficult and confused times, a politically naive one — and one that, following the logic of "a cursed time for a clean conscience," inevitably ended in tragedy.

Knowing that the reader has every right to expect me, after such long research, to declare what I believe about Arso's death — I will not disappoint: I firmly believe that his liquidation was ordered (by word, not written directive) by the leader of the Party and Supreme Commander Josip Broz Tito. Everything else was the product of a (clumsily executed, primitive and ominous) script that involved numerous errors — which, had it not been for the atmosphere of ideological conformity, the moral and spiritual collapse of the military and political leadership, the general hopelessness, and the overwhelming propaganda that dulled the legal profession — would not have passed unchallenged by the public, even then.

Arso Jovanović was an independent and strong personality, richly gifted, unprepared to renounce truth and honour before an autocrat, better educated than anyone else in his circle, a witness to much, a man of undisputed reputation and influence within the officer corps. Yet, at the same time, he was politically naive, unfamiliar with the full depth of the Tito-Stalin ideological conflict, and exposed to hostility from powerful wartime debtors in the first post-war years — above all Edvard Kardelj and "our Spaniards" (29 of whom were generals of the Yugoslav Army holding highly influential positions). He was also left without the firm backing of the "Montenegrin General Group," which Tito had long feared like fire. He did not remain silent before his only superior when he disagreed on vital questions of state and military policy. He could not help but point out the unfavourable balance of power on the eve of the looming confrontation, nor the wisdom small nations must employ in their military and diplomatic relations with great powers — especially with wartime allies. He warned of the price to be paid for a confrontation with the stronger side, and spoke clearly and decisively about the kind of national defence policy needed as the Cold War intensified. In all of this, Arso spoke openly and directly. That does not mean he was right about everything. At times, he stubbornly clung to views and conclusions that would not withstand the test of time. But from that moment on, the possibility of aligning perspectives was gone. As an opponent of any form of totalitarianism — including Tito's — General Arso had neither the need nor the desire to remain silent, to adapt, to retreat or to submit. He spoke with the voice of a soldier and patriot — without hatred or extremism. However, Marshal Tito had no tolerance for differing opinions. The situation was too serious — a form of wartime crisis — and ultimately a matter of national destiny. In resolving it, once Arso refused to fall in line and "march in step," it was decided, apparently without Tito's direct intervention — Arso had to go.

A man who until then had commanded respect — by personal authority and professional position — was suddenly transferred among those who, by literal order, were to be hated and despised. Deceitfully, hastily, and under heavy suspicion, General Arso Jovanović was executed — without trial or judgement. He was denied even the right to have his name spoken aloud, let alone to appear in encyclopedias or academic studies, in chronicles

and lexicons of the NOB, or in textbooks of history — where, respected by Wehrmacht generals and as an equal to Allied generals and marshals from both East and West, he rightly belonged in a prominent place. Between Tito and Arso, one of them had to leave the military leadership. It was known in advance it would be the one less skilled in politics, less informed about behind-the-scenes dealings, less aware of the true state of affairs — the one who had not been granted fame for wartime victories and whose truth-telling was unforgiven. From the meeting with the Party leader and Supreme Commander at the Brdo Castle near Kranj, sometime in early August 1948, Arso stepped onto a path of no return. But in doing so, he entered legend. He was condemned to glory and remembrance — forever bearing the halo of a martyred war commander, a legacy that in this land has always been remembered and honoured. Carrying such charisma, he will haunt — in dreams and in waking life — those who exiled (or eliminated) him, and who thereby became petty tyrants themselves. His name marked the beginning of a terrifying, too-long list of those liquidated and publicly shamed without proven guilt — victims who were " fuel for the pyre on which personal power and a single ideology were forged and reinforced." Arso Jovanović was removed from the stage of life in his 42nd year — at the height of his intellectual and physical strength, on the very eve of events in which he was most needed by the people and their army. For his proven merits, he was decorated with the most prestigious national honours and, as the only Allied military commander, awarded the highest-class Orders of Kutuzov and Suvorov. Upon his final rest — by order of Generalissimo Stalin — he was honoured with a salute by five million soldiers of the Soviet Army, from Sakhalin to Berlin. This was a privilege granted only to the most celebrated heroes of the victory over the forces of darkness and oppression — true representatives of their people.

To erase General Arso Jovanović from the record of history, those in power ordered the revision of documents concerning his role in the NOB, the marginalization of his wartime achievements and the banning of any mention of his name. Meanwhile, his shadow — whether from the edge of a remote field, a forest thicket, the bottom of a river, or a sealed-off tunnel, without a marked grave — haunted those who held power for decades, building themselves palaces and marble sarcophagi, and yet, because of it all, earned the contempt and oblivion of the people. Arso, even if he could, would not have traded his fate "neither in this world nor the next" for theirs.

That knowledge encouraged me to persevere in my research — despite great sacrifices — with generous support from respected historians, diplomats, journalists and writers, who brought me documents from archives and books from publishers across the world, for which I am deeply grateful. I also thank the many historians who — especially at scholarly gatherings on the Second World War, in which General Arso Jovanović was undeniably one of the most prominent military leaders of the anti-fascist cause — encouraged me to continue, despite open opposition from powerful adherents of dogma and delusion. The names of those military historians whose concrete help, particularly at the beginning of this work, was most valuable will be readily apparent to the reader from the citations in the book.

Of course, there were also those who opposed both the subject and its central figure — from the banning of Arso's name and rank in the titles of conference presentations, to the refusal of key witnesses and close wartime comrades to cooperate, to permanent professional

and personal estrangement from those who firmly believed that Arso R. Jovanović, because of "betraying the homeland," deserved no mention at all, or that any text about him should be no longer than a standard newspaper article — or, at best, a short contribution in a scholarly journal.

Unlike such individuals — who were, unfortunately, more numerous than one might think — others embraced both the topic and me as a researcher warmly, as comrades, with dignity and a sense of moral duty. These included Aleksandar Ranković, Milovan Đilas, Velimir Terzić and even Koča Popović — though at a time when all of them had already been discarded by the very man who removed Arso: Josip Broz. In seeking to ease the weight of their own responsibilities, and perhaps sensing that the end of their lives was near, they paid human tribute to their fallen comrade. I believe the reader will easily perceive this — and for that reason, I bow with reverence to their memory. I am, of course, grateful to all those who — in any creative capacity — helped shape the manuscript, as well as to friends who showed understanding and patience for my long accounts of new things I had heard or read about the central figure of this book — General Arso Jovanović. There was always something new. I owe special thanks to the Organizing Committee for the publication of this book about Arso R. Jovanović, especially its capable chair, Mr. Novak Bjelić, whose support and assistance were invaluable.

Originally, I had chosen the title Commander from the Shadows: A Chronicle of Arso R. Jovanović *— because, for six decades, he was deliberately, and unjustly, kept in the shadows. This was due to the nature of his role as chief of staff during the war, but more so due to intentional efforts to appropriate his merits — efforts that began in his lifetime and continued after his death. He was persistently denied any opportunity to step out of that shadow, even though primary sources clearly identify him among the most prominent commanders of the liberation wars of the 20th century in the Serbian lands. However, the reviewers and publisher persuaded me that the term "from the shadows" was not suitable as a descriptor for a military figure who had always stood on the brightly lit stage of war — on the highest military observation post.*

I dedicated the book to my grandsons, first-grade students Stefan and Luka, adding that I did so "with the sincere hope that they never live through a time and circumstances similar to those in which the central figure of this book — written for remembrance and as a lesson — was sacrificed without trial and, in the 'presence of power,' driven out of life." Some of those to whom I showed the dedication claimed it was unusual, and said its meaning was self-evident. I yielded to their advice — but I stand by the sentiment, firmly convinced that such a damned time, marked by ruthless purges and executions of dissenters, with Goli Otok as the paradigm of the greatest crime of the 20th century, has not existed in the recent history of this region.

I also accepted some comments and suggestions from the reviewers — Academician Vlado Strugar and Professor Dr. Ljubodrag Dimić, as well as the scientific editor, Colonel Professor Dr. Miloje Pršić, and from those readers of the manuscript whose opinions I especially valued. This was particularly the case when it came to trimming digressions, mitigating bias in portraying the central figure, and refining the interpretation of certain events. However, I did not agree to remove any fact or reference taken from key documents or testi-

monies. If the reader considers that a flaw of the book — let it rest solely on my conscience.

I am aware that the scope of the manuscript may overwhelm the reader, but the reader should also understand that any testimony about the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters/ General Staff of an army which, by the end of the war, numbered several hundred thousand fighters, must also tell the story of the leadership of those institutions. These were the places where, over four years of war, the events of the turbulent Yugoslav battlefield and the broader global frontlines inevitably intersected — a space in which this military commander, Arso, played a notably active role.

The breadth of this narrative and the wealth of data drawn from archival sources, published works and eyewitness testimonies compelled me to make the effort to preserve and clearly mark the red thread running from the first to the last page — the one that shows the central figure walking upright the entire time, as a commander. In the name of that effort, or because of it, I want to believe the reader will notice several key points, at least as I see them: that Arso Jovanović, acting in a time of upheaval, was not always, and certainly not in all things, right — and that those around him, to varying degrees, erred, causing misunderstandings, oversights and, inevitably, human and material losses. That he himself — over a wartime path exceeding 30,000 km — contributed significantly to the unearned myth around Josip Broz and the creation of his "genius" aura as a military leader. That some of the individuals mentioned in the manuscript as interlocutors or witnesses may have had personal motives to speak uncritically of Arso Jovanović — possibly to deflect attention from their own mistakes and raise themselves in the eyes of others — though I did not grant myself the right to comment on this. That individuals and events depicted in memoirs — especially those written decades later, and often cited here — are shaped by personal, increasingly fallible memory, frequently lacking any basis in primary sources and influenced by hindsight. That experts in medicine, law, ballistics, criminology and other fields could easily — if those who claim a monopoly on the truth would reveal Arso Jovanović's grave and permit the exhumation of his remains — establish the facts of how his life ended...

With respect and trust, I entrust this book — about a deep injustice from the time of Arso R. Jovanović — to the attention and judgement of readers, especially younger ones, with the sincere hope that the knowledge it contains will become an inseparable part of our history and collective memory, where it has long belonged. In doing so, even if belatedly, a great injustice committed against one of the deserving soldiers and anti-fascists of the Second World War might be corrected. I am fully aware that from this moment on, the book will stand — before the judgement of an impartial public — on its own, defending or challenging its central figure through its content and message alone. It must do so with the strength of truth as the ultimate standard of practice, alongside a degree of my own admitted partiality — which, quite simply, should be taken as a given.

Belgrade, February 6, 2001. *The Author*

Part One

FROM WAR TO WAR

• Son of a warrior blinded in the Battle of Mojkovac
• Top student of the Podgorica Gymnasium, en route to Military Academy
• His mother gave him a blessing that his steps be golden, and his uncle left him with a legacy not to falter when hostile doors strike at his heels
• High ranking in all military schools
• Successful start in the legendary Takovo Regiment
• Recipient of the Medal for Devoted Service and the Order of the Yugoslav Crown
• Author of the publication "Tactics of the Infantry Battalion"
• War interrupted his General Staff training
• In front of the Student Battalion, against the Germans and Ustaše near Travnik
• Return to his homeland — with family, rifle and "War Service"
• Agreement with those who refused to be bound in chains

Homeland

The village of Zavala in the Piperi region, located about ten kilometres north of Podgorica, is home to a branch of the Jovanović brotherhood of which Arso is a direct descendant. The village is first mentioned in an Ottoman *defter* from 1485, which also records the nearby village of Blizna, his mother Zorka's birthplace, originally from the Popović family. Descendants of both families, deeply devoted to tradition, could proudly and by heart recite the names of nineteen "generations" of their direct male ancestors — going back at least five centuries.[1]

According to ethnological sources, the population of the Piperi tribe is primarily descended from ancestors formed through a mix of local settlers and migrants from Old Ras, Zeta and the Skadar basin. These groups, fleeing the advancing Turks in the years and decades after the Battle of Kosovo (1389), settled in this rugged land of harsh beauty and resilience, between the Morača and Zeta rivers. A 1906 census recorded that the tribe had 984 households with a population of 5,900. Of these, three quarters were descended from those early migrants who brought with them toughness and perseverance, and found industriousness and virtue in the local people. From this blend emerged wise and hardworking farmers, reliable neighbours to the mountain tribes of Kuči, Bjelopavlići and Rovčani, and warriors and heroes celebrated in epic poems published in Njegoš' *Serbian Mirror*, in Venetian records and monastic chron-

[1] Đorđe P. Popović, *Piperi in Tradition and History,* Belgrade 1994.

icles, in King Nikola's famous *kola*, and in the writings of ethnographers.[2]

Prisoners of this harsh land and captives of a deep collective memory, they endured extreme material hardship with dignity, guarded their homes and tribal borders with vigilance, and for centuries lived in a constant state of war against all forms of violence. They drank the bitter cup, sharpened their bayonets and never parted from a loaded rifle — even in bed. They buried their young men and faced every hardship head-on, never considering themselves weak or authorizing anyone to rule over their lives or fate. They were of the kind who would not be bound in chains, passing down through generations the legacy of preserving freedom and the honour of the brotherhood and the tribe.

In the straw-covered lean-tos, even during Arso's coming of age, stories of battlefields from the liberation wars were intensely alive. The Piperi went to war voluntarily and en masse — almost never fewer than two from under one roof — whether advancing or retreating, falling or ending up wounded. Among the 5,000 Montenegrins who died over just three days before Saint Sava's Day in 1913, during the assaults to capture Skadar, and among the 1,200 who fell at Bregalnica, there were dozens of Piperi. In the battle fought on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day 1916 at Mojkovac, under the command of Janko Vukotić, Arso's father Radivoje was permanently blinded by an explosion during a charge on Austro-Hungarian lines at Bojna Njiva. It was by the family hearth, beside this man, that the boy spent time whose impressions sink deepest. He never forgot the names and feats of numerous heroes — his father's closest neighbours and contemporaries: Luka Filipov, who in 1876 captured Osman Pasha at Vučji Do; the freedom fighter and hero Serdar Jole Piletić; Lenin's comrade Dr. Vukašin Marković; and other powerful figures whose life paths marked the era and shaped the moral and working character of the Piperi generation born at the start of the 20th century — a generation in which Arso held the most distinguished place.

From that rocky land, dozens of young men followed the call of learning and went out into the world. Some of them, through talent and clarity of mind, diligence and vitality, earned global recognition and fame in science, culture, military and politics. Yet even as academicians, ministers or generals, they returned to their homeland, remaining loyal to its history and honouring the family hearth and the generations of ancestors — just as they had been in their own time.[3] Always and everywhere ready to give their lives for their honour — and to never give up their honour for anything in the world. The Jovanović family was no exception among the hundred or so Piperi brotherhoods in this regard.

[2] The Piperi were written about and researched by Konstantin Jireček, Pavle Rovinski, Jovan Cvijić and, especially, Jovan Erdeljanović.

[3] Among the famous Piperi of the 20th century are: academics Mihailo Stevanović and Milan Milutinović; Prof. Dr. Mirko Marković; Duke Mijajlo Nišin Vučinić and his son, division commander Milutin and brigadier Mašan Božović; politicians Ivan Milutinović, Božo Ljumović and Blažo Jovanović; generals of the NOVJ Arso Jovanović, Radovan Vukanović, Vlado Ćetković, Božo Božović and Božo Lazarević.

On the monument at Trijepče, unveiled in 1967, the names of 246 Piperi who died in the NOB are inscribed, of which 111 were under 25 years of age.

These few remarks about the Piperi tribe and the Jovanović brotherhood within it — today, in the age of computers, when for many young people the homeland is simply wherever life is comfortable and pleasant — may sound like something from another time. Yet without understanding them, even as briefly and selectively as presented here, one cannot fully grasp the formation of the generation to which Arso belonged, nor understand the patriotism that carried them, and especially, one cannot follow the course and outcome of the historical events in Montenegro and Yugoslavia from 1941 to 1945, in which this Montenegrin tribe held a very prominent place and played a visible role.

Roots

Arso was born on March 24, 1907, into the family of Zorka and Radivoje Lakićev. He was the only son among his sisters Draga, Raka and Miluša. Until the Balkan Wars, by the standards of Montenegrin village life at the time, the family was of modest, middle income — in good harvest years, they could make it to Đurđevdan (May 6) on their own flour, and then, with income from selling livestock and wood, make it to the next harvest, which in this region came fairly early. They owned fertile fields and gentle meadows on the sun-facing slope of Mount Vežešnik (424 m), sheltered from harsh northern winds and exposed to sunlight all day. They also had pastures, naturally suited for keeping large herds of goats, known locally as "the poor man's cows."

The sight of blooming meadows in his homeland, the sunrise above the ancient Zavala church, the view across the wide Drezga field and the stony sea toward Lovćen — "the holy altar," the murmur of ceaseless springs flowing through stone, the look of the lean-tos under whose roofs wise men and heroes were born — these were some of the idyllic images from his early childhood, to which he would return in thought and in stories even in his mature years, far from Zavala, along life's paths that led him as far as Naples, Trieste, even Moscow. But to his sorrow, these were overshadowed by terrifying scenes from the seven years of war, mostly tied to the fate of his father Radivoje: in his sixth year, he saw him off to Skadar; in his seventh, to Bregalnica; in his eighth, to the Sandžak — while he and his mother and sisters spent their days and nights dreading bad news, the wail outside the house. In his ninth year, he saw his father again by the family hearth, gravely wounded in the head and permanently blind. From the following two years, he remembered the crimes of the Austro-Hungarian gendarmes — the plundering of everything that could be taken or driven from their home, and then its burning — revenge against the Mojkovac warrior, whom they continued to harass and humiliate, even as he lay immobile and blinded by wounds. They even sought the life of his only son as part of that revenge. That is why his older sister and close relatives on both sides hid young Arso in dark, damp caves in the Piperi region — memories that would haunt him his whole life, returning in the form of severe migraines. The occupation brought such terrifying hunger that Zorka, like many others, ground beech bark and corn husks, and from that "flour" — mixed with nettles, conifer leaves and bulbs — prepared *kačamak* or thin stews that left the children

doubled over in pain. Illnesses followed — "Spanish fever" and typhus — decimating the Piperi youth to the point that cemeteries grew crowded and the living envied the dead. Of these wartime horrors, no lighter than the former Ottoman oppression, songs would be sung for decades — even accompanied by the *gusle*.

He remembered the gendarmes of Emperor Franz as well. Though called an Austro-Hungarian gendarmerie station, it was mostly staffed by men from Lika, Krajina, Banija and Kordun — mostly Serbs, but seen as "fiends and bloodsuckers," thugs and enemies. They would raid homes at night, based on informants' reports, and subject families to unimaginable torture to force them to reveal the last *perper* or handful of grain. Sometimes the master of the house was made to walk barefoot over burning embers, or the mistress, in front of her husband and children, had a furious cat tied under her skirt. From this "seed of local evil" also sprang spies and thieves, liars and leeches, the greedy and the traitorous — a scum that, seeing opportunity in the occupation and national suffering, crept from their "snake holes" and heartlessly attacked the defenceless. Only the *komitas* protected the poor from these abusers — when they themselves had not already become corrupted and lost their way...

The terrible war, like any human misfortune, dragged on "like a cursed year," and though it eventually ended, the problems for the Jovanović family were only just beginning — made all the harder by the fact that, like everyone else, they had expected peace to bring sudden relief. Instead: Radivoje died — and Miluša passed away in Zorka's arms; the house was burned down — and all their property destroyed; there was no help from anywhere, since no one else had much either — and three children were starting school, as their father's dying wish had to be honoured at any cost: that his daughters complete primary school so they wouldn't remain "blind despite having eyes," and that his only son pursue "higher education." To make things worse, personal hardship was accompanied by widespread difficulties — from extreme material deprivation and spiritual desolation to deep human fears, mistrust, unrest and division, some of which took violent forms, largely stemming from war trauma and the quarrels between supporters of two royal dynasties. This division deepened after the resolution of the Great National Assembly in Podgorica (November 26, 1918), which voted to depose the Petrović dynasty and unite Montenegro with Serbia, forming the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes under the Karađorđevićs. Arso's father Radivoje — a casualty of the battle to protect the Serbian army as it retreated through Albania, a soldier under Division Commander and Serdar Janko Vukotić — wholeheartedly supported the unification of Montenegro with Serbia, a belief he firmly instilled in his only son. However, there were also many who opposed it, some of whom expressed their dissent through armed resistance — the most bloody of which was the "Christmas Uprising" of 1919.

The decision of many people to resort to violence, even in the years of deceptive peace — combined with hunger, disease and poverty — forever marked Arso's boyhood and deeply influenced the formation of his worldview and character: proud of his social origins, dignified in his modesty, never envious of those who possessed material wealth, defiant in the face of oppression, and determined to achieve everything in life

through his own knowledge and work. He was also hindered by his father's death, deprived of the chance to be encouraged, guided, protected and supported by Radivoje during life's most formative years. His sisters were too young to offer the help and care that is traditionally expected in Montenegrin families during a boy's upbringing. Thus, nearly the entire burden of his schooling in Podgorica fell on the shoulders of his mother, Zorka — a hardworking and spirited woman, sharp and determined, capable and endlessly devoted to her family, beloved in her kin and household, wise and respected within the brotherhood and the tribe. She had spent years raising the children and faithfully waiting for her husband to return from the front — from Skadar, Bregalnica, Rogatica and Mojkovac — and she finally welcomed him home after the bloody Christmas at Bojna Njiva, gravely wounded and blind. For her, that meant the added duty of raising their only son Arso for some future Bojna Njiva of his own.

Until they married, her daughters Raka and Draga were a great help in the household, and later so was the youngest, Miluša — born posthumously — who grew into a striking, strong and capable young woman. From a young age, she took on the hardest men's work, passing up marriage opportunities with a firm resolve to remain with her mother as the youngest child — to tend the fire on the family hearth, preserve the memory of their father and welcome back her only brother.

Education

He was an excellent student at the gymnasium in Podgorica, where he studied with the support of Zorka's cousin Bula, who was married to Stefan Ćetković, an assistant court clerk. In the kind-hearted Ćetković household, Arso not only found a place to sleep and a corner for a desk, but also plenty of understanding and affection. In Bula and Stefan's son Vujadin — who would later become a respected lawyer — Arso gained a brother and dearest friend for life. Encouraging them in their studies, wise Stefan used to say: "My boys, students have long been leaving this place and becoming ministers, generals and judges; they rise, through knowledge and hard work, to high office, and then someone crooked and mean kicks the chair out from under them — and thud, they hit the ground. Then they come back to their father's land, if the devils haven't already sold it off, grab a hoe from behind the beam, and don't die of hunger." The lesson: succeed and good luck to you, but beware of wicked people, protect your family land and never forget the hoe.[4]

A career in teaching or law would have been his natural choice, but the officer's path was the only option he believed would have his father Radivoje's blessing. It so happened that in March 1925, a notice was published in the *Official Military Bulletin* announcing a competition to admit "up to 380 cadets" into the 53rd class of the Lower School of the Military Academy. Seeing this as the only viable and acceptable option,

[4] They will remember that council whenever they met, as the unfortunate year of 1948 cruelly "knocked the chair" from both of them and deprived them of their hoes — Arso was liquidated, and Vujadin was sentenced to the Goli Otok (Gulag) ordeal.

Arso applied, along with nine of his schoolmates.[5]

Before his departure for Belgrade, the entire household wept, as it was the first time they would be apart for more than a week. His mother Zorka's firm tears and tight embrace left the deepest impression, along with her maternal blessing: "Travel, my son, out into the world, and may every step you take be golden," a proud Montenegrin mother's most heartfelt wish for her son as he stepped onto the uncertain path ahead. His closest cousin on his father's side, and the dearest person from his homeland for life, Mirko Velišin — a big-hearted man with a child's soul — slipped a wad of banknotes into his pocket, earned from the sale of a goat, and said what Radivoje himself would likely have said: "Arso, my dear, foreign doors strike at your heels like enemies — be careful not to stumble." Mirko's brother Đorđija also gave him a gift. His three sisters cried, aware that from that moment, neither their sunlit home on the slopes of Vežešnik nor their lives would ever be the same without their only brother. He received gifts from his maternal relatives as well, and the whole village came to see him off. Everyone wanted to offer advice "for the wider world," though no one mentioned loyalty to the family hearth, love for Montenegro or honour — because here, that was always understood.[6]

The training of the 53rd class lasted from October 1, 1925 to April 1, 1928, when 358 cadet sergeants were promoted to the rank of second lieutenant by decree of King Aleksandar. Among the 243 infantry cadets, Arso R. Jovanović, with excellent grades in all subjects, ranked 12th on the infantry list and 22nd in the entire class.[7]

In addition to thorough instruction in both specialized and general academic subjects, from the beginning he read *Vojni vesnik* ("Military Herald") with great attention. The journal, whose masthead declared it to be a "publication for the military and literature," stood out for its content and production quality, capturing the interest of young readers. It encouraged their curiosity, fostered a desire to explore a broad range of literature, and developed their ability to express thoughts clearly, concisely and precisely — both orally and in writing — while nurturing a methodical approach to problems.

From the library, he borrowed novels, especially by Russian classics, as well as anthologies of Serbian patriotic and French romantic poetry. For those who were interested, he could recite by heart works by Njegoš, Šantić, Jakšić, Zmaj and Mažuranić. He studied French diligently, and in the afternoons, under the guidance of a part-time singing instructor, he pursued a musical education and refined what was truly a God-given gift — a remarkably beautiful bass-baritone voice.

The first book he brought home from Belgrade on leave — as recalled by his

[5] The memory of Arso's "classmate," Colonel of the JNA, Milutin Šušović. Travel was done "around and around": by bus or on foot (via Cetinje) to Kotor, then by ship to Zelenika, from there by narrow-gauge "train" (via Mostar, Sarajevo, Višegrad and Užice) to the capital, Belgrade.

[6] The memory of Arso's relative, Professor of History Jagoša Jovanović.

[7] The usual publication – the memorial for this class of the VA was not printed in the country; it was reportedly published in London after the Second World War, but I could not access it as a valuable source of data, and the memories of the mere twenty survivors of the "classmates," now in their tenth decade of life, have become more unreliable.

classmate Milutin Šušović — was a newly published biography of Napoleon I.[8] He also subscribed to the *Great War of Serbia* series, published by the Headquarters of the General Staff,[9] which was considered essential reading for the education and moral upbringing of the officer corps.

Service

Infantry second lieutenants were assigned to units of the 56 infantry and seven aviation regiments of the Army of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Second Lieutenant Arso R. Jovanović, along with three fellow classmates, was appointed platoon leader (platoon commander) in the 10th Infantry Regiment "Takovo," stationed in Sarajevo.[10] This marked the beginning of a thirteen-year-long service (interrupted by training) dedicated to various units and military schools in the city on the Miljacka River — the seat of the Bosnian Divisional Area and a desirable, prestigious garrison. It was home to an infantry regiment, advanced training schools for active infantry and artillery officers, and reserve infantry officer training — offering valuable opportunities for career advancement.

As a second lieutenant and platoon commander in the elite "Takovo" Regiment, he bore significant responsibility, particularly in the demanding area of troop training. He fulfilled these duties with great conscientiousness. But even in his free time — in Sarajevo, a city that, more than most in the region, offered a wealth of leisure and enjoyment — he imposed even greater obligations on himself: he continued studying French with diligence, read books on military history and theory, pursued his musical education and trained his naturally gifted voice. He did not do this — as Colonel Marko Prelević, one of the senior officers who remembered him vividly from those years, later told his son Milorad — out of some burden of inferiority as a peasant's son without strong connections, nor in hopes of securing a future outside his chosen profession. He had no serious reason for either and was not burdened by such thoughts. Rather, he simply wanted, as a young man, to become the best officer he could — truly "the architect of his own fortune." Warned by the poor example of officers who wasted their youth in taverns and who declared chronic poverty and professional neglect as virtues, he vowed to build his own military career through effort and to be accepted into a circle of reputable and progressive people. Neither at the Military Academy nor in the city beneath Mount Trebević did he envy the sons of gentlemen or descendants of influential families. But he was well aware that they enjoyed many advantages in service, and that he would only be able to compete with them if he brought at least twice as much knowledge and delivered significantly better results. He had no generals or senators backing him, and the high regard for his late father's noble sacrifice for the homeland carried little weight in his professional environment. In short, everything

[8] The author, General Staff Colonel, Professor at the VA Dragomir D. Pavlović.

[9] The first volume on the Battle of Cer, the last (1914) on the Salonika Front.

[10] Order of the Minister of the Army and Navy No. 9680, SVL dated April 1, 1928.



Before him lay a challenging and irrevocable officer's career: Arso R. Jovanović, by the end of the Second World War, a lieutenant general and Chief of the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army.

had to be earned through personal knowledge, intellect and effort — which he considered the only morally acceptable path to advancement in service and to earning genuine respect in both his social environment and his profession.

From his first paycheque, Arso sent what was then a considerable sum — 300 dinars — to his mother and sisters, along with a package of gifts after navigating the colourful mix of shops in Baščaršija.[11] From his first savings, he purchased another uniform made from the finest fabric, a decorated sabre, an elegant dolman jacket and boots with nickel-plated spurs — something he would always take particular pride in. Soon after came another major acquisition, paid in instalments: an Adler typewriter. Its advertisement in the *Official Military Bulletin* promoted it to officers with the claim that it "writes legibly regardless of good or poor handwriting." On it, he would type up

[11] The memory of Arso's aunt Duka, October 1995, in Belgrade.

interesting facts and thoughts in the evenings, filing them neatly into compartments in his small rented room, confident they would one day be of use. He was encouraged in this by Colonel Milivoje Milićević, assistant commander of the "Takovo" Regiment — a man of taste and integrity, kind and open — who told him that stars are only reached by climbing the "ladder" built from one's own knowledge and hard work. At the same time, he advised the young officer not to burden himself by memorizing every fact, but to remember only what was essential, and to know where and how to find the rest when needed. He guided Arso toward purchasing encyclopedias, lexicons, dictionaries, handbooks and anthologies. Colonel Mihailo R. Šćekić advised him to work on himself outside of duty — but also to make time for cafés, concerts and the company of women, never forgetting that from his earliest days as a second lieutenant, he was already being considered, recommended and prepared for the demanding entrance exam for the Higher School of the Military Academy.[12]

With his soldiers, he maintained "a clear account": fair, honest, respectful and ready to understand — even tolerate — the rougher antics of youth. In his platoon, it was clearly understood who the commander was and who the soldier, who gave orders and who obeyed, and what the rights and responsibilities of each were. Everyone received what they deserved based on their work and conduct. The soldiers of his first platoon — many of whom were his own age (21) — wanted to buy him a farewell gift: a newly released boot jack, listed in the Officer's Cooperative catalogue as a "servant." Their intention to present this wooden tool — a convenience for removing the boots that, per regulations and by choice, he rarely took off — was passed on to him, as was customary, by the platoon sergeant. Knowing it cost a then-steep 100 dinars, Arso ordered them not to do it. They reluctantly gave up the idea and instead, for five dinars, bought *The Soldier's Songbook*, published by *Vojni vesnik*. Inside, they wrote a dedication to their commander and all signed it as best they could. He received it visibly moved — touched by the sincerity, thoughtfulness and simplicity of these young men.[13]

In the spring of 1930, Second Lieutenant Pavle I. Đurišić joined the "Takovo" Regiment, having completed the 55th class of the Lower School of the Military Academy. Born in 1909 into a respected Podgorica family, he was orphaned early and raised in Berane — the heart of the Vasojević tribe — in the home of his uncle, Petar Radović, a respected judge and former old *četnik* in the detachment of the famed Vojvoda Vuk. Second Lieutenants Arso and Pavle quickly bonded, sensing they had enough in common — at least to begin a friendship. They were close in age, shared a love for the officer's calling, ambitiously developed the platoons they commanded and served as examples to others. In conversation, they often returned to their shared hometown of Podgorica. Both were tall, always well dressed and true gentlemen in social circles.[14]

He took great pride in the glory of his "Takovo" Regiment, which celebrated its

[12] A citation from journalist Jovan Šćekić, son of Colonel Mihailo.

[13] That little book, made of verses of minor literary value, was kept in his carefully filled library until the April War.

[14] The memory of General of the JNA Velimir Terzić, July 1982, in Miločer.

regimental *slava* on Palm Sunday (*Cveti*) — in lasting memory of the beginning of the Second Serbian Uprising. On that day, guests and friends would gather not only from Sarajevo; the regiment would be assembled, a religious service held, wheat blessed and the ceremonial *slava* bread cut, followed by a festive celebration. At those gatherings, alongside Pavle, Arso would recite patriotic poetry, sing folk songs and perform popular arias from operettas and operas for the cheerful company.[15]

He was not a religious man — not in the sense of strict adherence to religious canons — but he was devoted to the tradition of solemnly observing *slava* and major Orthodox holidays. He regularly celebrated the family's *slava*, Saint Archangel Michael (November 21), inherited from his father Radivoje, with the respect that such a family sacred tradition deserved, bringing together relatives, godparents and friends. He respected the religious beliefs of his subordinates and colleagues of all faiths.

Four years as a second lieutenant passed quickly. On April 1, 1932, under Article 81 of the Law on the Organization of the Army and Navy, he was promoted to the rank of lieutenant. Just days later, on April 12, a competition was announced for the admission of "up to 60 candidates" into the Higher School of the Military Academy, with classes scheduled to begin on October 1, following a series of medical examinations and rigorous entry exams. The conditions were: candidates had to have at least five years of officer service, including four years in the field; all service evaluations had to be good, and those from the last two years "commendable"; they must not have been "judicially or disciplinarily punished for dishonourable acts"; they had to be "physically completely healthy, fit for formation duty and resilient"; their financial situation had to be stable; they could not be older than 32; and they had to pass entrance exams, including in seven military subjects and French. Arso applied, with a strong recommendation from his commanding officer. His excellent preparation was evident in the fact that his name appeared second in the *Order of the Minister of War* dated September 26, 1932 — on the list of officers admitted to the 34th class of the Higher School of the Military Academy.

After two years of study — under the leadership of General Staff artillery brigadier general Uroš M. Tešanović — the focus was on mastering the art of war at all three levels, solving problems in tactics and operational strategy, participating in numerous command field exercises, and studying military history and geography with lessons drawn from past wars.

Following graduation, Arso was appointed commander of the 23rd Company of the Reserve Infantry Officer School.[16] The headquarters of the school and its 1st Battalion were based in Bileća, with cadet battalions stationed in Sarajevo, Goražde and Maribor.

The Company to which Arso was assigned as commander was based in Sarajevo, bringing him back to his former garrison. It was a respected post, one that could support advancement in service, but also a demanding duty — that of an instructor to

[15] *Ibid.*

[16] Decree No. 21206 of His Majesty King Aleksandar of October 1, 1934.

young intellectuals, men from various social, national and religious backgrounds, with differing political views and perspectives on life and society.



A dear panorama seen about ten years earlier: Sarajevo as seen in 1936 from the "Jajce" barracks.

When he reported for duty on November 1, Pavle Đurišić was no longer in Sarajevo — he had requested a transfer to Berane, into the embrace of his uncle and his old friends, from whom even Sarajevo — a city seemingly made to help forget provincial memories — had not managed to separate him.[17] In his new post, Arso met and formed a lifelong bond with another young and energetic officer from their homeland — Second Lieutenant Milovan M. Šaranović, born in 1910 in Potkraj near Danilovgrad. Noticed for his performance as a platoon leader in the 29th Infantry Regiment in Nevesinje, Šaranović had been transferred to a command position at the Reserve Infantry Officer School in Bileća, where — during a professional debate in which Arso also participated — he impressed with his knowledge, confidence and eloquence. They met again the following year, 1935, at the *slava* of the "Takovo" Regiment, which still saw Arso as its best platoon leader.[18]

He began diligently working with the young men — curious and motivated to learn the "craft" of defending their homeland. The first generation under his command completed their training on October 15, 1935. Those cadets, most of them university students, remembered him as an excellent professional and broadly educated man —

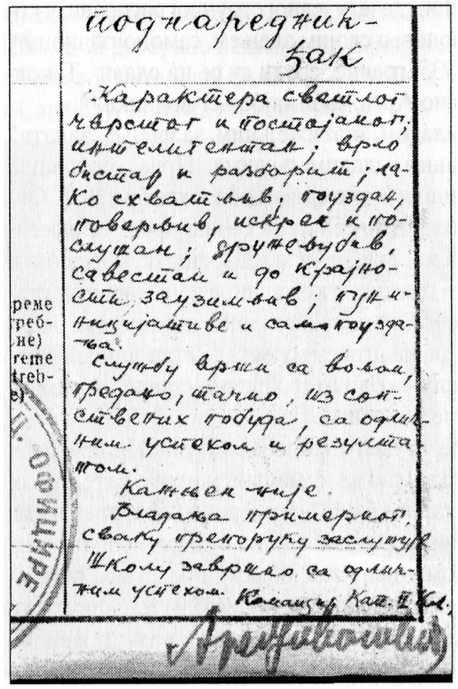
[17] In Berane, there was a detached battalion of the 48th Infantry Regiment from Pljevlja, where Captain Đurišić would become the commander of a company before the war.

[18] A younger colleague became attached to Arso and remained very loyal to him, addressing him with respect in all the positions he held until his death in July 1943 in Slovenia (in the rank of Colonel of the NOVJ).

eloquent and decisive, fair and dignified, rational and measured as a commander and instructor. He was a tall and always smartly dressed officer, proudly wearing the insignia of the Higher Military Academy — something that, as observed, drew envy from other battalion officers, including the commander, while his cadets were proud of it.

One cadet from that class, law student Vladislav Ilić,[19] recalled how he and his fellow cadets would pray to God that Arso would be on duty at the "Jajce" barracks, because only then — before going out into town — they wouldn't be harassed or humiliated during uniform and footwear inspections. Only then would they avoid being marched through Baščaršija in formation, even with cinema tickets already in their pockets, and wouldn't be searched on their return to the barracks for forbidden books or newspapers. According to Ilić, Arso was "a true gentleman, always ready to stand behind his cadets, to defend their dignity, to shield them from the ill will and harassment of the battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Konstantinović," who was nicknamed "The Cat" by the cadets — a respected Salonika Front veteran, but also a hard-nosed disciplinarian. Due to his harsh treatment of subordinates and repeated clashes with Arso over that very issue, "The Cat" was soon transferred, and in his place came Lieutenant Colonel Marković, whom the cadets nicknamed "The Black One" because of his appearance.

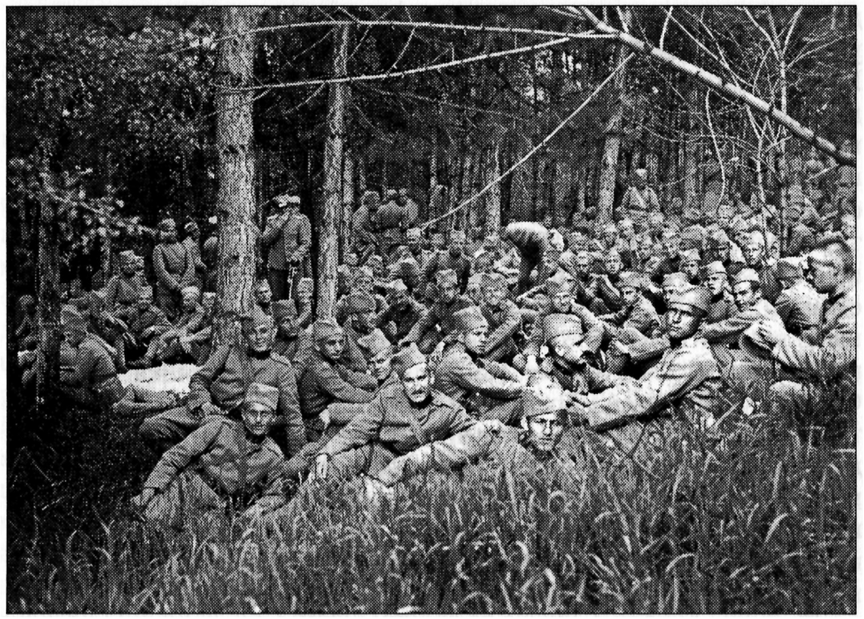
A cadet in the new class of the 23rd Company — law student and member of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, Milutin Morača — remembered that same Marković as a particularly dark-skinned, moustached and outwardly rough man. He was also a hardened field officer and a veteran of the Salonika Front, undeniably meritorious, but without formal schooling or any visible finesse for working with young intellectuals. That's what Morača initially thought of him — based on his appearance and the harsh manner with which he kept his distance from the cadets — until one day, completely unexpectedly and after class, Marković summoned him to his office and showed him a letter that had arrived in his name, in which the censors had detected a potential communist scheme. They discussed who had written to him from Novi Žednik, and about what — the letter was, admittedly, awkwardly and vaguely worded. In the end, "The Black One" — motivated in part by a desire to seem like a man who understood the mistakes of the youth entrusted to his care, but more so by a wish to avoid triggering an official "case" that could cost him his post, as had happened to "The Cat" — advised the future lawyer to ask his friend Danić Damjanović to send a new letter, one that clearly and thoroughly explained what he had meant in the original message. Then, he said, the matter would be handled by the company commander, Jovanović — who, as of April 1, 1936, held the rank of captain second class. The new, more detailed and carefully worded letter from Danić was shown to Commander Arso, who was officially obligated to resolve the issue. He summoned his best cadet to report. Without even looking at the letter, Arso carefully assessed the young man — whose responsibility and diligence he deeply valued — and said that he expected serious conduct and excellent results from him. And that was the end of the "case." Yet Arso could have, fully aware of Morača's political leanings and taking the first letter as damning evidence, had him transferred to any part of the country — or expelled from the School entirely, with no right to become a reserve officer. Cadet Morača did not betray his commander's trust. In his final evaluation — signed by Arso R. Jovanović — he received top marks, along with the following conclusion: "Of clear, firm and consistent character; intelligent; very bright and prudent; quick to understand; reliable; trustworthy, honest and obedient; sociable; conscientious and extremely dedicated; full of initiative and self-confidence."[20]


поднаредник-
зак
Карактера светлог
чврстог и постојаног;
интелигентан; врло
оштар и разборит; ла-
ко схватљив, поуздан,
поверљив, искрен и по-
слушан; друштвољубив,
савестан и до крајно-
сти заузимљив; пун и-
ницијативе и самопоуз-
дања.
Службу врши са вољом,
предано, тачно, из сво-
јствених побуда, са одли-
чним успехом и резулта-
том.
Напредовање.
Владалац примереног,
сваку пренеруку заслужује
Школу завршио са одли-
чним успехом. Командир Кат. II кл.
ОПШТИНЕ
Assessment from the "primer" for cadet sergeant Milutin Morača.

From his cadet days, Morača remembered many details that portrayed his company commander as an educated officer, a cultured and dignified man, a respected instructor and a sincere friend to young men. Once, he recalled — fifty years later — the cadets were served beans for dinner, a traditionally popular dish. But this time the beans were full of weevils, "floating" in their plates. Outraged, the cadets spontaneously decided — without considering the consequences — not to eat. They stood up and began walking out, ignoring the company duty sergeant, a non-commissioned officer, who first pleaded with them not to do it and then, together with the barracks duty officer, began threatening punishment. This collective act of defiance was, without a doubt, a serious offence in the cadet environment. Alarmed, the sergeant quickly summoned the platoon commander, who in turn called the company commander. Captain Jovanović, as usual calm and quiet, rushed from the gate to the dining hall and quickly determined that the food in question was indeed unfit for consumption. He did not publicly take the cadets' side, nor did he seek out the "ringleaders" or hold anyone accountable. Instead, he simply ordered them all to eat their slices of bread — and the next morning he "settled the matter" with Lieutenant Colonel "The Black One." What exactly passed between them remained known only

[19] When on May 15, 1995, he heard on the radio program "Argument More" that I spoke about Arso at the International Scientific Conference on the contribution of the Yugoslav NOB to the defeat of fascism, he somehow found my phone number and excitedly told me that he had "something very important and urgent" to tell me; the very next day, this hearty octogenarian, in his home in Belgrade, passionately spoke about his commander.

[20] The document is kept by General M. Morača.



Đurđevdan morning gathering of the 23rd cadet company.

to the two of them.

It seems likely that he had some kind of agreement — at least tacit — with the battalion commander that no one was to enter the premises of the 23rd Company to carry out inspections for prohibited press or literature, and he himself never conducted such searches nor allowed his sergeant or NCOs to do so. As Morača recalled, this discretion allowed the cadets to quietly bring in and read banned materials — *Politika*, for instance, or even Marx's *Capital* or Lenin's *State and Revolution* — because, as far as anyone knew, no one ever looked into their trunks, bags, pockets or under their pillows. Captain Jovanović, gentlemanly and measured, was occupied with responsibilities far more meaningful and rewarding than spying on his cadets at every step — cadets who would soon become reserve officers tasked with leading units in defence of the homeland. He saw suspicion and surveillance as unacceptable and refused to allow others to engage in them either — though in those circumstances, this stance could only bring him trouble and harm. He considered it his essential moral and professional duty to motivate his cadets to study all subjects — especially to prepare for leading platoons and companies through tactical instruction — and to encourage them by leading by example, together with his subordinate officers. That is why the 23rd Company consistently ranked highest in academic success throughout the School, with 1,908 cadets graduating from the first class he commanded.

The third and most delicate story from General Morača speaks of the day when the head of the School, Brigadier General Hadžić, appeared at the "Jajce" barracks with his entourage. What brought him there, Morača didn't know, but he and Platoon Ser-

geant Milan Bunjevčević were watching from the attic, where uniforms were kept, as the general conducted an inspection of the battalion's officers. Commander Marković delivered the report, and then they proceeded together to inspect the ranks. Suddenly, the general stopped in front of Captain Arso, examined him closely and said something, to which Arso replied. Then, in an abrupt and forceful gesture, the general tore the tassel from Arso's raised ceremonial sabre. In response, Arso demonstratively left the formation and stormed off to the barracks, then home. The two eyewitnesses from the attic couldn't hear the exchange, but sensed serious trouble for their commander — "who never bowed or bent to anyone." The core of the issue, as they later learned, was that the general had remarked the tassel on the captain's sabre was non-regulation. Arso responded that it was new and not of his own making. What followed was a breach of military protocol by both men: the general was not permitted, in a formal setting, to approach an officer closer than three paces, and the officer had no right — no matter how insulted or angered — to leave the ranks on his own initiative. Whether this mutual breach was the reason the entire incident — however harsh — was hushed up and seemingly passed without consequences is difficult to say. Nor is it clear whether Arso was formally disciplined. But it was widely believed that he fell into deep disfavour with General Hadžić, which likely explains why he only got his chance to begin General Staff training three years later — his last opportunity due to age limits. What was known for certain was that General Hadžić was involved in politics — something Captain Jovanović considered a curse on both the state and its army.

Several of Arso's younger colleagues and former cadets — convinced they would find it easier to rest in peace if they shared, however belatedly, even a piece of the truth long suppressed by ideological conformity — have said that, as an exemplary officer and patriot, he was angered by the disintegration of the unity of the state and its army. As a democrat by conviction, he was troubled by the looming militarization of the country and by the rise of aggressive nazi-fascism. It is telling, in that regard, that sometime in the summer of 1938, he confided in his close relative and well-known communist Blažo Jovanović that he had felt "the urge to take off the uniform for good and head to Spain to help defend the democratic world from fascist phalanges and nazi legions."[21] There is no doubt he said it — but at least two questions remain: first, to what extent was this the spontaneous reaction of a passionate Dinaric man, and to what extent a long-term conviction? Second, was it more a sign of disillusionment with the destructive politics of a state whose army, by constitutional duty, was meant to serve it — or an expression of the anti-fascist and humanist position of a professional soldier and patriot? Most likely, it was a combination of both.[22]

During that conversation about "removing the uniform," the measured and cautious Blažo — recalling the event years later in 1975 at the Igalo spa — said he had not been able to offer firm advice. He recalled that Arso had indeed been deeply troubled,

[21] That detail will be mentioned by General-Lieutenant A.R. Jovanović, on February 3, 1945, when he visited La Pasionaria in Moscow with Generals Gojko Nikoliš and Branko Obradović.

[22] A deep disappointment with the officer corps and the overall state of the armed forces at that time will be attested to in the September 1943 article "Our Military Schools."

and ready to impulsively walk away from the social order he had belonged to for 13 years. He was wounded by attacks on his integrity, honour and dignity, and frustrated by both the general political climate and the specific conditions under which he served as an officer and a man. No matter which way Blažo advised him — to remain loyal to the uniform or to discard it and go to Spain — he knew they would both end up regretting it. As a Podgorica lawyer and senior communist functionary, Blažo also knew "it was becoming harder and harder to reach Madrid, and that things on the front lines of the International Brigades weren't nearly as poetic, ethical or chivalrous as was being written or said — many went there only to be disillusioned, and some even lost their lives, sometimes at the hands of their own comrades in arms and ideas."

There are also more moderate recollections of this period, offered by two Belgraders — historian Milorad M. Prelević and journalist and publicist Jovan M. Šćekić. As sons of officers, they remembered Arso in the late 1930s as a close family friend — a pleasant, warm man, particularly kind to children and full of cheer. Prelević fondly recalled how Arso was always welcome in their home for long and lively conversations with senior colleagues, and how he — then just a little boy — would be gifted something each time, often held on Arso's lap while the captain sang to him in his clear voice. What those children couldn't have perceived at the time was that Arso — at least on occasion — carried within him deep anger, most of all over the growing divisions in the country and the lack of unity in the military. The officer corps had become fractured: some were Anglophiles, others Russophiles or Germanophiles. He was also burdened by the injustices done to him personally — largely, it was believed and whispered, by General Hadžić, a figure of the pro-British group of officers and their circle of "daddy's boys" who had gathered around him.

In the *General Active Officers' Roster* for 1937, the name Arso R. Jovanović appears on page 413, under serial number 900. Next to his name, in the corresponding columns, the following information is listed: Captain Second Class, with rank dated April 1, 1936; graduate of the 53rd class of the Lower and the 34th class of the Higher School of the Military Academy; married; awarded the Gold Medal for Devoted Service.[23]

He married in 1934. As required by regulation, he obtained permission from the Minister of War. His bride, Miss Ksenija — Senka — came from the officer family Vujića of Nikšić, and was a respected civil servant in Sarajevo. Their daughters Ubavka (born 1936) and Zorka — Zoja (born 1940) were born from this marriage.

In the autumn of 1938, he was transferred to a command post at the Infantry School for Active Officers. From there, on April 15, 1939, shortly after being promoted to captain first class, he was called to attend a short advanced course for commanders of support companies, held at the Training Centre in Kalinovik. The course provided broad insight into developments in military leadership and weaponry, as demonstrated in the ten or so wars that had recently been fought across the globe. In the same group with Arso were his close friends: Captain First Class Pero Ćetković of the 2nd Mountain Regiment and Captain Second Class Pavle Đurišić of the 48th Infantry Regiment. Following the course, Arso was appointed commander of the School Battalion at the Infantry School for Active Officers, a position considered a great privilege and a prestigious recommendation for further advancement. Commanding the battalion responsible for the final training exercises — particularly tactical drills with live fire — as well as participating in staff field trips, war games and experimental procedures for revising combat regulations, placed him "under the watchful eye" of the highest and most influential senior officers, and gave him the opportunity to demonstrate his full capability. Arso saw it as a God-given opportunity that this duty — mostly tied to the Military Training Grounds in Kalinovik — had been entrusted to him. When he later began his final education and preparation for General Staff service, he personally requested to retain his wartime assignment as commander of that elite unit.

[23] This recognition was received as a second lieutenant, and as a captain of the first class, he was awarded the Order of the Yugoslav Crown, 5th class, in 1940.

General Staff Officer

For Arso, 1939 was a fruitful year — not only because he was promoted to a higher rank, assigned to an advanced training course, and appointed commander of the School Battalion, but also because he published his book *Tactics of the Infantry Battalion* and was admitted to the Supplementary Course of the Higher Military Academy — the final step before entering the General Staff, the most prestigious professional military path.

In the *Official Military Bulletin* dated June 24, 1939, under the section "Literary Notices," among numerous publications authored by generals and colonels of the General Staff — all from Belgrade — Arso R. Jovanović's *Tactics of the Infantry Battalion* was prominently announced. He was listed as Captain First Class, from the Kalinovik garrison. The book had, as required by law, been officially approved by Army General Milan Đ. Nedić, "Minister of All Armed Forces — Land, Air and Sea," and recommended by the Adjutant Department, signed by Infantry Brigadier General Svetislav Savić, as "useful, modern and instructive." The book contained 30 tactical scenarios, grouped by topic: daytime and nighttime marches, encampment, outposts, advance guard engagements (3 tasks), withdrawal (2), evolution (1), attack (5), encounter battle (2), defence (4), pursuit (3), rear guard actions (2) and disengagement — both day and night. It was also recommended "as a basis for planning and executing war games," and included coordination keys for infantry with aviation and artillery. The book proved useful for exam preparation and the organization of tactical exercises with live fire. Each tactical task was accompanied by combat documents: a situation assessment, decision, work plan and orders. The examples were based on manoeuvre and karst terrain and also illustrated "battalion action with fast-moving units."[24] In his foreword, the author suggested the book might also interest officers from other branches of the military.[25]

[24] SVL dated August 1, 1939.

[25] Major M. Prelević, reassigned to Banja Luka, among the artillerymen of the Vrbas Division

The book, approximately 300 pages in length and featuring 28 maps, could be purchased in four equal payments of 80 dinars via cheque to account no. 2040 at a Sarajevo bank.

This technically strong and undeniably useful publication stood out as a rare exception to the norm — young field officers from interior garrisons did not typically write and publish works of this ambition. It also served as a response to many of his Sarajevo colleagues and acquaintances — even friends and godparents — who had wondered, "Why does he study so much? What is he always writing and drawing?" — using free time that most of them spent far more comfortably. Arso continually refreshed and deepened his tactical knowledge — as a branch of military science — by reading both domestic and foreign military theorists, creatively incorporating modern developments into exercises and training plans. He infused them with the spirit of a people's army and reflected on the individual articles of *War Service Regulations*, a manual he kept constantly at hand — in one of three places: in his hands, on his desk or in his officer's satchel. His training exercises, especially those with live ammunition, were superbly organized and became demonstrations on the Kalinovik Military Training Grounds. These were observed by hundreds of active and reserve officers, participants in staff field trips and organizers of war games, as well as those being groomed for General Staff service. At the time, Lieutenant Rade Hamović, serving at the Infantry Officer School in Kalinovik, recalled those live-fire exercises under Arso's command — coordinated with artillery and air force units, where every participant, whether from rifle squads, artillery positions or aircraft, engaged with live ammunition, firing over the heads and alongside the flanks of their own troops — as being exemplary in organization. He would remember them even years later, as Chief of the General Staff of the NOVJ.[26]

Arso's *Tactics of the Infantry Battalion* was advertised in three additional summer issues of the *Official Military Bulletin*. However, after that, it disappeared from the "Literary Notices" section — which had become dominated by "hot" wartime topics — until December 31, 1939, when the author, then residing at Stiška (now Galsworthy) Street no. 7 in Belgrade, informed interested readers that "a small number of copies" remained available for purchase under the previously stated terms. A reprint was announced in January and July 1940, specifically recommended to candidates preparing for promotion to the rank of major. After that, the book no longer appeared in the bulletin — clearly, the entire print run had sold out. The book was instructional and inspiring, and for six decades has been cited in all bibliographies and listings of professional military literature.[27]

In the *Official Military Bulletin* of June 15, 1939, a call was published for the admission of "a certain number of officers" to the Supplementary Course of the Higher Military Academy — from which candidates would be selected for General Staff service. This one-year engagement with "military science" represented the highest level of education within the Army of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Applicants were required to have completed the Higher Military Academy and served at least two years thereafter as platoon leaders or company commanders, achieving no less than a "very good" rating. They also had to demonstrate, through their service, that they were conscientious, precise and dedicated, and that they possessed the will and enthusiasm for their vocation. Candidates could not be of a rank higher than captain first class, had to be declared completely healthy by the Military Medical Commission, and had to submit — as a mandatory document — a full record of any disciplinary actions taken during their officer service. Among the 25 officers who passed all exams and evaluations with the highest marks was Captain First Class Arso R. Jovanović, though most others on the published list held lower ranks. The course began on November 1, 1939.

Confident — with good reason — that he would complete this course successfully and, by November of the following year, be accepted as a General Staff trainee and "transferred" to the Main General Staff, Arso relocated to Belgrade with official approval, settling at Stiška 7. It was a modest but comfortable home which he paid for in instalments — thanks to a favourable loan from the Officers' Cooperative and proceeds from his book.

Just as he had been diligent and responsible in field duties, he was equally so in his academic work. During the 1939-40 academic year, he thoroughly studied recent developments in military science, especially weaponry and war technology, and their application in military operations — including the wars in Ethiopia and Spain, nazi Germany's invasions of Western and Central Europe, Italian campaigns in Albania and Greece, and the war on the Karelian Isthmus.

Nazism had absorbed Austria, and fascism had used force against both of Yugoslavia's southern neighbours, while the regimes in Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria were already closely aligned with Germany. Everything pointed to the inevitability of war for Yugoslavia — and Arso, like many younger officers, particularly those of Serbian and Montenegrin heritage, believed that defending the homeland was the highest human and professional duty. According to Milutin Šušović, who recalled their conversations in July 1984, Arso discussed this very topic with their instructor and respected superior, General Staff Brigadier General Milan Zelenika (born 1885) — a Serb from Prijedor who had graduated from the War College in Vienna as an Austro-Hungarian officer and was now respected in the Yugoslav Army as a prominent military historian. At Arso's request, the conversation took place in Zelenika's office at the Military Academy. A knowledgeable expert on Wehrmacht war doctrine, Zelenika told the two younger officers that an attack on Yugoslavia was inevitable and that it must be resisted with full force — alongside that part of the population willing to fight the aggressor. However, he cautioned that there was no justification for excessive optimism about the outcome of that defence. The country was riddled with division, and ethnic tensions weakened both the state and the shared army — as well as the current war plan. Zelenika told them that he had openly discussed these concerns with authorities in the Main General Staff while still serving there, but rather than listening to him or attempting

---

Headquarters, collected 34 subscriptions.

[26] From a conversation with General R. Hamović, May 1985, in Belgrade.

[27] A copy is kept at the Centre for Military-Scientific Documentation (CVND).

any course correction, they reassigned him as a permanent instructor at the Military Academy. Arso, in turn, told them he understood the life of the troops firsthand. As a commander in Sarajevo and Kalinovik, he had come to know many officers — mostly sons of peasants and workers — who were patriots, ready to stand with their units and resist aggression even to the point of sacrifice. But he also admitted to knowing many who were not prepared to fight and who would throw down their weapons at the first shot — or even join the occupier. He believed such individuals should be purged, and there was still time to do it. Likewise, he argued that the war plan could and should be revised — that it was not some kind of "Holy Scripture." Zelenika agreed that changes might be made to the war plan — but emphasized that implementing them would be a monumental task. Large operational and strategic formations would need to be reassigned and redeployed, and this would require commanders who understood and accepted the changes, and who could execute them despite the likely resistance from those opposed to any revision. Still, he concluded, "one must believe in the patriotism of the Serbian people."[28]

Šušović also recalled a conversation held at Arso's home with Brigadier General Ljubo R. Novaković who, in the spring of 1940 — likely as part of preparations for war and certainly as an officer of the former Montenegrin army — was appointed commander of the artillery for the Zeta Divisional Area. He had come to the Main General Staff to receive his assignment from the relevant authorities. Arso had long been close with Novaković, who was originally from Spuž and had served until then as artillery commander of the Bosnian Divisional Area in Sarajevo, so he invited him over. At the table, the conversation naturally turned to the war — a topic that had become unavoidable by then. Already in his "later years," the general — instead of expressing frustration at having been sidelined to less significant duties for so long — radiated good cheer and showed readiness to defend the homeland with the troops he would command in his native Montenegro, in coordination with the people of Herzegovina. He was convinced that thousands of young men from these two Serbian provinces, like their ancestors in earlier liberation wars, would resolutely resist aggression from the direction of Skadar and, in an offensive operation, reach Valona in one stroke. Šušović recalled that Arso deeply believed the same. He added that officers and soldiers raised in the traditions of the Serbian and Montenegrin liberation wars — especially the battles of Cer, Kolubara, Mojkovac and the Salonika Front — would fight heroically. Although they would initially be deprived of direct Allied assistance, which would be a harsh test and a great trial, Arso considered it better than living under occupation — something he described from childhood as "the greatest human loss and misfortune." General Novaković left for his new post in Podgorica by military aircraft, determined to strengthen the forces of the "Queen of War" — the Zeta Divisional Area — a formation designated by the war plan to operate toward Skadar, Tirana and Valona.[29]

[28] General M. Zelenika, captured while serving as Chief of Staff of the 3rd Army, held himself patriotically and with dignity in the German "Oflag," and upon his return to the country in 1945, by the decision of the Chief of the General Staff of the JNA, Arso R. Jovanović, he was appointed the founder of the Military History Institute.

By decision no. 16444 of the Minister of War, Army General Petar Pešić, dated November 7, 1940, and based on "the recommendation of the Military Academy's director and the opinion of the General Staff Commission," three graduates of the Higher Aviation War School in Paris and 24 graduates of the recently completed Supplementary Course in Belgrade were accepted as trainees for the General Staff service and transferred for preparation into the Main General Staff. All were ranked from Captain Second Class to Major (in the case of the aviators). Arso was listed fourth on the official service roster — an extremely high ranking, given the competitive nature of the selection process, and a clear indication of how seriously he had approached his final phase of training. Interestingly, two more Captain First Class officers from the Piperi were on the trainee list: infantry officer Milutin M. Šušović (ranked fifth) and artillery officer Jovica M. Boljević (eighth).[30]

These "27 best-prepared and physically fit officers" reported to the Main General Staff on November 10, 1940. According to the Regulation on the Main General Staff and the General Staff Service,[31] they were to remain in training for 14 months, including two months in military district commands working on mobilization tasks.

The training program for General Staff trainees was conducted under the direct supervision of Divisional General Radivoje Janković, Chief of the Operations Department, and included solving problems in tactics (on maps and in the field), strategy and General Staff procedures. It also involved conducting war games, visiting training centres for all three branches of the armed forces, participating in two General Staff tours, working in various departments of the General Staff, and engaging in staff duties during large manoeuvres and exercises. Each completed task was graded on a scale from 10 (excellent) to 6 (satisfactory). All grades were summed to create a final ranking list — with the understanding that these rigorously selected officers, tested thoroughly in knowledge and skill, simply could not receive a failing grade on any assignment.[32]

There is almost no surviving record of what Arso accomplished during his time as a General Staff trainee — the relevant archives have been lost, thanks to at least three culprits: the Germans, who were meticulous and thorough in looting archives; the all-powerful KOS (military counterintelligence), which deliberately erased all traces that might point to the talent, highest-level education and professionalism of the wartime Chief of the Supreme Headquarters (later Chief of the General Staff); and finally, the incompetent or utterly irresponsible personnel of the military archives of

[29] In the April War, General L. Novaković would command the Komi Detachment and with it, with the 48th Infantry Regiment as the backbone of that formation, he would boldly penetrate as far as Skadar, relying on the wings of the Zeta and Kosovo Divisions; he escaped capture, along with his son, Guard Captain Jakša.

[30] The whirlwind of war would blow them in three directions: Arso, with the communists, launched an uprising against the occupiers; Šušović ended up in German captivity, where he behaved in a combative and patriotic manner, and later became a colonel in the Yugoslav People's Army; Boljević was liquidated in 1942 as an opponent of the NOP.

[31] SVL of January 29, 1939.

[32] Such an officer would forever lose the right to enter the prestigious General Staff profession.

the "Second Yugoslavia," who largely destroyed documents during so-called "archival processing." However, one of Arso's complete tactical assignments — done using a map and focused on the defence of Belgrade from positions on Torlak Hill — was once "borrowed" by KOS and, according to General Milisav Nikić, shown to top General Staff operatives in the JNA as a model of "highly professional, deeply reasoned and enduringly instructive staff work." Some of Arso's model tactical exercises from the few remaining copies of his now-lost book *Tactics of the Infantry Battalion* — spared from destruction after 1948 — were secretly studied and copied without hesitation.

Had peace lasted, those 27 General Staff trainees would, after 14 months of training, have been given two more months to prepare for a final exam, covering: Tactics (written and oral); Strategy (oral only); and General Staff service, requiring a six-hour written assignment from its applied segment. This strict and career-defining evaluation tested each candidate's: reasoning ability; flexibility and speed of thought; clarity and logic in presenting ideas; strength of arguments; depth of knowledge; maturity of perspective; and independence and decisiveness. Grades ranged from 1 to 10, with 6 as the minimum passing mark. There were no retakes — anyone who failed on the first attempt permanently lost the right to enter the General Staff track. This path, once passed, unlocked unrestricted promotion, access to elite assignments and a better material position.[33]

Known as a highly rational man who had spent years investing in his professional development, general education and cultural refinement — learning French, writing a respected book, publishing notable articles in military journals — Arso made it his personal mission to complete everything needed for his transition into the General Staff branch before the date he was, by rank, expected to be promoted to infantry major. According to the Law on the Organization of the Army and Navy, that promotion was set for April 1, 1942.[34]

Politics

One more question from Arso's pre-war life deserves at least to be raised — his relationship with politics. Based on conversations with people who knew him at the time, especially during his two years of higher military schooling in Belgrade and his service in the Main General Staff (1939-41), it appears that not only did he avoid politics, but he deliberately kept his distance from it. This was believed to be less because the Constitution prohibited officers from engaging in politics, and more because he had seen firsthand how destructive it was and how it ran counter to the vital interests of the people. So, while he did not engage in politics, he understood how it operated — a necessary condition for any professional soldier and patriot seeking to guard against

[33] The decree on the introduction of a special financial allowance for General Staff officers was published in the SVL dated November 1, 1939.

[34] War circumstances, however, completely changed the plans — on that day, at 35 years of age, he was the Chief of the Supreme Command of the NOP armed forces, and 13 months later, on May 1, 1943, the first major general of the NOVJ.

its dangerous traps and consequences. This was not easy, since politics was aggressively invading all aspects of personal and public life. In the end, even avoiding politics was itself a political act. Arso found true purpose in his family and his military career — in them he saw the full meaning of both his personal and professional life.

However, questions remain about his pre-war ties to communists, a topic that, for decades, was subject to speculation and manipulated depending on the political climate of the day — ranging from claims that he was a "sworn anti-communist" and "a promoter of total disbelief in the Red Army's readiness for war," to assertions that he was a member of the CPY, even a "Soviet intelligence officer." Two official British representatives in Yugoslavia during the NOB, Brigadier Fitzroy Maclean and Major Bill Deakin, wrote in their accounts of people and events on "Tito's battlefield" that Arso Jovanović, Chief of the Supreme Headquarters during the Second World War, had maintained contacts with the communists while serving in the General Staff[35] — which, to them, explained how he later ended up with the Partisans in a senior military role. They knew Arso was not an Anglophile, which is why he was targeted by "the powerful English man," General Svetozar Hadžić. Their information about him, including any possible ties to communists, likely came from British military intelligence. Accordingly, they and their missions kept a certain distance from him, seeing in him a "Russian man." For example, in *The Warrior's Mountain*, Bill Deakin wrote that Arso was "one of the few officers who secretly joined the Communist Party before the Axis attack on Yugoslavia."[36] In Chetnik propaganda from 1942, Arso was branded a "long-time communist bastard." Historian Dr. Aleksandar Drašković wrote that General Milan Đ. Nedić, head of the quisling government and self-styled "Father of Serbia," would curse his former pupil — whom he once considered the most gifted officer of his generation — upon hearing that "communist bands led by Tito and Arso Jovanović" had captured towns like Prozor, Šujica, Livno and Bihać: "Arso Jovanović, may your mother's milk turn to poison for selling your soul to the communists."

Soviet publicist Sergo Beria, in his book *My Father Lavrentiy Beria* — allegedly based on the intelligence files of Beria himself, Stalin's close associate and head of the all-powerful NKVD — also claimed that the Soviets "had their man" in Arso Jovanović.[37] However, the phrasing used — in its grammatical case, tense and mood — is so vague or deliberately ambiguous that even a skilled Russian linguist couldn't determine with certainty when this was supposed to have been: before the Second World War, in the year of the uprising, or just prior to the arrival (on February 23, 1944) of the Soviet military mission in Drvar. For this reason, such claims must be taken with caution.

Some scholars of the uprising in Montenegro believe (though they have no original documents or witness testimonies to prove it) that Josip Broz Tito, described as a cunning intelligence officer and unquestionably a Comintern appointee, could only have

[35] F. Maclean, *War in the Balkans,* Belgrade 1980, p. 40.

[36] F.W. Deakin, *The Warrior's Mountain,* Belgrade 1973, pp. 111-112.

[37] S. Beria, *My Father Lavrentiy Beria,* "Sovremennik," Moscow 1994, p. 372.

appointed Arso Jovanović as Chief of the Supreme Headquarters (on December 12, 1941) with the knowledge and approval of Dimitrov or Stalin — and likely both. That would suggest Arso had long been part of Moscow's network — i.e. a Red Army intelligence officer, possibly tied to Soviet military attaché General Aleksandr Sukhonin, Comintern resident Mustafa Golubić, or someone else. Objectively speaking, such a scenario is not entirely implausible, given that officers of the Royal Yugoslav Army — especially those working in the Main General Staff — were targeted by aggressive intelligence efforts from numerous services: the American predecessor to the CIA, British Intelligence Service, German Abwehr, Italian OVRA, Soviet NKVD, as well as Hungarian, Bulgarian and other agents. Comintern operatives and Yugoslav communists were particularly active. All of them — especially as war drew nearer to Yugoslavia's borders — were intensely active in the country, infiltrating the army, seeking collaborators and establishing footholds.

People who were very close to Arso at the time — for example, his cousin, the history professor Jagoš Jovanović, and his schoolmate and fellow cadet from all levels of military education, Milutin Šušović — believe that all the stories about his ties to the communists are a form of speculation and fabrication. This was also the position of Blažo Jovanović and Velimir Terzić. They allow that, as a democrat and humanist, he may have respected the CPY for its determination to defend the country from fascism, had some sympathy for its program of social reform, secretly admired the heroic stance of its members in the face of police repression and even privately embraced some of their ideas as a vision for the future — but nothing beyond that. Even Tito himself, in a 1972 interview, stated that Arso "not only was not a communist, but at one time even persecuted communists."[38]

There is, admittedly, one trace in the memoirs of Mitar Bakić, a lawyer from Zeta and a member of the CC of the CPY's Military Commission on the eve of the war, who was tasked with "working within the army." His activities mostly consisted of attempts to "reach out to" and maintain existing connections with individual officers, with the aim of strengthening the military's resolve to defend the country against fascist aggression — something that, in itself, was a patriotic act. His alleged failure to bring Arso into the Party was revealed by General Peko Dapčević at a meeting of the Defence Ministry's party cadre, held on September 15, 1948, less than a month after Arso's death. There, Dapčević called him a "longtime anti-communist and outspoken enemy of the Soviet Union." He backed this claim by recounting a story that, in early 1941, Mitar Bakić approached Arso to try and recruit him into the Party, to which Arso responded by throwing him out of his house, saying that "the Red Army is a giant on glass legs, that he was against all forms of dictatorship — fascist or communist — and that he would report Bakić to the police if he ever came to his home again with such matters."[39] Even if this conversation actually took place at Stiška 7, such an encounter must be viewed in context. It would have been highly unrealistic to expect a young

[38] J. Broz, *Autobiographical Narratives,* Belgrade 1983, Vol. II, p. 23.

[39] The front page of *Narodna armija* from September 18, 1948.

career officer — still serving in the Main General Staff, a father of two daughters and someone sworn to defend the very institutions the Party sought to dismantle — to throw open both his home and his heart to a communist entering his house for the first time, asking him to collaborate. While he was deeply concerned about the country's internal disunity — particularly the destructive chauvinism among a portion of officers of Croatian and Slovenian origin — and the resulting lack of cohesion within the officer corps, which left the army unprepared to repel fascist aggression, that didn't mean he would immediately embrace such a radical proposal from the communists, even if it came from a well-known compatriot.[40]

He truly did have a critical assessment of the Red Army's readiness for war against the Wehrmacht — an assessment that, in any case, was borne out during the war with Finland (1939-40), whose lessons were closely studied in military schools at all levels and incorporated into officer training. He based his view partly on intelligence reports that the General Staff received from Moscow, particularly from the military air attaché and Arso's close friend, Major Boško Stanojlović, a man he trusted without reservation. Stanojlović reported that the Soviet Air Force was small and, compared to the German one, inadequately prepared; that after its involvement in the Spanish Civil War (1936-39), dozens of the best commanders and pilots were purged or sidelined; that the General Staff had been gutted following the executions of Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky, Vasily Blyukher and other top talent, and replaced largely by inexperienced army and front commanders; that the transport network was sparse and had limited capacity; that the military industry was underdeveloped; and that many Soviet tanks were outdated, etc. Arso would respond with such carefully worded facts to those who, in excitement, claimed that if war broke out between the USSR and Germany, "the Russians would be at the gates of Berlin within days." He instead predicted that the Wehrmacht — unquestionably the best-trained and best-equipped army the world had ever seen — would, following old German expansionist ideas of *Drang nach Osten,* penetrate deep into Russian territory, perhaps as far as Napoleon had in 1812. In his view, albeit a pragmatic one, it would have been logical for the army of the only Slavic empire to break the aggressor's offensive power in the border zones. He believed that the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact (August 23, 1939) was merely a façade for Stalin's cunning move to buy time, and that a clash between the two military giants — the Red Army and the Wehrmacht — on the Russian plains was inevitable. He was convinced that a nation of 200 million people, defending its own soil, freedom, honour, history and tradition, spirituality and Orthodoxy, would eventually defeat the army of a German nation three times smaller. As had happened so many times before in history, the vastness of Russia, he believed, would once again swallow an invading force — in this case, Hitler's armies.[41]

In the end, an entirely authentic fact remains: when completing their first "CPY

[40] This statement, made at a public gathering just a month after Arso's liquidation, raises the question: Why did M. Bakić, on December 12, 1941, firmly defend such a man from Tito's wrath over the failure in Pljevlja and, especially, recommend him as Chief of Staff of the Supreme Command?

[41] According to the memory of M. Šušović and Petar Radević.

membership forms" in 1945, Lieutenant Generals Arso R. Jovanović and Velimir I. Terzić — Chief and Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army — stated in the appropriate section that they had "sympathized with the Communist Party before the war and cooperated with communists." This is most likely the full truth. In any case, that (possible) connection with the communists — assuming it existed — was not Comintern-driven, conspiratorial or subversive. At the same time, it is indisputable that he — as an intellectual with democratic views, a highly educated officer and skilled military tactician, a passionate patriot, Russophile and anti-fascist — was firmly committed to joining the fight against the occupiers of his country and people, without hesitation or compromise. Objectively speaking — even if he had no formal organizational ties with the Party at that point — he ended up on the same side as the communists, especially after the April disaster and the collapse of the state and army to which he had devoted the best and most productive years of his life — his youth and ideals.

The April War

If Arso hadn't been working in the Main General Staff "on special assignments," he would have found himself — at the latest by March 28, the day after the coup that, objectively, amounted to a declaration of war against the Axis powers, especially the Third Reich — in a wartime posting with the Training Battalion in Sarajevo. However, following the orders of Divisional General Milutin Nikolić, he worked alongside a team of General Staff generals and colonels on the detailed development of certain elements of the newly adopted *R-41* war plan. This work lasted day and night from March 27 to dawn on April 1. On that day, this strategically important document — along with several only partially completed annexes and an unfinished troop concentration plan — was distributed for execution to the Army Groups, Army Commands, the Air Force and the Navy. Later that day, these commands passed the operational plans down to brigades and detachments. Thus, despite all its shortcomings — keenly felt by those who had access to it — the new war plan was officially "put into action."

Everything — from the Main General Staff to tactical unit commands — proceeded in the worst possible way. The full activation of the armed forces (a covert mobilization) was ordered for April 3, while general mobilization was only officially declared on April 7, a day after the German invasion of Yugoslavia had begun. This delay was unforgivable and was driven by the desire "not to provoke Germany." It was calculated that, even after the full mobilization was ordered, at least another 20 days would be needed for troop concentration — meaning that all realistic chances for defence had already been lost. Furthermore, the Main General Staff, i.e., the Supreme Command Headquarters, was still in Belgrade when the bombing began on April 6 instead of being at its wartime command post in Banja Koviljača — a decision made "so as not to alarm the public." This failure would have very harmful consequences for the coordination of combat operations, which — poorly prepared as they were — engaged 28 divisions and 94 regiments, meant to swell to 1.2 million active soldiers and

500,000 reserves.[42]

At the morning briefing on April 1, Arso requested urgent permission from his superior, Divisional General Radivoje Janković, Chief of the Operations Section of the Supreme Command Headquarters, to travel to Sarajevo and report to his wartime post. Aware of several critical but unfinished tasks, Janković brought him to the Assistant Chief of the Supreme Headquarters Staff, Divisional General Milutin Nikolić. A respected instructor and sincere patriot, Nikolić had been working tirelessly and self-sacrificingly with several teams of staff officers to alleviate or resolve the major challenges faced by the Supreme Headquarters (SH). He persuaded Arso to stay three more days and work under Lieutenant Colonel Branko Popović, Chief of the Operational Subsection of the General Staff. He reassured Arso that his unit was mobile and part of the Supreme Command reserve, and that he would reach it as soon as full activation began. As a junior officer, Arso did not object. Being hardworking and meticulous, he was soon given tasks in the Transport Section under Brigadier General Vasili Petković, especially in the movement subsection for land transport, where, under great pressure, they were drafting march plans, timetables and coordination diagrams, and completing certain logistical reports. In short, they were hastily preparing transport plans for troop concentration — one of the most complex, extensive and crucial wartime operations.

After many difficulties along the way, Arso arrived in Sarajevo on the afternoon of April 5 and immediately tried to establish contact with the Training Battalion. However, despite making inquiries and searching through various positions, he failed to locate the unit — neither that night nor on the first day of the war. As a result, he reached out to an old acquaintance, Brigadier General Petar Lazić, a General Staff officer and commander of the Infantry Reserve Officers' School. He found him in a state of haste and uncertainty, clearly overwhelmed by the events unfolding — events that, despite his responsibility, competence and resolve, he had no real power to influence amid the general chaos that followed the outbreak of war. General Lazić kept Arso at his headquarters until they could determine the whereabouts of the Training Battalion, informing the headquarters of the Bosnian Divisional Area and the 2nd Army in the process.

Lazić lamented that all three of his cadet battalions were still scattered and distant from each other: the Maribor Battalion, according to wartime deployment orders, had been urgently moved from the city on the Drava River and was marching under the command of several officers — including Lieutenant Milovan M. Šaranović — somewhere toward its parent unit; the Goražde and Sarajevo battalions were on alert, deployed around their respective garrisons in full combat readiness.

The war had already lasted two full days and nights, yet General Lazić still had not established contact with the Supreme Command Headquarters, to which he was directly subordinate in peacetime. He had received no wartime mission for his battalions. Meanwhile, the SH — undoubtedly preoccupied with more pressing matters amid the

[42] V. Terzić, *The Collapse of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1941,* 2nd. ed., Belgrade 1984, Vol. II, pp. 227-234.

worsening situation following the Axis invasion on all fronts — had not issued a single written or telephone communication. Yet Arso persistently insisted on being sent to the front — any front, in any role.

At dawn on April 12, General Lazić returned from a debriefing with his superiors and only then gave Arso the order to report immediately to the 2nd Army Area Headquarters. There, he was informed that Ustaša elements were approaching Sarajevo and that their disruptive influence was already being felt in the city. As a result, Sarajevo needed to be secured from both the northwest and the south in order to maintain order within the city. To carry out this mission, Arso was initially assigned several hastily assembled units, which were tasked with providing armed escorts for all railway transports. It was not the kind of work he knew best, or had hoped for — but it was a wartime assignment and he accepted it without hesitation. He maintained intermittent contact with General Lazić, insistently requesting reassignment to join one of the divisions of the 2nd or 4th Armies, which were retreating south of the Sava River from the north. These included the Bosnian, Slavonian, Vrbas and Lika Divisions, in which Arso had dozens of friends and fellow officers he trusted, and in whose bravery and patriotism he had full confidence. However, his request was denied, as it was believed he was more urgently needed in the defence of Sarajevo. This was also due to the fact that by April 12, those two armies had already been broken up, and their units were retreating in disarray toward central Bosnia.

It was not until April 14 that General Lazić received an order from Pale, handwritten by Divisional General Mihailo Bodi, Commander of the Supreme Command's rear echelon. The order appointed Lazić as Commander of Sarajevo's Defence Headquarters, with instructions "to immediately and reliably seal off the approaches to Sarajevo in the direction of Travnik and Bugojno." At the same time, he was instructed to place the Sarajevo Cadet Battalion under the command of the 4th Army's commander, Army General Petar Nedeljković, in Travnik, and to bring the Goražde Battalion to Sarajevo and place it under the command of the Bosnian Divisional Area. Thanks to this, all three cadet battalions were already operating the very next day on the most threatened fronts: the Sarajevo Battalion toward Travnik, the Goražde Battalion toward Bugojno, and the Maribor Battalion around Jajce and Mrkonjić Grad. As Velimir Terzić noted in his diary, "their companies fought bravely and decisively."[43]

The cadets and their officers took seriously and in a soldierly manner the Kingdom of Yugoslavia's decision of April 13, calling on the army to continue resistance in depth, taking advantage, in particular, of "the natural advantages of the mountainous terrain, difficult to traverse and well suited for defence." Units were instructed to take "urgent steps to prepare and organize suitable defensive lines." However, it was already too late for such measures. On April 15 at 2:00 p.m., the German 16th Motorized Division, advancing from the east via Zvornik, entered Sarajevo, followed that evening by the 14th Armoured Division, after it had broken through a strong resistance of Yugoslav Army units near Doboj. As a result, the remaining elements of the 2nd Army

[43] *Ibid.,* pp. 534, 542.

in Sarajevo capitulated. At the same time, the 4th Army's units no longer constituted a serious fighting force. Following this, the German High Command issued a statement declaring that "thousands of Serbs laid down their arms in Sarajevo" and that "the number of prisoners and quantity of captured war materiel continues to grow." That same day, the Yugoslav government fled the country, and the army leadership, already for the second day, was working to conclude an "armistice with German and Italian forces," justifying it as a matter of vital necessity to "ease the consequences of this unwanted war for the army and the people."[44]

The war was lost, and all that remained for Arso was to head toward Nikšić and Podgorica — armed with a Kragujevac rifle and equipped with an officer's satchel containing the obligatory War Service Regulations and a map of Montenegro and Herzegovina — accompanied by a group of fellow officers.

[44] *Ibid.,* p. 444.

Part Two

COMMANDER OF THE INSURGENT ARMY

• Witness to the dismemberment of occupied Montenegro
• Member of the Military Revolutionary Committee
• Joined the uprising with 300 officers, 15 of whom would become generals of the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia during the war
• Alongside political commissar Milovan Đilas, commanded 32,000 insurgents
• Left behind an unfinished order for the liberation of Podgorica
• Withdrew in the face of the July offensive of 100,000 Italians
• A permanent break with former friends Major Đorđije Lašić and Captain Pavle Đurišić
• Start of bloody clashes with Albanian and Muslim collaborators
• Became a member of the CPY upon recommendation of the Provincial Consultation
• Arrival of the "Bullseye" intelligence group from Malta
• Report to the Supreme Commander in Užice

Occupation

Arso experienced Montenegro as oppressed by the occupier — shocked, wounded and turned inward.

On the day the capitulation of the Royal Yugoslav Army was signed (April 17, 1941), the German 8th Armoured Division of the 2nd Army swept through Montenegro — advancing from Prijepolje, via Berane and Andrijevica, as well as from Pljevlja and Kolašin toward Podgorica. On the same day, the German 60th Motorized Division captured Peć and — no less arrogantly than the armoured division — proceeded toward Andrijevica. Soon afterward, to avoid potential disagreements with its ally Italy over the division of Yugoslav territory into occupation zones, nazi Germany issued an order on April 18 for the 8th Armoured Division to redeploy from Trebinje to the Šabac area, while the 60th Motorized Division was to remain in Andrijevica.

Although there was no direct operational coordination with the Germans, Italian forces also invaded Montenegrin territory on April 17, advancing from Skadar toward Dubrovnik. By April 21, command of the 17th Corps (three divisions) of the 9th Army was established in Cetinje.

Shortly after, the overall strength of the "first wave" of Italian occupying forces in Montenegro was reduced to only 16,000 officers and soldiers, based on the assumption that the Montenegrins would show "loyalty and gratitude" to their "Italian 'uncles.'"[45]

[45] A sarcastic name for the Italian soldiers — their emperor and king, Vittorio Emanuele III, had a Montenegrin aunt Jelena, daughter of King Nikola Petrović.

In fact, the Italian command believed that occupation of Montenegro required no more than a reinforced "Messina" Division. Italian occupation authority was established in Cetinje and 16 other cities and towns — mostly county seats — while units of the Royal Carabinieri (military police) and border guards were stationed in several municipal centres.

The occupation of Montenegro was carried out in accordance with Hitler's "Provisional Guidelines for the Division of Yugoslavia" dated April 12, 1941, and further clarified on April 21 and 22 in Vienna. It was determined that Montenegro would be "maintained as an independent state, united with Italy through political and constitutional ties," while the Bay of Kotor and its hinterland (from Cavtat to Bar, including the Orjen massif) would be "recognized as an integral part of the Kingdom of Italy." This meant it was annexed and renamed *Provincia di Cattaro*, administratively linked to Rome via Zadar, the seat of the governorate. At the same time, in order to protect the military and political interests of its artificial creation, "Greater Albania," Italy annexed to the Albanian protectorate: Ulcinj and its surroundings, parts of the Podgorica, Andrijevica (i.e. Plav and Gusinje) and Berane (i.e. Rožaje) districts, where the majority of the population was of Albanian ethnicity. The Sandžak districts of Pljevlja and Bijelo Polje were placed under the occupation authority in Cetinje, with the demarcation line between Italian-occupied Montenegro and German-occupied Serbia drawn along the Uvac River.

Under Rome's Shrewd Direction, a *High Civil Commissariat* was established in Cetinje, which imposed occupying authority "in accordance with Italian wartime laws" and was tasked by Mussolini with "preparing the ground for proclaiming an independent Montenegro." This imposition of foreign rule was openly supported and assisted by a group of federalists and separatists known among the people as the "Greens." They welcomed Italian troops as "liberators from twenty years of Yugoslav slavery," hoping for the "restoration of the old, noble and proud Montenegrin state." They did this publicly and loudly, delivering welcome speeches to the occupiers and hailing them in *Glas Crnogorca* as the "heralds of a new order"...

It was this humiliated, devastated, occupied and silenced Montenegro that Arso returned to, accompanied by dozens of officers and his family.

His mother Zorka, endlessly noble and hardworking, gathered his daughters so that the four of them could relieve her only son and his wife of material worries. Yet neither they, nor the entire extended family, nor the people — nor even God Himself — could pull him out of the heavy thoughts and dark forebodings: his mind was consumed with the uncertain fate of his little girls and painful memories of his own bleak childhood under Austrian occupation.

Dressed in uniform without epaulettes, Arso sat by the hearth dejected, wandered his father's fields deeply downcast, and spoke with close relatives with great restraint. The question he asked himself — and heard from others — was always the same: how and why was the war lost so quickly? The villagers didn't name generals or officers, didn't ask why Croats and Slovenes had turned their backs on Yugoslavia — they asked why Serbs and Montenegrins hadn't defended it. They weren't surprised by the actions

of the king and the government — having had their own bitter experience with them in 1916. They weren't interested in Arso's technical explanations about how quickly the mighty French military had fallen, how the even greater British force was barely holding across the Channel, or how the Red Army would struggle in a clash with the Wehrmacht — the most modern, aggressive and brutal army in the world. They knew him. They knew he had worked in the General Staff. They trusted him, and because of that, they now looked to him for answers — and probably, accountability too.

Determined to preserve his freedom of action — and mindful of what General M. Zelenika once told him, that a lost battle does not mean a lost war — Arso avoided blaming himself for the mistakes and responsibilities of others. He tried to remain composed, to gather news about the fate of around ten officers from the Piperi and at least twice as many from neighbouring communities, and to meet insightful, experienced people who could see beyond clan borders — even beyond the misfortune-bound mountains of Montenegro.

He moved with caution and asked about people discreetly, aware that this war — like the one from his childhood — would breed those who, for a few personal benefits or material gain, would trample their honour and, as the saying among the Piperi goes, "rent out their ears" (sell out as informants). And indeed, almost from the first day of occupation, such dishonourable and worthless people emerged, prompting the honest folk to sing: "For smokes and cornbread — you betrayed your own brothers."

Haunted by his own wartime childhood, he feared illness and hunger — the chronic burdens and true fate of Montenegrins. He spoke of this and the difficult situation they had all fallen into with Miloš Todorović, a Montenegrin Army officer, at his home in the nearby village of Mrke, near the right bank of the Morača River. During a heated debate about the reasons behind the collapse of Yugoslavia's "warship" and the culprits responsible, two younger colleagues hinted that Arso himself bore some of the blame. The host tried to quell the noise and stop the argument, but the two second lieutenants, citing passages from Napoleon's memoirs from Saint Helena, insisted on criticizing the General Staff and its officers. Arso, struggling to restrain himself, responded that a captain first class, no matter what position he held — even in the General Staff — "could not have significantly influenced the course or outcome of this war." At most, he said, he could have shot himself in front of his unit — which some had done[46] and whom he admired for it — but he believed the better path was to preserve one's head and weapon, "so that under changed conditions and with the people, the war could continue." He added that Montenegrin officers must not burden themselves or others with the stigma of the lost war, since they had no say in its beginning, course or end — least of all in the unconditional capitulation. Instead, they

[46] Unable to bear the shame of the army's capitulation, the commanders of the 90th and 11th Infantry Regiments, Colonels Bogoslav-David Mažuranić and Živko Otašević, committed suicide before the firing squad; this chivalrous act was respectfully described by General V. Terzić, and following them, examples of Major Rudolf Primorac, Captain of the First Class Arso Jovanović and Captain Brano Krstić were mentioned as honorable exceptions who stood out in resistance to the occupiers and Ustaše, so that when it came to Arso's name — placed by the publisher before a harsh choice to either delete or withdraw the manuscript — he refrained (see in detail, *op. cit.,* second edition, Vol. II, p. 535).

must remain with the people, share their common fate, and under the circumstances, organize resistance to oppression. At that, the boisterous guests — prompted more by the host's good *lozovača* than any real argument — "turned toward the East," claiming that Russia would soon break the German's neck if Hitler dared attack, and that the Red Army would be at the gates of Berlin in no time. Some even recited or read from pocket notes passages from Stalin's speeches at two pre-war congresses of the CPSU(B), where he said that the Soviet Union did not fear threats, that it was ready to respond to any warmonger's blow with a strike twice as strong, and that the aggressor would be "quickly wiped out and destroyed" so that "never again would it dare to stick its pig's snout into our Soviet garden." They quoted Voroshilov's assessment of the "unmatched level of combat readiness of the invincible Red Army," and Molotov's threat "that any aggressor would smash their bronze forehead against Soviet border posts." Hearing how fervently they uttered the names of Stalin, Molotov, Voroshilov, Budyonny and Timoshenko, Arso understood that they were eagerly awaiting what they saw as an imminent and treacherous German attack on the Soviet Union — a conflict in which, they believed, Hitler's and Mussolini's armies would soon fall to their knees. That belief struck him as both important and risky, and he felt not just the need but a duty to explain — especially to people he respected and with whom he would share fate in this war — that there could be no talk of a "treacherous attack" when it came to nazis and imperialists surrounding the Soviet Union. They were adversaries to whom the only socialist country could place no trust, and even the non-aggression pact between the Third Reich and the USSR was merely a tactic — the strategy was the destruction of Slavic peoples, with Russia as their main pillar. Yes, the Russian people were great, and their empire vast, and their army large — but it would take time for that entire war machine to get moving, to turn westward and send Timoshenko's troops marching like Field Marshal A.V. Suvorov (1730-1800) once did, straight through Paris to the Channel, across the Alps. The need for such caution was underscored by both the course and the outcome of the Soviet Union's war with Finland (1939-40), especially the operation on the Karelian Isthmus. Some "strategists" scoffed, saying it would all go quickly and easily. Later, Đilas would recall Arso saying, at the Trešnjevik front, that it seemed as if those men could already see "Moscovites" under the hammer and sickle pouring down the Morača's Platije and marching across Ćemovsko Field. To gently warn them from a distance that such romantic, naive and one-sided thinking could be risky — perhaps even dangerous — he told them he'd be proud to be a soldier of that glorious army, and would sing at the top of his lungs if he thought he could call the Russians by song: "Blow, wind, from the Carpathians — and open the door to the Red Army." But he followed that thought with a cautious "but" — about the slow awakening of the "Russian bear." At that, the host's son Vojin, a successful lawyer and seasoned communist, later pulled him aside and advised him to be more reserved when expressing such opinions. People who didn't know him — especially those who "believe in Stalin down to his whiskers" — might misunderstand and label him an Anglophile or, worse yet, a Germanophile, which in those parts was only a short step

away from being branded something far worse.[47]

The Concept of a People's Army

Through the mediation of a mutual relative, Arso arranged a meeting with Blažo Jovanović, head of the Military Commission of the Provincial Committee (Pe-Ka) for Montenegro, the Bay of Kotor and the Sandžak. Blažo, more than three decades later from his sickbed in Igalo, recalled that encounter in his hideout near the Zeta River. He remembered how the newcomer, deeply worried and withdrawn, was reminded of some of their pre-war conversations in Belgrade and Zavala — always open and honest, without ever causing trouble for either of them — just to get the discussion going. They spoke at length — into the night and in the cellar of Blažo's house in Velje Brdo, which had been turned into one of six weapons depots in Piperi — about the past, and especially about what might come. When Arso asked whether there was any news about the fate of officers from Kuči, Bjelopavlići, Zeta and the Lješanska nahija, Blažo told him that Velimir I. Terzić had "somehow made it from Dalmatia" back to his native Zeta, that Major Vaso S. Vukčević was already "in contact with the communists," as were Pero Ćetković from Ljubotinje, Đorđije Lašić from Lijeva Rijeka, Pavle Đurišić from Berane and Jovo Vukotić from Nikšić. They also spoke — by name — about a group of officers from Piperi and Kuči, and the possibility of establishing ties among themselves, to agree on "joining the upcoming fight against the occupier." It was agreed that Arso would write a letter to his trusted friends and colleagues from military schools and the army, and that Party couriers would deliver them to the indicated addresses. His face lit up when he heard that the communists and other patriots had collected a large amount of weapons from participants in the offensive towards Skadar, and from the disbanded columns of the Zeta and Herzegovinian Divisions. There were plans to form strike groups that would be trained for armed actions in the coming uprising against the occupiers — an opportunity for patriotic officers to get involved in the training, to ensure professionalism and effectiveness, and to help prepare plans for sabotaging infrastructure critical to the occupiers.

This topic was revisited in early June during a meeting in Đurkovići with a group of Piperi communists and trusted officers. There, Blažo reported that they had gathered as many as 12,000 rifles, 30 machine guns and three times as many light machine guns. They also had howitzers, mountain guns, mortars, over three million rounds of ammunition, explosives, military gear and medical supplies. In his view, this made it possible to begin training strike groups. It was agreed to intensify efforts to form and train these units for combat operations. Arso took responsibility for helping form and train two strike groups of about twenty men each.

As part of the final preparations for the uprising, Arso — along with Major V. Vukčević and Captain V. Terzić, and under the instructions of the Provincial Com-

[47] According to the memory of the then second lieutenant Petar Radević, this happened at the end of May.

mittee's Military Commission — worked on a plan for how the coming military operations should be carried out. He led the group and reported directly to the Military Commission, which consisted of Blažo Jovanović, Mitar Bakić, Savo Brković, Jefto Šćepanović and Jagoš Uskoković. According to V. Terzić's recollection, the concept for armed struggle developed by that expert group — based on a careful analysis of the situation in Montenegro — was as follows: 1. At the right moment, launch a general armed uprising of the people; 2. Begin the uprising suddenly and simultaneously across all of Montenegro, by attacking enemy garrisons in order to limit the manoeuvrability of occupying forces; and 3. Form insurgent companies, battalions and brigades modelled after the structure of the Montenegrin People's Army from 1916.[48]

Arso had a decisive influence on the group's work, and within the Military Commission itself, when it came to adopting this idea — as he was the only General Staff officer among them. In his analysis, he often referred back to the organization, formation and combat tactics of the Montenegrin and Serbian armies during the Balkan Wars and the First World War, which he had studied in detail. He wrote about these experiences in his book *Tactics of the Infantry Battalion*, explained them in staff discussions and factored them into the elaboration of details for the *R-41* wartime plan.

The "officers' concept," carefully developed and explained, called for thorough and long-term preparation of the insurgent army for war, along with a clearly defined organizational and structural formation — from platoon to brigade — including an organized system for replenishment and supply.

However, the officers were unaware of how urgently — and above all, why — the Party was pushing forward, which is why, in the field, the early efforts were limited solely to the formation of smaller, fragmented combat groups that were hastily assembled. This was, in fact, a consequence of the communists' uncritical adherence to the Political Bureau's directive stressing the need for secrecy in preparations — a requirement likely driven also by fears that some individuals might become complacent. At the same time, a limiting factor in forming and preparing these combat groups within the Communist Party's framework was the more or less open distrust from the leadership of civilian political parties and certain officers of the Royal Yugoslav Army. Some of these individuals even formed secret plans to eliminate particular communists and sympathetic officers, reasoning that the occupiers were far too strong and that any resistance would bring devastating reprisals upon the people. Separatist leaders went so far as to publicly state — even writing in *The Voice of Montenegro* — that Italians were "friends of the Montenegrin people," and that "Montenegrins do not raise weapons against their friends."

The attack by the Third Reich on the Soviet Union (June 22) significantly boosted the fighting spirit of both the communists and the general population. It deepened their anti-fascist convictions and strongly reinforced a deeply rooted Russophilia. In response, the Provincial Committee sent a message to the people of Montenegro, stating that national liberation could only be achieved "through alliance with the great,

[48] Batrić Jovanović, *Montenegro in the NOB and Revolution,* Belgrade 1960, p. 56.

powerful and invincible land of socialism — the Soviet Union." For Arso, this message was more comprehensible and undoubtedly more relatable than the slogan calling for "a militant alliance of workers and peasants" and especially the call "to fight for the establishment of Soviet power and the final reckoning with the capitalist system." As a key witness to the July events, Velimir Terzić recalled how he and Arso deeply reflected on that appeal to "establish Soviet power" in Montenegro. As professional soldiers, they struggled to envision their place beneath the billowing red banner of revolution. Still, the call to arms against the global evil of fascism and the occupiers of their homeland fortunately overshadowed and drowned out all slogans and banners.

To manage the immediate preparations for armed struggle, on June 22 the Provincial Committee formed a Military-Revolutionary Committee composed of: Blažo Jovanović, Mitar Bakić, Savo Brković, Jefto Šćepanović and Jagoš Uskoković. According to participant recollections and the publication *Eagles of the Black Mountains* (Milan, 1987), Captain Jovanović was also a member of this body, while the names of V. Terzić and V. Vukčević were later added by the "OVRA" Special Political Police and the SIM Military Counterintelligence Service.

That the Party held the command role is confirmed by Peko Dapčević. A few days before the uprising began, when he asked who would command the insurgent army of Montenegro, he received a "firm and clear" answer from the Provincial Committee: "The District Committee will command." Reportedly, he responded: "Wait, comrades, but the army is the army, and the Party is the Party — committees are something else." They repeated: "No, the committees will command!" According to his 1991 recollection, "that was the only, dominant view at the time... The Party commanded, especially during the uprising. It's not unfortunate that the Party commanded back then. That's how it had to be, because — and we all know it well — we were wholly beholden to the Comintern."[49]

When authorities in Rome judged that the occupation system in Montenegro had taken hold and the political climate was ripe for inaugurating the "Independent Kingdom of Montenegro," Commissioner Mazzolini received instructions from Count Ciano to prepare an "historic assembly" for the occasion. The text of the Declaration arrived from Rome, along with a script for how the "session" in Cetinje was to be opened, conducted and concluded. The assembly was scheduled for July 12 — a date traditionally dedicated to the highly revered Saint Peter of Cetinje. The Declaration, drafted on the banks of the Tiber, was to be adopted without any debate over its content. In practice, 65 carefully selected delegates unanimously approved this "historic document," which proclaimed "an independent Montenegro in the form of a constitutional monarchy." Realizing that no member of the Petrović dynasty was willing to accept the farcical "throne," the assembly also adopted a text requesting "His Majesty the King and Emperor of Italy to graciously appoint a regent for the Kingdom of Montenegro who would proclaim the Constitution."

The documents were "unanimously accepted," and an overjoyed Mazzolini con-

[49] *Collected Works on the Leadership of the NOB and the Revolution in Serbia 1941-1945,* Belgrade 1988, pp. 238-241.

cluded his speech by stating that the day marked "a symbol and beginning of a new European order for Montenegro — an order already being secured by the genius of Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler, an order that will usher in an era of justice, true peace and cooperation among nations."

Everything regarding the proclamation of Montenegro's "constitutional monarchy" was completed in under an hour. The closing image: the "people's delegates," together with High Civil Commissioner Mazzolini, solemnly saluting the raising of the Montenegrin flag.[50]

The Uprising

The following day, July 13, the separatist leader Sekula Drljević was scheduled to travel to Rome with a group of "prominent citizens" to present the Declaration to the Italian King and Emperor, "as a sign of gratitude for his generosity toward Montenegro," and to request that he appoint a royal regency in Cetinje. It turned out, however, that the so-called "Independent Montenegro" was perhaps the unluckiest kingdom in the world — it did not survive even a single day. In fact, it was on that very day that the real, democratic and freedom-loving Montenegro made its voice heard — launching a nationwide uprising against the occupiers.

In the uprising, along with about 1,780 communists and three times as many members of the Union of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia (SKOJ), the majority of the 32,000 fighters also included roughly 400 active officers and non-commissioned officers from the Royal Yugoslav Army. That army had unconditionally capitulated less than three months earlier, but these officers — armed and determined not to let themselves be shackled — returned to their family homes, before their families, clans and tribes. Nearly every other one of them would not only participate in the NOB for the next four years, but serve in high command and staff positions throughout the war, from Lovćen to Triglav and from Dinara to the Stara Planina. Among them, and throughout the war the most prominent, was General Staff officer Arso R. Jovanović.

The uprising — with its sudden outbreak, intensity, mass scale and dramatic developments — surprised, confused and alarmed both the unprepared provincial military leadership of the uprising and the stunned and unready political and military leadership of Italy...

The core of the Provincial Committee and its Military-Revolutionary Committee — especially the Political Bureau delegate — were at first caught off guard, and then increasingly worried two or three days later, as reports from the field arrived, mostly through Party district committees: that within the first three days and nights, thousands of insurgents were attacking Italian garrisons in towns from Cetinje to Bijelo Polje and Berane, forming fronts; that dozens of enemy soldiers were killed, hundreds wounded or captured, and vast amounts of war materiel were falling into rebel hands. However, the directive issued by the Provincial Committee on July 8 in

[50] In detail: B. Jovanović, *op. cit.,* p. 26.

Piperi — in full alignment with the decisions of the Political Bureau of the CC of the CPY (CC CPY) from July 4 in Belgrade — was unambiguous: armed resistance was to begin with limited guerrilla actions by the 285 registered guerrilla units, composed of about 6,000 fighters, aimed at carabinieri stations, telegraph and telephone infrastructure, and transport routes. This directive was effectively ordered by the Political Bureau and the *GenSec,*[51] and was in line with Stalin's and the Comintern's calls to all European resistance movements. These instructions were obeyed and carried out in Montenegro without question. A unified strategy existed, and it was understood that it had to be implemented the same way, regardless of local conditions. Yet events on the ground quickly diverged from the CC of the CPY's strategy and the tactics outlined in the Provincial Committee's directive. Guerrilla units and strike groups, ranging from 10 to 30 fighters, were supposed to act at night — skilfully, decisively, according to coordinated district plans, targeting objectives selected by local committees, while staying at home during the day. It's true that the Party anticipated twice the number of fighters as had officially been registered, but for reasons of secrecy, they were not to be engaged in combat initially. The district committee secretaries were explicitly ordered not to begin operations before Sunday, July 13 — and even then, only with PC approval. Nevertheless, everything unfolded outside the directive's control, beyond the organizational capacity and planning of the PC — and beyond its readiness or capability. Within just the first three days, entire districts had been liberated (aside from their centres), and thousands of armed men had rallied around them. In the Danilovgrad district, some 3,000 insurgents were armed; following a highly successful action at Košćela on July 15, thousands of insurgents were holding the front lines toward Cetinje; and Piperi insurgent units, in plain sight of the Provincial Committee and positioned toward Podgorica, had grown to about 960 fighters. There was a growing risk of chaos — of events spinning out of the Party's control and oversight. That is why, on the night of July 15, the PC adopted "Directive No. 2" — calling for partial demobilization and a return to guerrilla tactics. The directive was sent out by couriers to all parts of Montenegro on the morning of July 16 — only to be revoked the very next day and replaced with a third directive, the third in just nine days. This new directive instructed committees to proceed with a full-scale popular uprising — including the blocking of garrisons and attacks on towns — and the transition from guerrilla groups to companies and battalions, formed mostly along village and tribal lines. This last directive was based on the positions brought that night by Mitar Bakić, who had come from Belgrade. He had arrived in the occupied capital shortly after July 4, when the Political Bureau decided to initiate armed resistance in the form of guerrilla warfare. He had briefed Tito and Ivan Milutinović-Milutin on the broad preparations made by Montenegrin communists and the readiness of patriotic masses to follow the Party into armed struggle against the occupier — a fight that was expected to expand into Herzegovina as well.

Much later, Bakić would recall that this decision had included several key pos-

[51] This refers to the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, Josip Broz — a term from the vocabulary of the "cadres" of the IK KI.

itions: that during the uprising, in case of an enemy counter-offensive, fixed front lines should not be established but rather the territory should be defended flexibly; that food, weapons and other war supplies should be evacuated from the liberated towns into the mountains; and that a representative political body should be formed, consisting of members of the CPY and prominent figures from opposition parties that supported the struggle against the occupiers, which would act publicly as the leadership of the uprising. These positions were, allegedly, incorporated into the "third directive," which was urgently dispatched to Party district committees and military-revolutionary committees and commissions in the counties. Whether they were truly included and how they were communicated "on the ground" remains largely unknown, but it is a fact that the guidance was not followed — not even in areas where M. Bakić personally represented the Party. In any case, the damage caused by the previous, rushed directive reducing the general uprising solely to guerrilla actions was varied: among insurgents in the Bar county it caused hesitation; around Cetinje, insurgent masses dispersed and went home; in Nikšić county, the blockade of the garrison was lifted; in Danilovgrad, the uprising leadership was never even informed; in Podgorica county (for example, in Piperi), the insurgents refused to abandon their positions; in Andrijevica, the directive arrived only after the town had already been captured; in Berane county, it was withdrawn just in time; while in the Kolašin Front area, "a good portion of the insurgents had dispersed and then regrouped for a renewed attack"...

By July 21, most counties had been liberated, and relatively strong occupying garrisons had been defeated in their centres — including Andrijevica, Grahovo, Danilovgrad, Berane, Kolašin, Bijelo Polje, Žabljak, Šavnik and others. More precisely, the entirety of Montenegro was liberated except for the cities of Podgorica, Cetinje, Nikšić and Pljevlja, and the narrow coastal belt from Ulcinj, through Bar, to the Bay of Kotor. According to National Liberation Movement (NOP) sources, the occupiers had around 4,880 troops "put out of action": 735 killed, approximately 1,120 wounded and 2,970 captured officers and soldiers. The captured war materiel included: 4,227 rifles, 85 machine guns, 118 light machine guns, 22 cannons, 28 heavy and 34 light mortars, 84 trucks, 4 airplanes, a large quantity of food and ammunition. Destroyed equipment included one tank and one airplane, as well as 57 motorcycles. Naturally, the figures provided by General Pirzio Biroli were entirely different: he reported 1,079 killed and wounded, 900 "captured" officers and soldiers, 4 airplanes, and so on.[52]

The July Offensive Operation

Italy's first response to the uprising in Montenegro came in the form of a brutal July offensive — essentially, the first major assault operation on the Montenegrin front. As an introduction, Count Galeazzo Ciano notes in his *Diary* that official Rome was so shocked and alarmed by the scale and resolve of the uprising in Montenegro that,

[52] Milija Stanišić, *The Course of the Revolution in Montenegro,* Nikšić 1980, Vol. 1, p. 107; Giacomo Scoti and Luciano Viazi, *Eagles of the Black Mountains,* Milan 1987, p. 242. Translated by Prof. Gracijela Čulić.

from the very beginning, there was doubt as to whether Italy's available armed forces — despite their numbers and extensive experience in the "pacification" of Abyssinia, Albania and Greece, as well as in crushing the fronts of democratic Spain — would be capable of handling the insurgents on their own, as urgently required. Some generals and politicians, in evaluating the situation, even considered the humiliating — though potentially saving — option of asking Hitler for Wehrmacht divisions to participate in the operation. The vain Duce, however, would not hear of it, and the military high command rightly feared that, if the uprising in Montenegro was not quickly and decisively crushed by Italian forces, the Germans would step in — as they had in Greece — and seize this "jewel in their sphere of interest in the Balkans." Relying on the strength and competence of their own troops — especially their officer corps with extensive wartime experience — the Italian command issued orders to Army General Pirzio Biroli, commander of the Higher Command of the Armed Forces in Albania, to urgently suppress the uprising and to "punish the insurgents with the utmost severity and exemplary retribution." Biroli, viewing this as a final opportunity to affirm himself at the twilight of his military career, took on the task with full force, determined to carry it out by the book, even at the cost of extreme brutality.[53] He left nothing to chance, unwilling to risk compromising the honour of his homeland through failure. His subordinates understood and accepted this. Of the 11 division and regiment commanders engaged in the suppression of the uprising — commanding several battle groups and special units — five were recipients of gold medals for bravery, a distinction that in the Italian imperial army could only be earned in combat, leading units in battles and operations from Asmara (1935), to Toledo (1938), to Epirus (1940).[54] Still, due to Montenegrin military traditions and mentality, the insurgents generally underestimated these commanders and their units — often irrationally — despite having virtually no combat experience against them, except for brief skirmishes during ten days of operations on the Skadar Front, involving the Zeta and part of the Herzegovinian Divisions, the Kom Detachment, and a battalion group from the Right Column of the Kosovo Division. It is worth noting that the Zeta Division alone, in just five days of advancing twenty kilometres toward Skadar, captured around 1,000 Italian soldiers, from which two flawed conclusions were drawn: first, that the Italians were weak fighters; and second, that only Montenegrin and Herzegovinian units could have carried out such an offensive. While these troops were indeed battle-ready, such assessments overlooked two key factors: 1. Italian units in Albania had been weakened by defeats in Greece in autumn 1940 and were still vulnerable — caught off guard and unprepared for this offensive; and 2. According to War Plan R-41, the Yugoslav Royal

[53] Army general at the age of 64, with a rich career: chief of staff of a division in the Eastern Forces on the Salonika Front (1916), where, by decree of the Serbian Crown Prince Alexander, he was awarded the Order of the White Eagle with Swords; commander of the Barsalier Regiment in the Battle of the Piave (1918), of an army corps in the war in Eritrea (1935), and of the army on the Greco-Albanian front; a successful professional soldier who did not interfere in politics, and Rome welcomed him as a national hero.

[54] According to *op. cit.,* Scoti, Viazi.

Army was to begin with defensive actions on all fronts to preserve manpower and buy time, with offensives reserved only for Albania, in coordination with Greek and British forces, in an attempt to break Italian troops (about 30 divisions, eight of which were positioned directly against Yugoslavia), and thus create a new Allied front — analogous to Salonika in 1916-18. In other words, the advance of the Zeta, Herzegovinian and Kosovo Divisions, and the Kom Detachment — under the command of generals Milenko Varjačić, Vojislav Petrović, Milutin Milenković and Ljubo Novaković — into Albania from the north and west, was not only due to their combat strength, but also because they were assigned offensive roles in the war plan. However, even these units, despite the bravery of their officers and soldiers, never reached beyond the approaches to Skadar, owing to the catastrophic collapse on all other fronts and the unconditional capitulation of the Yugoslav Royal Army on April 17. Nevertheless, the brief combat experience of these units — and more importantly, the arms they left behind to the Montenegrin people — would prove invaluable during the July uprising. This fact was, on the other hand, underestimated by the Italian command — and it would become one of the key reasons that thousands of their soldiers and officers were taken out of action in the first eight days of fighting, and that the insurgents captured a rich haul of war materiel.

For the July offensive, General Biroli mobilized a force of 100,000 soldiers, primarily composed of six divisions, reinforced by alpine cavalry groups, border guard battalions, Blackshirt legions, the Albanian "Skenderbeg" formation (two regiments), and various irregular Albanian and Muslim groups totalling about 10,000 men. These undeniably formidable ground forces, further supported by several tank units, were backed by naval detachments on Lake Skadar and at sea, and by the powerful 5th Air Group, comprising multiple reconnaissance and bomber squadrons. In total, 150,000 Italian troops were deployed against 38,000 Montenegrin insurgents.[55] Drawing from its rich and tragic experience in the "pacification" of countries and peoples, Rome responded decisively and harshly to crush what Count Ciano described as the "war between Italy and Montenegro," determined not to allow the emergence of a Balkan front.[56]

According to the Italian operational plan, the offensive's initial priority was the de-blockading of Cetinje, the seat of the occupation's civil and military administration. Next was to relieve pressure on Podgorica, then push through the Zeta Valley to "lift the blockade" on Nikšić, gain control of the Cetinje and Bar districts, and finally secure northern and northeastern Montenegro. As divisions arrived at the staging areas, they were sent to the following directions: "Pusteria," "Taro" and "Messina" from Podgorica and the coast toward Cetinje; "Cacciatori delle Alpi" through Danilovgrad, Nikšić and Šavnik; "Venezia" toward Kolašin, then Andrijevica and Berane; and "Puglie" from Peć toward Andrijevica and from Rožaje toward Berane. Supported heavily by artillery, tanks and aircraft, the attacking columns broke the

[55] Radoje Pajović, *Pavle Đurišić,* Zagreb 1987, 22.

[56] *Diary of Count Ciano 1939-1943,* Zagreb 1952, 263.

insurgent fronts and resistance over about thirty days (from July 18 to August 15), crushing garrisons' blockades and reoccupying towns. On August 15, when units of the "Pusteria" and "Cacciatori delle Alpi" divisions linked up on the Žabljak-Šavnik road, the major Italian offensive came to a close, having been strongly supported in its final phase by thousands of Albanian and Muslim bands, who committed atrocities while attacking insurgent positions from Pešter, Metohija, Plav, Gusinje and Albania. Rome had previously declared the uprising an illegitimate and illegal act, a "betrayal of friendly Italy," which only inflamed the vengeful tone of the operation's command. Italian officers were war-weary, and soldiers unmotivated to die in these "black mountains"; the "Cacciatori delle Alpi" and "Taro" divisions had actually begun boarding ships for leave just before the uprising broke out — one can only imagine the hatred and thirst for revenge with which they now turned against the insurgents and Montenegrin civilians.

Meanwhile, Mussolini handed over all civil and military power to General Biroli, ordering him to relocate from Albania to Cetinje to "personally command the operations, which were increasingly resembling a real war." By employing overwhelming force and brutal repression, Biroli believed he had fulfilled the main objective as stated in the July 15 order: to "prevent the great war from taking root and spreading, restore order and peace in the country, conduct a strict purge of unreliable elements, and completely and permanently disarm the population." Perhaps he believed this at the time, but wartime reality quickly disproved it — by Saint Elijah's Day (August 2) he reported: "To keep Montenegrins in submission... to try to maintain order through promises and persuasion — was like ploughing the sea."[57]

From the moment the decision to launch an armed uprising was made on July 8, Arso R. Jovanović was based primarily at the headquarters of the Military Revolutionary Committee. Among the leadership figures with the highest political authority, he was the most influential military figure. On his own initiative, he drafted attack plans for targets near the most heavily fortified garrisons — in the Durmitor region, Piva, the Sandžak and Vasojevići — all coordinated with Serbian uprisings, focusing on the central Balkan ridge from Prokletije to Prekornica, which could easily be defended and effectively shield northern Montenegro, the Sandžak and Serbia by controlling just two narrow passes from the south. With Blažo Jovanović's knowledge, Arso continued to write letters to officers he trusted and knew well, advising which enemy targets to hit, neutralize or disable in the event of an uprising. According to Velimir Terzić, the letters were sent to Major Đorđije Lašić, Signal Lieutenant Nikola P. Đurović from Petrovići, Captains First Class Nikola A. Vujosević from Kuči, Pero T. Ćetković from Ljubotinj, Pavle Đurišić from Vasojevići, Lieutenant Milovan Šaranović and Captain Petar Šaletić from Bjelopavlići. The letters were delivered by couriers via the Provincial Committee's mail or other trusted individuals, as ordered by Blažo.

The fate of those letters — as well as the usefulness of those that reached the intended recipients — varied significantly. Lieutenant Đurović, shortly after deserting

[57] *Collection of Documents on the NOR,* Vol. XIII, Book 1, Doc. 97.

his post as commander of an insurgent company, brought his letter to the Italian "bloc," using it as further proof of the "destructive campaign of the insurgents" and his own loyalty to the occupiers. For Vujosević, the letter served as a kind of instruction manual for organizing the first actions along the roads. Lieutenant Šaranović never received his — it was halted at the Provincial Committee after one of the "legal-illegals" loudly remarked (within earshot of a Political Bureau delegate) that in 1939, the Communist Party had condemned the family of Milovan's father Mihailo and his brothers to a harsh "general popular political boycott" because of a tribal "clash" in which two communists had been killed. P. Ćetković did not receive a letter either, though he would be among the insurgents from the first day. Šaletić, however, did receive his, and from the beginning of the uprising served as a military advisor in the insurgent headquarters, alongside Đ. Lašić and P. Đurišić in the Andrijevica and Berane districts.

Six prepared strike detachments from the Piperi region, well-acquainted with their combat assignments, occupied dominant heights on the northern approaches to Podgorica on July 14. Their goal was, in coordination with insurgent units from Kuči, to close off the Morača Canyon and roads toward Kolašin and Mateševo, and with comrades from Bjelopavlići, to block the Zeta Valley and routes toward Danilovgrad and Nikšić. After two days of fighting, the number of Piperi insurgents grew to 862, prompting Arso to propose the formation of an insurgent battalion composed of four companies. Captain Savo Dmitrović, though not particularly enthusiastic about the struggle against the occupiers, was appointed commander — partly due to his prominent family background and as proof of the broad appeal of the uprising.

Wearing a uniform without epaulettes, strapped with a belt carrying a pistol and two hand grenades, in shoes made from car tires, and with gaiters tightly fastened around his calves, a plain cap with no insignia, Arso moved swiftly over the rocky terrain, tall and armed with a Kragujevac rifle brought from Travnik. Talking with fighters, he was encouraged by their enthusiasm over early successes and their eagerness to jump into even fiercer and larger battles. It was a colourful band — from beardless youths to seventy-year-olds, all similarly armed. Leading them were company commanders in their thirties, intellectuals from respected families, mostly communists. They spoke of the attack on Podgorica and its capture as if it were a "simple, done deal." But amid such talk came something that — precisely because it was impossible and untrue — alarmed this professional soldier: someone was persistently spreading stories, perhaps not maliciously but naively and irresponsibly, about how the Italians, "terrified to death" and in plain view of the people of Podgorica, were packing up and retreating toward Skadar, virtually offering the city on the Ribnica to the insurgents; that they had abandoned other cities in Montenegro, fleeing across the sea or toward Metohija. Unknown from where or how, rumours also spread that "southern front units of the Red Army" had already taken Romania in an unstoppable offensive, that Marshal Budyonny and his famous cavalry were galloping along the Danube, reaching within 40 kilometres of Belgrade, possibly near Kovin or Smederevo, and that Timoshenko's tank wedges were breaking through Banat, rushing to aid — who else — but faithful and eternal ally Montenegro. It was also said that Russian paratroopers might drop at

any moment — likely all at once — onto Ćemovsko Field (Podgorica), Cetinje Field, Kapino Field (Nikšić), nearby Radovče, Ivanova Korita below Lovćen and Njeguši beneath Durmitor. These stories were accompanied by "Orthodox news" of mass uprisings of workers and peasants shaking the foundations of nazi Germany itself. These tales swept through the insurgent masses, intensifying the desire to drive the occupiers out, deepening fighters' impatience and prompting pressure on commanders to launch an assault on Podgorica. The most hot-blooded among them shouted in unison: "We'll be too late, someone else will do it before us."[58]

To those familiar with Montenegrin history, tradition and mentality, the stories about the Russians were understandable. After all, people there had long sung "Oh Russia, our only hope...," and more recently "Forward, Comintern — Montenegro is faithful to you." In 1921, Dr. Vukašin Marković, a known comrade of Lenin, had been welcomed with open arms on his journey to the land of his ancestors, aiming to "ignite the world revolution" and, with "the revolutionary masses," establish a Soviet Montenegrin Republic. Simple folk in the region truly wanted to believe that the high priests of communism could — from atop Lovćen, or better yet Durmitor — see the sunlit spires of the Kremlin on a clear day. It was a deeply rooted belief that in Russia, everything that served the people existed on a vast scale — from a grain of wheat to the Siberian railway. Arso had heard such stories long ago, and despite knowing his ancestors' tendency for exaggeration, he built a rational attitude toward Russia and its people. He considered the similarities in historical experience, shared Orthodox faith, cultural interconnection, and strategic alignment in political and military terms. Based on reliable intelligence, Arso also developed a realistic view of the Red Army's strength: unprepared to successfully resist the Wehrmacht in the early stages of the war, yet destined to become victorious, as its homeland — with its inexhaustible human and material resources — would sustain it. For Montenegrins, this meant patience, bloodshed and suffering. But how to explain any of this to the people — Arso wondered, listening respectfully to their misguided hopes. To tell them the truth would risk disappointment and potentially lead to abandonment of positions and disbanding of insurgent units. On the other hand, to say the Red Army would arrive in just a few days or weeks could be taken in two ways: either as a call to fight harder and welcome the Russians in a liberated land, or as a reason to give up, believing the Soviets would defeat the enemy anyway. When it came to the evacuation of Italians, Arso — unlike many insurgents — knew that reports of their withdrawal from Podgorica were false. But he still believed in the success of the uprising. Among the Piperi insurgents, whose forward positions were just 500 to 1,000 metres from the city's edge, he drafted an attack plan: organizing troops and supplies, specifying approach routes for units from Bjelopavlići, Lješanska nahija, Zeta, Kuči, Bratonožići and his native Piperi. He imagined the scene of Podgorica's liberation — perhaps even with a parade — and the capture of a rich war bounty, including artillery batteries, which would be especially valuable.

On the third day of the uprising, the Military Revolutionary Committee received

[58] M. Stanišić, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 130.

reports that villages in Lješanska nahija were hesitating to join the fight against the occupiers. The concern wasn't just that these villagers — allegedly under the influence of fifth columnists and wavering elements — were unwilling to fight, but that the Italians might use their territory and the main road from Podgorica to strike the rear of the insurgents attacking Cetinje. It didn't take long for Arso's assessment to result in the Committee's decision to send a combined unit of about 100 fighters, selected from the Piperi Battalion. It was led by Vojo J. Popović, the local Party committee secretary, and Ljubo Božanović as commissar. Arso joined them as military advisor. They were told their task was not to apply military pressure or take revenge, but rather to speak with local villagers and their representatives about destroying roads and other infrastructure important to the enemy in the event of an advance toward Rijeka Crnojevića and Cetinje. The unit reached Krnjička Kamenica and found themselves at a crossroads: bloodshed or return to Piperi with the mission incomplete. Arso firmly opposed bloodshed, though he didn't have unanimous support for this stance within the unit.

On his return to Piperi on July 18, Arso stopped at the Operational Headquarters of the Bjelopavlići insurgent units, which had been grouped into 25 companies and were closing in on strong Italian forces in Danilovgrad. They had cut off the water supply and blocked access to the Zeta River, cutting off water for the enemy troops and their 300 pack horses. After hearing the briefing from the Headquarters' advisor, Gendarmerie Major Milovan Leković, Arso endorsed their plan for attacking Danilovgrad. He also advised them on how to handle captured war booty and urged them to move quickly toward Podgorica, sharing his outline for its liberation. Finally, he warned them of the risk that the enemy, before being attacked in Podgorica, might attempt a tank-led breakout supported by aviation through the Zeta Valley and nearby highlands to recapture Danilovgrad and relieve Italian forces blockaded in Nikšić.

Commander of the Insurgent Troops

By a decision of the Provincial Committee adopted on July 19, and based on the assessment that the growth of the insurgent forces required a corresponding development of proper command structures, the Provisional Supreme Command of the National Liberation Troops of Montenegro, Boka and the Sandžak was established, replacing the existing Military Revolutionary Committee. True, the name was lengthy and ambitiously worded, but its essence lay in expressing the breadth and liberatory character of the struggle, presented as the only viable path forward for the Montenegrin people. Appointed to the Command, alongside the Political Bureau delegate, were: Božo Ljumović and Blažo Jovanović, political and organizational secretaries of the Provincial Committee; Budo Tomović, SKOJ secretary; Colonel Bajo Stanišić; and Captain First Class Arso Jovanović. The original order establishing the Provisional Supreme Command has not been preserved, nor does any other surviving document clearly indicate the specific roles assigned to each appointee. However, by drawing analogies from other "Yugoslav lands" where the Political Bureau of the CC of the CPY also deployed its delegates as of July 4, one might reasonably conclude that Milovan

Đilas served as commander of this high military body for Montenegro, Boka and the Sandžak, and that Blažo Jovanović acted as political commissar. In practice, however, the Political Bureau delegate — inexperienced and disinclined to deal with military matters — effectively left the command responsibilities to Arso, while he assumed the role of the "liaison with the people," the local term for political commissar. This was meant to highlight the broad, inclusive nature of the struggle, acting as a political concession and a form of invitation for officers and members of former democratic political parties to join the fight against the occupiers.[59]

Milovan Đilas, a key figure in these events, wrote in *Revolutionary War* that the Provincial Committee "concluded that a military command for Montenegro, Boka and the Sandžak must be formed" and that they "would need a professionally trained military figure." Blažo proposed Arso Jovanović, a General Staff major who had avoided capture and taken refuge in his native village, Zavala, in Upper Piperi.

Arso wasn't the only officer known to the Committee who could be relied on — there were several in each municipality hiding and liaising with communists — but Arso was nearby and, according to Blažo, especially suitable. Đilas was tasked with making the final judgement — all the more so because Blažo and Arso were distant relatives. Blažo had already met with Arso after the occupation, even though Arso had not yet joined the Party. It was already dark when Blažo and Đilas set off to see him. "I remember," Đilas wrote, "that we walked for more than an hour up a stony slope in the warm night. Arso lived cautiously, but we found him — in a stone ground-floor house with a hearth and a kerosene lamp. Inside were his mother, his sister Miluša, his wife Ksenija (Senka) and their two daughters, who soon went to bed. We began our conversation by the hearth, although we were a bit hesitant because of the women." They told him an Italian attack might occur and asked how he viewed the situation. Arso responded without hesitation: "I absolutely agree to anything that is against the occupier." "And the other officers?" Đilas asked. "I think they'll all join the fight," Arso replied. "They served us warm milk — clearly they themselves were in need," Đilas recalled. "Then Arso put on his officer's tunic, laced up his boots — he would wear boots and a uniform throughout the war — and walked us out to the front of the house. We agreed that he would come to us the next day, to the house of Todor Milutinović, brother of Ivan Milutinović, a Political Bureau member, where we had moved in the meantime." And thus began Arso's rise in the still unformed new army: first as chief of our Montenegrin command, and by the end of 1941, as part of the SH of Yugoslavia. "He would never have taken that path had the Royal Yugoslav Army — in which he had served loyally as one of the most promising officers — been prepared and willing to fight and die for the homeland..." Đilas concluded. "On their way back, Blažo and I exchanged impressions: I liked Arso for his unwavering determination, even though his way of speaking and reasoning wasn't particularly communist... He was slender, with a lean, ruddy face, dark eyes and thin lips — the kind of person who made an

[59] The data on Arso as a commander are cited by historians Branko Latas, Gojko Miljanić and Radoje Pajović.

excellent student from a poor family."[60]

On July 17, two of the "communist patriarchs" met with Colonel Bajo Stanišić at Arso's home. Đilas described him: "He wore a uniform — ironed but worn — without insignia. Broad-shouldered and stocky. He carried a thick cane, though he looked like a man in his fifties and was in such good health he didn't need it at all. He had a beard, and when we asked why he'd grown it, he replied that it was a Chetnik custom to wear a beard while the homeland was under occupation. I was aware of that custom, but I gave neither the beard nor its meaning much weight, as I didn't expect Bajo Stanišić to be anything other than a patriot and an officer.

"He already knew the uprising had begun, so they soon moved on to discussing goals and the creation of the Supreme Command. They proposed that he join the command, but he declined: 'Well, this was started by you... the youth.' He stressed the uprising was premature, but didn't criticize them for it — as if to say: 'I understand you — Russia is at war, and I understand the people — bitter over the collapse and betrayal by the Greens...'" Finally, Đilas proposed that Stanišić take on the role of commander, assuring him that the struggle wasn't about rank or prestige, but the fight against the occupiers. Stanišić refused without hesitation: "No, I can't do that. You young people started this — I wish you luck..." Đilas did not press the issue further: "I had the impression I was speaking not only to a rigid, conservative officer, but to a man of a world already gone by." Others, however — particularly Arso Jovanović — kept urging him, unable to understand how anyone could be an officer and stay on the sidelines in the fight against the occupier.

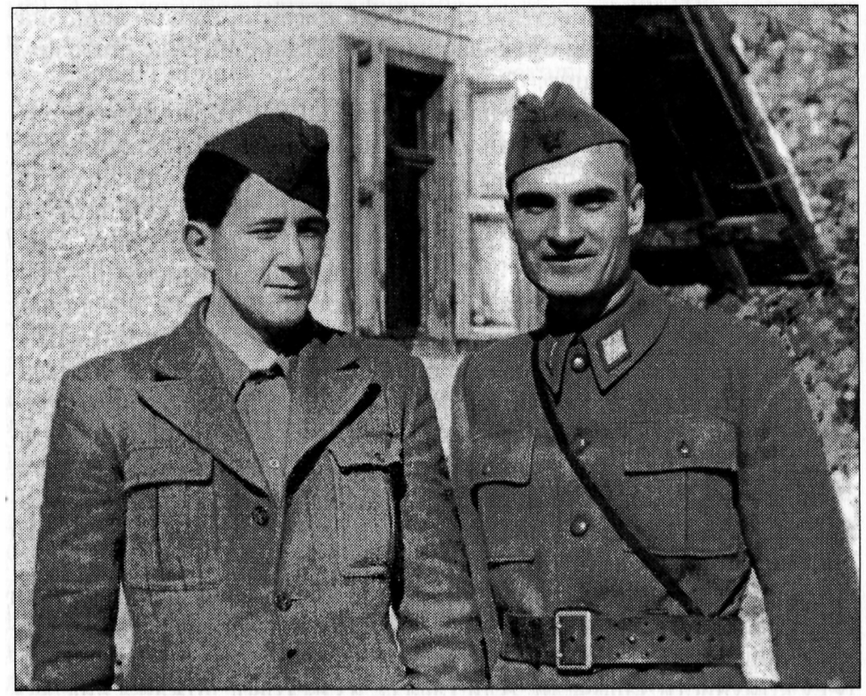
Stanišić stayed with them another day or two, even offering some advice, but cooperation ended before it had truly begun. Even then, it was apparent he did not align with the struggle the communists had initiated. Still, nothing in his conduct suggested that he would soon "slip under Italian protection." Later, in Užice, Đilas was mildly reproached — half in jest — for offering the command post to Bajo Stanišić. But Đilas always maintained he saw nothing wrong or unreasonable in it: "The uprising was a popular one — everyone should have been given a place in it. How else would we know who truly wanted to participate?..."

The very next day, July 18, they officially established the Provisional Supreme Command of the National Liberation Troops of Montenegro, Boka and the Sandžak."[61]

Interestingly, in conversations with Đilas, Arso insisted that the position of commander of the Provisional Command should go — in line with military tradition and respect for the hierarchy — to an officer of higher rank. He mentioned two names: Colonel Bajo Stanišić — an experienced veteran of both Balkan Wars, the First World War, and the early stages of the Second, from a respected family, and a heroic figure celebrated in song; and General Staff Major Đorđije Lašić (1906) from Lijeva Rijeka — a career officer, respected among junior officers, and highly influential in the Vasojevići region. Those unaware of the conversations between Đilas, Blažo, Bajo and Arso

[60] Milovan Đilas, *Revolutionary War,* Belgrade 1990, pp. 51-52.

[61] *Ibid.,* p. 58.



Arso Jovanović and Milovan Đilas — commander and commissar of the partisan units of Montenegro, Boka and the Sandžak (photograph from 1943).

believed that Stanišić left the Provisional Supreme Command insulted, having been subordinated to a mere Captain First Class. But in fact, after "politely" declining the offer to command, Stanišić had said he didn't know that young General Staff officer personally, but had heard only good things, and that: "The world belongs to the young," so he had no objection to being commanded by him in the uprising. In later conversations, however, it became clear that Stanišić was fundamentally opposed to declaring war on the occupiers, even while the people waited for him — "for Bajo to strike and lead the way," even singing songs to summon him, as if calling upon the commander of the Zeta Division to march "like Blažo Bošković on Skadar." But it was all in vain — not even songs could rouse him to join the uprising. On the contrary, he would soon go so far as to cooperate with the Italians in the fight against the communists. The underlying reasons for his withdrawal and eventual collaboration with the occupiers were: Loyalty to the monarchy; unwillingness to cooperate with members of a party that had been banned in the state he had served; and belief that it was too early for an armed struggle against the occupier.

On his first day as commander, Arso worked on finalizing orders for the liberation of Podgorica, carefully aligning the wording with *War Service* protocols, confident that this marked the opening of a new chapter in history. Periodically, from Stijena

Piperska, he would glance at the clouds of dust rising above Ćemovsko Field — clearly, he surmised, stirred up by motorized units arriving from Skadar, deployed as part of the July offensive to launch a counter-attack against the uprising. This reaction by the occupiers, though expected by such an experienced officer, surprised him with its speed — and would soon reveal the full extent of the brutality with which it was carried out. The next day, Arso was at the Velje Brdo front — undoubtedly the key sector both for the attack on Podgorica and for defending the wider approaches through the Zeta River valley, with forward positions at Malo Brdo. From early morning, seven battalions of insurgents from Bjelopavlići began arriving to join units from Piperi and part of Zeta. The insurgent force — around 3,000 fighters, led by Captain First Class Velimir Terzić and law student Boško Đuričković — took positions across a wide, desolate, rugged front, completely without water under the scorching July sun and lacking food supplies. Heroically, they repelled assaults from elements of the "Cacciatori delle Alpi" division, enduring losses and deprivation, frustrated that forces from Lješanska nahija, Zeta, Kuci and Bratonožići were not engaging the enemy as agreed on the approaches to the city. Artillery from Gorica methodically bombarded the insurgent lines, shifting fire from one trench to another, hitting chosen targets "as if by hand" — pausing only to cool the overheated barrels. Aircraft — *Capronis* and *Savoia-Marchettis* — flew in first from Skadar, then from the Podgorica airfield, bombing with precision from above. All of this began to shake the confidence of the fighters, who until then had believed they would easily take Podgorica and soon be roasting lambs in the shade of the cypress trees by the Morača and Ribnica. Yet no one on that part of the front was more deeply concerned than Commander Arso, who — while inspecting the positions — observed a deeply varied force: in age, armament, social background, profession, and especially in their understanding of the uprising and its prospects. There were about fifty active officers and NCOs, some in uniform with epaulettes, some without, wearing caps adorned with the national tricolour and cockades. Many of them became increasingly nervous and impatient — some openly expressed doubt about the success of this and future battles against the occupiers. They claimed the communists had dragged the people into the uprising too soon, that the sacrifices were too great and there was no help in sight. This spirit of doubt was being spread not only by some officers, but by others too — their numbers growing over time — whose words were carefully heeded by fighters from tribal, village and kinship-based units. Under the pressure of relentless Italian bombardment and the overwhelming military presence rolling across Ćemovsko Field, those units began to disperse.

Faced with this situation and aware that more Italian troops were arriving from Albania to reoccupy liberated towns and crush the uprising, and with reports from couriers indicating tribal units had not taken their planned positions, Arso realized — by July 21 in the morning — that the insurgents on the Velje Brdo front could hold out only until the end of the day. They would then likely abandon their positions under the threat of superior Italian firepower — a predictable fate for a hastily assembled, largely spontaneous, untrained and ill-equipped force, caught up in the tide of revolt but susceptible to dramatic swings in morale. Even delegate M. Đilas, referencing

Marx, had predicted such a potential outcome. Now, under the unbearable impact of Italian artillery and aviation, morale plummeted to a breaking point, worsened by unauthorized withdrawals from the front lines. Arso attempted, with the help of officers and unit commanders, to keep the troops engaged, reposition them to more defensible lines, and direct them toward favourable positions relative to the enemy columns. He focused especially on keeping Piperi insurgents on the commanding heights along the left bank of the Zeta and near the road to Nikšić, to slow the enemy advance. The bravest fighters tried to hold their positions even into July 22, still clinging to the illusion that the Italian troops were militarily weak. But there was no longer anything that could be changed — or accomplished. The majority of the men had abandoned



One of the 11 original sketches published in 1946 in Arso's publication "Overview of the National Liberation War."

Скица 2. — Размера 1:3,500.000. — Ослобођена територија Црне Горе у љето 1941 године (тачкаста површина) и спајање српско-црногорских партизана у Санџаку и њихова офанзива ка Босни (црно извучено: непријатељски гарнизони)

their posts, rushing home to their villages, watching from a distance as plumes of smoke marked the reach of Italian punitive expeditions, burning homes, haystacks and harvested wheat. Into the Provisional Supreme Command post on Dračev Brijeg burst Captain Savo Dmitrović, without the battalion he had commanded. He claimed the uprising had been premature, that they should have listened to King Petar and General D. Simović, who had urged over radio not to rise up until called — "to preserve the people." Shortly after, Artillery Captain First Class Jovica Boljević — Arso's former

classmate from General Staff training — stormed in, repeating the same claims. Arso, furious and disappointed by what he had seen on the front, cursed the two officers harshly, according to Petar Radević's recollection — which was not typical for Arso — and told them: "You can go — with or without your rifles — to the Italians' barbed wire, now's your chance. Or go home, under your wives' skirts. But leave me and the men who want to keep fighting — to either clear our name or die honourably, because we will not stand for cowardly betrayal."

Upon hearing that the front had collapsed even at the dominant Trijepč, Arso grabbed his rifle and ran from the house. Đilas, also armed, and a few others followed him. They intercepted armed men fleeing their positions, rushing home while shouting about the "terrible slaughter" of the insurgents — something which, upon closer inspection, turned out to be fabricated. Arso and Đilas tried to rally those disbanded elements and return them to the front lines, at least to slow the Italian advance, as the enemy forces, now moving through villages, ravaged everything in their path — looting, destroying, burning, killing residents or taking them prisoner. In the village of Rogami, near the abandoned positions, it was reported that six immobile elderly women had been burned alive in their homes.[62] The insurgents, however, were in no shape for a second attempt, hurrying instead to save what little they could before it too was lost to the flames.

Under pressure from Italian assaults and atrocities, the Provisional Supreme Command, along with the remnants of the exhausted insurgent units and civilians from Piperi, withdrew to the mountains — to the katuns of Radovče and Kamenik, about 13 km north of Podgorica as the crow flies. But even there, they were not safe from air raids and long-range artillery, which, guided by ominous columns of smoke, targeted burning villages, marking how far the occupiers had advanced in their campaign of revenge. The only relief was that it was summer — which made it easier to survive in forest shelters and mountain clearings — and food could be scavenged from meagre reserves or gathered from "what lay on or in the earth." With great sacrifice and solidarity, they endured, day by day.

From there, on July 25, Đilas and Arso — as the core leadership of the Provisional Supreme Command — set out for Kolašin, guided by Đilas' assessment that the military focus was shifting there. In Kolašin, they found Moša Pijade hurriedly organizing the captured war materiel — despite the fact that no one had asked him to do so, nor listened to him. Even during heated arguments with Đilas, he got into disputes with a group of officers surrounding Air Force Major Andrija Veskoviće and local "political authorities." In short, the locals — unlike the newcomers — favoured open war against the Albanian quislings and Muslim militias, while advocating reconciliation with the Italians. While these disputes unfolded, Arso, tucked between camp beds in a small room at the local Command building, was setting up a field telephone switchboard captured during the liberation of a small town on the Tara River. He persistently tried to establish contact with commanders at the fronts toward Plav and Gusinje, Čakor,

[62] Božo Lazarević, *Memory of War and Revolution,* Belgrade 1987, pp. 68-75.

Rožaje and Sjenica — areas where newly liberated territories were dangerously threatened by thousands of Albanian and Muslim extremists. But the commanders were reluctant to take orders from the Provisional Supreme Command — they mostly acted on their own. So, its two leading figures, Đilas and Jovanović, travelled to them in a vehicle taken as war spoils. In the Military Committee for the Berane district, they found Pavle Đurišić among the officers, and in Andrijevica, they found Major Đorđije Lašić — both men held considerable influence. Arso knew them well, mostly through personal connections — with one, he had even become godfather. Their greetings were warm, but the conversation was tense and strained from the start. Operating on separate fronts and surrounded by their own groups of officers, they firmly opposed the requests of Đilas and Jovanović: To establish a unified insurgent front in front of the Italian columns advancing from Podgorica and Peć, in an attempt to prevent the reoccupation of the entire Lim Valley; to consolidate the spoils of war from battles to liberate Berane, Andrijevica, Kolašin and Bijelo Polje in a single location — the town on the Tara River; and to transfer the Italian soldiers and officers captured during the liberation of Andrijevica and Berane to Kolašin, where they would be tried by the court of the Provisional Supreme Command.

Lašić and Đurišić, loudly backed by their entourages, insisted that each unit should retain the war spoils it had captured; that the Italian officers and non-commissioned officers taken prisoner should have their personal weapons returned and be held in the towns where they were captured until a mutually acceptable resolution could be reached; and that no fronts should be organized against the Italians. Instead, they proposed that the insurgent forces be immediately redirected toward operations in the direction of Rožaje and Kosovska Mitrovica, to confront armed formations composed of Muslims and Albanians who had committed atrocities against Serbs and Montenegrins. This position, however, was not in line with the concept promoted by the CPY. In these debates, the most vociferous were not Lašić and Đurišić themselves, but rather those around them — supporting their "arguments" even by brandishing revolvers. While the two officers hadn't yet fully "shown their hand," they did caution that officers and NCOs had no right to violate their oath of loyalty to the king and the homeland by supporting the policy or actions of any party. They weren't openly hostile to the uprising's leadership, but they did state that the armed resistance against the occupier had started prematurely and without proper organization, thus leading "the people into catastrophe." Therefore, they said, the Italians should just be "lightly scratched on the belly." This stance was contested by many, including local party and youth leaders from the Vasojevići region. Disagreements and divisions had already begun to emerge over such issues. Đurišić and Lašić had already held meetings with numerous groups of officers and NCOs from "their" districts, demanding their loyalty and emphasizing that none of them had the right to rally under the banner of a party that had been outlawed in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

Raising his voice in heated debate, Arso held to a logic he deeply believed in: that those who had served as commanders, advisors and instructors in the uprising — as professional soldiers — had no right to criticize the communist leadership or point out

mistakes made in the rebellion. The uprising's program, he emphasized, was broad and anti-fascist, not exclusive, and it called on all democrats and patriots to fight the occupiers. If officers claimed they had no right to rally under the red banner, what right did they have to remain inactive — effectively siding with the Italians? In fairness, Đurišić and Lašić had not yet openly refused obedience, nor had they called for a withdrawal or rejection of the fight against the Italians. Their comments — "we'll see," "not much can be done" and so on — left the door slightly ajar, offering some sliver of hope. Lašić, it seemed, was dissatisfied with the course and outlook of the struggle, and with his role as a military advisor to communist-led insurgents.

Meanwhile, Italian columns were advancing cautiously from the south and east, flanked and preceded by Albanian and Muslim units. These "local evils," like packs of enraged beasts, charged and howled through the rocky terrain on both sides of the roads, spewing curses at brotherhoods and tribes over long-standing grievances, and exacting brutal revenge on villagers — destroying homes and property.

The Vasojević communists and other anti-fascists found themselves in a dire situation, made no easier by the fiery rhetoric of Đilas and Arso. Discussions were held in raised tones. When arguments ran out, people resorted to curses and oaths, invoking the tribe's history and traditions, its honour and heroism, and the ancestral pride for which Vaso's great-grandson had paid with his life. Arso was no exception, especially in bitter conversations with fellow officers who increasingly questioned the uprising's legitimacy, claiming that Italy's military power could not be opposed. To such people, he replied that yes, Italy was a formidable force in this situation, but it could be defeated — by native officers leading their own people, using their own military skill, fighting on home ground, for the vital interests of their homeland.

The emergence of divisions and groupings among a significant number of officers — and their exclusion from the armed struggle against the occupiers, justified by instructions from the king and government transmitted to Montenegro via radio — alerted Arso to the danger of fragmentation and discord, possibly escalating into internal armed conflict, so familiar and tragic in Montenegro's recent history. He spoke openly and without reserve about this with Đilas, who downplayed the problem somewhat by pointing to the history, traditions and mentality of the Vasojevići — a people Đilas, as a student and professional party functionary from the Kolašin area, understood well. People from this region, Đilas reasoned, had lived for centuries at the crossroads of empires, cultures and religions, infused with the idea of pan-Serbism. It was thus understandable that this fiery segment of the population — sharp-tongued and quick to pull the trigger — was inclined toward a war of extermination against "anti-national elements," meaning the Muslim and Albanian populations. They were prone to entrust the destruction of the Italian Empire and Kingdom to other great powers. The occupation, with all the suffering it brought — even here — would pass just as others had before, they believed. But the domestic threat, if not cut down at the root, would remain a lasting curse for both Serbs and Montenegrins.[63]

[63] In a conversation 53 years later, M. Đilas told me that Arso and he "underestimated the forces for which Đurišić, Lašić and their comrades spoke," adding: "But even if we had been more rational in our assessments – we would not have changed history, but we would have altered the course and consistency of events." Lašić would die on May 5, 1944 from Allied bombs in Podgorica, and Đurišić would be referred to by General Draža Mihailović as "the most capable and bravest commander" until his death.

These bitter disputes and arguments, in smoke-filled taverns, at crossroads, and even at frontlines where long-time neighbours were now staring at one another down the barrel of a gun, foreshadowed trouble. The hardest of these confrontations occurred in Lijeva Rijeka, where Arso, on behalf of the Provisional Supreme Command, came from Kolašin or from the Bratonožići front to meet with Lieutenant Colonel Radivoje U. Milošević. Arso argued that this rugged terrain, with its lone road, was God-given for ambushes and halting Italian assault formations advancing from Podgorica to re-establish occupation authority in Vasojevići. No agreement could be reached with Milošević, who commanded a battalion of men from Lijeva Rijeka formed "on a purely national basis" and bound by a pledge to "boycott all cooperation with the communists." As Milošević later wrote to Draža Mihailović, Arso had arrived on Saint Elijah's Day in the village of Lopate for a planned assembly of representatives from Berane, Andrijevica, Kolašin and Bijelo Polje. According to Milošević, the Kolašin district was represented by "Captain Arso Jovanović, commander of the communist troops, with a group of his men" — who, he emphasized, had already been barred from attending the assembly "as a communist." Most of the delegates, however, demanded cooperation with the communist troops to resist the Italians (specifically units of the "Venezia" division) during their advance on Vjeternik. Milošević rejected these demands, supported by all the men from Lijeva Rijeka except for Reserve Lieutenant Đoko Laušević and Private Milić Radević. Seeing Milošević's position, the delegates left immediately, and Captain Jovanović promised to withdraw his troops from the area.[64] A different outcome could not be expected from Lieutenant Colonel Milošević and the officers around him, as two preceding moments made clear: 1. At the July 20 assembly, there had been unanimous support for a resolution stating that the men from Lijeva Rijeka should resist only the Albanians, but not oppose the Italians advancing from Podgorica — unless the Italians, without provocation, began killing civilians, interning people or committing other acts of violence. The reasoning was that resistance would be futile and would lead to the annihilation of the people in every sense; and 2. On July 28, an assembly attended by about twenty active and reserve officers decided and informed contacts in Andrijevica that no resistance would be given to the Italians during their advance from Podgorica. They also warned the "Command of communist troops in Kolašin" to withdraw from the area or risk armed conflict between their units and ours.[65]

On August 3, the Italians entered Lijeva Rijeka without a single shot being fired. Arso, with the remnants of units from the Bratonožići front, offered resistance at Raškov Guvno, slowing their advance toward Mateševo. Later, together with Vasojevići forces still willing to fight the occupiers, he established a front line at Trešnjevik. But by then, it was too late. The failure was compounded by the resolutions passed in

[64] *Collection of Documents on the NOR,* Vol. XIV, Book 2, p. 105.

[65] *Ibid.,* pp. 106-107.

subsequent officer assemblies in the Berane and Andrijevica districts, which included around 200 officers and NCOs, many of whom had previously held command positions in insurgent units. These meetings produced resolutions calling for no resistance against the Italians, and instead directing efforts toward fighting Albanians and the "Turkish militia" — a position that was incorporated into the official conclusions of the assemblies.

Exhaustion

Units of the "Venezia" Division reoccupied Kolašin on August 5. Arso, at the head of a small column, set off toward Mount Kamenik. Among the group was Moša Pijade, riding a saddled nag, dejected and dreadfully silent. Arso too was quiet, reflecting on the outcome of the three weeks of round-the-clock battles waged by the insurgents — from the Rumia Pass to Komovi and Bjelasica — and, more than anything, on the causes of the disputes and the emerging split with his former comrades from the officer corps, especially his godfather, Major Lašić. Though normally willing to speak about his doubts, particularly regarding the future of the uprising, he found no close confidant here. The kind-hearted and open-minded Blažo, as well as the brilliant intellectual and comrade, the young Budo Tomović, were waiting for him at the Provincial Committee headquarters. Commissar Đilas had remained in the Biogradska Gora area to coordinate further fighting by the people of Kolašin and would head to Kamenik in a day or two. With Moša — forever the suspicious ex-prisoner and conspiratorially secretive — Arso hadn't exchanged even two complete sentences during their entire stay in the town on the Tara River. The others in the group, hungry and thirsty, were likely tormented by their own troubling thoughts...

The Provincial (both party and military) Conference began on the morning of August 8 in Kamenik, without the participation of representatives from Boka, the Sandžak or some parts of Montenegro. The delegate of the Political Bureau was also absent. At the start of the conference, the issue of Arso's presence and status was raised, as he was not a member of the CPY. Opinions varied, but the proposal by political secretary Božo Ljumović was adopted — that Arso be admitted into the Party on the spot and, as a commander, be allowed to participate in the discussion, though without voting rights, since during the events being evaluated he had not been "organized." He was summoned and informed of this. "He didn't show" — Ljumović would recall five decades later in his home in Podgorica — "any visible change in mood."

The political and organizational reports were read aloud. There was little discussion. Moša Pijade spoke several times, brazenly criticizing Đilas for being hasty in decision-making, especially for sending out the ill-fated "Directive No. 2" to the front commands. Blažo Jovanović and Mitar Bakić offered brief clarifications on some parts of the report and the draft conclusions.

Then, just before the end of the Conference, Đilas burst in, arriving from Kolašin. Surprised that the meeting was taking place without him, he loudly asked why, a question to which no one seemed able to provide an easy answer. Blažo, clearly caught off

guard, tried to justify the haste by citing the fast-paced and dramatic course of events related to the uprising. To this, Đilas — delegate of the Political Bureau — responded that a single day, more or less, regardless of the uprising's dramatic state, could not change the course and outcome of events, nor the assessments of them. He added angrily that he understood why Pijade — "who will never give up cutting off the heads of dead Turks, and who will never stop acting like an underground conspirator, even in legal circumstances" — had wanted to use his absence to push through some of his own positions. What he could not understand was why a number of highly responsible comrades were in such a rush to hold an unscheduled conference, forgetting their obligation to include the delegate of the Political Bureau in the proceedings — "the highest military and political authority, whether some liked it or not." Moša responded with a sharp retort, again pointing out Đilas' responsibility for "Directive No. 2," while the others mostly stayed silent, clearly eager to get back to their posts across the war-torn land of Montenegro.[66]

To calm the situation, Blažo stated that the Provincial Committee, on the recommendation of the political secretary, had decided to admit Arso into the Party so that, as commander of the Provisional Supreme Command, he could participate in the work of the Conference. As Đilas would later write, he opposed this, citing a provision in the Party Statute that no party forum or gathering — regardless of its level or legitimacy — had the right to admit someone into the CPY, except in exceptional cases and even then only with prior approval from a higher authority. Admission to the Party was the exclusive right and responsibility of the party cell in the area where the candidate was active. The Provincial Committee could only initiate the process. Đilas said he had spent a month with Arso at the front, where a man was put to the strictest test. He had no complaints about Arso's military expertise, courage, moral principles, relationship with the people or patriotic conduct. However, even he — Đilas — could not support Arso's admission to the Party, nor could anyone else, unless it was done by the cell in Arso's home village, in accordance with the Statute and based on the Committee's proposal. As for Arso's participation in the Conference, Đilas said he could stay and, if he wished, join the discussion, but only members of the Provincial Committee would vote on decisions. He added that Moša Pijade also could not vote "since he is not a member of the forum and does not have the CC's authorization." Those more familiar with the matter — and with what they had heard from Pijade about Đilas — recognized this as a continuation of their old, bitter quarrels from prison days in Sremska Mitrovica, especially over the "Petko Miletić case," which Arso knew nothing about. That made the whole power struggle all the more frustrating for him, especially since he, as commander, had found himself "on the chopping block" through no fault of his own, in front of half a room of people he didn't know, many of them high-ranking party officials who couldn't fairly judge his military abilities. He would later confide in Velimir Terzić that not only had he never asked to be part of the Conference, he had not even expected to attend it — much less be "pushed" into the Party in this way.

[66] From a conversation with B. Ljumović, April 1992, in Podgorica.

To sum up: Blažo Jovanović tried to brief Đilas on the key points from both reports and handed him the conclusions that had already been adopted. Đilas only skimmed them, but then, red with anger that the documents criticized his actions — especially in relation to the infamous "Directive No. 2" — he demanded that everything be redone: both reports re-read, a new debate held, new conclusions and a new resolution drafted. The most influential participants managed to persuade him not to reread the entire, lengthy and practically irrelevant organizational report, but just its conclusions. However, the political report was read again, and the previously adopted conclusions — completely unacceptable to Đilas — were thrown out. He then delivered a long monologue that launched a new debate: could the events in Montenegro, according to Marxist classification, be considered a general uprising? He concluded that it was not an uprising — in fact, it had been "the coercion of the masses into a general uprising" for which, he argued, "neither the objective nor subjective conditions had matured." Those who managed to get a word in argued the opposite — that the actions carried out so far were an uprising, and that the conditions did exist for it, as it was the only appropriate form of struggle. Therefore, as they argued, there was no need — as Đilas demanded — to prepare for a "real" or "second" uprising, but rather to reorganize the remaining insurgent units, gradually form guerrilla groups, squads, companies, battalions and detachments, train and equip them for continued armed action that must not be stopped.[67]

The disunity over what had been done and the vision for future tasks — exacerbated by a complete lack of understanding of the laws of armed struggle and military skill, and "seasoned" with philosophical and political bickering — was as incomprehensible to Arso as the adoption of new conclusions and the Resolution, which were nearly all written under Đilas' "dictation." Even less understandable was how Đilas — the man who, during their twenty or so days together on the front, had become close and even dear to him — explained his views to the Provincial Committee shortly after the Conference in a document titled "Letter from Comrade Veljko" (Đilas' underground alias). In it, Đilas wrote, among other things, that to him, an uprising was an act of final and victorious reckoning with the occupier. This Montenegrin uprising, he said, was a failure because it lacked both the objective and subjective conditions "no matter how it was organized or how many people it involved." That is why Đilas advocated "guerrilla warfare today and an uprising tomorrow" — an uprising that would also be an "anti-fascist revolution." To Arso, that could only lead to a narrowing of the front in the fight against the fascist occupier.

What irritated Arso was the harsh assessment in the Resolution stating that the gravest military error was "the rigid insistence on maintaining fronts in certain sectors — so that the collapse of those fronts led to disorganization." He considered that inaccurate, since the fronts formed to break garrisons and liberate towns, regardless of their spontaneous nature, were both necessary and lifesaving — the same applied to defending the free territory of districts in northeastern Montenegro. That being said,

[67] B. Lazarević, *op. cit.*, pp. 74-75.

he acknowledged that holding positions and fronts "to the last soldier" against advancing Italian columns was a different matter. A strong enemy inevitably forced frontal withdrawals. Still, even there, one couldn't be entirely condemnatory — in some situations it was necessary to establish and firmly hold a defensive line, if only to allow the evacuation of civilians and parts of the units, to occupy the next set of positions, evacuate the wounded and war booty or prevent atrocities. That's why, according to Arso, such assessments — even those coming directly from the CC of the CPY — should be accepted critically, such as the message that "frontal fighting must be avoided." Because otherwise, how could Danilovgrad, Berane and Andrijevica have been liberated — with officers Leković, Lašić and Đurišić leading the offensives — except through frontal blockades of the garrisons? Those blockades cut off water, food and ammunition supplies and prevented reinforcements. And how else but by establishing solid fronts could the insurgents defend against the brutal mass incursions by armed Albanian and Muslim bands into Montenegrin territory? Besides, the armed insurgent masses — spontaneously assembled, unorganized and untrained — could only be held together through the use of frontal tactics. It's a military axiom: once the enemy breaks through the front, such an army collapses!

Arso discussed insurgent experiences — without mentioning the Conference or the Provincial Committee's conclusions — with a group of young officers from the Piperi area, focusing on lessons from the frontal battles fought around Podgorica, through Bratonožići and into the Vasojevići region. They read relevant sections of *War Service Regulations*, looked at diagrams from the book *Tactics of the Infantry Battalion* and listened to veterans with combat experience from earlier wars. Arso didn't hold these discussions to justify himself or discredit Party leadership. After all, he hadn't organized the uprising, nor had he led unorganized masses into it, nor had he established the fronts — those had largely formed spontaneously, in part, as old warriors explained to him, based on the long historical memory of the people. He spoke in order to help avoid mistakes and especially prevent defeats in future battles, engagements and operations — in the "second uprising." He said that while it was unfortunate that mistakes had been made, it would be even worse if those mistakes weren't analysed, the experience reviewed and lessons drawn — so they wouldn't be repeated.[68]

Member of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia

During the reorganization of the insurgent army and the preparation of units for the upcoming battles, Arso — now serving as Chief of Staff of the National Liberation Guerrilla (Partisan) Detachments for Montenegro, the Bay of Kotor and the Sandžak (with Milovan Đilas as commander, Blažo Jovanović as political commissar, and their deputies Peko Dapčević and Bajo Sekulić) — bore the greatest professional responsibility. Since the command structure was given just one more chance to redeem itself, he began preparations through conversations with as many knowledgeable, wise,

[68] A citation from General of the Air Force pilot Petar Radević.

experienced and respected individuals as possible. In this spirit, he also spoke with a number of senior Montenegrin officers, including the respected Captain Srđan Nova-ković (1881), a famed hero and patriot, and a committed supporter of the NOP, who would soon be appointed commander of the "Jole Piletić" Piperi Partisan Battalion as part of the reorganization.[69]

Arso and Đilas — appointed to their posts at the Conference — discussed their "military tasks" in private, walking through the highland meadows of Radovče. Half a century later, in his home on Palmotićeva Street in Belgrade, Đilas would recall how Arso spoke at length and convincingly — even citing sections from *War Service Regulations* — as he analysed the frontal battles at Velje Brdo, around Danilovgrad and in Bratonožići, emphasizing that sometimes fronts were both necessary and effective. Đilas agreed with this assessment. He also recalled three issues where their views did not align — something they did not hide from each other.

Arso, firmly convinced that many of his fellow officers would remain with the people even in the most difficult wartime circumstances, disagreed with Đilas' conclusion — voiced on the Vjeternik front after talks with Lašić and Đurišić, who opposed a decisive resistance against the Italians — that officers were opponents of the "front of workers, peasants and honest intellectuals" and "potential traitors to the true interests of the people." Đilas stuck to his position, although he added — so as not to offend Arso — that honourable exceptions only proved the rule.

They also disagreed on how to assess the implications of the fact that, in those days, Piperi peasants would leap joyfully from their huts at every sound of an airplane, expecting planes to land or parachutes to appear over the wide meadow — and whose would they be, if not Russian? Some would even lie flat with their ears to the ground, asking others whether they too could hear "the thunder of engines and the pounding of hooves," only to rise disappointed when rational voices reminded them that neither Timoshenko's tankmen nor Budyonny's cavalry could cross the rugged terrain of Mount Kamenik — though they'd add, "The Red Army will find a way to reach and help their Montenegrin brothers." Arso warned about the potential harm of such deep belief in something impossible, while Đilas — as he later recalled — countered by pointing out that this mythical love and attachment Montenegrins felt for the Russians, combined with patriotism and the threat of fascism, was precisely what had sparked the uprising; and that this love, if properly directed, would keep the people standing — regardless of how long the war might last.

As part of the preparations for Party membership — and a form of political vetting — Đilas asked Arso how he envisioned the future of Montenegro within the shared state for which they had taken up arms. Arso responded briefly — that Montenegrins would join Serbs in one country, as decided on November 26, 1918 by the Great National Assembly in Podgorica. He added that, among the majority of "the others" — in government service, education, and private life — he had encountered "deep separatism and even open hatred toward the common state, culminating in betrayal."

[69] Vojin Todorović, *The Podgorica District in the July 13 Uprising*, Belgrade 1954, p. 143.

Đilas responded that such observations might apply only to a portion of Croats and Slovenes, while the majority of them — like most Serbs and Montenegrins — supported a common Yugoslav state, one that would be democratic and free of monarchy, in which "Montenegro would be an independent federal unit, and Montenegrins a nation equal in every respect to Serbs and others." Arso shrugged and said that tradition, history and economic needs all pointed to unity between Montenegro and Serbia — as confirmed by the outcome of the Battle of Mojkovac and the decisions of the Podgorica Assembly. In response to Arso's views, Đilas referred to the position of the Communist Party, which was leading the struggle: back in late 1937, while outlining issues of vital importance to Montenegrin society, the Party had declared in one of the thirty-seven points of its Platform that successful cooperation among all democratic forces required "full equality for Montenegro with the other units within Yugoslavia" — a position that remained fundamental. Đilas recalled that he saw no sign his arguments had swayed Arso.

Đilas admitted that Arso was an exception among professional military men, toward whom he — the son of a Montenegrin Army officer — had a generally reserved attitude. Unlike the hundreds of officers he had met before the war and during the uprising, Arso impressed him as an intelligent man — something one is born with — and also as an intellectual, which is achieved through personal effort. He appreciated Arso's cultivated speech, clear and precise thinking, structured sentences, and sense of responsibility for every spoken and written word; his patriotism and "Montenegrin-style Russophilia," his loyalty to the officer's calling, and his devotion to friends; his knowledge of national history and respect for tradition, in which Đilas himself also felt strong. Arso had a gift for passionately recounting his father's wartime service — from Skadar, through the Battle of Bregalnica, to Glasinac — especially their shared legacy: the Battle of Mojkovac, in which Arso's father Radivoje lost his sight in a charge, and which later inspired Đilas to write his novel *Montenegro*.

At that time — Đilas wrote — he fully realized: "Arso Jovanović would never be a communist in a high position, shaped in the mold of the Comintern or Bolshevism, and I never, in all our conversations during the war at the SH, tried to steer him down that path. Among us Stalinists, who were the majority in the SH, we needed at least one like him: a first-class military professional, highly educated, diligent and responsible — and patriotism was a given. Our misfortune wasn't that he didn't engage in politics, but his misfortune was that he didn't understand how others practised it — by manipulating people. Everything was fine while politics needed him precisely because he was that way. He was a joy to be around — and an even greater joy to be friends with..."[70]

At Radovče, while working on the reorganization of the uprising forces in Montenegro, Captains Jovanović and Terzić — close colleagues and confidants — continued the conversation they had begun on July 21 at Velje Brdo. During a break in the fighting near Podgorica, under fire "from both land and sky," they "thought out loud"

[70] From a conversation with M. Đilas, September 1994, in Belgrade.

about their "alignment with the communists," wondering whether they had thereby broken their oath of loyalty to the king and the homeland. They admitted the question troubled them, but agreed they had made no mistake: the king had not remained loyal to the state and the army — and therefore not to the two of them — while the homeland remained, and they were with it, fighting to liberate it from the Italian imperial army threatening the lives of thousands of Montenegrins. With this, they refuted, both to themselves and to others, General Biroli's claim that "some officers of the former Yugoslav army had joined the uprising — naturally, by instinct."[71] They resumed this conversation from the front in a moment when there was no longer even a front outside Podgorica, the uprising army had receded into scattered groups, and enemy propaganda was louder than ever. Arso spoke about his encounter with officers from the Vasojevići region and the deep mistrust he had carried away from those talks — particularly with Lieutenant Colonel Milošević and Major Vesković, who had publicly stated that officers had neither the legal nor moral right to fight under the banner of a political party that had been outlawed in the Kingdom before the war. They argued that officers must remain loyal to the homeland and its monarch until death, since the king's "temporary absence from the country" had not broken the continuity of the state nor marked unconditional surrender of its army — and so had not released its officers from their oath. The two captains agreed: Milošević, Vesković and their group could think and say whatever they pleased — but the facts were that the army had capitulated and the state had been occupied; that the king, abandoning his duties, had fled abroad, supposedly to continue the fight from there, but he could not have taken the soil of the homeland with him on the soles of his boots. The homeland remained, it was under foreign rule and it must be defended from the oppressor — with the understanding that even within the military oath, the people and the homeland stand above all, and the officer is bound only to them.

Fully aware that a soldier swears allegiance only once in life — and convinced they had chosen the right side — they wished to avoid taking the new Partisan oath, feeling it would be uncomfortable. They shared this reasoning with Blazo Jovanović. He understood them as honourable and reputable men, recognized the painful dilemma they had been placed in through no fault of their own, but withheld the assurance they had hoped for — that he would arrange for them not to take the oath. He was likely aware, they believed, that fulfilling such a request would require prior explanation to others — certainly to Đilas and Božo Ljumović — which could complicate everything. Discreetly, Blazo asked whether they faced a similar or even deeper dilemma regarding admission into the CPY, which — as a sign of trust and the increasing demands of leadership — "was now on the agenda." They answered that they had resolved that matter: if he and the "comrades above" considered the time ripe, they were ready. Never — together or individually, Terzić recalled in 1983 at his home in Miločer — did Blazo reproach them for that conversation or their profound doubts, although there had been opportunities to do so. On the eve of the scheduled Partisan

[71] *Collection of Documents on the NOR,* Vol. XIII, Book 1, p. 248.

oath ceremony at Radovče, Blazo sent the two of them off on allegedly urgent assignments. The arrangement was tacit, but sincere and firm, and did not call into question anyone's honour or the interests of the struggle. After all, the oath itself — titled *For the People and Freedom* — contained not a single word that an honest man could not sign. It was an oath to fight "bravely and with discipline" for the freedom of the people and the homeland, and to that sacred human principle, these two senior officers of the Supreme Command of the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia — even though they did not formally sign it — remained loyal until the end.[72]

The Resolution, "Comrade Veljko's Letter," and other materials from the Consultation reached the CPY cell in Đurkovići on August 13. They were placed on the agenda between the items "Admission to the CPY" and "Miscellaneous." The first to speak — as recalled by the only surviving witness, Milisav Matović (age 96) — was the Local Committee secretary, Vojo J. Popović, who emphasized that the Provincial Committee proposed that Arso Radivojev be admitted into the Party. He added that Arso had "nominated himself" through his resolute conduct from the very first day of the uprising, having earned the Party's highest trust. He reminded the members of some of the actions in which Arso had distinguished himself and proven himself a "faithful son of the people and anti-fascist," on the fronts from Podgorica to Trešnjevik, adding that "the Party counts on him, a militarily capable and brave man, for the highest military duties." The cell secretary, Milorad R. Dragićević, added a few words: about Arso's origins from a poor peasant family — which was a strong recommendation — and about the fact that "although he is a General Staff officer, he is also a fervent patriot and a brave man, committed to the idea of fighting for freedom." It was unusual that Arso did not ask to speak, so the secretary asked whether, before Party members voted, he would like to say something at this "happiest moment in a man's life." Seemingly reluctant, he stood up from the bench in the home of descendants of the hero Luka Filipov. In uniform, with a pistol and two grenades on his belt, he said that he believed his conduct in the uprising had already answered all essential questions about his personal convictions — not to recommend himself for Party membership, but to ensure the uprising's military success, and that he would continue to work in the same spirit. That said, he sat down. Of the nine present, barely half had heard of him — maybe two or three had actually met him — but they all knew his respectable and hardworking mother Zorka and his sister Miluša, a prominent and spirited member of the communist youth. Trusting the words of secretaries Vojo and Milorad — and especially the recommendation of the Provincial Committee — they voted to admit him into the CPY.

When it came time to discuss the Resolution and "Comrade Veljko's Letter," Arso was asked, as a military expert, to "say a few words." Once again, he was brief: the style was a bit lofty for his taste, and there was a lot of politics in it — politics that others were skilled in handling — but, as he saw it, the core message was clear: to (re) organize, arm and train an uprising army that could defeat "the Italians and their

[72] From a conversation with General V. Terzić, August 1993, in Miločer.

collaborators." As a military professional and chief of staff of the guerrilla detachments, he would persist in that goal, which he viewed as a top priority. He believed that, especially in such a time of upheaval, everyone should do what they knew and did best. He said things needed to move very quickly — to preserve the cores of the uprising units, even just two or three dozen from former battalions, to organize them into partisan detachments, strengthen and arm them, and teach them the skills of war. This way, Montenegro could field five to six thousand reliable fighters to resume armed operations immediately — "in as many places and over as wide an area as possible, so the occupier would once again be thrown into disarray."[73]

That, in essence, was his take on the documents — which, in any case, the highest leadership of the revolution would soon (on October 22) annul, primarily because of their "separation of the partisan struggle from the people's uprising and the characterization of the national liberation war as an anti-fascist revolution." Tito and Kardelj would go on to write to the Provincial leadership of the CPY in Montenegro on November 10, stating: "You have ended up trailing behind the tide. After a temporary defeat — which, given the current circumstances, was understandable and to be expected — you gave up, engaging in long and empty debates about whether the uprising was correct or not. In fact, you should have viewed your temporary conquest of towns as a means to arm yourselves and demoralize the enemy. You should have been politically and tactically prepared to fall back to new positions and continue the partisan war, just as is being done in Serbia. You fail to see that there is no contradiction between the partisan war and the people's uprising — on the contrary, under our conditions, the partisan war is simply a form of the people's uprising. Read Lenin's 1905 article on the proletarian revolution, and that issue will become clear to you..."

There were, in that letter — naturally, seen from the other side of the Zlatibor mountains — some accurate observations, even assessments expressed with the wisdom that "it's easy to be a general after the war." But the very example of Serbia, cited as a model, would only twenty days later expose the catastrophic mistakes of precisely those two sharp critics. Namely, the result of the enemy offensive included, among other things, the complete disintegration of the National Liberation Partisan Detachments (NOPD) from the Morava region, Šumadija and western Serbia. Without coordinated cooperation, they came under the blows of a German offensive operation, which led to the dramatic abandonment of Užice and the retreat of part of the partisan forces (around 2,000 fighters) into the Sandžak, towards their Montenegrin comrades. And as for Lenin's ideas about the paths of the proletarian revolution from 1905 — they were, indeed, of little practical use amid Montenegro's war-torn crossroads and mountain wilderness.

The letter from Užice also highlighted the issue of enemy reprisals — something that weighed most heavily on the leadership of the Montenegrin uprising. That passage in the letter, unmistakably written in the language of Kardelj's "Marxist analysis," read: "You fear reprisals. And in that fear, the influence of the spontaneous element can

[73] A citation from M. Matović, recorded in October 1995, in Podgorica.

be seen. Naturally, every effort should be made to prevent the enemy from carrying out reprisals. But do not forget that reprisals are, in the beginning, a natural weapon of the enemy. They can only be fought with arms and the destruction of the enemy. With our strength, we must force the enemy to abandon reprisals — not through passivity or yielding."[74] Of course, Kardelj didn't mention how partisan units were fighting in Slovenia and elsewhere.

The issue of yielding in the face of reprisals was also criticized at the Consultation in Kamenik. The military leadership bore its share of responsibility, partly because it had failed to maintain control during the uprising and then completely lost it with the collapse of the fronts. As Arso stated at the meeting of the Đurkovići party cell, the leadership did not preserve the core — "the most battle-hardened element within the insurgent units" — for which he himself, objectively, shared some responsibility, though bearing in mind that he had been appointed commander and engaged operationally only after the insurgent fronts were already falling apart under the impact of the Italian offensive. Participant and researcher of those events, Batrić Jovanović, believes that the number of fighters in that "most combat-capable core" could have reached up to 5,000, and that "solid guerrilla (partisan) units should have been formed from it, which could have continued fighting the occupier even under difficult conditions." It could have been done — and should have been — but it wasn't. Still, the important thing was that even back then, on August 8, this missed opportunity was recognized. This made the newly assigned tasks of the newly appointed Headquarters all the more important, as they had to be carried out as part of preparations for "a second uprising as a precondition for the final showdown with the occupier."[75]

The upcoming reorganization of units — particularly the formation of guerrilla detachments — required intensive military and political preparations, and the Chief of Staff considered the former his top priority. In addition to the documents issued at the end of July, which incorporated his knowledge and experience in evaluating combat operations, mobilizing fighters, organizing units, assigning responsibility to civil authorities for resolving military matters, operating summary military courts and more — it was now necessary to draft multiple essential instructions, directives and orders. He frequently held meetings with commanders at Staff Headquarters in Radovče. He also toured guerrilla units, working to strengthen discipline, ensure training and prepare armed actions. He was firmly opposed to the practice of fighters living at home and being mobilized only occasionally, before combat operations. Instead, he advocated that at least the assault units should be kept together constantly — living, training and operating as a single unit — conducting firing drills, tactical training and, of course, engaging in real action. Though this made housing and feeding the units more difficult, it was also the key to success in combat, and therefore took priority as the highest operational interest. He opposed the practice of electing commanders in unit meetings. Instead, he favoured appointments issued by command — after

[74] *Collection of Documents on the NOR,*Vol. VIII, Book 1, Doc. 93, p. 229.

[75] B. Jovanović, *op. cit.*, p. 271.

broader consultations and with the application of consistent criteria. He insisted on strengthening reconnaissance and intelligence services as the key to preventing surprise attacks. At the same time, as his colleagues recall, he often returned to the issue of the uprising's downturn — essentially asking: where exactly had mistakes been made, how much had he, as the person holding the top military role, contributed to that, what were his own misjudgements, and how best to correct them. That said, it was difficult to expect from him a quick, complete and rational analysis of the mistakes made — especially his own — since even Đilas from the Political Bureau and members of the Provincial Committee hadn't found the strength to do so during the Consultation. And it's a big question whether any of them would have understood the developments across the insurgent areas of Montenegro more clearly, even if they had read Lenin's 1905 article on the proletarian revolution in Russia with the utmost attention — which, incidentally, was often read and quoted in these parts, along with Stalin. What would have been most useful — but didn't happen — was to have had more General Staff officers in the Headquarters who could have driven an informed professional, rather than ideologically rigid, debate on successes and failures. Then, the conclusions could have been of real value. As it was, Arso, surrounded by laymen and dogmatists, could only assess things from a professional standpoint by evaluating — in truth — himself, and interpreting what he already knew far better than the others.

Chief of the General Staff

It was only human that the Chief of Staff reflected on his own mistakes and tried, as far as possible, to correct them — helping others to do the same, especially in the domain of military tactics. He was aware of the truth that a smart and well-intentioned person changes their views with changing circumstances and adjusts their behaviour accordingly. Yet another issue was that, as commander, he hadn't really had the time or opportunity to make mistakes: during the battle for Podgorica, even though he had a properly drafted order for its liberation in his pocket, everything had already been lost. In the Vasojevići region, he was completely isolated and obstructed on all sides.

By late August 1941, around a hundred guerrilla detachments were active across Montenegro, each with between 10 and 70 fighters. These units would begin conducting "smaller" combat actions as early as September, especially during attempts by the occupiers to confiscate weapons from the population or to capture people and plunder property. At that time, about 600 fighters from the Nikšić and Durmitor districts were sent to Herzegovina to assist the insurgent forces. By the end of September, the formation of partisan battalions began in Montenegro, and by mid-October there were about twenty. The first battalion — 120 well-armed fighters — had already been formed in the Piperi region by the end of August. It was named "Jole Piletić" after a renowned 19th-century fighter. This battalion was formed with Arso's direct involvement, and he insisted that in the first 10 days — during which its numbers tripled — it should be made operational and mobile, ready to act "wherever the interests of the

struggle required."[76]

The Staff also handled essential regulatory duties. A directive titled "Instructions for the Mobilization of Personnel and Available Resources" was published, clearly stating that all patriotic forces and material capabilities should be mobilized for the purpose of waging a real uprising. Rules were issued concerning intelligence operations, movement of people within liberated territory, and the organization and structure of the army — an area where Arso, as an experienced professional, was especially active. It was decided that the existing guerrilla detachments would be renamed platoons, and that each detachment (there were four in Montenegro) would be the highest military unit, composed of two or three brigades, along with appropriate staff support. However, the plan to form brigades was abandoned because such structures were not included in the decisions of the Military-Political Consultation in Stolice (September 26, 1941) on the organization and structure of the partisan forces. These decisions did not reach Montenegro until a month later, which is why the existing Staff was officially renamed the Main Staff of the National Liberation Partisan Detachments for Montenegro and the Bay of Kotor only on October 25 — with Arso as Chief. Between July 18 and October 25, he served as either commander or chief of staff in all three iterations of the provincial military leadership. This clearly demonstrated the recognition of his professional competence, sense of responsibility, consistency, personal and command-level courage, patriotism and commitment to the goals of the armed resistance against the occupier.

In line with the decisions adopted in Stolice, the Main Staff of the National Liberation Partisan Detachments for the Sandžak was also established. For Montenegro, the following decisions were adopted: the use of the title "partisan" instead of "guerrilla"; the requirement that "all partisans must remain permanently armed"; the introduction of the clenched fist as a greeting; the design of the military flag — the Montenegrin tricolour with a red five-pointed star in the central field; and the mandatory wearing of the red star on headgear...

The introduction of the mandatory clenched-fist salute and wearing of the red star made clear that an ideologically defined army was being created and consolidated — a development that, objectively, marked a shift in the platform of the armed struggle. Judging by the date of the order, this happened during Arso's absence, while he was in Užice, but that was merely the formal aspect of the matter — everything had already been set in motion to accommodate such a move, and Arso would have accepted it too, as there was no real alternative. He would soon confide in Professor Jagoš Jovanović that he feared this insistence on politicizing the partisan army would inevitably deepen internal divisions, particularly with those elements for whom this approach was unacceptable. Indeed, the internal alignment of forces that Puniša Perović had ominously warned about during the Consultation began to take shape. In the first issue of *Narodna Borba* (September 15), the official publication of the Provincial Committee, these elements — clearly drawing on experiences from the defence of Red Madrid — were

[76] Radovan Vukanović, *On the Path of War,* Vol. I, Belgrade 1965, p. 75.

labelled the "fifth column." These were the same groups becoming increasingly emboldened after the ebb of the uprising, acting more aggressively, including by joining armed "anti-communist militia detachments" — auxiliary units formed by the occupiers to defend supply lines from insurgent attacks. Thus emerged local administrative bodies under the occupier's wing — "national councils" and "committees for national salvation" — organized by former officers, loosely or secretly tied to Chetnik military networks. Their declared mission was to "prevent any social change before the legitimate government returns." In pursuit of that goal, they would, "under the given circumstances," conduct limited mobilization of "nationally conscious elements," and, should the occupiers suddenly collapse, they would declare full mobilization to "restore order, if Allied or Royal Yugoslav troops failed to arrive in time."[77]

Beginning in June 1941, envoys from Draža Mihailović's Belgrade hub crisscrossed Montenegro with the aim of making contact with certain officers. These missions mostly failed, but, along with suggestions broadcast via Radio London, they influenced efforts to form "People's Army Companies" parallel to the partisan units. One such proponent was Major Đorđija Lašić from Lijeva Rijeka, who publicly advocated this agenda and approach.

The leadership of the NOP strongly condemned such activity and moved ever more decisively to suppress it. However, Arso, as a professional soldier methodical in assessing enemy actions and intentions — and well acquainted with the views of officers who had distanced themselves from the NOB, particularly in northeastern Montenegro — anticipated a further escalation of tensions, potentially leading to full-scale civil war. Such a conflict would be all the more difficult, complex and devastating for unfolding under the harsh conditions of occupation.

In the autumn, the people and their army — at least at the Staff headquarters — sang in unison of what they wanted to believe: "Voroshilov from the north drives back Hitler's hordes; Comrade Budyonny, rosy hope, now rides through the Ukraine; Timoshenko from the east, partisans strike from the flank." This "revolutionized the masses" — and further sharpened divisions.

Meanwhile, a Yugoslav-British intelligence group — codenamed "Bullseye" — arrived, sent from Malta with a mission to assess the situation on the Yugoslav front. Alongside Captain Bill Hudson, a British engineer who had lived and worked in Yugoslavia for years before the war, the group included Yugoslav Air Force staff majors Zahariye Ostojić and Mirko Lalatović — Arso's classmates from General Staff training and participants in the March 27 coup. During the April War, they had avoided capture and made their way to the Middle East via Greece. Also in the group, in charge of maintaining radio communications, was air force sergeant pilot Veljko Dragićević — Arso's neighbour from their hometown and a close friend.

It was likely by coincidence that all three Yugoslav members of the group had previously been close to Arso, but the rest was not coincidental: they were from the same region and had been sent to Montenegro by submarine — a region known, de-

[77] R. Pajović, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-34.

nešifrirana veza. A dotada je postojala i kakva-takva trpeljivost, pa i saradnja između četnika i partizana. Otada su počeli sukobi, sve krvaviji i nemilosrdniji. Kolika je uloga u tome majora Ostojića i Lalatovića – teško je reći. Sudeći po njihovoj kasnijoj četničkoj aktivnosti, oni su – kao sveži prenosioci mišljenja i raspoloženja emigranata – podjarivali obračun s partizanima. A što se tiče kapetana Hadsona – partizansko vođstvo nije smatralo da je on inicijator sukoba, mada se opažala njegova nenaklonost prema nama.

No bilo ovako ili onako, sećam se da je neko iz sredine oko mene predložio – kad su odlazili iz Pipera za Srbiju – da ih pobijemo iz zasede. Ja sam to shvatio kao šalu. Nikad, ni u najogorčenijoj zakrvljenosti s četnicima, nije mi bilo žao što smo kraljevske majore lepo

Milovan Đilas on the departure of the "Bullseye" mission to Ravna Gora.

spite unreliable communications, to be engaged in resistance against the occupiers, something Great Britain cared deeply about. The group included a British officer who spoke fluent Serbian and was well acquainted with conditions in Yugoslavia, and who undoubtedly had the reputation of a seasoned intelligence agent. They arrived in Radovče on mountain ponies, bringing three radio transmitters. From the coastal cove of Perazića Dol, where they had landed on the night of September 20, 1941 from the submarine *Triumph*, they were escorted by a guerrilla unit from Paštrovići. They had radio codes for maintaining contact with Station 8 of the SOE (Special Operations Executive) in Malta. It soon became clear that both Hudson and the two majors each carried separate encryption codes for communicating with their respective command points. Specifically, the majors had codes for contact with Cairo and London — unbeknownst to the British officer, Hudson.

All three officers — Hudson and the two majors of the Royal Yugoslav Army — were eager to understand the situation, but were at the same time quite wary of their interlocutors, reserved in conversation and cautious toward the leadership, despite being warmly welcomed by the provincial military leadership. Sergeant Dragićević, however, likely because he found himself among his fellow Piperi countrymen, spoke openly — something the two majors, as he would later note, reproached him for. They quickly — as Bill Deakin writes in *The Warrior's Mountain* — established radio contact with the station in Malta and, as early as September 26, reported that they had met a strong local unit of around 100 men conducting operations against the occupiers, led by "Captain Arso Jovanović and a certain professor." This was the first time one of the leading figures of the NOB in Yugoslavia was publicly named to the world, with emphasis on the fact that he was a captain in the Royal Yugoslav Army — which lent a certain degree of legitimacy and legality to the resistance, at least in the eyes of the Western Allies.[78] In their next message (October 13), alongside Arso's name, they

[78] The name Tito was first heard in the West through a telegram from D. Mihailović dated November 5: "The leader of the communists in Serbia, under the false name Tito, cannot be considered as the

added that of "university professor" Milovan Đilas.

With the knowledge and approval of the provincial Staff — as Deakin records — they also "made contact with the newly established committees of former Yugoslav officers who supported the views of the Royal Yugoslav government." From Radovče, the majors reported (in French) to Malta: "Instructions have been delivered to our group operating in Montenegro that they should not cooperate with those leaders of Chetnik (read: insurgent) units who do not recognize the Yugoslav government. The group has been told to limit its activities for now to preparations and the delivery of material in order to enable a coordinated and well-organized operation at a later date." Captain Hudson, through his radio, reported: "The communists, who are well organized, have now launched operations in Montenegro. They wish for everyone to unite in the fight against the occupying authorities. Many nationalist elements stand on the other side and are waiting. The nationalists must be urged to organize for combat..." In his final report from Montenegro, Captain Hudson informed Malta of the existence of "patriotic forces in the Danilovgrad area."[79]

They also received orders to establish contact with Colonel Mihailović at Ravna Gora, but attempts to do so via radio proved futile: they lacked the appropriate code, one of the transmitters had broken down, and spare parts were unavailable. They decided to proceed toward Serbia as soon as possible.

While they spent about fifteen days at Radovče, no one restricted the movements or monitored the conversations of the group. It is true that, in *The Revolutionary War* (p. 97), Đilas later wrote that "some of our officers" had proposed that these "royal emissaries" be eliminated, adding — fifty-three years later — that Arso had not been among them at the time, though he would soon — had he been able — have changed his mind. This is supported by the recollection of retired colonel and historian Bogdan Gledović, who met Arso and Bajo Sekulić around November 20, 1941, in Aluge, as they were heading toward Maoča to prepare the attack on Pljevlja. When asked why they were in such a hurry, Arso replied that he was carrying urgent mail to "Comrade Mladen"[80] in Žabljak. Bajo opened the envelope and, reading aloud that Chetniks under Colonel Mihailović had openly attacked the Partisans, Arso groaned and slapped his knee, saying: "Those three gave him courage with their messages from the King and the English; some people told me to eliminate them, and I trusted them instead, trying not to do anything that might turn them against us..."

While the intelligence group was stationed at Radovče, its members — undisturbed — attempted, and even succeeded, in establishing contact with some "national elements" from nearby clans and brotherhoods. Majors Ostojić and Lalatović spoke with Arso about the possibility of contacting their "classmate" Đ. Lašić and the potential to unite all patriotic forces in the fight against the occupiers. Lalatović surveyed the Radovče field, inquired about the strength and direction of prevailing winds, and

leader of the resistance. The fight against the Germans is a facade." (B. Deakin, *op. cit.*, p. 236).

[79] B. Deakin, *op. cit.*, pp. 158-159.

[80] One of the nicknames of Moša Pijade.

determined the best flight paths for approaching aircraft. With the assigned personnel, he marked and levelled landing strips, arranged branches for signal fires by which pilots could orient themselves according to prearranged codes. Part of the Dubravica forest was cleared on the western side to ensure safer landings. Reports were sent to Malta.[81] Arso neither had the time nor the inclination for lengthy conversations with the newcomers; he believed he had, in two or three discussions, given a clear enough explanation as to why, as a General Staff officer, he had found himself fighting alongside communists — with an emphasis on the core purpose of the national liberation and anti-fascist struggle. He told them, as far as he knew, who was who in Montenegro. Any further talks, in his view, were a waste of time — and such matters were, in any case, not the responsibility of the Chief of Staff.

In the first week of October, he focused on selecting and planning a major operation which, by its scale, location and consequences, would mark a departure from minor, uncoordinated skirmishes. It would also serve as a prelude to larger, more decisive actions against the enemy and carry significance in terms of separating insurgent fighters from their home regions, gathering them for joint operations wherever the situation required. In assessing the operational environment, updated by the rapidly developing intelligence service, the chosen target was the Podgorica-Kolašin road — specifically the Jelin Dub area, in the middle of the switchbacks through Bratonožići — a position Arso knew well, both from maps and from the battles in early August. By early October, long motorized Italian convoys were using those sharp curves daily, moving troops and especially materiel toward Kolašin and the garrisons in Vasojevići and the Sandžak, with little to no interference. Given the importance and scope of the mission, a unit was assigned and an operational directive written, indicating the region and approximate time of the action. Troops from a wider area were to be involved in the attack, while local partisans were responsible for reconnaissance, receiving the units, and providing guides. The operation's execution was entrusted to Blažo Jovanović, commander of the Zeta NOP Detachment. He would coordinate the ambush — the largest conducted in the autumn of 1941 on the Yugoslav front — with the commands of the "Jole Piletić" (Piperi), "Bijeli Pavle" (Bjelopavlići) and "Marko Miljanov" (Kuči) partisan battalions. After careful reconnaissance, a detailed assessment, covert occupation of positions and establishment of an efficient fire system, the ambush was carried out on October 18, 1941. The three combined battalions (about 370 fighters) achieved notable success: around 150 enemy soldiers and officers were killed or wounded, 64 were captured, and a convoy of 43 trucks was destroyed. The action echoed throughout Montenegro and the Bay of Kotor, serving as a powerful stimulus for other units to continue the fight.[82]

In Užice *(October 19-25, 1941)*

[81] B. Deakin, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

[82] B. Lazarević, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

In the meantime, Arso, together with Mitar Bakić, set off for Užice — "just as the first serious operation on the Podgorica-Lijeva Rijeka route was being prepared." They had received the assignment to travel to the headquarters of the Supreme Leadership of the NOB no later than the evening of October 13. They departed the next day as official representatives of insurgent Montenegro, carrying documents from the Provincial Council and tasked by M. Đilas to deliver them to the political and military leadership of the movement and report on the situation in Montenegro. Captain Hudson and Major Ostojić joined them.

On Mount Sinjajevina, in the home of Živan Knežević and his brother Veljko, they were met by Bogdan Đ. Gledović, a final-year student at the Pljevlja Gymnasium, originally from Kosanica and courier for the Local Committee of the CPY, led by Velimir Jakić. Dressed and equipped as a "tobacco trader," he delivered mail for the Provincial Committee, collected 100,000 dinars for the needs of the resistance in Pljevlja, and led the "group of comrades from Montenegro" toward Maoča. They were dressed in a ragtag fashion: the tall Arso wore an officer's uniform without epaulettes, rubber shoes and a cap; behind him walked Ostojić in a major's uniform; Hudson, tall and overweight, wore the uniform of a British officer; Mitar was in a soldier's outfit. Arso told Gledović who was who in the group, but without stating their roles or purpose of travel. While crossing the cold, swollen Tara River, the current pulled Gledović under and threatened to drown him. Arso, risking his own life, managed to grab him and carry him to safety. Completely soaked, he forced the water from his lungs, massaged him, wrung out his clothes, and in a house past Prenćani — where the host first made *cicvara*, which the Englishman "quite enjoyed," and later, realizing they were important figures, cooked a lamb — rubbed him down with rakija and revived him with a sip.

They spent the night at the Peruničić house, where Velimir Jakić, Komnen Cerović and Danilo Knežević joined them for a meeting. Also present were respected democrats and patriots, retired teachers Mile Peruničić and Dušan Ivović, known supporters of the liberation movement. Arso suggested that young Gledović guide them through the Sandžak — a wish Gledović also expressed, feeling he owed Arso his life — but Jakić had another task for the "tobacco trader," so instead, Mile Peruničić and Danilo Knežević accompanied the group to Užice.[83] That they travelled safely from one resistance point to another and arrived at their destination no later than October 19 is confirmed by the fact that the same evening, Tito received Mitar and Arso at the headquarters of the Supreme Command (SC) located in the National Bank building in Užice. The town was tense, as German aircraft had just bombed the weapons and munitions factory that day, and workers were pulling the wounded, the dead and machinery from the collapsed tunnels, with more bombings expected. The Supreme Commander quickly skimmed through the documents brought by Mitar and Arso, then passed them to Kardelj "for study and drafting a reply to the comrades in Montenegro." Tito himself had a long conversation with the visitors, especially inquiring about Đilas' work in Vasojevići. From the way the questions were worded and the one-sided perspective they reflected, it became clear that someone had previously — orally or in writing — informed Tito and the CPY General Secretary about Đilas' conduct, though not impartially. The two of them shared what they knew, and later in Foča, Arso would tell Bakić and Milutin that he suspected the source was either Moša Pijade or Professor Dušan Nedeljković, who had frequently clashed with Đilas during the "Kolašin period." Based on what they read and heard, Tito and Kardelj signed a directive letter on October 22, declaring the Council's Resolution and "Comrade Veljko's Letter" null and void. Đilas was to be recalled to Užice. Milutin was appointed as the new Political Bureau delegate and simultaneously as commander of the Main Staff. Naturally, Arso was unaware of the contents of the "letter to the comrades in Montenegro" or the evaluations made in it. Still, he could sense everywhere that their arrival — his and Mitar's — had sparked great interest in the CC of the CPY and the Supreme Command of the NOP of Yugoslavia. This was due to their information about the current military-political developments and optimistic assessments of the further growth of NOP armed forces in Montenegro and the overall course of the armed struggle. Even more so, because the data they provided were the first official reports on the progress of the uprising in Montenegro, and Užice was clearly counting on it — judging by a directive that Tito immediately showed them. It read: "In Montenegro, larger garrisons should be blockaded, worn down and gradually destroyed, cooperating with units in the Sandžak, Dalmatia and Macedonia." It wasn't entirely clear how they were supposed to cooperate with those in Macedonia while also being integrated into "War Service," but it all sounded somewhat optimistic. Similarly optimistic were the assessments of the comrades from the Sandžak, particularly concerning the successful development of the armed struggle and the activities of new authorities on liberated territory in Serbia, Montenegro and eastern Bosnia. This topic was discussed several times during the five "Užice days," thoroughly and seriously, as it deserved — both for its current importance and its future potential.

In the capital of the "Užice Republic," Arso learned from the first issue of *Borba* (October 19) about the contents of reports from the fronts in Serbia, where 23 National Liberation Partisan Detachments were fighting against German forces. In *Bulletin* No. 7-8 of the SH, he read the decisions adopted at Stolice. He informed the military leadership members and, according to Aleksandar Ranković's recollection, asserted himself in discussions through "military analysis and rational conclusions, a sense for assessments, and skill in staff work." At the time, none of the top leadership of the NOB had any substantial military education — before the uprising, they had not dealt directly with matters of military leadership. Their knowledge of strategy, operations and tactics was limited to what they may have heard in abbreviated courses at the Communist University of the National Minorities of the West in Moscow or what they had read in pamphlets from Lenin and Stalin's corpus of "military thought." The only person who showed greater interest in military matters — and displayed more knowledge — was Sreten Žujović-Crni, commander of the Main Staff of the Partisan

[83] Historian Colonel Gledović wrote a shorter serialized article in May 1975 about that journey, but the editor of *Politika,* due to the ban on mentioning Arso's name (except in a negative context), did not publish it; upon hearing this, the director and chief editor of the newspaper, Milojko Čiča Durlović, ordered it to be "immediately and literally printed," as it was.

Detachments of Serbia. In truth, the Supreme Commander of the National Liberation Movement of Yugoslavia (NOPJ), though it was unknown at the time, had served in the Austro-Hungarian army in 1914-15, fighting from Suvobor to the Carpathians, and earned the rank of *feldwebel* for his performance in battle. Kardelj, due to physical disability, had not even served that much. Ranković had done his military service in 1935. Most others (Milutin, Đilas, Lola and others), having been convicted by the Court for the Protection of the State for belonging to the banned Communist Party, were deemed "politically unfit" and never served in the military at all. There was little help in military matters — particularly in developing an intelligence service, applying analytics and organizing staff duties — from the two officers who, by chance, were performing operational duties at the SH. They were Major Branko Poljanac, from the engineering and technical branch, and First-Class Infantry Captain Sredoje Markićević. The former was an engineer by profession, a graduate of the Lower Military Academy and the Technical Faculty, with two years of engineering and technical specialization, and had served in the Fortifications Department of the General Staff. The latter had only completed the Lower Military Academy but had extensive field experience and, as a native of Užice, was "at home." Major Poljanac had joined the Posavina Partisan Detachment through connections at the university, specifically via Milentije Popović. He and Engineering Captain Second Class Pavle Ilić Veljko (b. 1910) had crossed from occupied Belgrade using the "Kosmaj connection." With recommendations from Koča Popović, both arrived in Stolice on September 29, where Lola Ribar and Aleksandar Ranković retained them to serve in the SH. Until then, there hadn't been time or expertise to properly establish the SH, nor was it achieved in Užice — but even if it had been, those two officers could not have meaningfully contributed to staff duties at the SH level. While staying at the SH, Arso observed that it was Tito who personally handled military affairs and issued directives, and that he was clearly dissatisfied with the work of the two officers. Arso repeatedly found them hunched over maps of completely unsuitable scale. While monitoring the military situation across Serbia — especially in Rađevina, Šumadija and Pomoravlje — the two officers constantly asked the Supreme Commander questions, often poorly phrased, unreliable in analysis, unskilled in responding, indecisive in proposing actions, and, above all, ineffective in executing decisions. They were, without doubt, well-meaning individuals, volunteers in the partisan ranks, patriotic officers willing to give their all for victory — but what they could offer in military expertise was far too modest for that level of command and decision-making. Josip Broz would later make note of this in material for his (unpublished) memoirs. Their lack of expertise in an otherwise completely undeveloped SH would later be cited as an explanation for the absence of an adequate intelligence and reconnaissance service, the unprofessional tracking of enemy movements and combat actions — particularly the failure to anticipate operations by the reinforced German 342nd and 113th Infantry Divisions, and elements of four other garrison divisions engaged in the offensive against the NOP detachments in Serbia. This would also help explain the ill-conceived decision to stage a last stand by partisan units at Crnokosa and Kadinjača, followed by the dramatic abandonment of Užice and the Supreme

Headquarters' panicked retreat across Zlatibor. Ultimately, it led to the decision on December 12, in Drenova, to appoint Captain Arso Jovanović as the first Chief of the Supreme Headquarters of the NOPJ.[84]

In Užice, Arso also met Captain Milorad Mitić, who had been sent by General Staff Colonel Dragoljub Draža Mihailović from Ravna Gora to act as liaison officer with the SH of the National Liberation Movement of Yugoslavia (NOPJ). Arso had previously known Colonel Mihailović from the Supplementary Course of the Higher School of the Military Academy and from General Staff exercises, where the former military attaché in Sofia and Prague, and on the eve of the war, head of the army's operations section, had lectured on intelligence services. Now, from Mitić, he heard that Mihailović was the military leader of the Chetnik movement, that he was in direct contact with the government-in-exile, that he had his own army in Serbia, and that he would "soon have one in Montenegro" as well. Regarding the disagreements with the Partisan leadership, Captain Mitić explained that he was there to smooth things over and help establish joint command. He had just received (on October 20) a letter from the Supreme Commander of the Partisan Army for Draža, containing a 12-point proposal for an agreement on joint struggle against the occupier.[85] The content of that proposal was openly discussed in the circles around the SH, with emphasis placed on the claim that it was a sincere and fully acceptable offer.

On the evening of October 24, Major Lalatović and Sergeant Dragićević arrived in Užice. The next day, Major Lalatović departed freely for Ravna Gora, where Hudson and Ostojić were already present, while Dragićević remained with the Partisans in Užice, where his brother Đorđija — Đuza — was also stationed as part of the immediate security detail for the SH. Captain Hudson — as would later become known from a document disclosed during Draža Mihailović's trial — brought the leader of the Chetnik movement a message: "Yugoslavs must fight for Yugoslavia, not for a communist rebellion on behalf of Soviet Russia." Roughly 20 days earlier (on October 2), the Minister of War, Army General Bogoljub Ilić, had sent a radio dispatch from Jerusalem warning General Simović in London that "everything must be done to subordinate the communists to Colonel Mihailović, because under proper control and leadership their enthusiasm could be useful to the overall cause." On October 28 — a day after the meeting between Tito and Draža at Ravna Gora concerning joint Partisan-Chetnik action against the occupiers — General Simović sent a message via Radio London: "Until a given signal for joint action, do not provoke the enemy unless absolutely necessary." That same day, Draža replied by radio: "I have made peace with the communists. The peace cannot last long, as they refuse to hand over Čačak and Užice. The weapons factory in Užice is of enormous importance for our detachments. I fear

[84] After crossing the Lim River, Markićević — as Dr. Venceslav Glišić states — was captured and imprisoned in a camp at Banjica, where his trace disappears, while Poljanac would continue to hold high positions in the NOVJ until the end of the NOB and, almost continuously subordinate to Arso Jovanović, reach the rank of General-Lieutenant, but would forever remain bitter that, as a major, "an ordinary captain," allegedly, stole the prestigious position in the military hierarchy from him.

[85] M. Stanišić, *Strategic Verticals of the NOB of Yugoslavia 1941-1945,* Belgrade 1999, pp. 260-262.

we may need to take the town by force very soon. We must not allow the communist movement to grow stronger."

During the "Užice period," Tito — albeit with major difficulties — maintained radio contact with the Executive Committee of the Comintern, led by Dimitrov (code-named "Deda"), based first in Kuybyshev (now Samara), and later in Ufa, in the Urals. Under "Deda's" organization, the *Slobodna Jugoslavija* radio station would also operate, making its first broadcast on November 11, 1941. Throughout the war, *Slobodna Jugoslavija* would air programs in multiple languages, disseminating information about who was who on the Yugoslav front, sharing intelligence, and transmitting orders and messages from the SH of the NOPJ to operational units. Maintaining this link with "Deda" and *Slobodna Jugoslavija* would fall largely to Veljko Dragićević — a task that, given the nature of his own duties, Arso would take a special interest in.

Sensing the danger posed by the Ravna Gora movement, especially in its alliance with the Yugoslav government-in-exile — about whose radio-based communications he had learned many details — Arso was particularly wary of the swift departure of Captain Hudson and Majors Ostojić and Lalatović to meet with Colonel Mihailović. He would have been even more alarmed had he known they were carrying a special message from the Yugoslav government: "Not to launch an uprising until receiving a signal from London" — encrypted as: "When the nightingale sings from the pyramids." Had he known that this message would bind Colonel Mihailović not only to cease all cooperation with the Partisans but also to wage open war against them, fuelling the formation of the Ravna Gora movement's "military wing" and igniting a civil war, Arso would certainly have tried to prevent them from delivering such instructions. While such an act would likely not have changed the broader course of the Yugoslav conflict — since Draža would have received a similar message through other channels — Arso, as Chief of the Supreme Headquarters of the NOPJ, would have lived with a clearer conscience amid the deepening civil war. As it happened, the two majors delivered the London message to the colonel and became his closest military associates, while Captain Hudson — known by the codename Marko — served as the official British representative in Draža's staff until early 1944. Though he rose two ranks during that period, he did not hide in his reports — as noted by Bill Deakin — that he continued to hold a "high opinion of Tito, Arso, Đilas and their struggle for advancing social revolution."[86]

In contrast, pilot sergeant Dragićević remained with the Partisans, serving in the SH — first as a radio telegraphist, then as Chief of Communications. He left behind two notes; the first, written in Užice on November 14, described how he had joined the Partisans and detailed who his fellow passengers had been on the submarine *Triumph* and what their mission in Yugoslavia was. He stated that up until 1935, he had been an active air force sergeant, leaving the service at his own request. Transferred to the reserve, he trained at the airline company Aeroput and became a first-class radio telegraphist for international air traffic, later earning a certification as a heavy bomber pilot. He did not participate in the April War, as on April 2 he flew, aboard an Aeroput passenger plane, Colonels Dragutin Savić and Božin Simić to Moscow, where they negotiated Soviet aid to Yugoslavia. The Treaty of Friendship and Non-Aggression was signed at 2:30 a.m. on April 6 — just as General Alexander Lohr's pilots were warming up their engines for the bombing of Belgrade. Dragićević remained in Moscow until April 10, then flew via neutral Turkey and Allied Greece to Egypt. There, among 250 escaped officers and NCOs of the Royal Yugoslav Air Force, he was sent to a camp in Amman where they studied English. In late August he was summoned to Cairo, where he trained in radio operation and cipher use. Also attending the course — held in the apartment of Colonel Žarko Popović, the former Yugoslav military attaché in Moscow — were Majors Lalatović and Ostojić, as well as a British officer. From Cairo, they travelled to Alexandria, then Malta, and two days later set out for Yugoslavia aboard the submarine *Triumph*. They landed on September 20 in the village of Vukovići near Petrovac na Moru, and from there reached Radovče. In late September, they received a radiogram from Malta instructing them to establish contact with Draža Mihailović as soon as possible. According to Dragićević, Major Lalatović had fallen ill, while Hudson and Ostojić were in a hurry to reach Ravna Gora. When he and Lalatović arrived in Užice five days later, they heard that "Ostojić and the Englishman were already serving Colonel Mihailović."



Captured in a moment of peace — Veljko Dragićević with his wife Zora.

Sergeant Dragićević ends his statement with the following: "I have never engaged in politics, but in these difficult times for our people, I realize that every honest Serb has only one place — on the front against Hitler and the traitors to the nation. I am convinced that Draža Mihailović's detachments are betraying our liberation struggle and are objectively serving foreign occupiers — the enemy. I believe the partisan units are the only ones consistently fighting for the people and against the occupiers and their collaborators. That is why my only rightful place is with them." He asked the SH to admit him into the Partisans so that he could "best fulfil my duties to the people

[86] B. Deakin, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

and the homeland."[87]

In another note, undated and titled *How I Joined the Partisans*, Dragićević writes that Ostojić scolded him at Radovče "for associating too much with the Partisans." Upon receiving the message from Malta to urgently establish contact with Colonel Mihailović, who was "somewhere on Suvobor in Serbia," Ostojić and Hudson departed immediately. Dragićević remained at Radovče with Lalatović for another six days. From there, they were "passed along" from one NOP unit checkpoint to another until they reached Užice, where they were told that Major Ostojić had gone to see Draža Mihailović and had not reported back since. At that point, Major Lalatović "asked to be escorted to Draža," and this request was granted immediately. "I was told I would join later, since he was in a hurry. But I saw clearly what was happening — it hadn't been three days since Lalatović left, and Draža Mihailović's armed Chetnik bands had already started attacking the Partisans from behind, even though they had previously had an agreement on a joint struggle against the occupiers. I refused to go to the Chetniks — I stayed with the Partisans."[88]

It is understandable that Dragićević, perhaps sooner and certainly more clearly than others, concluded that the meeting between Lalatović and Ostojić with Colonel Mihailović on Ravna Gora had fundamentally changed the Chetnik command's attitude toward the NOP — that is, toward "the other wing of the uprising led by the communists." However, neither he nor anyone else — not in Užice, Ravna Gora, Cairo or Malta — knew that the English captain and the Yugoslav majors had arrived in Yugoslavia on separate and distinct missions.

Captain Hudson's objective was to assess who was who on the Serbian battlefield, encourage armed resistance "against the Axis powers" — a matter of vital interest to his government — establish radio communication and organize the delivery of British material aid to those deemed worthy of it. On October 9, he received an order from Cairo, via Malta, to proceed urgently to Serbia, where "a certain Colonel Mihailović, a resistance leader against the Germans," had been transmitting messages in plain text, and thus "urgently needed to be provided with a cipher." In carrying out his mission — at least in the beginning — Hudson had no difficulties with NOP leaders. In contrast, when he met with Draža at his headquarters (at the time of Draža's talks with Tito on October 27 in Brajići), Mihailović displayed "reserve, even suspicion." This reaction — even though Hudson was the first British officer to reach him — was understandable, given that Draža, emboldened by the "oral directive" conveyed to him by the majors, had no interest in the truth that the British intelligence officer was seeking.[89]

The arrival of Majors Lalatović and Ostojić is quite a different story — one that,

[87] Archives of the National Liberation Army, Fund of the General Staff of the NOVJ, file 4, reg. no. 12/4.

[88] A statement typed on a typewriter and personally signed, given to the Security Service (led by S.K. Penezić), preserved among the documents of the General Staff for 1941, Archives of the National Liberation Army, file 7, reg. no. 92/2; published in the collection *Links in the NOP 1941-1945,* Belgrade 1981.

[89] B. Deakin, *op. cit.*, pp. 164-165.

thanks to Dušan Karić's research, is now more complete and clearer. For a long time, it was believed that the two were prepared for and sent on this mission by General Bogoljub Ilić, with the knowledge and approval of General Dušan Simović. Even "the technician" Dragićević was clearly under that impression. But the truth is that, after completing a course in Colonel Popović's flat in Cairo, they were transferred to London under the organization of Minister Jovan Đonović and his assistant Nikola Knežević. There, within the Military Committee of the Yugoslav government — under the authority of Dr. Slobodan Jovanović and the influential brothers Radoje and Živan Knežević — and following special preparations, they were given a secret cipher enabling them to communicate with London and Cairo without British knowledge, as well as an "oral directive" for Colonel Mihailović. Jovanović was Deputy Prime Minister with support from the royal inner circle, Radoje Knežević served as Minister of the Court, and his brother Živan was head of the Military Committee. Not only were the British and Hudson — as head of the Mission — unaware of this directive and its contents, but so were Prime Minister General Simović in London and the Chief of the General Staff in Cairo.

According to D. Karić's findings, the oral directive the majors received from their superiors in London — Dr. Jovanović and the Knežević brothers, who, bypassing General Simović, had already taken or were on the way to taking full control of the government-in-exile — can be summarized in five points:

"a) Do not engage in fighting or attack occupying military formations, as success is highly unlikely and it would only result in slaughtering the people; wait for our signal for uprising, which will come in coded form.

"b) Do not form large military units that the occupiers could easily destroy, but rather small, covert detachments. Keep lists of men for a potential future mobilization. Focus on organizing the movement.

"c) The communists are our main enemies and must be eliminated at every opportunity — they aim to use the war to gain power after it ends.

"d) Find common ground with Nedić to secure supplies, pay, arms and ammunition. Legalize as many of our people through him as possible and infiltrate his formations.

"e) Use the Germans whenever possible — especially in the fight against communists."

According to Karić, the arrival of the majors at Ravna Gora marked a turning point in Chetnik behaviour, and the oral directives they brought caused a complete shift in the policy of the uprising forces aligned with the government-in-exile. Everything Draža Mihailović did from that point onward had the approval of the émigré government. And all of it was diametrically opposed to the initial intentions of the uprising, creating a final split with the other wing of the resistance led by the communists. This step, Karić argues, represented a betrayal of the uprising and the struggle against the occupiers, fundamentally changing the Chetniks' tactics toward the Ger-

mans, Nedić and the Partisans.[90]

The stories Arso heard in Užice about D. Mihailović's Chetnik movement and its friction with the SH, the open warnings from London not to engage in battle against the occupiers until ordered, the hurried departure of Hudson and the two majors to Ravna Gora, Captain Mitić's remark that Chetnik units were being organized in Montenegro — Arso connected all of this with Đilas' stance on revolutionizing the army, with warnings of a "fifth column," with the red star and the clenched fist, and especially with the reasoning of the officer group in Vasojevići. He foresaw danger in tribal divisions and clan animosities, in disunity and internal conflict — fearing fratricidal bloodshed and its consequences. This fear stemmed from traumatic childhood memories, military history and war theory, and conversations with officers between battles. He often said, "There is no greater disaster for the people than a civil war — while still under occupation." According to Danilo Knežević, Arso spoke about this with Mitar Bakić before parting ways on October 25 in Užice. Mitar was preparing to leave the next day for Ravna Gora with Tito and Žujović, while Arso, together with Milutin and a group of comrades from the Sandžak, headed back to Montenegro. They went their separate ways — unaware that, in the meantime, Colonel Mihailović, the Chetnik leader and clearly the "card" the King and the London-based government were betting on, had already, as of October 15, appointed General Staff Major Đorđija Lašić as commander of all Chetnik forces in Montenegro, and Captain First Class Pavle Đurišić as commander of the Lim-Sandžak Chetnik detachments. The order appointing the latter stated: "All officers, non-commissioned officers, corporals and enlisted men from both active and reserve forces needed for his operations shall immediately be placed at his disposal upon request, and all authorities are instructed to provide him with the necessary cooperation — in accordance with wartime laws of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia — as a representative of the regular Yugoslav army."[91]

Seeing that Arso looked somewhat pensive, Mitar — known as an optimist and a man of compromise — remarked that there were no conditions in Montenegro for a civil war to erupt, given the strong reputation and influence of the Party there. He added that the Russians would soon launch their counter-offensive, which would help unravel the wartime drama in the Balkans. Then he suggested they part on a cheerful note by singing *"Oj Rusijo, jedino uzdanje..."* ("Oh Russia, our only hope...").[92] They wished each other good fortune in war. In November, Bakić would become "Minister of Finance" in the first anti-fascist government of Serbia, headed by Dragojlo Dudić, while Arso would be preparing Partisan units from Montenegro for the liberation of the Sandžak.

[90] D. Karić, serialized article in *Politika* from January 25, 1996.

[91] R. Pajović, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

[92] From a conversation with Danilo Knežević, June 1995, in Belgrade.

Part Three

THE EPIC OF THE SANDŽAK

• The Montenegrin NOP Detachment for operations in the Sandžak: 3,690 fighters organized into nine battalions with 34 companies
• Lack of surprise at both operational and tactical levels
• Heroic stand of Lovćen fighters in the embattled town
• Long-standing silence about the fact that part of the Muslim population acted with hostility toward the partisans
• Around 500 killed, wounded or missing
• A helping hand extended to the Serbian Partisans
• Arso's assessments from 1942 and 1946 are still cited today
• A broad list of causes for the failure, with the commander listing nine of his own mistakes — not sparing himself from responsibility
• General Esposito's message to his Alpini: celebrate December 1 for life
• Thirty years later, Tito gives high praise to the Pljevlja operation

The Battle of Pljevlja *(December 1, 1941)*

On the day Milutin, Arso and the Sandžak leaders of the NOP set off, the SH once again discussed the strategic importance of the Sandžak as a central part of the Balkan region and the urgent need to develop operations in and for it. The starting point was the assessment that this territory — covering 8,500 square kilometres and home to roughly 250,000 people — could indeed hold strategic significance, especially in enabling coordination among Partisan forces and in the creation of a unified liberated territory. This territory could extend toward Kosovo and Herzegovina, and from the south be protected by an unbroken mountain chain from Prokletije through Prekornica to the west, with only two or three narrow passes that could be easily and effectively defended. There was no doubt that this area, at the very heart of the Balkans, would enable the linking of uprising centres in the region, allow offensive operations in various directions, and — most importantly — secure the supply of food to Montenegro and neighbouring areas from Serbia.

From the discussions and evaluations made by Tito, Milutin, Arso and Mitar in Užice on October 25, a decision was made at the highest level to deploy a portion of Montenegro's uprising forces (Bakić mentions 1,500 fighters) to the Sandžak and to liberate Pljevlja, which served as a geographic corridor, transportation hub and economic source (Arso added: "the key and the throat") along the route for delivering economic aid to Montenegro, and as a centre of strong Communist Party organization. Later, in February 1946, Arso would write in his publication *The Belgrade Operation: The Battle of Pljevlja* that "Tito provided the operational idea that a strong base and



Key participants in the operation to liberate the Sandžak, starting from Pljevlja: Arso Jovanović, Ivan Milutinović and Mitar Bakić (photo from May 1942).

foothold should be created in the Sandžak area from which operations would be carried out in various directions, depending on the development of the situation."[93] He stated this in an official publication, and no one contradicted him during his lifetime. Some would later do so in their own "reflections," driven by the illusion that — beside the infallible Supreme Commander — their own importance should also be elevated. But the truth is that in his entirely accurate and purposeful assessment of the potential

[93] A. Jovanović, *Overview of the NOB,* Belgrade 1946, p. 25.

evolution of the situation, and to avoid frontal battles, the risk of encirclement and defeat, Tito was also considering the possibility of relocating to the Sandžak at least a portion of the 12,000 partisans who were heroically fighting the Germans and their allies in western Serbia, Šumadija, Posavina and Pomoravlje.

In a conversation with Tito regarding the "cleansing operation in the Sandžak," there was a shared belief that Pljevlja — with the engagement of stronger forces — could be easily and quickly liberated. Arso convincingly added that following its capture, at least five or six smaller garrisons in the Sandžak would inevitably "fall" as well. The idea, and subsequently the decision to attack Pljevlja, was also based on the strength of the Party's organization in the town, the fighting spirit of the Sandžak fighters, and the (now-lost) SH order from October 3 to transfer 2,500 to 3,000 of the "best fighters" from Montenegro to Serbia for conducting "larger-scale operations." Evidence of what was decided in Užice can be found in at least five letters sent by Commander Ivan Milutinović (Milutin) to the Political Bureau of the CC of the CPY and the SH of the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia between October 25 and November 20 — in each, the first operational goal in the Sandžak was the planned and agreed-upon attack on Pljevlja.[94] By the nature of military roles, it fell to the Chief of Staff Arso to oversee the operation. Even if he had doubted the feasibility of the plan or hesitated to take on the responsibility of executing it, he had no choice — under the Party's "iron discipline," and as a "former officer" who had little "capital" among the communists, he could not choose his assignments, set conditions for top-down decisions or refuse orders. Of course, this was only if he wished to remain under the flag of the uprising — which he never wavered from — when he still had the option to switch sides, whether to Ravna Gora or Vasović.

On the way back to Montenegro, Commander Milutin gathered intelligence about the strength of enemy garrisons and their supply routes, crossings and bridges on the Lim River, November-December weather conditions, and options for feeding the troops and caring for the wounded. Danilo Knežević recalls how, throughout the journey — particularly in talks with Velimir Jakić and Milo Peruničić, and later with key Sandžak NOP leaders Rifat Burdžović and Vladimir "Volođa" Knežević — Milutin kept returning to the subject of Pljevlja, even "working out possible attack scenarios." He ultimately communicated a firm decision to liberate the town during a meeting in Radoinja.[95] He saw the capture of Pljevlja as the gateway to the necessary liberation of the Sandžak and the establishment of a "direct link between insurgents in Serbia and Montenegro." According to Knežević, Milutin was "fervently preoccupied with this idea," further evidenced by the 150,000 dinars he left with the Local Committee of the District Headquarters for Pljevlja "to purchase food for the troops when they arrive in the area prior to the attack on the town." At the home of Đolo Gledović in Kosanica, where the group stopped to rest, Komnen Cerović — who had accompanied them from Užice — commented that Montenegrin comrades would soon arrive

[94] *Collection of Documents on the NOR,* Vol. III, Book 1, Docs. 48, 65, 77, and 85.

[95] M. Ćuković, *The Sandžak,* Belgrade 1964, p. 158.

so that, together, just as in 1912 under Brigadier Mašan Božović, they could liberate Pljevlja once again.[96]

Moved by the expanse of the Sandžak region, Arso also spoke of the "exceptional strategic position and significance of the territory between the Tara and Drina rivers, and the Lim basin," where coordinated action could link units and liberated zones in Montenegro and Serbia. He envisioned the Montenegrin operational force acting similarly to the Sandžak army in the First World War — effectively cleansing the Sandžak while dispatching part of its forces into Serbia.[97] In this context, on November 20, Milutin reported to the SH that Montenegrin troops "would not be able to move into Serbia until they completed the assigned task — the clearing of Pljevlja and Priboj." Before and after that report, there were at least four additional letters from Milutin, in which both he and Arso informed the SH — meaning Tito himself — of the impending attack on Pljevlja. The truth is, they never received a response to any of those letters.

It is difficult to explain their optimism that the "assigned task — clearing out Pljevlja" would be successfully completed. This is especially surprising in Arso's case, as one would expect greater caution from him — assuming, of course, that they had received accurate information from the local communists in Pljevlja: that the town was the headquarters of the elite 5th "Pusteria" Alpine Division; that key positions around the town were fortified and equipped with artillery; that many houses had been organized as strongpoints in a circular defence system and crossroads had been barricaded; that a portion of the Muslim population — under the influence of reactionary elements and holding unresolved grievances with the Montenegrins — would likely resist the Partisans, while the rest, with few exceptions, would remain neutral. However, the Main Staff for the Sandžak and the commanders of Partisan units continuously "fed" the commander and Chief of Staff with optimism, particularly while they were near Pljevlja assessing the situation.

Highly responsible, disciplined and endlessly loyal to Tito, Milutin — as soon as he and Arso returned to Montenegro — scheduled a meeting of unit headquarters with the Main Staff for November 15 to discuss the attack on Pljevlja. The very next day, he sent a written report to the CC of the CPY and the SH: "We immediately began gathering and mobilizing partisans for deployment in the Sandžak and began the clearing operation." That day, from Gostići, he issued an "advisory order" to mobilize units and prepare them "for movement outside their own territory." Just days earlier (on November 5), after arriving at the Main Staff, he reportedly told his deputy Peko Dapčević — as Dapčević recalled in an informal statement to Vladimir Dedijer on April 2, 1980 — that Tito had "ordered Pljevlja to be attacked with 3,500 men and for the Sandžak to be cleared, so that our main force could retreat from Serbia if necessary." Peko claimed that he "firmly opposed the idea," arguing that Pljevlja was fortified with three defensive belts, and that, based on his experience from the Spanish

[96] Memory of Colonel of the JNA B. Gledović, Belgrade, October 1995.

[97] *Collection of Documents on the NOR,* Vol. III, Book 1, Docs. 77 and 85.

Civil War, they would need three times more troops and would suffer heavy casualties. To this, Milutin allegedly reacted harshly and refused to appoint him as commander of the troops for the liberation of Pljevlja.[98]

The Gostići meeting brought together around thirty commanders and political commissars representing 5,475 fighters. As they gave reports on the state of their units, Milutin pressed them to speak "about the intensifying fight against fifth-columnists and spies in all parts of Montenegro" — a theme that would be emphasized to the extreme in the meeting's conclusions. According to the minutes, Milutin placed special emphasis on the role of political commissars in the units and on the Partisan army's duties "as the armed force of the Party." The conclusions also demanded "the strictest prevention of attempts to create a separate military organization parallel to the Partisan one, which would amount to fifth-column and subversive work by saboteurs and enemies of the NOB." A subsequent point emphasized that "only the Partisans can be the bearers of the national uprising in Montenegro."

The commander also ordered how many men each region had to contribute to the Montenegrin NOP Detachment for operations in the Sandžak, which battalions would be formed, where and when they would gather, and along which routes they would advance toward Pljevlja. He appointed the Detachment Headquarters: Commander Arso Jovanović, Political Commissar Bajo Sekulić, with their deputies Radovan Vukanović and Boško Đuričković. His supposed idea to detach 1,600 to 2,000 men from the Montenegrin NOP Detachment of "about 4,000 fighters" to move directly toward Užice — under the command of Radovan Vukanović and Jagoš Uskoković — was altered at least three times in various orders sent during the Detachment's march. At a minimum, these conflicting messages caused confusion among the command staff, such as: cancel the Sandžak operation and send all troops to Serbia; then, clear the Sandžak with part of the force while urgently sending 1,000 fighters to Serbia; or first liberate Pljevlja, then send units to Serbia.[99]

Most responsible for carrying out the operations that these troops were hastily and improvisedly preparing for, Arso assigned tasks to the headquarters regarding the composition of the battalions and their command structure; weapons and equipment; movement routes; marching discipline; soldiers' rations; and the timeline for reaching the assembly point of the detachment in Njegovuđa. In that regard, he issued written orders and drafted marching plans. Aware that the political decision to attack Pljevlja imposed the obligation for troops to act swiftly, he ordered that within just three to four days, numerous crucial tasks be completed and key issues resolved — including mobilization and organization, equipping and arming the units, feeding and resting the troops, and preparing them for long marches in poor weather and mountainous terrain. These challenges were made all the more complex by the fact that such large

[98] V. Dedijer, *New Contributions...,* Belgrade 1984, II, 105.

[99] R. Vukanović, *op. cit.,* 1965,1, 98; General Radivoje Jovanović Bradonja, in the publication *Introduction to the Critical Analysis of the Strategy of the National Liberation Army* (Belgrade 1998), states that Tito, at the end of October in Užice, ordered him to draw up a "proposal for the formation of an operational unit of 5,000 fighters, Montenegrins and Serbians."

and prepared troops — assembled, equipped, trained, ready for multiday marches, filled with volunteers or mobilized men — simply did not yet exist in Montenegro. To be more precise, around 5,500 fighters had been organized and were somewhat prepared to carry out operations in that theatre of war, based on previously planned objectives, but not for an attack on Pljevlja. Therefore, from scratch and mostly on a voluntary basis, purpose-specific units had to be formed across all levels — from squads to the full detachment, which consisted of nine battalions, or 34 companies in total. The personnel of these units, starting from the squad level, had not previously gathered or known each other, let alone operated together as combat collectives — particularly in armed actions or even joint exercises. As a result, everything had to begin from the ground up: assembling volunteers from across Montenegro without proper military or political preparation — or with only the most improvised versions — and then setting out on a demanding march and into combat to liberate Pljevlja, a fortified town, which in military practice is considered one of the most difficult combat tasks.

The commander and commissar left the council meeting and headed to the Sandžak to conduct reconnaissance and, based on their findings, complete all preparations — including making final decisions and issuing combat orders. Their plan was for the assembled units to move directly from the staging area (Njegovuđa) to their launch positions and to attack Pljevlja directly from the march. After five days of reconnaissance — with the help of local leaders from the Pljevlja area — the two men diligently carried out their assignment. There are witnesses to what happened during those five days and nights on the approaches to Pljevlja, especially in Maoča. They recall that several respected local figures — prudent, brave and loyal to the homeland — voiced their reservations to Arso and Bajo, despite understanding the Party's decision to liberate the town. At the home of Marinko Golubović, during the celebration of St. Michael's Day on November 21, they expressed fears about the "slaughter of the flower of Montenegrin youth" and the inevitable retaliatory reprisals from the occupiers after the attack.[100] As much as collaborators could, they gathered intelligence on enemy positions on dominant points around the town and within certain houses in Pljevlja. However, they lacked accurate information about the deployment of heavy weapons, particularly the number and positions of artillery pieces (12) and mortars (27). They also lacked reliable estimates of the effectiveness of enemy searchlight units, the engineering fortification of positions on the town's approaches and intersections, the layout of interlocking fire zones and the multi-channel communication links within the enemy's command system. Moreover, the information gathered reflected the state of the enemy defences as of November 20 — and after that date, with new intelligence reports about the detachment's approach, those defences were being reinforced daily, making it practically impossible for the Partisan forces to keep track in real time.[101]

Nevertheless, the entire operation relied heavily on achieving surprise and executing a unified, simultaneous attack — which, it was assumed, would cause the defences

[100] Memory of B. Gledović, Belgrade, October 1995.

[101] Memory of D. Knežević, Belgrade, June 1996.

to collapse regardless of their strength. Consequently, a key principle of military science — ensuring a 3:1 numerical advantage when attacking a well-fortified town — was disregarded. It is difficult to understand why Arso, despite directives from the SH, did not more seriously assess the situation and account for the fact that the enemy was vastly better armed and equipped. However, the detachment commander had counted on two factors when planning the attack on Pljevlja: first, that at least 6,500 fighters would participate in the entire operation in the Sandžak and on its approaches, which would significantly shift the balance of power in favour of the attackers; and second, that the detachment would possess more artillery and mortars — which were essential for the attack. He certainly did not expect the detachment to have 576 unarmed fighters, who would be practically useless for carrying out a night assault on a well-fortified garrison. Regarding heavy weaponry, a notable detail from Arso's brochure *The Belgrade Operation: The Battle of Pljevlja* states that the detachment had "36 heavy mortars, 4 cannons and 220 automatic weapons" — which may have been agreed upon or considered desirable during the Gostići council, and which he likely used in calculating the balance of forces. In reality, however, the detachment was armed with only 2,907 rifles, 70 light machine guns, 14 heavy machine guns, 6 light mortars, a single 36 mm cannon and 1,748 hand grenades — a force far below what had been estimated as necessary in terms of both numbers and weaponry.

Respecting the principle of classical military doctrine — march separately, fight together — six battalions from the southern regions of Montenegro marched toward the staging area in two columns: the first consisted of the Lovćen Battalion (341 fighters), the Zeta Battalion (453), "Bijeli Pavle" (480) and "Peko Pavlović" (506); the second comprised the "October 18" Piperi-Kuči Battalion (405) and the Kom Battalion (641). On November 25, they participated in a parade of units heading to the Sandžak during a large popular gathering in Žabljak, where Bajo Sekulić delivered a "fiery speech." In the afternoon of November 26, the battalions marched to Njegovuđa, where the first formation and inspection were held for what was, by Montenegrin standards at the time, a large and well-armed unit. The next day, they awaited the arrival of the Jezero-Šaranci (306), Uskočko-Drobnjak (297) and Piva (261) battalions.[102]

During the break at Njegovuđa, the detachment commander Arso convened the first full meeting of the Headquarters, where he announced the decision and issued the combat order for the attack on Pljevlja. Key witnesses to the event claim the order was in written form, typed across five pages, with topographical maps marking deployment sectors, approach routes, starting positions and designated targets. They also recall that the attack was scheduled to begin at 2:00 a.m. on November 30. However, the order has not been preserved, nor has the operations map (except for a copy later found by Italian royal carabinieri while searching the pockets of fallen partisan officers in Pljevlja), which has enabled some authors to freely interpret the strength of the partisan forces based on this lost combat document.

At the staging area, the detachment headquarters assisted battalion commands in

[102] Š. Lagator and Dr. Đ. Batrićević, *The Battle of Pljevlja,* Belgrade 1990, pp. 57, 134-135.

carrying out the most urgent tasks regarding organization and unit formation. According to company commissar Milija Stanišić of the Župa-Pješivci Company, after working with the "Peko Pavlović" Battalion command on refining the order for the attack on Pljevlja, Arso met with company leaders, helped resolve issues, and emphasized the significance of the upcoming task and the particularities of a night attack. He pointed out the specific objectives to be targeted and the need for careful reconnaissance along each assigned attack direction; the importance of keeping troop movements secret until reaching launch positions; maintaining contact with neighbouring units; caring for the fighters; treating the wounded; and maintaining respectful relations with civilians. To the Lovćen Battalion — led by Captain First Class Pero Ćetković — he stated that the battle for the liberation of Pljevlja would not be "like clapping your hands," but a decisive clash made up of assaults on hardened objectives within a town located in a basin, defended from dominant heights and fortified houses by elite Italian troops — the Alpini — experienced, motivated and skilled in warfare, who, in defending the town, were fully aware their lives were at risk and that help was unlikely.

Among the active officers in the detachment, in addition to Captains First Class Arso Jovanović and Pero Ćetković, were the following battalion commanders: "October 18" — Vaso Jovanović; "Bijeli Pavle" — Mirko Šćepanović; and the Piva Battalion — Vukosav Topalović. Deputy battalion commanders were: Lovćen — military official Pero Popivoda; Zeta — Captain First Class Velimir Terzić. Lieutenant Milovan Šaranović served as military adviser to the "Bijeli Pavle" Battalion Headquarters. Additionally, several other officers held positions as company commanders and deputies. Officers also included the head of the Sandžak Main Staff, Volođa Knežević, and the commander of the Pljevlja Partisan Company (135 fighters), Velimir M. Knežević. This composition was, without doubt, inadequate in terms of combat strength for executing such a complex operation — conducting a 200-kilometre march manoeuvre, shifting the focus of operations across the battlefield and ultimately launching an attack on a fortified town. The command staff had only limited military training, even though the commanders and officers had been chosen from among seasoned communists — undoubtedly brave and resolute individuals. Arso's deputy, Radovan B. Vukanović, wrote that there was an insufficient number of trained military leaders within the battalions, and that they lacked experience, which was a major deficiency in commanding what was, in 1941, the largest partisan unit on the Montenegrin front. This was, unquestionably, a reason for the unpreparedness of the commands to carry out such a complex military action — and certainly one of the reasons for the failed attack on Pljevlja.[103]

Some authors in their works point out that the headquarters of the partisan units involved in the attack on Pljevlja were heterogeneous, militarily unskilled and unprepared to carry out the idea of transferring combat operations into the Sandžak. That idea, writes Milija Stanišić, "was clearly expressed: to attack and seize Pljevlja with all available forces, then move on to Priboj and Rudo. After liberating those towns, 1,500 to 2,000 fighters were to be sent to Serbia, and with the remaining and

[103] R. Vukanović, *op. cit.*, pp. 131-134.

newly mobilized forces, take Prijepolje, Nova Varoš, Bijelo Polje, and then continue operations toward capturing Berane, Kolašin, Andrijevica and Nikšić."[104]

још на путу из Ужица за Црну Гору у сједишту ГШ за Санџак саопштио своју одлуку за напад на Пљевља и о томе писмено извијестио Врховни штаб.[15]

Оперативна идеја за дејства у Санџаку, која је у ГШ за Црну Гору и Боку даље разрађивана, била је јасно изражена: свим расположивим снагама напасти и заузети Пљевља, а потом Прибој и Рудо. По ослобођењу ових градова, 1500—2000 бораца упутити у Србију, а са преосталим и новомобилисаним снагама заузети Пријепоље. Нову Варош, Бијело Поље — продужујући затим дејство у циљу освајања Берана, Колашина, Андријевице и Никшића.[16]

Као што се види, ЦНОПО требало је у првој етапи операције да савлада главнину италијанске дивизије у Санџаку, а у другој етапи дивизију у горњем Полимљу и изворишту

Milija Stanišić on the idea of liberating Pljevlja.

Such ambitious operational objectives — and the forces required to execute them — are recorded in original documents. At the same time, however, these sources emphasize the stark discrepancy between, first, the actual capabilities of Montenegrin and the Sandžak partisan units at that stage of the armed struggle, and second, the real balance of forces even for simpler operations. To overcome, in the first stage, the main elements of the "Pusteria" Division, and immediately after that, in the second stage, the "Venetia" Division in Upper Polimlje and around the source of the Tara River — significantly stronger, better-armed and more combat-ready units were needed, with greater battlefield experience, than those hastily formed and deployed to the Sandžak. The Montenegrin Detachment, composed of battalions whose fighters, among all the essential components that constitute the combat strength of a military unit, possessed only high morale, a tremendous will to fight, a desire to win and — which is indeed of value — readiness to die. However, all that proved insufficient when faced with the first serious obstacle: the attack on Pljevlja. One of the key participants in that assault, Boško Đuričković, assessed that "the officer corps lacked substantial experience; they all knew how to lead their units into an assault, but during the battle itself, their role as officers, in most cases, was reduced to being the bravest and most combative fighters."[105] Moreover, the Italian units stationed in and around the town — in terms of combat morale, manpower, armament, preparedness for defence and, during the battle, their resolve to offer fierce resistance — were not like the Italian units from the time of the July uprising in Montenegro. That is, especially in the case of the Pljevlja attack, no one could expect any repeat of a tactical surprise.

[104] M. Stanišić, *op. cit.,* 241; NOR Collection, vol. III, vol. 1, doc. 77 and 85.

[105] B. Đuričković, *Rememberances, Reflections, Reactions,* Belgrade 1990, p. 142.

These were undoubtedly among the elements not adequately considered when deciding to launch an assault on the fortified town of Pljevlja. Furthermore, although bold and ambitiously conceived, the operation to liberate the Sandžak — as a strategically important area for linking armed forces and intensifying the uprising — was, at least from a military standpoint, completely unrealistic, unfounded, and therefore unachievable.

The commander of the Detachment and the entire Staff, carried by the general wave of optimism, did not possess sufficient information to make rational decisions. In any case, their duty was to carry out the decisions of the SH and the CC of the CPY. This was especially true for Captain Arso Jovanović, who, as an officer of the Royal Yugoslav Army, found himself "in the jaws" of the all-powerful Provincial Committee member Bajo Sekulić and two respected and influential communists, R. Vukanović and B. Đuričković. In other words, all that remained for him was to implement the Party's decisions — naturally, if he wished to remain an active participant in the armed struggle led by the CPY. For, had he chosen to criticize the decisions of the SH and the CC or refused to carry them out, he would have had to first answer two questions: whom would he leave such a large force to, and how could he save his own life after defying orders?

At the foot of Durmitor on November 26, Milutin's order was conveyed to the commander and political commissar — to detach and send 2,000 fighters to Serbia before the attack on Pljevlja.[106] They postponed that order without explanation, likely hoping to carry out the assault with as much strength as possible, or perhaps they had other information Milutin didn't know when he wrote the order on November 24, rushing to dispatch the planned forces — also possibly fearing a rebuke from Tito due to the worsening situation of the uprising forces in western Serbia. Naturally, neither Arso nor the political commissar could have known that, on November 26 in Užice — in connection with the highly unfavourable developments in combat operations — a session of the Political Bureau was held. It was concluded that the partisan detachments in western Serbia and Šumadija should resist the enemy with determined and stubborn defence, and that, in case of failure, some units should be transferred to the Sandžak while others manoeuvre behind enemy lines. At the same time, Dr. Gojko Nikoliš was ordered to immediately evacuate around 700 wounded to Zlatibor, and the Montenegrin troops — which the SH believed to be near the Lim River (although they were, in fact, still far from the Tara crossings) — were to "intensify operations toward Serbia" to ease the situation for units near the highest political and military leadership of the armed uprising.[107]

On the night of November 27-28, the Detachment crossed the bridge near Đurđevića Tara in two columns — the eastern column proceeded toward Maoča and the western toward Glibaći. According to the attack plan, they were to rest in those areas, then move to their assault positions the following night, with the attack scheduled to begin at 2:00 a.m. on November 30 — after reconnaissance of the terrain and enemy positions. However, due to an unplanned delay of the eastern column, the start of the attack was postponed by 24 hours, effectively forfeiting the element of surprise. It became impossible to conceal the presence and deployment of large, inadequately trained partisan units in villages near Pljevlja. Because of this unfavourable situation, both groups, through no fault of the Detachment Staff, spent November 28 and 29 in Maoča and Glibaći, reaching their designated starting areas only the following night. Thus, the eastern column reached the area around the village of Adrovići, and the western reached the villages of Gornja and Donja Brvenica. The "October 18" Battalion rested in the village of Obarde, from where Arso sent them to ambush Savin Lakat — the road leading to Pljevlja from Prijepolje. At that location, Arso reportedly said at least twice, with a deep sigh, that "it will be hard at Pljevlja tonight," and repeatedly stressed that the Piperi and Kuči fighters — whom he personally knew and deeply trusted — must, at all costs, protect the rear of the assaulting units.[108]

He deployed other forces to secure the roads leading to Pljevlja from Rudo, Priboj and Čajniče. At the same time, he ordered the commands of the Kom, Durmitor and Zeta detachments to support the assault on Pljevlja by setting ambushes, destroying bridges and obstructing routes leading into the Sandžak, cutting telephone lines and developing reconnaissance and intelligence activities. As an experienced soldier, he entrusted special assignments to the Sandžak partisan companies (eight in total), of which the Pljevlja company was tasked with providing guides for the platoons and companies of other battalions, and specifically with assigning couriers between the unit commanders and the leaders of bombing groups — a responsibility they shared with the local Party cell in the town.

On the eve of the attack on Pljevlja, the staff of the partisan battalions and company commanders, as part of the final preparations, scouted the town, identified and specified targets for the assault, brought their units to the starting positions, and coordinated plans for maintaining combat coordination and communication. During the reconnaissance, the Detachment Commander issued instructions to commanders on how to engage in combat, insisting on the need to maintain strong links between battalion staffs and company commands throughout the attack.

Following these arrangements, the commander and commissar of the Montenegrin Detachment would advance on Pljevlja with the eastern group (the Jezero-Šaranci and Kom battalions). The deputy commander of the Detachment would go with the "Peko Pavlović" battalion, while the deputy political commissar joined the western group (the Lovćen, "Bijeli Pavle," Zeta and Uskoci-Drobnjak battalions). They launched the attack without real confidence that they could decisively influence its course or outcome. They counted on the fact that the dark, bitterly cold night with heavy snow, the rugged terrain, well-organized enemy defences, fortified houses and barricaded alleys, and especially the weak communications — aside from couriers — between units, would all seriously complicate the execution of the night assault. Aware of this,

[106] B. Jovanović, *op. cit.*, p. 366.

[107] J. Radovanović, *67 Days of the Užice Republic,* Belgrade 1961.

[108] The memory of Radomir Ljaka Vujošević, Belgrade, April 1995.

Arso issued a supplementary written order for the attack. In it, he included additional information provided by locals from Pljevlja about how the enemy had organized its defences and how the assault should be carried out.

According to a report by the commander of the Italian 5th "Pusteria" Alpine Division, Division General Giovanni Esposito,[109] approximately 2,000 soldiers and officers of that division spent the night of November 30 in Pljevlja. Regardless of other estimates of the town's defensive strength — especially from those who failed in the attack — there is no reason to doubt the figures reported by the Italian division commander, especially since these figures are also cited in *Eagles of the Black Mountains* based on official reports on the total strength of the "Pusteria" Division and the size of garrisons across the eight other towns in the wider Sandžak region where it had forces deployed. Ultimately, the presence of a few dozen or even a hundred more or fewer soldiers on either side would not have fundamentally altered the balance of forces. Unquestionably, the ratio of forces, which stood at 1:1.25 in favour of the attackers, was unfavourable. However, two-thirds of the Italian occupying force were fragmented units — supply, medical and technical support — which, in theory, should have lessened the disadvantage for the partisan forces who were relying on the element of surprise during their night assault. On the other hand, the ratio was even more unfavourable for the Montenegrin Detachment given that the dominant positions around the town (Stražica, Glavica, Mali Bogiševac, Balibeg Hill and others) were occupied by artillery (12 guns), mortar (27) and infantry units. These positions were fortified and equipped with well-prepared fire systems covering all approaches to the town. In addition, the military camp in Dolovi, nearly all stone buildings, approaches to the town, houses along narrow streets and intersections — even machine-gun nests on mosque minarets — were all prepared for defence. Altogether, these formed strong resistance points and hubs for maintaining a sustained defence.

Anticipating that the partisans would attack Pljevlja, General Esposito, along with Colonel Arturo Barbieri,[110] commander of the 11th Alpine Regiment and overall town defence, spent days preparing the units for battle. He brought in and engaged the entire engineer battalion in building defensive positions, established multiple communication systems (telephone, radio, sound and light signals, couriers, etc.), which enabled him to effectively command his forces under any combat conditions. He paid special attention to organizing artillery and mortar fire from prepared positions on Stražica and Balibeg Hill, where traditionally skilled and well-trained crews, using preset targeting data and in close coordination with the spotlight units, covered the entire town with interlocking fields of fire.

In any case, there were elements of the Italian occupying forces' defence that Arso

[109] Born in 1882, officer since 1906, awarded the gold medal for his wartime merits in Cyrenaica, and in the First World War, a silver medal and two bronze medals; between the two world wars, he commanded a regiment of alpine troops and garrison troops in Zadar, then the "Lombardy" division stationed in Pula, and "Pusteria" on the Greek-Albanian and Montenegrin fronts.

[110] Born in 1895; awarded three silver and two bronze medals for military merits for his command of alpine troops in the First World War; in the Eritrean War, he served as the chief of staff of an army corps.

had not accounted for when making the decision to attack and assigning specific tasks to the units. This particularly applied to the strength and effect of the artillery and machine-gun barrage fire, the degree of fortification of dominant positions and strongpoints within the town, the performance of the engineering battalion, and especially the advantages provided by the powerful searchlight illumination and the system of multiple communication links. But would anything have changed in the approach to the attack had Arso obtained that information, even at the last minute? One thing is certain — they would not have cancelled the attack. And how could they, when the company commanders, political commissars and secretaries of the newly formed partisan cells — as B. Đuričković wrote — insisted that "all it takes is a strong blow and the Italians will surrender right away." Moreover, not even the general awareness that the enemy knew the timing and direction of the partisan assault, and had warned civilians through two town criers not to leave their homes on the night of November 30 to December 1, would have deterred the attack. For a full month, talk among the partisans had focused on Pljevlja, planning had centred on it, emotions had intensified, and all momentum was directed toward the town. In fact, everything had been planned in detail without supporting facts — the enemy was assessed, the assault strategy laid out — to the extent that the commander of the SH, without having seen the battlefield, predicted a certain victory with "20, maybe at most 30 dead." What's more, he instructed the commander and commissar of the Detachment on the type of caskets to use and the ceremonial details for burying the fallen. He explicitly requested that, once the town was taken, he be informed immediately so he could join in the victory celebration and begin planning the next operations.[111] So everything was prepared on paper, the plan laid out, the course and outcome of the attack predicted — except for the fact that a heavily fortified town, with an unfavourable balance of forces and lacking artillery and mortars, could not be captured easily or with minimal losses.

No element of surprise was achieved — neither on the operational nor tactical level. The Italian intelligence service closely monitored the formation of partisan units and their movement toward Pljevlja. They likely received information from local collaborators — which exist in every population — but it is also true that Montenegrins, by mentality, have never been particularly good at keeping secrets, even when secrecy might spare them harm. From the very beginning of the Detachment's formation, there was excited talk across Montenegro that the "Sandžak Army" was following in the footsteps of its 1914 predecessor. Even the fighters in the marching columns would eagerly tell civilians they were going to Pljevlja — the town had even been put into verse: "We leave Montenegro behind — to conquer Pljevlja we go." This was something that the staff and commanders — even though Arso had ordered secrecy around movements and the march's objective — simply could not prevent. A march of more than 200 kilometres had, as sympathizers described it, turned into a "popular expedition," a demonstration of brotherly aid and warrior solidarity that fit seamlessly into Montenegrin history and tradition. For the enemy, however — as described by

[111] R. Vukanović, *op. cit.*, pp. 108-109.

the commander of the 11th Battalion of the Royal Carabinieri — it was a "crusade" against the "Pusteria" Division.

As part of operational deception measures, Arso had ordered the spreading of rumours that the forces were heading to aid Serbs from Mostar, and later from Sarajevo — to protect civilians from the massacres committed by Ustaša forces against Serbs, which was believable, since horrifying stories of Ustaša crimes in the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) were reaching western and northern Montenegro. However, the news of the mission to liberate Pljevlja had already "broken," if not before, then certainly after the partisan parade in Žabljak and the inspection at Njegovuđa. After that, no one could stop the news from spreading — it "marched ahead" of the partisan battalions and reached General Esposito's ears before they even descended upon Pljevlja.

The fighters looked forward to the attack. In their enthusiasm, they were convinced that the task would be carried out quickly and easily — just like during the earlier insurgent assaults. They advanced with firm belief that they were heading not only to meet their Serbian comrades but also the Russians, whose arrival was expected precisely in the Sandžak region. Such ungrounded enthusiasm and belief in an easy victory were encouraged by political preparations for the assault on Pljevlja, during which the example of the heroic conduct of the "Russian soldier — who, in Montenegrin tradition, represents the very image of courage and endurance" — was often invoked. Even when a fighter would shiver from the cold, he would be told that "for a Red Army soldier, even -40°C was no obstacle." Inspired by such stories of the heroism of their blood brothers and wartime comrades — whom they were rushing to meet — many in the partisan columns didn't even know who was defending Pljevlja, or for that matter, where the town was. However, according to Gajo Vojvodić's recollection, this did not apply to the "Lovćen battalion" — "they were lively and cheerful, all singing and talking about the assault on Pljevlja, even about street fighting and celebrating the town's liberation." To the old soldier Tomo, father of the Lovćen battalion's commander Pero Ćetković, "it all looked like a wedding party, like they were off to claim a promised bride" — not, as retired colonel and historian Bogdan Gledović, a guide and courier to company commander Blažo Janković, would say, "to the bloody battlefield of Pljevlja."

Meanwhile, by November 29 and 30, the Italian command had become fully aware — especially during the two-day rest of the battalions in villages located directly on the town's approaches, where concealment was no longer possible — that an attack on Pljevlja was imminent. As a result, the garrison was placed on the highest level of combat readiness.

For decades after the failed attack by the Montenegrin Detachment on Pljevlja, rumours circulated about a supposed order from Tito not to attack the town. However, the mention of this document was always mired in controversy: first, no one spoke of it before the ill-fated year 1948, and afterward, some writers cited it — depending on how far they went in criticising or defending Arso Jovanović — assigning widely varying dates for when the document was written or received in the village of Adrovići, allegedly "delivered into the hands" of the Detachment's commander and political

commissar. Unfortunately, both of them were long dead and unable to confirm or refute the claims of numerous authors. The only person to ever speak publicly about that letter — not an order (as underlined — *I.M.*) — and its contents was Vojo Leković, political commissar of the Main Staff of the Sandžak Partisan Detachment. Even he, when discussing the letter, never referred to any living witnesses from the Detachment's staff except the honourable elder Milo Peruničić, who remained persistently silent on the matter. The Supreme Commander himself never spoke of the letter during the war, nor did he refer to it even in later decades of peace, when he issued his harshest accusations against the head of his wartime staff.

Two key witnesses, Radovan Vukanović and the still-living Boško Đuričković, in their recollections referencing that infamous letter, both cite Vojo Leković. The latter — B. Đuričković — in a publication printed in 1990, states that Leković clarified to him that — contrary to earlier accounts — the order to halt the attack on Pljevlja was delivered "into the hands" of Adrović, Arso, and Bajo "around 10 p.m. on November 30," and not "around 4 p.m." as recorded in the book *The National Liberation War of the Peoples of Yugoslavia 1941–1945* (1963 edition of the Military History Institute), from which this falsehood had been repeatedly copied, embellished, and ultimately pinned on Arso as an accusation. Leković "recalled" that he brought the order six hours later, "when everything had already been prepared for the attack." More precisely, it was delivered only four hours before the scheduled time of the attack, not ten — by which point the units, stretched across a broad front, had already taken up their starting positions.

The first thought of the two most responsible and certainly caught-off-guard officers upon receiving the letter must have been whether the couriers could — even in total darkness, sleet, and difficult terrain — find and deliver the order to all battalion headquarters, and whether those battalions could then inform their company commanders. This was especially concerning because, for example, the western group (four battalions) was very far away, and if the order failed to reach all units, only part of the Detachment might proceed with the attack, which would lead to chaos and certainly an even heavier defeat. According to what Leković recounted, after a brief conversation between the two of them in the house of Nićifor Lisičić, and on Arso's suggestion, they decided not to carry out the Supreme Commander's order. They then hurried to the command post in Golubinje with Peruničić and a newcomer, escorted by two couriers. Aware that Commissar Bajo Sekulić — equal in decision-making to the commander, but holding an advantage as a member of the Provincial Committee, a communist under arms, and a young man (28) whose dream of "storming the barricades" had come true — could easily have rejected Arso's proposal if he doubted its soundness, Đuričković believes that Arso and Bajo jointly assumed such great responsibility and risk primarily because they were convinced "that success in the attack was not in doubt (which, truth be told, all of us believed)," and thus they proceeded with the assault on Pljevlja "full of faith in a quick and easy victory."[112]

[112] B. Đuričković, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

Regardless of the many controversies surrounding the letter — which has left no trace in archival sources or SH documents — there are no serious reasons not to take the word of the sole witness, Vojo Leković, especially since it is highly unlikely that any future research will uncover new facts. Therefore, in order to objectively assess the essence of Arso's actions, it should be said that Tito's order probably did exist; that it arrived at the very last moment; and that Arso, as the most responsible officer in the Detachment, had the command courage and personal resolve to, believing in the strength of his unit and in victory, take full responsibility for not executing it.

The attack was scheduled to begin at 2:00 a.m. on December 1 — a time cited by four key witnesses, in contrast to several authors who give alternative timings: Arso himself in all his works on the Battle of Pljevlja; courier Vojo Leković; the commander of the "Pusteria" Division, who would be expected to know exactly when his units were attacked; and some officers' notes that were collected from the pockets of fallen partisans by the Carabinieri and later published.

Those who claim the attack began later, at 4:00 a.m., may not necessarily be acting in bad faith — but they are mistaken. Some used this as an argument against the commander, suggesting that he deliberately opted for a daytime battle instead of a night assault. However, such criticism is easily refuted, especially when the question is whether the attack began at 2 or 4 a.m. — since an extra two or three hours of darkness could have been "stolen" without affecting any tactical operations before the start of the assault. Furthermore, would even that have significantly changed the outcome of the battle, given the unfavourable balance of forces and the enemy's determined, well-organized defence? Probably not — aside from potentially making the withdrawal of the units easier after a failed nighttime assault and possibly reducing losses.

At 2:00 a.m., the Jezero-Šaranci and Kom battalions, accompanied by the Detachment commander and political commissar, initiated the attack. A short while later — in the pauses between the thunder of artillery and machine gun bursts from Mali Bogiševac — the song "Oh, Bright Dawn of May — Our Mother Montenegro" could be heard coming from the town. For the units still approaching their assault targets and simultaneously deploying their grenade teams, this was a remarkable morale boost. As a result, all units, recklessly and anxious not to fall behind or miss their timing, hurried to join the charge as quickly as possible.

Arso, the Detachment commander, had insisted on a simultaneous attack by all units — which, especially during a night assault on an urban area, offers considerable advantages. However, due to the failures of some basic unit commands, this did not happen. Everyone had believed they would achieve tactical and operational surprise — but that too did not materialize. Still, even though Arso, by general consensus among researchers, did everything in his power to forestall the attack's unfavourable course, he ultimately did not succeed.

All objectives and defensive strongpoints around the town and within Pljevlja were attacked — exactly according to the orders. The main units, and especially their officers, although surprised by the determination and resilience of the defence, held their ground well. They captured and lost positions, suffering heavy casualties in the

process. In the fighting for key points — strongholds within the town prepared for sustained defence — the Lovćen, Šaranci and Uskoci units, along with elements of other battalions, fought with particular bravery. They would go on to battle through the alleys and houses for the entire day of December 1, and even into the following night, fighting for their lives. The ferocity of the fighting and the conduct of the officers is evident from the fact that of the 28 members of the seven attacking battalion staffs (commanders, commissars and their deputies), ten were either killed or seriously wounded. As further proof of Montenegrin bravery in the Battle of Pljevlja, 106 of those fighters were later proclaimed national heroes — believed to be, at least in part, due to their demonstrated courage in this battle.

Despite such strong assaults, the enemy did not abandon or surrender a single vital point of its defence. It defended both the town and the outer "defensive ring" with equal determination. Where the line was broken under the initial blows of the Detachment, it was quickly re-established — backed by precise and powerful artillery support and heavy machine-gun fire. Such was the case at Mali Bogiševac, where in just two minutes of artillery fire (12 cannons) and heavy "Breda" machine guns, supported by searchlights, 52 fighters from the "Bijeli Pavle" battalion were taken out of action. The defenders manoeuvred effectively, reinforcing and generously supplying their units, particularly with ammunition, which they expended without restraint — while the partisans, unfortunately, suffered severe shortages and had no way to resupply during the battle.

The attack failed. A significant portion of the units that managed to break into the town were cut off and, throughout December 1, without external support, subjected to deadly fire. Only the next night were some of the fighters able to withdraw from the inferno — severely reduced in number. During the retreat, Italian alpine troops killed dozens of wounded partisans and executed any local who had helped them. As Dragomir Delibašić notes, what some in Pljevlja had feared most before the attack came true: the town was not liberated, a large number of townspeople were killed in the street fighting, 50 civilians were executed by the occupiers and around 50 houses were burned down.[113]

The Lovćen Battalion suffered the heaviest losses — 82 killed and 57 wounded — while the Jezero-Šaranci Battalion lost 52 killed and 40 wounded. According to the most recent research (1990), total losses of the Montenegrin Detachment in the Battle of Pljevlja were 238 killed (as listed by Špiro Lagator and Dr Đuro Batrićević by name) and 262 wounded. These figures alone speak to the extraordinary intensity of the fighting. In military science, it is generally accepted that the number of wounded should be at least three times the number of those killed — here, however, the numbers were "almost equal."[114]

Interestingly, even after five decades of accounting and verification, these figures do not differ significantly from those dictated by Arso to V. Dedijer on May 20, 1942:

[113] D. Delibašić, serialized article in *Pljevaljske Novine,* March 1987.

[114] Š. Lagator and Dr. Đ. Batrićević, *op. cit.*, p. 66, list of the fallen pp. 283-292.

"In all these battles, Italian losses amounted to 1,000 dead and wounded; their officer corps suffered particularly. Our losses: 253 dead and 193 wounded." The commander of the "Pusteria" Division, however, reported on December 10, 1941, that only 250 officers and soldiers from his units were taken out of action in Pljevlja. Still, that number should be increased to include casualties sustained by Italian forces in the surrounding areas during the fighting.

Five years later, in the brochure *The Belgrade Operation: The Battle of Pljevlja,* Arso increased both sets of figures. In truth, by then he approached the topic more broadly, placing it within the context of the operation carried out across the entire Sandžak region. "In that battle," Arso wrote, "as well as in the fighting around Pljevlja, we had 353 killed, 546 wounded and 35 missing, while the enemy suffered 1,150 dead and 1,870 wounded, and 900 captured." These figures thus include losses in the "battles around Pljevlja," fought under Arso's command, particularly in the direction of Prijepolje and Priboj between December 1 and 6.

From positions at Savin Lakt and Bučje, it was reported that 200 Italians had been killed and twice as many wounded. This was also published in the Supreme Headquarters' *Bulletin* in January 1942, where the attack on Pljevlja was described as "one of the most glorious battles in Montenegrin history. In a strong assault, the partisans captured two heavily fortified positions and broke into the town from three directions. Bloody street fighting lasted for two nights and one day. The enemy suffered heavy losses... But despite great bravery, our partisans, faced with the enemy's numerical and technical superiority, were forced to withdraw. In this great battle, which involved 3,000 partisans, we sustained significant losses..." There was not a word of criticism or reproach for the failure or even the decision to launch the attack. That was the appropriate attitude — then, throughout the entire NOB, and for the three years following it. Everything afterward reflected the "hindsight is 20/20" mentality.

Regarding the losses of Italian forces during the fighting in Pljevlja on December 1, General Esposito, after ten days of "tallying," reported 72 dead, 8 missing and 170 wounded, notably "forgetting" the 58 captured soldiers. These figures did not include losses from the fighting at Savin Lakt and Bučje, where 80 Italians were killed or wounded and 92 captured. Altogether, the "Pusteria" Division suffered 480 casualties in the fighting for Pljevlja — almost as many as the Montenegrin Detachment (500).

Wounded fighters who could be pulled out from under enemy fire and saved from falling into the hands of the Italian Alpini and certain "local thugs" were transported to field clinics and aid stations in Adrovići and Gotovuša. Meanwhile, in Pljevlja — according to Dr. Mitar Piletić — the Italians killed around 50 wounded fighters. Executions of the wounded, although no specific number is given, were acknowledged by General Esposito, Colonel Barbieri and Major Alberto de Giorgio, who justified it by saying that the situation for Italian troops was "almost desperate," so "with the coming of daylight, counter-attacks began, and artillery, piece by piece, systematically shelled and burned house after house with high-explosive shells." The general reported: "At dawn, fighting was ongoing on three fronts under divisional command orders, and the carabinieri and guards began house-to-house searches for insurgents or their

helpers and weapons. Weapons were found in many houses, and armed civilians were executed."

The authors of *Eagles of the Black Mountains*, Đ. Scotti and L. Viasi, wrote: "There was no mercy for anyone — all testimonies from Italian returnees agree on the aftermath of that battle: they fired at anyone who appeared on the street or at a doorway — man or woman, young or old. Among them were people with no connection to the fighting..." While the wounded partisans had, of course, been involved in the battle while still able to fight, once wounded and helpless they were protected under international laws of war and the knightly code of the stronger party — none of which was honoured on the streets of Pljevlja, where the Alpini killed the wounded not only with rifles but also with picks, mattocks and knives, aided — why keep silent about this? — by a significant number of local Muslims. Indeed, in its December 11 report to the SH of the National Liberation Movement of Yugoslavia, the Main Staff for Montenegro and the Bay of Kotor listed "the unexpected hostile stance of the Muslim population, who, armed with occupier-supplied weapons, helped the enemy break up our units' assault" as the primary cause of the failure.[115] Some Muslims pointed out houses and yards where the wounded were hiding — even pouring boiling water on their heads.

The aid station in Adrovići was run by Dr. Boro R. Božović, a physician from Piperi, assisted by 15 medics from the "October 18" and "Bijeli Pavle" battalions, among whom were Arso's wife Ksenija-Senka and his sister Miluša.

About 250 wounded — some from Serbian units — were evacuated under harsh conditions to the partisan hospital in Žabljak, 60 km away, which had been expanded from 20 to 250 beds. Their wounds would be treated by eleven doctors, mostly surgeons, including Captain Dr. Giovanni Bava, who had been captured at Savin Lakt. From December 1 to 8, in addition to focusing on protecting the troops from attacks by occupying forces, Arso also worked on evacuating the wounded fighters, ordering that captured Italian soldiers be used as stretcher-bearers. The fate of those prisoners was the same as that which the Italians had inflicted on captured and wounded partisans — most were executed under Durmitor, in retaliation for the murdered wounded partisans in Pljevlja. It should be noted that during the street fighting in Pljevlja, 120 Alpini soldiers had been captured and were released, primarily out of respect for the Montenegrin tradition that demanded a civilized treatment of prisoners, but also to preserve their own lives. However, when the occupiers — despite warnings that their crimes would be met with reprisals — began executing wounded partisans in town, harsh wartime measures had to be taken, including the execution of prisoners. Still, even then it was not a matter of 100 for one, as the Wehrmacht did in Serbia, or 60 for one, as practised by Italian units sent by Rome to suppress the uprising in Montenegro — it was simply one life for one.

Word of the failed attack on Pljevlja, which came at a high cost, quickly spread across Montenegro. From the beginning of the uprising until Pljevlja, Montenegrin units had lost only 72 fighters and 53 wounded, while removing about 4,800 enemy

[115] *Collection of Documents on the NOR,* Vol. III, Book 1, Doc. 168.

soldiers and officers from action. That was well known and a source of pride. But from Pljevlja, there was no news of the anticipated "quick and easy victory" — instead, like a bolt from the blue, came tragic reports from Zatarje of failure and massive losses. There was no tribe or clan, and certainly no village, from which a fighter hadn't fallen, and this was deftly and ruthlessly exploited in propaganda by all those who opposed the communists and the armed struggle against the occupiers. Wails echoed across Montenegro — 238 mothers donned mourning clothes forever, hundreds of sisters were left without brothers, wives became widows and children orphans. It was pointless to state obvious truths: that an assault on a fortified urban area is the most complex tactical action, usually involving even heavier losses than those suffered at Pljevlja; that war involves sacrifice; or the timeworn Montenegrin slogan that "there is no liberation without struggle, nor struggle without sacrifice."

Deeply affected personally, Commander Milutin initiated a letter from the Main Staff to the families of the fallen fighters. Read aloud at memorial gatherings, it stirred deep emotions and intensified mourning, which is why Tito and Edvard Kardelj — unfamiliar with the traditions and mentality of the Montenegrin people — criticized Milutin for "encouraging lamentation" when there was "no place or time for it." Yet it was a warm, human expression of sympathy for the families of fallen comrades, a civilized debt owed to those who died for freedom — something deeply rooted in Montenegrin life. In the letter, partisans were urged to tell grieving parents the following: to fathers — "to be proud that their sons continued the glorious traditions of their forefathers, the very deeds that earned them a place in world history"; to mothers — "not to weep, for the soil has received the blood of their sons, the noblest seed from which freedom for the enslaved homeland will grow"; to sisters — "to take up their brother's rifle and fill his place, as the best way to honour his memory"; and to everyone — "that the battle for Pljevlja will be another contribution to the glory of Montenegrin arms..."[116]

Controversial Assessments of the Battle

Each author who has seriously analysed the course and outcome of the Battle of Pljevlja lists between 10 and 20 reasons for its failure, nearly all of which are cited here. However, some — in the spirit of the saying "it's easy to be a general after the battle" — sharply criticize three additional points. They claim that not enough attention was paid to maintaining secrecy in the movement of troops, something the commander could realistically influence only during the final two days and nights, and even then only in a very limited way. Nevertheless, that requirement — undoubtedly important — can never be perfectly fulfilled, and one should also consider the statement from a Carabinieri publication, which noted that "the approach march was planned in detail and carried out in perfect order and relative secrecy." The "critics" argue that the Detachment should have conducted operations not through a direct battle for Pljevlja,

[116] *Collection of Documents on the NOR,* Vol. III, Book 1, Doc. 156.

but rather throughout the Sandžak in the form of ambushes and sabotage along the region's transport routes, particularly on all access roads to the town. This, they say, would have lured the enemy out of the fortified town, forcing them to respond — and if continuously attacked, even abandon some garrisons. According to some, instead of "charging the bull by the horns," the Detachment could have struck at its flanks — that is, rather than attacking the heavily fortified garrison at Pljevlja, they could have relatively easily liberated the garrisons at Priboj, Bistrica and Rudo, and perhaps even Nova Varoš. Eventually, they might have even taken Prijepolje — though it was indeed held by an entire regiment of the "Pusteria" Division. Such reasoning would be entirely acceptable if the Staff had the freedom to choose its targets, the nature of combat operations and its methods. However, it is often "overlooked" that the Staff had received a specific directive: to eliminate the Pljevlja garrison "on the move," then proceed to Priboj, transfer part of the forces into Serbia and continue operations across the Sandžak with the remaining troops.

Грешка руководства: што на појединим правцима нијесу одређени по два до три таласа, тако ако се један поколеба, сљедећи да га задржи и понесе у акцију.

Напад са свих страна није једновремено услиједио, па су Талијани ватру концентрисали редом против појединих група.

Komandni sastav bio je probran od istaknutih rukovodilaca ustanka u Crnoj Gori, sa izvanrednim moralno-političkim kvalitetima. Ali je bio mali broj profesionalnih vojnika, što je takođe potrebno za vođenje, bar u početku, krupnih jedinica kao što je bio bataljon sa prosječnim brojnim stanjem od 400 boraca. Ali to je bio početni i nužni stadijum našeg kadrovskog razvoja u kojem smo morali trpjeti i velike gubitke. S druge strane, „profesionalci" su nam nužno naturali neadekvatan oblik borbe:

Може се тврдити да је Црногорски НОП одред урадио највише што је могао према свим субјективним и објективним околностима. Сви батаљони су се залагали и урадили оно што су били у стању да учине.

After the unsuccessful Battle of Pljevlja: from the assessments of Arso Jovanović, Radovan Vukanović and Batrić Jovanović.

In critiquing Arso's supposed decision to launch a frontal assault on Pljevlja, some authors are both imprecise and contradictory. They criticize the fact that too much

importance was placed on the town centre at the expense of its outer defences, arguing that too many forces were committed inside the town — through unoccupied or weakly defended corridors — instead of being directed at fortified and strategically important positions like Stražica. Yet those positions could only have been taken through a frontal attack.

Had the battle ended favourably, Arso's attack order would have been studied as a model example of a well-prepared basic combat document. We are confident that, in that case, there would have been no mention of unrealistic tasks, unprepared units, an unfavourable balance of forces or an inadequate choice of combat tactics. In other words, there would have been no editorial note in the publication *War History* alongside R. Vukanović's text on the attack on Pljevlja in his book *On the Path of War* (p. 135), which states: "The choice of target was mistaken. The enemy's strength was underestimated, especially the fact that it was defending from a strongly fortified town. At the same time, the capabilities of the detachment were overestimated, and the mission as a whole was poorly conceived." Nor would other questions have been raised, such as: why the power station wasn't destroyed, why better coordination between units wasn't achieved, why the combat reserve wasn't used, or why there was no contingency plan if units had to continue fighting the following day, etc.

Based on analysis of captured documents and gathered information, General Esposito, Major De Giorgio and Colonel Barbieri wrote that "the plan for the attack on Pljevlja was drafted by Commander Arso Jovanović, with detailed instructions outlining the movements and objectives of each battalion and detachment, and providing commanders with exact intelligence on bunkers, command posts, positions, depots, etc. — all the way down to the locations of 27 mortars."[117] Esposito also noted, based on the data he had obtained, that the mobilization of the detachment, which began on November 15, "was expertly prepared and carried out very carefully, so that by November 30 all communist battalions had already reached their staging areas just a few kilometres from the town. There is no doubt that the organization was executed, and continues to be handled, by numerous capable officers from the former Yugoslav army, and that significant financial resources were provided for this effort from London and Moscow."[118] The Carabinieri also lavishly praised Commander Arso, alongside the Alpine forces' own leadership, in their pamphlet *Documents on the Rebellion in Montenegro*.[119] Cunning as they were, the Italians didn't shy away from a bit of exaggeration, reasoning that the better the enemy commander, the greater the value of their own victory.

Some analysts of the Battle of Pljevlja criticized the detachment commander for not clearly defining retreat routes or rally points in the event of failure in the operational order. While technically correct from a formal military perspective, this criticism doesn't hold much weight — as key witnesses R. Vukanović and B. Đuričković

[117] G. Scoti and L. Viazi, *op. cit.*

[118] B. Đuričković, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

[119] A publication of 158 pages, compiled from "papers" found in the pockets of the fallen in Pljevlja, Cetinje 1942.

recorded in their writings. It should be noted that the Staff, during its first meeting, assessed that openly mentioning the word "withdrawal" might negatively affect troop morale — and, frankly, would not reflect the shared optimism about the outcome of the battle.[120] However, they did agree that the commander and political commissar of the detachment should discuss the matter individually with battalion staff, which they did after scouting the terrain. Evidence of this can be found in the fact that commanders of the Lovćen and Zeta battalions, Pero Ćetković and Špiro Mugoša — both firmly convinced of a quick and easy victory — nonetheless marked fallback gathering points for company commanders, strictly adhering to basic military procedure. Danilo Jauković, a participant in the battle who was fully convinced that the red flag would fly from the minaret of the Pljevlja mosque at dawn on December 1, recalled how Commander P. Ćetković — confident that his "Lovćen men" and local residents would be dancing the Montenegrin *oro* in the liberated town centre by morning — had designated the village of Krnjača as the fallback location, "just in case." According to Gajo Vojvodić, the company commanders strongly objected, convinced that "failure was simply not possible."

In none of the original wartime documents from the NOB, nor in post-war accounts, was Arso — the commander of the Detachment — ever "named" as the direct culprit for the failed outcome of the Battle of Pljevlja and the heavy casualties sustained. As M. Đilas wrote in *Revolutionary War*, "He would never have been blamed for it" had it not been for the unfortunate year of 1948. Đilas adds: "In fact, Tito met him around that time, liked him and soon appointed him Chief of the Supreme Headquarters — a position he held until the end of the war. Therefore, Tito's more recent claims that he wanted to bring Arso before a military court, which formally didn't even exist, stem from retrospective reinterpretations typical of communist pragmatism. The only person who proposed an investigation into the failure at Pljevlja at the time was Moša Pijade — in a letter to Tito from Žabljak on Durmitor, where he was staying."[121] But Pijade was generally displeased with his subordinate role in Montenegro. And Tito, although he liked and respected Pijade, never held his opinion in high regard nor considered him fit for more independent and responsible duties. "To this day," Đilas concludes, "I still believe the main blame for Pljevlja lies with the Party leadership in Montenegro — particularly Milutinović — because they overestimated the capabilities of their predominantly 'people's' but diminishing army. As for Arso Jovanović, I think he was not only a brave and well-educated staff officer and pleasant comrade, but also a talented commander — perhaps not for guerrilla warfare, but certainly for a more developed army. As an operations coordinator in the Littoral and Istria in 1945, he was imaginative and effective — likewise in organizing the SH."[122]

In a letter dated December 22, Tito and Edvard Kardelj wrote that "the primary

[120] B. Đuričković, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

[121] *Collection of Documents on the NOR,* Vol. III, Book 1, Doc. 115.

[122] M. Đilas, *op. cit.*, pp. 90, 143.

responsibility for the defeat at Pljevlja lies with Comrade M." (Milutin — *I.M.*).[123] In his own letter to Tito on February 13, 1942, Commander Milutin acknowledged part of the blame, emphasizing that his optimism about the strength of the Montenegrin military organization — and thus the likely success of the attack on Pljevlja — was based on reports from Mitar Bakić and Arso Jovanović in Užice. He didn't go further in shifting blame onto the Detachment commander — likely because he, better than anyone, knew Arso was carrying out a directive from the military-political leadership.[124] Only after both men had died did some begin — either in hopes of elevating themselves or easing their own frustrations — to rush to pin the blame for the failure and losses at Pljevlja solely on Arso, knowing full well he was no longer alive to answer with the truth. For decades, these people inscribed the "Pljevlja tragedy" among Arso's supposed grave and unforgivable sins, actively trying to discredit him, demonize him among the families and clans of the fallen fighters. They did everything they could to ensure he would be remembered only in a negative light, or at least underestimated as a commander both at home and among the Allies — to erase his name and obscure his legacy. And they largely succeeded, meticulously destroying traces and testimonies that could present him to new generations as a gifted military leader and a deserving fighter in the ultimate victory over fascism and occupation.[125]

Aside from Tito, there were two others who — in hindsight — accused Arso of the failure during the Pljevlja assault. Tito, as is known, began claiming in 1951 that he had wanted Arso "shot" over Pljevlja — a position he maintained consistently. The case of Mitar Bakić is more complex. Only about ten days after the battle, Bakić not only defended Arso before Tito, absolving him of direct responsibility for the defeat, but even proposed him for the position of Chief of the Supreme Headquarters. Yet by 1951, now a general and senior official, he left a statement in a transcript for the Military History Institute in which he wrote: "The attack on Pljevlja came about through the initiative of Arso Jovanović — a fanatical man with a bourgeois military mindset, who saw this assault only as an opportunity to glorify himself. Overconfident and lacking accurate knowledge of the enemy garrison's strength and armament, while also disregarding the inexperience of the partisan units — which at that time were unfit to storm fortified towns — he carelessly promised a quick victory. This is proven by the fact that the decision to attack Pljevlja was made back in Montenegro at the Main Staff. At the time, Ivan Milutinović agreed with him, seeing in this operation the possibility of capturing a large number of enemy soldiers, supplies and weapons

[123] *Collection of Documents on the NOR,* Vol. III, Book 1, Doc. 168.

[124] *Ibid.,* Doc. 65.

[125] A fighter of the Komsko Battalion, Milija R. Vlahović, a non-commissioned officer in the Yugoslav Army, recorded how on December 1, at the position of Golubinje, in the midst of a great turmoil, he met "the commander of the Montenegrin army, Comrade Arso Jovanović," adding: "Although cannons, rifles, machine guns and other enemy weapons were firing, that man remained fearless. He was one of those old Montenegrin heroes." This chapter of the diary was published in the collection *The First Montenegrin Battalion of the First Proletarian Division*, Belgrade 1977, but under the intervention of the Editorial Board, Arso Jovanović's name was not mentioned and this place was "bridged" with the frequently (mis)used ellipsis.

— which certainly would have been valuable — but they failed to consider the consequences of potential failure."[126]

In his book *How We Waged War*, written with 15 years of historical distance, General Peko Dapčević analysed the Battle of Pljevlja, stating: "To launch such a difficult and complex attack with an improvised and poorly armed detachment, before gaining any experience in operations against smaller garrisons or communication lines, was extremely risky and unmilitary — as the outcome of the battle itself demonstrated." He argued that — "Instead of attacking Pljevlja, for which not even the most basic elements required for such a large operation during that phase of the war were ensured" — it would have been better if "that group of battalions had operated around the Pljevlja garrison, manoeuvring and provoking the Italian battalions and larger parts of the 'Pusteria' Division out of the garrison, then destroying some of them through bold actions in the open and along communication lines." One of Dapčević's conclusions was: "Had the Montenegrin Detachment not smashed into a wall during the fight for Pljevlja, much of its strength could have been used alongside Serbian forces in western Serbia. Together, they could have mounted a far stronger resistance to the Germans, and through an effective system of mobile defence, worn them down and slowed their advance. Moreover, it would have made it possible to evacuate many more Serbian troops from that area..."[127] Here, Dapčević speculates about what could have been, but does not answer the question of when and where the Montenegrin Detachment should have been deployed in order to participate in battles against the German 342nd Division in western Serbia (by then already routed), nor does he explain why — as deputy to Commander Đilas — he didn't act earlier, before Arso's return from Užice, to direct such a unit to that objective. The Detachment was dispatched only on November 20, and even if it had not engaged in the ultimately failed Pljevlja operation — the so-called "headlong charge into a wall" — by December 1 it could barely have reached the Uvac River. At that point, battle-worn and exhausted partisans, including Tito and Kardelj, were already retreating through the area, narrowly escaping death in Serbia.

In the book *New Contributions to the Biography of Josip Broz Tito*, under the chapter *An Informal Conversation with Peko Dapčević about the Battle of Pljevlja*, Vladimir Dedijer recounts the moment when "our Spaniard" sharply criticized Tito's decision to attack the town on the Ćehotina River. Allegedly, due to this disagreement, Milutinović refused to name him commander of the Montenegrin NOP Detachment for operations in the Sandžak. Dedijer writes: "When the attack on Pljevlja failed on December 1, Ivan Milutinović ordered me to relay that Arso Jovanović had been dismissed and to investigate how such a mistake had happened." He met Tito, he says, in Kasindoli near Rudo. Before that, he had spoken with Kardelj and told him that: "The situation in Montenegro was already lost — we were losing the rear, especially due to executions without trial (notably by Moša Pijade, particularly on Durmitor)." He added that he informed Kardelj Arso had been dismissed. Kardelj replied that he should

[126] AVII, file 2003, reg. no. 2/9 (statement by M. Bakić).

[127] The contribution was also published by P. Dapčević in the publication *Outlook from Military Thought*, Belgrade 1986, pp. 75-77.

remain silent about both Moša's actions and Arso's, since Tito had already named Arso Chief of the Supreme Headquarters. Tito, said Dedijer, was already tired of Poljanac due to his softness.

Dedijer records Peko's recollection: "Still, I presented the situation in Montenegro to Tito, and he agreed. But when I told him what Milutin had said — that it was Tito's own order to attack Pljevlja — Tito jumped up, flatly denied it and spoke very harshly about Milutinović. Afterward, I returned to Montenegro and reported all this to Ivan Milutinović. Milutinović wanted to kill himself then. He was a dry bureaucrat, heartless, with no real understanding of military matters..."[128]

Batrić Jovanović, both a participant in the Battle of Pljevlja and a researcher who wrote extensively about the event, argued that Arso, as a "formally trained soldier," was prone to underestimating the enemy and did not give enough thought to his own unit's potential losses. He concluded that the situation was "fatal for the Montenegrin NOP Detachment for operations in the Sandžak" because it was led by "a fantasist."[129] To support this severe judgement, he pointed to three "major errors" by Arso: 1. Failure to focus the attack on the main enemy strongholds; 2. Failure to form a proper reserve force that the Staff could use in key moments — though he seemed to forget that his own Kom battalion, the largest and best-armed, was kept in reserve (aside from one company), stationed near the command post of Arso and Bajo; and 3. That the attack was scheduled for 4:00 a.m., whereas key documents show it was actually planned for 2:00 a.m.

Tito and Edvard Kardelj would return to the operations of the Montenegrin Detachment in the Sandžak at the end of 1941 — and, within them, to the Battle of Pljevlja — from the temporal distance of three decades. While deliberately omitting Arso's name, they praised the strategic value of that march-manoeuvre, referring to the attack on Pljevlja as a tactical defeat but a strategic gain. Tito, in 1972, would list it among the "great successes of the CPY," stating that "while all of Europe was occupied and German armies were approaching Moscow and Leningrad, we were able to gather nearly 4,000 volunteers and launch an attack on such a strong occupying garrison."[130] Five years later, in 1977, Kardelj would also revisit the event. While criticizing "one-sided interpretations of historical facts," he stated that the attack on Pljevlja was "rightly considered a military-tactical defeat" but argued that was "less than half the truth" — unless it was also said that it was "one of the greatest and most courageous battles of our National Liberation Uprising, with far-reaching positive consequences for its development." He added that the battle significantly weakened the Italian occupiers, "at a time when Partisan units, along with the SH, were forced to retreat from Užice toward Bosnia," across the occupation zone border at the Uvac River.[131]

In essence, Tito and Kardelj were paraphrasing the assessment given a decade earlier (1965) by the deputy commander of the Detachment, Radovan Vukanović: "This battle is testimony to the readiness of the Montenegrin people to fight and die for the honour and freedom of their country, and it will remain in their history as a shining example. The size of the Detachment and the number of sacrifices speak to the magnitude of this event — at a time when victory seemed far off and Allied armies were suffering serious defeats, as Hitler had penetrated deep into Russia and England was under heavy air attack. That is why this battle, with all its positive and negative sides, deserves a prominent place in the history of our national liberation. It will remain an unforgettable 'monument for distant generations' in the glorious history of our struggle, regardless of the defeat suffered. Whoever cannot see in our defeats and failures our greatness, readiness and heroic effort will never truly understand our struggle — which consisted of an unbroken chain of victories and defeats, advances, losses and the gathering of new strength — all of which led to final victory."[132]

Severely shaken by the Montenegrin attack on Pljevlja, the Italians withdrew from six of the nine Sandžak garrisons — a move that objectively eased the position of the SH, CC, General Staff and the 2,000 fighters retreating before the German offensive in western Serbia. In this light, history will eventually acknowledge the prudence, courage and responsibility of the person who — assuming full risk — chose not to carry out the order to send Montenegrin troops into Serbia. By then, it was too late to significantly change the situation there; likely, it would have led to bloodshed between Serbs and Montenegrins — the first in their long-shared history. Thus, excluding the very real tactical failure at Pljevlja, the result was a strategic gain. The Detachment, alongside eight Sandžak Partisan companies, despite being considerably thinned, absorbed Partisan forces retreating from Serbia. In doing so, it drew the attention of occupying and collaborationist forces, withstood the wave of panic spreading from the remnants of arriving units, liberated Rudo, and enabled a period of regrouping and recovery for their comrades crossing the Uvac. In doing so, it significantly contributed to the formation of the first operational unit of the NOB, which included two battalions from the Montenegrin Detachment, totalling 355 fighters.

The Commander's Thorough Analysis

There are three preserved sources in which Arso testifies about the Battle of Pljevlja: the first, a letter to the Headquarters of the Durmitor Partisan Detachment from mid-December 1941; the second, a "dictation" to V. Dedijer dated May 20, 1942; and the third, a brochure titled *The Belgrade Operation: The Battle of Pljevlja,* published in January 1946. In the first, which is mostly focused on the care of the wounded, he also refers to certain issues that may shed light on the causes of the failure in that "gigantic battle unknown in the history of Montenegro, in which our partisans' heroism knew no bounds." He wrote: "Our army had been gathered — a volunteer force; there was no discipline, which such difficult street fighting requires. A mass of unarmed people

[128] V. Dedijer, *New Contributions...*, Vol. II.

[129] B. Jovanović, *op. cit.*, p. 385.

[130] Speech on the occasion of being proclaimed the "first doctor of military sciences in the SFRY," *Military Works*, Belgrade 1977, Vol. V, p. 293.

[131] E. Kardelj, journal *Vojno Delo*, No. 2/1977.

[132] R. Vukanović, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

(some of whom came for looting) joined in first, creating a certain level of disorder. We greatly underestimated the enemy, who offered considerable resistance. Our troops did not expect that resistance, and were thus caught off guard."[133]

Dedijer's record of Arso's account for the *Diary*, documented and systematically laid out across five pages, clearly demonstrates that many researchers never moved beyond what Arso had already "spontaneously" analysed in Piva during the ongoing Operation Trio — assessments that were later recycled and, without hesitation, used against him. Here is the full text of Arso's account, beginning with the "main reasons for the idea of taking Pljevlja":

"1) To establish a connection with the liberated territory of the Serbian partisans and bring ammunition and food into the harsh Montenegrin terrain.

"2) To activate the Sandžak region, which had a large human base, and to enable the transfer of food into the Šavnik district.

"3) With the fall of Pljevlja — to open the prospect of taking other Sandžak towns, as well as Berane and Andrijevica. In that way, a strong partisan stronghold could be established nearly in the centre of the Balkans — crisscrossed by canyons and mountains, making it defensible.

"4) Taking Pljevlja meant grabbing the bull by the horns, since the headquarters of the 'Pusteria' Alpine Division was there — after that, the other garrisons would fall quickly.

"5) Pljevlja was not heavily fortified, so from a military standpoint, it was possible to seize.

"6) Capturing Pljevlja would provide us with a huge amount of war material, allowing us to sustain successful actions longer.

"For this action, 3,500 people were mobilized in Montenegro (500 of them unarmed). This mass of people was gathered in the true sense of the word — unformed and politically and militarily unstable — but still eager to fight and quick to respond to the call.

"On November 20, the manoeuvre began with these forces marching from all parts of Montenegro. The main approach routes for each of our detachments were: Kolašin-Mojkovac-Maoč; Lower and Upper Morača-Boan-Đurđevića Tara; Nikšić-Šavnik-Žabljak-Đurđevića Tara. By crossing into the Sandžak, these forces surrounded Pljevlja from all sides by means of night marches. During the march, not a single combat incident occurred, so everything was executed according to the pre-established plan. Supplying and housing the troops posed significant difficulties. These aspects were not prepared in advance, as the operation depended on achieving surprise.

"The plan of attack was to seize the surrounding fortifications and simultaneously break into the town. The assault was scheduled for the night between November 30 and December 1. The movement began as early as 10 p.m., with the main attack expected around 3 a.m. Despite all efforts to maintain secrecy, the enemy learned about the attack through fifth column informants. Even the exact hour of the assault did not

[133] Š. Lagator and Đ. Batrićević, *op. cit.*, pp. 305-306.

go unnoticed. Regardless of this, the units proceeded with their mission. A fierce night battle broke out around and within the fortified town. The enemy held overwhelming fire superiority, with weapons even positioned on rooftops. They directed their fire using pre-recorded targeting data and two spotlights. It felt as if we were caught in a volcanic crater, as Pljevlja lies in a deep valley.

"This was one of the greatest battles in the history of the Montenegrin people. I do not believe Montenegrins have ever shown more courage than in this fight. This time, they were practically unarmed, rushing into a fiery cauldron and seizing the hated occupier by the throat. They understood the true significance of Pljevlja. The battle progressed, our fighters entered the town centre and captured three fortifications. A little more effort would have been enough for the battle to turn in our favour. However, due to the enemy's overwhelming firepower, the approaching dawn and a lack of decisiveness from command staff at critical moments, we had to withdraw from the town. Concurrently, during the attack on Pljevlja, measures were taken to secure the routes leading to the town.

"Fierce fighting developed there as well, where we achieved some success. In all these clashes, Italian losses amounted to 1,000 killed and wounded, particularly among their officer corps. Our losses were 253 dead and 193 wounded.

"Causes of the Failure:

"1. The entire force was not militarily structured or politically and militarily developed.

"2. Our young officer corps was unable to respond decisively at key moments when our units were on the verge of success.

"3. Our units did not know the terrain around the town or the town itself, and they were sent into a difficult task during the night.

"4. The units should have engaged in several clashes along communication routes leading into the town, scouted it thoroughly, and only then attacked. (However, in that case, the enemy would have been alerted to our intent, reinforced their defences and possibly thwarted us.)

"5. We had no weapons capable of threatening the enemy in its barracks or fortified positions.

"6. The units were exhausted from long marches.

"7. The attack on the town should have started much earlier to make full use of the night for operations.

"8. We severely underestimated the enemy — their weaponry and fortifications — and went in with 100 per cent confidence in success. We failed to anticipate that the enemy would defend the divisional headquarters for the sake of prestige. When our fighters encountered heavy resistance, they were caught off guard. We entered the operation with excessive optimism, neglecting the military challenges of such an undertaking. There was more talk about evacuating spoils than about seizing the town itself.

"Our units and individuals fought heroically. Still, the Lovćen Battalion stood out — it fully completed the most difficult task, fighting in the town for two nights and

a day. The 'Bijeli Pavle' Battalion captured the heavily fortified position at Bogiševac. The Uskoci-Drobnjaci and Jezero-Šaranci Battalions partially broke into the town, with some of their platoons holding out there for two nights and a day. The Kučko-Piperi Battalion performed excellently in securing the Prijepolje-Pljevlja route, achieving great success. The remaining battalions — Kom, 'Bajo Pivljanin,' 'Peko Pavlović' and the Zeta-Lješanska — completed their tasks only partially. Had all these efforts been coordinated into a unified whole, Pljevlja would have been taken.

"9) Lack of Simultaneous Engagement. The units did not engage the enemy at the same time, allowing the enemy to confront our battalions individually.

"Significance of This Action:

"a) The hated occupier was taken by the throat; the Montenegrin people showed what they thought of him.

"b) The enemy suffered heavy losses.

"c) This battle further encouraged Montenegrins to fight against the occupier.

"d) It boosted the combativeness of the masses in the Sandžak.

"e) It added another combat experience — albeit a bloody one.

"f) As a result of the attack on Pljevlja, the enemy evacuated Foča, Goražde, Čajniče, Rudo and Nova Varoš, thereby easing combat operations in that area.

"Harmful Consequences:

"Following this apparent military failure, reactionary elements began stirring dissent within our ranks due to the losses, and the enemy — feeling mortally threatened — began mobilizing fifth-column elements to dismantle our resistance."[134]

To conclude the account of the Battle of Pljevlja, here is a quote from General Esposito's letter, in which the commander of the "Pusteria" Division — surrounded by partisan troops in Pljevlja as if in a prison — wrote to his soldiers on February 15, 1942:

"Alpino, inscribe December 1 in golden letters in the book of your life. On that day, we truly fought for life or death, and it is only thanks to your bravery, Alpino, that we are not all — general and soldiers alike — in the grave today. All of Montenegro rose against you, and along with the Montenegrins came insurgents from the Sandžak, Bosnia and Serbia. Great in number, ten to one, they threw themselves at you in a fury, confident they would crush you, and with you, the Pusteria Division, which had forced them to taste gunpowder for the first time and had instilled in them so much fear. They calculated without accounting for your Italian courage. On that day, Alpino, you were magnificent. To the hordes of insurgents who had encircled all our positions, shouting and threatening, you responded, above all, with your composure, your calm bravery, waiting for daylight to fight openly. With the sunrise, resolute and strong, unbreakable, you launched a counter-attack, and the enemy — who already believed they had victory in their hands — fled before you, retreating to the villages from which they had come, leaving every path they took soaked in blood.

"On December 1, in and around Pljevlja, together with your fellow battalions,

[134] V. Dedijer, *Diary,* vol. I, Belgrade 1945, 157-160.

you dealt a mortal blow to the uprising. New difficult days may lie ahead, because the monster dies hard, but every hope the insurgents had for victory vanished in Pljevlja at dawn on December 1..."[135]

And the old general (aged 60), seasoned and confident, had every reason to sound assured — for at dawn on December 1, 1941, it was truly Providence that saved him from being captured in the bed of Pljevlja's most prominent widow, when a partisan group stormed the house. According to Major De Giorgio, "the general's residence was attacked immediately and suffered five fierce assaults." Thanks to the presence of mind of that very major, the general escaped with his life, and his Alpini — truly brave and well-armed, but tainted by the stench of occupation — under the command of Colonel A. Barbieri, defended the town. It was this relative wartime success that gave the general the standing to write such a confident letter.[136]

[135] Š. Lagator and Đ. Batrićević, *op. cit.,* 312-314.

[136] To Tito's letter sent to Italian soldiers immediately after the Battle of Pljevlja with an invitation (in Italian) to join the partisans, General G. Esposito responded to the "bandit commander" with a threat — that "for one officer shot, 60 citizens will be shot, and for one private, 10."

Part Four

CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF OF THE NATIONAL LIBERATION ARMY OF YUGOSLAVIA

• Speculation surrounding the reasons for his appointment as Chief of the General Staff
• First to charge at Rudo, with a carbine ready
• With Pero Ćetković, co-author of documents on the organization and formation of the 1st Proletarian Brigade
• In 1969 on Brijuni, Marshal Tito and General Veljko Kovačević described the only General Staff officer in the Supreme Headquarters: tactically competent to a degree, but with almost no understanding of strategy
• Caught in the vortex of the "Second Enemy Offensive"
• One hundred and five days in Foča
• Military consequences of the "leftist deviations"
• Organizer of the attack on the Ustaša gathering and stronghold in Borač
• A sigh over the fate of the Tara bridge
• Retreat toward Zeletovo

Drenova *(December 12, 1941)*

A key moment in the sequence of events at the end of 1941, following the Battle of Pljevlja, was the meeting between Arso, commander of the Montenegrin Detachment, and the Supreme Commander Tito. For at least two decades after 1948, Tito often recounted a version of this meeting: how Arso, completely devastated, was the first to report the failure at Pljevlja, arriving before dawn the next day in Drenova, after the defeat — and how, allegedly, Tito "crushed him," even contemplating a court-martial. However, a thorough reconstruction of events carried out during the writing of Tito's wartime memoirs confirmed that their meeting actually took place about ten days later, and that the first to inform Tito of the failed outcome of the Pljevlja battle — during the night between December 1 and 2 — was Vojo Leković, followed by Alfred Fedor Ota Horvitz. Horvitz, a fighter from the Pljevlja Partisan Company and later a member of the 5th Battalion of the 1st Proletarian Brigade, arrived at the SH around midnight on December 2 in Gornja Bistrica, at the home of Petar Radaković, and delivered the news of the terrible losses at Pljevlja "in a dramatic voice and deep into the night."

The next day, Bajo Sekulić, political commissar of the Montenegrin Detachment, arrived at the SH accompanied by an entire squad, while Arso remained in the field,

commanding about 800 fighters in operations around the outskirts of Pljevlja and coordinating the evacuation of some 1,200 wounded to Žabljak.[137] There is no surviving document on what Sekulić reported to the Supreme Commander, and the only (as of 1998) living and occasionally present witness to that meeting — held in the courtyard house of the Divac family — was retired General Ljubivoje Pajović, who recalled that the meeting, with breaks for meals, lasted a full five hours and was "cordial, without raised voices." The outcome of that conversation can also be inferred from the fact that none of the detachment's senior officers who had stayed behind in the Sandžak were interrogated — in fact, not only was there no investigation into the possible responsibility of the four top officers of the detachment staff, but they were promptly promoted to higher duties. Specifically: Arso Jovanović was appointed Chief of the Supreme Headquarters; Bajo Sekulić became political commissar of the Main Staff of the NOP Detachment for Montenegro and the Bay of Kotor; Radovan Vukanović became commander of the 2nd Battalion of the 1st Proletarian Brigade; and Boško Đuričković became political commissar of the newly formed Montenegrin–Sandžak NOP Detachment.

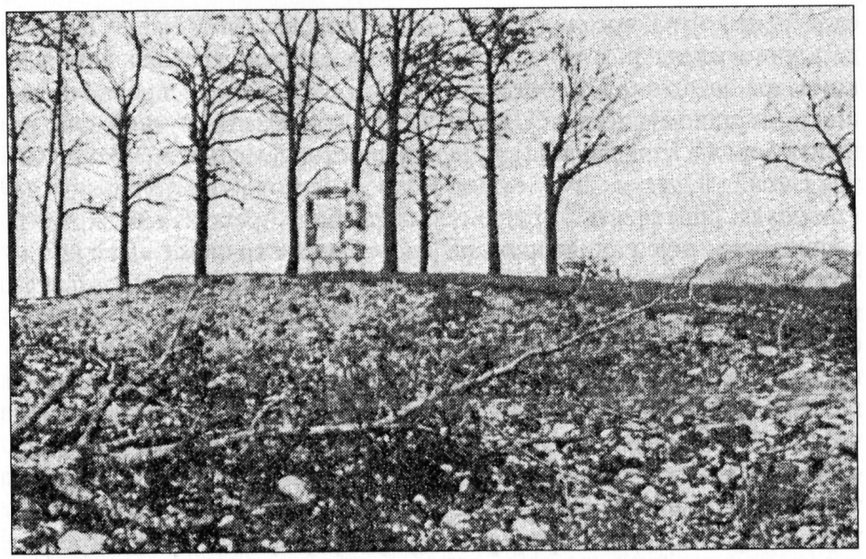
Arso received his summons to the SH while in Kamena Gora, where 1,400 fighters from the Detachment and the Sandžak had gathered, including around 400 from the "October 18" Battalion. On December 10, under his command and amid a very heated debate, a decision was made on where to send whom — toward the Lim River, deeper into the Sandžak or back to Montenegro. A day earlier, on December 9, he had received an order from the SH requiring this differentiation: "You must thoroughly screen your battalions and send home all those who are wavering or unwilling to fight in this area, and transfer the best fighters across the Lim."

When, with the help of Mitar Bakić, he had clarified the situation and was truly left with the best fighters, Arso — before their transfer across the Lim and under orders with enhanced protection — set off for the SH.

Upon arriving in Vranjak on December 12, Arso informed the Supreme Commander "of the failed attack on Pljevlja and the condition of his detachment. Tito tasked him with having his units liberate Rudo, where the formation of the 1st Proletarian Brigade was to take place. There, he decided to appoint Arso Jovanović — who had been a General Staff officer of the Yugoslav Army — as Chief of the Supreme Headquarters."[138] One of the witnesses to that meeting, Vuksan Ljumović — pre-war lawyer and veteran communist from Piperi, then deputy commissar of the "October 18" Battalion — remembered the conversation in more detail. He had accompanied Arso on that journey with a squad of fighters. In one room, they found Tito and Mitar Bakić. Tito immediately began sharply criticizing Arso for his "responsibility in the failure at Pljevlja," focusing less on the casualties and more on the fact that "he had not earlier extended a hand to the Serbian troops." While Tito was lashing

[137] *Collection of Documents on the NOR,* Vol. III, Book 1, Doc. 160.

[138] J. Broz, *Collected Works*, Vol. 8, p. 288; V. Dedijer recorded on December 12: "In the evening, Arso Jovanović, the Montenegrin commander, arrived. The old man says that he is a good soldier." *Diary*, Vol. 1, p. 67.



From this spot in Drenova (from the former house of Petar Radaković, hamlet of Vranjak), General Staff Captain 1st Class Arso Jovanović set out on December 12, 1941 as Chief of the Supreme Staff of the Yugoslav Anti-Fascist Army, a position he would hold until Victory Day.

out, Arso — as Ljumović later recounted to his wartime comrades (even during Tito's lifetime) — stood at attention and remained silent, undoubtedly aware of his own moral and command responsibility not only for the failed attack but, above all, for the removal of 500 comrades from the ranks. Mitar, visibly pensive, also remained silent, glancing now at Tito, now at Arso. But when the Supreme Commander mentioned a court-martial, he stood up at once and said that such a manner of speaking was not acceptable toward the commander of Montenegro's uprising army — a man trusted by the Party, a General Staff officer who had implemented the idea of shifting the centre of operations over more than 200 km with the utmost professionalism and responsibility; who had brought a detachment of around 4,000 fighters into the Sandžak; who was actively and selflessly striving to fulfil an objective that exceeded their capabilities; who had planned and carried out the attack on Pljevlja, thereby forcing the Italians to withdraw from six garrisons and thus easing the transfer of some 800 of his fighters and eight companies from the Sandžak, which — in extremely difficult conditions — had supported the units retreating from Serbia. Mitar added — in a tone unfamiliar to Ljumović and his fellow fighters, evidently speaking with complete candour in front of Tito — that he would not tolerate such a conversation with or about Arso, a proven patriot and hero. After all, no one had been held accountable for the days-long failed battles for Kraljevo and Valjevo, nor for the senseless sacrifice of the Workers' Battalion at Kadinjača, nor for the panicked abandonment of Užice, nor for the fate of "two to three hundred" wounded left to the Germans on Zlatibor — "so why should Arso be the scapegoat, especially since he had dutifully carried out the decision given to him."

Tito — undoubtedly taken aback by Mitar's tone — visibly calmed.[139] Who knows, perhaps at that moment the Supreme Commander finally recalled that Milutin had reported to him five or six times from the Sandžak and Montenegro about preparations for executing the decision to attack Pljevlja, which he had never objected to, thereby tacitly approving the operation — until only "on the December 29 or 30, when the broken units from Serbia, under the pressure of German forces, retreated into the Sandžak — he ordered that the Italian garrison at Ćehotina not be attacked. Not because he foresaw the outcome, but because at that point, those 3,690 fighters were needed as a fresh force to receive and protect him, the SH, and the remaining units retreating across Zlatibor. In other words, he needed those forces as a precondition for achieving success and reigniting the armed struggle. After all, Supreme Commander Tito himself was still shaken from the defeat in Serbia and especially from the personal ordeal he had endured during the flight from Užice. For all those reasons, on December 7, during a session of the CC of the CPY in Drenova, he "offered his resignation." Then — once he regained the trust to remain both General Secretary of the CPY and Supreme Commander of the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia — he decided to appoint a qualified person as Chief of Supreme Headquarters, which he now clearly understood, after the Serbia experience, was a prerequisite for successfully commanding military units during the war.

Rudo *(December 17-25, 1941)*

What each participant and witness of that Drenova conversation thought can only be speculated, but the fact is that Tito continued the discussion more calmly and softly, and, without much explanation, informed Arso of his decision — to appoint him Chief of Supreme Headquarters, on the condition that he first, with the units currently under his command, liberate Rudo, one of the six garrisons that General Esposito, after the battle of Pljevlja, had abandoned, leaving it to the Chetniks. He was also to consider the formation of a larger operational unit.

The detachment, under Arso's command, liberated Rudo on December 17. During the assault across the bridge on the Lim River, Arso — as Milisav Nikić recalls — led the charge in front of his fighters, carrying his *užičanka* rifle in a ready-to-fire position. There they encountered only Chetniks, whose commander had already escaped to the Italians in Višegrad.

From there, at 10:00 a.m., he sent a report to the SH, which was located in the village of Toci: "We've entered Rudo. Send reinforcements urgently. Part of the forces can also go via Bijelo Brdo, to cut off the enemy there. Comradely greetings, Arso, Bajo, Radovan and Boško." Tito received the report the next day, around noon, and arrived in Rudo only on December 19, 1941.

From the march toward Rudo, fighters from the "October 18" Battalion recall several details about Commander Arso, two of which are shared here. The first took

[139] V. Ljumović recounted this to Generals Petar Radević and Božo Lazarević.

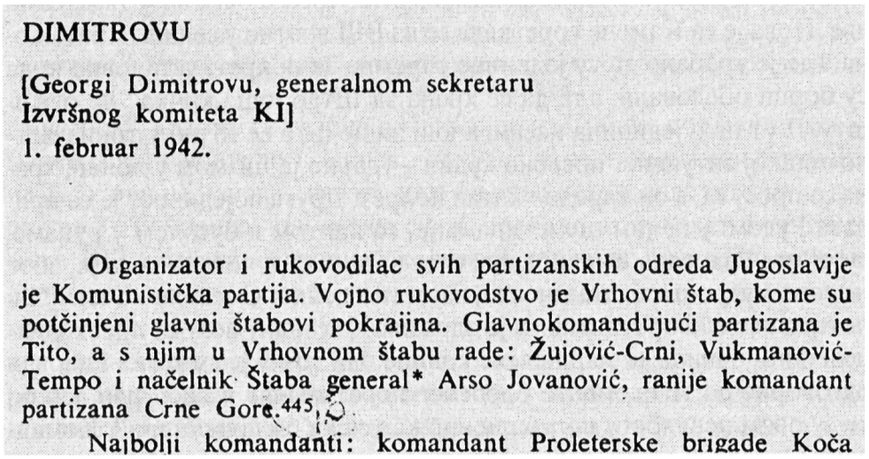
place on Kamena Gora: when he returned from SH to the battalion headquarters, where the units were supposed to be ready to move out, he found that the fighters had already eaten — but the food for the staff was still "simmering" over the fire. Angry that the unit was delayed, and even more upset that the staff was receiving special treatment in such an extremely difficult situation, he kicked the pot with his boot, spilling the food, and ordered an immediate departure. The second incident occurred near Rudo: in a dense forest, map and compass in hand, he caught up with Radovan Vukanović — his peer and a man he deeply respected for his wisdom and composure. Apparently expecting a positive answer, he asked whether he was maintaining constant communication with the advance guard and flanking elements of the marching column. Calmly, Radovan replied that he hadn't even deployed those elements, as they would "get lost in this wilderness and never regroup." The detachment commander, clearly restraining himself, muttered that "at least the most basic rules of war must be respected, otherwise chaos will cost us lives."

The decision to form the 1st Proletarian Brigade was made on December 7 at a session of the Political Bureau of the CC of the CPY in Drenova. Arso's role in implementing it was to work — following the liberation of the town of Rudo — on the technical aspects of the task alongside Captain First Class Pero Ćetković. On December 20, in the house of the local Orthodox priest in Rudo, where the inner circle of the SH was stationed, they thoroughly worked out the organization and structure of the first operational unit of the Partisan forces. Their work was overseen by the Supreme Commander himself. As qualified military experts, they proposed the formation of a unit modelled after infantry units — capable of operating across all Yugoslav theatres of war. Thanks to that structure, the brigade proved itself within just two months of combat as a viable model for conducting a successful liberation war under adverse conditions. It was precisely from this experience that other operational units were later created. Still, for Arso, as an officer of the Royal Yugoslav Army, this was a distinctly political and communist — a proletarian — unit, fighting under the red flag with the hammer and sickle.

From the parade ground of the 1st Proletarian Brigade, two officers and already established commanders of the Montenegrin Partisan army departed for new appointments: Arso became Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, while Pero took command of the 1st Lovćen Proletarian Battalion. Their comrade, also an officer and a proven anti-fascist, Velimir Terzić, was appointed Chief of Staff of the newly formed Montenegrin-Sandžak Detachment. This unit was commanded by Mile Peruničić, with Boško Đuričković as political commissar. Their deputies were Velimir Jakić and Jagoš Uskoković.

Arso R. Jovanović's appointment as Chief of the Supreme Headquarters of the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia (NOPJ) was not announced to the global public by Tito until February 1, 1942, and that was in response to a request from Moscow made on December 20. Namely, Dimitrov, on behalf of the Comintern and Moscow, demanded: "Urgently provide the names of some of the most important leaders of the partisan movement, so that the leadership of the movement does not remain an-

onymous abroad. It is not enough to speak only generally about the SH of the partisans; it is necessary to specifically say who actually leads the partisan movement." The response to this request from Moscow was written on December 30 in Podromanija and broadcast from a Comintern post in Zagreb, after its representative Valdes had returned from the SH. In it, Tito wrote that the SH included: "Žujović-Crni, Vukmanović-Tempo and Chief of Staff General[140] Arso Jovanović, formerly commander of the Montenegrin partisans," and that the best partisan commanders were Koča Popović, Radivoje Jovanović Bradonja, Pero Ćetković and Slaviša Vajner Čiča.



DIMITROVU

[Georgi Dimitrovu, generalnom sekretaru
Izvršnog komiteta KI]
1. februar 1942.

Organizator i rukovodilac svih partizanskih odreda Jugoslavije je Komunistička partija. Vojno rukovodstvo je Vrhovni štab, kome su potčinjeni glavni štabovi pokrajina. Glavnokomandujući partizana je Tito, a s njim u Vrhovnom štabu rade: Žujović-Crni, Vukmanović-Tempo i načelnik Štaba general* Arso Jovanović, ranije komandant partizana Crne Gore.[445]

Najbolji komandanti: komandant Proleterske brigade Koča

Dispatch to Dimitrov from Podromanija.

At the beginning of the April War, Arso held the rank of Captain First Class. Although he had met the conditions for promotion, he was not elevated to the rank of Major due to the outbreak of the war. Therefore, this "promotion" — as described in the telegram to Moscow, whether to the rank of general or major — can be seen as a smart move to support the international recognition of the liberation struggle led by forces under the command of General Arso. Either way, this was the third time — from September to December 1941 — that Arso R. Jovanović's name was presented to the global public. Namely, his name was mentioned twice on September 26, and a third time on October 14, always in telegrams from officers of the "Bullseye" mission — to the SOE post in Malta — and always emphasizing that he was an officer.

Let us now return to the question often speculated about after 1948: why did the Communist leader Tito choose Captain Jovanović to be Chief of the Supreme Headquarters — especially immediately following the failed attack on Pljevlja? Much has been written and said about this, most often based on unverified and disjointed information, on flawed logic or arbitrary and irresponsible assumptions. But the truth — if Tito's actions can be reliably interpreted — is most likely quite simple. He was, without doubt, a shrewd and pragmatic judge when selecting his closest associates.

[140] This is written in the original (in Russian), and the editor of Tito's *Collected Works* (Vol. 9, p. 154) added: "It should be General Staff Major."

Aware that the burden of war would fall on the Serbs and Montenegrins, and that the serious military challenges facing the uprising could only be overcome by enlisting the support of officers and Orthodox priests, Tito likely judged that Arso, in that critical moment — aside from his Serbian allies — was an exceptionally valuable figure through whom he could rally Montenegrins, even in the wake of failure. Moreover, Arso was a senior officer with a high level of military education, a true professional — responsible, disciplined and meticulous General Staff officer — capable and prepared for high military duties. He was also sharp, articulate, persistent, and able to interpret and execute orders with precision, transferring them with sufficient authority to subordinate commanders exactly as Tito, as Supreme Commander, required. In short, he was able to fully and responsibly implement Tito's decisions — which is why Tito appointed him as his first military associate. Additionally, Tito — a man who had travelled the world and met many accomplished and attractive people — appreciated Arso's youth and tidy appearance, his knowledge of French and his membership in the elite general staff corps. All of this lent Tito, especially given the circumstances he foresaw, a measure of prestige. After all, he had become Supreme Commander of a distinctly peasant-based "army" that lacked an educated officer corps. Though Tito had only modest military training and certainly no knowledge or experience in staff operations, he clearly understood the duties of a Chief of Supreme Headquarters: to gather intelligence, analyse the situation, propose decisions, and then implement the adopted ones thoroughly. He knew Arso understood all of this very well — especially the kind of relationship that should exist between a Chief of Staff and a Supreme Commander. In the ideological and rigidly uniform leadership structure of the time, however, Arso would be reminded — and denied the ability to act independently — that he was "an officer of the former and failed army," burdened with the stigma of a loser,[141] and especially with the guilt surrounding the failure at Pljevlja.

Arso's appointment as Chief of the Supreme Headquarters was continuously reaffirmed throughout the war as the best possible decision — something Tito himself emphasized many times before both his own command and that of the Allies, often placing Arso in the line of fire. Occasionally, for that very reason, Tito would protect him from overbearing or insubordinate commanders, especially from among the so-called "Spaniards" (veterans of the Spanish Civil War). He could do that because Arso was doing his job well — otherwise, had he made serious errors or proven incapable, Tito would have quickly and easily removed him from that high position in a "suitable" way, something he had countless opportunities to do over four years of war. Therefore, all of Tito's later — frequent and often harsh — post-war comments about Arso as a failed personnel choice at the outset of the NOB were based on biased and unsubstantiated assessments, supported by "evidence" from a few sycophantic collaborators or career-driven and untalented wartime commanders.

One such assessment was voiced in 1969 on the Brijuni Islands, where Josip Broz

[141] In the "use" of officers from the "former army," he had a role model in Lenin's Red Army: at the end of 1918, as many as 75% of the commanding staff at all levels — according to M. Stanišić — were imperial officers.

Tito and General Veljko J. Kovačević — one of the "Spaniards," a division commander in Gorski Kotar during the NOB and a corps commander in Slavonia near the war's end — were essentially competing over who could more thoroughly belittle and dismiss Arso. This occurred while they were framing an answer to the question: why had Arso been chosen as the Supreme Commander's first military associate, and what, as an officer of a defeated army, did he really know? The goal was for their conclusions to be recorded in the "victory marshal's" wartime memoirs. Caught "between a rock and a hard place," the editor of Tito's memoirs, military historian Colonel Mišo Leković, tried to establish and record the truth, while the relentless tape recorder captured everything for "posterity."[142]

A portion of this conversation, held on June 16, 1969 in the "White Villa" on Brijuni, was later published by Colonel Radomir Vujosević Ćaka, the responsible editor of the war-period memoirs, in *Politika* as part of the series "How Tito's Unpublished Memoirs Were Written."[143] The seventh instalment, titled "Why Arso Jovanović Was Appointed Chief of the Supreme Headquarters," serves as a key testimony for this topic. There, based on the proposed chapter "From Užice to Rudo," Tito suggested that the final version of the text should acknowledge that the attack on Pljevlja — led by Arso — "still had some positive aspects." Tito elaborated: "It's true — we should add something else here: that this attack, if we take into account when it happened — in 1941, at the beginning of the war, when German troops, as the text notes, were at the gates of Moscow and Leningrad, and all of Europe was occupied — that an uprising flared up in our country...

"Even failures like the one at Pljevlja sometimes had great significance, as they further fuelled the fight. What's more — they showed that the enemy was not invincible and that even larger enemy units could be engaged. So, although a defeat was suffered at Pljevlja — just like during the Fifth Offensive, where we also endured a significant setback — in the end, it was still a kind of victory. It could more rightly be seen as a defeat for the enemy, because they failed to achieve the objective they had set for themselves.

"Leković: I'd like to highlight one point here. It's about the fact that fighters from an entire province — all of Montenegro — were mobilized, nearly 4,000 of them, and sent to the Sandžak, to Pljevlja. These were no longer just local insurgent units defending their villages, but a force that could be deployed...

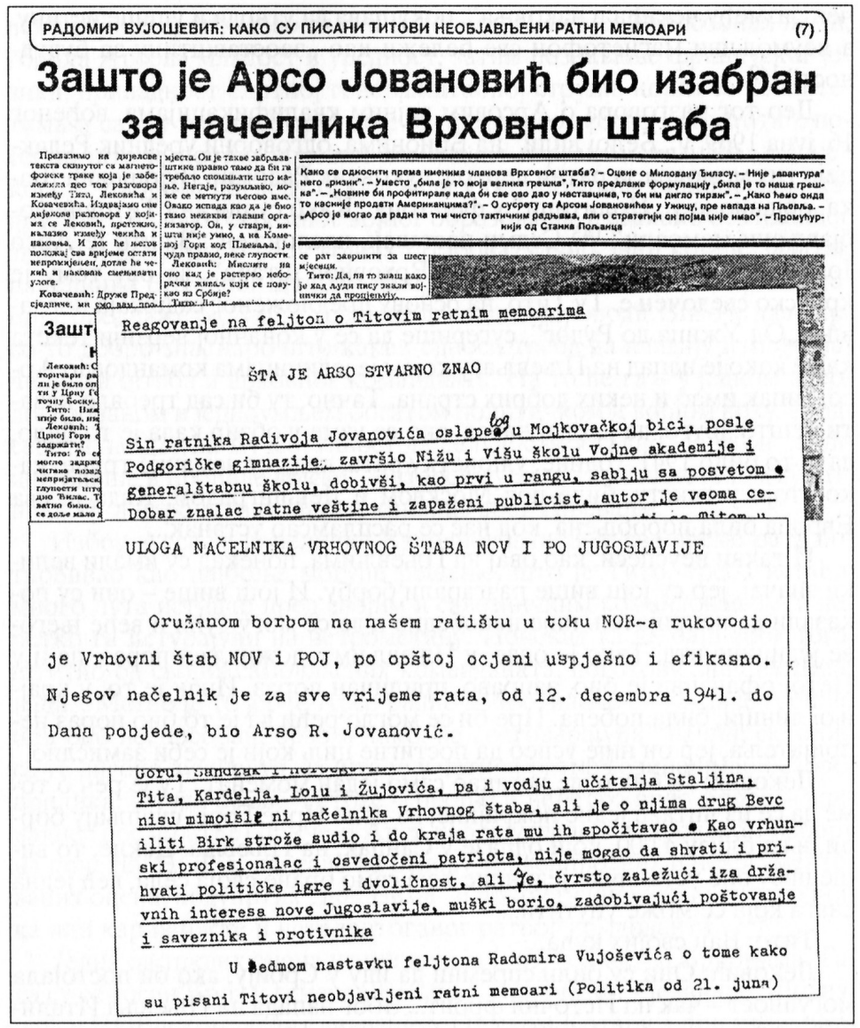
"Tito: Beyond their own homes.

"Leković: They were ready to go to Serbia if the opportunity arose — even to the Eastern Front... Because of the attack on Pljevlja, the Italians were frightened and abandoned all nearby locations where their troops had been stationed: Nova Varoš, Sjenica, Rudo, Čajniče, Foča and Goražde."

Flipping through the manuscript quickly, Tito pauses on page 51 of the text, where it says he "met" Arso in Drenova, and he comments: "That meeting with Arso

[142] Transcript, typed on 196 pages, kept in AVII.

[143] The serialized article was published in the *Politika* newspaper from June 14 to 20, 1996.



РАДОМИР ВУЈОШЕВИЋ: КАКО СУ ПИСАНИ ТИТОВИ НЕОБЈАВЉЕНИ РАТНИ МЕМОАРИ (7)

Зашто је Арсо Јовановић био изабран за начелника Врховног штаба

Како се односи према именима чланова Врховног штаба? – Оцене о Миловану Ђиласу. – Није „авантура" него „дизни". – Уместо „била је то моја велика грешка", Тито предлаже формулацију „била је то наша грешка". – „Новине би профитирале када би све ово дао у наставцима, то би ми дигло тираж". – „Како ћемо онда то касније продати Американцима?". – О сусрету са Арсом Јовановићем у Ужицу, пре напада на Пљевља. – „Арсо је могао да ради на тим чисто тактичким радњама, али о стратегији он појма није имао". – Промућурнији од Станка Пољанца

Reagovanje na feljton o Titovim ratnim memoarima

ŠTA JE ARSO STVARNO ZNAO

Sin ratnika Radivoja Jovanovića oslepeo u Mojkovačkoj bici, posle Podgoričke gimnazije, završio Nižu i Višu školu Vojne akademije i generalštabnu školu, dobivši, kao prvi u rangu, sablju sa posvetom • Dobar znalac ratne veštine i zapaženi publicist, autor je veoma ce-

ULOGA NAČELNIKA VRHOVNOG ŠTABA NOV I PO JUGOSLAVIJE

Oružanom borbom na našem ratištu u toku NOR-a rukovodio je Vrhovni štab NOV i POJ, po opštoj ocjeni uspješno i efikasno. Njegov načelnik je za sve vrijeme rata, od 12. decembra 1941. do Dana pobjede, bio Arso R. Jovanović.

Tita, Kardelja, Lolu i Žujovića, pa i vođju i učitelja Staljina, nisu mimoišle ni načelnika Vrhovnog štaba, ali je o njima drug Bevc iliti Birk strože sudio i do kraja rata mu ih spočitavao • Kao vrhunski profesionalac i osvedočeni patriota, nije mogao da shvati i prihvati političke igre i dvoličnost, ali je, čvrsto zalažući iza državnih interesa nove Jugoslavije, muški borio, zadobivajući poštovanje i saveznika i protivnika

U sedmom nastavku feljtona Radomira Vujoševića o tome kako su pisani Titovi neobjavljeni ratni memoari (Politika od 21. juna)

An assessment of Arso and the debate about it in "Politika."

Jovanović was a little different. That wasn't my first meeting with him. He had come to Užice. At that time, in the SH, I had Branko Poljanac and another lieutenant colonel, whose name I can't recall now. Poljanac was the main one. Arso came there. That was before the attack on Pljevlja, and he returned to Montenegro...

"Then, after the failure at Pljevlja, he came to Drenova, to that house, at night. He looked somewhat eerie. I was asleep. Someone called me: 'Comrade Supreme Commander!' Half-asleep, I asked: 'What is it? Who's there?' 'It's me,' came the reply. Then I turned on the light and saw — Arso was standing there. I asked him: 'What is it?' He said: 'The attack on Pljevlja failed.' 'What do you mean it failed, for God's sake —

you and Milutin both!' I scolded him harshly. I was furious with him because he was an officer. I thought he knew more than he let on. In the text, he's been given far too positive an assessment.

"Leković: I thought it was important to elaborate more on the reasons why you appointed him as Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, what guided you in making that choice.

"Tito: That assessment is too positive. Back then, I realized — if he, as a soldier and an officer of that rank, couldn't grasp that you can't send men with rifles against a fortified position — then I lost confidence in him as a commander. He was suitable for basic tactical tasks, but he had no clue about strategy. He simply didn't understand those things. He couldn't handle it... So change that — it's too flattering.

"General Kovačević: Comrade President, should we mention your first meeting with him in Užice? He was, in a way, coming on behalf of Montenegro. Because someone might interpret it this way — that he was an important figure representing Montenegro at the SH.

"Tito: In that case, I'd only mention the second meeting.

"Kovačević: So that it doesn't seem like he was some prominent figure arriving at the SH as Montenegro's envoy.

"Tito: You're right.

"Leković: I was interested in why you decided to make him your Chief of Staff. I was looking for an answer — I thought maybe you found him competent.

"Tito: He struck me as much more energetic than Poljanac. Poljanac was good, but terribly dependent. He had some military knowledge, sure, but he was too reliant — he would ask me about every single thing, and that was too much of a burden. So I said: 'Let Arso be Chief of Staff, and Poljanac can be his assistant.'

"Kovačević: But you chose him after a defeat... You didn't appoint him as a chief to propose decisions or analyse situations...

"Tito: What mattered most was that I saw he was sharper than Poljanac, that I didn't have to spell out everything from A to Z — I could give him a basic idea, a decision, and he'd know how to flesh it out technically and militarily.

"Kovačević: I think it's best we put it this way: You chose him because you needed someone who could take your decision and express it in military terms.

"Leković: I just wouldn't want us to pass judgement on him and his abilities right from the start. Later, through the entire course of events, his work becomes clear — you can see what he did at Kupres, Bugojno, Livno. He messed up everywhere. But I wouldn't say upfront that he was incompetent...

"Tito: Here, look — it says (reading from page 54), 'He seemed composed to me.' He wasn't composed. He was lively. He was sharp and had a military education — that can be said.

"Leković: By our standards at the time, he was educated. If someone could read a map, that already meant a lot.

"Tito (reading from Leković's text): 'I immediately concluded he was a good soldier.' I wouldn't put that in.

"Kovačević: He did have some military education.

"Tito: Yes. That's what I would say. I would cross that part out here.

"Kovačević: And at the time, that's exactly the kind of people we needed.

"Tito (reading): Yes, 'as a General Staff officer, he possessed solid military knowledge.' That should say: 'Some,' not 'solid.'

"Kovačević: Yes. But it should also be added that everything was disproven later.

"Tito: Yes, that could be said here now: 'The future will show whether he was what I expected of him. That's how I'd put it...'"[144]

So Tito, unconvincingly, spoke 28 years later about his first military associate — someone he had previously, up until the final day of the war and during the first three years of peace, consistently praised in both speech and writing, listened to with respect and held in high regard. That lasted until the summer of 1948, when they permanently parted ways.

Those remarks from Tito — clearly influenced by General Kovačević — would be published two decades later in his *Autobiographical Accounts*. There, he recorded:

"On the evening of December 12, Captain Arso Jovanović, commander of the Montenegrin detachment for operations in the Sandžak, arrived. This was my second encounter with the man who would soon become Chief of the Supreme Headquarters and my close associate. I had first met him back in October, when he came to Užice with Mitar Bakić, Captain Hudson and Major Zaharije Ostojić. He had made a positive impression on me at the time — seemed lively, decisive and militarily educated. As a General Staff officer, he appeared to have a certain degree of military knowledge and skill, particularly in terms of staff duties related to planning, organizing and executing tactical operations. In terms of strategy, unfortunately, he understood almost nothing.

"I scolded him thoroughly, and he stayed silent, not offering a single word of defence.

"We then talked more calmly about the attack on Pljevlja, about the causes of the failure and the state of his detachment. Regarding the planned attack on the Chetniks and Italians at Priboj Spa, we agreed that some of his forces, after crossing the Lim, would attack from the west and coordinate with Serbian units attacking from the east. I informed him of our decision to form the 1st Proletarian Brigade, which would include two battalions from his detachment, and ordered him to have his units liberate Rudo, where we would carry out the formation of the brigade.

"I was considering — though I didn't mention it to him or any of the other comrades — that it might be a good idea to bring him into the SH and appoint him Chief of Staff. For an independent command role, it was clear he was not suited — as the

[144] Carefully writing his observations from that meeting, Leković noted in his notebook in the evening, while the impressions were fresh, that Tito was "susceptible to suggestions: he listens carefully to his interlocutor and opponent, and usually adopts their remark, suggestion and proposal. This is good. However, it can be bad if the suggestion is inappropriate. There were examples of this when it came to Veljko's (General-Vice Admiral V. Kovačević, — *I.M.*) remarks and suggestions. He doesn't know, has no idea about the matter, and wants to eliminate everything that, in his opinion, would not be convenient for Tito, which is unacceptable, unscientific and biased." A facsimile of the note was published along with the article on June 20.

Pljevlja battle plainly demonstrated. But for staff duties, for implementing my plans and decisions, I believed he would be capable. We badly needed people with military knowledge in the SH, where — apart from me — no one could even properly read a topographic map. Unfortunately, my expectations would not be fulfilled, as it would turn out he wasn't up to the task."[145]

This alleged "unsuitability for the role," according to Tito's *Autobiographical Accounts*, would become evident as early as December 22, when the Kraljevo Battalion was dispatched on its first combat mission. He writes that he clashed with the Chief of Staff on that occasion: "Arso wanted the battalion to move toward Priboj, in the direction of the Italians and Chetniks, then veer left — which, given the snow, would have meant marching 15-20 kilometres. I said we're not going to fight like that — the battalion should go straight toward Gaočići, surround the buildings where the Italians and Chetniks were spending the night, and eliminate them. And that's what was done."[146] Through such comments, the reader is nudged toward the conclusion: "It all started wrong, so it's no surprise it ended that way" — suggesting that Arso not only lacked any understanding of strategy, the highest art of warfare, but that he also fumbled basic tactical matters. And thus, all his formal education — both Lower and Higher levels of the Military Academy, the Advanced Training School, his book *Tactics of the Infantry Battalion*, the Supplementary Course (War College) and preparation for the General Staff service — was, apparently, all in vain...

Another version of the encounter with Arso Jovanović after Pljevlja was also published in *Autobiographical Accounts*. This one was recounted on July 13, 1951, and it differs significantly from the version presented in 1969 on the Brijuni Islands. It reads: "When we settled in Drenova, at the Divac household, someone woke me in the middle of the night and reported: 'Comrade Commander, we were defeated at Pljevlja.' I got up and saw that it was Arso Jovanović. I jumped up and said, 'So, it happened after all — just as I had predicted!' At that moment, I wanted to have Arso arrested on the spot and immediately brought to trial because he was the main culprit — he had convinced the comrades and said that Pljevlja could be taken in a single charge. 'All right, so what now?' I asked. He replied, 'The army is falling apart and the peasants are going back home.' 'Do you have one solid battalion?' 'We do.' 'Which one?' He mentioned the Lovćen Battalion and a few others, saying that the Lovćen Battalion had fought heroically in the town. 'Withdraw those units immediately, farther from the town,' I told him, 'because the Italians will launch counter-attacks to completely scatter you. Pull back further, block the road between Prijepolje and Pljevlja so you can cut communications and prevent the Italians from harassing us.' I sent him back...

"I must say that at that time enormous mistakes were being made, which we turned a blind eye to — perhaps to our own greater detriment — because every man was valuable to us. At first, I believed that some people who were responsible for what

[145] J. Broz, *Autobiographical Narratives*, Vol. I, p. 32.

[146] *Ibid.,* p. 326.

had happened should have been executed..."[147] About thirty years later, Kardelj, reflecting on that event while recalling the errors made by Đilas and Milutin during that period, added in a conversation with journalist Goran Lazović: "Tito was very liberal toward the mistakes of old comrades — even though he could be strict in other matters. Afterwards (meaning: after Pljevlja — *I.M.*), everything fell on Arso."[148] And so Kardelj — quite surprisingly, and out of time — came to Arso Jovanović's defence. Although Arso would never hold the status of one of Tito's "old comrades," he would later become the most vilified member of the inner military leadership of the National Liberation Army.

Čevljanovići *(January 1-14, 1942)*

The formation of the 1st Proletarian Brigade in Rudo took place at a time when the course of military and political events — both globally and domestically — still offered little reason for optimism. True, from Red Square in Moscow, Stalin had, on November 7, 1941, proclaimed the Wehrmacht's defeat "in a few months, in half a year, or in a year"; shortly after, on December 6, the Red Army launched a powerful counter-offensive in front of Moscow; on December 7, Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, and the next day declared war on the United States and Great Britain, thereby burdening itself for the next four years with war against them and Chiang Kai-shek's China. Some degree of optimism was also offered by the British, who had defeated Italian forces in East Africa and stabilized the most threatened sector of the front in Libya. These developments on the global battlefront forced Hitler to transfer the bulk of Germany's air force from Western Europe to the Eastern Front, thereby weakening the Third Reich's defensive capacity in Europe. At the same time, after completing operations in Serbia, the Germans withdrew the 113th and 342nd divisions from the Balkans to the Eastern Front.

Events on the Yugoslav front — specifically in Serbia and Montenegro — were, however, unfavourable for the insurgent forces. The NOP detachments were either defeated or only a small portion managed to move from western Serbia and Pomoravlje through the Sandžak into eastern Bosnia. The attack on Pljevlja (December 1) by the Montenegrin detachment failed, and in the process, 500 of its fighters were taken out of action. The attack on Sjenica (December 22) also failed, resulting in over 100 fighters killed, wounded or missing. The attack on Vareš (December 12) was unsuccessful as well, preventing the attempt to break into the industrial-mining basin. There were ongoing divisions and dissolutions of partisan detachments in eastern Bosnia, and a growing number of officers from the Royal Yugoslav Army — including units sent by General Draža Mihailović — were being deployed to the eastern Bosnia front. Lastly, negotiations between Chetnik leaders and the Italians led to the transfer of garrisons from Šćepan Polje to Višegrad into Chetnik hands, along with the resurgence of the

[147] *Ibid.,* p. 333.

[148] G. Lazović, *Đilas on Himself — Others on Đilas*, Belgrade 1989, p. 123.

Chetnik movement in the Vasojevići region and Herzegovina...

Conclusions about the current situation and its possible development — both globally and domestically — led the CC of the CPY and the SH of the National Liberation Partisan Detachments of Yugoslavia (SH NOPOJ) to shift focus away from intensified combat against the occupier, placing instead an emphasis on sharpening the class struggle. Within that framework, partisan units were redirected to engage the Chetniks and the "fifth column." The top military and political leadership of the NOB believed that the Axis powers would "soon collapse on the Soviet front." Accordingly, the SH decided to move from Rudo toward Rogatica, where on December 25, at a meeting with the Main Staff of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a plan of combat operations was adopted. Its goal was to support the insurgent detachments of eastern Bosnia and to reinforce them with "workers from the industrial and mining centres in the Bosna River valley." To implement this plan, the 1st Proletarian Brigade was to relocate to the Romanija region, with the mission of, in coordination with insurgent detachments, liberating Vareš and Breza by mid-January — and, if conditions allowed, also Zenica. This territory held particular strategic importance for both sides, and it was no coincidence that both the Partisan and German commands planned to launch offensive operations there simultaneously. The highest leadership of the NOB estimated that by cutting off the "destructive influence" of numerous Royal Yugoslav Army officers transferred from Serbia to eastern Bosnia, and by liberating vital transport routes and industrial centres in the Bosna valley, this region could serve as a springboard for new military operations — potentially, despite previous defeats, once again toward Serbia.

In such overly optimistic assessments — lacking in supporting evidence — there were even proposals suggesting supposedly "entirely realistic prospects" for liberating Sarajevo, where, as was indeed the case, a strong intelligence outpost of the NOB operated. This outpost maintained contact with Belgrade and Zagreb, and thus with the Comintern as well. Naturally, this made it strategically important to be as close as possible to the city on the Miljacka River — and, if "luck allowed," even within it. That excessive optimism was encouraged by the belief that the balance of forces would significantly shift in their favour once proletarian battalions — to be formed in other parts of the country following the model conceived in Rudo — began operating.

At the meeting in Rogatica, it was stated that the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters would, upon arriving there with the bulk of the 1st Proletarian Brigade, finalize the operational plan and assign specific tasks to the units — for example, deploying the proletarian battalions, as elite forces, to the territory held by the Romanija detachment. This decision postponed the original plan from Rudo, which was to direct the actions of the 1st Proletarian Brigade immediately toward the "Drina arc," in the sector between Višegrad and Bratunac, with the aim of penetrating or returning Partisan forces into Serbia.

The SH remained in Ivančići and Čevljanovići — villages located between Olovo and Sarajevo — until January 14, 1942. From there, on January 2, Lola Ribar departed for Zagreb via the Partisan contact point in Sarajevo. Until he was picked up by the Sarajevo underground, Arso provided him with a strong military escort and, of course,



Rogatica — on the march toward Romanija, late December 1941: Arso's first wartime photograph.

wished him good fortune in war.

At the two-day council held in Ivančići — whose discussions and decisions were kept strictly confidential, even from the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters — it was decided that the fight against the Chetniks would take priority. This was particularly due to the Communist Party leadership's assessment that Draža Mihailović's officers, sent from Serbia across the Drina, were having a highly destructive impact in eastern Bosnia and had already begun extending their influence into Herzegovina, taking control over segments of certain insurgent detachments. Naturally, the decisions of the CC of the Communist Party imposed additional duties and extremely demanding tasks on the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, as the leading staff officer. Still, the central focus of the party discussions — based on Kardelj's report — was the call to enter the "second phase of the revolutionary struggle." This was based on the conclusion that the key question had become: who would prevail — the Partisans or the Chetniks and all their actual and potential allies. It was alleged that the bourgeoisie (though which and whose exactly was unclear) had imposed the class struggle, and the communists, with their army, were now embracing it under the slogan: "Whoever is not with us is against us."[149] There were even ideas expressed — from which Tito, according to Dedijer, would later derive the slogan during the formation of the 2nd Proletarian Brigade on March 1, 1942 in Čajniče — saying: "We will shoot even our own father — if he goes against the people."

Returning — five years later — to the reasons behind the decision to advance from the Lim region toward Bosnia, General Jovanović wrote in the publication *Overview of the National Liberation War* that "the Lim region was narrow and within immediate

[149] In detail: *The Party Conference in Ivančići 1942*, Sarajevo 1983.

reach of the German offensive group from Serbia," and that a prolonged stay in the area around Rudo "was not useful. It was necessary to stabilize the already shaken situation and create a favourable stronghold not only for rest, regrouping and consolidation of our forces, but also for regaining the initiative.

"The Bosnian mining region and the Upper Neretva area, in connection with Montenegro, offered better military and political prospects. The rugged mountainous terrain, forests, canyons and rivers supported more resilient defence. The central location of this region allowed for quick connections with other parts of our country. The mining basin promised the mobilization of new forces, and its destruction would deprive the enemy of important industrial resources. That is why, at the end of December, the 1st Proletarian Brigade advanced into the Jahorina-Romanija-Vareš sector. The 2nd Brigade was left behind to maintain the stronghold in the Nova Varoš sector. In addition, it was tasked with maintaining communication with remaining forces in Serbia and establishing a link with our forces in the Sandžak.

"Through its energetic offensive, the 1st Proletarian Brigade changed the situation in the east Bosnian sector. Strong support was provided to the partisan forces. The brigade activated along all major routes, gathered partisan detachments around itself and prevented their further decline. Units of the brigade also took over positions abandoned by the Chetniks..."[150]

At the same time, the German command was planning an offensive operation precisely in the region of eastern Bosnia. It assessed that eastern Bosnia, after the collapse of the armed uprising in Serbia, had become the strongest centre of the uprising and that the insurgent forces, besides threatening the uninterrupted exploitation of mineral resources — crucial for nazi Germany's war economy — needed to be "finished off." In other words, the German military actions in eastern Bosnia were undoubtedly a continuation of the offensive in Serbia, though this time involving, in addition to two German divisions, strong Ustaša-Domobran and Italian forces. The German general in Serbia, Paul Bader, planned to carry out the operation in two phases, with the goal of liquidating the uprising in eastern Bosnia. Based on intelligence that the main partisan forces, along with the SH of the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia (NOPOJ), were located in the Sarajevo-Višegrad-Zvornik triangle, he decided — as was characteristic of all German operations in the Yugoslav theatre — to employ a concentric strike from Višegrad, Zvornik, Tuzla and Sarajevo in order to push back, encircle and destroy them in the area around Vlasenica and Han Pijesak. According to his order of January 3, the forces for this offensive operation included the German 342nd and 718th Infantry Divisions, seven Domobran battalions, six howitzer batteries, tanks, engineering and railway units, all supported by four squadrons of aircraft. The offensive began on January 15, with German regiments, Ustaša, Domobran and Italian forces advancing along precisely designated attack routes with the objective of pushing back, encircling and destroying the partisan forces. In executing this operation, five Ustaša-Domobran battalions formed the blocking group "Vareš," tasked

[150] A. Jovanović, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

with preventing the partisan units from breaking into the Bosna River valley and crossing to the left bank, from the line Vareš-Visoko, while the Italian forces (from the "Pusteria" and "Ravenna" divisions) were to block any advance of the partisan forces toward the southeast.

Without intelligence reports indicating that the occupiers were planning a second large-scale operation, the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters — in line with previously adopted decisions concerning operations in eastern Bosnia — dispatched two battalions of the 1st Proletarian Brigade toward Vareš and Breza. Their task was to liberate those towns, in coordination with other partisan units, as all conditions for doing so had been met, based on the available data regarding the strength of enemy defences. In the meantime, the SH received reports that the enemy was concentrating strong forces and was already advancing from two directions: one from the Bosna River valley toward the east and southeast, and the other from the Drina and Lim valleys toward the west. From these initial reports, the Chief of SH clearly concluded that this was a broad offensive targeting partisan forces. He therefore decided to temporarily abandon the planned actions toward Vareš and Breza, and in the new situation, "confront the enemy with partisan tactics." In that context, he ordered commanders of the Proletarian Brigade battalions and the staffs of the partisan detachments to avoid direct frontal combat. Instead, they were to "leave only a light screening force at the front, which would engage the enemy to buy time while the main forces manoeuvred to strike at the enemy's flanks and rear."[151] That was, in fact, the only viable tactic under conditions of a concentric enemy attack — the only way to at least partially counter a far more numerous and better-armed enemy. However, under the imposed and harsh wartime conditions — in difficult terrain, without adequate supply lines and during a deadly winter — it became nearly impossible for the partisans to hold their positions. German units, their assault columns equipped with special gear, achieved tactical surprise and, through the use of unexpected winter manoeuvres, inflicted heavy losses on partisan units.

Reinforced assault columns of German divisions, after battles around Sarajevo, at Jahorina and Romanija, in the Krivaja valley and near Olovo, as well as around Vlasenica and Rogatica, linked up as planned. Some of their elements established contact with the Ustaša-Domobran blocking group "Vareš." With that, the first phase of the "Second Enemy Offensive" concluded after a week of fighting. On January 21, the units began withdrawing to their initial garrisons. In the second phase, German occupation forces were once again to cooperate with Ustaša-Domobran units in conducting an operation to destroy the strong and highly combative Ozren Partisan Detachment.

During these operations, by attacking along key communication routes, the enemy managed to seize road and rail lines between Sarajevo and Zvornik, and Sarajevo and Višegrad. They took control of the liberated territory and established Ustaša-Domobran garrisons in Rogatica, Han Pijesak, Sokolac, Olovo, Vlasenica and Bratunac, thereby disrupting the SH's plan for a breakthrough of Proletarian and partisan units

[151] *Ibid.*, p. 21.

into the industrial and mining centres of eastern Bosnia. This was achieved through decisive and swift actions. Objectively, the success of enemy forces was also aided by Chetnik propaganda, which emphasized the severe hardships and mistakes made by the partisans during the enemy offensive. As a result, the Romanija Partisan Detachment and the "Zvijezda" Detachment experienced severe desertions. In addition, the 1st Proletarian Brigade suffered heavy losses, especially at Pjenovac and Bijele Vode.[152] These losses included 172 fighters who, due to serious frostbite sustained during the Igman March, were either temporarily or permanently removed from the brigade's ranks.

Carried out within the framework of these battles, the Igman March became and remains one of the epics of the anti-fascist struggle — but also a powerful warning, an example of the extremely high price paid due to lack of wartime experience. At the beginning of this operation, the SH — coming under attack by columns of the German 718th Division — correctly assessed that its position in the Romanija region was threatened. Thus, with two battalions of the 1st Proletarian Brigade, it moved out of the Čevljanovići area via Podromanija, reaching liberated Foča on January 25 via Jahorina. Although on January 17 the group had initially set out along the southern slopes of Jahorina, Arso in Bogovići received information on January 22 that Durmitor units had liberated Foča. He proposed that they leave the mountain wilderness — where the situation remained highly uncertain — and head toward "a liberated town, with friendly units, supportive local people and a place suitable for directing the armed struggle across a wider area." Tito accepted this proposal, and Moša Pijade and Mitar Bakić, along with the Belgrade Battalion, acting as an advance party, hurried ahead to secure accommodation for the inner leadership circle of the SH — in the "Gertl" Hotel.

The column of the SH was led by its chief — Arso. This was certainly not part of his official duties — in fact, he had far more pressing and important tasks. However, in this case, it was a matter of absolute necessity, as no one else in the SH, the highest command body of the NOB, nor those around it, knew how to read a map — at least not reliably enough to navigate by it during day or night — except for Captain Arso. One often recalled detail illustrates this clearly — from Rogatica, at the very start of the westward movement toward Romanija. In front of the commander of the 2nd Battalion, Radovan Vukanović, Arso — provoked by Tito's sharp criticism that he had been late in bringing up the main body of the 1st Proletarian Brigade from Rudo, causing an unforgivably long wait "for him and his map" — responded by saying that "both the Supreme Commander and comrades from the SH should start learning to read maps a bit faster, because Arso won't always be right at their side." Tito flared up at that, saying that no one could speak to him like that — he would do what he believed was the job of a Supreme Commander, and certainly not "the tasks of a patrol leader, advance guard commander, or staff clerk." Trained to end even unpleasant conversations in order to reduce misunderstandings, Captain A. Jovanović added that

[152] At dawn on January 21, the 5th Battalion of the 1st Proletarian Division and parts of the Romanija NOP detachment had 59 killed at Pjenovac, while the 2nd Battalion of the 1st Proletarian Division had 15 killed and more wounded at Bijele Vode.

while reading a map and navigating with it may indeed be a secondary matter for the Supreme Commander and not his obligation, one could still find the will and a few hours to learn — and that, in the case of SH members, it should be mandatory. "You never know when you'll run into the enemy and find yourself in a situation where your life is on the line."[153]

Departing from Čevljanovići, the SH ordered — via courier on January 14 — the Staff of the 1st Proletarian Brigade to pull back its four battalions and Support Company from under the assault of German columns and, following the same route, break through to Jahorina via Vlasenica and Prača, before the enemy could close the encirclement. Three days later, from Podromanija, the commander of the 1st Proletarian Brigade was again instructed to hurry with the main body of his brigade (leaving two battalions in eastern Bosnia) to catch up with the SH column heading for Jahorina. However, the brigade staff was delayed and for about ten days had no contact with the SH, causing uncertainty and the darkest suspicions in Foča. Only on January 27, believing they were surrounded, did the brigade — about 750 fighters strong, accompanied by a group of provincial leaders (Rodoljub Čolaković, Isa Jovanović, Uglješa Danilović and others) — begin a march that led over Mount Igman. After 18 hours of continuous movement in -32°C temperatures, they reached Trnovo, on the territory of the Kalinovik Detachment. From there, after a brief rest and following orders from the SH chief, the Proletarians crossed into Foča — without abandoning a single frostbitten or exhausted fighter. Due to their tremendous effort and sacrifice, and the courage and determination of the Proletarians, this three-day march — culminating on the feast of Saint Sava — became one of the epic episodes of the NOB. The significance of the event is not diminished by the fact that, had the 1st Proletarian Brigade's staff been aware that the Germans had already pulled back from Romanija to Sarajevo on January 23 — four days before the march began — the battalions could have safely remained on Romanija or followed in the footsteps of the SH and reached Foča without loss. Likely out of respect for the magnitude of the feat, no one was held accountable for the failure to execute a clear and timely order, the delay in movement, or — most importantly — the irreparable losses. Commander Koča recorded in his war diary that of the 172 frostbitten fighters, six died, and that during the march "no one fell behind, no one got lost, and no equipment or weapons were abandoned,"[154] but that permanent damage remained: 75 frostbitten heels and 33 frostbitten soles, 224 amputated fingers, etc. The Supreme Commander rightly praised the brigade "which, during the German-Ustaša offensive in Bosnia, carried out a brilliant manoeuvre in the harshest cold and thereby ruined the enemy's encirclement plan," but by February 4, in a letter to the Romanija Partisan Detachment, he called the march by its true name — an adventure.[155] In Koča's *Notes on Warfare,* the editor, Proletarian Miloš Vuksanović, offered the following reflection on the event:

[153] From a conversation with R. Vukanović, Belgrade, April 1985.

[154] K. Popović, *Notes on Warfare*, Belgrade 1988, p. 27.

[155] J. Broz, *Collected Works*, Vol. 8, p. 183.

"When it was all over, it became clear that the brigade could have stayed on Romanija! The Germans had halted their offensive on January 23. It was an enormous risk — but it was also an enormous risk to remain in that area with no knowledge of enemy movements.

"Still, the Igman March was a unique victory. The Proletarians showed indomitable will, endurance, and belief in themselves and their cause. The Igman March served many times afterward as inspiration for sudden manoeuvres in the NOB — because it was a feat raised to the level of the sublime."[156]

The essence of what the editor wrote — and what Koča approved for publication in 1988 — had already been clearly stated by the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters 47 years earlier. True, it was said more cautiously at the time, with the utmost respect for both the feat and the sacrifices of the Igman March, as well as for Commander Koča, whom he had first met on Romanija when (at the end of December 1941) he was assuming command of the brigade's leading officer. Convinced that the unavoidable duty and foremost obligation of the Chief of SH was to speak and stand for "the truth and nothing but the truth," he said so publicly in Foča, on February 3, at a meeting before the Supreme Commander — Tito. He emphasized: that it was not only wrong but unacceptable for the SH to go ten days without knowing anything about its only operational unit — the 1st Proletarian Brigade; that the orders of superiors must be obeyed, because — as the Igman March demonstrated — that is the guarantee of avoiding casualties; and that he had personally, in the name of the Supreme Commander, sent couriers twice to instruct the brigade's staff to follow them. Present at the meeting, along with Tito and Arso, were members of the SH who had been in Foča at the time, staff and battalion commanders of the 1st Proletarian Brigade, and a group of provincial leaders from Bosnia and Herzegovina who had arrived in Foča two days earlier, elated and full of praise for Koča's decision and the feat of the Proletarians. Because of that, Arso's objection — although extremely carefully worded and without "calling out" anyone — hit hard the man who was most responsible for the decision to march across Igman and for its consequences, being the commander and thus ultimately responsible for the fate of 750 fighters. Still, Koča did not try to shift the responsibility for the decision onto others who had, indeed, strongly influenced its adoption; he did not explain that the intelligence and reconnaissance services were still underdeveloped, nor did he mention that he had tried to follow the SH with the battalions, per belated orders, but the enemy kept them under constant pressure. He could have said all that — and all of it would have been true — but he knew that none of it could lessen a commander's responsibility for the fate of the unit entrusted to him. He remained silent, then quietly said he believed Arso would not speak that way about the "Igman men" if his own sister, Miluša, had not suffered severe frostbite. The Supreme Commander interrupted the discussion, siding with neither "party" in the dispute — and, in fact, siding with both — but that moment marked the beginning of lasting and increasingly open tension, even a lack of fairness, from K. Popović toward

[156] K. Popović, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

"Arsenije and his crew," as he would soon — with no small amount of cynicism — refer to the operational wing of the SH.[157] The reader will easily detect this in the pages of Koča's *Notes on Warfare*, in Aleksandar Nenadović's *Conversations with Koča*, and in numerous preserved — both published and unpublished — documents. A battery commander and lieutenant from the Spanish Civil War, educated and wise Koča — like other of "our Spaniards" in high positions, such as Kosta Nađ, Ivan Gošnjak, Peko Dapčević, Petar Drapšin, Ivan Rukavina, Vlado Popović, Franc Rozman, Vlado Ćetković, Srećko Manola, Dr. Gojko Nikoliš and others — carried with them, from the start of the NOB until Victory Day, the memory of the betrayal and atrocities committed by officers of the Spanish professional army, constantly reliving the defeats of their International Brigades on the battlefields from Guadalajara to the Ebro. Fearing something similar in their own war, they showed open hostility toward the "former officer" Arso Jovanović.[158]

Exactly four years later, Arso would write in the brochure *Overview of the National Liberation War* that: "The famous march of the 1st Proletarian Brigade from Kreševo, through Rajlovac, Igman and Bjelašnica to Trnovo is one of the most glorious feats of this unit. The march lasted continuously for 18 hours in the bitter cold. Mount Igman will remain a towering monument to the struggle and dedication of our Proletarians. Climbing frozen cliffs, they never left one another behind. There, 160 Proletarians suffered frostbite (the precise number was 172 with serious injuries and about 100 with minor ones — *I.M.*). Those who survived proudly call themselves 'the Igman men.'" Thus Arso, rightly, held great respect for the "Igman men" — both in Foča and later in liberated Belgrade. But his deep respect for them did not free him from professional and moral obligations, nor from the right to regard the Igman March, as a military operation, as a miscalculation, an adventure and an instance of ignorance at the worst possible time — during war. At the same time, the fact that Igman — as a military operation, a test of wartime endurance and sacrifice — was entirely unnecessary, does not diminish the greatness and nobility of the personal and collective sacrifice of the Proletarians and their commander during that heroic campaign.

Foča *(January 25-May 10, 1942)*

From January 25, when the SH arrived in Foča, to May 10, when it was forced to leave under pressure from the offensive Operation Trio — during those 105 days of war — Foča served as the centre of a vast liberated territory of great military and political importance, with significant operational and strategic value for the development of the NOB. This liberated territory, with Foča at its heart, remained throughout that time more or less directly connected with the freed regions of eastern Bosnia, the

[157] From a conversation with V. Dedijer, Belgrade, October 1983.

[158] At a meeting of the CPY "Voroshilovists" cell, in January 1948 in Moscow, the well-known "our Spaniard" General Peko Dapčević will self-critically admit that during the war he had a "irregular, condescending and ignorant" attitude towards the "former officers" and generals of the NOVJ Arso Jovanović, V. Terzić, B. Poljanac and M. Apostolski. AJ, Fund of the CC LCY, XIII, file 53/3.

Sandžak, Montenegro and Herzegovina. It was often referred to as the "Foča Republic" and, during those 105 days, became the most active stronghold of the uprising on the Yugoslav front. From Foča — the "capital" of the free territory — daily direct radio communications with "Deda" in Moscow were maintained (starting February 9); operations were planned; instructions were issued. Orders for the formation of new, large units were written there; main and operational headquarters were appointed; partisan units were reorganized; a network of military-territorial commands was formed; logistical and technical supply systems were established; military courts were founded; hospitals were organized, and more. On February 4, the "Foča Regulations" were announced, establishing the framework for the new people's government, and on February 28, the *Statute of the Proletarian National Liberation Shock Brigades* was issued. Arso — the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters — played a central role in drafting these foundational documents, especially concerning the armed forces, drawing on his expertise in military organization.

On March 19, an Allied military mission arrived in Foča and remained until April 16. From that small town on the Drina, rail, road and postal traffic were organized; propaganda and cultural-entertainment activities were developed; health care was provided for fighters and civilians; the fight against the Chetniks was directed; and influence was exerted over the intensification or calming of dramatic and tragic class confrontations.

Arso worked around the clock, based on the decisions of the highest military and political leadership, to resolve issues in his field of expertise. Drawing lessons from the recently ended enemy offensive, he proposed the creation of operational headquarters for eastern Bosnia, Bosanska Krajina and Herzegovina to enable easier and more effective command of detachments. By early February, the first commanders of these new headquarters had already been appointed: Slobodan Princip, Kosta Nađ and Air Force Lieutenant Đorđe Putica. Committed to the essential principle of subordination, Arso advocated that these headquarters be subordinated to the Main Staff of Bosnia and Herzegovina, although this was not fully enforced. For the *Statute of the Proletarian National Liberation Shock Brigades*, he drafted the sections on military discipline, organization, unit structure and hierarchy. In early February, with the help of specialists, he prepared the structure of the Main Logistics Division and defined its tasks; wrote an order for the mobilization of military conscripts aged 18 to 45; and issued instructions for defending the free territory and maintaining peace and order in the rear. He also organized and directed combat actions of seven volunteer detachments and proposed the appointment of their commanders and chiefs of staff — thus beginning the staff career of Lieutenant Vaso Jovanović within the Drina Detachment.

From the period of the SH's operations in Foča, ninety-seven documents have been preserved that were written — and for the most part signed — by its Chief, Arso. The majority of these have been published. On January 27 alone, he signed three: an order to the Staff of the 1st Proletarian National Liberation Shock Brigade to transfer its units to Foča for rest and treatment of frostbite casualties; an order to K. Nađ to organize the blockade and liberation of Kalinovik; and a directive to the Staff of the



105 days of war in Foča: on the site of today's museum stood the "Gertl" Hotel, headquarters of the Supreme Headquarters.

Kraljevo Battalion to operate in the Prača Valley and toward Pale. On March 1, he wrote the order mandating compulsory professional military instruction, with a focus on training the staffs at all levels. Among the first tasks was learning how to read a topographic map — and those "first in line" were the members of the SH themselves. This was followed by military instruction for women comrades and staff personnel, weapons training for handling Italian and German automatic arms, live-fire exercises for youth company fighters and the organization of courses for medics. Compared with planning and conducting operations on the Kolašin Front, toward Bratunac, in Herzegovina and so on — which were the Chief's primary duties — these "military enterprises" (in the sense of undertakings and efforts) may have seemed marginal or even unsuitable for someone in such a high position. But ultimately, they fell under the domain of operations staff and served as a safeguard against surprises which, as he often said, "in war always mean the sacrifice of young lives."

Arso used the knowledge and energy of military officer Pero S. Popivoda, the SH's chief quartermaster, to help establish the logistics service — thus regulating the supply of food, clothing, footwear and other necessities to the army, and organizing the rear to support the front. Arso provided the initial guidelines and edited the final version of the logistics regulations, insisting that a structured supply method be put in place: through voluntary in-kind or monetary contributions from the people; cash purchases; requisitioning; and confiscation. A daily ration for fighters was also prescribed, con-

sisting of 11 essential items — from 750 grams of bread to ten cigarettes — though this was impossible to secure at the time. It was estimated that food needs until the next harvest amounted to about five million rations — an amount no one could feasibly store as a wartime reserve. Yet the ration chart was drawn up with a different, better time in mind — a time they hoped would come. Some, even among the SH members, mocked the feasibility of implementing this ration chart amid the extreme scarcity in this frozen, barren wilderness. Arso, however, paid no mind to the ridicule, viewing the matter differently — as part of broader SH efforts to organize and regulate the military and its internal life.

Together with the SH's and 1st Proletarian Brigade's medical leadership — doctors Gojko Nikoliš and Boro Božović — and a group of surgeons, Arso organized the treatment of the 172 "Igman men," primarily at the "Northern Hospital" and in private homes. Among them was his sister, Miluša, along with 27 other fighters from the 2nd Battalion. After the removal of necrotic tissue caused by frostbite, she was left without toes and with permanent foot damage — and would, a true martyr, walk the rest of the war on her heels. Almost every one of them underwent surgery — all without anaesthesia. Arso frequently visited the wounded. With Miluša, to distract her from thoughts about her injuries and their consequences for a young woman of marriageable age, he would recount memories from their youth. Lying beside her was the gravely injured Stoja Vukašinović, a girl from Piperi. Sensing that her death was near, she asked Arso to tell her stories about her homeland's mountains and spring waters, to sing about the girl Milijana, and to bring her a quince, a pomegranate and a sweet apple. Couriers from Montenegro brought the quince and pomegranate, while the apples arrived from Herzegovina. Thanks to the generosity of Zora, the kind-hearted wife of Veljko Dragićević, cheese and cream from their homeland were sent to the patients in a sheepskin pouch. From the commander of Foča, Mitar Bakić — from who knows what sort of hidden reserves — Arso received a fragrant bar of "Elida" soap for each of them, himself and Senka. These were rare and precious gifts. He brought them, as tokens of kindness, to Stoja and Miluša — and the two young women were genuinely delighted. Still, nothing more could help Stoja. She passed away on February 12, without a cry — her heart gave out.[159] Her comrades mourned her sincerely. Arso attended the funeral. That evening, by Miluša's bedside, he did not hide a hard-earned man's tear.[160]

Arso also attended the funeral of Slovene Anica Pibernik, who died from blood poisoning, the mother of twelve-year-old Albin — known to everyone as Korchagin. He also saw off little Jovica, from Gornji Milanovac, to his final resting place. Tito, his immediate and sole superior, perhaps not fully understanding local customs and mentality, jokingly told him in front of other members of the SH that he "seemed like a priest." Arso replied, with a hint of bitterness, that he was doing it at the expense of

[159] V. Dedijer in his *Diary* renamed her to Stojna.

[160] A fighter of strong will, Miluša (some called her Miljuša), nicknamed Igmanka, quickly recovered and then helped with the heaviest wounded in Piva, in the Bosnian Krajina, on the Neretva and Sutjeska; she would become the commissioner for hospitals of the NOVJ in Italy.

his already too-short breaks from wartime duties, in the role of an ordinary man, not "God's emissary on Earth"; that this was a custom from his home region — "an opportunity to say thank you and goodbye to a comrade, to pay final respects."[161]

In Foča, full of the wounded and refugees, there were still moments of joy in life. On Sunday, February 8, the town hosted six weddings — celebrations that, in a way, belonged to all of Foča and its liberators. There was singing and gunfire. During the festivities, the guests at the wedding of a volunteer from Commander Gojko Krezović's detachment — for whom he was the best man — went overboard with celebratory shooting. Sreten Žujović-Crni, a member of the SH — a well-meaning and honourable man, but a strict ascetic and extreme "party-liner" — at one point ordered the arrest of the most trigger-happy guests, claiming they were "wasting valuable ammunition as precious as bread." Arso, no less of an ascetic and a zealous guardian of wartime needs — especially the scarce reserves of ammunition — intervened to have the wedding guests released and calmed Crni down, reasoning that all these joyful people, if they kept their heads on their shoulders, would win new ammunition later; let them celebrate — after all, people don't get married every day, especially not during war. Still, he sent a courier, Straja Kočović, with a message for the guests to cut back on the shooting, since the next day they'd be heading to the front, "where every bullet will be worth the life of a partisan."[162] He did this because the "responsible commander" of the town, M. Bakić, was busy preparing to travel with Marijan Stilinović to Zagreb, where they were to work "on military matters." For their mission, Arso had compiled all available intelligence on the armed forces of the NDH on the Eastern Front, especially on those units being trained in Austria and Germany under Wehrmacht officers. That trip to Zagreb was eventually cancelled, however — due to Mitar's departure with Đilas to assist the provincial leadership in Montenegro.

The first public appearance of Arso's wife, Ksenija — the new member of the Agitprop section at the SH — was marked by jokes and words of encouragement. On March 29, "in the village of Bunovi, she delivered her first speech."

There was celebration, too, at the People's Cultural Centre. On March 29, Arso had another "misunderstanding" with Crni — otherwise a man with whom he had a close relationship both at that time and throughout the war, likely because Crni was the only member of the SH's "permanent staff" who was genuinely interested in military matters, understood them properly and resolved them effectively. He was a man of his word, dependable as a friend. That evening, Foča's cultural troupe performed a show made up mostly of songs, dances and skits. In the front row, between Arso and Crni, sat the popular Rifat Burdžović Tršo, who had just come from a rather sharp conversation with Tito regarding his alleged "softness toward class enemies in the Sandžak." Then, as one of the acts, a *sevdalinka* suddenly echoed from the stage: "Oh, my *kaduna,* let me kiss your lips and cheeks..." The hall erupted in shouts and applause — the audience jumped to their feet, many screamed with delight. Accord-

[161] From a conversation with A. Ranković, October 1973, in Belgrade.

[162] In more detail: L. Božović, *War Notes and Memories of a Former Partisan*, Belgrade 1986, pp. 38-47.

ing to Dedijer, if someone had fired into the ceiling, people wouldn't have known whether it was the partisans or the Chetniks of royalist Captain Sergei Mikhailovich — who had left behind not only a trail of atrocities against the Muslim population as local commander, but also a reputation as a thug in taverns, in the streets and in the homes of Foča's residents. That outburst snapped Arso out of his thoughts about the telephone and written reports from the Proletarian Operational Group, which, under Koča Popović's command, was at that very moment advancing toward Bratunac. Aleksandar Ranković had been sent to that group "for 15 to 20 days" as a delegate from the SH. Tršo remained pensive, likely thinking about what he and Tito had said to one another. Crni, however, immediately jumped on stage and began shouting that "we're not going to raise our youth on songs like that."

The young people of Foča — until then confident that this old *sevdalinka* would be the highlight of their program — were thrown off, unsure what the leadership would think or say about the rest of the show: for instance, the song *Ah, how tall is Mount Jahorina* or the skit *Old Man Vujadin.* Confronted with an extremely awkward situation, Arso gestured for Crni to step down from the stage. Once Crni had returned to his seat, Arso explained that this cheerful youth would — very likely as soon as the next evening — perform the program successfully, so long as Agitprop removed anything inappropriate. And the day after that, they'd be headed to the front. After the show, he took Crni by the arm and, walking with him and Tršo toward the hotel, remarked that these young people — hungry for life and love — were singing an old and beloved *sevdalinka,* one admittedly tinged with gentle eroticism, while longing for something beautiful like love to happen to them. Meanwhile, the two of them — and a few others — "already have someone to kiss and nibble on." (Along with Arso and Crni, present with their wives were Pavle Savić and Veljko Dragićević. Crni and Tito each had a "comrade in a skirt" beside them.) One shouldn't judge the behaviour of young Foča locals too harshly, he said — they were mostly fighters, council delegates, and apprentices working in some forty production units that supported 3,000 fighters and just as many impoverished locals. War had deprived them of even the most basic joys. Tršo, a great connoisseur and admirer of the spiritual life of the people in that region, merely mumbled that the song in question was an old and well-known *sevdalinka,* with nothing unhealthy or unnatural in it — let alone obscene. They all agreed on that point.

In Dedijer's room, they were joined by British Major Terence Atherton, who had arrived in Foča on March 19 and was welcomed warmly. He chatted away in decent Serbian, once again recounting how he had left Malta for Yugoslavia on a submarine — a mission that was an adventure in itself due to the dense network of German naval traps. They had gone in "blind," with no reliable contacts on land or sea, relying only on courage, resourcefulness and luck. Due to a violent storm, they couldn't land on the Montenegrin coast, so they continued to Šibenik, where they sank an Italian ship, then on to Pula, where they "took down" an Italian submarine. Only afterward did they land at Peražića Dol — the same spot where Captain Bill Hudson had come ashore the previous September. Chewing walnuts in silence, the others listened, convinced he

was exaggerating, but out of respect for the guest — and especially because he was a foreigner — no one interrupted him. Only Arso, rising to return to work in the SH and try to re-establish phone contact with Ranković, jokingly remarked that had they made it to Trieste, they probably would have sunk a battleship too. The clever Englishman understood the jab and merely smiled politely.[163]

In the SH, Crni was responsible for the development of the National Liberation Detachments (NOO), and he got himself "entangled" in another "incident" — mostly comical — which Arso was also drawn into resolving. One day, Crni told Slobodan "Krcun" Penezić, who was in charge of intelligence and security affairs there, that he had received a note from "former general" Ljubo Novaković — who, on the surface, was enjoying the hospitality of the Supreme Commander and the trust of the people's government. The note said that local peasants were complaining they couldn't take part in the upcoming spring fieldwork campaign because they had no one to shoe their horses, sharpen their hoes or repair their ploughs. They had an excellent blacksmith, Ranko Popadić, but he was now a committee member and therefore unable to do his regular job. The villagers had asked the general to help "straighten things out, if at all possible." The general forwarded the request to the "appropriate authority." Krcun read the note, jotted something down and commented that, according to his "people" who were keeping tabs on the general, that "shady character" was meddling in matters that didn't concern him and was involved in "unauthorized activities." Due to the sensitive nature of the issue, they agreed that Crni should discuss it with Luka Božović, the president of the local Natonal Liberation Committee, while the intelligence service would investigate who "on the ground was cosying up to the general." Božović was "taken to task" for his lack of vigilance — not knowing who all his committee members were or whom they were collaborating with. Krcun's "moles" discovered that the villagers, in their conversation with the general, had explained they both had and didn't have a blacksmith — they had one on paper but not at work, while the people's government was pressuring them to plough and sow every patch of land. The general passed on their plea as their petition and his own request. In casual conversation, Krcun later asked Arso — from a distance — what sorts of topics the general brought up during their walks together, and why "that man" was discussing "agricultural policy" with the peasants. Arso, sensing that the general was under surveillance, gave a wry smile and said that he was a household man, had family and land near Spuž, and understood who should be doing what when "the lark sings." To head off any potential embarrassment for the proud general, Arso discussed the "case" with Crni in Ranković's absence, and it seems the issue was smoothed over. In fact, Crni was left only to add this remark to the general's "petition": "Nonsense — a general intervening on behalf of an NOO member who is a representative and bearer of the people's government, and upon whom depends the organization and leadership of the rear. Strange!" That document — seemingly trivial in content, but in essence highly characteristic of a certain era and the people within it — was preserved, likely not by

[163] V. Dedijer's note for March 29, 1942, expanded upon in a conversation with him in October 1983 in Belgrade.

the will of its participants, but thanks to diligent archivists. It still provokes both a smile and a touch of melancholy — fifty-eight years later.[164]

In addition to all his important and urgent duties, the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters also paid special attention to the nutrition of the troops — fully aware of how sensitive an issue food is for people under the stress of war. Two brief examples illustrate this. First — sometime after the Igman March — he saw members of the 2nd Battalion Headquarters of the 1st Proletarian Brigade standing in line for food with their soldiers, mess tins in hand. He called over the commander, R. Vukanović, and asked what was going on. Vukanović explained that, during a battalion conference, the fighters had criticized the leadership for lapses that led to losses at Bijele Vode. They had then insisted that all officers — among other things — be present



For a successful wartime journey of the Foča Youth Company.

[164] AJ, Fund of the CC CPY, reg. no. 155/42.

with their soldiers at food distribution, standing in line with mess tins like everyone else. While criticism had touched on other issues, the focus was now on food. The SH Chief responded that the commander and his staff must, above all, care for every man — and that each fighter must feel their concern and affection — but that they also had much more urgent and significant tasks to address than spending half an hour standing in the food line. He said that true equality between commander and fighter in terms of nutrition was indeed important, but was not shown by standing in line — it was shown by eating from the same pot. He ordered that food be delivered to the commander, political commissar and their deputies by couriers — and that this be carefully explained to the Proletarians. If there were any complaints, he said, he would personally come and speak to them.[165]

He refused to eat specially prepared — and, as believed, slightly better — food. Instead, his courier brought him the same meals the fighters ate, in an Italian military mess tin, straight from the same pot. He strongly advocated for the strict enforcement of the order that bread for some 6,000 fighters and Foča residents be made in each of the town's ten bakeries according to a set recipe: 70 per cent ground dried pears and 30 per cent cornmeal. Meals were to be prepared in military and communal kitchens and equalized in caloric value.[166] Each person received a slice of that sticky, sweet-tasting "bread," and Arso joined that army of eaters, never allowing — as some others did — that real bread or a richer stew be brought to him.

Eyewitnesses Vladimir Dedijer and Luka Božović recorded the formation of two youth companies from Foča, made up of workers, students, residents of the children's home and young farmers, all aged 15 to 18. They were ceremoniously sent off to join the 1st Proletarian Brigade — straight to the front lines. The commissar of one of those companies, Proletarian Pero Damjanović, recalled how the SH Chief had called him into his office, showed him their future positions on a large wall map, and spoke to him about the prospects of the struggle. It was also noted how Arso, at a large public gathering on the Fairgrounds, called on the youth to join the fight. Just as he was building momentum, an aircraft suddenly flew overhead at low altitude. Most of the crowd scattered, though perhaps a third remained before whom he continued speaking calmly. The "sky watchers" later reported that it may have been a civilian flight headed for Mostar. While he continued speaking, the crowd reassembled. That evening, a social gathering was held, and in the days that followed, the 1st Proletarian Brigade officially received its youth company.

Details were also recorded about football matches between teams from the SH, the Proletarian units and staff support. Arso played for the first team — reportedly with great energy and a bit of talent — in midfield, where he worked particularly well with Crni and Lola.

A large public gathering was also held at the Fairgrounds to mark the anniversary of the fascist aggression against Yugoslavia. From early morning, columns began arriv-

[165] From a conversation with R. Vujošević, in September 1995 in Belgrade.

[166] L. Božović, *Foča Partisan Republic,* Foča 1982, 124.

ing — with flags unfurled and songs on their lips. The first to speak was Father Vlado Zečević, a member of the SH, who wore a prominent cross on his cap and paid tribute to the victims of Serbia in the anti-fascist struggle. Then Arso spoke, condemning "the clique of generals and the old Yugoslavia that had treacherously betrayed the people," followed by Crni and several others. As usual, the event went on for a while and ended in song and dance.

To mark May Day, sporting competitions were held — the so-called "Partisan Olympics" — in which Arso and most SH members participated, to reassure the public that the war situation around the town was not dangerous. In the afternoon, a large public rally was held in the warehouse of the tobacco station. The keynote speaker was Ivo Lola Ribar, who gave a "fiery address" following the election of an honorary presidium, consisting of: "Stalin, Kalinin, Voroshilov, Timoshenko, Budyonny, Molotov, Tito and all members of our CC." After Lola's speech, a cultural performance took place. In the front row sat Tito, to his right Arso, and then the others.[167]

Yet breaks between battles were becoming fewer and shorter, especially for the busiest man in the SH — its chief. As Dedijer recorded, on the night of April 7, Arso "was on the telephone all night." A battle for Rogatica was underway, led by the Proletarians under Koča's command. The Supreme Commander himself had gone there, accompanied by Dr. Vladimir Velebit, who had arrived with Lola "on courtesy duty" from Zagreb, as well as British Major Terence Atherton. In the morning, visibly sleep-deprived, Arso said, "Four Proletarian battalions have been charging all night — blood everywhere." He added, "The town wasn't taken, but fortunately our losses were small. Now we move to Borač and then west. Borač must be taken, and luckily there are no fortifications — because for us, it's unwise to attack fortified towns. We've had bad experiences, we don't have artillery, there's little ammunition, and we must not abuse the courage and determination of fighters by sending them into attacks with five bullets — or even unarmed. And the enemy has learned to entrench, has developed intelligence services, and so the element of surprise is gone."[168]

Here is another passage from Dedijer's *Diary*, dated the evening of April 20, at a time when Ustaša and Domobran units had begun their offensive toward Romanija and Glasinac several days ahead of the scheduled start of Operation Trio:

"We're sitting in Arso's room. Right now Arso, Koča and Lola are discussing how to respond to the Ustaša offensive. You have to stop it — resist it — but there's no ammunition. Arso sees the difficulties: no ammunition, no food, bad weather for marching, and politically this region is underdeveloped. Koča says our units are increasingly scattered. He wants to gather all forces on the left bank of the Drina. That way, we could mount an offensive and capture ammunition and weapons. Crni disagrees with Koča — says plans must always be made according to actual conditions. Arso tries to find a middle ground. He says the sector between Goražde and Orahov should be defended by a division — according to the rules of the Yugoslav Army. Of course, in our situation, things must be approached differently. The discussion goes on. The mood is firm, the Partisan spirit unshaken, and belief in victory strong." And, Dedijer adds, Lola jokes: "Our position is dialectical — you must defend but can't, you must shoot but can't — because there's no ammunition."

[167] M. Stilinović, *Rebellions and Resistances (War Diary)*, Zagreb 1969, p. 160.

[168] V. Dedijer, note in *Diary* for April 7, 1942. This explains Arso's deep caution, comprehensive preparations, and even doubts when later Tito explicitly ordered him to take fortified garrisons: Bugojno, Livno, Kupres, Bosansko Grahovo...

There was a severe shortage of ammunition, mines and shells — due in part to the heavy use during the assault on Borač, which was launched on April 17, 1942. The attack on this strong Ustaša stronghold had been carefully prepared. In fact, the operation targeted a cluster of twelve villages and hamlets in the Upper Neretva region, inhabited by a Muslim population and serving as a rallying point for about 1,400 armed Ustaše — around 700 of them being "elite Ustaše" from the village of Gornji Borač, and the rest men who had fled Foča armed, ahead of the Chetniks under Captain Sergei Mikhailovich. All of them, as the expression went, were "villains born of evil fathers and worse mothers." The plan and order for the attack were formulated by Arso. From a military perspective, he deemed the operation necessary to punish the perpetrators of atrocities, who — as he put it — had "overfilled their bag of sins" with their bloody raids on Serbian villages. However, he also set two operational goals: 1. To seize the initiative from the Chetniks and prepare as effectively as possible for a likely offensive by the occupiers; and 2. To eliminate this Ustaša stronghold, deeply embedded in liberated territory and located in an extremely sensitive area, in order to preserve the route for the breakthrough of the SH and the main partisan forces into the Prozor Basin and onward toward Bosanska Krajina. This second objective was emphasized to the Main Staff of Croatia on April 7: "We have undertaken measures to clear the Upper Neretva of Ustaše nests and from here would reach the area around Konjic. From there, through Prozor, we must open a corridor to reach the region of Mrkonjić Grad and establish a direct link with Bosanska Krajina. Via Konjic we would make contact with you. Therefore, this indicated direction is of primary importance for force manoeuvring — transferring from one region to another. In doing so, we would connect the liberated territories of the Sandžak, eastern Bosnia, Montenegro, Herzegovina, Krajina and Croatia. Thus, all units must intensify their actions along this axis."[169]

That was the primary strategic reason for the decision to thoroughly eliminate the Ustaša stronghold at Borač — which is why the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters personally held the reins in planning and preparing the operation. According to Arso's assessments and strategic thinking, this was a favourable direction for the movement of the SH and the units accompanying it. As a General Staff officer trained to carry all major operational variants in both mind and map, Arso judged that the chances of returning to Serbia — which still held particular military and police importance in Wehrmacht plans — were extremely slim. The conditions for survival in their current position were highly unfavourable, and a breakthrough toward Albania and Kosovo was unrealistic. Thus, his only viable option was a westward advance along the "central Balkan spine" — toward the homelands of the predominantly Serbian, fiercely

[169] AVII, file 102, reg. no. 1/2.

combative, patriotic and freedom-loving populations of Bosanska Krajina, Dalmatia, Banija and Kordun. For them, the fight for survival was inseparable from the fight against the occupiers and against nazi-fascism. That is why, on his working map for the Borač operation, Arso "drew in" a corridor for the westward advance of the main partisan forces — toward the hearths of the Serbian people, where they could find safe refuge and rest.

The attack was well prepared and secured. Around 2,000 fighters were engaged in its execution — Proletarians and members of partisan and volunteer units from Herzegovina, Montenegro and eastern Bosnia. The attack was originally scheduled for April 12, but Arso postponed it by five days due to the slow assembly of partisan units. As a knowledgeable student of national history and the people's army, Arso was convinced that, in the case of Borač, nothing could be left to chance. The people of Borač had a reputation for cruelty from earlier wars as well — remembered as such by the commanders of King Nikola's army when they passed through the Gacko and Nevesinje area before the Battle of Vučji Do (1876). On the second day of Christmas in 1942, the Chetniks had also attempted an assault on Borač. Major Boško Todorović, commander of Chetnik troops in eastern Bosnia, had come to Herzegovina to coordinate plans for the attack, but there weren't enough forces to take both Donji and Gornji Borač. The people of Borač took bloody revenge on the Serbian population, destroying everything they held dear. In March, the SH, trying to avoid bloodshed and to separate innocent locals from the Ustaše, issued a "Proclamation to the Muslims of Borač and the surrounding area," calling on those "who have not stained their hands with blood" to join the partisan and volunteer army — or to return "to your hearths and your fields. Rebuild your destroyed homes. Work your land in peace."[170] When there was no response, Arso requested that representatives from the Operational Staff for Herzegovina be sent to the SH to coordinate unit cooperation for the attack on Borač. Petar Drapšin dispatched the political commissar and deputy commander of the North Herzegovinian Detachment, Milija Stanišić and Dukica Grahovac. Stanišić later published a detailed account of their journey to Foča and their stay at the SH. They travelled with a strengthened escort and by day — at Arso's insistence, for safety — as enemy ambushes were frequently reported along that 50-kilometre route. Here is a passage from that account:

"On the second day of our march, we neared Foča. In the villages we passed through, we noticed something strange: armed men wearing caps with the tricolour — but no red star! As we passed, Dukica greeted them with the usual 'Death to fascism.' They said nothing. Dukica frowned and asked me, 'What's going on here, commissar?' In the next village, he refused to greet them at all. Instead, he marched straight up to them and asked sharply, 'Are you partisans or Chetniks?' An older man among them, looking surprised, replied, 'We are the volunteer army.' Dukica, stunned by this answer, said nothing to them but turned to me and muttered: 'They'd meet the god of volunteers if they were in our Herzegovina!'"

[170] AJ, Fund of the CC CPY, file 1942/262.

He also described meeting the SH Chief, whom he had known from preparations for the Battle of Pljevlja: "He received us and seated us at his desk. He began discussing the situation in Herzegovina, but his telephone kept ringing. He was talking to comrades in Goražde, Ustikolina and Kalinovik. For us 'real' partisans, that was remarkable. A telephone! That's a state! Suddenly, Arso stood up, startled! A man walked briskly through the room wearing a smart blue wool uniform, polished boots and a German Parabellum pistol at his belt. Once he entered the next room, I asked Arso, 'Who is that comrade?' He replied: 'That's Tito, the General Secretary of the Party and Supreme Commander!' As soon as he said that, I had the thought that I should go see him and ask for clarification on the current situation of the NOP, since I was due to give a political report at the party conference of northern Herzegovina as soon as I returned. I told Arso this and asked if he could arrange a meeting. Arso went to ask, and when he came back, he said: 'Stari said you should come at 8 p.m.'"

Stanišić had a three-hour conversation with Tito, which he experienced with great enthusiasm and recorded in detail. One of the key exchanges — concerning the commissar's observation that the Party line in this area seemed "softer than in Herzegovina," pointing to the existence of volunteer units — included the Supreme Commander's reply: "I believe that such units shouldn't be formed in your area. Things are more intense there. The Chetniks, as collaborators of the occupiers, must be crushed at any cost."

The delegates from Herzegovina arrived at Arso's office the next morning. "Commander of the Kalinovik Detachment, Rade Hamović, was already there. Together, and in full agreement, we quickly developed the plan for the attack on Borač. Roughly 2,000 partisans would participate in an assault launched from a circular formation. From the south and east, the Herzegovinian forces and two battalions of Montenegrin partisans would attack. From the north and west, the Kalinovik Detachment and one battalion of the 2nd Proletarian Brigade would strike."[171]

The attack began overnight on April 17 — "a Friday, the Turkish holy day." The first person to bring word of Borač's fall to Foča, after two days of fierce fighting, was the teacher Sveta Nešić, a native of Jagodina and a wounded company commissar. His words were recorded: "All of Borač is in flames. A huge herd of livestock was captured. Much butter and honey. The leader of the Borač group was caught alive in Šipovica. He was decked out in Herzegovinian-Bosnian finery. Borač stank. They had looted enormous amounts of livestock. Entire hills of garbage in front of every house. The Bosnian forces entered the fight an hour and a half late. They were led by some Muslims who deliberately misdirected them. Our forces were met with machine-gun fire. That is how Borač — the terror of this region — was destroyed." Reports soon followed that about 7,000 head of livestock and six wagons of grain had been captured — all previously looted from Serbian villages within at least a 50-kilometre radius. These were welcome news. However, alongside the 45 killed and 95 wounded on the partisan side, a more troubling fact was noted — that the success had been only partial. Arso, in his

[171] M. Stanišić, *Collection 1941-1942 in the Testimonies of Participants of the NOP*, Vol. 11, p. 643.

later writings and post-war reflections, would return to this as a key lesson in wartime practice. His operational plan had called for an immediate pursuit of any enemy survivors, but this was not carried out, allowing a significant number of Ustaše to escape toward Konjic and Nevesinje.[172]

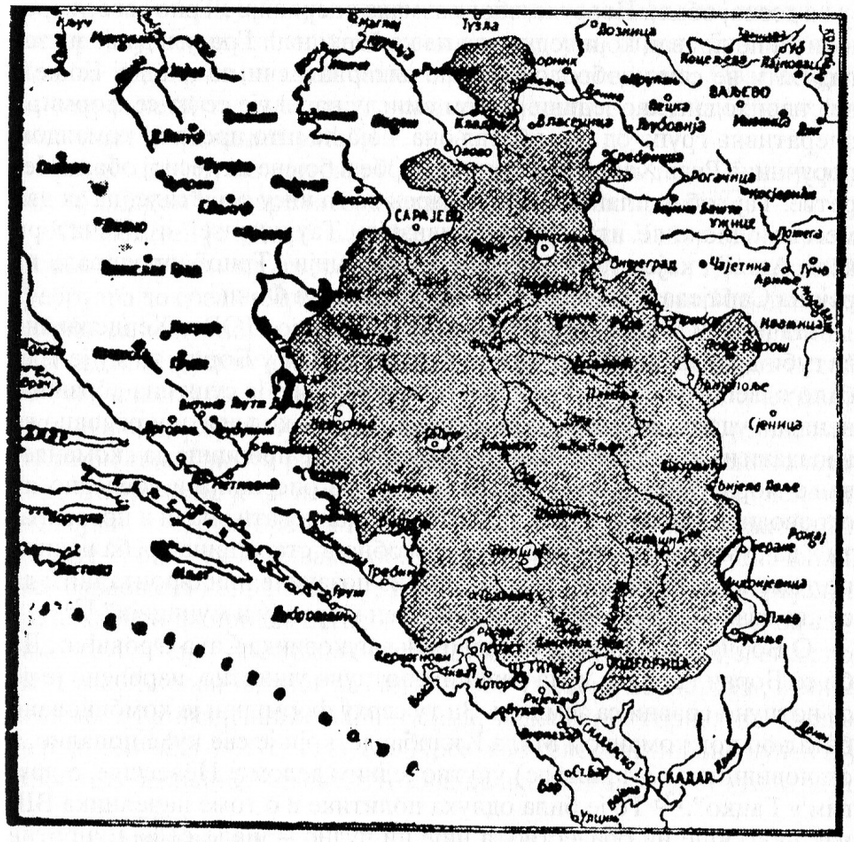
Right after the operation, following Arso's order, a staff consultation was held among the units that had participated in the battle. The goal was to conduct a prompt assessment and immediately launch a pursuit toward Konjic to liberate that strategically important area. However, the Operational Staff for Herzegovina disagreed — or rather hesitated between two options: pursuing the retreating Ustaše or attacking Fazlagića Kula, a group of Muslim villages south of Gacko, where around 1,000 adult residents had committed major atrocities in nearby Serbian villages. Caught in indecision about which course to take, the Operational Staff lost valuable time, missing the ideal moment to pursue the Ustaše retreating toward Konjic — and never launched an attack on Fazlagića Kula either, even though it was the last Ustaša stronghold in Herzegovina. Arso made his position clear in a letter dated April 22, reminding the staff — consistent with the principles of warfare he followed throughout the war — that: "A defeated enemy must be pursued to the last breath and the last bullet." He added: "Those who fled Borač would have triggered panic among other Ustaše along the Konjic route. That route is crucial for us." He also reminded them of the lesson learned at Pljevlja — that the houses in Fazlagića Kula were stone-built and that their garrisons could endure a long siege. The units being considered for the attack had "a few artillery and mortar shells, useful only to demoralize the enemy." He warned them: There was no possibility of a swift assault; no hope of surprise; and no conditions for a full blockade of Fazlagića Kula. He concluded firmly: "We've laid out all the facts — now choose wisely. Once a decision is made, it must be carried out decisively, without hesitation."[173] That line paraphrased a key principle from Arso's military manual, *Tactics of the Infantry Battalion,* in which he addressed commanders directly: "Carefully and responsibly assess all relevant factors — especially force ratios, the possibility of surprise and manoeuvring conditions — and then make a decision and act decisively. Even the most brilliant decision is worthless without firm execution."

In Arso's analysis, near the end, he requests a report on "the possibilities of manoeuvring larger partisan formations along the routes: Konjic-Prozor-Bugojno-Mrkonjić Grad, and across the Neretva toward Dinara and, north of it, through the valleys of Duvno, Livno and the Grmeč mountain range." This request was based on his own assessment of the enemy offensive, which had begun with the clearing of the Glasinac and Romanija regions, and which could lead to the loss of free territory in southeastern Bosnia — including Goražde, Foča and Čajniče. Arso factored in the potential need

[172] Some distinguished historians from Herzegovina, from 1948 until today (2000), in scientific meetings and in contributions on the NOP in their homeland, emphasize how the Chief of Staff developed the plan for the attack on Borač, worked out the cooperation of the units and required its analysis — by the design, authorization and order of the Supreme Commander, thereby attempting to dispute Arso R. Jovanović's merit, although the task was successfully completed.

[173] AVII, file 2-A, reg. no. 29/3.

to shift the focus of operations westward, into Bosnia and toward the Dinara region, where combat conditions were believed to be more favourable. In a postscript — following further deliberation and broader consultations — he orders that the attack on Fazlagića Kula be cancelled, stating: "We cannot risk everything. We must preserve the lives of our fighters. The Kula, Avtovac and Gacko are under blockade. All those bands should be ambushed and destroyed. In open combat, you hold all the advantages." He concludes this tactical lesson with a note that "no evacuation could be carried out from Fazlagića Kula — there would be no benefit to you." The letter was



Скица 3. — Размера 1:3,500.000. — Ослобођена територија у Црној Гори, Херцеговини и Источној Босни крајем 1941 и почетком 1942 године (црно извучено: непријатељски гарнизони и јединице)

delivered by the SH's logistics officer, who had been sent to assist in the evacuation and distribution of spoils from Borač. According to Dedijer, these included four wagons of grain, 1,500 head of cattle, 5,000 sheep and enough rugs "to cover half of Foča," among other goods. Arso ordered the supplies be moved to Goransko and Ćurevo as an untouchable reserve of food for both the army and the people, with a portion set aside for the wounded. The food stockpiles were also to be preserved in case the enemy offensive advanced into the Foča region, in which case the SH and its units would rely on the terrain and forces of the Herzegovina Operational Staff — including their food resources.

With the launch of the enemy's Operation Trio, Arso set out on April 24 to personally direct operations along the front from Jahorina to Čajniče. He periodically returned to Foča, from where — in a lengthy analysis signed by Tito on May 2 — he again emphasized the urgency of strong and immediate action by the Herzegovina Operational Staff on the right bank of the Neretva River. Increasingly convinced that the route westward toward Mrkonjić Grad and beyond would be not just a backup in case of disaster, but the only viable strategic direction, he ordered the formation of an operational group of eight battalions, under the command of Lieutenant Rade Hamović, which was to launch combat operations on the Neretva's right bank as soon as possible. This well-conceived plan was delayed by two months due to interference from the Italian divisions "Taurinense" and "Cacciatori delle Alpi," which were engaged in Operation Trio and pushing forward from the Sarajevo and Nevesinje areas toward Kalinovik and Foča.

Arso, as Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, rebuked the leadership of the National Liberation Army in Herzegovina for losing precious time, for being carried away by the victory at Borač, and for taking too long to settle on a tactical approach whose essence was: "rapid, surprise strikes, night attacks; surround the enemy and regularly strike from the rear." He stressed that command must always be anticipatory, based on "a series of preplanned operations carried out consistently," and that "to command means to foresee." He insisted that the skill, courage and competence of a commander should be judged by how they engage the enemy — from behind or frontally, and that every action must result in spoils of weapons and ammunition.[174]

On Borač, and a detail from the testimony of Colonel Savo Orović: "In order to completely destroy Borač as a stronghold of reaction, an order was given to level it entirely. A combined battalion under the command of Milo Kilibarda was formed for that purpose. He set all the houses on fire and sent the population — three to four thousand people — partly to Nevesinje and partly to Gacko."[175] This was a political decision, and the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters wasn't even informed about it — unsurprising, as it was known to go against his convictions and prior orders. While Arso did insist that the criminals — whom he called "Turks" — should be punished accordingly, he also demanded protection for the innocent and misled "poor folk." In

[174] AVII, file 3, reg. no. 19/5.

[175] S. Orović, *War Diary 1941-1945*, Belgrade 1972, p. 213.

his letter dated April 14, just three days before the attack, he ordered the Operational Staff: "Against civilians and those who surrender without resistance, do not allow any acts of brutality."

Soon after, the benefits of this — even if only partial — victory became clear, as Arso would later write in his *Overview of the National Liberation War* four years later:

"Before the advance of the main strike group, in April we eliminated the strong Ustaša stronghold of Borač in the Upper Neretva valley. That den of criminals, buried deep in the canyon, had done great harm to our people in Herzegovina. By destroying that outpost, located on the left flank of our route, we secured our advance across the Lelija mountain range. This movement ended in the liberation of a significant area in the western part of our country, where the strike brigades linked up with partisan forces from the Krajina and Croatia. Judging by its results, this manoeuvre can be considered one of the most important actions in the history of our war."[176]

One of the most pressing topics of daily discussion in Foča was the situation with "Deda" — and especially the long-awaited hope of "Russian aid."[177]

"Deda" had been informed about the construction of an airfield at Luburić polje near Sokolac, and later at Jezersko Field beneath Durmitor. From February 19 to mid-April, Moša Pijade kept watch there day and night, along with a duty team, awaiting the frequently promised flyover or landing of Soviet planes from Foča — particularly parachute landings. But the Russians never came. Moscow had been asked primarily for weapons and ammunition, but also for a stronger radio station, with the argument that "a large number of men" could be mobilized with "sufficient military equipment." They also requested "a few dozen paratroopers," "several military instructors" and even "Sturmoviks" (ground-attack aircraft), which — as Moša Pijade claimed from Žabljak — could be supplied with fuel and used to bomb enemy positions. Medical supplies were requested, especially medication for typhus (both spotted and abdominal). These items were promised occasionally via "Deda," but never arrived — for entirely rational reasons: the airfields were too far away; air routes were too dangerous; and there was not enough fuel at the partisans' airstrips. As someone trained in general staff duties and familiar with the logistics of aviation, Arso understood these issues — and tried to explain them, cautiously, to those willing to listen (though there weren't many). At a meeting of CPY members from the wider SH, disappointed by the abrupt slowdown of the Red Army's offensive on Moscow (which had begun with great force on December 6, 1941), Arso tried to reassure them: "This is temporary. The Russians will soon halt at a favourable position, await the Germans there, push them back and destroy them decisively." Only then, he added, would conditions be met for the Soviets to assist the

[176] A. Jovanović, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

[177] The General Secretary and Supreme Commander, since February 9 — thanks to the expertise and persistence of radio-telegrapher Veljko Dragićević, Pavle Savić and Jozo Butorac — had regular radio communication with "Deda" (G. Dimitrov) in the Urals: sending long reports, which he called "sausages," asking and answering questions, seeking approval, informing and asking for advice or solutions for all major issues. Only in Volumes 9 and 10 of the *Collected Works* (February 18-June 3, 1942), in 81 (out of a total of 105) "Foča days," Tito sent 90 messages to "Deda." A. Jovanović, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

Yugoslav partisans. According to delegate Đilas, on March 15, Arso sent a message to his comrades from the July Uprising: "On the Eastern Front, Russian divisions are still burning like matchsticks. So we must be patient in waiting for help from that direction."

In his *Overview of the National Liberation War*, which has been quoted here multiple times, Arso wrote that "we stood by our great Slavic mother Russia, believing in her strength and victory," but also that she was "geographically too far for her aircraft — even those with the longest range — to reach our airfields, even one way, let alone return." He emphasized that Russia was also preoccupied with her own fate in the Great Patriotic War. From his general staff training, he recalled that Anglo-American "Halifaxes" and "Marauders" — bombers built for the longest-range missions — could fly from North Africa to Yugoslavia and return, while Soviet planes, even if they had the necessary aircraft and crews, simply could not make that journey from their airbases at the time. And so it would remain — for far too long — until mid-1944, when the front had pushed deep into the Ukraine. But for those who didn't know or didn't want to hear the logistical reality, this was frustrating and painful — especially for the Montenegrins, who often said: "Since Peter the Great, never has a Russian rifle been fired that we didn't rise in revolt." Even the Supreme Commander found this hard to accept. He wrote to "Deda": "We are expecting planes day and night. Send automatic weapons, ammunition, mortars, mountain artillery and more. Also send some of your specialists." Telegraphers repeated these messages — also reporting that the enemy was closing in from all directions, and that, if only there were enough weapons and ammunition, the partisan movement could raise another 100,000 fighters.

At Deda's suggestion, Tito, in early March, sent him a draft proclamation to the peoples of the occupied countries of Europe — especially Czechoslovakia and France — calling on them "not to produce war materiel or supply raw materials and food to the bloody Hitler," and to instead develop a "partisan movement against the occupiers." When another suggestion came — to rephrase parts of the text and have it signed by more members of the SH — Tito agreed. Behind his signature as commander, the following were added: Chief of Staff Arso Jovanović, General Staff Captain, and members Vlado Popović, Sreten Žujović, Ivan Milutinović and Svetozar Vukmanović.[178] Why he didn't also list E. Kardelj, A. Ranković, M. Đilas and L. Ribar is unclear, but by early May, the list had expanded to include: Lieutenant Rado Hamović, Father Vlado Zečević, Franc Leskošek, Ivan Rukavina, Uglješa Danilović, Petar Drapšin, Sava Kovačević, Colonel Savo Orović, Peko Dapčević, Second Lieutenant Radivoje Jovanović and Major Vojislav Đokić.[179]

While the long-promised "Russian aid" was still being awaited day and night in Foča (as relayed through Deda), new reports began arriving from Milutin from Gostići and Tempo from Sarajevo — commanders of the main headquarters in Montenegro and Bosnia. One message from Tempo reported that an unknown group of parachut-

[178] J. Broz, *Collected Works*, Vol. 9, p. 102.

[179] AJ, Fund of the CC CPY-KI, 1942/92 (translation from Russian).

ists had landed on Romanija. The SH initially interpreted this as the long-awaited Soviet aircraft, expected at the prepared Luburić polje airfield, arriving according to plan with Deda. Tito then wrote that these were "planes of our brothers or allies." In reality, however, it was a four-man British military-intelligence mission led by Major Elliot Cohen, parachuted in from a transport plane out of Alexandria.

But the mission vanished almost immediately: just after landing on the night of February 4-5, they were arrested by Domobran units and handed over to the Germans — something that would only later be learned in Foča. When Tito heard that another group, including British Major Terence Atherton, had landed by submarine at Perazića Dol on February 4, he — after receiving approval from the Comintern — ordered that this group be securely escorted to him.

The group led by Major Atherton, disembarked from the submarine *Thorn*, was more fortunate at the start of its mission — code-named "Hydra" — than Cohen's team. Alongside the major were radio operator Patrick O'Donovan and air force lieutenant Radoje Nedeljković. They were escorted by fighters from the Lovćen Partisan Detachment to the headquarters of the Main Staff of Montenegro, and from there, on March 10, with Moscow's approval and orders from the SH, they were sent under protection to Foča.

This military intelligence mission, dispatched by the Balkan Section of the SOE, arrived in Foča to find General Ljubo Novaković, who had already been there for a month, "enjoying the hospitality" of the SH. A former officer of the Montenegrin army, later a royal artillery general and commander of the Kom Detachment in the April War of 1941, Novaković had pushed deep into Albania and fought bravely, skilfully and decisively against Italian troops near Skadar. He was brought in by fighters from the 1st Proletarian Brigade, together with his adjutant, Lieutenant Šaranović. Earlier, he had served on the staff of Kosta Pećanac, then under Draža Mihailović, and later appeared among the Partisans in Šumadija, trying to find his place in the fight against the occupiers — which, at least in words, he firmly supported. At the start of 1942, he had proclaimed himself the "commander of all Chetnik groups around Sarajevo," based on Jahorina, where the 1st Proletarian eventually located him. In town, rumours spread that during the Second Enemy Offensive, as sector commander near Sjetlina, he had ordered his "troops" to retreat before the Germans. He and his adjutant were often seen sitting in front of a tavern, loudly speaking of his resolve for the anti-fascist struggle. It was known that, at the end of 1941, he proposed creating a separate "Bosnian-Herzegovinian army" that would negotiate as an equal party with Mihailović's forces if they appeared in the region. According to Dr. Branko Petranović, the general "was undoubtedly a patriot, but his ideas about the goals of the struggle were more than muddled and confused."[180] A long-time acquaintance and friend of Captain Arso Jovanović, he was treated respectfully in Foča — given accommodation, food and "a degree of freedom of movement." The Supreme Commander met with him for the first

[180] B. Petranović, *Serbia in the Second World War 1939-1945*, Belgrade 1982, p. 369. Lieutenant Colonel Z. Vučković will write that General Novaković was "unbalanced"; D. Mihailović assigned him a "mania for persecution"; Tito called him "an old general scoundrel"...

time on February 4, in the presence of the Chief of Staff. The general openly spoke out against the royal government-in-exile in London and would write three letters exposing the truth about its minister of war and navy, asking that the SH transmit them to London via its radio station through Moscow. Arso had no time for lengthy conversations with the aimless general, and considered his proposals about organizing units, directing operations and his own role to be political matters — best left to more influential members of the SH. In their brief encounters, the two mostly returned to earlier conversations from Belgrade — about the defence of the homeland, the betrayal during the April War, and most often, about their families in their native regions: Arso's in Piperi and Ljubo's in Spuž, where his son Jakša, a Guard Captain 2nd Class, was stationed at Colonel Bajo Stanišić's staff. The general had no contact with his son, nor with his in-laws — the Ostojić brothers, a general staff colonel and a major from Gluhi Do in Crmnica, the younger of whom, Zaharije, was with Draža Mihailović. The general and the captain would exchange a few words — then the latter would get back to work, while the former would, as most here saw it, continue with empty talk.

Arso had no time for extended conversations with the inquisitive Major Atherton, who professed sympathy for the Partisans — at least verbally — and even less for Lieutenant Nedeljković, who "posed as an Englishman." These men were mostly dealt with by Dedijer. Due to a malfunction in their radio station, they were unable to establish contact with Malta, and would often ask Arso to let them use the SH's radio to communicate with their centre. But Arso, angered by the actions of Captain Hudson and Major Ostojić, whom he had personally brought to Užice five months earlier — only for them to defect to Ravna Gora — was not inclined to help.

Yugoslav General Novaković and British Major Atherton were constantly "plotting something." Tito treated them politely on the surface, but remained distrustful of their stories and intentions. In private, he referred to Novaković as "an old general scoundrel." Arso, however — knowing the general better than anyone — believed it was worth trying to tie him to the NOB, as a proven anti-fascist and patriot, perhaps by assigning him an advisory role, or naming him chief of staff of a volunteer unit — a "commander without an army," so to speak. Communist leaders were known experts in such manoeuvres.

Repeatedly dismissed, misunderstood or ignored, General Novaković resolved to seek a way to fulfil his ambitions back in his native region. He managed to establish contact with the Chetnik commander of Čelebići, Sergeant Spasoje Dakić, originally from Mala Crna Gora, and on the night of April 15-16, vanished unnoticed — along with Atherton, whose primary mission was to reach General Mihailović and deliver a demand from General H.M. Wilson, the Allied Supreme Commander for the Middle East, urging him to attack the Germans without delay. From Sergeant Dakić — who had already been sentenced to death in Foča by the SH — the general learned two facts: first, that the staff of his brother-in-law, Major Zaharije Ostojić, was near Nova Varoš; and second, that Draža Mihailović had marked him with the number "3" (for execution). Thanks to Ostojić, Novaković made it to Montenegro, thus evading his brutal death sentence. The investigation into the fate of the "high-ranking Allied officer" T. Atherton, spurred by inquiries from London and Moscow and overseen by Slobodan Penezić Krcun, concluded that Dakić, greedy and primitive, killed Atherton and his NCO P. O'Donovan for their gold coins. Lieutenant R. Nedeljković, who had pretended to be British the entire time, reached Mihailović's headquarters in Lipovo, where he also "vanished without a trace."

This version of events — regarding the deaths of the British intelligence officers — stood for five decades, until research by Dušan Karić in German and Chetnik archives uncovered a different story. It showed that Major T. Atherton and O'Donovan were executed on orders from General Draža Mihailović, who was then staying at the Borislavljević villa on Zlatar. Major Ostojić's men carried out the executions because Mihailović refused to accept Wilson's envoy and his demand, which would have forced the Chetniks into open war with the Germans. Lieutenant Nedeljković, who had up to then claimed to be English, was also supposed to be executed by Dakić's trio, following Ostojić's order. However, at the last moment, staring down gun barrels, he declared he was Serbian, an officer of the Royal Army, from Toplica and a representative of King Petar. This saved his life — he was transferred to Mihailović's staff in Lipovo, from where he vanished underground. Eventually, while seeking intelligence connections in Belgrade, he fell — quite by chance — into the hands of the Gestapo, as confirmed by preserved German records.

The fates of the other participants in this drama were tragic. General Ljubo Novaković and his son, Captain Jakša, were killed by Lovćen Detachment fighters in a cave the day before the Italian capitulation in September 1943. Lieutenant Šaranović reportedly died for his loyalty to the king and to his general. Dakić was eliminated by the Yugoslav National Defence Corps (KNOJ) forces during one of the post-war "anti-bandit operations."

Within the SH and its circles — more in the realm of hearsay than established fact — there was quiet whispering, often in front of Ranković, Krcun and likely even Tito, from the "true believers." This murmur was often laced with remarks aimed at Captain Arso Jovanović who, from time to time, would have friendly, private conversations with the royalist general. Some said he even acted as the general's "defence lawyer," insisting he was "a royalist, but undoubtedly a patriot," and recalled how he once publicly praised his subordinate, Colonel Velibor Pavlović, commander of the 48th Regiment, when — in front of the troops near Skadar — he removed his Order of the Karađorđe Star from his chest and pinned it on a brave soldier and known communist, Veljko Keković. Such an act could have cost both the general and colonel their ranks.[181] Arso was also known to have spoken of Novaković as a good family man and a caring father. From such details, suspicions began to circulate that Arso may have organized the escape of the general and Atherton from Foča, or at the very least facilitated their contact with Sergeant Dakić. For some, the "strongest evidence" was simply the fact that all three men were compatriots — members of the same "royalist, former, rotten and treacherous army." On the other hand, from Mihailović's headquar-

[181] V. Terzić, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 531.

ters in Lipovo, efforts to cover up their own crime led to accusations that Arso, as a "communist lackey," had organized the liquidation of the British mission — or, if he hadn't, that he had failed to protect them adequately. The facts clearly show there was no reasonable basis for either accusation.

One of the ever-present questions within the SH in Foča was the stance toward the Chetnik movement. On this matter, Arso's position was unambiguous: only traitors and war criminals should be punished; those misled should be spared and given a chance to reconsider; and the innocent must be protected. Toward the occupier, Arso echoed Kutuzov's victorious question to the remnants of Napoleon's army as they were expelled from Moscow and Russia: "And who invited you to fight here in the first place?"

After reviewing the November clashes between Draža Mihailović's Chetniks and Partisan units in Serbia, as well as the crimes of Đorđije Lašić and Pavle Đurišić's troops in Vasojevići — especially in late January 1942, when dozens of partisans were ambushed in their sleep or executed after being captured in Barama Kraljskim and Lubnice — Arso came to the conclusion that there could be no more dialogue or negotiation with such forces, except "through rifle sights." However, based on intelligence from Rudo, Rogatica, Romanija and Jahorina, he judged that the Chetniks in eastern Bosnia were "something else." He cautiously discussed this with those willing to listen, suggesting that communication with their commanders — all former officers — should not yet be ruled out. In that vein, he proposed seeking authorization to meet with General Staff Major Boško Todorović, a talented and well-regarded young officer, son of a general and brother of a lieutenant colonel, born in Belgrade. Tito approved the meeting on December 30, but in a follow-up letter stated that Filip Kljajić and Lola Ribar should also be present. Tito instructed Arso to try to win Todorović over — since they "knew each other from the Military Academy" — and to separate him from Dangić and other "reactionary elements." At the same time, he warned that the Partisans would no longer tolerate anyone "freely walking around and collaborating with the occupier at the expense of the NOB or working against us."[182] Expecting Todorović to arrive from Rogatica with 600 Chetniks, Arso prepared for the conversation. But the cautious major — perhaps influenced by the fate of Gendarmerie Lieutenant Colonel Milan Cvetković, who had recently been "taken off a train" in Međeđa — diverted from Rogatica, heading with his troops to Herzegovina to organize an attack on the Ustaša stronghold of Boroč. After arriving in Herzegovina on January 4, Major Todorović was, over the next month and a half, hunted like a beast by the Partisans. During the night of February 19-20, he was captured in his sleep, fought back fiercely, but was ultimately killed. His diary, passed from hand to hand, eventually reached Moša Pijade, who, beneath Durmitor, interpreted it according to the measure of his own beliefs and understanding.

At the other end of the front, near the Drina River, fought Gendarmerie Major Jezdimir S. Dangić, about whom it was said he was collaborating with the Germans.

[182] J. Broz, *Collected Works*, Vol. 8, p. 54.

His close acquaintance — one could even say friend — Captain Jovanović simply could not believe that this "steel-hearted Serb," the son of Father Sava from Srebrenica, former commander of the Gendarmerie Guard, who commanded some 8,000 insurgents in eastern Bosnia, actively fighting against the German-created NDH and working to protect the lives and property of the Serbian people — could be working with the German occupiers. Especially not with the descendants of those who had held him for years as a prisoner for being a convicted member of Young Bosnia, torturing him and his family so harshly that his mother Milica lost her mind from the suffering. Arso believed it was worth speaking with this officer — a man who had written two notable books, filled with patriotism, about his national struggle and years in German captivity.[183] He reasoned that he might learn directly what Dangić had been negotiating in Belgrade with Nedić, and that perhaps there was some concrete agreement to be made — perhaps about protecting the endangered Serbian population, or even a joint fight against the occupiers. He brought this up to the seemingly noble Roćko Čolaković, suggesting that he either go himself or accompany him to such a meeting. But there was no understanding for such a move. A similar, equally well-intentioned suggestion came just before the launch of Operation Trio, when the Proletarian Operational Group advanced toward Bratunac. It came from a passionate and seasoned fighter, Pero Đukanović, commander of the Srebrenica Detachment. When he heard from Ljubodrag Đurić that the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters was Arso — a General Staff officer — the patriot lit up with joy and suggested to the Proletarians that "this general staff man, for the sake of the suffering Serbian people," should meet with Major Dangić or some other influential Chetnik commander, since they were all officers of the Royal Yugoslav Army. This suggestion reached the ears of the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, but such a meeting required the approval of Tito, the Supreme Commander — and he did not give it.[184]

Ironically, the Germans arrested Dangić on April 9, just before launching Operation Trio — precisely when his cooperation would have been most useful to them — and sent him via Belgrade to a concentration camp in Nuremberg. There, once again, Dangić became a German prisoner, leaving behind the question: how could someone who had been a victim of Austrian torment — whose mother went mad and whose father died from the suffering — end up cooperating with a German general of Austrian origin? And even if such cooperation were somehow possible, how could the Germans arrest and intern their own "loyal collaborator"?[185] It would soon come to light that Dangić had travelled to Belgrade, to speak with Nedić and the German

[183] J. Dangić, *Our Imprisonment,* Tuzla 1938 and *Hunger and the Prison,* Novi Sad 1940.

[184] From a conversation with General Lj. Đurić, in June 1984 in Belgrade.

[185] Later, it would be learned — from S. Krakov's book *A Cup Full of Cider,* from sources from the Soviet intelligence service and from testimony before the divisional court in Sarajevo — that J. Dangić escaped from a German camp and, under the command of General B. Komorowski, participated in the Warsaw Uprising in the autumn of 1944, where he again fell into German and then Russian captivity. After two years of "squeezing" in Moscow's "Lubyanka," the Russians handed him over to Tito's judiciary, which, under pressure from political powerful people and without the presence of a lawyer, sentenced him to death and, in an emergency procedure, executed him.

command, to plead that 17 districts of eastern Bosnia[186] — including Sarajevo and all the territory up to the Bosna River — be annexed to Nedić's Serbia in an effort to protect the Orthodox Serbs from extermination by the Ustaše. After all that, a lingering belief remained — that perhaps it was not entirely hopeless to speak with this unquestionably respected nationalist and influential officer, and to do so precisely at a time when Partisan forces in Serbia and Montenegro were suffering serious setbacks. At the beginning of the war's second year, any fighter against the occupiers and their collaborators was urgently needed. Thus, a conversation should have taken place — one last attempt before the final break — an honest conversation aimed at understanding and meeting halfway, without dogma, factionalism or judgement over the fact that the man in question was a person of clear national feeling, had once commanded the Gendarmerie School in Sremska Kamenica, and so on. What mattered more was that he was, first and foremost, a recognized commander of the insurgent army — an organizer of popular resistance to Ustaša massacres. In fact, as early as August 1941, he had written to General Milan Nedić about the genocide being committed against Serbs by the Ustaše.

"We sleep in open fields, covered by the Bosnian fog, warmed by the flames of our own homes, surviving on mouldy cornbread; we chew on rotten onions, listen to the screams of abandoned children and the cries of grieving mothers. With stakes and axes we've captured rifles, with rifles — mortars and machine guns. Our companies are led by privates, and our battalions by non-commissioned officers. Give us bread! Take in our women and children. Poor Bosnia is calling."[187]

Among those who could have spoken with Dangić on equal footing was certainly Captain Arso Jovanović, an officer he knew well and trusted as a man of his word.

At a time when, on the ground in eastern Bosnia, it was still impossible to clearly draw a line between Chetnik and Partisan units — when both fighters and civilians resisted that division and demanded unity in the struggle — and when this idea, this psychological state, was shared by the prominent uprising commander Pero Đukanović and hundreds from the 8,000 armed insurgents in eastern Bosnia, almost all of them politically uncommitted Serbs determined to defend their people from Ustaša knives — Tito, disregarding this reality and guided solely by his own strategic vision, made a drastic decision in early March. Obsessed with the idea of delivering a final blow to the Chetniks in eastern Bosnia, seizing the uprising masses to his side, and paving the way for a return to Serbia under more favourable conditions, he formed the Proletarian Operational Group out of seven battalions from the 1st and 2nd Proletarian Brigades. He dispatched it — according to historian Dr. Zdravko Antonić — "to carry out a march-manoeuvre from Foča and Čajniče toward Sokolac, Vlasenica and Zvornik,

[186] He would speak in June 1947, before the judicial panel chaired by Lieutenant Colonel Dr. Vuko-Goce Gučetić, about 24 districts.

[187] The court panel assessed the letter as evidence of Dangić's demagogy and unwillingness to cooperate with the communists, who, as Tempo testified, "would only accept them if they accepted the commissars and replaced the cockade with a red five-pointed star," while with a "sworn oath on the Gospel to defend the Serbian people — they could only do that with Draža."

and in that area, and as widely as possible, liquidate all Chetnik commands and their bases."[188] The Main Staff of Bosnia and Herzegovina was informed in advance that the Proletarians were heading to Glasinac "to paralyse Chetnik bands and scatter their command staff."[189] From that moment on, only God could help those "bands."

Rather than analysing this Proletarian "operation" — which was ethically, militarily and politically quite questionable — and delving into the "cases" from that march of "a people's own army," we instead provide, with permission, an extended excerpt from Dr. Zdravko Antonić's work. He writes that "this manoeuvre was carried out from March 5 to 25, 1942, and ended with the Partisans taking from the Chetniks Borike on Romanija, Vlasenica, Milići, Bratunac and Srebrenica, and either killing or forcing into Serbia a large number of Chetnik officers. At Borike alone, 130 Chetniks were captured on their word of honour — which was immediately violated — including around 30 officers and NCOs. All of them were executed on the spot. A significant quantity of weapons, military equipment and food was also seized." This act severely ruptured the insurgent front against the Ustaše in Rogatica and Han Pijesak, and the consequences were swift: the Ustaše launched raids into surrounding Serb villages, resulting in widespread looting, the burning of homes and the killing of civilians.

After Borike, the brigades bypassed Han Pijesak, where Francetić's Ustaše held fortified positions, and continued toward Vlasenica, which they took from the Chetniks on March 18. In the following days, the campaign to drive out the Chetniks continued toward Milići, Bratunac, Srebrenica and Drenjača. All these towns were captured, and a large number of Chetnik officers either fled to Serbia or withdrew deep into the forests. From among the local insurgents — most of whom had been defending their own villages or were stationed nearby — volunteer detachments were formed. These efforts to unify the uprising forces under a single Partisan command were, according to this historian, cut short by a new Axis offensive, in the face of which the Operational Group of the SH quickly retreated toward Foča, leaving behind in the area of Drenjača-Milići-Bratunac-Srebrenica-Vlasenica only local insurgent forces, poorly armed and inadequately coordinated, who could not effectively resist the advance of Francetić's Ustaše from Han Pijesak into Vlasenica, and then toward the Drina.

The struggle for dominance between Partisans and Chetniks in this region again came down heavily on the shoulders of the Serbian people. When the Ustaše entered Vlasenica on April 1, linking up with their forces in Zvornik, they launched a coordinated attack on April 4 toward Milići, Bratunac and Srebrenica. They faced little resistance. Scattered uprisings by isolated insurgent groups stood no chance against the heavily armed Ustaše. Francetić's intention, which he carried out by mid-month, was to conduct one of the largest massacres of the Serbian people. Entire clusters of Serbian villages — from Vlasenica through Milići, and from Drenjača toward Bratunac and Srebrenica — were burned to the ground, their inhabitants massacred. The worst slaughter of innocent civilians, however, took place at several concentration points

[188] Z. Antonić in the preface to the book *The Records of Pera Đukanović on the Uprising on the Drina*, Belgrade 1994, p. 18.

[189] AVII, file 2-A, reg. no. 6/2.

along the Drina River, where refugees failed to cross the flooded river in time. At just one of those sites, Fakovići, on April 9, 1943, around 3,000 people gathered desperately hoping to cross to safety. While some managed to make it across, more and more refugees kept arriving. Pero Đukanović, a direct eyewitness to this bloody drama endured by the Serbian population of Bosnia, wrote in his notes: "Children were crammed into the boats — only the elderly and sick among the adults were allowed. Children were packed in with no count, as many as the boat could hold. On the Serbian side, they were unloaded onto bare ground, left exposed to the rain, because they had to wait until nightfall for their mothers to arrive and claim them. The children whose mothers hadn't yet crossed entered the night — naked, wet and hungry, lying there on the riverbank." The transfer of refugees across the Drina into Serbia, done at about ten different ferrying points, was eventually cut off by the Ustaša incursion into the river valley, where they slaughtered the civilians they encountered and threw the bodies into the river. Numerous women and girls jumped from the cliffs into the Drina themselves to avoid falling into Ustaša hands.[190]

Foreseeing yet another horrifying tragedy for the most vulnerable and the entire Serbian population did not require special military knowledge or political maturity. Still, Tito acted entirely on his own, and if he consulted anyone at all, he had the unreserved support of his closest associates in the Party leadership. For example, Tempo wrote to him on March 17, enthusiastically describing a moment at the formation of the Bosnian Battalion, which was to be integrated into the 1st Proletarian Brigade: "When I repeated your words (from the formation of the 2nd Proletarian Brigade on March 1, 1942 — *I.M.*) that we hope none of them would hesitate if they had to shoot even their own father, the entire hall erupted in a unanimous 'Even our fathers!' The battalion responded strongly and in unison with cheers for Comrade Stalin, the Red Army and Comrade Tito." Dedijer also recorded on March 25: "At last, a courier arrived from Vlasenica. He brought a report from the Proletarian Brigade. Our forces had liberated Vlasenica, Milići, Srebrenica, Bratunac and Drenjača. The Bosnian Chetniks offered no resistance. They all joined our side en masse." He added that the "Nedić-loyal elements were politically defeated in the eyes of the masses," quoting Crni (Sreten Žujović) as saying their military defeat "was merely a technical issue." In connection with this, Aleksandar Ranković, returning from the front on April 3, said that had he not stopped the Proletarians, "they would have reached Bijeljina."

As the Proletarian advance deepened, both they and Ustaša-Domobran units suddenly, in effect, found themselves on the same front line. The SH then urgently ordered a halt and retreat to Glasinac, because the fact that the Chetniks had simultaneously turned against both Koča Popović's Proletarians and Jure Francetić's Ustaše was being extensively exploited by Draža Mihailović's propaganda, especially abroad. In that difficult situation, Tito wrote to Koča Popović, commander of the 1st Proletarian Brigade, on March 13: "We assessed that marching in parallel with the Ustaše toward Vlasenica would not be desirable from either a political or military standpoint. The

[190] Z. Antonić, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

population would think we are collaborating with the Ustaše. After that, we would soon be forced into direct conflict with them, but without having recruited, organized or solidified our volunteer army. Moreover, we would find ourselves in the narrow space around Srebrenica (the Ustaše hold Drenjača, and they could break into Vlasenica). Such a battle would be useless. That might also lead to collaboration between Nedić's forces and the Ustaše."[191]

Two days later, Tito again wrote from Foča to Koča, who was still on Glasinac, saying that negotiations with Captain Dragošlav Račić, commander of the Chetnik Cer Detachment, were "not politically advisable": "We are unmasking them before the masses, while you are seeking talks. If the initiative had come from them, that might be understandable — but only for the purpose of gaining time and securing a more favourable strategic position."[192] Koča had, in fact, informed the SH of his intention to send Račić a written proposal for negotiations, aiming to prevent him from attacking a group of about 70 partisans (Major Dangić would later say 152) from the Valjevo and Mačva detachments who had crossed the Drina River on March 5. The group included detachment commanders Zdravko Jovanović and Danilo Lekić, along with Father Vlado Zečević, Lieutenant Ratko Martinović and others. In a letter from Boljević Polje, Father Vlado Zečević pleaded with Major Jezdimir Dangić for help, and Dangić ordered that the Partisans be given clothing, food and guides toward Romanija.[193] There is no written evidence that Koča's letter to Račić was ever sent, but Tito's order not to allow negotiations was preserved. Still, Račić did assist the group — or rather, its leader Danilo Lekić — with Dangić's approval, and it is believed he had two or three motives: they had known each other from fighting the Germans together in Mačva and Rađevina; they were both from the Vasović tribe; or perhaps Račić wanted to signal that he remained open to dialogue — maybe to repay a past debt to the communists, or to earn one "just in case." In any event, Račić showed Lekić a safe path on the map to reach his forces, who would then escort the group to Borike,[194] and from there to Foča, where they were assigned to units.[195]

Another area where the army of the CPY fought against Chetnik units — at the same time as in eastern Bosnia, but under significantly more difficult conditions — was Montenegro, particularly the Kolašin Front, which was established on February 23 and stubbornly held until May 26, 1942. During those three months of war, the majority of Montenegrin Partisan forces were continuously engaged there. At the same time, this front remained a constant subject of concern for the SH, especially in terms of how the Main Staff of Montenegro might succeed in breaking it and thus eliminate

[191] J. Broz, *Collected Works*, Vol. 9, p. 107.

[192] *Ibid.,* p. 114.

[193] This was said in June 1947, before the court in Sarajevo.

[194] From a conversation with General Lj. Đurić, June 1984, in Belgrade.

[195] D. Lekić was appointed as Koča's deputy, 3rd Jovanović as the commander of a company in the Belgrade Battalion, Priest V. Zečević as a member of the General Staff "with a cross instead of a five-pointed star," Lieutenant R. Martinović as Chief of Staff of the 3rd Proletarian, and most of the fighters joined the Support Company of the General Staff.

the threat of a possible Chetnik advance into the Sandžak or, even more dangerously, into the Šavnik and Piva regions, and toward Foča. The directive for establishing the front was signed by Supreme Commander Tito on February 15, in which he ordered that Chetnik commanders Đorđije Lašić and Pavle Đurišić be prevented from breaking through the "Mojkovac Gate." Tito himself would later spend months questioning the validity of this idea of frontal combat as an effective way of resisting the Chetnik offensive, regularly criticizing it in his letters and attributing the strategy to "former officers" and Montenegrin military leadership. In truth, the concept had been proposed by Captain Arso Jovanović and Velimir Terzić, both well-versed in military history and geography, familiar with the strategic importance of the Kolašin operational hub and the possible tactical directions leading from it toward liberated Partisan territory. They also understood the mentality and high combat value of the Vasojević fighters and their commanders — men with whom there was no possibility of joint combat efforts. Under those circumstances, it was essentially impossible to defend liberated territory by any means other than through the establishment of a solid front, as this was the most viable form of military operations in that specific area. After all, the initial 1,130 Chetniks, later tripled in number, were well-organized, heavily armed and led by roughly 100 professional soldiers. It would have been nearly impossible to stop them using only small guerrilla actions — in which the enemy, as it happened, was considerably more skilled. Later, once the front was stabilized — thanks to the deployment of 4,000 fighters drawn from all Montenegrin NOP units and the best commanders — across a 40-kilometre width divided into sectors, Arso proposed a different method of operations. He called for the creation of small, fast-moving, strike and light units that, drawing on the experience of Montenegrin *komita* detachments, would infiltrate behind enemy lines and launch attacks under all conditions and at all locations. Another issue was Tito's long-standing inability to grasp the scale of the Chetnik movement's threat in Montenegro, including its military strength and territorial gains. He continued to prioritize crushing the Chetniks in eastern Bosnia, believing this would clear the way for a renewed push into Serbia. As a result, seven battalions of Proletarians were sent toward the "bend of the Drina" on March 2, while the much more threatened Kolašin Front did not receive even a single unit — not until the situation became critical. It was only at the end of March, and only after Arso's persistent urging, that Tito abandoned his idea of an offensive operation to break the Chetnik front and instead shifted to defensive tactics aimed at blocking further Chetnik advances through key strategic "channels." This change saw a significant portion of the Montenegrin Partisan forces (sometimes up to 4,000 fighters) deployed to close off routes leading toward the Sandžak, the Durmitor region and Old Montenegro. Throughout that harsh winter — which in this region can last well into May — there were constant skirmishes and preparations for an eventual offensive intended to "pacify the Moračani and Vasojevići" and push through the Lim Valley into Serbia, with continued hope for support from the "Russian brothers." In mid-April, at Arso's insistence, Tito finally allocated forces to this effort, sending the Lovćen Battalion of the 1st Proletarian Brigade to Sinjajevina as a kind of general reserve. On multiple occasions,

when the Kolašin Front was at its most critical, Chief of Staff Arso issued directives to the Partisan unit commands, instructing them how to conduct operations and analyse their effectiveness. These were essentially lessons in the art of war, considered equally valuable for all commanders. Among those leading the Partisan forces on that front, in addition to others, were Velimir Terzić, Peko Dapčević and Blažo Jovanović. Still, they were unable, with the resources available and under the imposed combat conditions, to break the forces of Đorđije Lašić and Pavle Đurišić — which was seen as a prerequisite for defeating the Chetniks, separatists and nationalists.

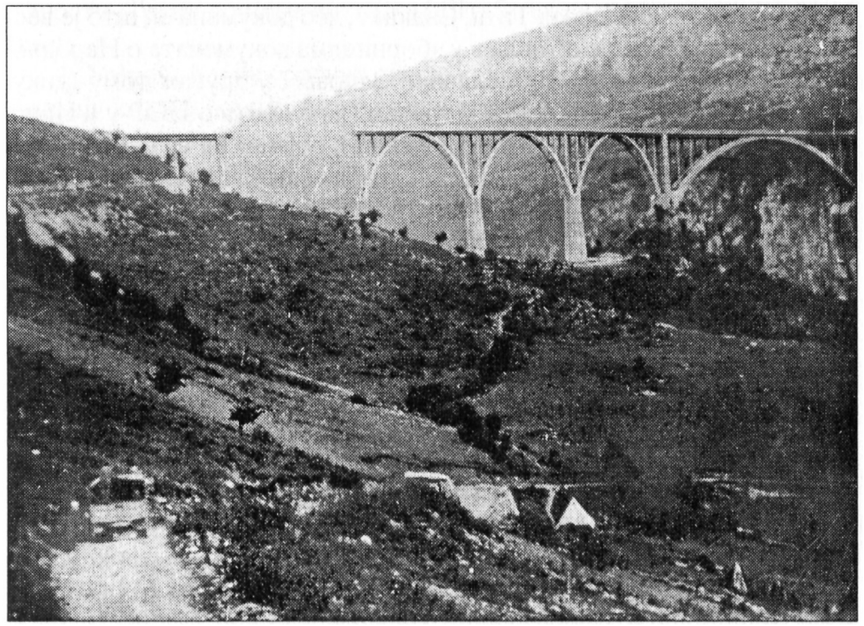
Supreme Commander Tito had long clung to the illusion that Montenegro was "entirely communist and red," that defeating the Chetniks was merely a matter of "honour and heroism," that Montenegrins could "solve the issue of betrayal in their own ranks" without help from the Proletarians, and that reports of extreme hunger were exaggerated, and so on.[196] On April 10, he issued a directive to Đilas stating that "only a tenth of the forces should remain at the front, while all other units should execute a manoeuvre and strike from the rear. That way, the Chetnik bands will flee like cattle."[197] Still, the Partisans continued to lose ground against an enemy that was numerous, militarily well-organized, well-armed and highly motivated — so the value of such directives, orders and suggestions proved limited.

By mid-May, as the SH considered shifting the focus of operations across the Lim River into Serbia, it issued an order to attack and defeat the Chetnik forces in the Kolašin and Mojkovac region. The attack was carried out by eleven battalions, but their actions were uncoordinated, resulting in yet another failure. The strategic shift toward Serbia was postponed for another time. A subsequent assault, launched on May 20, also ended in failure. After three months of fighting in the Kolašin sector, the Chetnik units finally broke through the Partisan defensive line at Sinjajevina. These Chetnik forces then advanced to meet up with Bajo Stanišić's troops, who were pushing in from Nikšić with Italian support. Exhausted by hunger, winter and decisive battles — thinned in numbers and still justly called "five-bullet fighters" — the Partisan units could not halt the Chetnik advance. The conflict on the Kolašin Front ended with the evacuation and burning of Žabljak on May 26, marking the conclusion of a bloody three-month struggle with an outcome that proved unsuccessful for the Partisans. It became evident that honour and heroism — which both sides prided themselves on — were only one part of what was needed to win. In the end, what mattered more was good organization, sufficient manpower and strong armament.

A key development tied to this dramatic phase of the Yugoslav front was Tito's April 22 order to destroy the Đurđevića Tara Bridge on the road between Žabljak and Pljevlja. The bridge — 370 metres long, built on five arches, with the central one rising over 160 metres above the Tara River — was the only road crossing over the deep canyon between Mojkovac and Šćepan Polje. It was the only route through which the

[196] Commissar of the General Staff Bajo Sekulić wrote on March 9 from there how "even ground rice and hay had been eaten, and now they are searching for lime bark"; *Collection of Documents on the NOP*, Vol. III, Book 3, Doc. 70.

[197] J. Broz, *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, p. 4.



Đurđevića Tara, May 1942: prolonged postponement of the bridge's destruction.

enemy could advance from the north, from the Sandžak, and threaten the "Durmitor Republic." Fearing a potential breakthrough by Italian motorized columns, occupying forces and Chetniks from Pljevlja toward Žabljak, Tito ordered the bridge be destroyed immediately. Arso Jovanović, however, delayed executing the order as long as he could. He remembered the bridge well from his staff journeys during military academy, and from the maps and war games he'd published in his book *Tactics of the Infantry Battalion*. He most vividly recalled crossing the bridge in November 1941 with Commissar Bajo Sekulić, leading a Montenegrin detachment of 3,690 fighters toward operations in the Sandžak. Arso postponed the demolition, hoping for a turn in the situation, but also because he understood the bridge's economic and military value, and appreciated its engineering beauty. Still, by early May, the order had to be carried out. The destruction was led by engineer Lazar Jauković, the same man who had built the bridge before the war. He rendered the bridge unusable for transport, but — proud of his architectural and engineering achievement — spared the magnificent central arch from destruction. The Italians did not forgive him. They arrested him and executed him next to the ruined bridge. "There could be no easier death or greater monument — if one had to die — than for a builder like him," said Arso.

Arso, who experienced a poetic connection to bridges — those structures that join riverbanks and bring people and places closer together — grieved over the destruction of three bridges over the Drina in Goražde, one in Ustiprača and two near Foča, delaying their demolition for days. He personally issued the orders — by virtue of his function — to engineer Vladimir Smirnov, who, with his sappers, would promptly

carry them out. The bridges near Goražde were destroyed on April 24, just moments before the Italians reached that section of the river. Because of the destruction of the bridges and the evacuation of the SH's radio station, the equipment was moved to Brod na Drini. There, following Arso's order, a generator previously owned by the Forestry Department was restored to power the station. From that very location, on May 3, Tito sent a telegram — written at Moscow's request — asking for "short biographical information about the unknown senior leaders of the Partisan army, especially former Yugoslav officers, for the purpose of popularization through *Slobodna Jugoslavija*." From a list of 18 officers, details were provided for ten individuals — likely assuming that names such as Arso Jovanović, Pavle Ilić, Branko Poljanac and Vaso Jovanović were already known to the Soviets from earlier reports by "Deda." The newly submitted list, with short bios, included the following officers: Colonel Savo Orović, Major Vojislav Đokić, Captain First Class Pero Ćetković and Velimir Terzić, Lieutenant Radivoje Jovanović, Miša Dudić, Vladimir Knežević, Ratko Martinović and Rado Hamović. It was noted that Kosta Nađ was "an officer of the Yugoslav Army and also served in the International Brigade in Spain."[198]

During the entire "Foča period," the Chetniks in Montenegro, the Sandžak, Herzegovina and eastern Bosnia committed serious acts of violence, but the Partisans retaliated just as harshly — or even more so. The occupying forces took advantage of this, as it suited their interests to preserve their own strength by fostering civil conflict. From Foča, the SH issued directives, instructions and orders such as: "No Chetnik ear may appear" and "Wherever one appears, cut off the head." Nearly all of these documents bore the signature of Josip Broz Tito. It is worth noting, however, that a portion of these documents — interestingly — was never published in the collections of documents on the NOB in Yugoslavia. In Volume II (documents of the SH), as well as in Volume III (documents on the NOP in Montenegro) and Volume IV (Bosnia and Herzegovina), while many documents were published, the most "severe" and compromising content was either inadequately explained in footnotes or entirely replaced with the infamous ellipsis "...". This form of document presentation is unacceptable — those collections were compiled by the Military-Historical Institute, which, since 1950, operated under strict political instructions. The omissions were the result of efforts by those at the top of the state, who did not want the public to learn of their "footprints" left on Yugoslavia's wartime paths. For instance, in documents dated from late February to early March, signed by Tito (e.g. documents nos. 94, 116, and 117 in Volume II), sections of the original text were left out, and replaced with ellipses. This questionable practice — contrary to both historical scholarship and archival standards — was first publicly criticized by Colonel Mišo Leković during an historians' symposium in Ljubljana in the early 1970s. In his presentation titled *On So-Called Leftist Deviations and Sectarianism in Montenegro and Herzegovina*, Leković, a conscientious writer, truth-seeker and author of numerous works on the NOB, cited multiple documents in which the SH clearly advocated for revolutionary violence against both known and

[198] AJ, Fund of the CC CPY-KI, 1942/92 (translation from Russian). The document ends with "continuation follows," but there is no trace of that document.

potential enemies. He proved this by quoting entire sentences that were deleted from the official records, such as: "All attention should be focused on the liquidation of the Chetniks"; "Disarm and liquidate all those who could tomorrow become our enemies"; "Confiscate all property of fugitive Chetniks, as well as all fifth columnists, enemies and saboteurs of the people's struggle"; "We have decided to liquidate all fifth-column elements and other traitors"; and "In all this work, the first priority is the liquidation of all Chetnik bands and unreliable elements in the rear."

As further evidence, Leković presents a short excerpt from a directive of the SH, dated February 14, 1942, sent from Foča to the Montenegro-Sandžak NOP Detachment Headquarters. The order emphasized the need for decisive action, stating that "the strictest measures must be applied without hesitation" and that everything possible must be done to stop the spread of Chetnik influence and halt the wavering of some fighters in the Partisan units. At the same time, the SH, according to Leković, warned: "Remember, for us it is now more important to kill and disperse Chetniks than Italians." Though frequently cited as key evidence of the push not for liberation but for a civil war, this document has never been fully published, and is particularly relevant when addressing criticisms of Arso Jovanović. It is presented here for public review. The text begins with praise for the unit's successes, then continues:

"1. With the help of the Montenegrin forces that, according to your report, are gathering near Mojkovac, completely cleanse the eastern half of the Sandžak of all hostile elements. You must execute all those who supported the Chetniks or were sympathetic to them. Likewise, deal with indecisive and wavering individuals. In all of this, you must be fully forceful and without any mercy. These scoundrels are destroying our best cadres. They are working in collaboration with the occupiers, and we are waging a hard and unequal struggle. If you make any omission in this regard, we will hold the Headquarters responsible. Develop your intelligence service accordingly. Execute a mass of those who had defected from the Partisans to the Chetniks. After such executions, those who remain will no longer dare consider doing the same.

"Once the area is cleared — which must be done quickly — leave a portion of your forces in Šahovići to prevent any raids from Bijelo Polje.

"In addition to this task, you are also required to carry out a mobilization of the population in the Bijelo Polje district. Those who do not show up — execute them. Your units must also go village to village collecting men for the fight. Granted, they may not be much of a fighting force, but something useful can still be extracted from them. If nothing else, they will no longer fall under Chetnik influence. Therefore, mandatory mobilization of all fighters aged 18 to 45. In the villages, set up local guards from older men, over 45. We will no longer allow some to fight while others stay in bed at home. We must be forceful. We must lead events, not follow behind them. Your reputation there has grown, so you will be working with increased authority, which will also encourage the arrival of Montenegrin forces via Mojkovac.

"In this entire effort, you will be supported by comrades from the Bijelo Polje district. But you must pressure those comrades not to hesitate or stall, but to step forward with a rifle in hand. Tell us how the Bijelo Polje Partisan companies and their

leadership have performed.

"We also believe that the people of Komarani must be included in this mobilization. They cannot just lie around while the battle is fought around them. But they are a peculiar element. We leave it to you to think through and decide how to handle the Komarani issue.

"Issue partisan identification cards to the mobilized men using the attached form..."

Since the order requires political-military training courses to be held with the mobilized companies, it also recommends that, "following the example of the Bosnians, the Sandžak Youth Partisan Companies be formed" — these units were to be politically and militarily educated near our established units, and only then sent into smaller operations. The directive continues:

"2. Once you have put affairs in the Bijelo Polje district on solid footing, move your focus to the Pljevlja district. In resolving the situation in Bijelo Polje, the Montenegrins will give you full support, as will comrades from the local area — but they must act with greater resolve.

"In the Pljevlja district, matters remain unsettled. The Italians are conducting raids together with the Chetniks. There are some Chetnik bands in Zabork and farther north. There are even bands in Babine and Toci. The Italians use the Prijepolje-Pljevlja road. The Chetniks are also mobilizing fighters from the surrounding areas. So, this all requires a rapid resolution of the situation in the Pljevlja district.

"Therefore, you must quickly turn your attention to this district. This means sending your units there and deploying them strategically. Remember — it is now more important to kill and drive off the Chetniks than the Italians. We do not know exactly what strength and composition of forces you have available, so we cannot provide detailed instructions. The main thing is that the issue of the Pljevlja district must be resolved quickly. You already know that with your operations toward Bijelo Polje and Velimirovići toward Čajniče, Pljevlja was left without forces, and hostile elements have raised their heads. Additionally, there are rumours that the Italians may evacuate Pljevlja. Some collaborators have already left town. Others are preparing to flee. So, it's not unlikely. They may be forced to abandon it if we cut off their supply routes. In the meantime, however, they are carrying out massive requisitions. We will be left without food. This must be stopped by any means..."

The following messages in the document are directed to Montenegrins and are irrelevant for this context.

The original document,[199] typed single-spaced over two full pages, is kept in a file folder marked with this handwritten note:

"Clearly, this document was neither written nor signed by the Commander of the National Liberation Army and Partisan Detachments of Yugoslavia. By all accounts, this is Arso's letter, and it could only be used as an illustration of his 'work and ideas.' In any case — not for publication." (Initials illegible — written in blue pencil) Bottom

[199] AVII, k. 2, reg. no. 16/2.

right corner: "Forged: Cleansing of the Sandžak — liquidation. Withdraw!" And it was withdrawn — and indeed, remained inaccessible for sixty years, even to historians.

Issues falling under the domain of the so-called leftist deviations — calls for intensifying class struggle, assessments that "everyone who is not with us is against us," and the like — primarily belong to the ideological and political sphere. The Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, by the nature of his responsibilities, was focused on military matters and, being surrounded by figures from the very top of the CPY, did not engage with such topics. Therefore, we would not even mention, let alone discuss here, what was arguably the most tragic "episode" of the NOB in Yugoslavia — if not for the fact that these actions were attributed to him (Arso), particularly the quoted passage, as well as several other documents which called for and encouraged repression and revenge. This text — that is, this document — was "attributed" to him not only by the two unknown individuals who left their handwritten notes on the cover page, but also by Tito himself. Namely, the document, along with other originals from that period of the war, was presented to Tito for review and authorization by the editor of his war memoirs, Colonel Mišo Leković — undoubtedly the most knowledgeable person about the operations of the SH and the CC of the CPY in 1942. In other words, an historian thoroughly familiar with the content and scope of their work and, because of that, very well aware of who wrote and could sign what. Josip Broz Tito, however, refused to allow this document to be included in his *Collected Works*, writing a large "NO" and his distinctive "T" on the manuscript. He explained that it was "probably the work of Arso Jovanović," adding that "former officers, the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters and his deputy — Jovanović and Terzić — allowed themselves to write and sign documents without my knowledge." Key witnesses — including Ranković and Đilas, as well as those in the technical apparatus who were very familiar with the internal dynamics of what was, for a long time, a relatively small group — among them Branka and Pavle Savić and Milorad Janković, state clearly that no important document could have been sent from the SH without Tito's knowledge, and certainly not in his name or without his explicit approval. Ultimately, if things were as Tito claimed, it would speak more to his own conduct than to that of the two men from the SH. Be that as it may, Tito disavowed the document — and so it became "the only one from that period" not included in the 8th volume of his *Collected Works*.[200] When news of the document broke, some individuals — convinced of their superior linguistic insight — analysed the text and "identified" Arso Jovanović's style in it. What both Tito and these individuals said about the document may, in principle, not be incorrect. But how then do we explain the fact that this order — in its content, style and messages — is in no way different from dozens of other documents, both earlier and later, signed by Tito and published in volumes 8, 9 and 10 of his *Collected Works*? Ultimately, a proper linguistic analysis would very reliably determine that Arso wrote 90 per cent of the directives, orders, reports and similar documents of a purely military nature — which makes perfect sense given his expertise and role — but that they were, almost without

[200] Less than two months before his death, M. Leković told me that he "firmly believed it was a document by Broz," adding: "otherwise, I would not have given it to him for verification."

exception, attributed to the Supreme Commander, Tito, because of his position and the fact that he had "dictated," approved or signed them. There is nothing unusual about that — it is standard military practice.

As further evidence, in addition to the quotations already cited, here are excerpts from several more documents — written and signed both before and after the document dated February 14 — which have been published in *Collected Works*. For example, on January 29, Tito orders the Staff of the Montenegrin-Sandžak Detachment: "Open combat must be waged against all Chetnik bands, and they must be liquidated at all costs. No organization besides our partisan and volunteer army may exist in your territory."[201] The very next day, he writes to the Main Staff of Montenegro: "I believe that it is necessary for you to use force to prevent any formation of Chetniks in Montenegro, and their leaders must be eradicated without mercy."[202] On February 1, he issues a directive to the Operational Staff for Herzegovina: "At all costs you must liquidate all Chetnik bands in your area," reiterating that the primary task is "the liquidation of all spies, fifth columnists and saboteurs of the people's war," adding: "All property belonging to fifth columnists is to be confiscated in favour of the NOB, leaving their families with food for a few months."[203] Then, on March 5, a report addressed "to the Supreme Commander personally" stated that a great success had been achieved in Herzegovina in the past two months — "250 fifth columnists and their leaders were executed." On February 4, in a letter to the Staff of the Župopiva Battalion, Tito sets the following tasks: "2. All Chetnik bands in your region must be liquidated. They can no longer exist anywhere within the territory of the SH. 3. The liquidation of all spies, fifth columnists and saboteurs of the people's war — no mercy should be shown. The Chetnik bands, along with these traitors, are our greatest enemies. Therefore, they must be liquidated immediately."[204] That same day, in a letter to the Staff of the Romanija Partisan Detachment, he commands: "No Chetnik formation besides the National Liberation Volunteer Army, which must be under our command, is allowed to exist in your sector."[205] The following day, he sends another order to the Staff of the Montenegrin-Sandžak Partisan Detachment: "1. Liquidate all Chetnik bands in your territory... 2. Liquidate all spies, fifth columnists and saboteurs of the people's war in your territory. Confiscate all their property."[206] Or, in his March 3 letter to the Durmitor Partisan Detachment, Tito writes: "The Chetnik bands are cowards — they do not fight well. You must act decisively against them... Confiscate all property of the fled Chetniks, fifth columnists and other traitors. Wealthier peasant elements must be burdened significantly more."[207] In a directive dated March 3 to the Operational Staff

[201] J. Broz, *Collected Works*, Vol. 8, p. 145.

[202] *Ibid.,* p. 149.

[203] *Ibid.,* p. 159.

[204] *Ibid.,* p. 173.

[205] *Ibid.,* p. 182.

[206] *Ibid.,* p. 189.

[207] *Ibid.,* Vol. 9, p. 75.

of Montenegrin troops in the Kolašin sector, Tito instructs: "Focus all attention on the liquidation of the Chetniks. The only threat to you came from that side... Any failure against the Chetniks is a major political loss, a loss of prestige... We believe that all of Montenegro is proletarian, communist — and nothing should or can stand in the way of such fighters. Call your youth to arms. Now is their time to be tested... Those bandits must be completely destroyed. Apply the strictest reprisals (burning of houses)."[208] Or Tito's letter to the Main Staff of Montenegro on March 10: "2. You must devote your full attention to the liquidation of Chetnik bands and the fifth column... You must resort to reprisals against the Chetniks. You must burn the homes of hardened criminals and bandits, and certainly the houses of all Chetnik leaders and instigators. All their property must be confiscated... Until the Chetniks are liquidated, avoid combat with the Italians — only engage when unavoidable or when you are certain to gain spoils in weapons and supplies."[209]

In accordance with these orders, in just the first week of April, around 60 men and women were executed in the Gacko district alone. For some, their entire property was destroyed, homes burned, and families expelled to Gacko toward the occupiers. In this context, the commander of the Operational Staff for Herzegovina, Petar Drapšin, reported to the Supreme Commander on April 11: "The fight against the fifth column is extremely popular. When a fifth columnist or a Chetnik is caught, individual partisans come to the Staff and ask to be the ones to kill the enemy. No one asks anymore why we Serbs are fighting each other."[210] And when fighters asked why they weren't also fighting the Ustaše and the Domobrani — that is, Croatian traitors in Herzegovina — Drapšin responded by questioning the Supreme Commander: "In your letter, that is, in your order, there is nothing about what we are to do with the Ustaše."[211]

What Tito ordered from Foča was consistently interpreted and applied "on the ground." Thus, the Provincial Committee of the Supreme Headquarters for Montenegro, in a directive to the District Committee for Nikšić on March 12, pointed to the essence of the "second phase": "Consider the destruction of the fifth column as the main task. With the defeat of the Axis powers, their armed forces will fall apart, but if we fail to liquidate the fifth column, it may come back to haunt us. Precisely for that kind of situation, it must be eliminated in time."[212] The Staff of the Lovćen Detachment, in a March directive to the Staff of the Coastal Battalion "Stefan Stijlanić," ordered: "You must show results in terms of destroying the fifth column in Grbalj. We are sending you a list of spies and fifth columnists executed by the Lovćen Detachment. We are now making list number 2. It already has six new names, and we only started it two days ago."[213]

[208] *Ibid.,* p. 75.

[209] *Ibid.*,, 94; AVII, k. 1708, reg. no. 57/1-3.

[210] More about the "left turns" in Herzegovina: notes 62-65 to volume 10 of Tito's *Collected Works*; AVII, k. 1708, reg. no. 54/1-3; Collection of statements from the conference held on June 11, 1982 in Trebinje, on the topic *Events in Herzegovina* from December 1941 to May 1942, Belgrade 1986, 661-752.

[211] But why fight the Ustaše and wipe them out — it was reasoned in Foča — when they and their NDH would, in any case, "go down with the Axis powers" before the advance of the Red Army, and thus would not be competitors in seizing power.

[212] *Collection of Documents on the NOR,* Vol. III, Book 9, p. 216.

The commander of one of the three sectors on the Kolašin Front, Peko Dapčević, powerless to suppress the Vasojević Chetniks, wrote to the Main Staff: "According to yet unconfirmed reports, it seems that the Albanians have begun to raid the Vasojevići... I had earlier written to Comrade Milutin suggesting that it would be a good idea to send couriers through Crmnica into Albania and ask our comrades to have two or three units of Albanian partisans cross into the Vasojevići region via Plav and Gusinje, burn a few villages and then retreat back into Albania. That would help us a great deal."[214]

Evil in Montenegro also made itself known where the delegates of the Supreme Commander Tito — Milovan Đilas and Mitar Bakić — arrived. They were dispatched on March 15 to address the tragic situation caused by the so-called "leftist deviations." With their approval, not only individual houses but entire villages were burned — for example, Ozrinići and Donji Zagarač — and civilians were massively expelled into "blocks." From beneath Durmitor, Moša Pijade reported to Tito that "the Nikšić shock troops killed 150 thugs and burned the village of Ozrinići... only with such ferocity can we destroy the filthy fifth column." The Supreme Commander, based in Foča, was informed that Sava Kovačević — in order to punish the murder of Lieutenant Đorđe Putica, commander of the Operational Staff for Herzegovina — led a punitive expedition and executed 21 people from Ljubomir, in front of a crowd forced to watch the executions and even sing and dance. At this "ceremony," an order was issued (and written confirmation sent to the Supreme Commander Tito) instructing all partisan commanders and political commissars of companies, battalion commanders and commissars, as well as all patriots and honest men, women, girls, boys and children — to kill those "bandits" wherever they were found, without any questioning or trial.[215] Members of the 1st Herzegovinian-Montenegrin Battalion were reported to have danced and fired shots around the corpses of "enemies of the people" brought to the threshing ground in the middle of the village of Jasenak.[216] Tito was informed that Moša Pijade often wielded the "sword of proletarian justice" too readily from under Durmitor; that in Montenegro, without trial and solely based on decisions made by party cells, dozens of "real and potential enemies of the people" were executed and thrown into sinkholes — two of which, Mačkova Pit and Kečina Pit, were in Arso's native region and were "filled to the top," right next to the headquarters of the Main Staff and the Provincial Committee...

Tito knew all of this — and through either encouragement or silence — approved it. Long lists of "enemy" executions were published in the "communiqués" of the Main Staff for Montenegro, always ending with: "To be continued in the next issue." These

[213] AVII, file 1708, reg. no. 53/1-3.

[214] *Collection of Documents on the NOR,* Vol. III, Book 9, p. 255.

[215] Contribution by S. Kovačević in *Herzegovina in the NOB*, Vol. 4, p. 738.

[216] *Ibid.,* contribution by Lj. Mihić, p. 720.

were delivered to him directly, likely reminding him of the lists of Trotskyists he — Tito — published issue after issue in *Proleter* before the war.[217] Arso did not issue or approve of such actions. The leadership of the Political Bureau, headed by the General Secretary Tito, would later wash their hands of it after receiving a letter from "Deda" on March 5, in which Moscow strongly rebuked them for straying too far "down the path of revolutionary zeal and leftist excess," instead of leading an anti-fascist and anti-occupation struggle.[218]

No member of the Political Bureau or Supreme Headquarters — whether or not they issued direct orders to treat those "not with us" this way, whether they read reports on executions or heard or ignored briefings from commanders and party secretaries about what was happening on the ground — can be absolved of responsibility, even if they claim, as individuals, that they didn't know what was being done to dissenters among the Serbian people. Arso knew, though likely not everything — from couriers arriving daily from across the liberated territory; from those summoned to report and be criticized for not implementing instructions "revolutionarily" enough; from the "communiqués" of the Main Staff for Montenegro and reports of the Operational Staff for Herzegovina; from the stories of Veljko Dragićević's wife, Zora, who had come from Piperi; and from Milutin, who, on the evening of April 4 after returning from "the field," listed dozens of names of people executed in their shared homeland, including entire families. He remained silent, pensive — likely wondering whether all those people, many of whom were "former officers," had truly deserved a bullet to the head or to be thrown into a pit. Questioning the fairness of the "sword of red justice" so often invoked, he was never asked if he accepted such a harsh policy of repression — and he never chose, or perhaps never dared, to speak out about it.

Written records and testimonies indicate that the repressive measures were a response to the increasingly frequent crimes committed by Chetnik "elements" and the beginning of their more or less open collaboration — by individuals, groups, political parties and military movements — with the occupiers, something Arso understood deeply and experienced with growing distress. At the same time, these actions stemmed from a flawed political and military assessment of both external and internal developments and power dynamics, particularly from the ambition to establish themselves — through a merciless struggle — as the sole anti-occupation and anti-fascist army on the Yugoslav front. The cause can also be traced to a superficial interpretation of Lenin's "April Theses" — in essence, a detailed plan for entering the second stage of the revolution, which was to hand all power to the proletariat and the poor peasantry. Edvard Kardelj transposed Lenin's April Theses schematically onto the local situation — in Drenova and Ivančići — insisting that the complete victory of the Red Army was near and that it was therefore urgent to prepare for the new, second stage of revolutionary struggle: a final reckoning with class enemies. That label — "class enemy" — increasingly came to be applied not only to actual enemies of the NOB (the

[217] It would later be established for almost everything — that the innocent were tied to the pillar of shame, and many were even liquidated.

[218] AJ, Fund of the CC CPY-KI, 1942/34 (translation from Russian).

occupiers, whose numbers grew in proportion to the intensification of class struggle), but also to those who responded to the greeting "Death to fascism" with "God help us," those who refused to raise a clenched fist in salute or wear the red star with the hammer and sickle, those who were confused, hesitant or fearful in judging the usefulness of armed resistance, those who doubted the justification for executing "enemies of the people" without trial, those who owned a goat or a sack of grain above the set quota, and even those who dared — in defiance of prohibition — to take a dozen eggs to market in order to bring home a kilo of salt. And anyone who hesitated when asked whether they would kill a fifth columnist. To reduce the number of such people, potential enemies were also liquidated — in line with the conclusion of the commander of the Operational Staff for the Kalinovik sector, who wrote on April 28 that "there can be no progress until we not only root out the fifth column but also those who may become one even 20 years from now."[219] Before party cells, the same fate awaited those merely suspected of collaborating with the Italian OVRA — though it later became clear that many of those accused couldn't possibly have collaborated, not just morally or mentally, but not even physically.

Sectarianism and leftist radicalism were not exclusive to Montenegrins, Herzegovinians or the Sandžak natives — these tendencies were grounded in directives and encouragement from the political leadership itself, namely the CC of the SH. Even the "communist prince" Ivo Lola Ribar was caught in this fever. On January 12, 1942, explaining the conclusions of the CC session in Drenova to Blagoje Nešković, he wrote from Zagreb: "Indeed, we are slowly entering that 'second' phase of struggle everywhere!"[220] On July 14, 1942, Kardelj would write to him that the same "leftist" mistakes seen in Montenegro and Herzegovina were happening (he called it "in miniature") in Slovenia as well, citing a growing number of "enemies of the people" being liquidated as proof. As for the number of victims of this "political madness" in Montenegro, the then-commander of the Main Staff, Milutin, left behind a figure in his dictated contribution to Dedijer's *Diary* — about "1,200" Montenegrins executed "on that basis."[221] Historian and publicist Batrić Jovanović put the number of victims of the "bestial terror against the fifth column in Montenegro" at 1,500 — a figure also echoed by witnesses and researchers of the same phenomenon in Herzegovina — none of whom were ever officially contradicted.[222]

In Montenegro, the agony was — at least in words — ended during the session of the "rump CC of the SH" held on April 4 in Foča: the errors were condemned, the culprits (the Main Staff and the Provincial Committee) were "removed" and new people appointed.[223] On April 12, Tito wrote an "Open Letter" to the Montenegrin and Boka

[219] *Collection of Documents on Herzegovina in the NOB*, Vol. 4, p. 729.

[220] *Collection of Documents on the NOR,* Vol. II, Book 2, Doc. 104; the sentence about the "second phase of the struggle" was omitted from the original preserved in the Archives of the CC CPY.

[221] V. Dedijer, *Diary*, Vol. I, note from Vrbnica for June 22, 1942.

[222] Polemic in the pages of the serialized article in *Politika* from December 1995.

[223] The composition of the new General Staff consisted of: commander Peko Dapčević, commissar Mitar Bakić, Chief of Staff Velimir Terzić, member Sava Kovačević and Colonel Savo Orović.

Kotorska communists,[224] and Đilas and Žujović published extensive pieces in the party press — all three casting stones at the leaders of the "leftist deviations." On the surface, the "family" was now in order, and "Deda" was informed. The military and political leadership of Herzegovina, which had continued the push for "Sovietization" of their region into April and May, would be brought "to account" on June 19 at a session of the CC in Vrbnica. Leading figures Petar Drapšin and Miro Popara fared even worse before the "Party court" than Ivan Milutinović and Milovan Đilas[225] — the latter two were "expelled from the Party" and "brought before a summary military court."[226]

The Chief of the Supreme Headquarters did not take part in the analysis of the "leftist deviations," the "identification" of culprits or the pronouncement of punishments, nor in determining measures for overcoming the deeply troubling situation. However, his close comrades kept him informed about the essence of the conclusions adopted by the CC. Whether they did so on orders — so that, as the chief operative, he would "be in the loop" — or out of personal motivation, he did not reflect upon. He first heard about the resolution of the "Montenegrin-Herzegovinian drama" from Milovan Đilas on Mount Zelengora, and he became pensive upon learning of the punishments handed down to leading military and political figures. His first reaction was a readiness to defend the principle that someone who consistently implements a determined "line" should not be punished for doing so — "certainly not more than those who determined that line."[227] A few days later, during a break in the march across Bjelašnica, he secluded himself with that comrade from the early days of the uprising in Vasojevići and, visibly worried, began to speak about the punishment. Wanting to lighten the mood, Đilas replied: "Forget the punishment, Arso — it's not my first, and it won't be my last. What matters is that the current of the revolution is becoming clearer and faster." To divert any further questioning about the punishment, he asked Arso whether he had ever read any of the founders of scientific socialism, to which Đilas — fifty years later — would still recall the answer: "Only the *Communist Manifesto*, in the fall of 1936 in Sarajevo, when I realized that there were some student communists in the cadet company at the School for Reserve Infantry Officers. I wanted to see what it was that Marx had used to guide and forever intoxicate them, so I could decide what I, a plain fool, should do before them." Đilas then asked whether, "as a General Staff officer with a marshal's baton in his bag," he had read *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. With a smile — likely at the mention of the "marshal's

[224] J. Broz, *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, p. 11.

[225] Only reprimanded by the party, the remaining members of the Political Bureau would still be among the first generals of the NOVJ and national heroes.

[226] However, M. Popara was captured by the Chetniks and handed over to the Italians who executed him, after which he was proclaimed a national hero; Drašpin, one of "our Spaniards," would start "from scratch" — beginning as a fighter deprived of the right to wear a red star and carry weapons, he built his military career, reaching the rank of General-Lieutenant, commander of the 4th Army and the Order of People's Hero.

[227] Đilas told me this in September 1994, saying it "sounded like the Chief of Staff was preparing himself for defence from possible similar situations and draconian punishments for working on the implementation of the decisions of the General Secretary and the Supreme Commander."

baton" — Arso replied that he had only heard of the book, but that he had read, several times, about Napoleon Bonaparte and his coup of 18 Brumaire 1799, in a brilliantly written military biography. Đilas shoved a pamphlet into his hands and pointed out a passage marked in red pencil, jokingly adding, "Read it, commander!" — clearly hoping Arso would grasp the essence of revolutionary struggle and, in that light, the punishment he had received, which, as he said, mattered to him "as much as last year's snow on Mount Kamena Gora." Arso read: "Proletarian revolutions constantly criticize themselves. They repeatedly interrupt their own course, return to what seemed already completed in order to begin it anew, ruthlessly and thoroughly mocking the half-measures, weaknesses and cowardice of their initial attempts..."

Upon first reading — he later admitted — he couldn't quite "grasp" how that passage related more directly to Đilas' punishment. To that, Đilas responded: "Ruthless, severe judgement of the course of revolution and of the revolutionaries themselves — that, Captain Jovanović, is the dialectical essence! And that you would never find in your military manuals, written according to bourgeois models..."

That freezing morning on Bjelašnica, it seemed the two of them — this revolutionary "steeped in self-criticism" and his comrade — grew even closer, though they had "connected" from the earliest days of the uprising. They each found in the other something they had not inherited or acquired through education: Arso was a solid soldier — Đilas "the very image of an anti-soldier"; Arso a stern commander — Đilas "a dishevelled soldier of the revolution"; Arso a diligent and patient staff officer, hunched for hours over directives and operational maps — Đilas always on the move, averse to "fastening his rear to a chair."[228]

They were different, and they did not hide those differences — but neither did they dwell on them. In military affairs, they complemented each other and worked together successfully, which was likely the reason why, just before March 15 in Foča, Đilas proposed to Tito that Arso should accompany him and a group of political cadres to Montenegro "to improve the military situation." That day, they had received a mandate to work with the Main Staff to "undertake the necessary measures to organize strong military units for effective combat against Chetnik bands near Kolašin and in other areas of Montenegro." In that context, Đilas proposed that Arso accompany him, adding that this was primarily a military mission, in which the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters would be most useful — practically indispensable. The response he received was that this was above all a political mission. Đilas, smiling, said that while politics may come first, the army is the main force, the striking power. Tito responded that "the higher political decision is for the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters to stay here, at the centre of operations, where the push into Serbia is being prepared," and that Montenegro, in any case, was "on the military and political margins." Đilas, being who he was, couldn't help but respond — saying that no one wished more than he did to return to Serbia, but that he believed the breakthrough would "go through Kolašin," and if that "hard nut" didn't fall, there would be no advance across the Lim — espe-

[228] *Ibid.*

cially if the Chetniks struck from there into the Sandžak. Arso shared his opinion, but Tito not only didn't ask them — he didn't even listen.[229]

In Montenegro — particularly on Mount Durmitor and across Sinjajevina — Đilas would frequently encounter Moša Pijade, "the SH's delegate in the centre of the Durmitor Republic." This continued the long-standing friction between the two, each maintaining direct and special communication with Tito. They especially clashed over the deployment of units on the "Sinjajevina front," where Moša, truthfully, had neither the knowledge nor the authority, yet constantly interfered — then reported these arguments to Tito. One letter from late April 1942 is particularly telling and linked to Arso's name. In it, Moša informed the General Secretary that Đilas considered "the guerrilla style inapplicable — except in Berane district, where there are reports of success with such actions. Whenever we argued, Đilas framed it in such a way that everything was written by Arso and you merely signed it. I objected to that framing, knowing how closely you work with Arso in issuing directives — because I saw that you were the one making decisions, and Arso followed your advice."[230]

While the SH operated from Foča, working to form new units, expand and secure liberated territory and prepare troops for an advance into Serbia — counting on Soviet military aid — the enemy was preparing a large-scale spring offensive against National Liberation Movement strongholds from the Sandžak to Gorenjska. For the first time, German, Italian and quisling forces were to be deployed jointly. After negotiations and planning led by the commander of Southeast forces, it was decided that the first two phases of Operation Trio in eastern Bosnia and the Sandžak (codenamed "Rogatica" and "Foča") would involve one German and three Italian divisions, along with about ten Ustaša and Domobran battalions. Despite strict secrecy, information about the operation leaked: preparations for the "general offensive in Bosnia" were hinted at by Lola Ribar in a letter from Zagreb dated March 17, and already on March 16, a source from an NDH unit reported that the operation would begin on April 15, involving four divisions. Tito informed "Deda" about the enemy's troop build-up at least three times and in good time. The operation was originally set to begin on April 15, but due to delays in transferring Italian divisions to their starting positions, it was postponed to the 20th, and finally to April 21.

Piva *(May 10-June 16, 1942)*

Already in the first phase of Operation Trio, carried out from April 21 to 29 north of the Sarajevo-Višegrad line, all six volunteer detachments disbanded (except for a group of about fifty Drina fighters), the Kalinovik NOP detachment dissolved, and of the Partisan units in eastern Bosnia only three shock battalions and the Birač detachment remained active.[231] The second phase, known as "Foča," began after a five-day

[229] *Ibid.*

[230] AVII, file 2-A, reg. no. 4/7.

[231] This would become the core of the 6th Eastern Bosnian Brigade, formed on August 2, 1942.

pause and lasted from May 4 to 15. Faced with the advance of strong enemy forces, the NOP detachments withdrew, demolishing bridges in Goražde (three of them) and Ustiprača as they retreated. At the same time, on Đurđevdan (May 6), Supreme Commander Tito — emulating Marshal Stalin — issued a daily order calling for "constant attacks on the enemy wherever and whenever possible." Written under conditions of joint assaults by German, Italian and Ustaša-Domobran forces from all directions, the order concluded with the directive that in 1942, "shoulder to shoulder with the heroic Red Army, we drive the occupiers out of our land, destroy their domestic collaborators and secure freedom and independence for the peoples of Yugoslavia."[232] The order, understandably, stirred enthusiasm among fighters and commanders and revived hope among the people.

A large sports competition was also scheduled in Foča for Đurđevdan. The development of the enemy offensive seriously called it into question. Still, Arso insisted that it be held "to reduce tension among the troops and the people." However, this optimism was met with growing doubt. Confronted with grim reality, Vladimir Dedijer confided to Arso one night and recorded in his journal how he had come to understand that, instead of heading into Serbia, they would first need to go west — admitting he had been naive to write back in January that "within a month, we'll be in Belgrade." He concluded: "We'll be walking across Yugoslavia for a long, long time." Milentije Popović, searching for the most inspiring passage in Lenin's teachings for such a "complex situation," found it in Lenin's "titanic faith in victory."

Though not well-versed in Lenin's theoretical works, Arso truly had "titanic" faith that they would pull through this situation too. While giving orders by a rather unreliable phone line to commanders Volodja Knežević, Koča Popović and Ratko Sofijanić, he admitted in the journal that "ours didn't offer much resistance due to lack of ammunition, but we're preparing to strike by surprise." Soon after, in a "situation overview," he noted that the fighters had "generally five, and only a few twenty-five bullets each," which meant "we must conduct night attacks only." For the "military review" dated May 8, he assessed: "The offensive has basically failed because they haven't managed to destroy our manpower." Although lacking key intelligence and concerned about the situation on some fronts — especially regarding the poor performance of "local units" — he remained optimistic about the outcome of the enemy's offensive. After all, what kind of Chief of the Supreme Headquarters of the People's Army would he be if he didn't believe in victory? He and Sreten Žujović "calculated" that Foča was being attacked by 19,500 Italians and Germans: 6,000 from the direction of Pljevlja and Rudo; 2,000 from Prača, Rogatica and Višegrad; 10,000 from Hadžići and Sarajevo; and 1,500 from Nevesinje-Ulog-Kalinovik. To that Arso added: "These groups of Germans and Italians were reinforced by traitors: Ustaše and Chetniks. Montenegrin Chetniks also began moving toward Šavnik and the Sandžak in connection with this offensive. Our forces have launched a counter-offensive..."

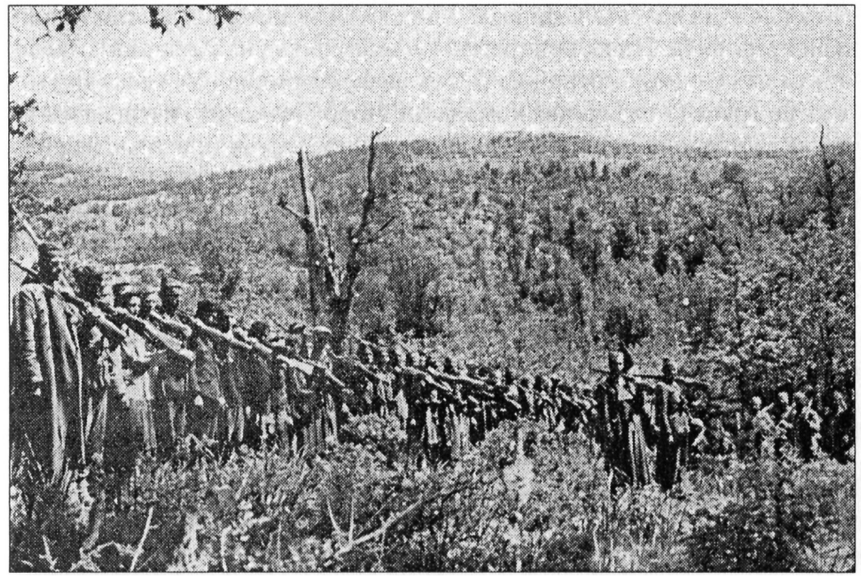
Despite the optimism of the Supreme Commander, the Chief and members of

[232] AVII, file 2, reg. no. 15/4.

the SH, the fighters and the people — Foča would remain in uncertainty for only two more days. That same day, Arso's assessment radiated optimism: "Liberating Borča was of enormous importance. It would have been the most dangerous direction for us — an attack from the rear by an exceptionally bloodthirsty enemy, the Ustaše. With that, the route toward the Montenegrin mountain massif — Piva, Maglić, Volujak — was secured."

However, the optimism quickly faded. On all fronts under enemy assault, positions were defended with ultimate sacrifice and hardship. With each passing hour, it became clearer that survival on this ever-shrinking and increasingly threatened territory would be impossible — and that crossing into Serbia through eastern Bosnia, due to the successful conclusion of "Rogatica" and the momentum of "Foča," was no longer viable. This led to the revival of plans for a breakthrough across the Lim River and through Nova Varoš, though this required the prior elimination of the Kolašin sector and, if possible, the capture of the Berane and Andrijevica districts. The enemy, however, would not allow that either: on May 20, some 4,000 Chetniks under Pavle Đurišić, following two failed Partisan attempts to break their lines near Kolašin, began a push to breach the Sinjajevina front. On May 26, after linking up with Bajo Stanišić's forces (6,340 strong), which had advanced from the south, they entered the burned-out town of Žabljak. On May 27, a Chetnik coup erupted in Golija. Eight shock and Partisan battalions from Herzegovina were "melting away" under heavy attacks by Italian and Chetnik units. Piva was abandoned after evacuating eight improvised field hospitals with 410 wounded and 160 sick, as well as 19 livestock farms containing 6,597 head of cattle for food reserves. The main Partisan forces withdrew toward Zelengora. In battles across the Sandžak, Montenegro and Herzegovina, roughly 25,000 Chetnik troops were supported — in many cases directly — by units from no fewer than ten Italian divisions belonging to the 6th and 14th Army Corps. Ten of the first Proletarian battalions, divided for operational reasons, fought as part of the Durmitor forces on the northern approaches to Piva and in Herzegovina. Six battalions from the Sandžak and ten from Montenegro were, during critical engagements, reorganized into three new Proletarian brigades: the 3rd Sandžak Brigade (June 5, five battalions, 958 fighters); the 4th Montenegrin Brigade (June 10, five battalions, 1,080 fighters); and the 5th Montenegrin Brigade (June 12, four battalions, 920 fighters). From Herzegovina, 370 fighters reached Zelengora, retreating alongside a group of Proletarian battalions ahead of parts of four Italian divisions and 3,600 Chetniks.

According to *The National Liberation War of Yugoslavia*, the SH's central strategy "gradually crystallized during the course of the enemy offensive" and consisted of the following: "Through active operations by Partisan units, inflict losses on the enemy and delay their advances in all directions, while securing strong flanks on key approaches — Golija and Durmitor — to enable the withdrawal and reorganization of Partisan forces into brigades. These would then be concentrated at the tri-border region of Bosnia, Herzegovina and Montenegro in order to, at a favourable moment, launch an offensive along a direction that would be most militarily and politically ad-



A reunion with comrades from the uprising days: The Zeta Detachment, May 1942, in Lipova Ravan near Nikšić.

vantageous for the further development of the NOB."[233]

Such a strategy could only be realized through skilful and decisive application of partisan tactics, and that within an increasingly narrow, roadless, and in nearly every way unfavourable area — both for unit survival and combat operations. Aware of this, members of the political and military leadership rushed to the field as delegates: Ranković with the Sandžak units; Sreten Žujović and Lola Ribar in Herzegovina; Milovan Đilas in Montenegro — each with a team of instructors. From preserved documents, we see Arso, Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, sometimes on the northern front from Jahorina to Čajniče, sometimes ordering the demolition of bridges after long delays. He was the last to leave Foča (May 10), together with Sreten Žujović, Pavle Ilić and engineer Vladimir Smirnov, following the destruction of the second bridge and the burning of buildings in the town.

Arso was also heavily engaged in other tasks. He coordinated the evacuation of eight hospitals from the endangered area of Piva; on May 19, he prepared the attack on Kolašin with the goal of advancing immediately through the Vasojevići region; on May 24, he formed the Durmitor Forces (seven battalions, under Commander Pero Ćetković) and issued their orders; and on June 10, he was the last to leave Piva, instructing the remaining leadership in the area to go underground. Throughout this period, Arso maintained contact with the staff, operational and rear commands, the wounded and the people. He issued orders, gave advice, offered support — and also reprimands — to save whatever still could be saved. All of this was happening while the population, due

[233] Edition of the *The Liberation War of the Peoples of Yugoslavia*, Vol. I, p. 218.

to political beliefs, propaganda, fear, and above all condemnation of the "red terror," was turning its back on the partisans in large numbers.

Assessing that only reorganized, rested, strong and well-armed partisan units — of which there were no longer any in this region — could meaningfully improve the position of the NOB here, Arso insisted on preserving the core of the partisan forces that had been withdrawn. In his view, that was the first condition for their breakthrough to the west, from where they could influence the further development of the NOB in Bosnia, Croatia and Slovenia. He would later, four years on, describe the formation of the first seven Proletarian Brigades — including the 6th East Bosnian and 10th Herzegovinian — as one of the greatest achievements of that time and space. In his *Overview of the National Liberation War,* he called them "the crown and essential legacy of the people's uprising in the eastern part of our country. Despite all the measures taken by the occupiers, Chetniks and Ustaše, the uprising was not crushed. It produced solid military formations to continue the struggle.

"In these difficult early operations, the great moral strength of the partisan fighter was revealed. Political awareness and a sense of purpose led them into the fight against fascism far from their homes. Our military and political leadership based its decisions and future plans on this fact. At the same time, sound solutions to the problems that arise in war gave the fighters confidence in the leadership, and they followed it steadfastly. In this region, through the unification of Serbian, Montenegrin, Herzegovinian and East Bosnian partisan forces, a real fighting unity was achieved in action. Here, those who had been hardened through the harshest trials came together — the most committed and determined elements of the Serbian people, ready to continue bearing the heavy burden of war across the entire country, for the freedom of all our peoples.

"So, before the start of the major Third Enemy Offensive, launched in the spring of 1942 against the main partisan strongholds in Yugoslavia (Montenegro-Herzegovina-eastern Bosnia; Bosnian Krajina-Lika; Slovenia), thanks to the vigorous efforts of our forces, we gained enough time to reorganize all our units in the tri-border area into brigades. The prior practice of maintaining large partisan detachments tied to their specific areas was, in principle, abandoned. All of our operational experience to date was applied to these brigades, and they were suited to the new conditions of warfare — allowing for fast and agile movement, shifting operations to distant areas, and more reliable manoeuvring in the face of a superior enemy that was making every effort to destroy us. These brigades were the true beginning, the foundational core of our army — solid, resilient and battle-hardened..."[234]

As the last line of defence, on June 8, the final unit of the Durmitor forces crossed the Piva River. Arriving with them, Arso stayed behind in Plužine, believing it was both a military and moral duty for the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters to be the last to leave the Piva region. Before that, he met with the leadership of the NOB, who had chosen to remain behind enemy lines — in hiding. He viewed this type of struggle as more complex, significantly harder and more dangerous than front-line fighting,

[234] A. Jovanović, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

and therefore held great respect for the underground fighters. At that meeting — according to Obrad Cicmil's testimony on the Durmitor underground in 1942 — "he spoke calmly, without any burden of defeat or anxiety, as he addressed his comrades." A former commander of the Durmitor detachment recalled that "around that time, Radio London reported that Molotov had visited the capital of Great Britain, where he signed an agreement of friendship and cooperation between the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom with British Foreign Secretary A. Eden (on May 26), valid for 20 years. Representing the two leading powers of the Anti-Fascist Coalition, they committed to opening a Second Front in Europe against fascism in 1942." The locals



Piva region, June 8, 1942: farewell to the underground fighters, with wishes for wartime success.

in Piva asked Arso when they could expect that to happen in concrete terms, where the operations might begin, how much relief it might bring to their region — and especially, how much it might speed up the end of the war. Cicmil records that Arso disappointed them: "He told us that although 1942 was named in the treaty as the year for opening the Second Front, the agreement itself was, in fact, a general understanding among the Allies — one which would require much more preparation and time before it could be realized. For such a massive undertaking, the time remaining until the coming winter — only about three to four months — was too short. He tended to view the declaration of 1942 as the target year more as a tactical-propaganda manoeuvre and a form of moral pressure on the enemy." "'As for us,' Arso explained, 'for now, we will withdraw from this region — but elsewhere, we will establish new liberated territories. And perhaps we will later leave those too and create third, even larger territories. In essence, our basic tactic is and will be a long struggle in circular movement.' Those words — 'a long struggle in circular movement' — deeply etched

themselves into my memory, though I heard them and used them for the first time in that context. Somehow, they illuminated the concept of the tactic that the SH had set for our units in the fight under occupation."[235]

These fighters — who remained in deep underground resistance to preserve the unextinguished flame of the NOB and the honour of freedom-loving Piva — remember how Arso spoke to them about fighting on occupied territory using the traditional *komita* style of warfare, something he had heard much about during the grim years of his childhood, and studied to some extent in his courses on military history, tactics and strategy. He urged them to safeguard the ancient Piva Monastery, especially against possible sabotage or provocations by "hostile enemies," who might then blame their acts on the partisans. He told them, roughly, that it was a true asset of national importance — a testament to the spirituality of this people, seven centuries old — adding, "we humans are but earthly dust, temporary guests in this world."[236]

At the very end of the initial phase (April 15-June 15) of the comprehensive offensive Operation Trio, which involved eleven occupying divisions (Italian: Pusteria, Venezia, Taro, Emilia, Messina, Marche, Murge, Cacciatori delle Alpi, Taurinense; German: 718th and parts of the 717th), the Ustaša Black Legion, Domobran forces and Chetnik units across eastern Bosnia, Herzegovina, Montenegro and the Sandžak, the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters was "seen" on June 14 in the area of Izgori. From there, he directed the withdrawal of units from the Sutjeska valley toward Zelengora, oversaw the evacuation of severely wounded fighters, ensured the protection of refugees, redirected food reserves and maintained communication with the Supreme Commander, who was retreating toward Vrbnica.

He could not have known that the operation was nearing its end — unfortunately marked by the Italian raid on the hospital in Goransko and the massacre of the non-evacuated wounded — but he did know that the partisan units directly under the SH had lost all the liberated territory they had held for months. They had suffered heavy losses, many had disbanded or scattered, yet the core of the forces, despite the ordeal they had gone through, had managed to survive and retreat into the mountainous terrain around the Sutjeska River. He understood that the units could not remain in that terrain for long — both because further enemy attacks were expected and because the area was entirely unsuitable for the troops' survival. He had a clear plan for a westward breakthrough by the partisan units, which he outlined in correspondence with the Operational Staff for Herzegovina regarding the attack on Borač. But at that point — with all decisions made by the CC of the CPY — it remained only a possibility...

It was during this period (on June 16), at Tjentište — not far from where exhaust-

[235] O. Cicmil, *Durmitor Illegality in 1942*, in *The Uprising of the Peoples of Yugoslavia*, Belgrade 1962.

[236] Hearing this testament from the partisans, the exiled abbot of the Morača Monastery and Arso's conversation partner from August 1941, Ilarion Mijatović, said: "Thus speaks the people's chosen leader and true military commander. Protect the people's sanctities, nothing else!" The abbot, with the partisans, protected the Piva Monastery until the Chetniks broke through there as well and captured him. According to some, they hanged him on a plum tree in front of the monastery, while others (academician Obren Blagojević, Piva, Belgrade 1971) state that "they burned him alive in a barn." For more details: R. Zogović, *Becoming and Existence*, Novi Sad 1993, pp. 240-242.

ed partisan units, the severely wounded and numerous refugees were gathering, with the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters at the centre — that two important anti-fascist and freedom-oriented meetings were held: the 2nd Conference of Patriots (the first had taken place on February 8, 1942 at the Ostrog Monastery) and the Assembly of Priests of Montenegro and Boka. The first gathering, the Conference of Patriots, was organized with the aim of denouncing the Chetnik movement and clarifying to the international public who was who on the Montenegrin front. It was initially planned for the end of May, then rescheduled for June 14 in Goransko (Piva), and ultimately held at the last minute on June 16. For the planned Conference of Patriots in Goransko, Arso Jovanović — at the request of organizer Božo Ljumović and with Tito's approval — was designated as a participant and presenter on behalf of the Partisan army. He prepared seriously for this public appearance, but on June 16 he was prevented from attending due to urgent military duties in the Zelengora region.[237]

At the Conference, a Declaration was adopted strongly condemning the Montenegrin separatists and Chetniks, and appealing to the government in London to renounce Divisional General (promoted to that rank on June 10) Draža Mihailović and to denounce him for his open collaboration with the occupiers. The document — the Declaration — was signed by 39 of the 75 invited delegates who were present, with another 36 signing it the following day, including six from the Sandžak. In total, 75 patriots signed the Declaration, but due to technical reasons during the preparation of the SH's letter to "Deda," the number was reduced to 36 of the most prominent signatories, among whom were seven officers of the royal Montenegrin and Yugoslav armies. When consulted about the final text of the letter, Arso supported a strong condemnation — with all due respect to the Allies — including criticism of the government-in-exile. He was convinced that, despite its distance from the battlefield, the government was fully aware of what its chosen representative and Chief of the Supreme Headquarters in the country was doing. Tito did not accept this, prioritizing political considerations. Tito's decision might have been different had he known that, on June 17, General Draža Mihailović had already requested from London that Arso Jovanović, along with a group of officers from the partisan army — as a "deserter from the Yugoslav Army in the Fatherland" — be stripped of his rank.[238] The Declaration of Patriots, with the names of 35 signatories, was broadcast several times on July 6 and 7 by *Slobodna Jugoslavija,* through which it reached the global democratic public.[239]

On the same day at Tjentište, Orthodox priests in the partisan army also held an assembly and adopted an Epistle to the clergy and the people, calling for resistance against the occupiers and condemning any collaboration with the enemy as treason. On behalf of all participants, the Epistle was signed by four priests, and its content was likewise shared with the public.

[237] From a conversation with B. Ljumović, April 1992, in Podgorica.

[238] The proposal was adopted by the government, and a decree was issued on July 3.

[239] AJ, Fund of the CC CPY-KI, 1942/127 (translation from Russian).

Part Five

THE OFFENSIVE OF THE PROLETARIANS TO THE WEST

• Direction of the breakthrough designated as early as February
• Author of the order for the advance march toward Bosanska Krajina
• Commander of the Operational Staff of the Northern Marching Column
• Leader of the battles and engagements for Butojno, Livno, Kupres, Bosansko Grahovo and Jajce — with shifting fortunes of war
• Proposal to Tito to bypass Kupres the next day
• Encounter with the ill-fated hero Cvijo Oraščić
• Sparse tally of the 4th Montenegrin Proletarian: from Pazarić to Kupres — 115 killed and 115 wounded
• By Order No. VK 809 from London on July 3, Arso stripped of rank and branded a "military traitor"
• Disagreements with Kosta Nađ over the Bihać operation
• Architect of the NOVJ as the regular armed force of the NOP
• Organizer of the wartime military education system that would eventually graduate 28,030 officers

Over the Balkan Ridge to Cincar *(June 24-July 26, 1942)*

Four proletarian brigades (1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th), with a total strength of 3,800 fighters and the SH at the head, carried out — from June 24 to September 25, 1942, from Zelengora to the Imotski-Jajce line — an advance march-manoeuvre across an 80-kilometre-wide zone and to a depth of 250 kilometres. Throughout, their movement was combined with continuous day-and-night offensive combat actions. Arso, in his section of the *Overview of the National Liberation War*, guided by the standards of military expertise, would refer to this movement of brigades as an offensive, without denying historians the right to call it a campaign. To him, it was a major and complex offensive operation of strategic importance, undertaken primarily to shift the focus of combat operations from one part of the battlefield to another — that is, to a more favourable area for consolidating forces and seizing the initiative.

Under the given circumstances, with the other officers of the SH occupied with different duties, all preparations for the march of the brigade group from Zelengora into western Bosnia — the military assessment, development of the operational plan and drafting of the order for executing this combat operation — fell entirely on Arso's shoulders. Only Colonel Savo Orović, during a meeting of SH members, brigade and some battalion commanders and commissars, held on June 20 "at the camp near Vrb-

nica," would deliver a few sentences charged with patriotic fervour. In his *War Diary*, he later noted that Tito gave a speech about the situation on the global and domestic fronts, the political significance of the "upcoming operation," and then addressed the need for "mutual support among comrades and units, evacuating the wounded and fallen at any cost, documenting acts of bravery, keeping individual records and lists of the dead and wounded, and gave instructions regarding camouflage and silence on the march, limited fire-lighting, etc."[240]



Скица 4. — Размера 1:5,000.000. — Офанзива пролетерских бригада крајем пролећа 1942 године ка Босанској Крајини

Arso, according to Milovan Đilas, laid out the military objective of the march, explained the manner of movement and stressed the importance of marching discipline. In fact, even the old Colonel Orović thoroughly recorded the address by the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, which conformed to the provisions of *War Service*, and in which Arso explained in detail the procedures for units and fighters during the march:

"The movement will take place at night, without noise or fire. Marches will not be long. Units must remain under control. Mutual assistance is essential. Rest and overnight stays outside populated areas — in forests, at higher elevations.

"Food: to be acquired with gold and silver coin or by requisition. Each brigade must have its own supply section.

"Small skirmishes are to be avoided; those that are forced upon us should be met with determination. In recent times, several female comrades have been killed due to lack of training. Train and protect them.

"Identification signs will be issued every 10 to 15 days.

"Signalling: with red flags, flares and fire.

"Reconnaissance at longer distances, 2 to 3 km, using 20 to 30 soldiers.

[240] S. Orović, *op. cit.*, p. 250.

"Security on location: consistently, from dominating positions.

"Approach to civilians: friendly; efforts should be made to neutralize them in advance with proclamations and agreements.

"Guides are essential — always seek reliable ones.

"Maintain order at wells and springs.

"Keep lists of personnel.

"Record outstanding examples of bravery.

"Clean weapons and inspect them more often, especially after combat.

"Readiness: always strict. Units should stay grouped.

"Always carry one day's worth of food by hand, but do not consume it immediately.

"Conservation of strength: protect both troops and animals from unnecessary exhaustion.

"Treat soldiers as comrades."[241]

The oldest and most respected soldier, Savo Orović, recorded how Arso spoke about troop nutrition and discipline on the march, stressing that "it should be reinforced following the example of the Red Army." He also pointed to measures for strengthening reconnaissance and intelligence services, as well as combat security, stating that "Serbian troops lost the Battle of Maritsa (1371) due to shortcomings in these areas." He emphasized the need to develop manuals for moral education, "training and combat," and



Loyal wartime comrades and planners of the western offensive: Colonel Savo Orović and Captain Arso Jovanović.

[241] *Ibid.*, p. 251.

"hygiene maintenance," repeating the obligation of "conducting instruction within the units whenever possible."

However, there is something else recorded about that meeting that, as this brave man and steadfast soldier put it, "slipped out." Namely, he wrote that there had been discussion about which direction to go from there, and from that discussion — he wrote — three options emerged: "first, to head through the Sandžak into Serbia; second, to move toward eastern Bosnia; third, to return to Montenegro." Tito — he notes — disagreed with all three proposals and instead "decided to move via Kalinovik, along the northern slopes of the Dinaric range, toward Bosanska Krajina and on to Croatia, following a route dictated by both military and political reasons — that is: good opportunities for major sabotage operations, such as blowing up the Mostar'Sarajevo railway; taking advantage of the local population's readiness for uprising; forming new brigades and larger units; and establishing a free territory, etc."[242] The author of this account was clearly remembering all this in retrospect — that is, at a time when propaganda had already begun painting a halo above Tito's head as a military leader, even fabricating a legend beneath what was otherwise a valuable photograph of Orović in Vrbnica, allegedly taken on June 22, 1942 — while Tito was dictating to his secretary Zdenka the order for the march of the Proletarian Brigades into Bosanska Krajina. That, however, could only have been "a photo staged for history," because the order — as military protocol always required — was written and read aloud before the officers by the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, Arso, and the Supreme Commander Tito merely signed it. After all, Arso was the only one in the SH in possession of a topographic map, according to which he "guided" the brigades. In the written order — three typed pages long — he listed the names of 49 locations and 22 elevations. Moreover, at that time in the SH on Zelengora, there was little to no knowledge of the enemy's deployment or strength along the route of the march — something that is explicitly stated in the introduction of the order, which covered only the first three days of the march, from June 24 to 27. Apparently, the SH was also unaware of the withdrawal of Italian troops from the so-called 3rd and most of the 2nd Occupation Zones in the NDH, precisely along the direction of the Proletarian Brigades' advance. This withdrawal was formalized in the "Zagreb Agreement" of June 19. The Italians had, in fact, pulled back to the coastal strip, and in the deeper hinterland, they maintained positions only in areas where they had specific military or economic interests (Mostar, Bosansko Grahovo, Karlovac).[243]

At the meeting described by Colonel Savo Orović — according to the testimony of M. Đilas, S. Zujovic and A. Rankovic — there was no discussion of any breakthrough options. Tito simply stated that they would head west, offering only a brief explanation. However, he would later recount and write that there had been a debate, and that he had supposedly been forced — using his authority as Supreme Commander — to "slam his fist on the table" to put an end to it. There is also no mention of any such

[242] *Ibid.,* p. 250.

[243] The text of the Agreement in *Collection of Documents on the NOP*, Vol. V, Book 5, pp. 303-310; commentary by D. Nenezić, *Yugoslav Territories under Italy 1941-1943*, Belgrade 1999, pp. 112-117.

debate in Vladimir Dedijer's *Diary* — only a note that a meeting of the SH's party cell had been held, at which Lola Ribar explained why they were not going to the long-anticipated Serbia: "Aside from Nedic's forces, we would be fighting the Germans and untouched Bulgarian troops. We'll go into Serbia under better conditions. For now, we have chosen the territory between Western Bosnia and Croatia — that is, between the Italians and Ustaše. We will strike the main German communication line in the Balkans: Zagreb-Belgrade. Our intended direction was Eastern Bosnia, but the people there are exhausted from war, and food is a serious issue. In the new direction, we will need to carry out intense political work, because this is a region where not a single Partisan boot has set foot. We'll buy food. We have gold, silver and some kunas." Dedijer adds: "Tonight, *Slobodna Jugoslavija* broadcasts data on the past year of war. Losses: 10.5 million Germans versus 4.5 million raised under socialism. Sevastopol is holding. On the Kharkov front, the Germans have begun advancing."[244] There is no doubt that the decision to move the brigades westward — at the time the only viable direction with any prospect of success — was made under the heavy impression of Stalin's failed counter-offensive and the advance of German forces toward Crimea, Kharkov, Voronezh and Rostov. This meant that turning eastward was no longer an option, something Moscow had made unambiguously clear to Tito.

What is most relevant for this topic is that this direction of advance for the main units under the command of the SH had already been anticipated by Arso. In his correspondence with the Operational Staff for Herzegovina, he had "enveloped" the idea three months earlier, writing at 11:30 p.m. on April 24: "Keep in mind that for us and our operations, it is very important to clear the area from Konjic. Via that route, through Prozor, it's easiest to connect with Bosanska Krajina and Croatia, where the Partisan movements are very strong. So, this direction can serve as a channel for the penetration of our forces. In addition, that would bring us to the Mostar-Sarajevo railway and allow us to seize various supplies — from where actions could be launched in multiple directions. All of this points to the importance of clearing the Neretva..."[245]

The Chief of the Supreme Headquarters developed his plan in detail on June 20 at a meeting of commanders in Vrbnica. Climbing onto a large tree stump — tall and gaunt from exhaustion — and aligning himself with the general outline of Tito's decision, Arso spoke at length before the commanders and commissars of the Proletarian Brigades. In attendance, aside from them, were also the commanders of the 5th Proletarian Brigade and the Herzegovinian NOP Detachment — Sava Kovačević and Vlado Šegrt (each unit numbering around 1,200 fighters). These units were to remain in the Zelengora area to protect a field hospital with 170 seriously wounded and a civilian column, and then — depending on the evolving situation — either break through toward Montenegro or Eastern Bosnia, or, if conditions permitted, follow the Strike Group into Bosanska Krajina. In line with the assessment that units could no longer remain in the rugged terrain around the Sutjeska River, the military and

[244] V. Dedijer, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, note for June 23.

[245] This stance will be repeated on May 2, in a letter from the Supreme Commander to the Operational Staff of Herzegovina, AVII, file 3, reg. no. 19/5.

political decision to carry out a breakthrough into Bosanska Krajina with a group of brigades was adopted on June 19 at a CC meeting in Vrbnica. The goal was to push into western Bosnia and toward the Dinaric Alps, to connect with Krajina and Dalmatian units — about which only fragmentary and overly optimistic reports were available. Some of that optimism was also inspired by *Slobodna Jugoslavija's* reports of major victories further along the intended breakthrough route, in Slovenia. Arso had already presented the Supreme Commander with a military assessment — that it was possible, using methods to be determined on the ground, to cross the road and railway from Sarajevo to Konjic, then reach the Bitovnja and Vranica mountains and proceed from there — depending on operational conditions — westward, across the Rame and Vrbas valleys, and ultimately toward the Dinaric range. The front line of that breakthrough — in conventional terms, no broader than that of a well-equipped infantry brigade of the time — could, given the terrain and the disposition of NDH Ustaša and Domobran forces, be between 60 and 80 kilometres wide, with a depth of up to 250 kilometres according to geographical maps. Therefore, such a breakthrough could not be fully defined in advance due to the unknown situation on the ground, and would have to proceed in stages — the first from the crossing of the Foča-Kalinovik road to the approaches to the Sarajevo-Mostar railway, the second to reaching the Bitovnja and Vranica mountains, and "beyond that, depending on how the situation unfolds." The Supreme Commander, after a discussion with the Chief of Staff in which he understood and accepted all of Arso's arguments, presented this idea as his own assessment and decision at the CC session on June 19, and the following day before the commanders. According to the recollections of three members of the Political Bureau and the Supreme Headquarters, the decision was adopted without debate — because there was no alternative. Second Lieutenant Petar Radević later recalled hearing Arso tell Tito, on the approaches to Vrbnica, that one of the lessons learned from the months of previous combat — especially from the recent offensive Operation Trio — was that the enemy needed to be "drawn out of barracks and fortified settlements and attacked in open ground, decisively," primarily through ambushes and partisan tactics, using their own combat experience and knowledge of the terrain, and at a time that best suited their own troops. Conditions for applying that principle, at least east of the Neretva, no longer existed — so heading west was inevitable. In the previously cited publication *Overview of the National Liberation War*, Arso later wrote that Tito, having formed the Strike Group of brigades, sought to "support and ignite uprisings in the western regions of our country. It was no longer useful to remain in the tri-border area with the main forces. The Italians had exploited the Chetniks to the maximum, so the struggle was at risk of losing its essential character — a fight against the occupiers. Keeping such a strike group on rugged mountainous terrain with scarce food supplies was untenable and would have meant the loss of its combat potential. The Croatian masses, who had largely remained on the sidelines, needed to be stirred and drawn into the national liberation movement."[246]

[246] A. Jovanović, *op. cit.*, p. 26.



Zeletora, June 24, 1942: the northern column sets off on a march along the long Balkan ridge.

The Chief of the Supreme Headquarters drafted the operation order and delivered it on June 22. In addition, each commander received a marching plan and movement sketch, containing dozens of geographic names (for the 1st Proletarian Brigade alone, there were five elevation points and fourteen other locations). These documents were prepared by Arso and his deputy, Pavle Ilić. At the meeting, the commanders criticized Arso for the firm stance he had taken — both in discussion and in the order — that, in order to spare the exhausted brigades from losses and to avoid entirely possible surprises, the march should proceed via Treskavica, Bjelašnica and Igman. There was resistance, but the Supreme Commander accepted the "military reasoning," and after the first stage of the march, in Presjenica — first at the CC session and then in the SH — it was concluded that this decision had been life-saving.

Over the following two days, leading up to the brigades' departure, Arso was undoubtedly the busiest person in the SH. He visited units, organized, inspected, advised, demanded and issued orders — all to ensure the success of this movement and its intended outcome: shifting the focus of operations to what he firmly believed would be a more favourable area, with very real prospects for creating a new and broader free territory, from which combat operations could expand in coordination with the Krajina units, forming the basis for larger operational formations of the National Liberation Army. To increase unit mobility, he ordered the brigades to lighten their load by leaving behind more of the wounded, the ill and the infirm, reducing the number of pack animals, and reallocating most of the riding horses to those wounded fighters deemed fit to endure the march. Ammunition was redistributed and the Main Supply Command was disbanded — a decision that made the brigades responsible for their own provisioning in the territory they passed through, "through voluntary contribu-

tions and purchases using money."

As part of the political preparations for the march, and by decision of the CC of the CPY, political departments were established within brigade headquarters, acting as "instructional bodies of the Party's highest leadership." This deepened the political oversight of the partisan units in practice, ensuring the Party's absolute control over command. According to Arso, this did not strengthen the units — but he understood it as a necessity, a continuation of the political indoctrination of the army which, as Tito stated on June 19 at the assembly of the 4th Proletarian Brigade and the Herzegovinian NOP Detachment in the village of Ljubina on Mount Zelengora, was keeping pace with Stalin's Red Army — which served as both example and inspiration even in this desolate mountainous region.[247] During the offensive, Arso's wife, Senka, would also serve in the political department of the 4th Proletarian Brigade.

During an extended halt in Trnovo, where he arrived with the advance party of the 1st Proletarian Brigade, Arso organized "in-depth reconnaissance" and surveillance of the Sarajevo-Konjic railway line, focusing on assessing the defensive security of stations, bridges, cuttings and tunnels — in order to determine the best crossing point and method. At a meeting held on June 30 in Presjenica, he presented and evaluated the collected intelligence on enemy forces in Sarajevo and along the railway to Konjic, then proposed abandoning the earlier plan for a simultaneous crossing at a single point by all four brigades. Instead, he suggested launching attacks along two separate routes across a 60-kilometre front. In line with this, he proposed forming two marching columns. The Right Column — composed of the 2nd and 4th Proletarian Brigades — would operate under the command of an Operational Staff made up of Arso Jovanović and Milovan Đilas as SH representatives, along with brigade commanders Ljubodrag Đurić and Peko Dapčević. Their task was to reach the railway near Sarajevo, attack enemy garrisons, destroy the Hadžići and Tarčin stations, and then, without delay, continue toward Mount Bitovnja. The left (southern) column consisted of the 1st and 3rd Proletarian Brigades. Under Tito's direct command, they were to reach the railway line closer to Konjic, destroy the railway stations along with their facilities and any trains found there, and then quickly push on to Bitovnja.[248]

The attack on both fronts was carried out during the night of July 3-4. Its outcome would likely have been quite different had the partisan command had accurate intelligence on the targeted objectives. That night, the communications line between Sarajevo and Konjic — and the installations along it, which were of great importance to the Germans, Italians and the NDH — were defended by only 211 Ustaše, gendarmes and Domobran troops, as the Italians had withdrawn their security forces from that zone based on the "Zagreb Agreement." In fact, just one day earlier, these facilities had been guarded by only 51 gendarmes and a few militiamen.

However, on the eve of the attack by the Proletarian Brigades on the Sarajevo-Konjic railway, the Ustaša-Domobran command — having been warned by the intelligence

[247] *Collection of Documents on the Fourth Proletarian Brigade*, Vol. I, Belgrade 1969, pp. 9-12.

[248] For more detail: M. Leković, *Offensive of the Proletarian Brigades*, Belgrade, 1965.

service of the German 718th Division of a possible partisan offensive — reinforced the railway line with around 80 additional Ustaše, gendarmes and militiamen. Simultaneously, the Germans dispatched an armoured train from Sarajevo toward Konjic, tasked with patrolling as far as the tunnel beneath Ivan Pass and, if needed, assisting in the defence of the railway installations. That very train would, on its return to Sarajevo, completely surprise the Proletarian units of the Right Column, which had been attacking the railway stations. Caught under fire, the train retreated toward Sarajevo. However, it was reasonable to assume it would soon return — and with reinforcements. For this reason, the Proletarian units withdrew from the railway, failing to sever it completely and thereby prevent the possibility of the Left Column being caught off guard if, for any reason, their part of the mission took longer. Tito would later reproach Arso and Đilas for this failure, without acknowledging the proximity to the strong Sarajevo garrison, the brigades' lack of adequate weapons to destroy the armoured train or their lack of tools and explosives needed to demolish the railway. Additionally, the attack had to be carried out swiftly, without engaging in prolonged combat, with the aim of quickly crossing the communications line and reaching Mount Bitovnja.

The Right Column — under Arso's command — after destroying the railway stations at Hadžići, Pazarić and Tarčin and dispersing enemy garrisons, immediately headed into the mountains, orienting toward Kreševo, Kiseljak and Fojnica. The Left Column, however, by later decision of the Supreme Commander, would remain along the railway for several more days, during which it destroyed stations, installations, special cogwheel locomotives designed for climbing Mount Ivan, bridges and other vital infrastructure used for transport between Sarajevo and Mostar. Meanwhile, the brigades, particularly on the southern sector, captured significant war booty, and the railway was rendered inoperable until September 11.

During this time, the Right Column captured Kreševo and threatened Kiseljak and Fojnica — towns it likely would have taken in the initial assault had it not been driven out by strong elements of the German 718th Division and Ustaša-Domobran units. After that, the brigades repositioned to the Zec and Vranica mountains, from where they awaited news on developments concerning the Left Column.

During that brief operational pause, the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters and the commander of the 2nd Proletarian Brigade had a chance to speak a little more informally. As Lj. Đurić recorded in his *Memoirs* (pp. 99-100), among other things, Arso "justified Tito's harshness." Sometimes, said Arso, "the Supreme Commander flares up, but quickly calms down. What irritates Tito the most are tasks that are carried out halfway or sloppily. That's why everyone around him tries not to anger him. Besides that, concern for Tito's safety is always on their minds." He told him that Tito is a "gifted strategist" and that he "admires him not only for his political strategy but also for his performance on the battlefield, which is incredibly difficult under the conditions in which we're conducting the NOB — made all the more complicated by domestic traitors."

Praising the Supreme Commander, according to Đurić, the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters continued: "When I took on this role, I was anxious about the immense

responsibility and the possible consequences of wrong moves. However, I quickly shed that burden because Tito, as Supreme Commander, would anticipate such details in his strategic decisions that I was left speechless. Not only that, but behind every strategic plan lay a longer-term strategic outlook that inspired confidence in our success. However, when it comes to commanding our units, or 'plugging gaps' in difficult situations, some members of the SH react nervously and hastily. I myself sometimes give in to that momentary mindset — driven by the need to ensure Tito's and the SH's safety..."

On July 7, the staff of the Right Column informed Supreme Commander Tito of their plan to advance toward the Vrbas River valley, with the goal of cutting the Travnik-Gornji Vakuf road. Two days later, a reply arrived from Solakova Kula — addressed to "comrades Đido and Arso" — in which Tito stated he agreed with the plan but also emphasized the need to "at the same time seize the road between Gornji Vakuf and Donji Vakuf in the Vrbas valley." He added, "My opinion is that your brigades should take Bugojno, and possibly even Donji Vakuf. If there are larger garrisons there, we will, after taking Prozor, come to your aid. Your right flank should extend to Donji Vakuf. Later, our direction will be southwest from Donji Vakuf toward Čador Mountain, so that we bypass Jajce from the south and reach the Jajce-Split railway." He also mentioned having information "that supposedly the Chetniks are to arrive in Gornji Vakuf," and therefore believed it was essential to "seize Gornji Vakuf and the area between Mount Vranica and Raduša as soon as possible," indicating that if the Left Column successfully takes Prozor, it "will immediately move toward Gornji Vakuf" as well. He concluded: "Consider the seizure of Gornji Vakuf your first and most important task. The presence of a stronger enemy force in that town would jeopardize the direction of our continued movement."[249]

Realizing the Supreme Commander's concept for a continued (joint) direction of operations along a wide front through the Vrbas valley, Arso and Đilas — judging that their assistance would not be necessary for the Left Column — redirected their units toward Gornji Vakuf, with the goal of liberating it and securing the road toward Travnik and Donji Vakuf. On July 11 and 12, the brigades liberated Gornji Vakuf and Šebešić, but missed the opportunity to seize Bugojno and Donji Vakuf on the move — while those towns were still defended by weak Ustaša forces. This hesitation, along with a four-day wait on Vranica to monitor the development of the Left Column's advance, can partly be considered a failure on Arso Jovanović's part due to the nature of his duty. We say "partly" because, according to the agreement in Gornja Presjenica, the columns — separated by about 50 kilometres — were to rest after crossing the railway, establish contact at Bitovnja and then decide on the next phase of the advance. After all, the seizure of Gornji Vakuf was, in the Supreme Commander's letter of July 9, defined as the "first and most important task," while the liberation of Bugojno and Donji Vakuf was noted as a possibility and a need — achievable with the support of the Left Column. The Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, however, was wary of spreading the

[249] AVII, file 2-B, reg. no. 2/2.

units too thin across such a wide area and attacking multiple targets simultaneously, which were defended by strong Ustaša, Domobran and even German forces. As events unfolded, Arso's caution proved justified. Namely, on July 16-17 — during the attack of four battalions from the 4th Proletarian and the 4th Battalion of the 1st Proletarian Brigade on Bugojno — it became clear that the enemy had concentrated substantial forces for the defence of the garrison, which five Proletarian battalions were unable to overcome in a direct assault.

Meanwhile, the 2nd Proletarian Brigade was engaged around Donji Vakuf. Đilas — believing that Bugojno could be taken without the brigade — ordered it to manoeuvre and appear between Donji Vakuf and Jajce, confident this would contribute to the liberation of Donji Vakuf, Bugojno and possibly even Jajce. While such a plan would have been reasonable had the Partisan brigades been larger and better armed, under the actual circumstances it proved unrealistic and ineffective. That is, rather than launching a concentrated attack on Bugojno with both brigades, they operated separately with no real chance of success. The manoeuvre sent the 2nd Proletarian far from Bugojno and led to seven days of independent, unsuccessful fighting with heavy casualties.

At the same time, the enemy had concentrated two battalions of the "Black Legion," one Ustaša and one Domobran battalion, and several companies around Bugojno. Additionally, between Bugojno and Donji Vakuf, there was an armoured train and a vehicle. Based on this intelligence, the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters — on July 19, without the support of the 2nd Proletarian Brigade, which was some 20 km from Bugojno — proposed to the Supreme Commander that the attack be delayed by one day, allowing time for the brigade to relocate and participate in the assault. Tito rejected Arso's proposal and ordered that Bugojno be attacked on the night of July 20-21, insisting that sufficient forces were available even if the "Serbian proletarians" failed to arrive — namely five battalions of the 4th Proletarian, three battalions of the 1st Proletarian and the 2nd Brigade as a reserve near Donji Vakuf.[250] According to Arso's orders, three battalions from the 2nd Proletarian were to join the attack, but only two arrived — and with delay — which was not enough to ensure success in this second attempt on Bugojno. Even if the entire 2nd Proletarian had participated, the outcome likely would not have changed, given the unfavourable balance of forces along the Travnik-Bugojno-Kupres axis. The cost of these failed attacks was very high — the 4th Proletarian Brigade alone suffered 100 killed and wounded, the 2nd Proletarian 57 and the 1st Proletarian around 10.

In explaining his independent and, in this case, ultimately futile decision, Đilas wrote to the Supreme Commander about why he had separated from Arso and taken the 2nd Proletarian far from Bugojno: "We made a major mistake by separating from the main force (i.e. you) and being out of contact for so long, even though the goal — severing the Donji Vakuf-Jajce and Donji Vakuf-Travnik connections — was, at least in my opinion, properly set. Arso later wrote to me that the failure to liberate

[250] J. Broz, *Collected Works*, Vol. 11, p. 108.

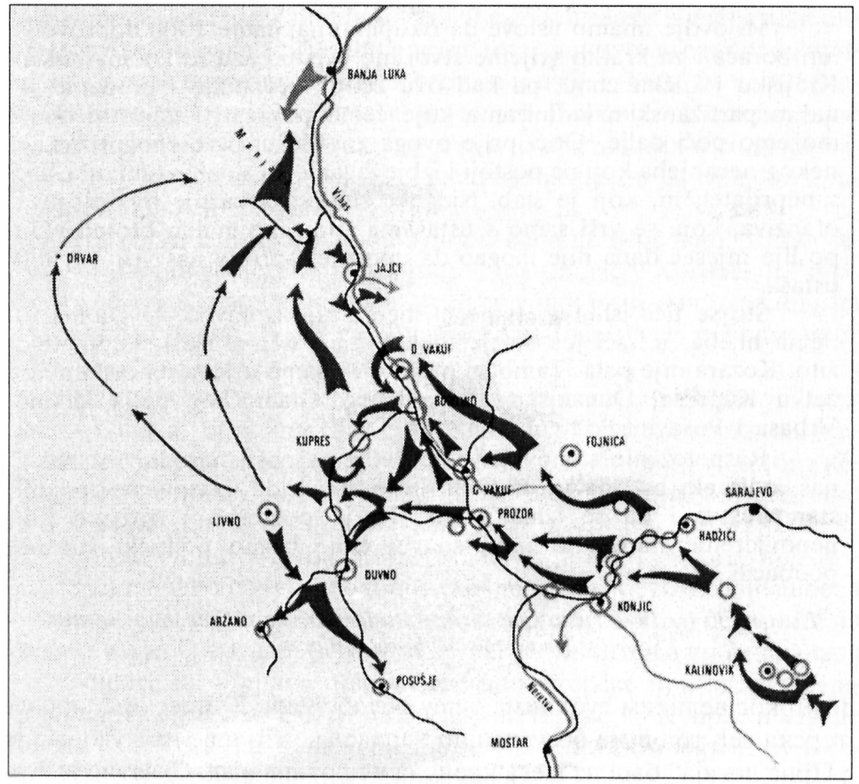
Bugojno could — in Tito's words — spell disaster for us. I don't quite see it that way, and I think Arso is exaggerating; although I do recognize the importance of Bugojno, which is the centre of an entire region and would be an inexhaustible source for us, not only of material goods but — more importantly — of human resources. But... the 2nd Brigade was unable to complete the task assigned to it, partly due to — shall we say — objective reasons, and partly subjective ones." Assuming that he would "likely bear the brunt this time," Đilas identified the first "subjective reason" as the fact that the command of the 2nd Proletarian was "very poorly composed and enjoys no trust from the troops." He went on to assess each individual member, concluding that few were truly fit for their roles. However, this would soon be convincingly disproven by Sreten Žujović, who was sent by the SH as a delegate to verify the accuracy of Đilas' assessments about the unit's leadership and performance.

As for Đilas' prediction that he would "bear the brunt" for his evident mistake and insubordination — it came true. On July 17, Tito wrote to Arso from Prozor: "Đido's actions are utterly condemnable, as they are the actions of an irresponsible man which have led to serious consequences and could have ended in disaster if immediate steps are not taken to transfer the 2nd Brigade to the Bugojno-Donji Vakuf sector and link up with you."[251] That stern reprimand of Đilas was the only immediate consequence. For the next six years (until 1948), no one associated Arso's name with the failure and losses at Bugojno, and during the following six years (until 1954), under Đilas' own authority, no one mentioned the events as his mistake — instead, they were attributed to Arso. Only after Đilas' political downfall were his self-critical letter and Tito's harsh rebuke revealed, along with Tito's direct order to Arso not to delay the attack on Bugojno. Nevertheless, historians and writers — almost by default — continued to associate the failed assault on that fortified town and its heavy casualties exclusively with Arso's name, "forgetting" his proposal to postpone the attack by 24 hours to allow the 2nd Proletarian Brigade to participate. Only a few, and only long after Tito's death — for example, Colonel Prof. Dr. Mladenko Colić — would state the truth: that with the capture of Gornji Vakuf, along with Prozor and Šćit, the Strike Group secured a favourable operational base from which to continue actions toward the northwest, and that "the evident failure at Bugojno and Donji Vakuf did not significantly alter the SH's operational plan."[252] Indeed, in his letter to Arso on July 17, the Supreme Commander ordered that unit commanders explain "this setback to the fighters as a normal occurrence, one that cannot impact our further successes."

At a meeting between the Supreme Commander and the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters on July 22 in Pidriš, it was decided to redirect combat operations so that the main force, while leaving some elements behind in the Prozor valley, would move northwest — the Right Column toward Kupres, and the Left toward Livno. That decision ultimately proved sound. Prozor was preserved as a connection to units still on Zelengora, and also as a supply source for the Partisan forces. Kupres would

[251] *Ibid.*

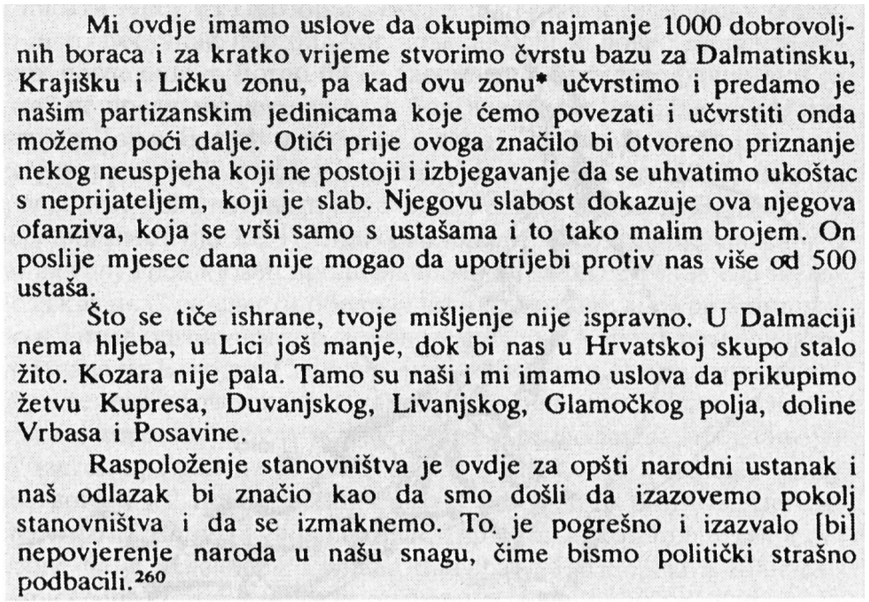
[252] M. Colić, *Overview of Operations in the Yugoslav War Battlefield 1941-1945*, Belgrade 1988, p. 63.



The course of the offensive at a depth of 350 kilometres.

be blockaded after several failed attempts to take it; then, following the liberation of Šujica and Duvno, Livno would also be liberated — representing a key milestone in the Proletarian Brigades' advance westward.

The Chief of the Supreme Headquarters participated in the attack on Šujica alongside the staff of the 3rd Proletarian Brigade. Those who took part remember him from the front line of battle, where, after the success on July 25, he told them to rest, bathe in the stream and prepare for new attacks against the Ustaše. He then hurried to Mala Drežnica on Mount Cincar for a meeting with the Supreme Commander, during which it was decided that Arso would, during the night of July 28-29, launch an attack on Livno with six battalions. However, an Ustaša counter-offensive from Kupres recaptured Šujica and Duvno, forcing Arso, with a group of three Proletarian Brigades and a detachment of Krajina fighters, to push them back. As a result, the attack on Livno was delayed to the night of August 2-3, and then again to August 4-5 due to delays by the Combined Krajina Detachment, when it was finally carried out. Confronted with the altered circumstances, Arso had already made a new assessment and wrote to Tito about it. This letter, though not preserved, is referenced by Milovan Đilas and Ljubo-



Mi ovdje imamo uslove da okupimo najmanje 1000 dobrovoljnih boraca i za kratko vrijeme stvorimo čvrstu bazu za Dalmatinsku, Krajišku i Ličku zonu, pa kad ovu zonu* učvrstimo i predamo je našim partizanskim jedinicama koje ćemo povezati i učvrstiti onda možemo poći dalje. Otići prije ovoga značilo bi otvoreno priznanje nekog neuspjeha koji ne postoji i izbjegavanje da se uhvatimo ukoštac s neprijateljem, koji je slab. Njegovu slabost dokazuje ova njegova ofanziva, koja se vrši samo s ustašama i to tako malim brojem. On poslije mjesec dana nije mogao da upotrijebi protiv nas više od 500 ustaša.

Što se tiče ishrane, tvoje mišljenje nije ispravno. U Dalmaciji nema hljeba, u Lici još manje, dok bi nas u Hrvatskoj skupo stalo žito. Kozara nije pala. Tamo su naši i mi imamo uslova da prikupimo žetvu Kupresa, Duvanjskog, Livanjskog, Glamočkog polja, doline Vrbasa i Posavine.

Raspoloženje stanovništva je ovdje za opšti narodni ustanak i naš odlazak bi značio kao da smo došli da izazovemo pokolj stanovništva i da se izmaknemo. To je pogrešno i izazvalo [bi] nepovjerenje naroda u našu snagu, čime bismo politički strašno podbacili.[260]

Cincar, July 30, 1942: Tito criticizes Arso Jovanović for the proposal to move south of fortified Kupres.

drag Đurić, and Tito himself strongly contested its contents in a reply dated July 30. Arso had clearly begun to reflect: Kreševo had been taken and lost the same day, Šujica and Duvno would fall the following day, and Gornji Vakuf after a few days. Despite heavy losses, Donji Vakuf and Bugojno remained unconquered; Kupres had already been unsuccessfully attacked three times by the 2nd Proletarian Brigade — which was not surprising given that the "Black Legion" had launched its counter-attack from there. Arso came to realize that fortified towns could not be taken or held with such tactics and without artillery, even with the Proletarians' heroism, and that the strategic goal could only be reached by changing the direction of attack and employing a different approach. He outlined this first point in his letter to Tito, arguing that such garrisons could be blockaded by partisan forces while the main force — the Proletarian Brigades — bypassed them. Regarding the second point, he composed a brief lesson for brigade staffs with guidelines on how to seize settlements at night, drawing on his extensive experience from Pljevlja to Bugojno. Tito wrote back on July 30 at 8:20 a.m. from Cincar, rejecting Arso's proposal that the SH and the Proletarian Brigades abandon the current territory and continue advancing through Dalmatia and Lika toward the northwest.[253] Tito explained:

"Here, we have the conditions to gather at least 1,000 volunteer fighters and, in a short time, to establish a firm base for the Dalmatian, Krajina and Lika zones. Once we consolidate and hand over this zone to our partisan units — which we will strengthen

[253] J. Broz, *Collected Works*, vol. 11, note 260, p. 288.

and unify — we can move on. To leave before doing so would be an open admission of failure, which does not exist, and an avoidance of confrontation with the enemy, who is weak. His weakness is shown by this offensive being carried out solely with Ustaše, and in such small numbers. After a month, he has not been able to send more than 500 Ustaše against us.

"As for supplies, your view is incorrect. There is no bread in Dalmatia, even less in Lika, while in Croatia grain would cost us dearly. Kozara has not fallen. Our forces are there, and we have the conditions to collect the harvest from the fields of Kupres, Duvno, Livno and Glamoč, the Vrbas valley and Posavina.

"The population here is ready for a general uprising, and our departure would look like we came just to provoke a massacre of the people and then retreat. That would be a grave mistake and would cause the people to lose confidence in our strength — a major political failure."[254]

Since Arso's full argument is unknown, it's easy to criticize him for not accounting for the economic exhaustion and arid terrain through which he proposed an advance, as well as the political considerations Tito pointed to. Tito concluded by ordering that, after neutralizing the counter-attack from Kupres toward Šujica, all Proletarian Brigades and Krajina partisans regroup, that the 2nd Proletarian Brigade resume its assault on Kupres, and that an attack on Livno be launched, ending with: "Carry out my order and inform us of the completed preparations."

Livno Falls *(August 4-7, 1942)*

In response to Tito's order, Ljubodrag Đurić, as he writes in his memoirs, firmly told Arso and Crni that his brigade, after three failed attempts, "cannot take Kupres without artillery." The Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, according to Đurić's account, reacted by writing another letter to Tito: "Comrade Stari, my personal opinion is that Kupres should no longer be attacked — at least for a while — because the element of surprise is gone. I believe we should move quickly to Livno." In writing this, Đurić not only relied on memory but also referenced a source: *Collection of Documents on the NOR,* Vol. 2, Book 5, Document 65.

Tito's decision stood: The Serbian proletarian battalions would continue attacking Kupres, while other Proletarian and Krajina battalions would move against Livno. Beyond that, little could be done to stop the bloodshed.

Assigned to command the group of battalions attacking Livno, and facing delays in assembling the units, the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters reported to the Supreme Commander on August 2: "Given the disposition and condition of the 1st and 3rd Brigade units, as well as the feasibility of establishing contact with the Glamoč Detachment (meaning 450 fighters of the 5th Krajina Partisan Detachment), I've decided to carry out the attack on Livno during the night of August 4-5." According to the order issued by the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, the attacking force

[254] *Ibid.,* p. 137; AVII, file 2-B, reg. no. 46/57-1.

consisted of four battalions from the 1st Proletarian, three from the 3rd Proletarian and elements of the 5th Krajina Detachment. Overseeing the preparations from the command post on Švabino Field, Arso realized that parts of the Krajina units assigned to a key direction of attack would not arrive on time. He informed the commander of the 1st Proletarian Brigade of the possibility of delaying the attack by 24 hours. Commander Koča, who was already on position conducting final reconnaissance and issuing operational assignments with his staff and battalion commanders, was deeply frustrated by the suggestion of postponement. Certain that "the enemy is present this time" and that the attack would succeed, Koča — angry and impulsive — scribbled a note on his knee, tearing it from his notebook. Even he would admit, five decades later, that the message was "inappropriate in tone," and certainly curt and offensive. The note to "Comrade Arso" read:

"1. We received your letter at 2:00 p.m.

"2. All of us in the Staff are absolutely against any delay.

"3. I don't understand how you could have muddled the whole matter now. At the very least you could have firmly said 'no!' instead of leaving everything hanging, depending on whether some courier will arrive or whether a village is taken or not. This is the worst possible scenario: everything is left in the air! That should've been foreseen. Clearly, my reply can't reach you in time — nor yours reach me.

"We are all firmly for the attack.

"4. We received one report — not particularly alarming.

"5. We're convinced Stari will be very angry.

"6. We believe that seven battalions are entirely sufficient, especially since the approach to Bašajkovac is inaccessible."

Alongside Koča, political commissar Filip Kljajić and Staff Chief Branko Poljanac signed the message in a show of support. The editor of Koča's *Notes on Warfare* added a comment from Koča's deputy, Danilo Lekić Španac, to strengthen the tone: "We'll thrash them, crucifix, they'll be stunned!" — and his own remark: "The Chief of the Supreme Headquarters allowed the attack to proceed under the full responsibility of the 1st Proletarian Brigade's Staff."[255]

Livno was largely liberated during the night of August 4-5, and completely over the next two days, with the final objective being the fortified Mitrović house. It was a true feat — a turning point. Tito, justifiably thrilled by the success, wrote that "all battalions of the 1st Proletarian Brigade fought brilliantly, cutting through the town like lightning, undeterred by barbed wire and fortifications." Still, the 2nd Battalion stood out as the strongest "lightning bolt": it destroyed a heavily fortified blockhouse on its axis of attack, tore through wire obstacles, severed communications, disrupted enemy command, captured the garrison commander and stormed the prison — freeing about fifty imprisoned anti-fascists. As noted in *The Liberation War of the Peoples of Yugoslavia*, this "significantly eased the efforts of the other units, which — despite stiff resistance — entered the town by 6 a.m." Dedijer, in his *Diary*, called it an "heroic

[255] K. Popović, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

feat." There's no doubt that the first hero of that night assault — due to his courage and ingenuity in helping neutralize the blockhouse and break into the prison — was Second Lieutenant and pilot Petar Radević. Even today (in 2001), he believes that chaos nearly led the Proletarian battalions to abandon the still partially occupied Livno at dawn, as Commander of the 2nd Company, Božo Božović, received several consecutive orders to urgently withdraw his unit from the town. Božović later confirmed this, stating that after receiving a third such order, he might have issued the command to retreat had his fighters not refused — arguing that they were "already in a captured town."

Eyewitness Luka M. Marković confirms that he, acting as a runner between the company command and the 2nd Battalion's Staff, delivered three identical orders for withdrawal at dawn — orders he was sure came from Koča, who had likely realized that it was nearly morning and most of the battalion's objectives hadn't yet been completed, and therefore wanted to support the 2nd Battalion's retreat. The 2nd Battalion, however, reported that it had taken the town centre and — so far as could be heard above the gunfire — was calling out, by name, to other battalion commanders to continue the fight on their assigned axes.[256] Bogdan Gledović, the commissar of a company of the Sandžak fighters, recalled how Arso, from the captured fortress "Tabija," was calling to Lovćen Brigade commander Pero Ćetković to "push forward with his brigade." Courier Marković, having assessed that a withdrawal was unwise, remained with the company and was soon severely wounded. Eyewitnesses remember him, from his stretcher, shouting words of encouragement to himself and his comrades — cheering for Stalin and the Comintern.

What mattered most was that the remaining battalions — realizing that the 2nd Battalion had broken into the centre of the town, cut communications and disrupted enemy command — continued their advance and "by 6 a.m. had penetrated the town."

Regarding the attack — in which the role of the 1st Proletarian Brigade was undeniably decisive — Koča wrote a report to the Supreme Commander, sharing some conclusions drawn from the Brigade Staff's analysis "about serious shortcomings and problems," emphasizing that these were "primarily identified as shortcomings and problems in organization and political awareness that must be addressed within our military units." He stated that "the SH has therefore been informed, among other things, about the following persistent causes and contributing factors of this situation":

"a. The negative effect of Comrade Arso's presence — before, during and after the operation; Comrade Arso, especially once operations enter the execution phase, becomes extremely hesitant and disorganized; he is incapable of making quick but well-thought-out decisions; moreover, instead of unifying the actions of different units as a representative of the SH, his hesitation, inconsistency and lack of composure, along with issuing scattered and contradictory orders, work in the opposite direction. Based on this, we believe Comrade Arso should not be present on the ground during operations, as his presence causes more harm than good. In Livno, during and after the conclusion of the battle, there was significant disorder — and if anyone is to be blamed

[256] From a conversation with L. Marković, August 1996, in Podgorica; note by General P. Radević.

from the command structure, it is largely due to Comrade Arso's aforementioned traits. After the town was taken, many units were in Livno but there was no unified command, leading to a loss of control over units and fighters. The same issue occurred during the assault on the fortified Mitrović house, which could have been carried out more efficiently, earlier and with fewer casualties..."[257]

On August 5, Arso sent a report to Tito stating that seven battalions had taken Livno and that the enemy, "as of 8 a.m., still held the barracks, the church and the livestock station." Tito passed this news on to Sreten Žujović that same day, announcing an upcoming attack on Kupres and, near the end of his letter, added: "We received six horses (scrawny ones) from the 2nd Brigade. Tell them we know these are their own supply horses, not the ones captured in Zloselo. They're even marked. We hold Comrade Milinko Kušić (then brigade commissar — *I.M.*) responsible and believe he should stop with these tasteless jokes."[258]

The Chief of the Supreme Headquarters requested gasoline from the Supreme Commander to finish off the defence of the Mitrović house. Tito responded the same day at 12:30 p.m.:

"Comrade Arso,

"We received your report, which surprised and delighted us — all the more so because we thought you weren't launching an attack last night...

"We have neither bottles nor gasoline. Try to get it from Glamoč or Duvno. It's possible there's some in Livno itself.

"The Ustaše resisting there (the still-unsurrendered strongpoints in Livno — *I.M.*) are criminals from Glamoč. Back in Glamoč, they held out in houses for two or three days and escaped at night to Livno. Make sure they don't escape you as well. Find gasoline wherever you can and burn them out during the day. They've killed many of our people — they owe us. They all need to be wiped out. Set up a tight cordon around the town and search the houses during the day.

"What's the situation with the Germans and the Domobrani? (In the Mitrović house, 35 Germans had barricaded themselves along with Ustaše — they had been manufacturing hand grenades in Livno. — *I.M.*)"

Tito added: "Don't allow the horses from the livestock station to be divided up. Evacuate all spoils in the direction of Glamoč — that is, to villages in the Glamočko polje. Send us more detailed reports."[259]

There is, in fact, an indirect indication that Arso had sent Tito a more detailed report, and that he stayed in Livno with Ranković until August 7, when the town's last stronghold was eliminated. However, neither Arso's letter from August 5, which Tito referred to, nor that report have been preserved, so we don't know what he wrote in them. Koča's note, however, has been preserved — as well as his report from newly liberated Livno — and those have been published and repeatedly referenced, then

[257] K. Popović, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

[258] J. Broz, *Collected Works*, Vol. 11, p. 168.

[259] *Ibid.*, p. 170.

retroactively "pinned" on the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters after his departure from the stage of life. There is no written trace — either in the archives or in memoir literature — about how the Supreme Commander "ruled" in this delicate conflict between two of his prominent comrades. However, a written record remains that may hint at the cause of Koča's resentment expressed in his letter to Arso and report to Tito. On July 30, at the end of the letter in which he rejected Arso's proposal for the group of Proletarian Brigades to bypass the area from the south, the Supreme Commander wrote that "the Staff of the 1st Brigade must be sternly warned not to allow themselves to be caught by surprise again and to pay closer attention to what's happening around them, rather than allowing even a cannon to be captured."

To underscore how seriously he took that rebuke directed at Koča, the Supreme Commander added in his next day's letter to the Staff of the 3rd Sandžak Brigade — which had captured Livno together with the 1st Proletarian Brigade under Arso's command: "Let Comrade Arso write to the Staff of the 1st Brigade to act a bit more decisively (in the Šuica-Livno sector), and not to sit idle in one place for days without contact with the enemy." As a disciplined and responsible Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, Arso conveyed this remark as instructed by the Supreme Commander Tito. But it was perceived by the Brigade Staff — particularly by Koča and Poljanac — as Arso scheming behind their backs, and they reproached him for it whenever they could, including on August 7, at a moment when they should have been celebrating the great victory of the Proletarians.

In liberated Livno, the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters met a figure who stood out — even by wartime standards. While speaking with Ranković, he encountered a burly, bearded and heavily armed man wearing a tricolour badge on his cap, with stitched emblems on both sleeves — a portrait of King Petar on the right, and Stalin on the left. When Arso entered, Ranković said to the man: "Here's the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters of the Proletarian Army, Cvijo — talk to him to see if someone like you can be placed under our command. Things will go as he decides." The bearded man, around forty, jumped to his feet, stood rigid at attention and reported that he was Cvijo Oraščić, a native of the village of Sajković near Livno, and commander of the "Starac Vujadin" Battalion of 800 fighters — all insurgents "against the Ustaša criminals and all of Pavelić's army." He declared that he wished to fight alongside the Proletarian Army, which had so skilfully and bravely liberated Livno. Arso eyed him and smiled, offering his hand, which Cvijo grabbed and shook firmly — all while remaining at attention. Arso told him to stand "at ease," but Cvijo didn't comply, likely believing it his right to choose the posture from which to address the "Chief of the Supreme Headquarters," especially someone reputed to be a "General Staff officer." Arso, half in jest, ordered him again to relax and said that there would be no problem in fighting "against the Ustaše and all of Pavelić's forces," but that this fight must also include the occupiers and all their collaborators — and that they must wear standardized insignia and, certainly, shave their beards. Cvijo responded that he had "let the beard grow" after the state collapsed and had vowed — following the old Chetnik tradition — not to shave it until the king returned to the country. Arso said

he knew and respected that tradition, which belonged to the true, original Chetniks, like those who had once fought in the "bloody-shirted Krajina," but noted that some of today's so-called Chetnik units — also bearded — were slaughtering Serbs in Serbia, Montenegro, Herzegovina and Bosnia. Cvijo listened thoughtfully, then said: "Those kinds of men have spilled blood here too, but we'll make sure they stop. And right now, I order my unit to sew on red stars, and as for myself — I'll shave my beard, and as punishment, I'll do it dry!" He was offered a barber, but declined. There are still Sandžak veterans alive who recall how he "scraped himself clean," and then — belt strapped tight, covered in ammo belts and grenades, of average height but stocky, well-built, clean-shaven and youthful-looking — he resumed his conversation with the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, now seated and relaxed. He said he had worked as a labourer — a cobblestone layer in Belgrade — then as a small-time grocer in his village, and mostly as a horse smuggler across the old Austro-Hungarian border between Dalmatia and Bosnia, which was the most lucrative. Until July 27, 1941, the Ustaše had slaughtered what they could of the Serbian population from Sajković, Čelebić, Rujani, Lištani and other villages — "putting about 800 souls to the knife." But from that day on, they never entered those areas again, as they were defended by the insurgents under his command. For a long time, they belonged to no formal army — they fought only to protect the Serbian people — but now they were the 5th Krajina Detachment, which had contributed even a cannon to the liberation of Livno.

Somewhat more relaxed, Cvijo told Arso that his battalion included two officers — one served as his "clerk," and the other as a "military advisor." They had escaped from Sinj and declared their willingness to fight the Ustaše. They had remained with him, equally brave and loyal. In further conversation, Arso learned that they were Artillery Captain First Class Branko Obradović, originally from Pljevlja, and Major Rudolf Primorac, a battalion commander during the April War, known for his resolute armed resistance to the Ustaše on the Mostar-Nevesinje axis. Arso immediately vouched for both men to Ranković, and in the case of Primorac, Velimir Jakić, political commissar of the 3rd Proletarian Brigade, also vouched for him, having fought alongside him in those battles as a reserve officer. The battalion "clerk," dressed in a thick wool sweater and strapped with a belt from which hung a Walther pistol and a cluster of grenades, was immediately transferred to the Proletarian units and would become the first commander of the Artillery Division and head of the Artillery Section of the SH. Major Primorac soon became chief of staff of the 1st Dalmatian Brigade, then of the 3rd Shock Division, later the 2nd Shock Corps and the Main Staff of Serbia. From December 1944 he was Arso's assistant and, at the very end of the war, the head of the Yugoslav military mission in Moscow. Both would become generals during the war. Having fled Sinj, they found refuge in Livanjsko polje with Cvijo Oraščić, a Serb and the "commander of an army that belonged to no one," but which fought fiercely against the Ustaše. Cvijo was a popular commander, a brave man and a skilled knife fighter, nicknamed the "Dinaric Budyonny." It was said that two horses had been shot under him in battle, and songs were already being sung about him.

In Ranković's presence, they agreed the next day that Cvijo — now, like all his

men, wearing a large red felt five-pointed star — would remain commander of a battalion within the 5th Krajina Detachment, and later perhaps be integrated into one of the Proletarian Brigades. At parting, he hugged and kissed both men — after asking for permission — which was taken as a clear sign of his satisfaction with the outcome of the talks.[260]

When the 4th Krajina Brigade was formed on September 9 — made up mostly of select fighters from the former 5th Krajina Detachment — Cvijo's battalion was incorporated into it, and he was appointed deputy commander to Milutin Morača. The brigade's first battles were against Chetniks in the villages around Bosansko Grahovo, and in the reports from those actions, Cvijo's name was mentioned only positively. The war went on, battles became more complex, reports to the Operational and Supreme Headquarters more frequent, and Cvijo continued to be praised in them. In the meantime, he was wounded, but remained with the brigade. Then, suddenly, brigade commissar Nikola Kotle — a hardened communist and blacksmith from Drvar — returned from a summons by the District Committee deeply saddened and revealed to Commander Morača that he had been ordered to liquidate Cvijo Oraščić as a "pro-Chetnik element." Commander Morača, who had known Cvijo since the early days of the uprising and held him in high regard for his bravery and patriotism, refused to carry out such a sentence — issued without trial — without first having it discussed by the Brigade Staff (without Cvijo) and the Political Department (Živko Žižić, Milijan Neoričić, and Sava Radoičić Feđa). The discussion was long, open and conducted in good faith. The District Committee's sentence was put to a vote. For this story, it no longer matters who voted how, only that the result was tied — three in favour, three against. This was formally recorded and reported "up the chain." There was no reaction, but word of it reached Tito, via the district military and party leadership. Tito summoned Ranković and Arso and, with a reserved smile, said: "Your protégé is causing some trouble." Once they learned what the issue was, both replied that they had not vouched for him, but had only done what they could to give him a chance. Now they agreed that any accusations should be proven publicly, adding that his liquidation would cause significant political damage — especially among the insurgents of the Livno region — all the more so if it were undeserved.[261] This conversation occurred shortly before Arso's departure for Slovenia. For the next nine months, he would not know that Cvijo, along with 720 Krajina fighters, had joined the 2nd Proletarian Division in February 1943 and become deputy commander under Peko Dapčević — where, however, he would ultimately not escape a bullet from his fellow soldiers on distant Ozren...

In Livno, a town of around 2,500 people, the Proletarians let themselves relax, as Luka Božović notes in his memoir. He writes: "Some comrades became regulars in the town centre. They even found girlfriends. They were constantly attending events. But good news kept coming: the Italians and Ustaše near Imotski had been crushed, and

[260] The memory of B. Gledović and M. Morača, October 1995, in Belgrade. His real name was Cvetko Pajčin, but he was called Cvijo Oraščić.

[261] From a conversation with A. Ranković, October 1973, in Belgrade.

Mrkonjić-Grad had been liberated."[262]

The Chief of the Supreme Headquarters defended these "uninhibited Proletarians" from orthodox moralists, pointing out the necessity for young people at war to unwind — though not to indulge — but to "maintain balance, and they will become even better fighters."

Assaults on Kupres *(August 11-14, 1942)*

After the liberation of Livno, Arso arrived at Cincar to report and receive his next assignment — the capture of Kupres. There he was on the evening of August 9, gathered around a blazing fire with Milutin, Đilas, Savo Orović, Blažo Jovanović and Dedijer. They were listening to Radio London. The announcer quoted the *Sunday Times*, saying that "the British Army is studying the tactics of Draža Mihailović in fighting the Germans." Đilas reacted with a jab: "There you have it, Arso — did you hear that? But no one ever mentions your tactics." Visibly irritated, Arso replied: "They certainly will — not mine personally, but the partisans.'" They changed the station to Radio Moscow. A choir from one of the Soviet commissariats, conducted by the famed Isaak Dunayevsky, was singing "in honour of the partisans of Yugoslavia." Smiling and trying to match the melody with his resonant bass-baritone, Arso quipped: "Didn't I tell you, comrade Đido, that people would hear, talk, write — even sing — about the partisans and their struggle."

Next in line was the assault on Kupres, which Tito was also eager to carry out — with emphasis that "it must fall." By August 3, the town had already been attacked two or three times by the 2nd Proletarian Brigade, suffering heavy losses (33 casualties), without success. Sreten Žujović was there on behalf of the SH. Upon learning first-hand about the course and failure of these attacks and being well-acquainted with the strength and layout of the town's defences, Arso — as previously cited by J.B. Đurić — was against continuing the attacks. But Tito dismissed his concerns, wanting only to hear a report that the Ustaša fortress had fallen — something he could immediately relay to Moscow. Infuriated by the atrocities committed by the "local Ustaše," Tito issued an order that several surrounding villages be burned, including the notoriously brutal Zlosela. According to Đurić, Tito ordered the burning of "houses from which shots were fired," though it was immediately apparent on the ground that there were hardly any from which shots had not been fired. Houses and schools went up in flames. Đurić wrote: "Mines and bombs left behind by the people of Zlosela began exploding, mixed with the lowing of cattle, the cries and wails of women and children, and the stampede of livestock through fire and smoke." Žujović told Đurić that he would "never again allow houses to be burned." The elderly, with a bit of salvaged livestock and essential belongings, fled to Kupres, while the able-bodied — those who could carry weapons — took up positions, seeing the town's defence as their only chance of survival.

[262] L. Božović, *War Notes...*, 78.



On Cincar, August 9, 1942: standing from the right are S. Orović, A. Ranković and A. Jovanović; seated are S. Žujović, P. Ilić and Tito.

Just as he rejected the earlier proposal to bypass the area in a wide arc, Tito also dismissed Arso's strategic suggestion to stop further attacks on Kupres, arguing that the town had "geared up completely for defence." On the contrary, on August 6, Tito wrote to Arso that: "The matter of Kupres is extremely urgent and must be resolved if we don't want all our previous successes in this region to be in vain."[263]

Kupres was a forward enemy garrison and a staunch Ustaša stronghold. Its capture was expected to provide a solid base for operations toward the Vrbas and Neretva valleys and into Dalmatia, to remove the threat of enemy attacks on Livno, Glamoč and the Pliva valley, and to significantly improve the political climate in the area — which could lead to a greater influx of new fighters. The enemy, fully aware of the strategic importance of Kupres, gave particular attention to its fortification and defence. Notably, on July 25 and 26, after successfully defending Bugojno and Donji Vakuf, a substantial part of the Ustaša Black Legion was redeployed to Kupres. The commander of the defence, Colonel Franjo Šimić, a personal envoy of Pavelić, had at his disposal

[263] AVII, file ZA, reg. no. 12/3; J. Broz, *Collected Works*, Vol. 11, p. 172.

1,500 Ustaše and local militiamen notorious for their atrocities, a battery of mountain artillery, and an armoured vehicle. Additionally, he could call on garrisons in Bugojno, Donji Vakuf and Travnik to support Kupres if needed. The town had a well-organized defence: the area was heavily fortified, every stone building turned into a stronghold, and the surrounding villages, populated by numerous Ustaša militiamen, formed a reliable outer defensive ring. Having committed many crimes, the Ustaše and militiamen were ready to fight to the last bullet — especially as they were defending their families, property hidden in the town, and ultimately, their own lives. The size of the town's defending force was known, as was the presence of a refugee population numbering several thousand — many prepared to defend themselves and their kin. But it seems Tito had not fully anticipated such a determined resistance when he ordered an assault by the 2nd and 4th Proletarian, the 10th Herzegovinian Brigade, two battalions of the 3rd Sandžak Brigade and nine Krajina companies. Nor did he know about the defiant messages Kupres Ustaše had sent to Pavelić: "If you're not safe in Zagreb — come to us in Kupres!"

The attack on Kupres was launched on August 11 at 9:00 p.m. under the order issued by Arso, who, on behalf of the SH, coordinated the actions of all participating units — a total of twelve battalions involved in the operation. Drawing from past experience, he ordered that the units begin their assaults as soon as they reached their jumping-off positions after breaking through the elastic outer defence — without waiting for a synchronized, simultaneous attack. He also directed smaller units to infiltrate the town, and for each brigade to keep one battalion in reserve — in case of failure, to provide backup. After capturing surrounding villages, the attacking units were met with heavy defensive fire and were mostly halted by the outer strongpoints. Only the 2nd Proletarian Brigade and parts of the 3rd Krajina Detachment managed to break through the enemy line in the initial wave, taking some outer positions on their attack routes and penetrating the town with two companies. However, left isolated, these units were pushed back by a Ustaša counter-attack. Other elements attacking along the Bugojno-Kupres road were pinned down by intense fire at the edge of the town. At dawn, all attacking units were pinned along the town's perimeter under constant enemy fire. The Ustaše launched a strong counter-offensive, inflicting significant losses — particularly on the 2nd Proletarian Brigade. Fifty-one fighters were put out of action, and two well-known Krajina commanders, Simo Šolaja and Dušan Metlić, were killed in street fighting.

Unwilling to abandon the goal of eliminating the Ustaša stronghold at Kupres, the Supreme Commander ordered another attack for the following night. However, the 2nd Proletarian Brigade would not be able to rejoin in time. At that point — based on information from Arso — Tito was fully aware of the strength of the town's defences and understood that not only the 1,500 Ustaše, but also hundreds of other war criminals, would fight to the end, knowing there was no room for retreat or surrender. Still, Tito saw the capture of this fortified position — which he called "the Ustaša Alcázar" — as a matter of personal prestige and honour for the political army under his command, and refused to permit any hesitation in the face of fortifications. Tito

was supported in this by SH delegates to the 2nd and 4th Proletarian Brigades, Sreten Žujović and Peko Ilić. The attack on Kupres was particularly welcomed by Serbs from the villages of Vukovsko, Ravno, Rilić and Malovan, victims of Ustaša atrocities who had lost everything — their homes reduced to ashes. They saw the Proletarians as their only hope for freedom. Arso rode on horseback through these villages with a small escort. Upon learning who he was, villagers adorned his saddle with hand-embroidered towels, and elderly women even tried to kiss his boots — a moment that deepened the sense of vengeful determination in the lead-up to the attack.

To better coordinate the actions of all units — now numbering sixteen battalions, or roughly 2,400 fighters — a new formation, the Operational Headquarters of the Kupres Forces, was established. The 1st Krajina Brigade had now been committed for the direct assault, while the 5th Montenegrin Brigade was tasked with diversionary actions toward Donji Vakuf and securing the approach from Bugojno. Colonel Savo Orović was appointed commander of the Operational Headquarters, with Major Vojislav Đokić as his deputy — both members of the SH. In a conversation with Tito, Arso described the renewed assault on Kupres as "a continuation of bloodshed" and refused to command the operation, even at the risk of being removed from duty. He did, however, insist on participating in the assault in whatever capacity was assigned to him. Sticking to his decision that "Kupres must fall tonight," Tito assigned Arso to coordinate the attacks of the units advancing from the west, representing the SH.[264]

Colonel Orović even held a briefing with brigade staffs, during which he thoroughly elaborated the plan of attack scheduled for the night of August 13-14, and issued orders "according to all principles of military command," as he would recount 30 years later "for the historical record."

A fierce night battle for the well-fortified town ensued. Elements of the 4th Proletarian and 1st Krajina Brigades, pushing through intense suppressive fire and suffering heavy losses, managed — as they had pledged to the Supreme Commander — to break into the town, but at dawn, confronted by stiff resistance and counter-attacks from the Ustaše, they were forced to withdraw. The other units had attacked frontally — across open fields toward trenches and fortified buildings — and were similarly halted and exposed to severe losses. At dawn, the Ustaše launched a powerful counter-attack, driving the Partisan forces back on all fronts. Thus ended not only the second, but, counting previous attempts by the 2nd Proletarian Brigade, the fourth or even fifth consecutive failed assault on Kupres. The main reason for failure was, without doubt, an underestimation of the enemy's strength and defensive capabilities. In *The National Liberation War of Yugoslavia*, additional reasons are cited: the attack plan was flawed, as it relied on a frontal assault on the garrison rather than night infiltration; there was great determination by the enemy, a lack of experience in storming fortified urban areas, and a shortage of artillery and other offensive tools.

This — the fiercest urban combat to date — cost the Partisan units heavy cas-

[264] About the resolute opposition of the Chief of Staff to the renewed attack on Kupres, later, except for Lj. Đurić, it would be written (during Tito's life) by M. Đilas, and R. Vukanović also told me about this in April 1985.

ualties: 98 fighters and commanders were killed, and 141 wounded, while the enemy suffered 56 losses during the initial attack alone. In the second assault, the 4th Montenegrin Proletarian Brigade lost 64 fighters and officers killed and 51 wounded, while the 2nd Serbian Proletarian Brigade lost 37 killed, 65 wounded, and 4 missing during the fighting in and especially around the town.[265]

Regarding the losses of the 4th Proletarian Brigade, Boško Đuričković, the political commissar of its 2nd Battalion — which lost 33 killed and 20 wounded out of 119 fighters, meaning 45 per cent of the battalion was put out of action — recorded a detail from immediately after the night action in his memoirs:

"The reports brought to Brigade Headquarters by the officers were truly heart-wrenching. Comrades were choking back tears. Everyone knew our struggle demanded many sacrifices and that we were only just beginning to pay them — but the immense fraternal love and the thought of our fallen comrades, who had been ready to complete any mission, brought tears to our eyes. Yet, from all that, a firm determination emerged — to continue fighting and to win."[266]

Shaken by the outcome, the Supreme Commander abandoned further assaults on Kupres — but not entirely. On August 19 at 9:00 p.m., elements of the 1st Krajina and 2nd Proletarian Brigades launched a smaller, mostly demonstrative attack, to facilitate the reception of up to 700 Ustaša militiamen who, on August 16, through their representative Lieutenant Latifić, allegedly declared their intention to defect, surrender to the Partisans and be transferred to liberated territory. In this, the Partisan units took no real risk, and the National Liberation Movement stood to gain both politically and militarily, but the effort ended in failure. The so-called defectors — supposedly prevented at the last moment by the Ustaše — never appeared, and the prearranged recognition signals never came: the call was "Allah is great," the password — "Allah is with us."

Glamoč *(August 17-September 14, 1942)*

Be that as it may, Kupres remained a synonym for the mass death of partisans in a single battle, at a single location — a model for war criminals who, in the autumn of 1943, according to Pavle Jakšić in his memoirs, saw the town burned, destroyed and depopulated by the partisans, on Tito's direct orders, as punishment. For more than five decades, many historians, publicists and other public figures have continued to attach the blame for the mass partisan losses in the attacks on Kupres to Arso Jovanović — disregarding the truth that he had firmly opposed the assault on that town. In doing so, they also ignore a basic logic: the one who executes an order bears blame, but

[265] These two brigades, on the march and in battles from Vrbnica to Kupres, thus in 50 days of war, were the biggest losers: the numerical strength of the 2nd Proletarian Division dropped from 836 to 505, meaning that one in four "fell" from the combat line; the 4th Montenegrin Division, from the attack on Hadžići to Kupres — according to the report of its commissar M. Bakić from August 24 — had 115 killed and 115 wounded.

[266] B. Đuričković, *op. cit.*, p. 226.



In Glamoč, August 25, 1942: from the left, Arso, Tito, A. Ranković and P. Ilić.

even more so the one who gives it — and in this case, Arso was neither the executor nor the commander. In fact, having assessed the balance of forces, he had proposed bypassing that area from the south, as is evident from the quoted letter from Tito. From his comfortable and secure headquarters on Mount Cincar, Tito issued orders, without budging "for any reason" toward the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters and the bulk of his forces, who, during the night of August 13-14 — having sworn to him in writing (the 4th Proletarian and the newly arrived 1st Krajina Brigade) that they would "not spare their own blood in liberating Kupres" — would charge with Stalin's and Tito's names on their lips. To be fair, Tito was not the only supreme commander in history who did not stand in the first line of battle during an assault on a fortified position — a place he arguably didn't belong. However, those more informed criticized him for what he was doing that very night — the moment his units were occupying assault positions — namely, signing an order on who within military formations was entitled to a riding horse, an act that strongly echoed the days of June 1942 in Piva, when the entire uprising seemed to be falling apart. At that time, under the "P.S." of his orders and directives, he reminded members of the SH to send him horses, procure coffee and white flour, get him a watch, safeguard saddlebags full of gold and silver, look after the typewriter, etc. This time again, while the partisans were charging into battle, he was issuing orders that specified who had the right to use riding horses, dividing them into eight categories — from brigade commanders to doctors.

The Battalion Commander in the 2nd Proletarian Brigade, Sredoje Urošević, recalls that they received that order at a time when the unit was already depleted and

wounded, and that it was met with a sense of disgust and resistance — perceived as a kind of belittling of the sacrifices made by those who fell at Kupres and earlier. He recounts that even some company-level officers rushed to get themselves horses, taking them from local peasants for whom horses meant survival. Moreover, the very regulation granting battalion commanders the right to a riding horse — regardless of how essential it was for operational tasks — did not sit well. In his monograph *The Second Proletarian Brigade — Warfare and Warriors*, Urošević wrote: "The matter with riding horses, and shortly thereafter with the separate and higher-quality food provided to command staff and headquarters, clearly reflects the first signs of bureaucratization in certain leadership structures of the liberation army. That disease eating away at a healthy body — called bureaucracy — did not spare even the ranks of the leading revolutionaries."[267]

That same day, Tito requested that "Deda" use the radio station *Slobodna Jugoslavija* to broadcast a statement from the SH regarding the revocation of military ranks from SH members Colonel Savo Orović and Captain Arso Jovanović, along with other officers fighting in the ranks of the National Liberation Army. This referred to the statement published in the *Supreme Headquarters Bulletin* nos. 17-18-19 (for June, July and August). On June 17, General D. Mihailović sent a dispatch (no. 246) to the London-based Yugoslav government requesting that officers fighting among the partisans be stripped of their ranks for "violating their military oath and betraying the King and the people." On July 3, Prime Minister Dr. Slobodan Jovanović signed Supreme Command decision no. 809, declaring the named officers stripped of their ranks and proclaimed military deserters. This followed the Declaration by a group of partisan officers from Montenegro, Serbia and Eastern Bosnia, adopted on June 16 in "the forest beneath Treskavica, on Zelengora." In it, 30 officers condemned those fighting in collaborationist and quisling units, calling on all patriotic military officers to join the NOB. The signatories included: Colonels: Savo Orović, Veko Bulatović, Risto Perović, Blagota Ramović; Majors: Branko Poljanac, Vojsilav Đokić; Captains: Srđan Novaković, Batrić Zečević, Đuro Roganović, Arso Jovanović, Pero Ćetković, Velimir Terzić, Božo Lazarević, Velimir Knežević, Mileta Đukić, Mitar Vujović, Momčilo Poleksić, Boško Marković, Pavle Ilić, Đoko Pavićević; and Lieutenants: Milovan Šaranović, Vasilije Jovanović, Ljubo Vučković, Petar Radević, Petar Jovanović, Periša Grujić, Ljubiša Urošević, Ratko Martinović, Vladimir Knežević, Rade Hamović. The officers requested that their Declaration be broadcast via *Slobodna Jugoslavija Radio* — which Moscow aired from August 9 to 13, following the recommendation of the SH. Along with Tito and six civilians, the statement was also signed by four professional military members of the SH: Arso Jovanović, Savo Orović, Vojsilav Đokić and Rade Hamović. The statement — soon carried not only on *Slobodna Jugoslavija* airwaves but in the international democratic press — declared that: "The accusations and the justification for stripping these comrades of rank are vile slanders, worthy only of the enemies of the NOB." It stated that the officers had been fighting honourably for 15 months as

[267] S. Urošević, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

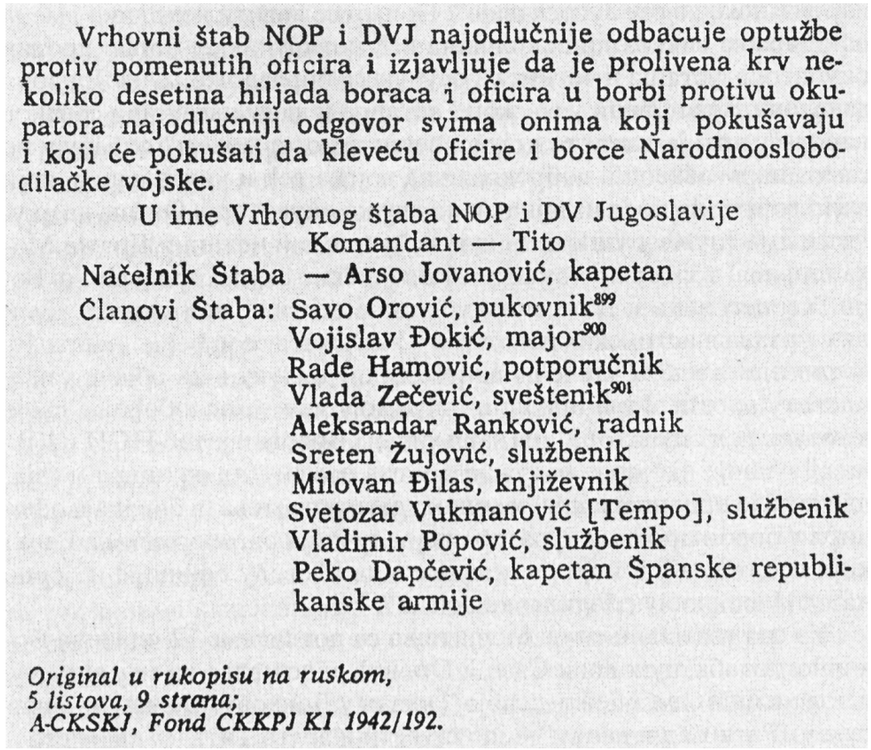
true sons of their people within the National Liberation, Volunteer and Partisan Army of Yugoslavia. It pointed out that several of the accused had already died in combat against the occupiers, the Ustaše and Chetniks, and condemned the London-based claim that these men "served the Gestapo and were traitors to the Serbian people." The statement rejected these lies with great indignation, asserting that not only the partisan and volunteer army, but also the entire people, knew full well who the traitors were and who served the occupier. "They know that it is various Chetniks — including those of Draža Mihailović — who, under the command of Italian occupiers in Montenegro, Herzegovina and Dalmatia, have killed not hundreds but thousands of innocent victims and true patriots." The statement questioned how the Yugoslav government could make such a decision and publish such slander against officers shedding their blood for the liberation of their homeland, and concluded: "The SH of the National Liberation Movement and Volunteer Army most strongly rejects the accusations against the mentioned officers and declares that the blood of tens of thousands of fighters and officers spilled in the struggle against the occupiers is the most resolute answer to all who try — and who will try — to slander the officers and soldiers of our National Liberation Army."[268]

With all due respect for the statement signed by twelve members of the SH, Colonel Savo J. Orović nonetheless wished to address "his" government in London from the field in August. "I," he recorded in his *War Diary*, "responded personally, at Comrade Tito's suggestion, in accordance with Vuk Mićunović's advice: 'Write back however you know how, Vladjka, and protect his honour as he would protect yours.'" Colonel Orović presented his reply to the London government in five points, concluding that: "The stain intended for me and my heroic and patriotic comrades falls squarely on the Yugoslav government itself and its fascist lackeys — Draža Mihailović, Blažo Đukanović, Bajo Stanišić and others. The righteous judgement of the people and of history will reward each person according to their true merit. For: 'Generations judge deeds — what belongs to whom, they give to all.'" In his *War Diary*, alongside his own name, he listed ten more officers demoted "in the first round": Colonel Rade Avšič; Reserve Lieutenant Colonel Veko Bulatović; Major Branko Poljanac; Captains First Class Arso Jovanović, Velimir Terzić, Petar Ćetković and Rudolf Sremček; Lieutenants Mileta Đukić, Ratko Martinović; and Reserve Lieutenant Nikola Šekularac.[269]

In mid-August, a leaflet issued by the Italian occupation authorities reached Arso, addressed to "Montenegrins fighting in partisan units in Bosnia." After invoking the era when their "small but brave nation" had been the "shield and banner of Christianity," it went on to claim that fascist Italy had given Montenegro the very freedom for which it had bled for centuries, declaring: "Today, Montenegro is free and looks with love and loyalty to her great daughter: Jelena, Queen and Empress of fascist Italy. The Queen and Empress sees her homeland, after the inhumane and unjust Yugoslav domination, finally liberated, and with her great dark eyes she shows her deepest love

[268] AJ, Fund of the CC CPY, file 1942/173 (translation from Russian).

[269] S. Orović, *op. cit.*, p. 274.



Vrhovni štab NOP i DVJ najodlučnije odbacuje optužbe protiv pomenutih oficira i izjavljuje da je prolivena krv nekoliko desetina hiljada boraca i oficira u borbi protivu okupatora najodlučniji odgovor svima onima koji pokušavaju i koji će pokušati da kleveću oficire i borce Narodnooslobodilačke vojske.

U ime Vrhovnog štaba NOP i DV Jugoslavije
Komandant — Tito
Načelnik Štaba — Arso Jovanović, kapetan
Članovi Štaba: Savo Orović, pukovnik[899]
Vojislav Đokić, major[900]
Rade Hamović, potporučnik
Vlada Zečević, sveštenik[901]
Aleksandar Ranković, radnik
Sreten Žujović, službenik
Milovan Đilas, književnik
Svetozar Vukmanović [Tempo], službenik
Vladimir Popović, službenik
Peko Dapčević, kapetan Španske republikanske armije

Original u rukopisu na ruskom,
5 listova, 9 strana;
A-CKSKJ, Fond CKKPJ KI 1942/192.

Protest to London via Moscow: defence of the "former officers," members of the anti-fascist Partisan Army.

to the Montenegrin people...

"You have been taken from your homeland and forced to fight Italians in Montenegro and Herzegovina, and now you are being pushed to fight in Bosnia, and soon you will be sent to Croatia and Northern Dalmatia. You fight for a faith that is not yours, for an ideology that is not yours. You blindly fight to establish a new Yugoslavia that would oppress you even more than before, that would throw you and your villages into utter poverty.

"Montenegrins! Abandon your leaders, who are using you solely for their own selfish purposes, for the gain of Jewish-Anglo-Saxon gold, for the benefit of communist Russia, which is falling apart. Axis forces are at Moscow's gates, already gazing upon the shores of the Caspian Sea and the Volga, and seizing each day the most crucial objectives — the oil centres of the Caucasus. Russian grain and oil — indeed, all of Russia — are in the hands of the Axis."

At that time, the SH was also addressing a Comintern demand to end the practice of designating units as "Proletarian." This demand had first reached the CC of the CPY on March 5, 1942, in Foča, and was reiterated more sharply in a dispatch on August 9, raising the issue of whether such titles were politically appropriate. The

Comintern viewed these as "a result of sectarian deviations in the policy of the CPY." The Comintern insisted that, during the war against the Axis powers, the movement should not raise the issue of the future social system. Although the CPY disagreed with that stance — believing the struggle, due to the realignment of internal social and political forces, would inevitably lead to deep social transformation — the Party leadership, precisely because of the "broad character of the resistance, did not see the need for all brigades to carry the 'Proletarian' designation."[270] As such, only the 1st and 2nd brigades initially received that title, later joined by the 3rd Sandžak, 4th and 5th Montenegrin brigades formed by the end of June 1942. By early August, ten more brigades had been created, designated as "strike" brigades (*udarne brigade*). To avoid conflict over the issue, the CC of the CPY decided that "only the first two brigades would retain the 'Proletarian' title."[271] Thus, the 3rd, 4th and 5th brigades were officially "stripped" of the name, which prompted some backlash — which Arso helped to calm, both defending the Comintern and reassuring the Proletarians in the interest of preserving morale. Ultimately, reality settled the matter: The 3rd and 4th regained the Proletarian title by the end of 1942, upon being incorporated into the 1st and 2nd Proletarian Divisions, respectively; and the 5th Montenegrin Brigade regained the name on July 13, 1944, during a review in Kolašin.

At the "Glamoč session of the CC of the CPY," held on August 21 and 22, the committee also discussed the completed phase of the Proletarian Brigades' offensive, which, according to the conclusions, "proved to be correct." The minutes were kept by M. Đilas, who recorded the following: "Assessment: The Left Column (1st and 3rd Proletarian Brigades) fulfilled its task. The Right (2nd and 4th Proletarian) did not, due to carelessness and slowness. Overall assessment: The operation has great military and political importance. Regarding Bugojno: The failure is blamed on Đido and Arso. At Kupres, we failed due to: 1. a missed opportunity; 2. lack of coordination; 3. poor leadership; and 4. strong enemy resistance and fortifications. Kupres is important to the enemy, and that's why he defends it stubbornly."[272]

Later, even Sreten Žujović, Political Bureau and SH member — and the most persistent advocate for both brigade assaults on Kupres — came to realize that the town had been impossible to take and should not have been attacked at all, but merely blockaded. Dedijer recorded his remarks: "Kupres held Pavelić's elite forces. They fought to the death. They advanced upright, firing from machine guns. The fighting was brutal. Hand-to-hand. Heavy casualties on both sides." He recounted a captured Ustaša telling him: "If Kupres falls, the Partisans could take a train straight to Zagreb." Dedijer commented: "That wasn't much of an exaggeration," adding: "If we destroy Francetić's Black Legion, half the battle against Pavelić's army would be won." It is telling that Kosta Nađ, writing three and a half decades later in *War Memoirs 1942*,

[270] J. Broz, *Collected Works*, Vol. 11, note 329, p. 293.

[271] AJ, Fund of the CC CPY, file 1942/172 (translation from Russian).

[272] M. Leković, *Operations of the NOP Leadership*, Belgrade 1989.

admitted he had little hope for the attack on Kupres.[273] Arso had been opposed from the start, which only deepens the question of why the Supreme Commander insisted so forcefully on immediate and powerful assaults that resulted in around 240 elite fighters being put out of action. Until the end of 1942, Tito either could not or would not acknowledge that properly assessing the balance of forces was of primary importance — that assaulting fortified urban positions is among the most difficult tasks a unit can face; that one cannot charge a bunker, reinforced building, or trench without artillery, howitzers, mortars, and grenades. It is easy to command that a town "must fall," but there are moments when that order simply cannot be carried out, not even with the utmost sacrifice, bravery, and resolve from the troops and their commanders. Kupres — after Bugojno and Donji Vakuf, and before Bosanski Grahovo — stood as proof that not even the Proletarians could execute every command, even those from their Supreme Commander. Bound by the strict laws of military art and principles of armed combat, Arso — deprived for the first two years of the war of any effective reconnaissance and intelligence service, without communication equipment, and often relying on untrained reports — had tried to base operational decisions on force ratios, to know what was impossible and refuse it. "Assaults on the sky," he felt, were best left for party and youth meetings. When Tito ordered that Bugojno and then Livno "must fall," Arso formally requested that the attack be postponed by at least one day to improve the balance of forces and ensure a realistic chance of success — or even cancelled altogether, as in the case of Kupres — primarily to avoid discrediting their own troops and, more importantly, to avoid mass casualties. However, some commanders, especially the so-called "Spanish veterans," recorded this against him in the "ledger of sins," accusing him of being indecisive — which, given his care in evaluating combat conditions, he admittedly was at times. But he was also aware of his responsibility for the outcome of battles and, above all, for the lives of the fighters. His greatest fault, however, was that in such cases, he was not firmly opposed, as he should have been ahead of the second brigade assault on Kupres — even if it meant accepting the consequences of such a personal stand. As for Tito, it would take him months — up until late 1942 — to understand that fortified towns cannot be taken without heavy weaponry and communications equipment, a lesson that came through during his meeting with the delegation of the 2nd Serbian Proletarian Brigade at the 1st Congress of the Unified League of Anti-Fascist Youth of Yugoslavia (USAOJ) (Bihać, December 27-30, 1942). There he stated: "From now on, we should not attack fortified towns until we have heavy weapons." No one understood better than Boško Buha, the legendary grenadier, and the nine other members of the brigade's delegation, what Tito's orders had cost them — from Donji Vakuf to Kupres, from Jajce to Bosanski Grahovo. After that meeting with the Supreme Commander, they began to hope for better days and safer nights, quietly asking themselves: "Did it really take so much time, so many sacrifices, so much suffering... to understand such a simple truth?"[274]

[273] K. Nađ, *op. cit.*, 353.

[274] *Collection of the Second Proletarian Division*, Belgrade 1998, Vol. 4, p. 77. The Chief of Staff was criticized for constantly calculating the strength ratio and repeating how only large forces can afford, in mass clashes, to "have divisions burn like matches," while for domestic terrain "even a small unit is a large force."

Based on an analysis of the military and political situation in Bosanska Krajina, Kordun and Banija, the SH, following the heavy fighting at Kupres, decided that the Shock Brigade Group, reinforced by Dalmatian fighters and in coordination with Krajina units, should continue operations toward the valleys of the Vrbas, Sana and Una rivers. The objective of this action was to establish a broad liberated territory to serve as a solid base for conducting offensive operations toward central Bosnia, Posavina and Dalmatia. The Chief of the Supreme Headquarters assessed that Mrkonjić Grad and Jajce should be liberated as soon as possible. Mrkonjić Grad was taken on the night of August 23-24, and a month later, Jajce — known as "the toughest Bosnian town" — was liberated. It had been defended by around 1,200 Ustaša and Domobran troops, equipped with a battery of field guns, a howitzer detachment and an armoured car. Nearly 100 concrete bunkers had been built around the town and the medieval section had been turned into an "impregnable fortress."

For the attack on Jajce, two Proletarian and two Krajina brigades were assigned, each positioned according to their assault targets, while elements of local Partisan detachments filled the spaces between them. After thorough preparations, the assault was launched on the night of September 24-25. Bomb squads infiltrated the first line of bunkers during the night and reached the outskirts of the town. Fierce street battles followed throughout the morning, with alternating attacks and counter-attacks. The final resistance, mounted from firing positions in the Old Town, was crushed by the afternoon of September 25 — after 18 hours of combat.

Despite failures at Bugojno and Kupres, the operations and achievements up to that point had fulfilled the objective of the offensive by the Proletarian and Shock Brigades into western Bosnia. By breaking through to the Imotski-Livno-Mrkonjić Grad-Jajce line, the main axis of fighting shifted to western Bosnia. After nearly 300 kilometres of movement — under constant, often intense, day-and-night fighting — the core of the operational units had reached the region. In cooperation with Krajina and Dalmatian units, they significantly expanded the liberated territory. This, in turn, created a stronger military and political base from which — as stated in *The National Liberation War of Yugoslavia* — "from a central and extraordinary military-strategic position, it was possible to exert a more direct influence on the further development of the liberation war and revolution throughout the western parts of Yugoslavia, especially in Croatia, where a large portion of the Croatian population still remained outside the National Liberation Movement."[275] The emergence of such a major centre of anti-fascist resistance attracted many new recruits to Partisan units.

The enemy correctly recognized this as a serious threat — the growing potential for a wider armed uprising. In other words, the breakthrough of the Shock Brigade Group into western Bosnia jeopardized occupier interests, especially in the areas of troop deployments and key economic centres, notably around Banja Luka and the Ljubija iron ore mines. At the same time, with Partisan forces reaching east of the

[275] Edition *The Liberation War*, vol. I, 291.



Glamoč, early September 1942: a group of NOB leaders — from the left, Vlado Popović, Ivan Rukavina, Arso Jovanović, Savo Orović, Milovan Đilas and Pavle Ilić.

Dinaric Alps and the uprising gaining strength in Dalmatia, Italian interests along the Adriatic coast were seriously endangered. Additionally, these actions disrupted efforts to regroup Montenegrin, Herzegovinian and Dalmatian Chetnik units — forces that, under Ilija Trifunović-Birčanin and his circle of officers in Split, had aimed to push into western Bosnia, seize control in coordination with local Chetnik units, and link up with their strongholds in the Knin region and central Bosnia. Thus, the advance of strong Partisan units into western Bosnia seriously threatened the interests and positions of all enemies of the National Liberation Movement. In response, the Germans and Italians, together with their allies, launched a series of successive operations under the umbrella name "Dinara." Individually, they were called "Alpha," "Beta," "Jajce-1," "Jajce-N," and so on. The German 714th and 718th Divisions and the Italian "Messina" Division attacked from all directions against the liberated territory. The SH coordinated defensive battles on the outskirts of the free territory and simultaneously, in order to relieve pressure on Partisan forces in Bosanska Krajina, ordered offensive actions by other Partisan units toward Banija, Kordun and Dalmatia, and called for intensified fighting in Slovenia and northwestern Croatia. Additionally, some forces were redirected toward Bosansko Grahovo and Bihać for planned assaults on those towns, while the remaining units continued to focus on enemy garrisons in the Sana, Vrbas and Rama river valleys.

The attack on Bosansko Grahovo had been advocated by Tito since August 25,

and especially from September 13 onward, with the aim of using the attack to neutralize the enemy's offensive actions, break up the Chetniks in the Knin region, and establish a stronger connection between the liberated territories of Bosanska Krajina, Kordun, Lika and Dalmatia. On September 15, 1942, Dedijer recorded that, on Tito's orders, "the 1st Proletarian was sent toward Grahovo. It is preparing to eliminate this wasps' nest of strategic importance together with three Krajina and two Lika brigades. With the fall of Grahovo, we would seriously threaten the Split-Zagreb railway line, since Knin is not far away." The main objective, however, was the elimination of the Chetniks.

The Krajina leadership, however, had a different assessment, prompting the Supreme Commander to send Arso to explain to them why the attack on Bosansko Grahovo was to be given absolute priority. Commander of the Operational Staff, Kosta Nađ, and his Chief of Staff, Branko Poljanac, insisted instead on the liberation of Bihać, supported by the Krajina and especially the Podgrmeč Party leadership. From these disagreements over whether to attack Bosansko Grahovo or Bihać first, an ugly intrigue arose, tied to Arso's name. The key figure in this intrigue was Arso's old debtor, newly appointed Chief of the Operational Staff Branko Poljanac, who had the backing of his commander Kosta Nađ, as well as other already glorified, ballad-worthy but self-important and suspicious commanders. A similar intrigue emerged around the attack on Bosansko Grahovo, carried out on October 26 by a strike group under Arso's command, consisting of two Proletarian and one Krajina brigade, but without success. The Supreme Commander had justifiably insisted on the attack in order to divert enemy attention from the planned assault on Bihać, to reduce pressure on the free territory during a complicated military-political moment, and to prepare for an offensive against the Chetnik Dinara Division, led by Vojvoda Momčilo Đujić. Tito demanded that Arso stop waiting for artillery support and the Lika units initially planned for the attack (which were engaged elsewhere), and launch the assault during the night of October 26-27. In doing so, he directly caused the operation to proceed with significant risk. Additionally, Koča Popović opposed involving the 1st Proletarian Brigade in the attack — a stance that reflected not only a different opinion from Tito's but also his long-standing and open hostility toward Arso. In his *Notes on Warfare,* Koča wrote: "At dawn on October 23 we arrived by train in Drvar; in the afternoon we marched and arrived in the village of Peći on the evening of October 25; on October 26 in the evening we reached Bosansko Grahovo; during the night of October 26-27, fighting; on the morning of October 27, we withdrew to Reljići near Grahovo for a drink — all night again; attack during the night of 27-28; before dawn on the 28th, we withdrew; on the evening of the 29th, attacked Strmica..."

As a commentary to this text, its editor for publication, Miloš Vuksanović, adds: "The order for the attack on Bosansko Grahovo was issued by the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters. It was attacked over two consecutive nights by the 1st and 2nd Proletarian Brigades. The attack was poorly organized and unsuccessful.

"The second attack was carried out the following night, but it was much less organized, less energetic and resulted in heavy losses.

"Dissatisfied with the failure of the attack on Bosansko Grahovo, as well as the very fact that the attack had been carried out (he had previously refused to attack such a heavily fortified town), Koča Popović wrote a note about Arso."[276]

In the late 1970s, Koča pulled this note from his private archive and had it — written in French — translated and published in a public outlet. The heading read "Such a Chief," the title was "Practicism," and to remove any doubt as to whom it referred, he added "About Arso," along with a sort of subtitle in parentheses: "A sense for immediate needs at the expense of principles." The entry, dated October 28, includes the following four points:

"1. Blind passion for slogans;

"2. False precision, a whirlwind of confused details;

"3. A professional deformation, already noted with Terzić after the events in Duvno; concrete actions interest him primarily as military problems; the same tendency noted during our stay on Treskavica, prior to the operation — but usually only after the action;

"4. A repellent attitude toward people, discouraging, 'cretin-like.'"[277]

On October 30, also in French, from Orlovica above Strmica, Koča added five more points:

"I am able to confirm two major mistakes:

"1. He was completely against attacking Strmica first and isolating Grahovo, despite the conditions being exceptionally favourable.

"2. After the second attack, the 2nd Proletarian units should not have been pulled back. It would have been very easy to block all communication lines between Strmica and Grahovo. After a few days, Grahovo would have been forced to surrender. It's not entirely too late yet; but supplying the 2nd Proletarian will now be difficult.

"3. Likewise, Strmica should be strongly attacked on the 29th. 'Watch the timing' — 'set the pace.' As usual, he arrives late and blindly.

"We completed all necessary preparations on time. There should have been more determination — against 'decisions' made in nervousness and with poor judgement.

"4. Insensitive to the physical condition of people; reduced to remarks like 'understood' and 'I know,' accompanied by appropriate facial expressions.

"5. At 4 a.m. came the order — destroy the railway line — we carry it out. At 5 a.m., another order, incomprehensible.

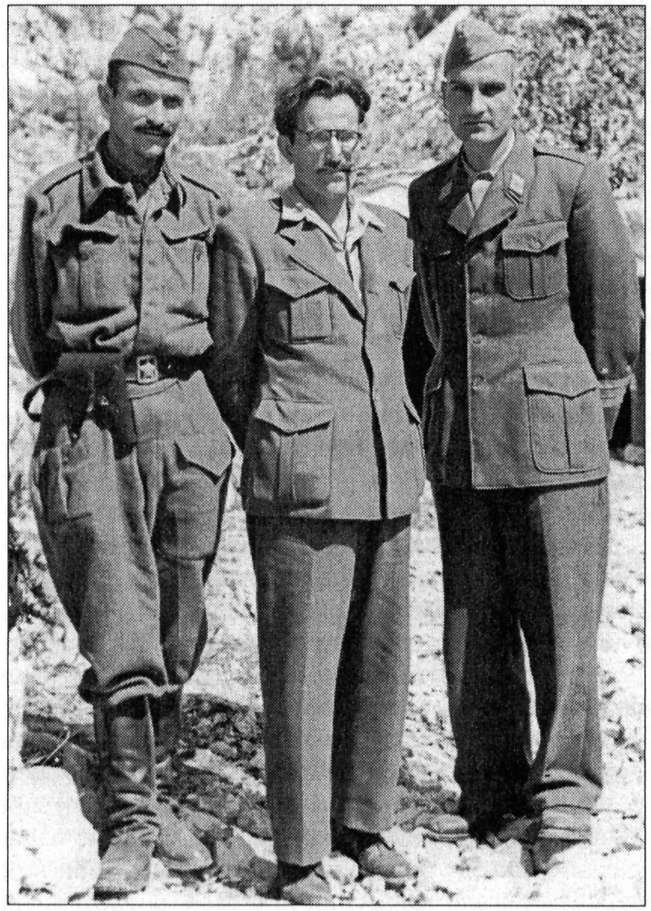
"Irresponsible, incapable of anticipating anything, he only reacts to the enemy's movements.

"Once again, we told him before heading for Plavno: you can't leave just one battalion in the direction of Grahovo. Today, several days later, he sent two brigades there! He always seeks isolated targets. As soon as he turns his attention to a new sector, the previous one no longer interests him. These are more ingrained habits than mere reactions. So, when the arrival of a small column from Strmica toward Grahovo was

[276] K. Popović, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

[277] *Ibid.,* p. 64.

announced, he sent the entire 2nd Proletarian and two battalions of the 4th Krajina Brigade to intercept it..."[278]



Mlinište, late September 1942: from the right, Arso Jovanović, Ivan Milutinović and Blažo Jovanović.

Koča, a commander who genuinely loved his Proletarians — and they him — could not stand the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, Arso, and expressed that publicly and everywhere. In the book *Conversations with Koča*, when journalist Aleksandar Nenadović asked him, "What were your experiences in relations with the SH?" — Koča replied: "Whenever possible, Peko and I would avoid Arso, who was then Chief of the Supreme Headquarters. We had no confidence in his ability to lead a partisan war. He was a formally trained peacetime General Staff officer who lacked the ear or sense for guerrilla warfare." When asked whether that was a matter of "military distrust," he responded: "Exactly that. Peko and I would, often by agreement, step

[278] *Ibid.,* p. 65.

aside when Arso was approaching. We were wary he might mess up the operations we were preparing or conducting. I remember one such case — near Livno. I had already done reconnaissance and was about to launch an operation to liberate the town with my units. At the last minute, Arso demanded that we wait, to postpone the attack. He wanted to dissuade me, believing 'on paper' that the enemy was too strong. But I had a good grasp of the enemy garrison's strength and was certain we could break them. And we did — in a single night, without much trouble. All of it contrary to Arso's assessments and proposals.

"Arso was, no doubt, a highly educated officer, but in my opinion, he could not grasp the specific nature of partisan warfare. He remained doctrinaire; he couldn't adapt. My view was that with his professional qualifications, he could only truly be useful in the final stages of the war, during broader frontal — let's say 'normal' — operations conducted more or less according to known, learned rules.

"And ultimately, it wasn't just about Arso. As for me personally, I was — and remain — convinced that partisan warfare, the way we waged it, could not be properly understood by any officer who held a rank higher than an active-duty captain in the old Yugoslav army. That applies, to some extent, to (Velimir) Terzić as well. He, for instance, had a tendency to demand that every operation be carried out 'at all costs.' That annoyed me, because such leadership is absurd: if every order must be carried out at all costs, then nothing has any real value..."[279]

Due to the failure of the attack on Bosansko Grahovo, the SH, under the decision of its Chief, reduced the objective from taking the town to isolating this enemy stronghold, which resulted in significantly fewer losses than the attack on Kupres. Realistically, taking Bosansko Grahovo, which was defended by two battalions of the Italian "Sassari" division and about 200 Chetniks, reinforced by a battery of guns and a well-organized defence system, was impossible, especially without the use of artillery and cutting off the communication lines to Knin. Arso, during the approach to the town, discussed this with Milutin Morača, the commander of the 4th Krajina Brigade. The goal of the operation, Arso told his former best pupil in Sarajevo, was to isolate the garrison from the most favourable positions, and its future fate would depend on when and how much artillery would be obtained from the Krajina forces. In this context, on November 5, the day after the liberation of Bihać, in a directive to the 2nd Proletarian Division's Staff for further actions toward Bosansko Grahovo, it was ordered that the division "block Grahovo and prepare to capture it once heavy artillery ammunition

[279] A. Nenadović, *Conversations with Koča*, Zagreb, 1989, p. 71. In a conversation held during a break in the "round table" held on April 23 and 24, 1985, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the victory over fascism, Koča — in response to a carefully worded objection that he had written negatively about some comrades in *Notes on Warfare* — admitted that "it can indeed sound that way," but said that he had "written in his diary, for himself, not thinking it would ever be published — otherwise, I wouldn't have written some things at all, and certainly none of it would have been published by my own choice. I gave in to pressure. I especially wrote harshly about the unfortunate Arsenije — the episodes from Livno and Bosanski Grahovo in particular; I deeply regret that, he has a family, and since 1948 it's been easy to write and publish bad things about him — he can't respond, can't defend himself. I'm not one of those hunters who measure a dead wolf's tail, but still, it is what it is..."

is obtained." This approach differed from Tito's assessment that "Bosansko Grahovo can easily fall with a small number of heavy weapons." Nevertheless, researchers of the NOB until 1980 never addressed the fact that Tito insisted on capturing Bosansko Grahovo, while they judged Arso's (ir)responsibility based on Koča's notes made during a period of his dissatisfaction with the Chief of Staff. The only remaining (2001) living commander from that attack, Milutin Morača, believes that Arso's plan, which led ten battalions into the attack on October 26, was successful: the garrison was isolated, and attention was diverted from the preparations of the partisan forces for the Bihać operation, which was sufficient for the start. On October 27, Arso and Koča jointly wrote and signed a report about the actions of the previous night's units. In that report, there is no trace of any disagreement between them. However, the next day, Koča, in his note after another attack on the stronghold, vented his anger toward Arso. On the outcome of the fighting that took place on that second night, the commander of the 2nd Proletarian Brigade, Lj. Đurić, wrote in his war diary, between two air bombings, on October 28: "All units did what they could this night, but we could not take Grahovo; mainly due to the very strong fortifications and our weak heavy artillery. Before dawn, the delegate from the SH sent an order to abandon the direct blockade of Grahovo."[280]

The misunderstandings between the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters and the leaders of the Operational Staff for the Bosnian Krajina began as early as August 21, when Arso called Đuro Pucar, the secretary of the Regional Committee, and Osman Karabegović, the commissioner of the Operational Staff, to a meeting in Glamoč, emphasizing: "At this meeting, it is necessary to establish agreement on further actions. Therefore, let the comrades gather all necessary data for such actions and come up with concrete proposals. Comrade Kosta should stay to lead the actions around Mrkonjić." Arso could not invite two leading political figures of the Bosnian Krajina to such a meeting without the knowledge and authorization of the General Secretary of the CPY. Less important for this topic is what was discussed and decided at the meeting, than the fact that Kosta Nađ — after receiving a detailed report from Đuro Pucar and Osman Karabegović — was offended, in terms of how the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters had organized such a meeting without him, why he had invited political leaders but not him, the commander, or his deputy Slavko Rodić. After being informed about Kosta's anger, the Supreme Commander organized a meeting at the SH, which was stationed in the villas "Danica" and "Mileva" in Glamoč, sending his car for the commander of the Operational Staff. The commanders of the Proletarian, Dalmatian, Croatian and Krajina units mostly gathered. According to the recollections of the commanders and commissioners of the 4th Operational Zone, Vicko Krstulović and Ivica Kukoč, the meeting laid the groundwork for the creation of a unified army, "whose fight and activity under a single command would be directed toward general, rather than local interests." In this context, decisions were made "about gradually liquidating the units that were tied to their insurgent territories and, in combat, mostly guided by

[280] Lj. Đurić, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

local interests," and moving toward shock brigades. The attending commanders, mostly "our Spaniards," were cautious about discussing the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, "a former military officer," even a General Staff officer, about transforming the partisan army into an operational army, but the meeting was led by the Supreme Commander, and that was enough for them to remain silent. One of the priorities established at this meeting, especially emphasized by the Supreme Commander, was the liquidation of the Bosansko Grahovo garrison, which was positioned against the Italians and Chetniks of M. Đujić, with the provision that the planned breakthrough east of Vrbas would be temporarily postponed. With this conclusion, the commander of the Krajina units agreed. Later, on October 14, when Arso repeated this priority at Slavko Rodić's headquarters in Bravska, specifying the need to clear Manjača and push into central Bosnia, the commander of the Operational Staff, B. Poljanac, insisted on the priority of liberating Bihać, conveniently omitting that it was a political calculation and the obligation of the regional leadership. Explaining the latest assessments of the SH, verified by the Supreme Commander, Arso, not hiding behind the authority of a joint superior and the supreme military institution he personified, analysed the need for a breakthrough toward the Kninska Krajina and the Vrbas valley. During the intense debate between Jovanović and Poljanac, Slavko Rodić remained silent, and the commander of the Operational Staff, playing on the card of the commander's vanity, wrote to Kosta that Arso had unilaterally made some personnel moves, including appointing Slavko Rodić and Koča Popović to command the key sector, adding that the commander of the 3rd Krajina Brigade, Nikola Karanović, Kosta's "classmate" from the non-commissioned officer school of 1932, "very unfavourably received the assignment of Comrade Koča to command the sector and told Comrade Slavko and me that he would file a complaint."

Poljanac wrote to Kosta about his conflict with Arso "regarding the prioritization of actions," asking him to discuss the matter with Tito. Then came a jab aimed where Kosta was most sensitive: "I hold the view that no outsider is better positioned to assess the situation than the Operational Staff for the Bosnian Krajina. That staff led the most successful operations for a full year and liberated a large territory — without Arso and without me. Now I feel that this approach completely strips the Operational Staff of its initiative, as Arso is directly interfering in the work of the Operational Staff and taking over its duties."[281]

The Poljanac Letter was delivered to Tito by Kosta on October 16 — along with a personal note that, understandably, reflected poorly on Arso. When Tito summoned him two days later, he commented that Kosta's letter, in which he complained about "the actions of certain comrades from the SH," "was not written in the usual comradely tone. It caught us off guard..."[282] Kosta tried to further explain which actions he was referring to, but the Supreme Commander didn't want an extended discussion and simply ordered, "Write it down. We'll sort it out." He did write it down, mostly

[281] K. Nađ, *op. cit.*, p. 424.

[282] *Ibid.,* p. 434.

listing "orders from Pavle Ilić, Arso and others" that had been issued to the technical workshops and foundry, instructing them — without consulting the Operational Staff — to send certain quantities of their products from Grmeč to the headquarters of the Proletarian, Lika and Dalmatian units. The Supreme Commander resolved the issue, now framed as a technical matter, by visiting the workshops and appointing Sreten Penezić from the 2nd Proletarian Brigade as their political overseer. Kosta Nađ, who was unwaveringly loyal to Tito, was satisfied with this. Earlier, on September 26 — the day after Jajce was liberated — Kosta arrived at Mlinšta with a gift for Tito: two staff cars and two motorcycles. There he found father and son Ribar, Stevo Krajačić, and the National Liberation Theatre troupe. The celebration was truly something to remember. Two days later, Nađ hosted a reception at the villa of the director of the carbide factory in Jajce, assigning the event protocol to a well-known ceremonial master who had arrived from Zagreb. Tito and Kosta arrived by car, escorted by two motorcycles. They were greeted with a formal dining table set with silverware, crystal glasses, a selection of fine dishes, a wine list and — specially prepared for the occasion, arranged by Kosta — an enlarged photograph of Tito gazing from the head of the table. The food and drink rivalled the best of times. The army, stationed at the front lines, reliably protected the liberated Jajce and the communist elite within it. However, with a new German offensive looming, staying in Jajce much longer was not an option. On October 4, the withdrawal had to be carried out in haste, from the city on the Pliva River. One of the "headquarters" columns, led by Arso and marching toward the SH at Mlinšta, was attacked by Chetniks — a development that deserves further context.

Around the time preparations for the attack on Jajce were underway — Jajce being the seat of the Ustaše's Grand County of Pliva and Sana, whose elimination the Supreme Commander had designated "a matter of primary importance" — the Chetniks, feeling threatened, began rearing their heads. Those under Uroš Drenović, in particular, were patrolling in small groups near the approaches to Mlinšta, where the SH had been based since September 14. Tito, informed that Drenović's Chetniks had started to appear in these areas — and never fully trusting the security around him — went out on September 25, accompanied by the chief and members of the SH and his staff, to elevation 1816, "to survey the surrounding terrain for the protection of the SH encampment."

Using a map, Arso conducted geographic and topographic orientation, determined a reference point and, while pointing out visible landmarks, provided intelligence on the enemy and explained the security system protecting the Headquarters. He emphasized that a strong defence was possible. Colonel Savo Orović wrote that Arso, having another assignment, departed, and Tito continued observing the surroundings with binoculars. He then spread out a topographic map in front of him and studied the situation to develop an appropriate directive. "As a seasoned officer," Orović wrote, "I was surprised at how skilfully he read the map and used a compass on the ground — as if he had completed a general staff academy." It almost seems as if the colonel — a graduate of military schools under Kings Nikola and Aleksandar — believed that reading a topographic map and using a hand compass required a General Staff officer's diploma,

as if he had forgotten from his own experience that these skills are taught even in the lowest non-commissioned officer training. Having been trained to always place someone all-knowing and omnipotent between himself and God, he recorded that in that moment of admiration, he was reminded of a famous French military commander: "In my chests, I have 200 million — and I would give it all for Ney," Napoleon once said of his celebrated marshal who rose from common soldier to high command. And what more could one say of Tito — who rose from a common metalworker to a great revolutionary and renowned military leader? Orović noted that he captured a photograph of Comrade Tito at that moment — bent over the map in a pose befitting a gifted military strategist.[283]

About ten days later, on October 4, Arso and a group of members from the SH, along with other leaders, were ambushed in the village of Podgorija — four or five kilometres east of Mlinšta — by a group of Chetniks under Uroš Drenović. The event was recorded by Savo Orović, Vladimir Dedijer, Ljubodrag Đurić and Sredoje Urošević, and even three decades later, A. Ranković, who was part of that group of leaders, recalled it vividly. Alongside him were Arso, Dr. Ivan Ribar and his son Lola, Moša Pijade, Dr. Simo and Dr. Olga Milošević, Kosta Nađ, and several escorts and couriers. They were retreating from Jajce, which the Germans were just entering. Believing they were safe on that part of the route, they travelled in a column — mostly on horseback — overlooking the fact that just four days earlier, also near the approaches to Mlinšta, the Milošević couple had been ambushed while returning from the Congress of Partisan Doctors in Bosanski Petrovac (September 25-27). That detail had apparently been forgotten, likely due to the loss of Jajce. When sudden gunfire erupted from a grove, Arso commanded everyone to hit the ground. He was the first to return fire with a pistol, running — hunched over — from one comrade to another, assigning cover positions and firing directions. According to Orović, the firefight lasted "an entire hour, but without casualties."[284] Cheerful that they had made it to Mlinšta without losses, Arso reported to the Supreme Commander what had happened, adding that the Germans were "retaking Jajce." Angry at his associates for withdrawing from Jajce carelessly and without stronger escort — and especially furious with Drenović's Chetniks — Tito ordered that "the criminals be captured the next day, and the village from which they attacked be severely punished." He added that this task should be carried out by "Serbian Proletarians," and left everything else to Arso. For the operation, Arso proposed two battalions — one each from the 2nd and 1st Proletarian Brigades — and appointed Ljubodrag Đurić as the "commander of the operation." He presented the plan to the Supreme Commander, who approved it and ordered him to "go with the expedition" as well. Arso, inexperienced in punishing Serbian villages, excused himself by citing urgent duties scheduled for October 6, suggesting instead that Moša Pijade go with the unit.

Sredoje Urošević, author of the monograph *The Second Proletarian Brigade*, wrote

[283] S. Orović, *op. cit.*, p. 291.

[284] *Ibid.,* p. 294.

that on October 6 the 2nd Battalion received orders to "blockade the village of Podgorija and, in coordination with the 4th Battalion of the 1st Proletarian Brigade, search it due to the Chetnik attack launched from it on members of the SH. Six Chetniks were captured during the operation."[285]

Commander Ljubodrag Đurić recalled that he and the 2nd Battalion were met outside Podgorija by Moša Pijade, Ivan Krajačić Stevo and the Kraljevo Battalion of the 1st Proletarian Brigade. Moša confided in him that Tito had sent Krajačić — who had just emerged from the underground — to the 2nd Proletarian as "the best-organized brigade, one that could serve as a model for forming staffs within brigades of the Main Staff of Croatia." Until then, Krajačić had been a prominent Comintern "resident" in Zagreb — undoubtedly skilled and bold as an underground operative, but completely unfamiliar with "regular" military organization and the conduct of combat operations, especially under such "special circumstances." He was slated to become commander of the 2nd Operational Zone of Croatia, so this mission was to be one of his "lessons" on how to wage war. Along with Moša and Krajačić was the political leader of the 2nd Proletarian Brigade, Slobodan "Krcun" Penezić. Đurić wrote: "With both battalions, we blockaded Podgorija due to the Chetnik attack on comrades from the SH who were travelling from Jajce to Mlinšta. Among the attacked comrades was also Čiča Janko, who came along now to help lead the investigation. Six bandits were captured and executed. A conference was then held with the remaining villagers, during which the entire incident was explained. Given the seriousness of the attack, Čiča Janko had initially decided that more should be punished. However, after pleas from the peasants and the weeping of women, he was moved and pardoned several of them."[286]

After the action, Đurić reported that Krajačić scolded Penezić for tolerating looting, citing an example in which a local woman pointed out a fighter who had taken a new pair of socks from her. He advised Krcun, as the party leader of such a well-organized Proletarian Brigade, not to allow such behaviour. One word led to another, and according to Đurić's *Memoirs*, Krajačić exclaimed: "The Serbians were looting before, and now they're looting us — and you, Krcun, don't even notice it!"

Đurić testified: "Agitated and full of rage, Krcun jumped to his feet. I stepped in front of him, and over my shoulder, he shouted at Stevo: 'If there was looting, it was in a Serbian village — not in your Ustaša one!'" Stevo got up from his stool and headed for the door. Krcun cursed him and whoever had sent him, yelling: 'If you were worth anything, they wouldn't have booted you out of Croatia!'"[287]

The Liberation of Bihać *(November 1-5, 1942)*

At a meeting at the Supreme Command, the Supreme Commander agreed with Kosta Nađ's proposal to liberate Bihać, where entirely pragmatic but also different pol-

[285] S. Urošević, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

[286] Lj. Đurić, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

[287] *Ibid.,* p. 129.

itical reasons of both the Supreme Commander and the Krajina leadership coincided. Tito, with his consent, added: "This operation must be carried out by November 5 at the latest, so we have something to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the October Revolution," adding that "operations east of the Vrbas can come a little later."[288] This was a radical change from his earlier decision, but the Chief of the General Staff, though caught off guard, understood that the new circumstances required new solutions, especially when it came to politics. For Arso, it was not in question that Bihać needed to be liberated, but with enough strong forces, particularly because at that time the vast liberated territory of Bosnian Krajina — divided by enemy garrisons in the Una Valley and northwest of it — was separated from the liberated territories in the Banija, Kordun and Lika. Bihać was, among them, the most important for the enemy, as the seat of the district, a significant military-political centre.

Therefore, the liberation of Bihać had immense political and military-strategic importance for the partisans: it would link the liberated territory of the Bosnian Krajina with the liberated territories of Lika, Kordun and Banija; it would expand the operational base of partisan forces; and the highest military leadership would be able to have a more direct influence on the development of the struggle in neighbouring territories and the linking of partisan units. For this reason, the Supreme Command planned offensive actions against enemy strongholds in the middle Una Valley and in the Cazin area, with Bihać being the first to be attacked. Arso knew from military history that Bihać and the Cazin area, as well as Slovenia, were "historical gates" through which armies had been advancing towards Vienna for centuries, and in his vision, they were also the roads leading the main body of the partisan army with the Supreme Command at the head. He did not — working intensively with his associates on the plan for combat actions to expand the liberated territory towards Dalmatia, Banija, Kordun and central Bosnia — question the need for an attack and liberation of Bihać, but he gave priority to blocking Bosansko Grahovo and then, by redirecting part of the units, moving the focus of the next offensives towards central Bosnia. The Supreme Commander had the same stance. However, the Krajina leadership made Tito waver, and in the planning of actions, the priority shifted to the attack and liberation of Bihać. The change of the primary stance was also influenced by the approaching anniversary of the October Revolution and the holding of the 1st Session of the AVNOJ.

At a briefing with Tito, Arso stated that in the immediate attack on the city "seven or eight brigades should participate, including one or two partisan brigades." He argued that the operation should be planned and coordinated by the Supreme Command, which implied that its representative would lead it. Tito supported this until Kosta Nađ returned to the Supreme Command, where he firmly advocated the position that the task could and should be carried out by a group of Krajina brigades, with the operation being led by the Operational Command, which he commanded. Despite initially supporting Arso's proposal, the Supreme Commander accepted Kosta Nađ's solution, reassuring Arso with the words, "Kosta knows what he's doing." Realizing

[288] K. Nađ, *op. cit.*, p. 433.

the direction in which things were heading, the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters insisted that the meeting to adopt the final decision be postponed for at least two days, which was acknowledged. He then carried out an analysis of the proposed attack on Bihać on five densely typed pages and concluded by emphasizing that "without six brigades, including one or two partisan brigades, we cannot succeed." The following day, at the meeting in the Supreme Command, which was attended by the Commissioner of the Main Staff of Croatia, Dr. Vladimir Bakarić, he voiced the opinion: "If we go into the operation without at least one partisan brigade, we are taking a risk." After that, Kosta Nađ, supported by Dr. Bakarić, presented a different plan for the attack on Bihać, in which five Krajina brigades and three Croatian brigades would participate. Both of them were in favour of the idea that "the Krajina city should be liberated by the Krajina forces themselves," and that "the borders of the liberated territory should be protected by the partisans — then the people will be safest." Nađ, however, "raised" unconvincing arguments about the partisan brigades: that they were all too far from the target area or engaged in other tasks; that they were "the worst equipped and completely unshod," and "exhausted and needed to be relieved of the hardest tasks," etc. Arso easily countered each of Kosta's "arguments," insisting on the participation of at least one partisan brigade and on the operation being led by the Supreme Command. The disagreement was resolved by the Supreme Commander: he thanked Kosta for caring about the partisans, but left the issue of the operation commander "open." However, this remained the case only until lunch when Tito, Bakarić and Nađ agreed that Nađ would command the attack. In this case, Arso was left with the task of elaborating the attack plan, predicting the possibility of a larger number of casualties and ensuring that at least two surgical teams would participate. Nađ accepted this idea, with Dr. Gojko Nikoliš deciding on the teams.

The units for the attack on Bihać were prepared with the direct assistance of the Supreme Command. Special emphasis was placed on the secrecy of the partisan units' attack. By grouping eight partisan brigades, the largest concentration of forces for an attack on a fortified position was achieved up to that point. Almost 9,000 fighters, with 3,600 attacking the city itself, were gathered in secrecy. According to a report sent to the Comintern on November 3, 1942, Bihać was defended by 4,500 Ustaše and Domobrani. The partisan brigades began their attack on Bihać at 9:30 p.m., and liberated it, along with 32 surrounding villages, on November 4 at 4:00 p.m. In these battles, the enemy suffered about 650 killed and 835 captured, while about 700 Ustaše broke out of the city. In addition, the partisan forces captured a very rich war booty.

The battles for Bihać lasted continuously for 42 hours. Arso monitored the entire process, ready to intervene with reserve forces if necessary. Fortunately, the outcome was victorious.

As soon as Zoran Žujović, the "courier on a motorcycle" at Oštrelj, brought the news that Bihać had been liberated, Arso brought Tito the order for signature, giving "recognition and praise for heroic conduct" to the fighters and commanders of the brigades involved in "this large and significant operation." On a piece of squared paper torn from a notebook, he congratulated Kosta Nađ on "the brilliant success of the

units under his command." Commander Nađ and Chief of Staff Poljanac recorded this chivalrous act of a man they had previously, without valid arguments, harshly accused in front of Tito — Nađ in his published war memoirs, and Poljanac in his unpublished ones. Later, in 1946, Arso would write that the liberation of Bihać "was the greatest victory until then, eliminating the wedge that had been driven into the free territory."[289] To him, even then at Oštrelj and never later, it wasn't important whose victories they were — whether from the partisan, Krajina, Montenegrin or other units; the most important thing was that the partisan forces were winning and growing stronger. That's how he felt, and for that reason, despite their harsh words, he sincerely congratulated the two comrades on the very important military victory for which they, due to their duties, alongside the Krajina brigade fighters, had great merit. His insistence on the participation of at least one partisan brigade in the battles for the liberation of Bihać, just before the attack, was an expression of his military rationality — to seize this strong enemy stronghold with as few casualties as possible.

On Oštrelj *(November 5-17, 1942)*

Immediately after the liberation of Bihać, the Supreme Command — in accordance with the operation plan — began regrouping forces with the goal of liberating the enemy-held strongholds that divided the free territory into two parts. In this regard, Assistant Chief of Staff Pavle Ilić was tasked on November 8 "to coordinate the work of the Krajina and Croatian forces and take effective measures to liberate Banja," with the note: "In case of any enemy offensive from Dvor and Bosanski Novi, it should be repelled." The Operational Staff for the Bosnian Krajina and the Main Staff of Croatia were informed about this task, with the latter being emphasized: "Therefore, you will execute all of its operational orders. You must maintain constant contact with him." The units launched the attack planned by the Supreme Command and by November 15 had liberated Cazin, Velika Kladuša, Cetin Grad, Pećin Grad, Vrnograč and Slunj, thus linking the free territories of Bosnian Krajina and the Kordun and Banija regions. At the same time, the Supreme Command planned attacks towards central Bosnia and Dalmatia, issuing orders for the 1st Proletarian Division Staff to prepare for an advance towards Jajce, reinforcing it with three Krajina brigades; the 2nd Proletarian Division Staff to act in the sector of Bosansko Grahovo and towards northern Dalmatia; and the 4th Operational Zone Staff to block the Livno-Glamoč route.

The bold offensive actions of the group of Proletarian and shock brigades towards western Bosnia resulted in an outstanding military and political success. The liberation of numerous cities created a vast free territory in Bosnian Krajina, which, with the liberation of the territories of Banija, Kordun and Lika, grew into a large compact area with its centre in Bihać. This territory, being larger than one-fifth of Yugoslavia, represented a solid strategic base for both undertaking larger military operations and further fuelling and strengthening the struggle on neighbouring territories, particularly in Croatia and later in Slovenia.

[289] A. Jovanović, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

Thanks to the offensive of the group of Proletarian brigades, the NOP gained significant momentum in the western parts of the country. New brigades and NOP units were formed in Bosnian Krajina, Lika, Kordun and Banija, thus creating very important conditions for the qualitative reorganization of the NOP armed forces, specifically transitioning from brigade to division and corps levels of military organization. With the formation of divisions and corps (November 1, 1942), the National Liberation Partisan Units and the Volunteer Army (DVJ) were renamed the National Liberation Army and Partisan Units of Yugoslavia (NOV and POJ). Undoubtedly, in all of this, Arso, by virtue of his position as Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, had significant merits and responsibilities. The victories of the partisan forces created favourable conditions for a more direct influence of the Supreme Command on the development of armed resistance in the western regions of Yugoslavia. In this sense, Arso was sent to Slovenia in mid-November. However, in addition to the highly favourable impact on the intensification of the armed struggle and the creation of the NOV and POJ as a respected military force, the creation of the large free territory was a prerequisite for ensuring that, alongside the increasing victories in the anti-fascist struggle, these be validated through the establishment of the highest military-political authority, namely the formation of the Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia (AVNOJ) as the supreme joint military and political body of authority in the war.

General Arso would later assess the results of the offensive in 1946 as follows:

"The victorious march of the shock brigades, the destruction of the Adriatic railway Sarajevo-Mostar, the first diversions on such a large scale in our warfare, the capture of the cities: Konjic, Prozor, Kreshevo, Gornji Vakuf, Mrkonjić Grad, Duvno and Livno, strongly resonated and gave new momentum to our forces in the western regions. And the arrival and battles of these brigades on the Vrbas, Sana, Una and Dinara rivers stirred the masses of the people.

"By developing operations in the territories of Bosnia and Croatia, we broke Pavelić's quisling apparatus and destroyed most of his bloodthirsty Ustaše. Pavelić and his deputy, Maček, were politically completely exposed. The Croatian masses witnessed firsthand the justification of the liberation struggle. Dalmatia erupted in a popular uprising. The uprising spread to those Croatian regions where it had previously only smoldered (Žumberak, Slavonia, Zagorje). This had an echo in Slovenia.

"The army grew rapidly. From brigades, we advanced to a higher level of military organization, and divisions and corps were formed. This was the second important developmental stage of our army. We gained strong shock groups, capable of major actions and solving operational problems across the entire Yugoslav front.

"With the liberation of a large territory, a state and popular government began to take shape, culminating in the formation of AVNOJ in Bihać. Thus, the uprising of our peoples not only built and strengthened the armed forces but also laid the firm foundations of people's power, which was of great significance not only for our internal but also for our international position.

"For the first time in history, fighters from all our peoples found themselves

together on the same battlefield. This resulted in such significant successes, which could only be achieved through joint efforts, jointly spilled blood, from which grew the brotherhood and unity of our peoples — the greatest achievement of our struggle.

"With this movement, we positioned ourselves centrally within our country, linking all our forces and taking control of the very strong terrain of the Dinaric ridge, where the enemy could not exploit modern technology. Relying on this powerful central point, we launched, like from a springboard, into the Sava basin on one side, and towards the Adriatic coast on the other. From this time onwards, the Dinaric ridge became a strategic lever, linking the forces of Slovenia with our forces in the eastern regions: Montenegro and Serbia."[290]

With the offensive and the creation of such a vast free territory, the quisling creation of the NDH was brought to the brink of danger. On the free territory, unity between the front and the rear was achieved, and the practice (begun in Foča) of creating military-territorial bodies — area commands, local commands and partisan guards, etc. — was deepened. Arso played the most prominent role in the conception of these institutions and in defining their tasks, particularly regarding their obligations to operational units. Specifically, the new military-territorial bodies had (legal) obligations to: carry out mobilization; take care of the feeding and accommodation of units; establish military workshops and storage facilities, and command them; oversee medical care in the rear; organize the transport of troops and materials; maintain order and security in the rear, etc. This was one of the important prerequisites for successfully conducting new operations, and the economic side was also significant, as many production capacities were placed at the service of the NOP; partisan units, youth labour brigades, and the people collected a rich harvest, cultivated neglected land, and rebuilt burned Serbian villages.

The liberated vast territory, called the "Bihać Republic," had all the essential attributes of a state: territory, population, system of government and military power; with its 50,000 square kilometres, it was larger than some European countries. The basic prerequisite for military successes in the new conditions was the decision of the Supreme Command to form the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia as an operational armed force of the NOP, organized into brigades, divisions and corps, along with partisan units. Arso envisioned such large, well-organized, equipped and combat-capable units in all conditions and on the entire battlefield from the early days of the uprising. These were the kinds of units he had in mind when, in the fall of 1941, he ordered the formation of partisan brigades. Their core, he saw, was in the 1st and 2nd Proletarian Brigades, and then in the Group of Proletarian Brigades with which, as Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, he reached Bosnian Krajina, Lika, Banija and Kordun. He, better than anyone else, saw their advantages and values, knew how to direct their actions, issue directives, set tasks according to possibilities and adopted decisions, always keeping in mind the idea that these units should evolve into divisions and corps. The decision to transform the NOP and the DVJ into the NOV and POJ

[290] *Ibid.*

was made by the CC of the CPY and the Supreme Command. Still, the leading figure of the General Staff, General Staff officer Arso R. Jovanović, not only contributed most in terms of his professional military preparedness but also in his broader view of military art, playing the most significant role in shaping and establishing the organizational and structural framework of the units and their staffs. He, after all, prescribed their structure, defined their purpose, as detailed by direct participants in these historical events in their memories. Arso genuinely rejoiced in the growth of the liberation army, seeing it as an opportunity to create a strong operational army as a guarantee of victory in the liberation struggle.

Of course, while working diligently and responsibly, professionally and exhaustively, he made mistakes. This represented a process of his gradual understanding of the essence of partisan warfare. Sometimes, admittedly, he insisted too much on conceptualizing the combat order according to the balance of forces; on strict adherence to adopted decisions; on rigid rules of military subordination, both in command during combat operations and in centralizing the captured war booty, etc. Throughout this time, he was a staunch advocate for the formation of numerous and strong partisan units, as territorial units, which would carry out smaller combat actions on their own territory, while cooperating with operational units in larger operations. Arso consistently insisted that, in line with the military-political conditions on the Yugoslav front and the new needs of the NOP, the military organization should be constantly improved. He writes about this in the *Overview of the National Liberation War:* "The foundation of any military enterprise is a strong organization. An army does not tolerate improvisations, especially not under such harsh living and working conditions as those our NOP faced. It took a lot of system and sense to organize the resistance of a people oppressed by the fascist boot."[291]

The orders for the formation of the 1st and 2nd Proletarian Divisions were written on November 1, and for the formation of the 3rd, 4th and 5th eight days later. Documents regarding the formation of the 6th, 7th and 8th Divisions, the 1st Bosnian and 1st Croatian Corps, and the renaming of the NOP and DVJ General Staff to the Supreme Command of the National Liberation Army and Partisan Units of Yugoslavia were left in draft form, as he left for Slovenia on November 17, and were handed over to his deputy, Velimir Terzić.

According to the Supreme Command's assessment, with the intensification of the armed struggle, the conditions were created for the organized schooling needed for the partisan units, an idea that had long been maturing in the mind of its chief. The introductory part of the Order on the formation of the "Military School of the NOV and POJ under the direct control of the Supreme Command" states that "with the growth of the National Liberation Army, its tasks expand, and their resolution requires capable commanders who closely follow the experience of our struggle and deepen their military knowledge." The goal of the School was stated as "training to improve the command staff of the NOV and POJ, studying and applying the experiences of the

[291] *Ibid.,* p. 6.

NOB, and implementing a unified doctrine in our army." According to the Order, the School had three courses: Higher — for preparing battalion and brigade commanders; Lower — for training sergeants and company commanders; and practical youth military courses. At the Higher course, according to an act of the head of the Military School, division commanders were also to be trained, and they would practice: tactics and solving tactical tasks on maps and the terrain, reading maps, using infantry weapons, as well as studying the basics of fortifications and communication services, with the entire program to be completed in 21 days. The acquired knowledge would — as written — "be transferred to the troops," and "the assessment of success would serve as a criterion for determining the position of the respective listener, about which the Operational Section of the Supreme Command would keep records." Here, we see the beginning of the relentless effort by the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters to ensure that expertise be the primary criterion for the advancement of the command staff, and certainly, because of that, the development of military education.[292]



Oštrelj, early November 1942: the first head of the Supreme Staff Officer School, Colonel Savo Orović, with his wife Joška.

Colonel Savo Orović was appointed as the commander of the First Military School of the Supreme Command. He would submit proposals to the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, as his superior, regarding matters important for the operation of this military educational institution. He was certainly assisted by the political commissar

[292] The military schools of the NOV and POJ would, from November 1942 until Victory Day (May 9, 1945), graduate 28,030 officers.

of the School, Milentije Popović, who, on this basis, was directly subordinated to A. Ranković. Simultaneously with the preparations for the opening of the school, it was ordered that the first four Proletarian brigades send two fighters each, while the 5th Montenegrin and 10th Herzegovinian brigades would each send one fighter, and that the Main Staff of Croatia and the Operational Staff of Bosnian Krajina send five candidates, and the "Dalmatian Operational Zone" three candidates to the Higher Course. It was required that those commanders who "had all the conditions to develop into battalion and brigade commanders, as well as those who were already in those positions," be sent to the Higher Course. According to the order, the course was to begin on November 15 in Donji Lapac. However, this deadline was postponed to November 17 due to delays with some of the participants arriving from the front, and thus, the first course would successfully finish on December 7 with 23 attendees.

The Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, then the person with the highest military education in the NOV and POJ, understood that military knowledge was a prerequisite for successfully carrying out duties in a modern military organization. In contrast, ignorance and improvisation in "leading" units in battle "from memory" were often disastrous for them. Understanding the importance of military knowledge, as soon as he learned that the Officers' School of the Main Staff of Croatia was also working in Donji Lapac, he sent Colonel Savo Orović from Glamoč there. As befitted a member of the Supreme Command, he gave him a good horse and escort and, seeing him off on September 7, 1942, said that he should stay at the school's headquarters as long as he found necessary to observe life and work there, help the commanders with his knowledge and experience, and see what could be used for organizing the Military School of the Supreme Command, which, as he emphasized, "would be formed once this offensive quieted down." Colonel Savo Orović stayed in Donji Lapac for a week and, upon his return, reported everything he had seen at the School to the Chief of the Military School, whom he highly respected as both a senior officer and a younger colleague. His conclusion was that the school, led by Captain First Class Danilo Latas and six other officer instructors, "gives the impression of a well-organized peacetime institution and produces very useful results." Along the way, he also told Arso about his meeting with a group of actors from Zagreb who had joined the partisans in April and, upon leaving Donji Lapac, performed sketches, one-act plays, scenes and dramatic performances, including plays by Nušić such as *The People's Deputy* and *A Suspicious Character,* as well as Gogol's *The Government Inspector*. Around the actors gathered poets, publicists, painters, and other figures of the written word and the arts. This left a deep impression on Colonel Orović, a known lover of fine arts, as he later shared on the evening of November 6, in the working room of the Chief of the Military School, in a forest railway carriage, in the presence of Mitar Bakić and Radovan Vukanović, whom Tito and then Arso had received before their departure for new duties. Radovan Zogović had also somehow appeared. Zogović recalled, three decades later, that at that moment Arso wistfully said, "Only the wicked Montenegrins, unlike the rest of the intelligent world, don't know how to spare their artists and intellectuals in war, but send them on the first charge, and then in ten bombing missions, so they can prove themselves as pa-

triots and heroes through fire, and then those who survive are, perhaps, sent behind the front line, to a task that the greatest number of soldiers were neither skilled nor capable for, and which, even in war, is of general significance and great benefit." Those present understood this as both a warning and a task.[293]

On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the October Revolution, the Supreme Commander, on November 7 in Bosanski Petrovac, ceremoniously presented the war flag to the 1st Proletarian Brigade. A festive dinner followed for 70 guests, and then a performance by actors at the Sokolski Dom building, after which Lola Ribar gave a speech. On this occasion, the CC of the CPY issued a proclamation to "workers, peasants and citizens," and then to "fighters, commanders, commanders and political commissars of the NOVJ." In addition, telegrams with "fiery greetings" were sent to Stalin, the Red Army and the Comintern by the Supreme Commander and the staffs of the brigades engaged in the battles around Bihać. Tito sent all of this to Moscow, requesting that it be broadcast on the waves of *Slobodna Jugoslavija,* with the note: "It can be corrected if necessary."

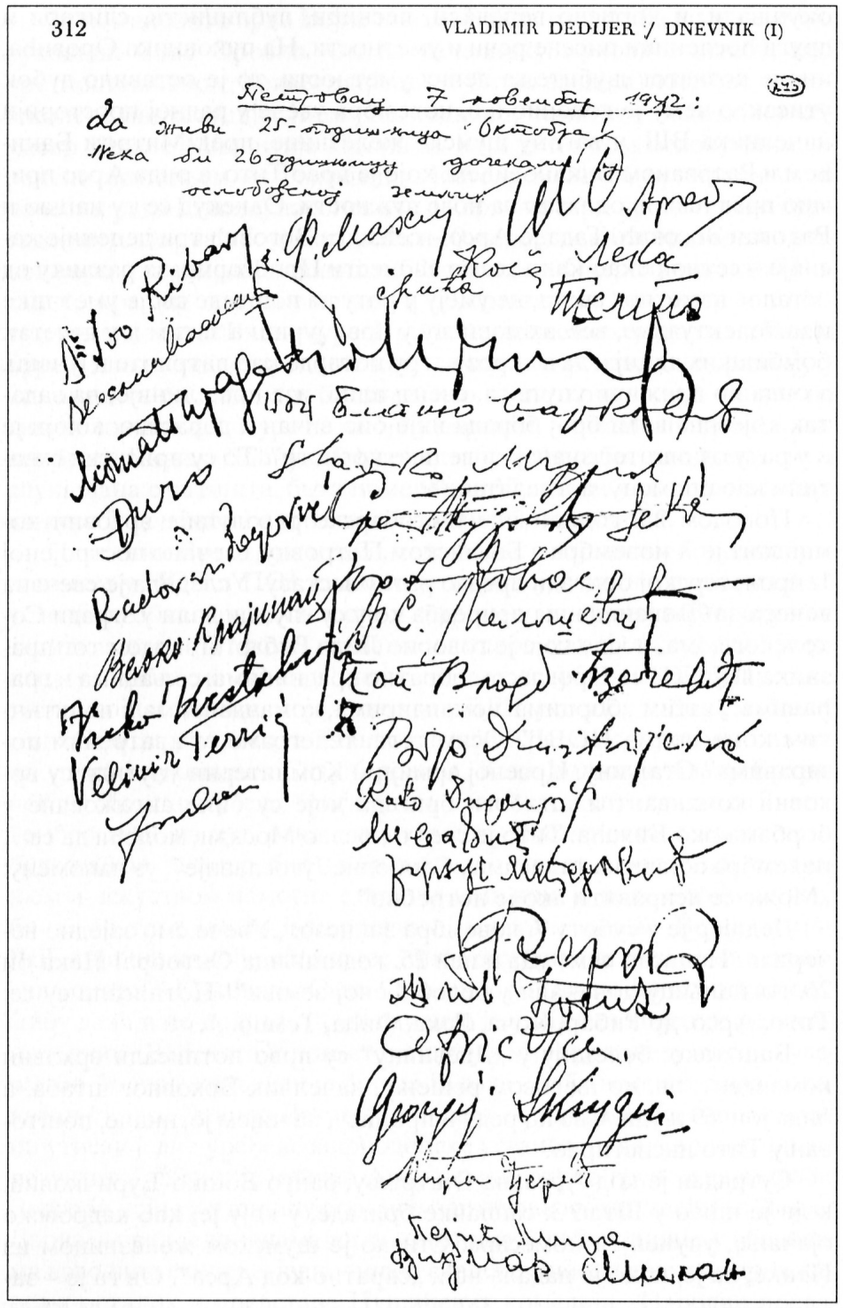
On November 7, Dedijer recorded: "In the evening, we had dinner together. I wrote: 'Long live the 25th anniversary of October! May we celebrate the 26th anniversary in a liberated country!' Signed: Tito, Arso, Dr. Ribar, Koča, Leka, Fića, Tempo..."

Just like that, the note in the *Diary* was first signed by the Supreme Commander, then by the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, as per his decision, and then by 69 other people. Everything was done according to procedure, which Tito insisted on respecting.

The next day, at Arso's, in Oštrelj, Boško Đuričković arrived, who was headed to the 3rd Sandžak Brigade Headquarters, where he had been sent as a political commissar reinforcement. He had arrived by forest railway from Pećka, and as night fell, "he stopped by Arso's." Arso — he writes — kept him for the night. He took him to dinner. Soon, Tito also entered the dining room. Kosta Nađ was also there, having arrived to report on the liberation of Bihać. He spoke at the table, in front of everyone. Đuričković recorded two details from the report, both related to the name Moša Pijade. When he entered the room at the Bihać municipal building where the archive was kept, he saw — Kosta had said — how the long barrel of a "Mauser" protruded from a cupboard. When he sharply asked who was inside, Moša popped out from the cupboard, rummaging through the archive. The second detail: Moša had ordered that the barracks built for the Operational Staff and its accompanying units be immediately liquidated, explaining that "it fosters a desire for a bourgeois life," and so Kosta asked the Supreme Commander, in front of everyone, what he thought about it. Tito, as testified by Đuričković, "smiled sweetly and, pulling a crooked cigarette resembling a pipe from his mouth, said: 'As for Čiča Janko, don't listen to him about the army. We need to organize a better and more comfortable life for the army and for the headquarters whenever possible.'"[294] From there, Đuričković went to the Sandžak

[293] From a conversation with R. Zogović, April 1974, in Belgrade.

[294] B. Đuričković, *op. cit.*, pp. 238-239.



Bosanski Petrovac, November 7: celebration of the October Revolution.

Proletarian Brigade, which had, in one night a month earlier, been strangely left without its commander, Vladimir Volodja Knežević, party leader Rifat Burdžović Tršo and battalion commander Tomaš Žižić. Arso also reminded the new commissar of the 3rd Sandžak Brigade, Đuričković, of the responsibility he would face. He deeply felt all of this, as all three of the missing from the brigade were very popular commanders, making their replacement even harder, especially with a brigade that had been devastated by their disappearance and still didn't know how they had perished. They had gone missing on the night of October 2-3, during the German offensive operation "Jajce-1." The Germans, advancing from multiple directions, were determined to reoccupy Ključ, Mrkonjić Grad and Jajce in order to somewhat improve their position, which had been severely compromised by the severing of the vital Vrbas valley. The situation from Mlinište looked dramatic: communication with Mrkonjić Grad was severed, the Germans began advancing from the newly captured Ključ towards that town and merged with a column coming from Banja Luka, with additional forces from the direction of Petrovac and Livno, where "one division" was expected to be deployed. In such a complicated situation, Arso hastened to the front, to the area where the battle was most intense, the place where a favourable outcome had to be achieved, or else previous victories would be in jeopardy. Previously, he had engaged the 3rd Sandžak Brigade near Mrkonjić to halt the German advance toward Jajce, while sending the 1st Krajina and 2nd Proletarian Brigades from Jajce. On the night of October 2-3, he was with the commander of the 1st Krajina Brigade, Milinko Kušić, organizing the units and arranging their combat actions. To better understand the chaos of that battle, it's worth reading Dedijer's notes in the *Diary* from October 2-4, 1942, which are related to the disappearance of Volodja, Tršo and Tomaš — who, as it turned out, were lost due to their ultimate carelessness and the Chetniks. The loss was all the heavier for the brigade since the operational situation was extremely dramatic, and these were people the fighters trusted and followed loyally. Arso sincerely mourned Tršo and Volodja, men he had known since October 1941, having shared many close moments with them from Pljevlja to Livno, mostly in the first battle line, facing the toughest obstacles. Of the three praises the Supreme Commander gave to the exemplary partisan commander Lieutenant Volodja — for destroying Chetnik headquarters near Nova Varoš, for the night crossing over the Lim (February 7-8, 1942) and for the liberation of Prozor (July 13) — the last two were proposed and formulated by Arso in his capacity as Chief of the Supreme Headquarters. For Arso, this great loss, which led to a deep crisis in the 3rd Proletarian Brigade, was even harder, as it involved an operational unit he deeply trusted and one he could always rely on in difficult situations. Indeed, nothing was known about the fate of Tršo, Volodja and Tomaš for not just days, but a full four months. Investigations were conducted. On October 10, even Aleksandar Ranković wrote about the possibility of attempting an exchange of prisoners with the Germans, and a commission, appropriately composed, conducted an investigation on behalf of the Supreme Command. But the life of an operational military unit could not wait for the results of the investigation, so, until a decision was made by the relevant authorities, in line with the old military rule that no unit can be without a commander at

any point, especially in wartime — Commissar Velimir Jakić took Volodja's place, and party leader of the battalion Jezdimir Lović took Tršo's place, with Boško Đuričković appointed as the new commissar.[295]

[295] B. Đuričković will note (in *op. cit.*, p. 240) that in the Headquarters, after a long and thorough investigation, they only learned the truth on February 2, 1943 — on the spot — that they had been ambushed and killed by the Chetniks from the village of Baraći, "on Mount Lisina, surrounded by Mount Manjača and Dimitor," and thrown into the Grujić pit. This was later discussed by the Military Court of the Mrkonjić area, and six criminals would pay for the crime. It was only when the Supreme Commander learned this at the end of 1944 that he fully understood the attack by "Drenović's chicken farmers" on him and his group of comrades, carried out the day after the liquidation of Trša, Volođa and Tomáš — at the approaches to Mlinisht (not far from the place of the crime).

Part Six

FIRST MISSION IN SLOVENIA

(November 17, 1942-July 5, 1943)

• Authority of the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters: 40 years hidden from the public
• Arso's insight, which he once proudly declared: "If I had the 1st Proletarian Brigade, I would have solved not only the White Guard issue but also all the small Italian garrisons, based on the speed of movement of that brigade"
• In the Dolomites bunker, he listened to reports on the progress of the "Weiss" operation and De Gaulle's decoration of Draža Mihailović
• Kardelj's letter of January 12, 1943, soaked in fear of "Serbian officers and Serbian hegemony"
• It is generally acknowledged that he was absent during the battles of Neretva and Sutjeska
• Italian Officer Salvatore Loi: In the entire Ljubljana province and throughout the war, 304 Italian soldiers were killed, 520 wounded and 69 went missing
• Regret on the Island of Flowers, three decades later

During the session of the CC of the CPY held on September 8, 1942, near Glamoč — according to the brief minutes — it was discussed that staffing assistance be provided to the leaderships of the National Liberation Army (NOV) in those provinces and areas where communication was irregular and unreliable. One of these areas was Slovenia. Although the minutes do not specify the name of the delegate to be sent to this "country of Yugoslavia," decades later, participants in the session, A. Ranković and M. Đilas, recalled that Arso's name was mentioned during the debate, "whose professional profile best matched the persistent requests of E. Kardelj in his letters to Tito — asking him to send a soldier, preferably the best one." Tito, at the time busy breaking new stages of the "Dinaric" operation, fighting for the liberation of Jajce, attacking Bihać, engaging in battles around Bosansko Grahovo, organizing the first military school and primarily restructuring the armed forces in the NOP and POJ as the operational armed forces of the NOP, did not mention anything about this "appointment" of Arso.

Meanwhile, on September 26, Lola Ribar and Ivan Krajčić arrived from Zagreb, bringing very bad news about the military situation in Slovenia, which further confirmed the correctness of the decision to send "some personnel" to Kardelj. This urgent need was also pointed out at the session of the CC of the CPY held on October 19 at Oštrelj. During the discussion about the "deployment of certain political and military leaders," and regarding the military-political situation in Slovenia (then at the end of the large offensive operation by the Italian and German forces), Tito once again mentioned Captain Jovanović's name "as the military leader who would best assist Kardelj

in sorting out the dramatic military situation." Lola — Đilas remembered — expressed some reservations, being quite familiar with both, especially Kardelj; he said that they were "too strong," that Arso would immediately "go at the problem with great force," and there would be tension between him and the "cautious, pragmatic, hypersensitive and somewhat vain Kardelj." Moša added that "from this tension, instead of small groups of fighters in bunkers, brigades and divisions could be born." Đilas suggested that, instead of Arso, Velimir Terzić or Pavle Ilić be sent to Kardelj, both "quite competent, but also more flexible." Tito only smiled and then, on the evening of November 8 (in his own way), assigned all three captains: Ilić was to coordinate the actions of the Krajina and Croatian partisan forces advancing towards Karlovac; Terzić was ordered to take over the position of Chief of Staff of the 4th Operational Zone (Dalmatia) and report to Oštrelj; Jovanović was informed that, "for a certain time," he would be sent to Slovenia, "to Comrade Bevc, to settle military issues." He ordered Savo Kovačević and Vlado Šegert to ensure that the tasks Jovanović had started be completed in the coming week and that, by the next day, arrangements be made for 11 military commanders to be sent to Slovenia, based on his selection or the criteria of the divisional commanders, as "staff assistance for Comrade Bevc." It was announced that, on November 14, Jovanović would hand over the position of Chief of the Supreme Headquarters to Captain Velimir Terzić.

The decision did not surprise him, partly because he had already "heard it firsthand" from R. Vukanović and M. Bakić; Tito had, two days earlier, "in confidence," told them that Arso had to be sent "temporarily" to Slovenia, "to sort out the situation in the military organization," or, as he put it, "to replace the resistance movement with the NOV and create a part of the NOVJ," and he felt, he said, "as if his own right hand were going with him," but the Supreme Command would "certainly pull him back before the spring offensive with significant forces towards Montenegro and the southern parts of Serbia."[296]

Kardelj's and Arso's acquaintance, and especially their cooperation, were brief: October meetings in 1941 in Užice; December meetings in the Supreme Command, from Drenova, through Rudo, to Rogatica; the subsequent march towards the Bosna River, during which Kardelj remembered Arso as physically weak and inexperienced with riding, occasionally tumbling off the back of a Bosnian mule (where Moša also proved to be a poor rider); the ten days of January in the second year of war, during which this member of the Supreme Command and Political Bureau insisted on the radical intensification of relations with the Chetniks and "all other class enemies, both current and potential." Kardelj, although lacking military knowledge and experience, regularly interfered with military assessments, especially in decision-making. Arso, however, stubbornly followed the unyielding logic of military reasoning, especially when discussing the conquest of Vareš and Zenica, and even Sarajevo itself — "due to the mobilization of the working class and improving the social image of the partisan army," which, in the analysis of the Chief of Staff, in the given situation, was unfeas-

[296] From a conversation with R. Vukanović, in April 1985, in Belgrade.

ible.

On January 12, Kardelj was sent from Čevljanovići to an illegal point in Sarajevo, from where, together with Ivan Maček, he would travel to Zagreb. Arso provided them with strong protection and, as he had for Lola ten days earlier, sincerely wished them good luck, fully understanding the uncertainty of their journey and mission.

In fact, Kardelj was sent to Zagreb to strengthen the "CC of the CPY for the unliberated regions," and on the same assignment, Lola Ribar was also dispatched. From his travels, both from Sarajevo and Zagreb, Kardelj communicated with Tito. He wrote, among other things, that the German troops assembling in Sarajevo were actually "on their way to war against Turkey," but in a few days, it would become clear how wrong his assessment was — because those Wehrmacht units had already started their offensive in eastern Bosnia on January 17.

From Zagreb — which Lola called the "graveyard of communist personnel" due to frequent fatal enemy infiltrations into the ranks of the Communist Party of Croatia's leadership — Kardelj, together with Ivan Maček, headed for Ljubljana. From this city, the headquarters of the Italian creation "Ljubljana Province," they would operate for the next three months. Tito was periodically updated through detailed letters. One of Kardelj's first personnel moves was the appointment of Ivan Maček as the commissar of the Main Staff of the partisan units in Slovenia, whose commander was Franc Leskošek, a member of the Political Bureau of the CC of the CPY. In mid-July, Kardelj emerged in the centre of the partisan territory of Kočevski Rog, again acting covertly — from a bunker. From the August "Roška Offensive," as he wrote to Lola and Tito, he "barely escaped with his life," before being transferred to the Dolomites, once again in underground shelters. That was how little was known in the Supreme Command about his "movements" in the military...

One of Kardelj's tendencies, evident in conversations at the Supreme Command and in correspondence, was his criticism of the party and partisan leadership in "the region," in line with the statement from his letter to Tito in Zagreb in August 1941 — that the party leadership in Slovenia was "politically very weak and struggling," citing that, for example, Franc Leskošek and Miha Marinko were initially very opposed to partisan actions, only supporting sabotage, etc. The slowness in implementing what was otherwise the correct line (as directed by the CC of the CPY — for armed struggle — *I.M.*) should partly be attributed to this resistance within the leadership itself. They did not believe in success. You know them; they tend to fall into extremes."[297]

From Zlatars to Jahorina, his criticisms of the partisan leadership of Slovenia could be heard, which had barely managed to bring 500 fighters into the first winter of the war, adding that such a number "can be found in the smallest municipality in the Sandžak and Montenegro." Even that small number hid in bunkers and forest camps, unprepared for resistance in the winter conditions, while groups of "People's Protection" were illegally present in villages and towns. He agreed with Tito's furious comment on a report from Slovenia in January 1942: "Goddamn it, is snow a hindrance to

[297] *Edition of Documents from the Central Bodies of the CPY, NOP and Revolution 1941-1945*, Vol. 1, p. 192.

fighting for Slovenians!?"

Operating from a bunker, Kardelj distributed and rotated the military and party leadership of Slovenia, tolerating the dilettantism and opportunism of certain individuals. Fearing any extremism and radicalism, especially sectarianism, and intensifying the resistance to such phenomena, particularly after receiving a letter from Lola Ribar (April 10, from Foča) condemning "deep leftist deviations and mass red terror" in Montenegro and Herzegovina, which led to "political catastrophe," he feared the consequences of a civil war that, according to Tito's assessment from 1972, "lasted throughout the years of war in Slovenia, but we didn't want to talk about it because it wouldn't help us."[298]

He feared the extremism of the "southerners" and "skipping to the next stage," to which, according to him, the "Montenegrins" were particularly prone, probably "forgetting" how he personally and his only superior — Tito — had "thrown out" the slogan about "moving to the next stage of revolutionary struggle," and thus transforming an armed uprising into a class (civil) war. It was, in fact, the main reference at the party conference in Ivančići, where he developed his slogan "Those who are not with us are against us,"[299] which sharpened class struggle and fuelled sectarianism, on whose waves communists and the SKOJ would liquidate thousands of "enemies of the people," especially among the "southerners," who, even as individuals, had to be preserved in Slovenia. The fact that he encountered "some government" in Slovenia, called the Liberation Front (OF), formed by a political coalition within the OF, under the presidency of Boris Kidrič, in which he was appointed as "minister for relations with the South Slavic peoples," or in other words, "foreign affairs," he saw as a "political operetta," but not a political act that testified that the OF advocated the concept of Slovenia outside of the state of South Slavs, considered a "Versailles creation." He wrote to Tito that there, the secretary of the Executive Committee of the OF, Boris Kidrič, had politically "pulled a fast one on him, and he did it very well."

For a long time, there were no news from Slovenia, and in the Supreme Command, prompted by their own dramatic experiences after Foča, they began to "fear the worst for the NOP and for Comrade Bevc." Suddenly, after this "silence," on the evening of June 16, in Zelengora, the news from *Slobodna Jugoslavija* was "caught" stating that "the situation in Slovenia is very favourable, as the nationwide uprising has spread across a significant part of Slovenia," mentioning that from Trieste to Kočevje, a large territory had been liberated and that "in the first week of fighting, 1,500 Italians had been killed." Whether the report about the large losses of the Italian occupation forces reflected the actual situation on the battlefield in Slovenia or not, the Supreme Commander concluded that such a report could only have come from Kardelj and that it had been delivered to Moscow via the Comintern point in Zagreb, making it trustworthy. As a result, Dedijer and Lola noted a sense of joy, as "Comrade Bevc is alive, and the successes of the Slovenian partisans are remarkable." Arso, however,

[298] Interview in *Vjesnik* from May 24, 1972.

[299] *Collection of the Party Consultation in Ivančići 1942*, p. 79.

heard the cheering accompanying the news while he was roasting "a strip of bacon" over the fire (which, being twice the width, he had received from the partisan fighter Vojo Dimitrijević, and shared it in equal parts with Sreten Žujović and his son Zoran). Overcome with excitement, he dropped the bacon into the coals and ash, as it was a significant success for the partisan army in Slovenia, at the very edge of the "central Balkan ridge," from where, only a week later, after regrouping in Zelengora, a group of Proletarian brigades would head.

Meanwhile, the leadership of the NOP in Slovenia, with Kardelj at the head, was doing everything in its power to prevent the insurgent units, like the "southerners," from turning into a political army; it closely monitored developments and impatiently awaited the outcomes of the covert offensive of the Vatican across the English Channel, hoping to pull official England to their side "to create a Catholic Central Europe," which, as Tito wrote to Moscow on July 16, 1942, from Prozor, would include Austria, Slovenia, Croatia and Hungary as autonomous states, all under the protection of Italy.[300] Kardelj, ever cautious, listened to what was being decided and done not only in London and Rome but also (especially) in Moscow and Bosnia, so he skilfully balanced and sought a solution for Slovenia. In a letter from July 16, he wrote to Tito that "the 1st Proletarian Slovenian Brigade is being formed in Slovenia," but when he heard on August 9 that the Comintern was angry at Tito for naming the brigades "Proletarian," the very next day he warned Lola to stop "such lapses that pour water on the enemy's mill, both domestically and abroad," emphasizing how "this issue had been sharply raised in Moscow" and it was "right at this time." Therefore, the 350 fighters of the "Tone Tomšič" brigade did not carry the name "Proletarian," and the commissars and commanders would, instead of the "sickle and hammer," carry the symbol of "OF," at Kardelj's suggestion and Tito's approval, due to the "specific conditions in Slovenia" and the need for peace within the coalition.

Some details about the situation (especially the military situation) in Slovenia were — carefully selected — known to Arso from Kardelj's letters and (via Moscow) telegrams to Tito, and most notably from conversations with Lola, who interpreted for him the essence of the dramatic report from Josip Kopinić, who had been caught in the "Great Offensive" while on duty in Kočevski Rog. This, as much as the tasks he had started and planned allowed him to, was something Arso reflected on, preparing to professionally and responsibly carry out the not-so-precise task given by the Supreme Commander — namely, to create a part of the NOVJ from the Slovenian partisans and "save Slovenia for Yugoslavia." Confronted with this task, he introduced his deputy, Captain Velimir Terzić, to his role, outlining the structure of the Supreme Command as a professional operational body, made up of seven sections, two sectors and one commission. The entire organization, in military terms, was under the leadership of the chief, directly bound to the Supreme Commander, especially the most important leading body, the Operational Section, with three sub-sections: for preparing and carrying out operations; for the organization, formation and mobilization of the army;

[300] AJ, Fund of the CC CPY-KI, file 1942/186 (translation from Russian).

and for education and training. Functionally, the Intelligence Section (except for its counterintelligence section, which was directly tied to Ranković) and the Medical Section were most immediately subordinated to him in military terms. However, the nature of his position required daily cooperation between the Operational Section and the Technical and Economic Sections (sections for armament and military equipment, for food supply and transportation, and for clothing and footwear), the Section for Military Authorities in the rear and the Military Court Section. The heads of these second group of "non-operational" sections — Vladimir Smirnov, Ivan Milutinović, Moša Pijade and Dr. Vladimir Velebit — were, because of their position in the party nomenclature or special relations with Tito, bound to the Supreme Commander, but Arso also coordinated their work and, in frequent reports on military matters, unified them. The composition and tasks of these bodies and the way they operated, with particular emphasis on the complexity of the duties of the head of the Supreme Command, Arso thoroughly explained to his "temporary replacement," Captain V. Terzić.

Meanwhile, a group of senior officers chosen to go to Slovenia arrived in Bosanski Petrovac. Namely, on November 9, after Arso's proposal was approved, the headquarters of the first three divisions of the NOVJ were instructed to send a precise number of "comrades who will go to Slovenia" from the 1st, 2nd, and 4th Proletarian and 5th Shock Brigades. The battalion commanders from the 5th and 2nd Brigades, Milovan Šaranović and Predrag "Dragan" Jevtić, were specifically named, while the rest had to be "loyal, fearless, disciplined, in a word, exemplary commanders," people "who have all the conditions to develop into brigade commanders."[301] It was approved that the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters and Šaranović would also take their escorts.

Thus, on November 13, in addition to the "named" Šaranović and Jevtić, the following arrived: from the 1st Proletarian — platoon commander Zdravko Jovanović, squad commander Radomir Raco Božović, Aleksandar Leka Marjanović and Pero Popivoda; from the 2nd Proletarian — deputy battalion commander Rajko Tanasković; from the 4th Proletarian — battalion commander Danilo Šorović and platoon commander Petar S. Brajović; from the 5th Shock — deputy battalion commander Milo Kilibarda and platoon commander Milivoj Mile Čubrić. Also accompanying them were: Arso's — Boško Dedeić Pop and Milovan's — Svetolik Mita Jovanović.

On the evening of November 14, the Supreme Commander received Kardelj's reports, written on September 20 and October 7, which had taken 40 days to arrive due to slow courier connections (via Zagreb). He read them in solitude and then, late in the evening, visibly upset, in front of the members of the Political Bureau, handed them to Arso for careful study as part of the preparations for his departure to Slovenia. He specifically pointed out one part from the detailed letter of September 20,[302] which concerned the problems of command. During the offensive (in which, he mentions, about 40,000 Italian soldiers participated in the Kočevski Rog area), he wrote, "there were also bad examples, indiscipline and constant fleeing before the enemy. The command staff, with whom we had already dealt before, turned out to be, in part, very bad, and in the vast majority, quite weak. This is our greatest hardship. Unfortunately, the fact is that our Main Staff also performed poorly, in fact, very poorly. There is not a single person capable of leading such large operations." He goes on to say that they were "still in a very difficult position" and adds, "If I didn't know how things were on your end, I would ask you for a little help in this regard. If you have improved, that is, if there are now, beside you, commanders who are more capable, it wouldn't be bad if you could send at least one of them to us, who could lead in the Main Staff. Right now, we only have Lojze (Franc Leskošek), who, in operational matters, according to our belief, has completely failed, and Angelo (Ivan Maček), who also performed poorly. Our intention now is to remove Lojze as commander and return him to organizational party work, and appoint Angelo in his place. However, I am almost completely convinced that this will not fix anything. As for myself, I believe that I could set the basic lines, and I have worked that way so far, but when it comes to practically implementing those lines, I cannot take on any special responsibilities, except for general oversight, because, first, I don't understand them, and second, I am not physically capable of chasing through the forests and ravines. Our solution, therefore, will be rather temporary. If you can help us — this help must truly be genuine — it would solve a lot."

The letter concludes: "We somehow pulled through, barely saving our heads. I've been ambushed by the Italians four times, and I still find it hard to believe that my head is still on my shoulders. It was definitely more dangerous than anything we experienced there" (referring to the German offensive on the liberated territory of western Serbia — *I.M.*). In such a dramatic situation, Josip Kopinić complained to Tito that he had shown himself "to be half a stranger to us, a panic-stricken coward, and all that you can imagine" — thus returning the favour for what he had told Lola and S. Krajčić about the retreat on Kočevski Rog (which, in any case, he also mentioned, noting how the leadership, in a critical situation, had split into two groups — he and Leskošek on one side, and Kidrič and Maček on the other, "falling into ambushes every 20 metres").

In the letter of October 7,[303] written a month before the end of the 112-day-long enemy offensive operation in Slovenia, Kardelj reported that they were forming four "numerically small" brigades (350-400 fighters), that the German army in Slovenia (Gorenjska and Štajerska) numbered 8,000-10,000 soldiers, but that they had managed to mobilize and arm about 30,000 Slovenians who were mixed among the Germans under the command of Gestapo officers and were indeed fighting against the partisans. He also mentioned that the CC had made some personnel changes: "Lojze proved inadequate as a commander, and in addition, he got into such a conflict with the Executive Committee of the OF that we could no longer justify him. We removed him as commander. Now, the commander is Angelo, Petar (Boris Kidrič) is the political commissar, and the deputy commander is an active Yugoslav general staff colonel (Jaka Avšič), who is a bit older (almost 50 years old — *I.M.*), but still strong and able to

[301] AVII, Fund of the NOR, file 4, reg. no. 51/3.

[302] AJ, Fund of the CC CPY, 1942/556.

[303] From a conversation with R. Vukanović, in April 1985, in Belgrade. *Collection of Documents on the NOR,* Vol. II, Book 6.

climb through the forests and hills." Regarding the military leadership, he emphasized, "we are generally very weak. The past battles have not yet given us any permanent commanding staff. Everything is still in training. That's why we couldn't assemble a better Main Staff." "We also removed" Hertman (Aleš Bebler) — "due to illness and some mistakes."

How he and his associates lived in the base in the Dolomites and operated by going to the units in the field was a "devilish way of life, but somehow it works. If we were alone, it would still go well. But we also have the burden of the entire Executive Committee of the OF, which consists of comfortable (but not always courageous) gentlemen whom we must secure. However, difficulties make us inventive. And so, we somehow push forward."

Thus, the most difficult part of the Italian "Great Offensive" in the area of the "Ljubljana Province," which began on July 16, particularly intensified in August and, with the engagement of German units in the regions of Gorenjska and Štajerska, ended on November 4, was finally completed — very unfavourably. Initially, the reinforced 11th Army Corps of the Italians participated, supported directly and indirectly by forces from the 23rd in the Slovenian Littoral and the 5th Corps from the territory of Croatia. In short, four complete divisions were engaged in the "pacification of the Ljubljana Province" (one each brought from Herzegovina and Italy). As the final part of the overall spring and summer offensive that had covered the largest area of the Yugoslav front, the operation in Slovenia came after the eastern parts of Bosnia, Montenegro, Herzegovina and Kozara, according to the plans of the occupiers and collaborators, and consisted of 12 consecutive stages. In the report on partisan losses, the chief commander of the offensive, General Mario Roboti, recorded 1,807 killed, 847 captured and executed and 1,677 unarmed surrendered. The numbers, despite the acknowledgment that the outcome was dramatic, were exaggerated, as according to the data from the Main Staff, there were 2,500 to 3,000 partisans in the "Ljubljana Province" before the offensive.

After reading the letter multiple times, Arso sought the data that could help in constructing a plan for the constructive action of the armed forces of the NOP on that part of the front. He noticed the mention that, after the devastating effect of the Italian offensive, contact had been established "with all parts of Slovenia," with the Main Staff of Croatia and with Zagreb. With considerable optimism, Kardelj outlined the military situation in Slovenia, which he believed was improving: the reorganization of the army was successfully completed and, in addition to a larger number of partisan units (including in the Koroska and Slovenian Littoral), four brigades were formed, the military leadership was reorganized, and "the conditions in the OF leadership are quite good." The data about processes "in the surroundings" also gave some optimism: the influence of the communists in northern Italy was growing, and in Austria, "anti-Hitler sentiment" was spreading.

In one of the longer passages, Kardelj commented on two very different perspectives — Arso's and his own — regarding the prospects for opening the long-promised "Second Front" in Europe. The Chief of the Supreme Headquarters presented his own

views — not hiding behind his position, and quoting Stalin and Churchill — in a short article in the journal *Nedeljni Pregled* No. 3 from August 2, which Kardelj read in the bunker and then "cut off" in his letter to Tito.

According to Đilas, Arso wrote his contribution "on the knee on Mount Cincar," without sufficient data, and especially without enough time for a more thorough analysis. In the rush due to preparations for the attack on Livno (August 4), he gave it to Tito for review. This witness would write that "the Supreme Commander might not have agreed with his Chief of Staff on this issue in everything, especially not sharing his optimism — that the front would be opened that autumn — but he approved the article for printing, thereby standing behind it." Dedijer recorded that, along with Arso and Đilas, he participated, at night, in the technical preparation of that issue of the journal. He would also send Kardelj the freshly printed issue, along with "other materials from the Supreme Command," which a group of Slovenian couriers took on August 3. Thus, on October 7, Kardelj wrote to Tito saying that he had "one remark regarding your publication." He wrote, "I read Arso's article on the possibilities of the Second Front (in *Pregled*). I think it would have been better if such articles weren't printed. First, because it is politically not entirely correct, and second, because it is completely one-sided in its military analysis. My opinion is that the question of the Second Front is more complicated than Arso presents it. I believe that the issue of the Second Front involves a struggle between Chamberlain's tendencies, which still want to use Hitler to destroy socialism, and true democratic and anti-fascist forces. Therefore, the question of the Second Front primarily has a political character. It is, above all, a matter of the political collapse of Chamberlain's remnants in England and America, which is why I wouldn't have the courage to predict so easily the opening of the Second Front — in September. Also, regarding the starting points of the invasion that Arso predicts; I believe it's not right to frame it this way, because there are no firm bases for it, and people still ask: What about the London government and Mihailović? As a private person, Arso can, of course, develop his own opinion if he wants, but as the Chief of Staff and within the Supreme Command, in my opinion, these are things that time quickly disproves." He understood that Arso viewed this issue "purely from a military perspective," but added that "today, such an issue cannot be viewed solely from that angle."

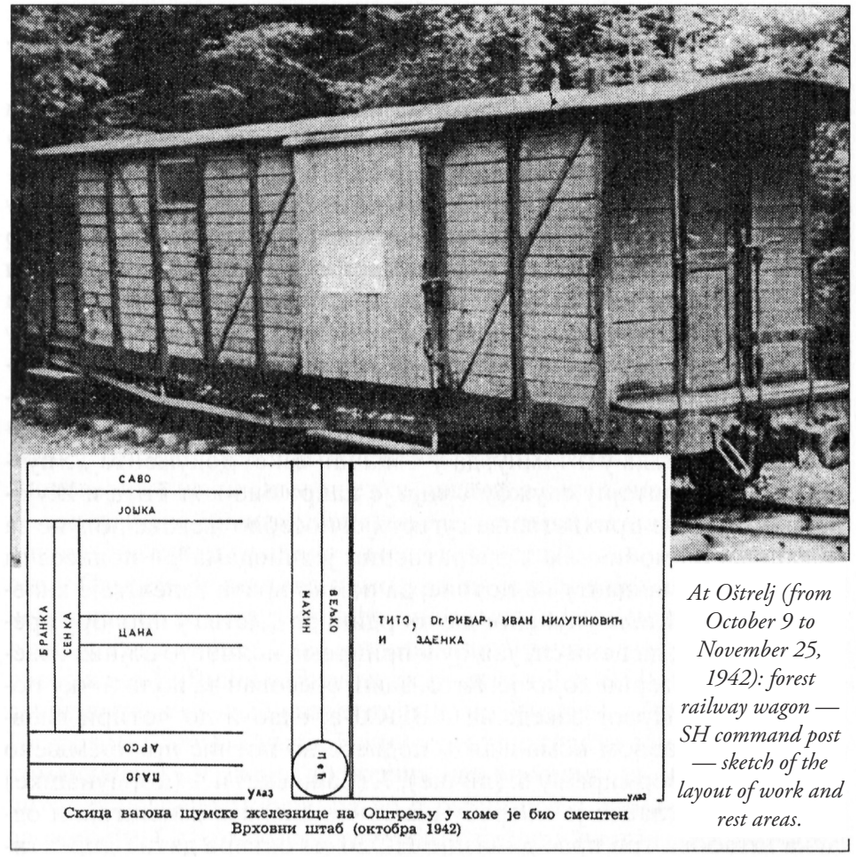
Since the *Nedeljni Pregled* with Arso's article has not been preserved, its content cannot be presented or commented on, meaning the authors of the quoted letter and the article are not on equal footing. As for Arso, Terzić recalls that "he was thoughtful about this criticism, fully aware of some shortcomings in his arguments, and certainly quite upset that he had yielded to the pressure of the agitprop people to write the article quickly and without valid sources for the purposes of propaganda. However, as an intellectual and tolerant person, he did not attach much importance to the criticism; he believed that 'members of the Supreme Command, as individuals, have the right to their opinions, which are subject to public evaluation.'" In any case, most members of the Supreme Command, during the wartime journey from Kamenja Gora to Cincar, spoke and wrote as if they believed that "the Second Front" was about to open, that fas-

cism and nazism would be finally defeated in 1942. Even Tito, on Zelengora, encouraged by Stalin's "daily order for May 1," which predicted that 1942 would be "the year of the collapse of German fascist troops," and the formulation in the Soviet-British agreement from May 26 stating that "full agreement had been reached on the urgent need to open a Second Front in Europe in 1942" — repeated this in the conclusions of the discussions between F.D. Roosevelt and V.M. Molotov on June 11. Tito spoke of opening "the Second Front" as though it was a foregone conclusion, and on August 26, in a radio telegram to the Comintern from Glamoč, he predicted that such an event would occur in the very near future, on the Balkans, adding that timely and substantial material assistance from the Red Army to the Yugoslav partisan movement would enable the creation of "an army of at least 500,000 fighters," after which "our partisan units could operate in Austria, Italy, etc."[304]

Moreover, in the same letter, Kardelj criticizes Arso and writes to Tito expressing his hope "that we will soon have the opportunity to meet, if not before, then at least sometime in the summer, when, I hope, fascism will experience its true collapse. Maybe even before that." Just five days later, in a letter sent to the same address, full of fear of "falling from the saddle," he adds his estimate that an intervention of English troops in the Balkans will likely occur soon, and their presence in Yugoslavia "will give our reactionaries the chance to unite their military formations, uniting all reactionary forces, from Nedić and Pavelić to the HSS, SDS, etc." He had also received a letter from Lola Ribar on July 7, in which he read that "Comrade Stari also thinks that it won't be long before the opening of the Second Front." None of those who had been mistaken — Stalin, Tito or Lola — were criticized by "Comrade Bevc"; only Arso was not given that right, and the General Secretary would remind him of it.

Focused solely on the interests of "the region," safeguarding every Slovene life in the joint struggle against fascism, leading the resistance movement instead of the NOP, gathering every fellow countryman he could find on the Yugoslav front, constantly asking for help from others and offering nothing in return — Kardelj writes in that letter to Tito how it would be "extraordinarily nice if we could have one of your brigades with us," adding: "Indeed, we would need them now, especially against the Germans. (By the way, while I'm on this, wouldn't it be good to send us, in a short time, one or two Croatian elite brigades with heavy weapons, which we don't have, so that our brigades could, together with them, strike across the German border and raise the masses for mobilization there? In such a surprise advance, where the Germans least expect it, we could capture large quantities of weapons. We've proposed this to the Croats. We don't know what they will decide, but if you agree, it would be good if you could tell them.)" Called (by "order" from Rade Ristanović), Arso put a bottle of liquor, along with his obligatory notebook, into his officer's bag and, together with Terzić, went to Tito's "office." There were about ten of them gathered. On the table — A. Ranković recalls — was a litre of Italian brandy, which, as a gift from the staffs of the 5th Montenegrin and 10th Herzegovinian brigades, had been brought by Sava Kovačević

[304] AJ, Fund of the CC CPY-KI, file 1942/186 (translation from Russian).



At Oštrelj (from October 9 to November 25, 1942): forest railway wagon — SH command post — sketch of the layout of work and rest areas.

and Vlado Šegrt. He explained that he was saving the liquor for St. Archangel's Day (November 21), the patron saint's feast of his father Radić — so they could drink to the souls of the dead and wish for victory. But the farewell was near; on that day, they would be hundreds of kilometres apart. There was also some prosciutto in Terzić's saddlebags, a gift for a safe journey from the Dalmatinians. Glass by glass, with the intoxicating prosciutto, their tongues loosened, even for those who were usually reserved in conversation; a joke here and there, a cheerful story about the beautiful Slovenian women Arso would meet, a lament for their homeland and years of peace. A detail of this story is Tito's deep sigh about Arso having to be sent to Slovenia: "It will be hard without you in the Supreme Command, but there, in this situation, you are needed more. We have to create an army there that, with its operational units and partisan detachments, will be an inseparable part of the joint NOP, and, at the same time, save Slovenia for Yugoslavia; if they wanted, the Slovenians themselves wouldn't know how,

and certainly, without our help, they couldn't do it, so go and help Comrade Bevc."[305] Tito expressed a clear fear of the danger that everyone here saw and feared in the first part of his sentence, while in the second part, he pointed out the goal of the upcoming mission of the Chief of Staff.

Midnight was creeping up on Oštrelj when the leadership dispersed, but for the two captains, it was still not time to rest; they retreated to the "office" of the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters (the cramped part of the partitioned wagon), where they would talk for a long time. According to Terzić's memory, "almost in whispers, so as not to disturb the neighbours who were sleeping around us behind the thin partitions: Pavle and Branka Savić, Senka Arso, and Cana Babović, as well as Tito, Dr. Ribar, Milutin and Zdenka in the other part of the wagon. Sleep was scarce, in shifts, almost with one eye open, in the bunk beds." They talked until dawn about the situation on the front and the upcoming tasks. The Chief explained, while his deputy wrote down the duties: to publish the article "Creating the NOVJ," signed by Tito, in the press; to incorporate all acceptable suggestions into the final version of the document "Instructions for the Intelligence Service," whose draft was with Tito and Žujović, and submit it to the Supreme Commander for signature; to carefully follow the reports of Captain Veljko Ilić, who was tasked with coordinating actions in the advance towards Karlovac; to evaluate the situation and prepare drafts of military reports for the Comintern, which Tito, interested in political support ahead of the 1st Session of the AVNOJ, was sending as often as four times a day;[306] to submit for signature the prepared order for the formation of the 6th (Lika), 7th (Banija) and 8th (Kordun) divisions to the Supreme Commander. He emphasized the need for a careful analysis of the reports and decisions from the headquarters of the first three divisions of the NOVJ according to the given directives — 1st Proletarian and 3rd Shock to advance towards central Bosnia, and the 2nd Proletarian to "block Bosansko Grahovo, acting in the area of Knin and Drvar, with the intention of advancing deeper into Dalmatia and southeastern Bosnia, reinforced by the 9th Lika Brigade and in coordination with units from the 4th Operational Zone." He repeated that the advance towards Karlovac should be closely monitored and decisively encouraged, where — according to V. Terzić — "he expected the merging of the divisions under the command of the Supreme Command and Slovenian operational units to be formed."

Finally, they read Terzić's letter to the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, written when he had not yet been informed about the decision to appoint him to the new position. Quite angry at "those above," among other things, he stated that in Dalmatia, "brigades pop up like they are pulled out of a sleeve," but the Supreme Command, as well as the Zone Staff where he was chief, "reduces them to a military territorial body." He wrote that in Dalmatia, "soon we will proceed to divisions, armies and army groups, and then we'll see who will withstand that competition with us!" He concluded with a demand for the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters to immediately order that the "Zone Staff, as the operational command for Dalmatia, intended to lead and manage the operations here — shake off this stagnation and trivial writing in the role of military district command."[307] Arso, smiling, left this part of the task to his deputy, emphasizing that "from the Supreme Command, with more surveillance, that issue would look different."

[305] In war and peace, Tito knew that, in close circles, he would say that the Slovenes could not have liberated themselves without strong support from the "southerners"; see: M. Đilas, *Revolutionary War*, p. 340.

[306] AVII, Fund of the NOR, file 3-A, reg. no. 40/1.

At the very end of the preparations for the trip to Slovenia, Arso, upon the recommendation of A. Ranković, was visited by Milentije Popović, who had just been appointed as the commissioner of the Officer's School. They discussed what awaited him in Otočec, in an institution directly linked to the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters. The meeting was also welcomed by the host, as the opening of the Higher Course (for training battalion and brigade commanders) was scheduled for November 16, which, according to the firm agreement with Colonel Orović, he was supposed to attend. However, due to his departure to Slovenia, this became impossible, so he carefully addressed some issues to the commissioner, who, unlike the commander, would be "in contact" with Ranković. He explained to this experienced political worker how the Higher and Lower Courses would be conducted in Donji Lapac with around one hundred students, and the youth courses (lasting 30 days) in Bihać, Ličko Petrovo Selo and Suvaja. The Higher Course would gather 45 students, from battalion commanders to fighters, all selected warriors but with different educational backgrounds, so the work with them would be all the more complex. He also sent three instructors, officers from the royal army and deserving fighters of the NOP: Major Vojislav Đokić, Captain Mile Pavičić and Lieutenant Mile Đukić, asking him to be particularly careful in working with them. The first two were intelligent officers, but somewhat stubborn, while the third had quite poor health, making him overly sensitive. Among the already gathered 15 instructors (from lieutenants to majors), there would be "people of various temperaments," so Colonel Orović should be, as much as possible, spared from their "outbursts." Regarding Colonel Orović, with whom Popović was meeting for the first time on the same task, he said that he was a highly skilled and responsible, hard-working and disciplined senior officer, with high ethical and patriotic values, epically inspired and personally a very brave man. However, as a colonel and a member of the Supreme Command, he was hypersensitive to the relationship of junior officers and the younger generation towards him, and also to his wife Jošk a, a Czech by nationality. So, whenever he was right, he should be publicly supported, but any potential weaknesses should be criticized privately and with carefully chosen words. He had, for the commissioner — along with his wishes for "success in the very important task" and apologies for not being able to attend the beginning of the courses due to "emerging tasks" — sent (found in Bihać) the rule regarding the combat use of battalions.[308]

The equipment for "Arso's group" was handled by several bodies of the Supreme Command, where even the "eternal quartermaster" Moša Pijade found himself — he

[307] AVII, Fund of the NOR, file 3-A, reg. no. 40/1.

[308] The book (with Arso's dedication) was proudly shown to me by the old general in June 1973.

ordered that tailoring workshops make uniforms for everyone, tailored to measure, using the woolen fabric he had kept at hand. They also received standardized caps and scarves. On November 15, the Supreme Commander, already quite fatigued from Kardelj's persistent requests to send him a "cadre," and to lend the Slovenian partisans "at least three or four mortars, even a small cannon, etc.," received them. After the conversation, he wished them a safe journey and a successful military mission, treating them to cigarettes.[309]

Although preoccupied with preparing for the historic political gathering in Bihać (November 26-27) and consultations with Moscow, the Supreme Commander, in the last two days, set aside some time for talks (almost exclusively "one-on-one") with the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters about his mission in Slovenia. At parting, he handed him a letter addressed to the "CC of the Communist Party of Slovenia — Comrade Bevc," dated November 16. He was not given the opportunity to read the letter at Oštrelj, nor would he in the Dolomites, nor ever in his lifetime. It would remain unavailable to the public until after the deaths of Kardelj (1979) and Tito (1980).[310]

In the introductory part of the letter, Tito reproaches Bevc for not contacting the Supreme Command more frequently and for not taking a firmer stance regarding it. He mentions that the messages sent via Moscow were "of less importance, while you didn't inform us about the major issues of your struggle," including the confusion during the course of the "Great Offensive," adding that based on the information received through Zagreb, he believes, "as you yourself admit in your letter, the main fault for your significant, especially material, losses lies in the incompetence of your military leadership." He criticizes Bevc for "keeping Comrade Franc (Leskošek) in the position of commander of the Slovenian partisan forces, someone who truly has no sense for military matters, let alone military knowledge. I believe you bear quite a large responsibility here because you saw this clearly, yet you didn't take action to replace him with someone who understands military work," adding that he was surprised "that the enemy offensive didn't end more catastrophically for you." He continues, saying that he "cannot agree in any case with such a solution as you have adopted, i.e., that now, instead of France, you have appointed Comrade Maček as commander," who is "a very good political worker, but he has no qualifications for a commander, since he was neither a soldier nor has he served in any unit as a commander during this struggle, let alone as a commanding officer. Maček should have been kept as a political commissar, and a military expert should have been appointed as commander or deputy commander until a better solution could be found." Tito insists that Bevc take his remarks "very seriously," demanding what is essential to this issue: "With the arrival of the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, Arso Jovanović, to you, you must immediately proceed with changes to your command structure. This change must also be applied to the other members of the Liberation Front because it is necessary as a pre-

[309] For more details on the farewell of "Arso's group": Petar S. Brajović, *Final Liberation*, Zagreb 1983, pp. 155-157.

[310] The letter was first published in 1982, in Volume 13 of Tito's *Collected Works* (pp. 15-18); until then, it had been registered under no. 15064/1942, stored in the Historical Archive of the CC LCY.

requisite to create a truly national army in Slovenia that will be able to plan and carry out all the tasks set before it. The Supreme Command considers it necessary, and this is mainly my view, that the command and reorganization of your units be temporarily taken over by the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, Arso Jovanović, and his deputy should be Šaranović (Milovan), who could later take over the command when Arso Jovanović returns to our Supreme Command if needed. Along with Arso Jovanović, we are sending 12 more comrades, whom we have carefully selected from our brigades, where they have proven to be extraordinary commanders and leaders. These comrades have gained valuable experience over the past 18 months, as you know that we do not conduct random skirmishes, but well-planned large operations. You should assign these comrades in cooperation with the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, and in their characteristics, you will see which roles each is capable of fulfilling.

"Let it not confuse you that comrades from outside will be commanding your units, as it will benefit you and the Slovenian people. From our Proletarian brigades, we have already provided over a hundred commanders and political workers for Bosnian, Dalmatian and Croatian brigades...

"I do not agree with the idea that you are creating such small brigades; you should create two brigades from the three or four that you currently have, each with at least 800 to 1,000 fighters. Three hundred, 400 or even 500 people is not a brigade, but a battalion. Therefore, it makes no sense to rush into having as many brigades as possible, if none of them are capable of performing larger independent operations. Moreover, you are already short on command personnel, which would also affect the quality and success of such operations. Solve this issue together with the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters. I will not go into all the details of these military-organizational matters, nor the issues of potential military operations or plans, as you will be the ones to resolve this best on the ground with the Chief of this Staff."

After warning about the need to intensify propaganda against the "refugee government in London" and Draža Mihailović, Tito informs about the idea of forming the "National Liberation Council of Yugoslavia" (referring to AVNOJ), where Slovenia would appoint six delegates from the ranks of "prominent political workers." This body, made up of over 50 members (45 will attend — *I.M.*) "from all parts of the country, will fight a little with the London refugees, not only the Supreme Command," and Tito continues: "Be merciless with the White Guard. If things continue to develop well here, we will send one of our divisions closer to you so that you can eliminate this band around Krško and other areas."[311] He notes that the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters will tell them about the great successes of the NOP operational group in the central part of the front. Tito concludes the letter with a paragraph of eight lines in which he responds to Kardelj's criticism of the content of Arso's article on the possibility of opening the Second Front:

"As for Arso's article in *Nedeljni Pregled*, you are not completely right. Recent events completely disprove it. As for the deadline for opening the Second Front, it was

[311] The plan to advance towards Karlovac and, further, to Krško, will not be achieved due to the German offensive operation "Weiss" (launched on January 20, 1943).

not only Arso who was mistaken but also others, much higher than him. Stalin's clear and sharp statement during his speech on November 6 (1942) clearly shows that this front must be opened much sooner than the English actually intended to open it." Moreover, Tito answers Kardelj during the time of the brilliant victory at El Alamein (November 4) and the landings of Anglo-American troops in Morocco and Algeria (November 8), which were a sign of prospects for the European front as well. The "Russian steamroller" was gathering momentum to crush von Paulus at Stalingrad (February 2, 1943), so why shouldn't Arso warm his hands on this spark of optimism?

The editorial board of the *Collection of Documents of the NOP* (Vol. II, Book 7) did not publish Tito's letter, providing the explanation in a footnote: "because the instructions and decisions contained in it, based on inaccurate information about the situation in Slovenia, were not implemented. Only when he received comprehensive reports from Kardelj and others did Tito get a complete picture of the actual situation in Slovenia, and he then agreed with the work of the Supreme Command and the CC of the Communist Party of Slovenia." This formulation (from the footnote) was repeatedly adopted by historians and publicists over the decades, who cited it verbatim in front of the public, without mentioning the other side — evaluations and authorizations from the aforementioned Tito's letter, as well as Arso's reports, some of which remain unpublished to this day. Thus, in one of the 23 notes (29-51), along with this (first published) Tito's letter — authorization, the editor of Volume 13 of Tito's *Collected Works* wrote (and the Supreme Commander authorized it); "Since many of the information Tito received from various sources regarding the course and outcome of the Italian-German four-month offensive and the situation in Slovenia were based on many inaccurate reports, some of the instructions and decisions from this Tito's letter were not implemented. When Tito, having received detailed military and political reports from the Supreme Command of the NOP and PO of Slovenia, as well as two reports from E. Kardelj (dated December 14, 1942 and January 12, 1943), got a full picture of the actual situation in Slovenia, he agreed with the work of the Supreme Command, that is, the CC of the Communist Party of Slovenia." Following that note is an even more pronounced unilateral statement: "The decision of the Supreme Command of the NOP and POJ to have Arso Jovanović temporarily take command of the Supreme Command of the NOP and PO of Slovenia, and for Milovan Šaranović to be his deputy, was not implemented because, as E. Kardelj reported to Tito on January 12, 1943, Arso Jovanović, having exceeded the powers granted to him by the Supreme Command, with his arrogant demeanour ('acting like some kind of Yugoslav inspector') and his misunderstanding of and inability to comprehend the political line of the Communist Party of Slovenia regarding the creation of a broad front of progressive and patriotic forces ('a stance of absolute underestimation of all previous achievements'), and the fact that 'he started interfering in political matters,' attacking the OF, introducing symbols of the hammer and sickle, 'misbehaving towards our allies in the Communist Party' and 'transferring the Bosnian situation and imposing his sectarianism on our sectarians' — came into conflict with the Slovenian leadership. Since such behaviour was considered 'a violation of national rights, a breach of the people's right

to self-determination and a repetition of Yugoslav practices,' and since his conduct made 'Arso's position politically untenable,' Kardelj, in his capacity as a member of the Political Bureau of the CC of the CPY and the Supreme Command, 'ordered that he focus solely on military matters and not interfere with our political situation.'"[312]

However, Tito — never by any act or even by a single spoken word — ever contradicted the evaluations made in his letter of November 16, 1942; he never, at least publicly, said that Arso was wrong in Slovenia, let alone that he "removed" or "recalled" him, which is an outright falsehood. This is because Tito and Kardelj, mostly due to the "Weiss" and "Schwarz" operations, had no contact for at least six months, and the Supreme Commander could not have seen the quoted evaluations of the Chief of Staff's work and behaviour in Slovenia before July 5, 1943. Even then, Lola did not present them to him when he arrived at the Supreme Command with Arso; rather, they were left to be stored in the archives of the Headquarters of the Croatian Main Staff. Moreover, Tito never wrote or (as far as we know) said that Kardelj was right. Only before his death did he authorize a prepared formulation regarding how the decision of the Supreme Command for Arso Jovanović to "temporarily take command in the Supreme Command of the NOP and PO of Slovenia was not implemented" because he "exceeded the powers granted to him by the Supreme Command." If these were powers given by the Supreme Command, then they must have been revoked in a meeting, and the holder of those powers, due to mistakes, exceeding authority, etc., should have been criticized or punished — all the way up to dismissal. But none of this happened; Tito personally gave the Chief of Staff full powers, instructions and authority for his work, personally wrote to Kardelj, and Kardelj also bypassed the institution and wrote directly to Tito. Thus, Arso — completely unaware of the contents of the letters from both — became the only victim of such conspiratorial decision-making and sectarian evaluation. That is the story about Tito's letter and the circumstances surrounding it.

On November 17, Arso's group left Oštrelj; they got into an old truck, but the engine soon broke down, so they continued on foot. In Bihać, during a break, they watched Gogol's *The Government Inspector* performed by the National Liberation Theatre. They reached the Žumberak Mountains on November 26, where they had an unexpected encounter with the 13th Croatian Brigade. Due to a misunderstanding, a serious accident could have occurred: the partisans were in woolen uniforms that, by their colour and design, resembled the notorious "Black Legion" uniforms, and only by sheer luck was gunfire avoided. At the II Operational Zone Headquarters in Pilatovići, they apologized to the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters for the misunderstanding, and he told them that, on the contrary, it was actually a good thing, as it showed vigilance, which Brigade Commander Rade Bulat understood as a compliment. Based on their joint attack on Suhor, which the group participated in, there was a discussion about the possibility of broader combat cooperation between the Croatian and Slovenian units. The Chief of Staff insisted on "establishing a permanent operational bridge" for cooperation and for transferring units from one territory to another. On

[312] J. Broz, *Collected Works*, Vol. 13, note 40, p. 164.

November 30, he sent a letter to the "Main Croatian Staff," outlining, point by point, his observations from the approach to Slovenia and indicating possibilities for operational cooperation between Croatian and Slovenian brigades in the Žumberak area. In this regard, he suggested: clearing the southern shore of the Kupa River to "establish a strong link" between Croatia and Slovenia; sending stronger forces to Ključ, at least one battalion, as the local population is for us; and for the 13th Brigade, to create "a stronghold in Žumberak," to "send another brigade with two or three heavy weapons," as this would provide support to Slovenia, "where Draža is trying to create a foothold close by Gorjanci, which would complicate your position as well." He appreciated that the 13th Brigade was "very combat-ready, with high morale," and since it "originated from a Proletarian battalion," he suggested that it be declared a Proletarian brigade (which was agreed upon and realized on December 11). Their successes "near Suhor, Metlika and on the railway were well heard" and helped lift Slovenian units out of stagnation. These, he wrote, were "great successes." He emphasized that he had "agreed on joint cooperation between the 13th Brigade and the 'Cankar' Brigade" with the Zone Headquarters, suggesting that they also "work on this permanent cooperation." He took on the responsibility: "I will establish a strong connection with you via Sinji Vrh, and you see that you help us with weapons." He stressed that he would "write more extensively about all of this to the Supreme Command." And he did, at the latest, on December 12.[313]

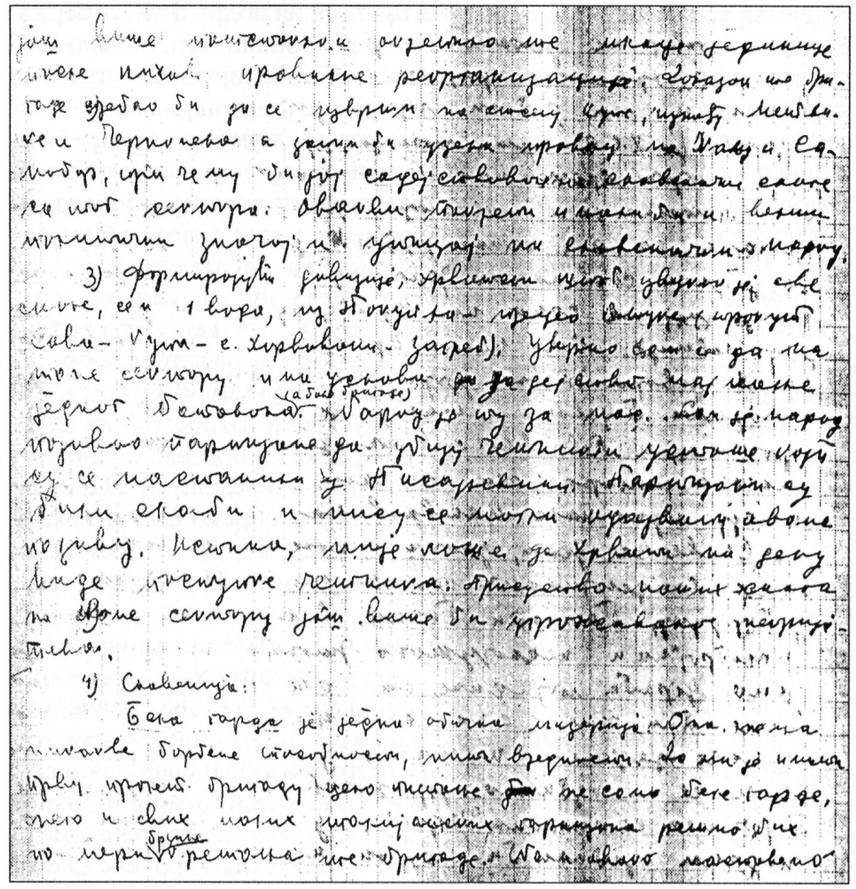
I say "at the latest" because the "cover" of the document states that it is "probably from December 1942," but someone has, with a graphite pencil, added 1944, which, along with a large question mark (also in graphite), is written at the top of the card that should represent the document's business card, where the "professional editor" wrote: "The Supreme Command (Operational) Comrade Arso submits a report on the situation encountered during his inspection of the territory across Žumberak, south of the Kupa River, Kordun and so on." From such a "legitimization" of this document, written by the hand of the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters of the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia (NOJ), no one alive can understand what it is about and from which time it originates. But it is certainly one of the key documents for this topic.[314] In this report to the Supreme Commander, the crucial part is what he wrote (after noting the situation in Croatia) about the military-political situation in Slovenia, and since this part is being published for the first time, we quote it in full:

"4. Slovenia.

"The White Guard is an ordinary misery. It has no combat capability or value. If I had the 1st Proletarian Brigade, I would solve the issue of not only the White Guard but also all the small Italian garrisons according to the speed of that brigade's movement. But even so, we will strive to resolve this issue quickly. I hope we will destroy the White Guard and force them back into the occupier's garrisons. It has emerged

[313] He usually wrote with green ink and Cyrillic, on six lined A4 sheets, oddly without noting the date.

[314] Stored in the Archives of the CC CPY under no. 15147, but never cited or published, it was then handed over to AVII in a "military package," where it received the designation file 3, fund 4, reg. no. 38.



Letter from Slovenia published for the first time.

due to the poor work of our comrades and units. While they were camping in the mountains, far from the people, the occupier forcibly mobilized and pushed them, through Draža Mihailović's agents and Catholic clerics, into the White Guard. You will see the situation, numbers and political turmoil in that White Guard from the interrogation of Captain Vasiljević, which I am sending you (Captain Dobrivoje was captured, interrogated and executed, and the interrogation was not preserved — *I.M.*). This interrogation almost exactly outlines the entire work of the White Guard. It is most numerous around the Gorjanci area, where it has almost completely taken over. Draža intended to create a stronghold there, get English help and then act according to the circumstances. He did not choose Gorjanci by chance; he wanted to separate the Slovenes from the strong partisan movement in Croatia and, probably, strike at Zagreb at the opportune moment. However, the White Guard is politically strongest around Ljubljana. It is an instrument of Catholic reaction. It is more dangerous around

Ljubljana than near Novo Mesto. We will keep that in mind. Otherwise, the White Guard has no vitality or offensive intentions. After the offensive, the Italians drove it into strongly fortified buildings in various villages, where it vegetates and secures the Italian communications. The only difficult part is that these buildings are heavily fortified, and the Slovenes have no mortars or cannons. Acquiring at least one 65 mm mountain gun (for which the Supreme Command has plenty of ammunition) would be of great importance. Blockading these buildings is difficult because the Italians respond quickly from the garrisons. But with the reorganization of our army and command, we will manage to improve the situation. Almost the entire population is with us and the partisans are welcomed with great enthusiasm. At first glance, I can say that the Slovenian partisans have not earned such love from the people. With the heroic attack of the Croatian partisans on the occupier's stronghold of Suhor, the Slovenian people were thrilled beyond belief. The people themselves complained that their partisans carried out the action and then ran away for nine days. We will prevent this from happening in the future.

"*Partisan units:* the lower command cadre is quite brave, but has no tactical orientation. This is the fault of the main Slovenian leadership. The enemy has been reinforcing its combat formations, while the Slovenian brigades consist of around 250 to 300 fighters. They did not take any action to mobilize the masses, but instead, allowed the occupier to mobilize them. There were also units, but these were entirely territorial units, similar to those in Montenegro and Herzegovina, without any combat value, as they did not perform any combat tasks. Everything was going along the lines of conspiratorial fighters, a completely opportunist approach. I note that the combat material is excellent, but without any combat experience. At the beginning of the uprising, the Slovenes easily took over villages without a fight. In the enemy's offensive and after it, the Slovenian partisans did not fight. Hence the great influence of the White Guard and other difficulties. I noticed: why don't your partisans sing, because it is known that Slovenes sing. The explanation: we sang while we had free territory, but later we didn't dare — to avoid being detected by the enemy. Ridiculous! Or: they issued an order for the National Liberation Committees to be clandestine. In my opinion, this is also opportunism, because we are waging an open fight for life and death. Even now, we must strive to have our own government emerge from the struggle and to harden the people. Otherwise, from what I noticed among the fighters, there is conscious discipline, but less of the combat discipline and soldierly demeanour. However, this can be quickly achieved.

"I still do not have a clear idea of the Liberation Front. I see that there is some non-military mixture. There are also political mistakes, in my opinion. For example: the deputy political commissar of the General Staff has behind him, again as some deputies or controllers, a Christian socialist and a falcon. They are political representatives of their parties. Why now should a representative and organizer of our party have any control over the civilian parties? I can understand that they were accepted, say, as members of the General Staff, but not as political representatives within our party and alongside our party. If they have a political agreement, then it should be outside the

partisan army, outside the General Staff, and could be represented in some larger body. I will discuss this with Bvec. Besides that, I noticed that the deputy political commissar in the brigade does not have the role he has in our units. This role is taken by the secretary of Agitprop! That is why I noticed, at first glance, a different influence of the Party compared to our units. It seems to me that this is a concession to the civilian parties. Of course, I will only share this with Bvec. I regret that a comrade who would have examined all of this did not accompany me, because I fear that these people from the Liberation Front will not go far. It seems to me that the Christian socialists have their own organization in our partisan army. At a certain moment, this could be dangerous. I found here: the deputy commander (J. Avšič) and political commissar (B. Kidrič) of the main Slovenian staff together with these two civilian political representatives. I noticed their very good relationship, agreement and understanding. It seems to me that I will not allow such a combination in the General Staff. I will form the staff according to our principles and experiences. And of course, I will discuss everything with Bvec beforehand and come to an agreement. It is interesting that Bvec did not hold any position in the General Staff. He left all of that to others and buried himself in the Ljubljana 'bunker,' as these comrades call their shelter in Ljubljana. For now, I cannot tell you about political work in the army. I will suggest that it be done as in our units. I noticed that there are no such songs about the Red Army, Stalin or our Supreme Commander, as we have in our units. Indeed, they did not dare to sing recently! (And in winter, they could not fight due to heavy snow — *I.M.*). I told you, as for party matters, I will just give Bvec a suggestion. Maybe it was a bit strange for me when I did not notice that certainty, decisiveness in the political workers here, as we have in our units. He somehow tactically dealt with all the civilians, and the Christian socialist even wrote a leaflet after our success at Suhor. I asked for the ratio of forces. The political commissar (B. Kidrič) told me: 70 communists, 25 Christian socialists and 5 falcons. I will see if our political workers are hesitant when it comes to interacting with the army because of the Liberation Front. Otherwise, our literature is well represented in the army. I will send it to you for review. The Christians also published a book about the White Guard.

"*The measures I took:* The 'Ivan Cankar' brigade, which was operating or, better to say, hiding in the Gorjanci or Kočevski Rog areas, had 260 fighters. Immediately, I withdrew the territorial forces and increased this brigade to 500-600 fighters, formed into three battalions. Due to the importance of the sector, I left, by mutual agreement and my personal conviction, Comrade Šaranović as the chief of staff and two more battalion commanders. I gave the brigade a directive for the destruction of the White Guard and actions on the railway line and smaller Italian posts. In this work, this brigade will be supported by the 13th Croatian brigade, which, with its presence and successes, revived this sector. I ordered the voluntary mobilization of all forces. This should first be politically prepared. It is interesting that the Slovenian units did not resort to such manifestations. If a large number of people were gathered, and we could not arm them, we would send them to you. How I wish that Bvec had 'sent us a brigade' when they had tens of thousands of partisans. I could not conclude how many

partisans the Slovenes currently have (about 2,500?), but that number will certainly increase quickly.

"I have established a command with several points in the Gorjanci-Belokrajina area, leaving about 200 partisans for various sabotage actions. Since this territory is not liberated, this area has, in addition to the prescribed tasks, also actions related to the brigade located in this sector. I organized the establishment of communication via the Kupa River, in the area of Sinji Vrh, with Croatia and with you. In this way, we will be able to quickly receive all the things you intend to send us; at least one 65 mm mountain gun with several shells, etc.

"Finally, forgive me for writing so untidily. I am in a hurry to leave. Now I am going via Krka, east of Novo Mesto, then through Kuma and south of Litija towards Ljubljana. On this route, I will find two more brigades. For these brigades, I will also order organizational measures. These measures are fundamental, and they must be understood by the remaining comrades from Slovenia. After that, I will visit all other units and areas in Slovenia. There is no free territory anywhere, but partisan influence is strongly felt.

"*Report on the action:* The 13th Croatian brigade and the Slovenian 'Ivan Cankar' brigade captured the Italian and White Guard stronghold of Suhor near Metlika. The attack was carried out by the 13th Croatian brigade, while the 'Cankar' brigade provided security. Result: the entire enemy garrison of 176 soldiers was destroyed. There were 40 Italians and 136 White Guard members. Captured: 6 machine guns, 99 rifles, and a large quantity of food supplies and various equipment. Six heavy machine guns were stored in the barracks. The captured White Guards, who were forcibly mobilized by the Italians, were accepted into the brigade — number 51. We killed Captain Dobrišo Vasilić, the battalion commander, whose interrogation I am attaching.

"After this, the Italians from Metlika launched an assault towards the village of Radković. Our forces ambushed them and killed over 50 enemy soldiers, captured 9, and seized 2 heavy machine guns and 2 submachine guns. The enemy, completely defeated, retreated in parts towards Metlika.

"On the night of 29-30, both brigades carried out an attack on the Metlika-Črnomelj-Urena Vas railway. We heard intense fighting. The result is unknown, as we left for the journey. All these actions — along with their results — were announced to the people.

"After these three actions, the brigades will rest and replenish, and then begin new actions in line with the directives issued.

"Receive comradely greetings with 'Death to fascism — Freedom to the people!' Greetings, Arso."

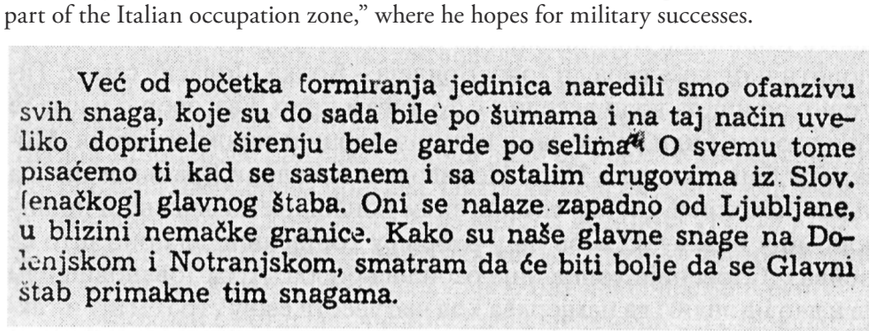
Arso's report sent to the Supreme Commander on December 12 from "Mokrec, 15 km southwest of Ljubljana" was preserved — detailing what he found in Slovenia and what, together with part of the General Staff found in Dolenjska (commander I. Maček, commissar B. Kidrič), he undertook in the reorganization of units.[315] They also

[315] *Collection of Documents on the NOR*, Vol. II, Book 7, Doc. 19.

formed the Notranjska (along with the previously established Dolenjska) operational zone, which included the "Tone Tomšič" and "Ljubo Šercer" brigades, each with 500 fighters, and the Notranjski detachment consisting of three companies with 20 to 30 men.

From the senior officers he brought, they were assigned: for the "Tone Tomšič" brigade, the Chief of Staff and one battalion commander; for the "Šercer" brigade, only the Chief of Staff; for the commanders of the Dolenjska and Notranjska operational zones, Milovan Šaranović and Zdravko Jovanović (who was soon, through a personnel change initiated by Kardelj, renamed as the Chief of Staff). He specifies that these two zones now "have a total of 2,300 partisans, of which 2,000 are in four brigades, and the remaining 300 are in three detachments."

He emphasizes: "Already from the start of the formation of the units, we ordered an offensive with all forces, which until now had been in the forests, thus contributing to the spread of the White Guard in the villages. I will write to you about all this when I meet with the other comrades from the Slovenian Main Staff. They are located west of Ljubljana, near the German border. Since our main forces are in Dolenjska and Notranjska, I believe it would be better for the General Staff to move closer to those forces." Confident that Kardelj would accept this solution, he reported that they issued directives to the Dolenjska and Notranjska zone headquarters for combat actions that, if mutually coordinated, would result in the creation of "free strongholds in the central part of the Italian occupation zone," where he hopes for military successes.


Već od početka formiranja jedinica naredili smo ofanzivu svih snaga, koje su do sada bile po šumama i na taj način uveliko doprinele širenju bele garde po selima. O svemu tome pisaćemo ti kad se sastanem i sa ostalim drugovima iz Slov. [enačkog] glavnog štaba. Oni se nalaze zapadno od Ljubljane, u blizini nemačke granice. Kako su naše glavne snage na Dolenjskom i Notranjskom, smatram da će biti bolje da se Glavni štab primakne tim snagama.

Report from Dolenjska, written on December 12, 1942.

He reports on the deployment of the remaining Slovene forces — detachments: the Dolomite Detachment (about 250 fighters) west of Ljubljana; the Littoral Detachment (350) in the territory centred around Idrija; the Gorenjska Detachment (350) around Jesenice; the Styrian Detachment (300) around Pohorje. One Carinthian company (40) was transferred to Austrian Carinthia.

According to reports, "the Slovenes have 3,600 organized partisans. With intensified fighting, an increase in new partisans is likely." From the Dolomite and Littoral Detachments, they intend to form another operational zone "with two combat groups," while directives for action would be given to the Gorenjska and Styrian units. With this, it is written, "the reorganization of Slovene forces would largely be completed, and the time would come for the Main Slovene Headquarters."

"Due to the need for autonomy in operations, we will assign our best people to the zone headquarters for both military and political work (the original — Arso's, Maček's and Kidrič's — deployment of 'Tito's officers': M. Šaranović — commander of the Lower Carniola Operational Zone; Z. Jovanović — commander [later chief of staff] of the Inner Carniola Operational Zone; Predrag Jevtić — deputy brigade commander; Rajko Tanasković, Milo Kilibarda and Pero Popivoda — brigade staff chiefs; Danilo Šorović — detachment chief of staff; Petar Brajović — battalion commander; Radomir Božović, Aleksandar Marjanović and Mile Čubrić — deputy battalion commanders — *I.M.*)." He reports to the Supreme Commander that he has taken all measures "to establish contact with you across the Kupa, south of Metlika," and concludes: "Receive our comradely greetings with 'Death to fascism — Freedom to the people!' Greetings, Arso."

The then-commander of the Main Staff, Ivan Maček, would later write in his *Memoirs* that he encountered this "group of Tito's officers" near Mirna — when Arso "had already assigned four comrades from the group to work in the Cankar Brigade. To my great surprise, he had even founded the 1st Operational Zone and had already set up headquarters — appointing Milovan Šaranović, from the group that came with him, as commander, and Dr. Jože Brilej — Bolko as political commissar. I was very pleased with the arrival of Tito's officers and did not hide it. The conversation with them was pleasant — they were all experienced fighters and modest young men. Perhaps because of this, it was precisely Pero Popivoda and Chief of the Supreme Headquarters Arso Jovanović, with their arrogant, condescending attitude, who caught my attention. Suddenly and bluntly, they 'assessed' that what was happening in Slovenia was not serious combat at all. Arso Jovanović even made it clear that he intended to introduce his own strategy and tactics here — in the meantime, he had already diverted the Cankar Brigade from its planned attack on Orehovica — to take over com-

komandanta Milovana Šaranovića iz skupine koja je došla s njim, a za političkog komesara dr Jožu Brilcja-Bolka. Dolasku sam se Titovih oficira vrlo veselio i to nisam krio. Razgovor s njima je bio ugodan, bili su sve sami iskusni borci i skromni momci. Možda su baš zbog toga Pero Popivoda i načelnik Vrhovnog štaba Arsa Jovanović svojim uobraženim ponašanjem s visine i privukli moju pažnju. S neba pa u rebra su »ocijenili« da ono što se zbiva u Sloveniji uopće nije ozbiljna borba. Arsa Jovanović nam je i dao na znanje da namjerava kod nas uvesti svoju strategiju i taktiku — u međuvremenu je već odvratio Cankarovu brigadu od planiranog napada na Orehovicu — preuzeti zapovijedanje slovenskom partizanskom vojskom i reorganizirati je. Po njegovu je mišljenju Slovenija već morala domalo sva biti oslobođena. Nije mogao razumjeti zašto partizani borave u šumama a ne u selima. Drugi oficiri su njegove riječi pratili s velikim poštovanjem, iako im je možda bila malo neugodna gruba kritika slovenske vojske.

From the memoirs of Ivan Maček.

mand of the Slovene partisan army and reorganize it. In his view, Slovenia should have already been entirely liberated. He could not understand why partisans were staying in the forests and not in villages. The other officers followed his words with great respect, although his harsh criticism of the Slovene army may have been a bit uncomfortable for them..."

Wondering, "What right does he have to undertake a reorganization of the units without the approval of the Slovene Main Staff?," he decided — in order to soften up the "southerners" — to resort to cunning: for "Arso's group" and a few "Slovene officers" (?!), he arranged a dinner at the "Pri Bulcu" inn in Mirna, "from appetizers to desserts." The food, he writes, softened them, and even more so "the fine Lower Carniola wine," after which "their tongues loosened and they no longer listened to Chief Arso with such reverence."[316]

The next day, the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters warmly said farewell "to Tito's officers, who were going to their assigned units according to the deployment we had agreed upon," while Zdravko Jovanović and Milo Kilibarda (assigned as Chief of Staff of the Šercer Brigade) departed with him and Maček. They marched toward Mokrec, where the Šercer Brigade was encamped. Maček allegedly told the patrol accompanying them "who Arso Jovanović was and drilled into the boys' heads that they must guard him like the apple of their eye. They took the instruction very seriously and were very attentive to Arso throughout the journey."

They arrived in Mokrec "late in the night of December 6," and the next day began talks at the brigade headquarters. In front of the newcomers, Commander Bojan Polak Stjenka "presented a report on the state of the brigade — the number of personnel, armaments and particularly the brigade's actions. Once he finished, Arso Jovanović immediately spoke. He criticized the brigade headquarters and said their actions were not at all on the level of a brigade. I will never forget his words: 'A brigade must be like a steamroller that crushes and flattens everything before it all the way to Ljubljana!' He spoke as though we were the best-armed army and lacked absolutely nothing in terms of heavy weaponry," to which the members of the headquarters were "stunned," and even he, it is written, "lost patience," supposedly telling the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters bluntly that "under the current circumstances, we cannot represent any kind of 'steamroller' and that we cannot plan an attack on Ljubljana at all" (Arso, according to this author, did not speak of an attack on Ljubljana, but of action "up to Ljubljana" — *I.M.*), because, as they later said — emboldened by his remarks — "we don't have cannons, or mortars, or explosives, and we still lack a lot of ammunition even for light arms."[317]

Certainly, after December 12, they headed towards "Kardelj's bunker" in the Dolomites, at which point "Arso soon felt that the journey was long and began to complain about where the General Staff and the CC had hidden. He constantly needed something to respond to and kept grumbling about 'keeping in touch.'" Above

[316] I. Maček, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

[317] *Ibid.*, p. 190.

Vrhnika, they crossed the railway and the road and reached their marching target.

Maček continues: "The day after arriving in the Dolomites, Arso Jovanović met with our Dolomite Council. He again began to develop his theories on strategy and tactics of warfare, giving advice and instructions left and right. Despite his obviously inflated chatter, Kardelj listened to him patiently and responded very cautiously. He wanted to maintain the authority of the Chief of the General Staff. To me, Kardelj's patience seemed unnecessary, so after the meeting, I explained in detail how Arso had behaved on the journey..."[318]

He doesn't say what exactly he explained, but it can be assumed from the previous text, and it was certainly one of the reasons that, according to Maček, Kardelj "sharply and openly opposed Arso's command and made it clear to him that Slovenia would not be a field for his unreasonable strategic plans."[319]

The document in which Arso was "crucified on the cross" in his mission in Slovenia is Kardelj's letter from January 12.[320] He wrote it after reading Tito's sharp assessment of the situation in Slovenia (mostly based on his letters), realizing the unlimited powers of the Chief of the General Staff in overcoming it, where "the finger in the healthy eye" was the appointment of a "southerner," a "former Yugoslav officer," as the "commander of the General Staff of the NOP and POJ for Slovenia" (the "for Slovenia" part particularly irritated him, as he saw it "as a death sentence for the Slovenian national army" — *I.M.*), forgetting — at least at that moment of the explosion of vanity and the peak of Slovenian self-sufficiency and chauvinism — that it was precisely such personnel solutions, albeit without mentioning names, that he himself had personally asked for several times. There is no doubt that this cup of bitterness — filled with the extremely bitter content of Tito's letter and the obscure observations of the then Commander of the Slovenian Main Staff on the work of the Chief of the General Staff from Gorjanci to the Dolomites, who had come to replace and substitute him — also soured the content (in the Maček's bag brought) of an even more bitter letter from Valdes (J. Kopinič) from Zagreb. He wrote to Kardelj on November 27, mostly conveying the impressions of Stevo Krajacić from his visit to the General Staff.[321] In short, Valdes wrote to Kardelj that Tito was "unpleasantly surprised by the news passed to him by Ribar and Krajacić," adding: "Stari got quite angry at you about the events and the offensive (he said that all the news had been good all the time, and suddenly all of that

[318] *Ibid.,* p. 191.

[319] It is possible that Kardelj acted so harshly even then, but he had already launched sharp attacks against the Chief of the Supreme Command earlier, in letters dated January 12 and 17, 1943, which were delivered to Tito by none other than I. Maček — "before the ink had even dried."

[320] *Collection of Documents on the NOR*, Vol. II, Book 7, Doc. 109.

[321] Kardelj and Valdes had "unresolved issues" since the end of August 1942, when the latter, in a panic, fleeing (with his wife Stella) from the chaos of the "Roška Offensive," narrowly escaped, remaining "a very inconvenient witness to the breakdown" of the partisan units and the poor conduct and fragmentation of the Slovenian leadership, which he "recounted" to L. Ribar and S. Krajičić, and they, arriving on September 26 at Oštrelj, conveyed everything to Tito. Since the only radio station in the "Roška Offensive" had disappeared and there was no way to verify these damaging claims, this uncertainty hastened Arso's dispatch to the northwestern front.

stopped). This was told to me by Brko (the nickname of S. Krajacić) after his return from the General Staff."

Sidelined "in the corner" by the superior's assessments, yet convinced that in the General Staff there is no respect for "Slovenian specificities"; trust in Slovenian personnel; understanding of the difficulties in leading partisan warfare in the conditions of an advanced road network, peasant clericalism, the actions of reactionary forces from various global centres, especially London and Rome, etc. — in this context, he was even rougher and unfairer towards Arso. There is no doubt that his prior animosity towards the Chief of the General Staff was deepened by the traditional Slovenian self-sufficiency and closed-mindedness, local patriotism (which, at least when it came to the Slovenes, but also in letters to Lola, he did not hide), the manner of gossiping about leadership members, the fear of sectarianism and any radicalism that could irritate influential individuals or groups from the coalition of the Liberation Front, composed of 18 members — parties, movements and "wings" from the pre-war political life of Slovenia, as well as the aversion to "southern extremism," the general condemnation of "former officers," and especially the constant vigilance not to lose a prestigious position in the CC of the CPY and, most importantly, the favour of the Comintern. All of this — along with other circumstances and elements — culminated in the sharpness of the knife with which the Chief of the General Staff, who had brought a "group of southerners," "a bunch of Tito's commanders," "a dozen Serbian officers" to Slovenia, was received. However, the essence was the criticism of Tito's evaluations, positions and plans, with Arso's formal and fabricated mistakes being a convenient excuse to cleverly and pragmatically communicate, warn, beg and test the validity of his own positions. Hence, in the letter of January 12, he poured all his venom on Arso on every one of its 21 pages, confident that Ivan Maček would hand it over to Tito.

The letter begins with the note that they had, "perhaps a bit too harshly 'turned' them (meaning: criticized — *I.M.*), likely based on what he presented in his panic 'X'" (referring to the observations conveyed by Valdes to I. Krajacić, and the latter to Tito). Confident in this, Kardelj presents his reasoning and his own assessment that, in the circumstances created by the offensive, no "military expert with such forces could have achieved better results, at least not significantly better." He admits that the command structure "from a military perspective, in many aspects, fell short, but that its immaturity, due to inexperience in military matters, was largely compensated by political awareness," adding that after the offensive, they began reorganizing the collected units "almost incapable of more serious actions," in the conditions when "our party, command, OF and other apparatuses in the field were severely broken, our equipment was shattered." He states that, in their reorganization, "before Arso came, our intention was to create only one strong brigade of about 800 fighters and to strengthen the detachments, as we believed that it would still be a long time before we could move to operations and tactics like yours. We will certainly remain partisans for almost the entire duration (!), as the circumstances (terrain) and enemy pressure require it. However, we immediately agreed with Arso to raise all four brigades to a number of 500 and over, and reduce the detachments to the smallest necessary number of a few

companies, which will have specific terrain duties. I believe that the situation has now been properly set, and they have already embarked on the right path..."

He writes that "from Arso's position, I concluded that you did not have the right idea about our situation," admitting his own fault for not having been able to establish "a more permanent connection," although in November they decided that someone from their side should go to the General Staff, but "we were all so busy that we didn't dare send anyone for such a long time. Now, with Arso here, we can only free Matija, i.e. Angelo (I. Maček), for a while."

In the beginning, with Arso, he writes, "there were some minor disagreements regarding tactics," mainly on three fundamental issues: first, the survival of a large number of detachments, where Arso, unlike Kardelj and his collaborators, was for gathering them into larger and more mobile units, brigades, because, as they were, they represented "bases of concealed resistance"; second, "creating liberated territory," in which the Chief of the General Staff advocated that "somewhere in Dolenjska we must create a liberated base that our troops can rely on," which Kardelj considered premature and unacceptable; third, the issue of "basing" the highest military and political leadership in Slovenia — Arso was for this "headquarters being in Dolenjska," where the strongest forces were and where the NOP was most developed, while Kardelj and his collaborators were for the Dolomites, in the bunkers, from where, allegedly, they could more successfully "dedicate themselves to the systematic building of our fighting strength in other provinces."

It could be concluded from this introductory part of Kardelj's letter that these were the only three issues where they could not agree with Arso, and therefore Tito's arbitration was requested. These issues appear to be merely tactical but, in essence, they deeply interfere with strategy, because it is a matter of choosing: to create a numerically strong, organizationally firm, and militarily capable integral part of the NOP, which, like the units under the direct command of the General Staff, will lead the NOB, or to remain in partisan activities, more precisely, in a well-organized resistance movement. Key individuals from the NOP leadership present at Oštrelj claim that Arso received — verbally and in writing — authorizations for the first issue and believe that he began to implement them consistently and decisively, probably without a sense for political manoeuvring (for which, in any case, there was neither time nor place). This is also written by the number of historians who study the NOP professionally and responsibly, for whom everything else that was later discussed during the war years and the decades following about the alleged overstepping of authority, arrogance, political narrow-mindedness and mistakes of "the southern leader" A. Jovanović was simply political gossip, mostly based on claims that were grossly ripped out of context from the central and, for this subject, critical part of Kardelj's letter of January 12, which is why we are quoting it in full:

"At the beginning, when Arso came, we had a few conflicts. I believe that he absolutely exceeded the authority you gave him, or you did not explain his duties and position here enough. Besides that, his overall attitude towards the situation in Slovenia was such that it immediately caused our conflict with the allies (referring to the

Communist Party of Slovenia and partners from the Liberation Front — *I.M.*)." Then follows an extensive explanation in five points: his behaviour "at the very beginning was like that of some kind of Yugoslav inspector, who couldn't hide the great importance of his role," which was understood as "a position of absolute undervaluing of all the previous results, which immediately brought him into conflict with our cadres," he began to "interfere with political issues" — attacking the Liberation Front, introducing the symbols of the sickle and hammer, wrongly relating to the allies of the Communist Party of Slovenia, etc., "in other words, he began to transfer the Bosnian conditions and to dominate our sectarians with his sectarianism"; regarding the CC of the Communist Party of Slovenia, he "treated them completely incorrectly, immediately, without our knowledge and consent, began to appoint and change personnel, to reorganize the army," excusing himself by "saying that he was too far from us, and that's why the reorganization was delayed for another 14 days, etc." In the Dolomites, he started "to hold sectarian lectures on politics, on the Liberation Front and all that stuff, with which we, of course, sharply clashed, and I told him that he was only to deal with the army, and not to meddle in our political matters," because "his behaviour caused our first extremely sharp conflict with the Executive Committee of the Liberation Front. Everyone, to the last one, opposed his behaviour, moreover, they made it a principled issue: appointments and changes in the military, which Arso made without agreement with the Executive Committee, they considered a violation of national rights, a breach of the people's right to self-determination, a repetition of the Yugoslav practice," making "Arso's position politically untenable here, because none of the allies sees him as the first person of the General Staff anymore, but only as a former Yugoslav officer who knows something in military matters — that's what everyone admits right away — but who tried to introduce some old methods into the perception of the Slovenian people," and the Communist Party allies fear that behind his actions "there is an attempt 'from the south' to again turn the national rights of the Slovenian people."

Somewhere in the middle of the fourth and most extensive point, entirely devoted to Arso, it says: "I believe you gave him too broad of an authority, or that you did not clearly set how he should use those powers. You had Arso in mind as he was down there. But you forgot that Arso is a young Party member, and also a former officer. And the position of the Chief of Staff today is largely a political function when you send him to another terrain. I admit it wasn't comfortable for us — again from a formal side — that you gave him the order to create the Main Staff of Slovenia because I cannot believe that you seriously believe Arso will be better at evaluating personnel than we can, who, first, know these personnel, and second, because we have a party criterion for evaluating personnel, while Arso has none, which I saw from the first day he arrived here." Now, his mistakes, he writes, have been corrected, and with the personnel he brought to Slovenia "everything has gone well," unlike in the beginning, when "they mostly shared Arso's view of things with us," and "now they are making statements that this is the best people, the most conscious, that it is worth dying for them — says a Montenegrin that our partisans are such fighters as they never expected, etc." He believes they quickly adapted to our situation, and "there is no such case with

them as with Arso." They were "mostly assigned as deputies of commanders or heads of staff, so they could first get familiar with the people and show their abilities," in which, supposedly, they "had conflicts with Arso, because he wanted to appoint them all as commanders, without even getting to know our personnel first," so on this "proposal of Arso's — except for one case (Šaranović as commander of the zone, and with the plan to attract him to the General Staff) — we did not agree, and it turned out we were right to do so." He concludes that "now everything is completely settled with Arso, who, in the meantime, has seen many things he didn't see before, and has even begun to understand the Liberation Front (OF), and is even enthusiastic about it." He created, he writes, four brigades of 500 people each, which is less than their previous intention to form one with 800 fighters and more partisan units within the reorganization, but he believes this solution "will be good, because they will still be able to control the terrain quite a bit, and besides, they will quickly grow with new mobilization."

Again, he complains: "We would really need weapons, mortars, and especially some small artillery pieces. If you can help us even a little, please support us with at least two or three mortars and — what would be even better — a small artillery piece, which would significantly change our position here because it would morally shake the White Guard as soon as we break one or two of their positions."

Somewhere towards the end of the letter, he reasons that the NOP forces in Slovenia should be "viewed as an integral part of our general NOVJ, not as a separate unit," but he adds, "it must be acknowledged that the tasks of our Slovenian army are specific. I am convinced that we — by ensuring that we, as partisans, will manage to remain on this terrain (naturally, not at the cost of excessively large losses of living forces) and tie down the occupying forces — will be of much more use to you than if we artificially forced the premature concentration of all our forces, which would sooner or later be pushed out of Slovenia, and we would come to you perhaps with 3,000 well-organized fighters, but without the people. In one word, my opinion is that our main task is to maintain living strength and hold the terrain, and to adjust tactics according to these goals. We've had enough of Serbia, enough of Montenegro and Herzegovina, so we should undergo the same process in Slovenia." He outlines the idea that, along with "a central and strong army that will be able to be transferred, as needed, to any province in Yugoslavia," "sufficiently strong armies" should be created, which will combine partisan warfare with brigade division actions, etc., and be strong enough to prevent the concentration of the London-based government, which would certainly want to assemble from all possible current formations: Nedić's, Mihailović's, Ustaše, Domobrani, White Guard, and probably some formations of the current occupying army. That concept of waiting for the collapse of fascism and "sharpening" for armed resistance to the "Londoners" was clearly not accepted by the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, who — using clear and broad powers — demanded an offensive, as well as actions by Slovenian units on other parts of the front, thus outside the narrow national space, which "Bevc and the others" were wary of. This was the essence of the conflict...

If the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters truly deserved such a negative assessment, which emanates from every line of Kardelj's letter of January 12, then, to put it mildly, the author's "P.S." is hypocritical: "As for Arso, he should not be hit with direct criticism, as it would be too harsh for him as a young Party member. We are now on good terms with him. Send your position in a positive form."

Perhaps as a sign of these "good relations," Arso was proposed to co-sign the report to Tito on January 17, giving a detailed account — three days before the comprehensive offensive operation "Weiss" — about the "regrouping of the occupying forces and their moral-political state and intentions" on that part of the front: a "complete German division for fighting partisans in Bosnia" was moving through Židani Most;[322] Major Karlo Novak, the commander of Draža's forces for Slovenia,[323] returned from Belgrade to Ljubljana with the directive "to change course: offer cooperation to the partisans, do not attack them unless they attack first, mobilize the army and prepare for an offensive against the Italians," expecting an English offensive in February or spring; within the "White Guard" group, the Chetniks, avoiding the clericalists, were "gathering at two points — around Ljubljana and in Gorjanci," with the aim "to occupy Ljubljana and Zagreb, which they openly declared"; thus, the two of them suggested to the Supreme Commander to "warn the Croats to watch out for Gorjanci and clean them with our forces," not abandoning the Žumberak sector "because it is an offensive position not only for us but also for Mihailović's bands." They reported (still) unverified information about: the arrival of German troops in Ljubljana in case a front opens on the Apennines; German plans to establish a front on the Soča "as the second stage of the front on the Genoa-Apennines line"; the firm decision of the Italians to "hold the Ljubljana province at all costs"; strengthening Mussolini's position after fascism had temporarily "broken the dynastic Anglophilic current and the king himself." They also mentioned an "unconfirmed report" about how "the Italians should give power mainly to the White Guard," which was "a rather uncertain prospect, although not entirely excluded," and this applied to the stories circulating among the Germans in Ljubljana that they were "determined to prevent the defeat of Italy at all costs." Thus, all the intelligence data necessary for assessing the situation for concluding and deciding on their own actions. This was the first report of such a theme and content sent from Slovenia, where Arso's principle is easily recognized: to present to the superior, within the context of the situation assessment, all relevant data without selecting them according to criteria that might be (un)pleasant to his ear or mood, and to provide options for decisions, being ready for the efficient implementation of the one that is adopted.

Uncertain, perhaps, that Ivan Maček would accurately interpret what had not fit into the 21 pages of the previous letter, Kardelj, on the same day, wrote to Tito[324] in a detailed and, as usual, lengthy manner, beginning with the statement that his remarks

[322] This referred to the 7th SS Mountain Volunteer Hunting Division "Prinz Eugen."

[323] Instead of Salonika volunteer Colonel Rado (Jake) Avšič, who refused and joined the OF, General Mihailović appointed Karl Novak, Major General of the Yugoslav Army, as the commander of Chetnik forces in Slovenia. In the April War, he was the Chief of Staff of the Triglav Mountain Detachment.

[324] *Documents of the Central Organs of the CC CPY, NOP and the Revolution 1941-1945,* Vol. 10, pp. 220-227.

would "largely rely on conversations with Arso," qualifying it with: "How reliable Arso can be as a source in this regard is another matter, so please consider these 'remarks' simply as my opinion." By questioning Arso's reliability "as a source" in advance, he tactfully criticized him for "political nonsense" and, ultimately, cast doubt on his professional competence to lead the partisan war, while again asking Tito to be "careful, fair and kind" towards him, "a young member of the Party." He emphasized his belief — confirmed to him "in the case of Arso Jovanović" — which should also serve as a warning — that the slogan "the self-determination of nations" would become "an increasingly relevant and strongest slogan," and concluded that the Party, "in the face of the danger of Serbian hegemony," would find solid footholds for this slogan among all the oppressed nations. He stressed that "this will, in the future, be the very link we must firmly hold onto against the forces of imperialism and reaction." Regarding this, he criticized Arso for allegedly hinting at the "possibility of the liquidation of the main (national) headquarters," evidently fearing that this was the stance of the Supreme Command, and he hurried to share his opinion, which was undoubtedly the main reason for all the "fuss" against the Chief of Staff — "that such a measure would absolutely be premature," that the Slovenian people in the General Staff and their army see "the greatest achievement of the current liberation struggle," and that Slovenians "fear the return of 'Serbian officers' and Serbian hegemony."

Constrained by the walls of the bunker, separated from events from Moscow, through Bihać, to London, physically weakened, E. Kardelj was constantly searching for a "scapegoat," a "guinea pig" on whom he could sharpen his main tool — his pen, and affirm his undeniable talent for writing long "analyses." For this, Arso, "the former Serbian officer," seemed to him providential, and he wrote extensively about him. However, for sectarianism, he also blamed the only "southerner" appointed as commander of the (Dolenjska) operational zone, M. Šaranović — who, "without our knowledge, as soon as he arrived, turned the shock brigade 'Matija Gubec,' which he liked the most, into a Proletarian one."

Around January 25, two letters addressed to the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters arrived in the Dolomites from his deputy, Velimir Terzić. The first was written on January 6, reporting that by that date, three of Arso's reports had arrived via a courier channel established through the Kupa, and that, in order to establish this crucial connection, the request was made for the Main Staff of Slovenia to "immediately designate three 'selected persons' to act as permanent couriers to the Supreme Command," who would regularly carry mail between them and the SH.[325] In the same envelope was also the "Instruction on Intelligence Services" (whose draft had been entrusted to his deputy).

The second letter from Captain Terzić, instructed by Tito on what to write to "the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters of the NOV and POJ, Comrade Arso Jovanović," begins: "We have received all your reports that you sent from Slovenia to the address of the Supreme Commander. We agree with the measures for the organization of our

[325] *Collection of Documents on the NOR*, Vol. II, Book 7, Doc. 105.

military formations that you have taken in Slovenia.

"It is now necessary for all Slovenian forces to undertake offensive actions, primarily against enemy communications. Considering the type of weapons currently available to the Slovenian forces, for now, we should limit ourselves to eliminating smaller enemy strongholds and communications, destroying facilities on communications and breaking up the White Guard.

"Please pay special attention to creating free territory, both in Dolenjska, as well as in Notranjska, Gorenjska and Štajerska. This is made possible by the deployment of our forces and the characteristics of the mountainous terrain that surrounds the Ljubljana Basin on all sides..."

Under point two, he writes: "We will send you, in two to three days, one heavy mortar, one light mortar, and one heavy machine gun with ammunition," which, along with the promise of a 65 mm gun, was a response to Kardelj's frequent requests.

Along with fairly favourable news "about the situation in other operational areas," Captain Terzić also reports one concerning piece of information: that "the enemy is preparing a new offensive on our free territory," which he writes, "will likely be the last fascist offensive against us..." This news did not surprise the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters as much as it worried him: convinced that the Germans, after the "African campaign," expecting an Allied landing in the Balkans, would not leave the "Bihać Republic" in peace, he predicted that the enemy, before launching the Operational Group's divisions in the planned offensive towards the southeast, might undertake a larger-scale operation against the main forces of the NOVJ. Therefore, two months earlier, he had instructed V. Terzić to order the main headquarters to strengthen intelligence and reconnaissance services and to detect the enemy's intentions and plans in a timely manner, without interrupting the offensive momentum of the operational formations: the 2nd Proletarian Division towards the southwestern part of Bosnia; the 1st Proletarian and 3rd Shock Divisions towards the Bosna Valley, linking up with eastern Bosnia; and the 1st Bosnian and 1st Croatian Corps towards the communications leading from Belgrade to Zagreb and from there to Split.

Under the "P.S.," Terzić writes to the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters: "Comrade Lola, who is coming there, will familiarize you with the current military-political situation."[326] The youth tribune, sent by Tito to "assess the military-political situation along the Party line and, together with Rato Dugojić, help the Slovenes with youth work," will set out from the Ostrožac Castle, the headquarters of the CC of the CPY and the Supreme Command, on January 15. This follows historic meetings held in Bihać at the end of November and December: the 1st Session of AVNOJ (November 26-27), the Yugoslav Women's Conference (December 6) and the Congress of the United Partisan Youth of Yugoslavia (December 27-29), at which there was "no trace or word" from the Slovenes. To make the situation more uncertain, during this time, Tito received only one report from Kardelj — unlike the three from Arso — which was writ-

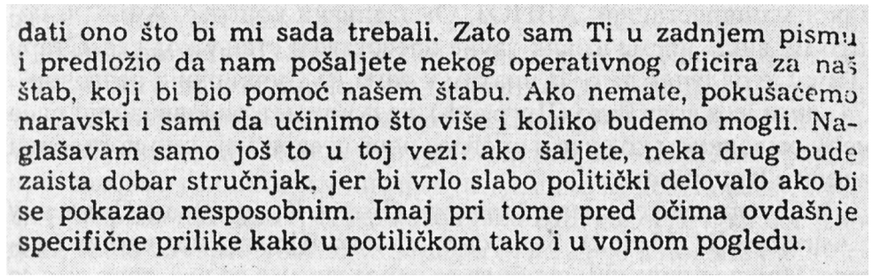
[326] *Ibid.*

ten on December 14 in the Dolomites.[327] In it, he does not mention Arso because he had not heard of his arrival in Slovenia 19 days earlier, due to a lack of communication with Dolenjska and Notranjska, and he writes in the old manner: "Regarding armament, we are standing very weakly," adding that the "partisan troops" had run out of ammunition, and were "also lacking heavier weapons, particularly mortars, heavy machine guns, or possibly some smaller cannons. Two mortars, which were previously captured, were lost during the offensive, and the third, which was recently captured, the Italians managed to damage before surrendering it. Therefore, we do not have any mortars, and the enemy is heavily fortified and entrenched. If we do not manage to acquire at least a few pieces of such weapons in the near future, it will be difficult to force the enemy out of their fortified positions. We have some heavy machine guns in our army, but it's also a small amount. Recently, the Croatian partisans loaned us a mortar, and immediately the result was evident: with that mortar, our forces captured one heavy machine gun and five lighter ones in the first attack. Naturally, the mortar was returned to the Croats..."

Regarding armament, he makes another "great request — that if at all possible — you provide us with at least three or four mortars," which would "also have a significant moral impact among the partisans and political influence among our allies. Naturally, it would be best if, with your help, we could arm one of the prescribed brigades, which could then truly achieve a lot. However, we would be very satisfied with just a few mortars and, possibly, machine guns. And you do not need convincing about the importance of Slovenian terrain for the overall struggle of the people of Yugoslavia. As for the general combat capabilities of our partisans, under the right command and with proper organization, they do not fall behind other partisans in Yugoslavia, and in some matters, they might even surpass them. If, with your help, we could truly form such a genuine shock brigade, or at least strengthen the current one, we would soon capture enough Italian rifles and ammunition to equip the partisans in the Ljubljana province and in Primorje with that weapon, and send the Yugoslavs to the German sector. And if you can provide us with some Yugoslav ammunition, we would be very grateful!..."

As the most difficult, permanent and current problem, he cites "the command structure. We've been suffering from this from the very beginning. It truly shows the lack of tradition. While some of our partisans are certainly no worse than the Serbs, our commanders or command staff are on average far behind the Serbs. It has also been a great struggle with the General Staff. If our staff had been more militarily capable, many things would have been better off with us." Doubting that things would improve with Colonel J. Avšič, appointed deputy commander of the General Staff, and aware that the new commissar, Boris Kidrič, "naturally, cannot provide what we need in terms of military operational guidance," he repeats his request for the Supreme Command to send "an operational officer for our staff" but that he should be "a truly good expert." He reiterates his request to "provide a few mortars," adding: "There is

[327] *Collection of Documents on the NOR*, Vol. II, Book 7, pp. 59-69.


dati ono što bi mi sada trebali. Zato sam Ti u zadnjem pismu i predložio da nam pošaljete nekog operativnog oficira za naš štab, koji bi bio pomoć našem štabu. Ako nemate, pokušaćemo naravski i sami da učinimo što više i koliko budemo mogli. Naglašavam samo još to u toj vezi: ako šaljete, neka drug bude zaista dobar stručnjak, jer bi vrlo slabo politički delovalo ako bi se pokazao nesposobnim. Imaj pri tome pred očima ovdašnje specifične prilike kako u potiličkom tako i u vojnom pogledu.

B. Terzić: Kardelj requested a capable officer — he received the best.

no doubt that increasing our activity and, above all, our strike force in Slovenia would relieve you as well. Therefore, it would be wise on your part to do so. We promise that, shortly thereafter, we will be capable of competing with your brigades as *Borba* suggests."

"They urgently need," he writes, "a large, strong, manoeuvrable brigade, well-armed, and with that, our army in Slovenia would enter a completely new phase. We must form this brigade in the shortest possible time — I hope with your help — and then, in the shortest time, we will have a strong army of at least 10,000 fighters and strong divisions of the People's Protection, thereby permanently eliminating the threat of greater White Guard successes in the future. We must not waste time now, and that is why we are asking for your help."

At the Ostrožac Castle, reflecting on Kardelj's letter — according to V. Terzić — it was reasoned: "We have sent you the most expert officer, the most skilled in staff affairs and the most knowledgeable about our operational and strategic plans, the Chief of the General Staff, along with 11 officers trained in proletarian units. We will send you some heavy armament, so please, Slovenian brothers, fight for our common and your own interests, for it is not easy here either, and a great offensive is being prepared."[328] However, considering all the given and possible circumstances, and in the context of the "situation in certain regions of Yugoslavia," the decision was made at the meeting of the CC of the CPY on January 5 to send "a member of the Supreme Command and Secretary of the CC of the SKOJ, Ivo Lola Ribar, to Slovenia." The General Secretary and Supreme Commander, even before the meeting, concerned about the intelligence reports on the enemy's troop movements, spoke of the need to "send a strong personality from the inner party leadership on a political mission to Kardelj." Taking all circumstances into account, particularly Kardelj's obsession with "Slovenian specifics," selfishness and hypersensitivity, such a person, according to M. Đilas' recollection, was not found among the members of the Political Bureau, so he chose Lola Ribar, a member of the CC of the CPY and "leader of the SKOJ," undoubtedly the best person who knew Kardelj "from the right side" and someone whom he "respected and personally, even from him, predicting a quick political rise, increasingly grew wary of."[329]

[328] From a conversation with General V. Terzić, in July 1983, in Miločer.

[329] From a conversation with M. Đilas, September 1994, in Belgrade. In *Revolutionary War*, Đilas will note that his comrade from the leadership of the CPY "was not completely open, but neither closed

Heading to Slovenia just five days before the start of Operation "Weiss," Lola — in the first paragraph of a letter sent from Poljane on January 27[330] — reminded Kardelj of the Muslim proverb: "When Muhammad won't go to the mountain, the mountain goes to Muhammad." "Thus, since we hadn't received news from you, and since you weren't at any of our major events: AVNOJ, the Youth Congress, the AFŽ, and because we no longer had an accurate idea of the situation on your side, Comrade Tito decided that I should return to you for a 'more detailed discussion.' Comrade Rato (Dugojić) is with me to help consolidate work among the youth on your side and to convey the new things we've established in connection with the Congress.

"In Suhor we met with Janez (Boris Krajger), and in Podturn with Angelo (I. Maček). We had already been to Ajdovščina to visit your brigades. Our initial intention was to push all the way to you, although we were astonished at how far it was! But events forced us to change our plan now." Regarding this, he states that "Comrade Tito thought that Rato and I would finish our work with you in five or six weeks. Now we see that this is impossible and that much more time will be needed." Namely, the offensive "on the Bosnian-Croatian liberated territory" had started, and Kardelj was too far away, with all connections cut off, so the "first Skijovac" delayed his departure to the Dolomites. At the same time, he decided to send back Edvard Kočbek and Josip Rus (who had been delayed with Maček in Bihać). He announces that, together with Angelo and Rato, he will go "with our brigades to Suhor, i.e., to the headquarters of the 2nd Operational Zone," where they will stay for a few days with Milovan Šaranović to issue orders to three Slovenian brigades and coordinate their cooperation with two Croatian brigades, and to establish a method for maintaining communication under the conditions where they are completely separated from the Supreme Command and the main headquarters. Additionally, Lola Ribar writes to Kardelj: "As I wander through Slovenia, it's exhausting, but I don't regret it because I have gained a picture of the terrain, the circumstances and our personnel. This way, our discussions will be more fruitful — and we have much to talk about. I read your letters to Angelo (from January 12 and 17, all about 'critiquing' the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters — *I.M.*) to Comrade Tito, and I don't fully agree with everything — so be prepared for a discussion." He warmly greets "Arso and all the comrades there," with hope for a soon meeting.

From Slovenia, Lola wrote to Tito (for the third time) on February 12, informing him that "there are no liberated territories in our sense of the word in Slovenia for now," and that "Bevc, Arso, and their group are not two days' journey from the border, but rather (in favourable circumstances) eight to ten days' journey." He continued, saying that their connections with Dolenjska, "where the main Slovenian partisan army is currently located, are quite weak and slow." The connections were, he wrote, insecure, travel was only possible at night, and "travelling to any of the Slovenian provinces to-

— as long as he did not feel threatened in his position and ambitions. When it did not concern the Slovenes, or when it was to their benefit — he was very approachable and patient in discussion. Slovenia was his cult, a small independent state."

[330] *Collection of Documents on the NOR*, Vol. II, Book 7, Doc. 168.

day isn't a matter of a few days, but rather one or two or three months if something is to be accomplished." Therefore, he would "extend the timeframe of his stay here by at least a month," uncertain that even in that period he and Rato would be able to hold a "party consultation on a broader scale."

The development of events would show that he was right to doubt in this regard: the party consultation, at least on a "broader scale," could not be held; he couldn't reach Kardelj and Arso; and Tito (who on that day was slipping away from Livno, under the pressure of Operation "Weiss," towards Šćit) would not receive that letter. However, the letter was preserved, and from it, at least three things can be understood: first — that Lola was primarily sent on a political mission, not to, as some later wrote, correct the alleged mistakes of the Chief of the General Staff, or even to inform Kardelj that Arso was being suspended due to those mistakes and withdrawn from Slovenia; second — that his main task was to organize "party consultations on a broader scale"; third — that his mission, unlike Arso's, was time-limited. The question remains of the scholarly and human responsibility of historians who, writing about the development of the NOP in Slovenia at the end of 1942 and the beginning of 1943, for example in the *The Liberation War of the Peoples of Yugoslavia 1941-1945*, mention only Lola Ribar as the delegate of the General Staff, while silently omitting Arso Jovanović and what he had done in Slovenia. In fact, without diminishing the great importance of Lola's actions, it should be stated that he primarily followed in Arso's footsteps: skilfully engaging the units Arso had organized; maintaining the established connections and utilizing the knowledge and talents of the commanders that the Chief of Staff had appointed, which, in wartime circumstances, was certainly the wisest and most natural course of action. Had it been easier and quicker to reach "Bevc, Arso, and their group," Lola would undoubtedly have gone to them, and, surprised by the offensive, would have stayed in some bunker. But faced with the impossibility of continuing his journey, he organized the command of a group of five brigades. In fact, he appointed the Operational Staff, with Milovan Šaranović at the head, and — in accordance with the directive from the General Staff on February 7 to all NOVJ units — to reduce the pressure on the Operational Group of divisions and units affected by Operation "Weiss," he encouraged "offensive actions on strongholds and communication lines," pushing for attacks on the Zagreb-Karlovac communications and the enemy's bases towards Kordun. This way, at the junction of Croatia and Slovenia — undoubtedly with the significant contribution of the talented commander Šaranović — a strong strike group was formed, and "it allowed the Slovenian brigades to more easily acquire weapons and arm their newly mobilized personnel." What the Chief of Staff had demanded from both the Croatian and Slovenian staffs from the first day he passed through here had been achieved — offensiveness in attack, activity in defence, with cooperation and organization being implied.

Lola, operating in the border area of Croatia and in that part of Slovenia where Arso had long-term directed the development of partisan units, carried out his main task — organizing party meetings in Bela Krajina and a SKOJ consultation for Dolenjska. He wrote to Tito that he hoped this was also the purpose of his mandate — "a

military and political breakthrough that eliminated the previous isolation of Slovenian brigades from the rest of our army," concluding that "the Slovenian units are returning to Slovenia significantly better armed and more experienced."

The enemy's offensive operation reached not only the border area of Croatia and Slovenia but also the Dolomites. Ivan Maček mentions that, starting from March 18, 4,000 Italian soldiers attacked the liberated territory, and in three days of fighting, the Dolomite detachment was defeated, and the NOP leadership was forced deep underground. He writes that this was preceded by a period of about twenty days in which the Chief of the General Staff — after Kardelj's "open and sharp approach" against his "command" — was "less offensive; he was content with attending meetings of the General Staff and the Executive Committee. He had a radio receiver available and caught the broadcasts of all the radio stations he could pick up. Boris Krajger once maliciously remarked: 'Strange. Doesn't the Supreme Command have a closer, more suitable place for listening to the radio, so it has to be done right in Slovenia?' Arso was diligently writing some military study in the Dolomites. Cveta (wife of I. Maček — *I.M.*) typed it in countless versions. As far as I know, the discussion never saw the light of day."

The group in the bunker could not understand how Arso, confined by the walls of the dark bunker and unable to visit the units, systematically recorded events on the battlefield and at military fronts (of course, as much as could be gleaned from radio broadcasts), deeply aware — as V. Terzić would later say — of the "well-known wisdom that everything not recorded is forgotten, and what is not recorded has not happened." These notes would later become inseparable from him, used when writing "lessons" on intelligence services, solving tactical tasks, organizing military education and training of commanders, writing articles on military history and wartime practice, and more extensive publications.[331]

Regarding this point — about Arso's supposed futility in Slovenia — I. Maček, three decades later, concluded: "It was only much later that we learned that Tito also had difficulties with him, and that his visit to Slovenia was a relief for the Supreme Command..."[332]

This version, "written at the source" — that the Chief of Staff was moved to Slovenia, even locked in a bunker (with Bevc) so he wouldn't — during the expected offensive of the Operational Group of divisions towards the Neretva and Drina rivers, and further through Serbia — get in the way, was widely, although devoid of any logic, (mis)used by various memoir writers and newspaper columnists. The truth, however, is quite different: he was sent to Slovenia with specific tasks and tried to carry them out — using his broad powers — consistently and decisively, and when he was completely blocked and unable to proceed, he withdrew into himself: he organized his war diary, wrote treatises on partisan warfare and made a periodization of the achievements of the NOP up until that time, convinced that this was also part of the Chief of Staff's

[331] As a whole, the notes were never published; with Arso's liquidation, these records most likely disappeared forever.

[332] I. Maček, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

debt to history. Additionally, day and night, he "tuned in" to broadcasts from Moscow and London, then Berlin and Rome, and Belgrade and Zagreb separately, hoping to — as he later told V. Dedijer in Jajce — hear some news about his comrades from the General Staff on the approaches to the Neretva or Drina, or perhaps a call to join them, since, isolated and rendered useless, he was sincerely concerned for their fate, humanly unhappy that he was not with them, at the heart of the offensive. This was something that Boris Krajger and the "group in the bunker," with Kardelj at the head, couldn't understand, and he didn't share his thoughts with them either. The same goes for his human anguish and astonishment upon hearing the "caught" news that General de Gaulle had awarded General Draža Mihailović the "War Cross with the Flame of Laurel" as the "legendary hero of the continuous struggle against the occupier" and the "symbol of the purest resistance, patriotism and the highest Yugoslav military virtues," which he saw as a result of the British government's involvement; he listened with contempt to propaganda stories about Chetnik megalomaniac plans to, after the "march on the communist Bihać Republic," capture Split and Sarajevo, and then, as the Anglo-American vanguard, move towards Hungary and Austria via the NDH; he listened with enthusiasm to Radio Moscow broadcasts about the collapse of von Paulus's army at Stalingrad, realizing that the "Russian bear" — like in the time of Field Marshal Mikhail Kutuzov in 1812 — had awoken in the middle of winter, and would unstop the West. Whether the people around him in the bunker were listening to this, whether they knew the lessons and messages of military history and how they would understand him if he confided in them what he was thinking — he no longer cared; he and they were two worlds, discordant in everything, accidental companions on the same ship caught in a storm, eager to see each other's backs as soon as possible...

Based on others' memories and his own "hindsight," Maček writes that the Chief of Staff, when things got tough in the Dolomites, "retreated to a bunker in some house below Toško Čelo, together with Kardelj, Kidrič, Leskošek, Pold Maček Sr., who helped build the bunkers in the Dolomites, Cveta, and maybe with someone else. The bunker was well camouflaged and the entrance was concealed in the kitchen floor." During the raid, a soldier, while searching the house, "stole sugar in the kitchen; the bag tore and fell on the floor; the sugar slipped through the cracks of the secret entrance into the bunker. They told me that Arso completely lost his nerves because of this, and they barely calmed him down." This remains the only written or oral reference from the NOP that Arso was not personally brave and composed, even when many were losing their nerve and their heads. Indeed, as he notes, his comrades "told me this," since he was "spared the Dolomite adventures and misadventures, as I remained in Dolenjska after Ivo Ribar's arrival."

The dramatic consequences left behind by the offensive in the Dolomites were the reason why Kočevski Rog was once again chosen as the "headquarters of the central organs." Marjan Brecelj, in preparing the underground bases, as I. Maček notes, "brought the first group from the Dolomites at the end of March. With them were Rato Dugojić and Arso Jovanović. They planned to return to the Supreme Command. They travelled from Notranjska via the Bloška Plateau and Loški Potok and reached



Formation of the Šercer Brigade.

the area of Draga-Podpreska; there, our brigades rested after the great victory in Jelen's Gully, where, on March 26, they completely destroyed the enemy 'Macerata' battalion. There, the Chief of the General Staff held a meeting with the commanders, where experiences were analysed and tasks were given. Some 'southerners' recall that he pointed out one of the major shortcomings of the Slovenian units, which he had insisted on removing for months — the underdevelopment of the military intelligence service."

We conclude Maček's story about Arso with the note: "On March 28, 1943, the brigades assigned an escort for the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters Jovanović and the Secretary of the CC of the SKOJ, Dugojić. The fighters escorted them to the Croatian partisan units."[333]

Finally, meeting on the same task, Arso and Lola, together with Commander Šaranović, would first define the tasks of the NOV units in Dolenjska and part of Croatia. From there, they headed to the Main Staff of Croatia, from where, on April 7, a telegram was sent to the Supreme Command: "Arso Jovanović on his way to us." He arrived there with Lola three days later, which the Supreme Command was informed about, as it was located at Govza (near Kalinovik) that day. The telegram was received and deciphered by Pavle Savić, the head of the Cipher Section. Happy to finally receive good news about two dear comrades, he rushed to Captain Velimir Terzić, and he, all excited, went to Aleksandar Ranković, the duty officer at the headquarters of the highest political and military leadership of the NOP. Known for his diligence and responsibility, the deputy Chief of Staff repeated this news in three reports written on the same day: at 10:45 a.m. — that "Arso is on his way to the Main Staff of Croatia"; in the early afternoon — that "Arso and Lola, according to the received telegram, have arrived at the Main Staff of Croatia"; and at 6:00 p.m. — that their arrival there had been confirmed, but that "the scouts have not yet returned," which concerned Captain Terzić.[334]

In the telegram from April 13, the Supreme Command orders the Main Staff of Croatia: "After resting, Arso and Lola should travel together with the Soviet officers (who had escaped from German captivity) under secure escort to the Bosnian Corps Headquarters, from where they will then proceed to us, via central Bosnia. They will travel together with the Bosnian units assigned to the task."[335]

On the same day, in the next telegram, the Supreme Command demands from the Croatian Main Staff the maintenance of constant contact with the 3rd Corps and orders "that Vladimir Popović, together with Arso Jovanović, immediately proceed to the Supreme Command."

In the telegram from April 17, Tito from Govza repeats the order: "Vladimir Popović should immediately go together with Arso to us."[336]

It wasn't until April 22 that Arso and Lola were able to report to the Supreme Commander.[337] Starting with the assessment that "military-political matters in Slovenia are correctly set up," they continue with a report on their work: "We have established military cooperation with the Croats in the sector of Dolenjska, Kupa and Žumberak. We discussed military plans and the creation of new military formations with the Croats. In Banija, cooperation was established with one Krajina brigade.

"In Krajina, four brigades and three units remain, with the divisional headquarters (4th Krajina Division). Specific plans were set. Five brigades with the corps headquarters are moving to central Bosnia, where all forces will arrive by May 1. Further communication with us will be via the Bosnian Corps." They headed to the Corps Headquarters that same day, with Vladimir Popović.

The next day (April 23), Captain Terzić reports to A. Ranković: "A telegram has arrived from Arso and Lola saying that an Anglo-American mission landed with parachutes near Brinje, which allegedly has full authority to survey the situation in the Balkans. We are awaiting a more detailed report on this."[338]

[333] *Ibid.,* p. 204.

[334] In the "big game hunting" trip, Tito and, for such occasions indispensable, M. Đilas and V. Dedijer went in the morning, returning only in the evening. General JNA Bogosav Mitrović Šumar will note (in his book *With the Supreme Commander*, Šabac 1975, p. 121) that "Comrade Tito caught a roe deer weighing 23 kg."

[335] AVII, Fund of the NOR, file 7-A, reg. no. 4/1.

[336] *Ibid.,* file 14, reg. no. 31/4.

[337] *Collection of Documents on the NOR*, Vol. II, Book 9, Doc. 124.

[338] AVII, Fund of the NOR, file 6-1, reg. no. 27/1.

On the same day, Tito responds to the Main Staff of Croatia: "Keep the so-called delegates with you until we investigate what is going on here. Do not let them go anywhere so that nothing happens to them or that they don't provoke something like Atherton did last year, to compromise us in front of world public opinion. They are your guests, and you should keep them safe until you get further instructions from us."[339] This was connected to Arso and Lola in that they "proposed" that one radio station be taken from the newcomers and given to the 3rd Corps Headquarters. In this regard, Tito ordered on April 28: "The radio station must not be taken from the mission; they can only be asked, if they don't really need two stations, to lend us one."[340]

Meanwhile, on April 25, 1943, the Supreme Command requested from the Croatian Main Staff urgent data "on the further intentions of the Germans and Italians in Yugoslavia and the Balkans and their new regrouping of forces." Arso and Lola got to work, providing particularly valuable information about the deployment and intentions of the 2nd Italian Army, as well as about the movements and plans of German and collaborationist units on the western front, which in memoir literature and historiography is considered the first serious warning of the imminent preparations for the offensive operation "Schwarz."[341]

On the last day of April, Arso and Lola report to the Supreme Command that, at the end of March, four newly formed Slovenian shock brigades "with a broad deployment" attacked the occupier's strongholds in Suha Krajina, the main base of the White Guard. "A seven-day battle developed in which the fascists were decisively defeated. 307 enemy soldiers were killed and many more were wounded"; 4 mortars, 7 heavy and 13 light machine guns, 60,000 rounds of ammunition, and a large quantity of supplies were captured. They report that the operations were led by "the headquarters of the Dolenjska Operational Zone, headed by Commander Milovan Šaranović and Commissar Viktor Avbelj," adding that the Italians, while retreating to Notranjska after the operation in Suha Krajina, set up an ambush on the slopes of Velika Gora, but, "through a clever manoeuvre by Comrade Šaranović, they were surrounded and destroyed. One hundred and fifty-seven dead remained on the battlefield, and the following were captured: 6 mortars, 6 heavy and 15 light machine guns, 70,000 rounds of ammunition and 2 radio stations." Arso was genuinely pleased by the successes of the Slovenian units in Dolenjska, achieved shortly after his departure from Slovenia — as he would tell the commander of the 5th Division, Milutin Morača — for at least two reasons: first, the Slovenes had finally revived, launching larger offensives, with operational units that had been formed with his help, as he had demanded from them in the name of the Supreme Commander, and the results would encourage them to engage in even broader battles; second, Milovan Šaranović had justified his trust. This undoubtedly significant success did not diminish Arso's doubt about the accuracy of the reported Italian casualties, considering them — provided by the "local commanders" — to be exaggerated, which was, as with minimizing their own losses, a known practice of warring parties.[342]

[339] *Ibid.,* file 11, reg. no. 44/1.

[340] AJ, Fund of the CC CPY, reg. no. 18140-P, 4-5(43).

[341] This was written by V. Dedijer, M. Đilas, P. Jakšić and G. Nikoliš.

The 3rd Corps Headquarters, along with the 5th Krajina Division, was rushing to meet the Supreme Command, with Arso and Lola ahead of them. On May 10, Tito ordered this group, from Donji Kruševac, to "urgently carry out a move to eastern Bosnia," where it would be reinforced with brigades from there and three NOP units, one of which was the Srem unit with 700 fighters, adding: "Destroy the railway along the way if you can."[343]

Together, Arso and Lola signed the "Directive for the 2nd Bosnian NOP Corps Headquarters for further military-political work" on May 11.[344] At the start, evidently in the language of the Chief of Staff, they defined the operational area: west of the Bosna and Neretva rivers, with support from the partisan forces in Dalmatia, Lika and Banija, concluding that "no corner of the assigned territory should remain without your military-political influence." In the instructions for organizing the 4th, 10th and 12th Divisions, consolidating and using them, they emphasized the need for them, from the manpower of larger units, "to form the 3rd and 4th shock brigades as soon as possible," keeping in mind "the main goal: the growth of our mobile strike units," leaving on the ground "less mobile detachment forces as security organs for our rear institutions."

They detail what must be undertaken in terms of organizational restructuring within the brigades of the three divisions, how to staff the Corps Headquarters, and how to establish communication with the SH of the National Liberation Army and Partisan Detachments of Yugoslavia (NOV and POJ), the Croatian Main Staff and the Headquarters of the 3rd Corps. The core principle is "vigorous tactical-operational work," where "actions must cover the widest possible area." They provided instructions on where to deploy the divisions, how to group forces for attacks on communication lines and urban clearance, aiming through such actions to create "liberated territories and more favourable conditions for work." Emphasizing the importance of mobilizing personnel and filling out units, they ordered that Chetniks be "approached in a differentiated manner, where the main criterion shall be their attitude toward fighting the occupier," and that "more than ever, vigilance must be maintained in handling the Domobrani properly." Under point five, they write: "In the event of a loss of contact with us, closely follow the broadcasts of the radio station *Slobodna Jugoslavija,* which

[342] Historian Salvatore Loi, on p. 263 of the study *La operazioni delle unita Italiane in Jugoslavija 1941-1945*, mentions the data that in the entire "Ljubljana province," during the entire war, 304 Italian soldiers and officers were killed, while 520 were wounded and 69 went missing, which is hard to believe; however, Arso admitted the loser's right to diminish the size of their loss, in front of others and himself, adding that — in the end — what matters is who won. (D. Nenezić, *op. cit.*, p. 135).

[343] AVII, Fund of the NOR, file 14, reg. no. 36/5.

[344] *Collection of Documents on the NOR*, Vol. II, Book 9, Doc. 175. On this day, the previous 1st Bosnian Corps was split into the 1st and 2nd (later, on October 5, renamed the 3rd and 5th, as we now call them for easier tracking of events). The 3rd (commanded by K. Nađ and commissar V. Popović) will head toward the SH, while the 5th (commanded by S. Rodić and commissar V. Stojnić) will be assigned tasks in the designated operational area.

provides general orientation and communicates the most important military and political directives for our operations." Following the order to the headquarters of both corps — to issue specific tasks to the divisions "in accordance with the plans set out in this directive" — the document "for the SH" is signed by Arso R. Jovanović and Ivo Ribar.

Ten days later (May 21), Tito informs the 3rd Corps Headquarters that a very large offensive against the Supreme Command and the units around it "has begun from all sides," and orders the Krajina forces "to urgently destroy the Sarajevo-Brod railway and move towards Olovo-Han Pijesak-Rogatica-Goražde, to assist our operation and strike the enemy in the rear. Kosta and Arso are responsible for the urgency of executing this order."[345] In relation to this, the 5th Krajina Division, urgently sent in the designated direction, will attempt to cross the Bosna River near Nemila and Begov Han on the night of May 26-27, but due to rising waters and a lack of means to overcome the river, it fails. This insistence on cooperation with the Krajina forces from the west, the constant requests (through Major V. Jones and Captain A. Hunter, who descended to Krbavsko polje on May 18-19) for Allied assistance in explosives and medicines, the expectation of an English military mission under Durmitor and other events, occurred in the days following May 15, when the German Supreme Command of the Southeast, after extensive preparations and the concentration of its own, Italian, Bulgarian and Ustaša-Domobran troops, numbering 127,000 soldiers, launched the offensive operation "Schwarz." The objective of the operation was not only to prevent the breakthrough of the Operational Group of Divisions into Serbia — which, after a short pause, had already started crossing the Drina, Tara and Lim rivers on May 15 — but also to destroy it, along with the supreme leadership of the NOP. The main idea of the enemy's offensive was to surround the Operational Group, gathered in the narrow mountainous, still pathless, waterless, and economically completely exhausted area of Montenegro and the Sandžak, thus extremely unfavourable for life, combat and unit manoeuvring, and then to strike it with concentric attacks from a circular operational base (Andrijevica-Podgorica-Nikšić-Trebinje-Mostar-Kalinovik-Goražde-Plevlja-Bijelo Polje), hitting the massifs of Durmitor, Maglić and Volujak, where it would be fragmented and, in parts, destroyed. The Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, hundreds of kilometres away from the battlefield, didn't know these details, but as a professional soldier and human being, he understood the dramatic nature of the calls sent daily to the 3rd Corps Headquarters and the requests for the Main Staff of Croatia to mediate with the Allied officers. Additionally, on May 29, after making the final decision about the breakthrough of the Operational Group of Divisions through Vučevo and Sutjeska and receiving a six-member English military mission under Durmitor, the Supreme Commander sent a message for "Arso's group": "Report via the Main Staff of Croatia because we can't hear you. If Kosta has crossed the railway (meaning Sarajevo-Brod — *I.M.*), he should immediately head towards Rogatica and Goražde. If he hasn't crossed, he should immediately head across Foča for Igman towards Trnovo and Kalinovik.

[345] AVII, Fund of the NOR, file 7-A, reg. no. 13/1.

Execute this at all costs because we are in a difficult situation." After listing part of the "German and Croatian" formations that had surrounded the Supreme Command and the units with it, he emphasized: "Your intervention is urgently needed."[346]

Here, chronologically, belongs a note from Dedijer's *Diary*, written on May 27 in Žabljak: "Arso's Senka left her two children last year in Piperi, at Arso's house below Ljuti Krš. Senka set out to see her children, marched for two days and two nights, and just as she descended into Piperi and caught sight of the house, she noticed Italian soldiers approaching — and had to turn back without seeing her children." She had used the operational pause between "Weiss" and "Schwarz" — that is, a moment of rest for the SH and the Division Operational Group before their push into Serbia — to leave Đurđevića Tara and, walking through the mountains and free territory, "hop over" to visit her daughters, about whom she had last heard in October of the previous year. At the time, they were reportedly hiding, protected by the brave hands of their grandmother Zorka, somewhere near their father's family home. She was not lucky enough to see them.

On June 5, Tito — once again, and in an increasingly urgent tone — addressed the Staff of the 3rd Corps, with whom Arso and Lola were marching: "I order you to proceed without delay in the direction of Fojnica-Igman-Trnovo. Do not engage in combat along the way unless absolutely necessary. March at night to avoid revealing your direction. Cross the railway wherever you judge best — perhaps near Pazarić. You are support for our units that are breaking through. If possible, order other units of yours in central Bosnia to follow you. This order is not to be delayed."[347]

On the same day (June 5), Arso, signing as "on behalf of the SH," ordered the Staff of the 5th Corps to send "a highly mobile tactical group" (three Krajina battalions, around 800 fighters) to the area of Ivan Sedlo. Their task was to cut the Sarajevo-Mostar railway and, through their actions, ease the advance of part of the forces from the Division Operational Group that was breaking through from Zelengora toward central Bosnia. He specified the group's composition, appointed Petar Vojnović as its commander, outlined the directions of movement, deployment at specific positions, procedures for receiving units from the encirclement, the organization of an intelligence service, the reporting system, and so on. Still guiding the direction of the 5th Division's march — at this stage toward Igman "to receive certain of our elements breaking through from the Kalinovik area" — he ordered the Corps Staff to deploy its forces "in such a way that you can, at any moment, come to the aid of the forces sent toward the Mostar railway." Leaving no room for ambiguity in such a critical situation, he emphasized that "the main strength of the Corps should be in the Glamoč-Bugojno-Mrkonjić Grad sector," while also providing a solution for one likely scenario: "In case the 5th Division units break through across the railway toward Trnovo and Kalinovik, your group should remain in the Bitovnja sector for a possible reception of our forces across the railway" — referring to the Division Operational Group units.

[346] *Ibid.,* box 6-1, reg. no. 1/2.

[347] *Ibid.,* box 14, reg. no. 36/6.

Following the dramatic unfolding of the situation, the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters added three separate notes under "P.S." to that order by 11:00 the next day: that large quantities of food be transferred from Glamoč to the area around Prekaje and also to the Pridjel-Vaganj sector, for the units breaking through from Sutjeska; that Mesud Hotić, Chief of Staff of the 10th Division, be sent to him immediately — someone he knew from last year's operations in Krajina as a capable and proactive staff officer, and whom he now wished to assign a suitable military role in the area inhabited by Muslims; and that, "according to the latest intelligence," part of the Operational Group from Zelengora was heading toward Bradina, and thus the newly formed Krajina detachment would "have to be engaged directly on the railway, in the Ivan Sedlo area and further south, to receive those of our elements," for which he specified locations and timing of arrival at the designated positions.[348] This shows how this professional soldier and responsible leader — caught in an extremely dramatic situation and cut off from the Supreme Command (up to 300 kilometres away) — in consultation with Lola Ribar, Vlado Popović, Kosta Nađ and others, pursued what he deeply believed to be the most appropriate course of action. He adapted his plan according to the latest intelligence and would not allow anyone to misinterpret or undermine it. By doing so, he assumed full responsibility for the course and outcome of the planned combat operations, striving to ensure he would not be caught off guard, restricted or overwhelmed by events as they unfolded. This was especially crucial because at dawn on June 6 — as Vladimir Dedijer reports in *Slobodna Jugoslavija's* broadcast — he heard a message from the Sušica Canyon: "Đido is in a dire situation. Arso must immediately move along the route Koča used last year." Dedijer adds: "Đido means all of us. Arso is in central Bosnia with the 5th Division of the Bosnian Corps and is to strike the Germans from the north, hitting them in the rear."[349]

Persistently seeking answers for every possible scenario, Arso tried to do the best he could for the surrounded units, with the forces available and under the given conditions. This was acknowledged both then and for years after — until, after 1948, some individuals began pushing the "narrative" that it was supposedly Arso's indecisiveness and slowness, compounded by alleged ignorance and incompetence, that had prevented the 3rd Corps — and especially the 5th Division — from advancing eastward more swiftly and offering quicker support to the SH and the Division Operational Group around it. In doing so, they weren't just attacking the integrity of the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, but also casting doubt on those trusted Krajina units — while persistently omitting the names of L. Ribar, V. Popović and K. Nađ, which is incomprehensible, considering they, along with Arso, formed a kind of operational headquarters that decisively influenced the course of events. The essential truth is that Arso and Lola — and, without doubt, also the commander and commissar of the 3rd Corps — were doing the utmost of what they knew and could manage. Milutin Morača was a capable and resolute commander. It is another matter that, alongside

[348] *Collection of Documents on the NOR*, Vol. II, Book 9, Doc. 175.

[349] V. Dedijer, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 276.

the unpredictable moves of a powerful enemy, some objective obstacles also got in the way — such as the overflowing Bosna River, whose width and force simply could not be overcome.

At the very end of the "Schwarz" operations, on June 19, Kardelj finally communicated with Tito via the radio station of the Main Staff of Croatia. He reported on the "favourable military-political situation in Slovenia" and asked "whether the formation of divisions should proceed." Tito's response came on June 27: "In Slovenia, form divisions from the existing brigades. Capable headquarters and division commanders must be appointed. Use those we have sent."[350] This stance would be heard by Arso on July 13, when, eight days after returning to his position as Chief of Staff, he submitted to Tito for signing the order for the formation of the 14th and 15th (Slovenian) Divisions of the NOVJ, in which he saw his own success in an otherwise bleak wartime mission in Slovenia — from the forces of the resistance movement and scattered partisan groups, brutally defeated in the four-month offensive by the occupiers, operational units had been created. Kardelj moved to the Main Staff of Croatia on June 10, primarily due to the joint action and operational connection between the Slovenian and Croatian units, something that Arso had particularly insisted on. Eight days later, he wrote to the top of the Communist Party of Slovenia about "the military-political and organizational experiences of the local leadership bodies that can be usefully applied to the Slovenians": the consolidation of units, the organization of the Main Staff, the concentration of forces for conducting battles and operations, etc., which were also focal points of Arso's work. Had he read this at the time, Arso would have — like Lola, who marched with him — had personal satisfaction for his efforts in breaking the Slovenian, incomprehensible and counterproductive, isolation, self-sufficiency, lack of inventiveness, inactivity, selfishness and the aversion to the "southerners." However, Kardelj mentions him in this letter only in a negative context: "I believe that recently we have been weakened primarily by the frontal battle line brought to us by our comrades from the 'south,' especially Arso himself," stressing that "this should be stopped at all costs," with the emphasis that in Slovenia "it has been much more harmful than anywhere else." To be fair, Arso never advocated for a frontal battle in any of the preserved documents, most of which we quote, but he did advocate for offensiveness in defence, for the consolidation of units, for their cooperation and good organization, for careful preparation and effective execution of attacks on strongholds, railways, roads and the objects along them — all with the goal of breaking the enemy's system, mobilizing new fighters, encouraging the people, and, particularly, obtaining heavy weaponry. After all, Kardelj himself wrote to Tito that in the year and a half of "digging" through Slovenian military fields, "not a single small cannon" was captured, admitting that this could only be achieved "on the line" — in an attack on strongholds, but that it required the willingness and courage to do so.

Kardelj also admits that the Slovenian Main Staff "has lagged behind in organizational terms, and therefore, understandably, does not have the influence in the army

[350] J. Broz, *Collected Works*, vol. 15, 228.

that the Croatian Main Staff has, which has more departments and they have more sectors." Just a few months earlier, he simply refused to listen to Arso's proposals regarding the improvement of the General Staff's organization, seeing them as a sign of "a Serbian officer of the old sort." But now, he acknowledged that their efforts were "too slow," even "very outdated," and offers them a "proposal for the organization of our staff in Slovenia," suggesting the formation of something he could only mechanically "copy" — three departments, each with 3-5 sectors. This was only one of the military issues for which the Chief of Staff gave an insurmountable evaluation to Kardelj, who would soon adopt everything Arso proposed, ruthlessly appropriating it and presenting it as his own intellectual achievement. This is something that is not easily forgotten, either in front of himself or others. On the contrary, Kardelj, defending his concept and work, would throw harsh words at Arso for decades after the war. However, this and all the "Marxist judges" who wrote after 1948 about the "Slovenian sin" of the Chief of Staff — under the pressure of facts and the truth as the supreme criterion of practice — all fell apart, in line with the popular saying that "it is easy to measure the tail of a dead wolf."

On June 23, from Slemenska Planina, the Supreme Commander reported to the 1st Proletarian Division Headquarters: "We have made radio contact with the corps. Arso with two brigades near Kreševo and will be on the Sarajevo-Konjic railway on the 25th of this month. Intense fighting is underway in central Bosnia."[351]

The next day, from the village of Petrović near Kladanj, he informed the 3rd Corps Headquarters that he has "ordered Peko to eliminate Olovo and Kladanj, and Koča to take Han Pijesak and Vlasenica," but that "the brigades of both groups are exhausted and hungry," and therefore "their combat capabilities are weak. They need rest and bread." In this regard, he gave tasks to the corps units (which included Arso and Lola) to primarily "prevent enemy manoeuvring." On the same day, Captain Velimir Terzić, signing "for the Supreme Command," informed the 1st Proletarian Division Headquarters that "Arso's group with two brigades is advancing across Foča and Kreševo," and estimated that they would "reach the Sarajevo-Ivan Sedlo railway on June 25."

Finally, on July 5, Tito (at 4:50 p.m.) reported to the 1st Proletarian Division Headquarters from Brateljević: "Arso and Lola have arrived. Their division is in the Zenica-Zvijezda area. They destroyed Kaknja and many bridges on the Zenica-Sarajevo railway." At the same time, he informed the 7th Banija Division Headquarters: "Comrade Arso has crossed the Sarajevo-Zenica railway with the 5th Division, destroying 30 km of track with bridges and attacked the Kaknja mine, which they completely destroyed."[352]

On July 8, Tito informed Koča: "Arso has arrived with three brigades at Zvijezda.

[351] This refers to the action of the 10th and 12th NOV Division of the 5th Corps. AVII, Fund of the NOR, file 706, reg. no. 1/38-15.

[352] *Ibid.,* file 812, reg. no. 17-1/1. Two days later, Arso would sign again, for the first time after an eight-month absence, as the Chief of Staff, just below an order to the staff of that division. The previous day, V. Dedijer wrote that Arso said "The 5th Division is now good. Otherwise, it too suffered greatly from the spotted fever. I ask Arso how things were in Slovenia. He says the unity of the people was exemplary. Our military leaders who went with him to Slovenia performed well." (*Diary*, Vol. II, p. 347).

Arso [Jovanović] stigao s tri brigade na Zvijezdu. Uz put uništio brodsku prugu i rudnik Kakanj i 6 mostova. U Kaknju našao velik plijen, između ostalog i 2000 kg dinamita.

Finally, good news: "Arso has arrived."

On the way, he destroyed the mountain railway and the Kaknja mine, and 6 bridges (in a report to Dimitrov the following day, he mentioned: 6 railway stations destroyed, 30 km of track, 2 railway and 3 road bridges — *I.M.*). In Kaknja, they found a large haul, including 2,000 kg of dynamite."[353]

The meeting with the leadership of the Supreme Command and the three members arriving from the west was very warm. "We embraced like aunts, happy that this offensive was broken, that we survived the mortal danger and that we were together again," recalled A. Ranković. "Tito was particularly happy to meet Lola and Arso; he was impressed by the youth, energy, openness and certainly the unwavering loyalty of the first; with the second, he appreciated his military knowledge and responsibility, was confident in him during uncertain military situations, assured of his complete loyalty, but also his readiness to oppose him with arguments drawn from his assessment of the situation and the balance of forces. In his absence, we had Velimir Terzić with us, a man we valued for his human virtues and military knowledge. He was an exemplary staff officer and a personally brave man, but during the most difficult times on the Neretva and Sutjeska, we missed the more robust Arso; we didn't speak about it loudly, but we all, each in our own way, felt it, as seen from Tito's daily dispatches urging us to hurry and help us, with the 5th Division, offering a helping hand. I never discussed this with Tito until August 1948, and after that, it was pointless. However, I am sure he regretted sending him to Slovenia and depriving himself of his cooperation during the Neretva and Sutjeska operations. Only in the spring of 1946, when the wartime Chief of Staff was studying in Moscow, during a break in the Political Bureau session — where, based on Gošnjak's report, the results of the reorganization of the Yugoslav Army and the organization of the Ministry of Defence and the General Staff were discussed — did he tell me that he had a firm intention to recall Arso from Slovenia before the offensive move from Krajina towards Serbia, as he would be the best to implement the adopted decisions. He added that for such, peacetime, discussions and solutions, his variants and alternatives would be useful, because someone who decides by argument forces themselves to think, re-evaluate practices and check their own stance before making a decision."[354]

During this meeting in Brateljevići near Kladanj, Arso, as usual, did not have time for long conversations about the most intense eight months of his life, nor for emotional outbursts, despite it being the perfect moment for them; in the middle of offensive actions by weakened, exhausted and starving NOPJ units across eastern Bosnia, he took up the tasks of the Chief of Staff, from which he had been separated for

[353] AVII, Fund of the NOR, file 706, reg. no. 1/59-15.

[354] From a conversation with A. Ranković, October 1973, in Belgrade.

238 dramatic days while engaged on the other end of the battlefield. His return to duty brought joy to everyone, and especially, it seems, to the Supreme Commander — who, finally, would again have a highly skilled, determined and persistent Chief of Staff by his side, and to Captain Terzić — who, according to Tito's promise, was "scheduled for reassignment to a new position."

Arso returned, and in Slovenia, on duties in the headquarters from battalion to operational zone, there remained eleven selected officers whom he had brought there and, in agreement with the political and military leadership, left: five of them were officers (from sergeant major to lieutenant) of the Army of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (M. Šaranović, R. Tanasković, Z. Jovanović, P. Brajović and P. Popivoda), to whom Kardelj, Maček and other powerbrokers from the top of the NOP of Slovenia forever feared the "Serbian officers" and had an extremely suspicious, or rather sectarian, attitude; seven of them, along with two companions who would grow into brigade commanders during the NOP in Slovenia, and nine in total, were Montenegrins (whom Kardelj, Maček and the "group" considered, among other things, prone to extremism and sectarianism); six of them, for their merits in the NOP, would be declared national heroes of Yugoslavia — Milovan Šaranović, Zdravko Jovanović, Predrag Jevtić, Radomir Božović, Milo Kilibarda and Boško Dedeić; two of them from this group, Šaranović and Kilibarda, would become chiefs of the Main Staff of Slovenia; also, two others, colonels Rajko Tanasković and Pero Popivoda, would sequentially become commanders of the 7th Corps, but both — judging by the records from their "files" and Kardelj's personal requests to Tito — were dismissed "for indecency in private life" (young, healthy, and with the halo of famous commanders — they would extinguish the fire in the heart of some beauty from the sunny side of the Alps), and deemed "unsuitable for cooperation and incapable of commanding," were sent to the "south," with a note that they would "probably be useful" there, and immediately replaced by Slovenes.[355] With almost the same "recommendation," Lieutenant Colonel Danilo Šorović was also sent back from Slovenia in the fall of 1944, from a high position in the General Staff. All three were correctly accepted in the Supreme Command and, after a brief verification of the records accompanying them, were appointed to high military positions: Colonel R. Tanasković first as Chief of Staff of the 23rd, and then as Commander of the 25th Division; Colonel P. Popivoda as Commander of the 22nd Shock Division; Lieutenant Colonel D. Šorović as Chief of Staff of the 46th Serbian Division, and later, as a colonel, as Commander of the 52nd Kosovo Division.

From Arso's group in Slovenia, the following were killed on duty: Milovan Šaranović, Zdravko Jovanović, Predrag Jevtić and Aleksandar Leko Marjanović, as well as Boško Dedeić Pop and Svetolik Mito M. Jovanović, who grew from companions to brigade commanders.

Tito did not say a word about Arso's work in Slovenia, which he did not raise either, confident that there would be an opportunity for it later, the best of which, with Kardelj, would be during the relevant discussions. His personal satisfaction came

[355] AVII, Fund of the NOR, file 62, reg. no. 4/2-9.

from the content of two radio messages from Kardelj and Tito's responses to them: one about the formation of the first two Slovenian divisions and the other about the removal of I. Maček. The first had already been discussed; the second in short: on August 4, Kardelj, instead of I. Maček, proposed Franz Rozman as the new commander of the General Staff, adding in parentheses: "32 years old, worker, Party member since 1936, was in Spain, completed an officer course there, in the partisans since 1941, was the commander of the Styria Operational Zone, we consider him the best commander in Slovenia." He considered this change necessary "because of larger operational tasks and raising the role of the commander." Maček, he says, "is going to the CC for organizational matters" (where his predecessor, F. Leškošek, was also "removed"). He requested immediate approval for this "staff decision." When asked what he thought about it, Arso simply stated that this was certainly "much better than the previous, absolutely unacceptable solution." Four days later, in a letter to the "comrades in Slovenia," Kardelj asks his comrades, "how Stane is doing," adding as a recommendation: "Tito says he remembers him from Spain and that he was very good there." Thus, another of Tito's chosen ones ascended into the constellation of "our Spaniards" — alongside commanders in top positions: Koča, Peko, Nađ, Gošnjak, Vlado Ćetković, Ivo Rukavina, Danilo Lekić, Dušan Kveder and others.

Known for his correctness, discipline and loyalty to the highest leadership, Arso did not want to comment, much less evaluate, the recently concluded dramatic wartime events in which he, in any case, had not participated. However, the conclusions drawn from the analysis of the actions and conduct of brigades and divisions, which he had attended by virtue of his position, where some leaders openly and clearly spoke about the mistakes "from above" made from January 20 to June 20, 1943, especially in the battles on the Neretva and Sutjeska, which were paid for with tens of thousands of lives, as well as critical observations and "poisonous comments" from individuals in the supreme leadership and those around him, forced him to think critically about what he had heard and, often in the role of the leader of these analyses, to conclude.

Harsh words, for example, were heard in the analysis of the combat actions of the 2nd Proletarian Brigade, in which the Supreme Commander participated; it survived the Neretva and Sutjeska with the deepest scars, and Tito did not spare it harsh criticism and some sporadic individual occurrences, which left a very heavy impression. Regarding the meeting dedicated to the analysis of the conduct of the 6th Eastern Bosnia Brigade, R. Čolaković recorded: "When they were discussing the 6th Brigade in the Supreme Command in July, Arso asked me: 'Who did this stupidity of bringing the 6th into the encirclement?' When I briefly said 'He' — Arso fell silent. Already then (referring to Tito — *I.M.*), no one dared to say a word of disagreement, let alone say that he had made a mistake. Marko and others around him tolerated this. 'So that Stari wouldn't get upset' — that was the excuse. In fact, they were protecting his personal favour."[356] The participants of the meeting knew very well who "He" was — but

[356] These words were recorded by Roćko, based on memories and notes, under the date August 31, 1982, and they were published in the preparation of Dr. Zdravko Antonić, *Rodoljub Čolaković in the Light of His Diary*, Belgrade 1991, p. 508.

they also understood why no one dared to mention his name in a negative context. Not even Arso — as this witness recorded — said another word. And Tito had heard both Arso's question and Roćko's response about the "unnamed" culprit, who was, of course, "under review."

Ročko was a witness who was trusted, but when it came to writing about the details of silence in front of Tito, he was, at the very least, uninformed — not everyone in the Supreme Command remained silent in front of "Stari." Witnesses from the front row, Ranković and Đilas, note how Tito, when he came out of his cave, tent, hut or similar lodging in the morning, no one dared or wanted to approach him until he had composed himself — except for Arso. He, "by nature of the removed position of Chief of Staff," had to, and regularly did, report to the Supreme Commander without hesitation or self-criticism — "before Miloš" — about current issues, the situation on the battlefield and news from world fronts. And that he knew how to "smile" at the expense of Tito's decisions is evidenced by this example: at the suggestion of the commander of the 2nd Proletarian Division, Peko Dapčević, the Supreme Commander had decided to reinforce the depleted proletarian unit with parts of the 5th Shock Brigade, which had arrived after being decimated on June 13 at Tjentište. Arso firmly opposed this — first in private, and then, to gain support, in front of a group of the highest officers — arguing that the 5th, also known as "Sava's Brigade," was an old unit with rich combat experience, hardened personnel and an enviable military tradition, and would quickly recover from its heavy losses, replenishing with young fighters gathered around parts of the brigade that had broken through from the hell of Tjentište in two directions — one toward the capital and the other toward Montenegro. This position of the Chief of Staff, supported by the two newly arrived leaders of the 2nd Group of Divisions, Radovan Vukanović and Milovan Đilas, was adopted as a decision. Life would soon prove its true value and significant advantages.[357]

Believing it unacceptable to remain silent about the sharp criticisms made in analyses regarding the command of the NOP forces, especially in the battles on the Neretva and Sutjeska, Arso carefully and precisely reported them to the Supreme Commander. Moreover, he felt obligated to ask his old comrades and close friends, as well as his deputy and especially some of the senior commanders, a few uncomfortable questions, asking them for further clarification and even reproaching them. For example, he asked them how they could have allowed: being "led into that graveyard — the Prozor Basin and the Rama Canyon," and soon after, "into the abyss of Sutjeska," instead of staying "together" in smaller columns; how the units were completely taken by surprise at the start of Operation "Schwarz" on May 15 and that the decision about the direction of the breakthrough from the encirclement was delayed until May 29; and how the 2nd Group of Divisions, with thousands of wounded and typhus patients, was shoved into Tjentište, resulting in horrific losses that significantly increased the

[357] The brigade was reinforced and, in battle, was hardened to such an extent that it was praised three times by the General Staff and, at the inspection on July 13, 1944, in Kolašin, was declared a Proletarian brigade.

total number of Sutjeska victims.[358]

That is to say, he did speak, they say — not mentioning the name of the Supreme Commander — but instead engaging in a professional and reasoned discussion with competent and responsible individuals. Still, it was inevitable that all of it would reach Tito's ears, and rightly believed to be "under review." Tito and Arso would have a very tense conversation about this on August 10, 1943, at Petrovo polje, inside Tito's tent. It was no coincidence that the press and publicists — particularly in the early 1990s and largely thanks to Dedijer and his "sources" — began to write about this. They wrote that Arso had gone a step further in his criticism; supposedly, he remarked that even a sergeant — if he had, during an exam, led units into an encirclement at Tjentište using only a map or terrain knowledge from nearby mountains and plateaus — would have failed. He stressed that the decision, made without the most essential intelligence and proper analysis, was so unacceptable that, if he didn't know the Supreme Commander personally, he would have thought Tito had abandoned command and surrendered his army to a cruel fate — especially the 2nd Division Group and thousands of wounded soldiers. Allegedly, bitter after months of built-up frustration, he also spoke about the "welcome" he had received in Slovenia as a delegate of the SH with special powers — especially from Kardelj, who was widely seen there as Tito's favourite, but disliked by the military commanders.

There are no written records of that conversation, nor were there witnesses. Later, Ranković only recalled that Arso "walked out of Tito's tent like he'd been scalded." Đilas wasn't fully informed about the matter — since he had been "busy preparing for the next day's movement toward Croatia, with Lola, Crni and Terzić, for an extremely unpleasant mission" — but he had heard that the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters had "been summoned for a dressing down," believing it was "because of something in Slovenia." Four decades later, Đilas reflected that Arso "was not the kind of man who had any reason to bow or submit to anyone; he did what he was authorized to do — and the same applied in Slovenia. Another matter altogether is that Kardelj, using his influence with Tito, went his own way and got what he wanted — he sidelined the representative of the SH and implemented his own concept of resistance until the international situation became clearer, preserving the Slovene army, lives and property." If Broz did intentionally remove Arso from the SH in the autumn of 1942 — which Đilas found hard to believe — then by spring 1943 he was calling him back daily to come and meet them, for at least two reasons: to support them with the units he led, and to resume the duties of Chief of the Supreme Headquarters. After all, Radovan and Đilas, along with comrades from their division group left to a cruel fate, knew best how right Arso had been in most of his criticisms of the Supreme Command's misjudgements at Sutjeska and in the surrounding areas — and Tito knew it too, personally, as the Supreme Commander. He was ultimately responsible for the massacre of the wounded, for the disintegration of the 3rd Assault Division and for Sava's death

[358] Colonel V. Kučan cites a figure of "about 7,500," while some historians mention "total losses" and "more than 10,000" killed and died from wounds, typhus, and hunger between the Drina and Bosnia, and from Piva to Spreča.

— which all of them felt painfully. Tito didn't have to — and by his nature couldn't — publicly admit any of that, and he was accountable to no one but Moscow. But he couldn't free himself from the weight of that guilt, especially after recovering physically and psychologically from all the horrors of Sutjeska. Radovan documented some of it — in his memoir *On the Warpath*, in the *Sutjeska* anthology of recollections and in the monograph on the 3rd Assault Division. Because of this, he faced serious trouble from Tito and, even more so, from Tito's loyal followers — particularly among some orthodox military historians. But Radovan had come to terms with that cost ahead of time. As for Arso — often personally naive but always politically cautious — he spoke his mind, even knowing it wasn't always wise. But it was an expression of his professional and moral duty to truth and to life. Had he not done so, he might today be publishing memoirs — and he certainly had more than enough to write about. And you wouldn't now be reading the chatty Dedijer about this "close encounter" between two strong men at Petrovo polje — you'd be hearing it from him.[359]

In this story, the only thing that can be said with complete certainty is that the conversation in Tito's tent took place on August 10, at Petrovo polje on Vlašić. It happened shortly after Tito had awarded ranks to General Koča Popović and Kosta Nađ, Lieutenant Colonel Vladimir Velebit, Major Momo Đurić and others. Arso, despite being read first on the list of the first eight Major Generals of the National Liberation Army, did not receive his general's rank in front of the troops. Instead, he was summoned to the tent — something a few people "took note of." Two other details are not disputed: that Arso stayed in the tent for about twenty minutes, and that when he came out — as recalled by the newly promoted Lieutenant Milorad Mića Janković — "he looked dejected and had bulging neck veins, which was a sign of his fury."[360]

In any case, even if Arso was right in everything he said to his superior, he could not have been entirely correct, especially considering that the context of the wartime situation in the area from Lim to Sutjeska literally dictated decisions, and some contingencies, such as the occupation of the Vučevo plateau or the breakthrough at Balinovac, pointed to the outcomes of the battles. And it is possible that Arso's critical reasoning was judged in line with the old truth – that after the battle, especially a lost one, it is easy to be a general. He certainly had arguments for his assessments, which he advocated in the closest circle of military leadership and presented in conversations with relevant officers, pointing, above all, to the lessons of those losses. Of course, such analyses were met with condemnation from those commanders who had led their units and themselves into the imposed, usually the toughest, circumstances, and then, with delay and often haphazardly, or on intuition, made decisions, which in the Battle of Sutjeska came at too high a price. He reasoned that it was not a good situation in that Supreme Command where personal and argument-based viewpoints could not be openly presented, up to the adoption of a decision, meaning that it was not good if one could not express objections to the Supreme Commander, certainly well-intentioned

[359] From a conversation with M. Đilas, September 1994, in Belgrade.

[360] From a conversation with M. Janković, December 1996.

and in a polite tone, in a manner that would not hurt his personality or diminish his reputation. The Chief of Staff respected the Supreme Commander, not least because he was 15 years older, but he did not allow anyone to deprive him of the right and obligation to present his own opinion in the analysis of combat actions — battles and engagements, in which, as in this case, "he sometimes exaggerated." Of course, Tito, as an "inconvenient collaborator" — both here and elsewhere — could easily have gotten rid of him: sending him on some new mission (to Serbia, Kosovo, Vojvodina or Albania, or perhaps again to Slovenia); or even physically eliminating him (in a well-staged and rehearsed "circumstance"). However, in the existing conditions of warfare, he was indispensable to him as a military expert necessary for leading the upcoming, increasingly significant operations, which were expected to be conducted in cooperation with the Allies, and perhaps more than that – as a living proof of the broadness of the NOB and the cooperative nature of the communist leadership.

However, neither Arso — immediately after Victory Day, when he was tasked by the political leadership to write the history of the victorious war — managed to rise above the highly orchestrated victorious euphoria and the agitprop language in the assessments made in the *Overview of the National Liberation War* ("NOB"). The analyses of combat actions in the battles at Neretva and Sutjeska (5 pages), although written with a somewhat elevated "temperature," were militarily correct, but the evaluations and conclusions were cloaked in praise, with Tito being attributed the epithet of a "genius military leader." At that time, this was probably the only way it could, and had to, be written.[361]

Although hundreds of kilometres away from Neretva and Sutjeska, many, particularly from the enemy's ranks, thought that Arso was there, in the midst of the events, making decisions. For example, General Staff Major Zaharije Ostojić, commander of the Detachment of the Supreme Command of Draža Mihailović at Neretva, with 18,000 Chetniks (as he reports), reported on February 23 that the strongest group of NOVJ, "under the command of Tito and Arso Jovanović," was attacking via Preko, in the direction of the hill. Colonel Dr. Mario Romano of the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA), a Jewish doctor sentenced by the NDH authorities to treat typhus patients in the Foča region in the spring of 1943, recalled how panicked Domobran officers from the 4th Hunting Brigade, after the battles at Trovrh and Zlata Bora (May 21-22), where Koča Popović's units won, rushed into the market (where the Chief of Staff was remembered from the spring of 1942), shouting: "Oh, people of Foča, damn your mothers, here comes Arso Jovanović with his divisions!" They were convinced that only he could have inflicted such a defeat on them. The ideologist of the Chetnik movement, Dragisa Vasic, in a June 1943 document full of bitterness and reproach, blamed Čiča (D. Mihailović) for how his most famous commanders at Neretva were defeated by "Captain Arso Jovanović and student Peko Dapčević." From that time, there is also the deep sigh of the "father of Serbia" (the army general deposed in December 1941), Milan Đ. Nedić, over the Chetnik defeat at Neretva, recorded in *Novi*

[361] A. Jovanović, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-43.

Vreme: "Oh, Arso Jovanović, may you have been deprived of your mother's milk for going with the communists as my best officer!" General Staff Colonel Ljuba Petrović, who had twice tried to escape from the German camp, told Generals V. Terzić and M. Apostolski, after returning to liberated Belgrade, how, detained in one of the "offlags," he heard from the broadcasts of the Allied radio stations about the outcome of the battle at Neretva, firmly believing that the creator of that victory could have been his student Arso R. Jovanović, whose "splendid military talent" he had noticed as a war skills instructor at the Military Academy.[362]

Strangely, Arso was also noticed by Captain F.W. Deakin, head of the Operation "Typical" part of the Allied military mission, when he parachuted into Njegovuđa under Durmitor on the night of May 27-28. He writes in his memoir *The Warrior's Mountain* that in the morning, "among the trees surrounding the Black Lake," Arso Jovanović was with Tito, and in the following days, "in the ensuing chaos," it became clear that this "grumpy witness, obviously unaccustomed to strangers," was, in fact, "the main military expert advisor to the Supreme Commander."[363] The two of them, however, could only meet about a hundred kilometres away, 39 days later, from which point, over the next two and a half months (until Brigadier Fitzroy Maclean arrived on September 17), they would have more frequent meetings and conversations, not always pleasant.

Finally: why was Arso sent to Slovenia and what did he do there — this is a question that has been written about in the years following the unfortunate 1948, often arbitrarily and inaccurately. Regarding this — along with what has already been presented here —is a shorter selection of opinions from relevant authors and quotes from authentic sources.

Colonel Savo Orović records in his *War Diary* that "Chief of Staff Arso Jovanović, along with twenty comrades, was sent to Slovenia to reinforce the local leadership cadre."[364]

In *The Revolutionary War,* M. Đilas writes that Arso, with a group of military officers, was sent to Slovenia because there "the Italians, after three months of fighting, succeeded in suppressing the uprising and the free territory, and Tito believed that Slovenia was lagging behind in military organization."[365]

In the *Collection of Documents on the NOR,* it is stated that in Slovenia "he provided assistance in organizing the units of the National Liberation Army of Slovenia."[366]

In an article addressed to the international public, titled "The Struggle of the People of Occupied Yugoslavia," written at the end of March 1944 in Drvar, Tito mentions that in the autumn of 1942, "the Supreme Command sent its chief of staff and 11

[362] From a conversation with M. Šušović, October 1986, in Podgorica.

[363] V. Deakin, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-112.

[364] S. Orović, *op. cit.*, p. 312.

[365] M. Đilas, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

[366] *Collection of Documents on the NOR*, Vol. II, Book 7.

officers to Slovenia to organize regular units from partisan detachments."[367] However, later, driven by "hindsight" and political speculation, he provided completely different reasons for such a decision. One of them is mentioned in "Bela Vila" at Brioni, in front of General and writer Veljko J. Kovačević, the leader of the creation of his projected and much-announced but unpublished military memoirs. Prompted by the general's words that Arso was sent to Slovenia "to be rid of him as an incapable Chief of Staff before exceptionally important events," mentioning also the "counter-offensive of the Operational Group of Divisions towards Neretva and beyond" — Tito, according to the preserved transcript, added that he had, in fact, sent him from Bosanski Petrovac to get rid of him, concluding: "If he had been capable as Chief of Staff, I would not have sent him." He then said that the Supreme Command was "quite crowded" at the time and that they had a lot of work because "Arso was unfit for the position," so, as the Supreme Commander, "he had had enough of him, and the people (he meant the commanders — *I.M.*) would not accept his interventions," they "always knew what I ordered and what he ordered from the Supreme Command, so they did not accept his orders, because his instructions and directions were often foolish and put together in the old Yugoslav mould. They were not adequate..."[368]

Undoubtedly, from the same "kitchen" comes Maček's much later realization that Tito had "difficulties" with Arso and that his visit to Slovenia was a relief for the Supreme Command. The essence of almost every day's telegrams from Tito to Arso, instructing him to hurry to meet them after hearing on April 10 that he had arrived at the headquarters of the Supreme Command of Croatia — to provide help at Sutjeska and beyond — Maček, however, did not understand.

Historian Branko Petranović writes in his study *Serbia in the Second World War 1939-1945* (1992) that "Arso Jovanović's attempt, based on Tito's authority, to form brigades in Slovenia in 1942, which would leave its territory, faced resistance from the CC of the Communist Party of Slovenia and a disavowal of the Supreme Command's representative's authority, with the justification that this would remove the 'organic basis' of the Slovenian army." This well-informed historian of the NOB (along with the reference from Kardelj's letter from January 17, 1943, that the Slovenians "fear Serbian officers and Serbian hegemony") supports his conclusion: "While the units of other Yugoslav nations in brigades under the direct command of the Supreme Command fought outside the borders of their countries, only the Slovenians did not accept that their units cross into the territory of other Yugoslav countries, except for the border areas of Croatia."[369]

General and publicist Pavle Jakšić notes that Kardelj — "who insisted on assistance not only in terms of material support but also human sacrifices" — in his letter to Tito of January 12, 1943, "militarily and organizationally, tactically and operationally, and not ideologically or politically, characterized the actions of the Chief of Staff of the

[367] J. Broz, *Collected Works*, Vol. 19, p. 180.

[368] Original transcript in the Archive of the Military History Institute.

[369] B. Petranović, *op. cit.*, 528.

Supreme Command, Arso Jovanović (in his attempt to turn the Slovenian 'resistance movement' into a real war, like those conducted by the brigades and divisions around the Supreme Command — a potential weakness!) as sectarian, 'an attempt from the south' to switch the 'Slovenian army from Slovenian to Serbo-Croatian language,' as a violation of the national rights of the Slovenian people."[370]

Colonel Dr. Zdravko Klanjšček, a renowned historian of the Second World War, mentions Arso only once on one of the 442 pages in his book *The National Liberation War in Slovenia 1941-1945:* "With the consent of the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters of the National Liberation Army and National Liberation Army, Arso Jovanović, who arrived in Slovenia with a group of officers, the General Staff reorganized the Slovenian National Liberation Army; instead of groups of units and groups of brigades (four), operational zones." According to him, these officers came with a task given by the Supreme Commander — "to transfer the experiences of the partisan war, especially the Proletarian brigades, to Slovenia. After getting acquainted with the circumstances, they quickly became very good and popular commanders in Slovenian units."[371]

Ladislava Slavka Becele, a prominent activist of the National Liberation Movement of Dolenjska, and later from May 1944, serving in the Supreme Command, and after the war, the wife of A. Ranković, writes in her text *Slovenia of My Youth* at the end of a few lines dedicated to this "group of southerners," including a description of their warm welcome: "Arso Jovanović visited some areas where these officers were assigned to command duties in the headquarters of the NOB units in Slovenia, and then returned to the Supreme Command." Unlike some leading Slovenes — no further words.[372]

Let's conclude Arso's "Slovenian period" with two retrospective evaluations made by Kardelj from one and three decades later.

In 1951, in Ljubljana, at a ceremonial gathering marking the decade of the formation of the Liberation Front, Kardelj analysed the alleged mistakes of Arso Jovanović in Slovenia and their real and, particularly, possible consequences, in the main report spread over six pages. He largely repeated the arguments from his letters to Tito from January 12 and 17, 1943, but with even sharper (dis)qualifications. He called him a "specialist of the old school," a former officer who "only counted numbers, not the people and their energies," a General Staff officer who "was simply terrified of the people," a "casual companion of the NOB," a "demoralized soul," an advocate for creating "an army as the only lifeline," a "paper strategist," etc. The conclusion implied that the CC and the Main Staff of Slovenia "prevented him from executing his plan." From the extensive "Marxist analysis" presented to a packed hall, later "refined" for print and public publication, he concluded: "I am not at all surprised that this same defeatism eventually led Arso Jovanović to betrayal and traitorous death. In 1942, the forces of the Hitlerite army and the immediate negative consequences of the Italian-German offensive affected him, and in 1948, the power of the Soviet army standing behind the Cominform resolution. A capitulator remained a capitulator."[373]

[370] P. Jakšić, *Over Memories*, Belgrade, 1990, vol. I, 294.

[371] Z. Klajnšček, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-16.

[372] S. Ranković, *Life with Leka,* Belgrade 1998, p. 7.

A die-hard Stalinist, a sectarian student who surpassed his teacher in his sectarian reasoning and practice, a Communist University of the National Minorities of the West (KUNMZ) graduate, signatory of the founding act of the Cominform (1947), and the judge for four of his Political Bureau colleagues — Andrija Hebrang and Sreten Žujović (1948), Milovan Đilas (1954) and Aleksandar Ranković (1966) — he only laid down his pen before the truth shortly before his death (1979). That is the "second evaluation."

In the mid-seventies, General and publicist Milija Stanišić met him at the home of the Vlahović family near the "Island of Flowers" near Tivat. The very kind hosts created an atmosphere in which Stanišić, working on his book *The Personnel of the Revolution,* asked Kardelj how, with the passage of time, he evaluates the group of military leaders who were sent from Oštrelj to Slovenia in November 1942 as personnel assistance to the command. In a good mood, the respondent answered without hesitation that "he doesn't blame any of them, except one," adding that "he is neither Arso nor a Montenegrin."[374] So, Kardelj ultimately did not condemn Arso, whom he fiercely criticized in two letters to Tito in January 1943, nor the prominent "southerners" Pero Popivoda and Danilo Šorović, who, at his request, were expelled from Slovenia in October 1944.

At least in words, Kardelj, three decades later and before his death, had the strength to rise above his own separatist captivity and sectarianism in assessing the "southerners," something his chosen and the Commander of the Main Staff of Slovenia, Ivan Maček, could never do, because even in 1983, in his wartime memoirs, he recorded Arso's name alongside the words "pretentious babbling" and "an irrational strategist."

So much — at first glance, perhaps overly detailed — about the eight months of life and work of the Chief of Staff of the NOB Arso Jovanović on the war mission in Slovenia. I dare say it was among the most intense of his 41-year-long life. Meanwhile, the essential reason for Kardelj's persistent request for personnel assistance from Tito has also been revealed: "The Slovenian fighter," he admitted, "was slow, immobile, indecisive and without individual initiative in action, which can also be seen in our commanders. Serbian and Montenegrin officers have much more initiative, which is why I thought it would be good for us to get a few people from the Supreme Command."[375]

[373] E. Kardelj, *Ten Years of the People's Revolution 1941-1951*, Belgrade 1951, pp. 32-37.

[374] He mentioned a name, the citation of which is unnecessary for this topic.

[375] P. Jakšić, *Over Memories*, Belgrade, 1990, vol. I, 294.

Part Seven

THE GENERAL AND THE DEPUTY

• First Major General of the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia (NOVJ), at the top of the list of 5,000 promoted
• Leading operations for the disarmament of 18 Italian divisions
• Unfortunate beginning of cooperation with the Allies
• On behalf of the General Staff, he greeted the members of the People's Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ZAVNOBiH) and the People's Assembly of Yugoslavia (AVNOJ)
• Maclean's high praise for the "Chief of Tito's Staff"
• Finally, one Slovenian division on "foreign" territory
• Far-reaching military significance of the decisions adopted in Jajce and Tehran
• Breaking the cycle of winter operations by the 2nd Panzer Army of the Wehrmacht
• Organizing the state of affairs in the General Staffs of the 8th Corps and the 2nd Proletarian Division
• Advocate of the decision to turn Vis into a fortress on the Adriatic
• First Battle of Banja Luka: tactical failure, operational goal achieved
• Welcoming Majors Randolph Churchill, Linn Farrish and Ian Mackenzie

Petrovo polje *(August 4-25, 1943)*

On the last night of July, Arso, together with Koča Popović and Pavle Ilić, spent time on the Bosna River. He supervised the crossing of partisan brigades across the river and the railway, on the section from Vranduk to Nemila. He directed them and urged them to hurry through the fords, ensuring there were no delays, especially avoiding any confusion caused by non-swimmers. Skilled in water, he helped a few panicked people reach the other bank and even supervised the mining of the railway at several locations.

The General Staff's march column, with strong front and flank protection, arrived on August 3 in the village of Pavlovići. In the afternoon, Veljko Dragićević's radio operators set up antennas and tried to catch news from Moscow and London. They "caught" a BBC broadcast about the "5th and 6th brigades of Draža Mihailović's army crossing the Italian border and now liberating Istria." At this, Arso, Koča, Lola and a few others jumped up angrily, while the members of the English military mission remained silent in embarrassment. The Supreme Commander, informed of this diversion by the Chief of Staff, was boiling with rage...

At Petrovo polje, V. Dedijer recorded: "Today, an official protest was lodged with the English mission regarding the news of Draža's brigades in Slovenia. Arso came and handed over the protest on behalf of the General Staff. I translated it. It was demanded that Radio London correct this information. At the same time, an official request was made for the American mission to be sent as soon as possible."

Later, an unrelated conversation took place. Arso, full of old, military honesty, passionately asking his question to the English mission:

"Please translate for them, Vlado, how can these English officers, how can their officer honour allow them to sit with Draža Mihailović, eat Italian canned food and falsely report to their command... Do you understand — falsely reporting to their command!"

The English were flustered. They didn't know what to do. They understood Arso without translation. In the end, they said that the protest would be sent immediately. "We will inform them," they said, "that such news ruined all the trust established between the General Staff and our mission."

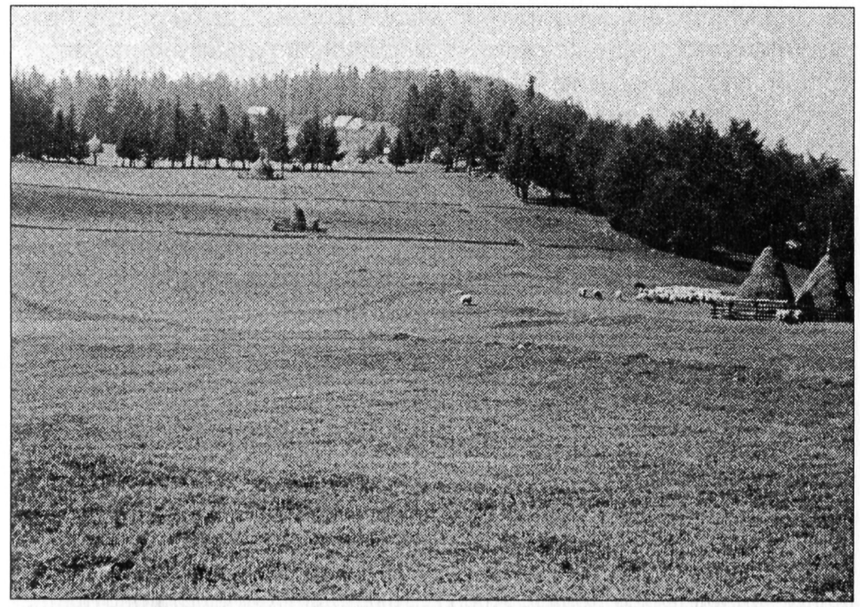
Later, the English requested that Arso provide a list of our recent actions... "I would like to know the number of your brigades, their strength and armament, as well as their tactics during the two offensives." Arso replied that he would provide them with an official report on the offensive.[376]

The following day, good news arrived — the Red Army had liberated Orel. All the partisans were extremely happy about this. As none of the English spoke "his" French, Arso asked Dedijer to explain to the English the reason for the joy, as they had been making jokes about how "Orel is fleeing west." They replied, "We're happy that Orel has fallen, but our joy would be complete if Catania fell as well." And it happened in the evening. "Major Deakin held a toast, opened a few cans," Dedijer notes.

Petrovo polje is a plateau below Vlašić, "on the edge of a massive ravine," 30 km by air from the Bosna River and the same distance from the Ustaša garrison in Travnik. Surrounded by mountains and forest, the plateau was an ideal resting place for the partisan army, especially after the ordeal it experienced at Sutjeska. The General Staff would stay there for 20 days. During this time, the first ranks were assigned to the commanders of the NOVJ; the first decorations were established, ranging from the Order of the People's Hero to the Medal for Bravery; the first British surgeon sent to the National Liberation Struggle (NOB) and the first American officer were welcomed; and, arriving with Arso from the West, a group of Red Army soldiers, mostly Russians, who had been captured by the Germans, also found themselves there. Finally, all necessary measures were taken from there to rationalize the deployment of NOVJ forces on the Yugoslav battlefield, related to the expected capitulation of Italy...

At that time, the NOVJ had four corps, 18 divisions, 55 brigades and more than 80 partisan units. Particularly concerning the assessment of the upcoming events, it was necessary to urgently and successfully restore the disrupted lines of command and timely orient the respective NOVJ forces toward the Italian occupying troops in the

[376] V. Dedijer, note for August 4, 1943.



The landscape of Petrovo polje, from which the Supreme Headquarters directed the NOB in August 1943.

area from the Lim River to the Soča River. Their task was to make contact with the German headquarters before the Germans and offer them two possibilities: either join the fight against nazism or surrender their weapons and move to Italy. The task was made even more complicated by the fact that the Germans, having placed all the quisling armed formations under their command (in the NDH alone, 130,000 Domobran soldiers and 55,000 Ustaše), had moved four of their divisions closer to the occupation zone of the other Axis member — to quickly disarm the Italian forces in Yugoslavia and at the same time occupy the largest seaports from Drač to Trieste.

From Petrovo polje, directives were sent to the operational unit headquarters, either directly or through intermediaries, on how to proceed with the Italian units. To achieve success in accomplishing this, then paramount military and political task, leaders and units were dispatched from Petrovo polje and later from Jajce to the operational headquarters in the Adriatic region. The results of this organizational effort to engage NOVJ headquarters and units in disarming the Italian formations would be impressive, and they could only be evaluated in mid-October when the analyses in the Operational Department of the General Staff in Jajce were completed.

On August 10, in front of the ceremonial formation of the Escort Battalion, a Decree on the first promotions of NOVJ officers was read. According to the list published in the Bulletin of the General Staff, the Supreme Commander promoted the first ten generals, six colonels and 33 lieutenant colonels.[377] The only general lieutenant was

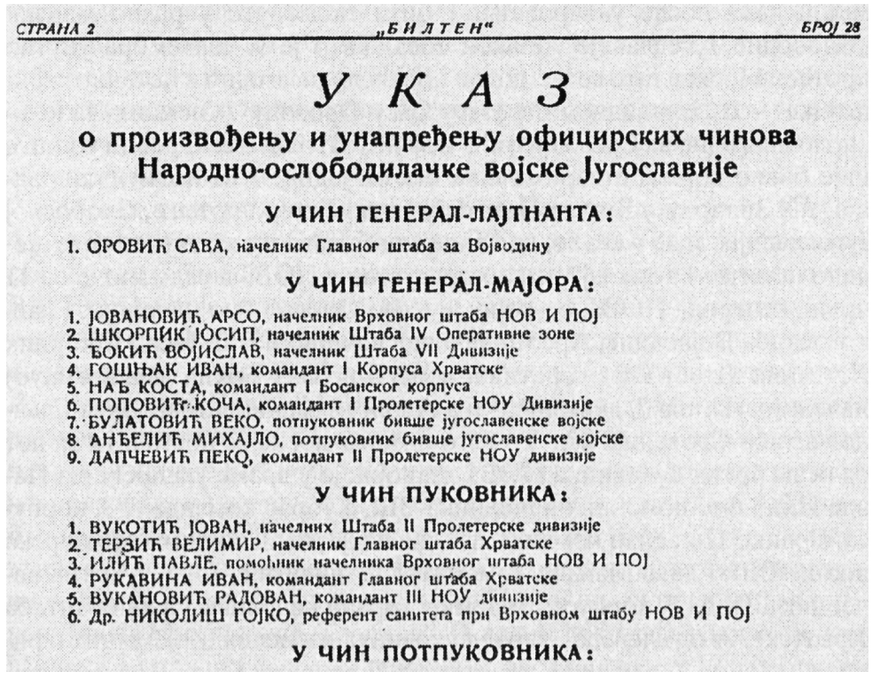
[377] Bulletin of the General Staff, no. 28 for May 1943, p. 2.

Savo Orović,[378] and at the top of the list of nine general majors in NOVJ was Arso R. Jovanović. Of the ten newly promoted generals of NOVJ, six were "former officers"; besides Savo Orović and Arso, they were also: Josip Škorpik, Vojislav Đokić, Veko Bulatović and Mihailo Anđelić, while the other four were "our Spaniards" — Ivan Gošnjak, Kosta Nađ, Koča Popović and Peko Dapčević. Soon, posthumously, Pero Ćetković would be promoted to the rank of general. Of the six colonels, the first three on the list were officers of the Yugoslav Army — Jovan Vukotić, Velimir Terzić and Pavle Ilić, followed by "our Spaniards" Ivan Rukavina and Dr. Gojko Nikoliš, and Radovan Vukanović. Posthumously promoted to the rank of colonel were Sava Kovačević and Milovan Šaranović — the first, commander of the 3rd Shock Division, who died on June 13 at Sutjeska, and the second, Chief of the Main Staff of Slovenia, who died on July 31 at Žumberak.

The list of the first 33 lieutenant colonels of NOVJ was led by two former officers of the logistical branch — Gligo Mandić and Mitar Vujić, followed by their colleagues, Ljubo Vučković, Vaso Jovanović and Miloje Milojević. Among the "our Spaniards" were Vlado Ćetković, Veljko Kovačević, Srećko Manola and Ilija Engel. Lieutenant colonel insignia at Petrovo polje were pinned by Ljubodrag Đurić, Pavle Jakšić and Milutin Morača, and a group of six doctors was led by Dr. Borisav Božović. The last name on the list was Obrad Cicmil, commander of the highly active Durmitor NOP detachment from the Foča days, here simply listed as "professor from Piva."

In the "chronology" of the 16th volume of Tito's *Collected Works,* it is stated that after reading the order, the Supreme Commander congratulated Kosta Nađ, Koča Popović and Vlatko Velebit on their promotion to the rank of colonel, and Savo Orović on his promotion to general major. The only accurate part is that Kosta Nađ and Koča Popović were there, but they were promoted to general majors, while V. Velebit was not on the first list and would only receive an officer rank in NOVJ in Jajce, but as a lieutenant colonel. There are two inaccuracies regarding the name Savo Orović: he was promoted to general lieutenant, not general major, and Tito could not personally congratulate him as he was on that day, in his capacity as the Chief of Staff of Vojvodina, at the partisan base in Kraljevc on Fruška Gora. Tito had promised him the rank of the first general of the new army during their first meeting on June 18, 1942, in Vrbinac, and Savo, deeply impressed by the Supreme Commander, wrote in his war diary: "Here is the chosen one! The fate of the uprising, the country and the people is in safe hands." Tito kept his word — Savo was first on the list of the first group of NOVJ generals. His name, exactly one month after the promotion, would be mentioned in a radio broadcast of *Slobodna Jugoslavija*. After that, on September 9, Tito sent a protest to Moscow because a "convenient and inaccurate statement" appeared in the broadcast about "the genius strategist Savo Orović." Tito stated that this was "very inconvenient for Savo Orović and for us because Orović was not dealing with military

[378] Colonel of the Yugoslav Army, advisor in the Staff of Sava Kovačević, from St. George's Day 1942, a member of the General Staff, commander of the Officer School of the General Staff, Chief of Staff of Vojvodina.



СТРАНА 2 „БИЛТЕН" БРОЈ 28

У К А З

о произвођењу и унапређењу официрских чинова Народно-ослободилачке војске Југославије

У ЧИН ГЕНЕРАЛ-ЛАЈТНАНТА:

1. ОРОВИЋ САВА, начелник Главног штаба за Војводину

У ЧИН ГЕНЕРАЛ-МАЈОРА:

1. ЈОВАНОВИЋ АРСО, начелник Врховног штаба НОВ И ПОЈ
2. ШКОРПИК ЈОСИП, начелник Штаба IV Оперативне зоне
3. ЂОКИЋ ВОЈИСЛАВ, начелник Штаба VII Дивизије
4. ГОШЊАК ИВАН, командант I Корпуса Хрватске
5. НАЂ КОСТА, командант I Босанског корпуса
6. ПОПОВИЋ КОЧА, командант I Пролетерске НОУ Дивизије
7. БУЛАТОВИЋ ВЕКО, потпуковник бивше југословенске војске
8. АНЂЕЛИЋ МИХАЈЛО, потпуковник бивше југословенске војске
9. ДАПЧЕВИЋ ПЕКО, командант II Пролетерске НОУ дивизије

У ЧИН ПУКОВНИКА:

1. ВУКОТИЋ ЈОВАН, начелних Штаба II Пролетерске дивизије
2. ТЕРЗИЋ ВЕЛИМИР, начелник Главног штаба Хрватске
3. ИЛИЋ ПАВЛЕ, помоћник начелника Врховног штаба НОВ И ПОЈ
4. РУКАВИНА ИВАН, командант Главног штаба Хрватске
5. ВУКАНОВИЋ РАДОВАН, командант III НОУ дивизије
6. Др. НИКОЛИШ ГОЈКО, референт санитета при Врховном штабу НОВ И ПОЈ

У ЧИН ПОТПУКОВНИКА:

Facsimile of page 2 of "Bulletin" No. 28.

affairs, and for us, he only has political significance."[379] It was known in the General Staff about Tito's protest to *Slobodna Jugoslavija*, and from it, the conclusion could be logically drawn that "only political significance" was present in the NOVJ of seven out of the first eleven generals of the NOVJ, including Savo Orović, who was Chief of Staff of Vojvodina, Arso Jovanović, Chief of the General Staff, Josip Škorpik, Chief of Staff of the 4th Operational Zone, Vojislav Đokić (who had already died), Chief of Staff of the 7th Division, Jaka Avšič, Deputy Commander of the Main Staff of Slovenia, etc. The same question could be asked about five of the first eight colonels of the NOVJ, including Pavle Ilić, who at the time of his promotion was Assistant Chief of Staff of the General Staff and would soon become the commander of the 8th Corps; Branko Poljanac, commander of the 4th Division and later Chief of the Officer School of the General Staff; Gligo Mandić, commander of the 17th Division; Jovo Vukotić, Chief of Staff of the 3rd Corps; Velimir Terzić, Chief of Staff of the Main Staff of Croatia. As for the next "batch" of colonels raised from "former officers," they included Rajko Tanasković, commander of the 7th Corps; Mile Pavičić, commander of the 1st Air Base; Rudolf Primorac, Chief of Staff of the 2nd Corps, etc. However, it seems that their notable and productive engagement in such high positions did have a military significance, and their contribution to the creation and building of the armed forces of the NOP, especially in planning operations, improving military organization, developing

[379] AJ, Fund of the CC CPY-KI, reg. no. 143/233.

military education, etc., was evident and valuable. The Supreme Commander, quickly and to some extent, corrected his assessment in a message to *Slobodna Jugoslavija* on September 13 — besides repeating the remark that it was wrong to add "genius strategist" to Savo Orović's name — he stated that he was "a colonel of the Yugoslav Army, somewhat old-fashioned, but a wonderful man, brave and devoted to the cause of the people, carrying out the military tasks he is given. He has great political merits for our struggle, although he is in a military position, and for that, he was promoted to the rank of general-lieutenant, the only one in our army, and this will again have great political significance."[380] Orović, indeed, was not a "genius military leader," but he successfully dealt with military issues: he was with Savo Kovačević; he commanded the Kupres Operational Forces, consisting of 16 battalions; he established the Officer School of the General Staff of NOVJ; after Sutjeska, he became the first Chief of Staff of Vojvodina; later, in Drvar, he was designated to be the head of the NOVJ Military Mission to Roosevelt. And undeniably, he was an example of loyalty to the homeland, the officer profession and chivalric morals, for which the Chief of the General Staff greatly appreciated him and always showed special respect.

On August 21, Captain Melvin O. Benson of the U.S. Army, from the Office of Strategic Services (intelligence), with the status of liaison officer with the NOVJ General Staff, arrived at one of the four "Halifax" stations at Petrovo polje. He probably, not coincidentally, had in his war bag an article from the *Daily Worker*,[381] which addressed how and why the real leader of anti-fascist France, General De Gaulle, decorated Draža Mihailović, declaring him the "exemplary anti-fascist leader of the Balkans." The article, shown to Arso at their first meeting, was translated by Vladimir Dedijer. In it, the military commissariat of General De Gaulle is explained in response to statements from members of the exiled government who claimed to be surprised by the award: "The Yugoslav government decorated several French officers, so we requested a list of Yugoslav officers. On that list, the first was General Draža Mihailović. That's all." (Later, Milan Grol's comment from his diary entry on February 12 would be revealed: "Simply a reciprocal gesture of attention. Nothing special, and nothing with an intent to mystify General Mihailović.")[382] Thus, the real truth about this "incident" was learned half a year later at Petrovo polje and was then delivered to *Slobodna Jugoslavija*.

Captain M. Benson was hosted by Tito and Arso for dinner, as was the British military surgeon, Major Ian Mackenzie, five days earlier. They discussed, among other things, the possibility of the "group of liaison officers with the General Staff" soon transforming into a permanent U.S. military mission, increasing the scope of Allied military assistance in food, weapons, medicine and medical personnel, which, as Arso emphasized, was easier because Mediterranean bases had been established. Washington was also urged to influence Moscow to send at least military observers to

[380] The old (1888) general would die (1974) without learning the content of those two Tito's telegrams, as they were later translated from Russian.

[381] Number from February 11, 1943.

[382] M. Grol, *London Diary 1941-1945*, Belgrade 1990.

the central leadership of the NOP, so that the leaders of all three Allied powers could receive firsthand reports on who was who and what was happening on the Yugoslav front. The experienced intelligence officer, holder of the Legion of Merit, who would stay on the Yugoslav front for the next four months and correctly interpret the truth about the NOP, was, likely without the full authority from his superior, General William Donovan, politely smiling and noting the essence of the conversation with his hosts. He firmly promised only something more in terms of medical aid and explosives. Tito was fairly reserved, Velebit "covered" things with proper translations, while Arso, not a little aggressively, insisted that this was not just about solidarity and aid but primarily about military cooperation against the common enemy. He added that some of the 19 German divisions, had they not been so heavily engaged in fighting the NOP, would easily and quickly have found themselves on any of the Allied fronts, especially the Italian one. As an example of NOP's success, he cited the outcome of the night raid by the 1st Brigade of the 5th Division, carried out on August 10-11 at the Rajlovac airport, where, among other things, 37 German bombers were destroyed on the runways or in hangars, while at the same time, multiple sections of the railroad to Sarajevo and Visoko were destroyed. Major F.W. Deakin's collaborators had been asking about Rajlovac for days before the Krajina unit's sabotage, allegedly so that U.S. bombers could destroy it, as it was considered an extremely important target. In fact, Dedijer wrote on July 25 that the British had repeatedly inquired with people from the General Staff about "how Rajlovac was fortified, where the hangars were and how many planes there were." "We gave them a list of the facilities at the airport that should definitely be bombed." Whether the Americans actually intended to bomb it remains an open question, as they were pre-empted by the 1st Krajina, and Arso emphasized to Benson that he personally knew and highly valued the commanders Vojin Todorović Lerer and his superior Milutin Morača, with whom he had recently captured Kakanj while rushing to meet the General Staff and the Operational Group of Divisions. The point was this: if these and other commanding officers of the NOP units had better engineering tools, more explosives and instructors for demolition, the effect of their attacks, especially sabotage, particularly on important communications, would have been significantly greater, thus more important for the overall cause. He also raised the question of evacuating "at least 2,000 of the most seriously wounded and tuberculosis patients and their treatment in Allied hospitals in the Mediterranean and North Africa." They parted with hopes for closer Allied cooperation.

In one of the following conversations at Petrovo polje, conducted in French, Captain Benson admitted to General Jovanović that he was not entirely convinced about the open collaboration of the Chetnik leader Mihailović with the occupiers. He based this belief on the reports from American officers with Draža and discussions with his acquaintances from Cairo, Lieutenant Colonels Pavle Novaković and Luka Baletić — two excellent professionals who headed to Ravna Gora after Draža returned there from Montenegro. Benson valued their awareness, dedication to their duty and patriotism — something Arso easily agreed with, adding that they were his friends and compatriots, surely patriots and excellent General Staff officers, but, unfortunately, they were

misinformed. Benson was, however, unclear on how they managed to remain in the General Staff for months, overseeing important services — Novaković in intelligence and Baletić in operations. Arso knew them well, but it was the first time he heard that they were at Ravna Gora, so it took him some time to "digest" their choice of wartime allegiance.[383]

The Allied material assistance received in July, despite all the insistence and promises, remained symbolic. Dedijer wrote on July 25 that at dawn, one "Liberator" dropped some food, and he commented: "It will be just enough for a bite, about 100 grams per person. But let the partisans see that our allies are still sending us something. Truly, the help we received from the British doesn't amount to much in material terms, just a modest meal, but politically it means a lot. In truth, the Allies should be providing more material support, since they've now seen firsthand, in person, how much we matter in the fight against Hitler."



Pavle Ilić and Vladimir Dedijer writing a report on the fate of the wounded.

The beginning of Allied material aid to the NOP is linked to June 25, 1943, immediately after Prime Minister Churchill, at the conference of the Chiefs of Staff of the British Armed Forces on June 23, emphasized "the very great importance of providing the greatest possible support to the Yugoslav anti-fascist movement, which was holding about 33 divisions of Axis forces in that region." This issue was so important that he ordered a small number of planes to be allocated to increase our aid, even at the cost of bombing Germany and submarine warfare.[384] This was said at the

[383] Both would, at the beginning of 1945, leave Draža's headquarters, heading with P. Đurišić's group towards Slovenia to meet the Allies, only to be liquidated by the Ustaše, along with the main column, at Lijevča field.

[384] W. Churchill, *The Second World War*, Belgrade 1966, Vol. V, p. 454.

start of operations on the Apennine Peninsula and ahead of the Kursk and Orel battles, which increased its significance. It was the beginning, and a modest one, so on September 1, 1943, seven days after arriving from Petrovo polje in Jajce, Tito informed G. Dimitrov that the British had sent 40 planes by then, and "promised to send 70 more planes with material in September." He requested that the Soviets send their representatives to the General Staff, as the British already had "several dozen" representatives, but "our army and people are eagerly awaiting a brotherly Soviet delegation."[385]

Really, the British dropped some war material on Petrovo polje in two or three instances from a "Halifax" plane: 5-6 anti-tank rifles, some ammunition, 150 uniforms, 320 hand grenades and 5 radio stations. The delivery of the radio stations was conditioned upon them being used for the needs of the headquarters of units with more than 3,000 fighters and that the radio operators use their encryption system instead of numbers, as the Germans could discover the latter. Both conditions were accepted. It happened that the planes also dropped two barrels full of fly repellent pellets, which Arso, smiling, took as a mistake by some sergeant from a warehouse on the desert airports of North Africa, or as a harmless joke from the English. He asked his comrades not to assign any other meaning or importance to it. Yes, he said, "help in small doses, but it is help, significant from a political and military perspective, when viewed on a broader scale."[386]

Insisting that official London once and for all refute the news about Draža's "victories" in Slovenia, Arso "pressed" Deakin to hurry this with his superiors. Only on August 8 did he officially inform him that the Supreme Command from Cairo had firmly promised that "the most energetic measures would be taken to refute the news about Slovenia." Arso then demanded to be informed of the exact day and time of the broadcast, which may have sounded like nitpicking to the relaxed English, especially in the isolation of Bosnia, but the Chief of Staff was known for his insistence on precision. Cairo responded that the Supreme Command would "be informed in a timely manner." Both the general and the major remained dissatisfied.

In his communications with Frederick William Deakin, Arso, still angry about that Radio London broadcast which Deakin surely had nothing to do with, tried, even during this wartime respite, to enforce order by issuing official statements from the SH. On August 12, he delivered an official statement about what the SH had responded the day before to the question from Canadian Major William Jones: "Under what conditions will the NOPJ negotiate with Italian troops and under what conditions will they conclude an armistice with the Italian troops." The response was: "Since the Slovenian headquarters is not competent to answer this question, it addressed this command. It is our honour to inform you of the response we sent to the Supreme Headquarters of Slovenia regarding Major Jones's question:

"The partisans of Slovenia will suspend hostilities with the Italian troops on the following basis:

[385] J. Broz, *Collected Works*, Vol. 16, p. 153.

[386] From a conversation with V. Dedijer, October 1983, in Belgrade.

"1. If the units of the Italian army cease hostilities against the partisans and turn their weapons against the Germans.

"2. If the Italian units surrender their weapons to the units of NOP and PO and leave the territory of the Yugoslav state.

"These are the two conditions under which we will conclude an armistice with the Italian occupying troops.

"3. During negotiations, hostilities will be suspended by both sides. At the same time, Italian units must not carry out acts of violence in the occupied areas.

"With utmost respect,

"For the office of the Supreme Headquarters,

"Chief of the General Staff."[387]

To avoid any wrongdoing, it should be said that F.W. Deakin from the U.S. Army initially showed himself as a correct collaborator and objective observer, and in this spirit, he reported to his superiors, demanding greater and more diverse assistance for the partisans, particularly in medical supplies. Later, in his *The Warrior's Mountain* memoir, he wrote: "The surviving groups of the wounded were scattered in the forested areas of Bosnia in a state of extreme scarcity. The bandages taken from those who were dying were washed in streams and used for those for whom there was hope they would survive. Medicines and equipment were long used up."[388] At his personal request — and from Bosnia, there was the impression that his word was respected both in Cairo and London — larger quantities of medicines and bandages were delivered, and a British surgeon, Major Ian Mackenzie, arrived, a man who, with his humanity, expertise, wartime experience and agility, immediately won the staff of the SH, demanding to be sent "to the field," to the wounded, earning the nickname "the miracle of the English."

When it comes to medical care, especially the treatment of the wounded, misunderstandings were deepened at Petrovo polje between Dr. Gojko Nikoliš and the Chief of Staff of the Supreme Headquarters. Among the several consultations held during this wartime respite was one regarding the experiences of the medical services in previous operations, with an emphasis on the fate of the Central Hospital at Sutjeska and the perspective of treating the seriously wounded. The consultation was led by the head of the medical service at the SH, Colonel Dr. Nikoliš, and attended by General Major Arso Jovanović, who was his superior and had recently been promoted. In his introductory remarks and answers to questions, Nikoliš raised several theses, three of which are worth noting: first (and old) — that the role and importance of the military medical service would have been much greater if its head was "a member, not a referent at the SH," as only direct contact with the military leadership, and certainly the Supreme Commander, would allow for more efficient problem-solving, something that was "not sufficiently understood in the existing organization"; second (and new) — that the distribution of allied assistance in medical staff, equipment and medicines should be under the exclusive authority of the medical services, not the command;

[387] V. Dedijer, note for August 12, 1943.

[388] V. Deakin, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

third (and most controversial) — that the true culprits for the tragedy of thousands of seriously wounded — from Tara, Piva and Drina, through Sutjeska, to Miljevina — were outside the medical services, especially in the Headquarters of the 2nd Group of Divisions. On every thesis, including these three, the Chief of Staff had his own opinion, which he clearly expressed at the meeting. The first thesis was as old as the SH itself: Dr. Nikoliš would often turn to the Supreme Commander personally, from Foča to Mlinista, for consultations and help in solving truly major medical problems, for which he was, often, either too busy or impatient to address, and would instruct Žujović and Ranković to "get him off his back." In October 1942, they called him for a "black coffee." The conversation was quite bitter, especially when they pointed out his self-will and unhidden ambitions (which he diligently noted in his war diary), and in the end, they forbade him from addressing the Supreme Commander for medical issues personally, instead instructing him to solve such problems "through military channels," at meetings with his superior, Arso Jovanović.[389] This was particularly difficult for him because, in that conversation, he had called commanders Peko and Koča "genuine geniuses" and "Kosovo knights," while he could not hide his certain aversion towards "former officers," among whom were his superiors Arso, Terzić and Ilić. Such an attitude towards V. Terzić at Neretva and Sutjeska could not have been beneficial to the wounded; on the contrary. As for the medicines and medical equipment received (since June 30) from the English, the Chief of Staff allowed them to be distributed on the proposal of the "referent of the medical service at the SH," but exclusively with his written approval, keeping control over these precious supplies until better times. For a valid discussion of the third thesis, he considered there were no elements, and when Dr. Nikoliš insisted again on the responsibility of the command (which had, in fact, collapsed), as well as naming "the culprits" who, by general consensus, had burned out in the battle to protect the lives of the wounded — he responded, somewhat harshly, that while performing his duties in Slovenia, he had not even moved 3,500 wounded from Krajina, nor led them, nor distributed them along the way, nor did he have complete data on their fate at Sutjeska, as neither the referent of the medical service nor his selfless doctors and medical staff had such data, so there were no grounds to blame the command for that; for such evaluations, there would be time, and for now, the essence was saving the survivors, in which both agreed.[390]

From a report of the 2nd Proletarian Division's Headquarters, the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters learned the sad news that his strange acquaintance from the recently liberated Livno, Cvijo Oraščić, was no longer among the living. The report was written on July 15 and reached his hands on August 10. It read: "Despite our caution, we experienced several attacks and surprises, and in one of these surprises, on the 9th of this month, Comrade Cvijo Oraščić, former deputy commander of the 4th Krajina Brigade, later at our Division's Headquarters, was killed by an ambush from a Chetnik band." To be precise, Pajčin — Cvijo Oraščić was not "at the Headquarters," but, at

[389] G. Nikoliš, *Roots, Tree and Withering,* Zagreb 1980, p. 446.

[390] From a conversation with Dr. Saša Božović, October 1983, in Belgrade.

least formally, the deputy commander of the division, which he deserved, as he led his battalion, "Starac Vujadin," to the last fighter, and they joined the NOVJ brigades. In January 1943, he returned to his home region in the lower Livanjsko polje after leaving the deputy position under Milutin Morača, and with his influence and reputation, he gathered 720 fighters and led them into the brigades of the 2nd Proletarian Division — 421 in the 4th Brigade and 299 in the 2nd Brigade. Of those, 416 would die on the war path of the proletarians, including him — unfortunately, probably at the hands of a comrade, which could not be verified from Petrovo polje at the time. However, rumours were circulating in the SH regarding this loss, suggesting that "things were not clean," a suspicion introduced by the couriers who brought the report. These young men, none of whom could hide anything, whispered that he was liquidated by a group of comrades on Chetnik Ozren, as it was heard in the Headquarters, which was "pushing" for the division to break through to Montenegro, that Cvijo was convincing his Livno people to return to Krajina and "defend their homes from wolves and ravens," left in great uncertainty, or to stay on Ozren for the time being. This was considered a "pro-Chetnik orientation," and the Chetniks, both in Krajina and Montenegro, were seen as "enemy number one." But who, in that wartime turmoil, could verify the truth of that story, and even less, who dared to investigate in the Headquarters, where Peko and Mitar were in charge!? Nevertheless, everything remained at the level of intrigues, which were occasionally fuelled among the Krajina fighters.[391]

The account of the SH's stay at Petrovo polje ends with an unusual, almost equally joyful and melancholic scene, which, recorded on the spot, can be found in the notes of Dedijer and Nikoliš. Three decades later, Aleksandar Ranković, who at that time was, along with the Supreme Commander, the only member of the SH present at the event, remembered it.[392] The scene is about a group of Soviet soldiers, captured by the Germans and then, by various means, joining the partisans, gathering around a fire in the Bosnian wilderness on a cool mountain night under a full moon. With Tito, Ranković and General Jovanović, they sat around the fire, singing together in harmony. It was as though a group of collective farm workers, after a bountiful harvest, had gathered, happy and singing about the fruits of their labour, inviting, of course, their leader and teacher, Stalin, to come and share the joy with them. Arso, for a while, sang "solo parts" between their refrains, his bass-baritone sounding strong, harmonious and beautiful. Then, suddenly, he fell silent. They begged him to sing more, but neither the locals nor the Russians could persuade him. Later, he confided to Ranković that he had suddenly felt a chill around his heart when he remembered Stalin's unequivocal message: "A Soviet soldier cannot be a prisoner — unless he is a traitor!" He thought, he said, how this might mean that all these people — since they had recently been

[391] In the mid-eighties, military historian Colonel Bogdan Gledović asked General Peko Dapčević, in front of a group of Federation Council members, "How did your men liquidate Cvijo Pajčin Oraščić?" To which he replied that he had nothing to do with it, but "you should ask M. Bakić and Broz; such things were done by their line." However, both "accused" men had long been dead (the first since 1960 and the second since 1980), so there was no one left to ask "about the outcome of the ambush at Ozren."

[392] On August 11, heading west (towards Otočac), were: S. Žujović, M. Đilas, L. Ribar and his father Dr. Ivan, Colonel V. Terzić, poet V. Nazor, M. Iveković and others.



Among the victors of Sutjeska: to the left of Arso are the commander and commissar of the First Proletarian Division, Koča and Mijalko Todorović Plavi.

German prisoners — were considered traitors to their homeland, and after the war, each of them, if they survived, would be "beheaded by their own," which would be the saddest fate for a soldier.

On Petrovo polje, on August 6, a beautiful, and probably less known, photograph was taken, probably because General Jovanović was in it. The military and political leaders of the 1st Proletarian Brigade, after analysing the conduct of units during the Battle of Sutjeska, stood in front of the camera, calling for the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters to join them. According to reports, Arso repeatedly refused, perhaps feeling that he had no place among the victors of Sutjeska, from which he had been hundreds of kilometres away while carrying out a special task. But the commanders and commissars insisted that he "be pictured" with them. They begged him and placed him in the middle, and about thirty of them "framed" him.[393] As a soldier would say, "for memory and long remembrance."

Jajce *(August 25, 1943-January 7, 1944)*

The news reached Petrovo polje that Jajce was liberated on August 17. This led to a decision to abandon Tito's plan to move the leadership of the NOV to Otočac, the headquarters of the Croatian Main Staff, where on August 11, 1943, three members of the Political Bureau, the SH and members of the narrowest leadership of AVNOJ had already been sent as a precursor.

[393] The photograph was published in the book *Koča Popović: Notes on Warfare*, pp. 102-103.



Jajce, August 28, 1943: with a group of Krajina leaders.

The SH entered Jajce early in the morning on August 25, by Arso's order — in military order and formation.

Previously, on August 22, for the first time, under the rank of general, the SH sent an order to the Headquarters of the 5th Corps — that the commander and commissar, Slavko Rodić and Velimir Stojnić, should arrive "by dusk on the 27th of this month in Jajce." On this occasion, they were to bring accurate statistical data on all units in the territory of the corps. For a better and more complete understanding of the military and political situation in that area, a meeting was called with the secretary and member of the Regional Committee of the General Staff, Đuro Pucar and Osman Karabegović.[394] The meeting was held on the night of August 27-28 in Jajce, where, based on submitted reports and evaluations, it was decided that two divisions (the 4th and 10th) with three brigades each, each with 800 to 1,000 fighters, would join the corps. It was also decided that partisan detachments would be reduced to smaller units, and a certain number of fighters would be allocated to strengthen the brigades of the 1st Proletarian Division. The main operational and tactical tasks of the corps were also established. Criteria for mobilizing personnel, the work of military rear commands and the supply sources for the units were determined.

General Jovanović's signature also appeared on the order to Colonel Slavko Rodić from September 6 — to liquidate the Chetniks around Bosansko Grahovo, who had been major debtors since October 1942. The operation was part of those leading up to

[394] *Collection of Documents on the NOR*, Vol. II, Book 10, Doc. 94.

the expected capitulation of Italy — the allies and protectors of Pop Momčilo Đujić and his "Dinaric Division" units.

For securing the city and the organs of the NOP, Arso assigned the 1st Proletarian Brigade, organizing anti-aircraft and anti-tank defences as part of measures to protect from possible surprises. Later, when the 1st Proletarian Brigade, as part of its division, was sent towards Split in connection with the Italian capitulation, the responsibility for securing the city was entrusted to the "Rade Končar" 13th Proletarian Brigade.

The first news from Radio London that the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters heard in the town of Pliva was that the Chetniks had liberated Jajce and that the royal flag was flying over its fortress. For him, such fabrications and the most malicious lies about the NOP were nothing new, but he found it unacceptable that these lies were being broadcast by the official radio station of an Allied country, which, after all, had its own military mission within the supreme leadership of the anti-fascist struggle in Yugoslavia. Therefore, this inaccurate news triggered new tough conversations between General Jovanović and the unfortunately innocent Major Deakin, and simultaneously new official protests, now from the Yugoslav battlefield via the newly established agency *Tanjug.* Namely, the news and the Radio London broadcast — that British officers were leading the partisan units' fight — was debunked on September 16 through the radio *Slobodna Jugoslavija*. Additionally, these refutations pointed out that the SH of the NOP had reached an agreement with the Allied Supreme Command in Cairo to accept a certain number of English and American liaison officers "for the purpose of obtaining war material and coordinating our operations."[395]

On September 18, the Allied military mission, sent to the SH of the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia by General Henry Maitland Wilson, arrived in Jajce. The mission, consisting of ten British and American officers, landed at night on September 17-18 near Mrkonjić Grad, and the next day, Colonel Slavko Rodić, along with Lieutenant Colonel V. Velebit, brought them to the SH. The head of the mission was Brigadier Fitzroy Maclean, a prominent member of the Conservative Party, a Member of Parliament in the House of Commons and a personal friend of Prime Minister Winston Churchill, which was very important for this occasion. This emissary was also well-suited to the partisans because, as a volunteer in the rank of lieutenant, he had been involved in combat in Malaya and Africa since the start of the war, and later trained for conducting sabotage operations in the Middle East and the Mediterranean. He had proven himself as a dignified man, loyal to his arguments and devoted to the truth as the highest criterion of practice. He was accompanied by a professional soldier, a highly educated staff officer, Lieutenant Colonel (soon to be Colonel) Vivian Street, who, as Maclean introduced him to Tito, would serve as his deputy and a kind of Chief of Staff for the Mission. Upon their first meeting, it was agreed that the Supreme Commander of the NOP would keep the official representatives of the Allied Commander Wilson, and primarily his chief, "constantly in the loop" through General Arso Jovanović, who would be in contact daily with Lieutenant Colonel Street. The connection

[395] AJ, Fund of the CC CPY-KI, reg. no. 1943/246 (translation from Russian).

between these two General Staff officers would be all the more intense given that the relationships between the NOP and the Allies were becoming increasingly intricate, and the Supreme Commander was dedicating most of his time to solving political problems. New operations, announced by Italy's capitulation, required even closer cooperation, which was facilitated by the fact that the head of the mission and his staff were operating at the SH, with the following officers under his command: in Slovenia, Major William Jones; in Vojvodina, Major Basil Davidson; in Montenegro, Stevan Serdar; and a group of American liaison officers, mainly from the intelligence apparatus of General William Donovan, among them Major Linn M. Farrish, a trusted man of U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt. To avoid potential advantages for Western "players," the leadership of the NOP in Jajce urgently requested the arrival of Soviet military missions to the SH, and Tito, sensing political manipulations by the English, banned Tempo from further work on activating the Balkan Headquarters established on June 25, which would have represented the national liberation movements of Yugoslavia, Albania, Greece and Bulgaria equally.

On the first day in Jajce, the Mission members — Maclean, Street and Farrish — were received by the Supreme Commander, together with the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters. The well-mannered and reserved Brigadier presented Tito with an official letter from the Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in the Middle East, General H.M. Wilson, who sent the Mission "to lead a joint fight against the Axis."[396] In the conversation, Tito raised several issues, among which was the propaganda of the Yugoslav government in London, whose untruths about the NOP were broadcast on the BBC and rarely corrected, citing several examples. He mentioned — according to Maclean's notes — that King Petar had awarded two Karađorđe Stars in recognition of "bravery shown against the enemy" to completely wrong people: one to "Mihailović's commander who at that time was living in the Italian headquarters" (Momčilo Đujić), and the other to "the Chetnik leader at the moment when this same man also received the Iron Cross from Hitler" (Pavle Đurišić), and that official London should be aware of this. Maclean recorded this, and later published it as part of his war memoirs in the book *War in the Balkans*, adding Tito's words that "recently, in a radio broadcast from London in Serbo-Croatian, it was announced that the King had outlawed Tito's Chief of Staff as a traitor. This announcement reached them after exceptionally hard battles with the Germans, and Tito said that his Chief of Staff, a tall, serious man who sat on the other side of the table, took it very much to heart." The British brigadier, acknowledging the reasons for the partisan leadership's anger, said that "perhaps they were a bit too harsh on the King, as he had undoubtedly been misinformed about certain aspects of the situation," adding his belief that "as a young and energetic man, he would have wanted to join the fight if he had the opportunity." He took the opportunity to ask (on behalf of W. Churchill): "If it came to that, would he be allowed to join the partisans, if somehow he could get here?" It was answered that "the 'bag of sins' of his government and its armed formations in the country was so full that the immediate

[396] *Ibid.,* Doc. 232; J. Broz, *Collected Works*, Vol. 16, p. 187.

answer to that question would be 'yes,' but the people would decide on that."[397]

At the meeting with the Mission, Arso, unlike his hosts who were quite cautious, spoke the language of a professional soldier, relying exclusively on facts — though not always diplomatically, but sincerely and patriotically. He emphasized a simple truth: the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia (NOVJ), organized into divisions and corps on its own battlefield, was holding 35 divisions of the occupiers with about 600,000 soldiers and 300,000 collaborators, thus a military force that, in large part, had been "drawn" from the Allied fronts, where the outcome of the war greatly depended; if they could increase the material supply, which was already symbolic in quantity, and provide air support, the Allies could be confident that the NOVJ would continue to tie down these forces, benefiting greatly, especially the troops in Italy, where the 5th Army of the U.S. had just landed in Salerno. He added: "The Germans are still in Smolensk, in Italy they firmly hold Rome near Naples, there is no movement from the southeast of Europe, and the opening of the Second Front in Western Europe is still far away. Therefore, the importance of the front in the Balkans, which would soon be at the strategic junction of the Allies' wings, is growing, and it must receive increasing support." The brigadier, somewhat taken aback by both the content and the tone, agreed, adding reasons why the possibilities were, unfortunately, still limited, and the interests of the relevant groups, parties and movements influencing this were different, often contradictory. Furthermore, there were more anti-fascist movements in the Balkans, and their expectations from the Anglo-Americans were high, and in the case of Yugoslavia, there was also the reality that the weapon handed to one side, the partisans, to fight the occupiers "could be used against the other side involved in the civil war," thus subtly referring to the Chetniks. Here, Arso, despite Tito's "struggles," did not yield: on the Yugoslav battlefield, the only side fighting against the Axis powers is the partisans, and he immediately listed dozens of examples where weapons, received from the Allies in the last two or three months, had been used against the occupiers. He asked the brigadier and his colleagues to provide at least one example where the troops of Draža Mihailović used a significant amount of assistance against the Germans and Italians; on the contrary, they were fighting alongside them against the NOVJ and the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia. The Allied NOV of Yugoslavia, he said, had the moral right to demand assistance in the urgent and radical treatment of at least 2,000 of the most seriously wounded soldiers — precisely because they had sacrificed themselves in the fight against the common enemy.

The conversation, partly over dinner, lasted, but at no point — according to "official translator" V. Dedijer's recollection, four decades later — did it cross the line of full correctness; the distinguished soldiers of the Allied armies spoke the language of professionals and truth, openly and with good intentions. Arso, from the start, persisted in some undeniable facts, which Tito, tacitly, it could be said, approved or at least allowed, wisely securing himself a wider manoeuvring space.[398]

[397] F. Maclean, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

[398] From a conversation with V. Dedijer, October 1983, in Belgrade.

Two of the most prominent members of Maclean's group, English Lieutenant Colonel W. Street and American Major L. Farrish, approached the situation quite differently: the first remained grumpy and persistently silent, while the latter, often smiling, diligently took notes of what the hosts were saying. For him, Brigadier Maclean, introducing him, said that he was "Roosevelt's man and the advance of the U.S. Military Mission," which, for starters, was very important, a reason to give him the attention he would soon prove deserving as an emissary. The next day, with the help of Velebit and Đilas, he would carefully study documents which, according to the General Staff, compromised the Chetnik movement, particularly regarding its collaboration with the occupiers and its crimes against its own people. He was granted permission to visit units' headquarters, and he also engaged in preparing an airstrip near Glamoč for the incoming American military mission, using the opportunity to converse with NOVJ commanders, fighters and locals. It was clear that he had special tasks, which Tito may have partly been aware of, but his role remained unclear. A month later (on October 27), Major Farrish, on another assignment, would travel to Bari, and much later, after his death in a plane crash on the Greek front (in 1944), it would be revealed how his report to President Roosevelt, as well as Brigadier Maclean's report to Prime Minister Churchill, had played a crucial role in determining the truth in Tehran about the situation on the Yugoslav front. These reports helped make decisions regarding the recognition, support and aid to the NOV. The arguments of both Farrish and Maclean were based on personally collected data and information from their associates during a time when the official West unconditionally supported the Chetnik movement, both materially, politically and morally. At the same time, Brigadier General C.D. Armstrong, a British military mission officer, had been working alongside Draža Mihailović since September 25, and he had over 200 officers in Chetnik headquarters across Serbia, maintaining five communication centres linked to 39 radio stations.

The daily picture repeated itself: Lieutenant Colonel Street, with "Partisan Chief of Staff Arso Jovanović," was seen over large maps; Peter Moore was discussing demolition with engineer Vladimir Smirnov; Mitar Vujić was meeting with supply officers; Gordon Olston was exchanging information with the chief of intelligence at the General Staff. They were determining, as Maclean noted, "priority needs lists based on the best frameworks from staff schools." In principle, every three to four days, the chiefs and officers would meet with Tito "to review the analyses." Maclean wrote that he and his colleagues were "satisfied with the organization of the staff services," recognizing that "the partisan movement in Yugoslavia has an effective top-level organization with which it is possible to plan and exchange intelligence." This was also the assessment of General Jovanović, expressed by competent experts. Along with this assessment, Maclean noted in his memoirs:

"Among the people who surrounded Tito, we saw the most of his Chief of Staff, Montenegrin Arso Jovanović, who was an active officer in the Yugoslav Army and had graduated from the Belgrade General Staff Academy under General Mihailović. Stiff, inflexible, stubborn, unpleasant, he strictly adhered to the current orders, without imagination, but very capable and supporting his arguments with facts and figures, often

referring to a captured German map. During Tito's outbursts of anger or satisfaction, he would remain silent. Then, when Tito calmed down, he would continue to present his accurate and conscientious assessment of the situation.

"But Arso was not part of Tito's closest circle of collaborators. They were, as we soon determined, people of the same life experience: professional revolutionaries who shared Tito's exiles and imprisonments, who helped him organize cell and strike activities, and who went through police persecutions with him..."[399]

In Major F.W. Deakin's book *The Warrior's Mountain* (p. 112), he writes how the Chief of Staff was "a stubborn and impulsive man, the result of his military education, but, as we could see, a frustrated advisor on tactical matters, who transmitted Tito's orders to the commanders, but was not entrusted with making decisions." It was time for Brigadier Maclean and his adjutant Henrik Merger to leave from Jajce towards Korčula, where a combat boat from Bari would be waiting for them. On their way, from Jajce to the Adriatic, Captain Mića Janković and a group of fighters would accompany them. Before parting, one of the brigade officers, a logistician from the Mission, wishing the chief a safe journey as he went to investigate the possibilities for receiving material aid by sea, pulled two packages of "American rations" from his backpack — hermetically sealed food intended for "eating in difficult operational conditions." American officers had two or three such packages carefully stored in their backpacks, perhaps fearing harder days ahead. Everything was prepared synthetically, in pills and wraps, so all three meals could fit into a small uniform pocket. Arso knew they had it and selfishly kept it "just in case." He could have thanked them and declined, but he considered it part of his duty as the Chief of Staff to swallow even such "pills." He glanced over the "delicacies" carelessly, tasted them for the sake of order and remarked that it was good, all prepared "for a silk stomach," in a colourful package "like for Mickey Mouse," but "a little too small for a partisan fighter from the Balkans, who, due to eating habits, must feel full after a meal." Well, it was good, even better if some quantities could be sent, but it would be best if the Americans kept it for themselves, for the battlefield in poor southern Italy (where they were just getting a grip on the "Sara" of its "boot"), and the partisans should be sent weapons, ammunition, radios and clothes, with air support — and then they'd see how fiercely the war would be fought, and there would be more food.[400]

Relations with the Allies were complex, just as their interests were. While representatives of both Western powers were in Jajce, the arrival of a Soviet military mission was still being persistently requested. Dimitrov occasionally promised it, but then explained their absence in future reports, citing the short time available for returning planes to their bases behind the front at Bryansk, Novgorod and Smolensk. Suddenly, on September 18, instead of the anticipated Soviets, a group of high-ranking Bulgarian party officials, sent by Dimitrov to stir up the national liberation movement in their

[399] F. Maclean, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

[400] From a conversation with General M. Janković, F. Maclean's escort to Korčula.

country, "fell from the sky" at an airstrip near Bugojno.[401] The arrival of Soviet paratroopers was again arranged, locations, dates and codes were settled, but everything was delayed. The mission would not arrive until after surviving yet another dramatic war winter. During this time, attention from Jajce, and later from Drvar, turned to the East. Almost every day, Moscow was informed of events, asked for advice, and pleaded for political and military support, especially with the approach of the second AVNOJ session. On November 6, while news of the liberation of Kiev was heard, and in honour of Lenin's October Revolution, following the Chief of Staff's orders, a "small parade" was held in Jajce. He ordered that two companies of the Escort Battalion, neatly dressed and well-armed, march in formation through the town, which was warmly greeted. In the evening, the National Liberation Theatre performed Gogol's *The Government Inspector,* and in the following two nights, the plays *Doubtful Face* and *The People's Representative* by Nušić were on the program.

Despite the improvement in conditions, relations with the Western Allies were not easy, especially since they were sitting on "two chairs" — the NOP and the Chetniks. The British had a substantial military mission at the SH of the National Liberation Army, led by a brigadier, but there was an even larger one with General C.D. Armstrong at Draža Mihailović's headquarters, where, since December 25, 1942, Colonel Bill Bailey had been stationed, along with at least 200 officers and non-commissioned officers, which was more than any resistance movement in Europe. Roosevelt also had his representatives with Draža, and on October 6, he presented the Yugoslav royal army with four "Liberator" bombers, a gesture accompanied by the kind of fanfare that only Americans know how to organize. However, this also triggered new protests from Jajce. Major L. Farrish was very eager to convince General Jovanović that it was the realization of an old agreement between Prime Minister S. Jovanović and General W. Donovan, that 40 Yugoslav officers and non-commissioned officers had been trained in the United States "for long flights" in 1941, and that the aircraft were a personal gift from Roosevelt, as confirmed by the agreement from March 11, 1942, signed by General Bora Mirković. The agreement stated that American military aid to the army, both domestically and abroad, would be delivered with four special bombers provided for the Yugoslav Air Force in the Middle East. However, it was all in vain. General Jovanović, as Brigadier Maclean would say, "stubbornly" repeated that only the NOP deserved the support and aid of the great USA and its respected president in Yugoslavia — the side that was mercilessly, effectively and victoriously waging war against fascism, the common enemy. He said that things couldn't have turned out worse: "an act of interference in Yugoslavia's internal affairs," and in the "Statement of the SH and AVNOJ" broadcast on October 18, it was written that "this act contradicts the principles expressed in the Atlantic Charter." However, the opportunity was used to express the demand that "the weapons and equipment Italy seized in April 1941" be handed over to the NOP.[402] Arso knew that this request was only beginning the issue,

[401] The group was led by Shteryu Atanasov Viktor, a member of the CC of the Bulgarian Communist Party.

[402] Broadcast on *Slobodna Jugoslavija*; J. Broz, *Collected Works*, Vol. 17, p. 276.

with little hope that the usual West would resolve it favourably for the NOP anytime soon, but he also knew that Roosevelt's gesture had far greater significance than the "trivial gift of 4 bombers" to Draža Mihailović, especially since Washington had long known about the open collaboration of the Chetniks with the occupiers in the fight against the NOP, but its interest in preserving the monarchy in Yugoslavia outweighed the truth.

On the other hand, adhering to the policy of "equal support," the Anglo-Americans agreed to establish a NOP Base in Bari on October 2, which would be commanded by Colonel Milentije Popović. The tasks of the Base were to: organize the reception of weapons, equipment, and food from Allied aid and their transfer to Yugoslavia; receive interned Yugoslavs and tens of thousands of Istrians and coastal Slovenians who had been in the Italian army and ensure their return to the country and integration into the NOP; take care of the accommodation for thousands of wounded soldiers transferred from Yugoslavia, as well as all refugees in Allied territories. Thanks to the base's efforts, the process of forming and transferring five overseas brigades to Yugoslavia began immediately and the first contracted "tour" of 1,600 wounded soldiers was treated in Italy.

On October 13, Tito, requesting assistance from Moscow for the creation of "several dozen uniforms for our generals" and the provision of medical supplies, portable radios, anti-aircraft guns, "submachine guns for special units," some clothing, etc., informed Dimitrov that after the Italian surrender, the NOP had gained a large amount of weapons and, with mass mobilization from the significantly expanded liberated territory, "grown considerably, while the English were sending a pitiful amount, and that too when they were sending spies. Everything they have sent so far is not enough to equip and arm two battalions."[403] He complained to Dimitrov, in one of his first messages from Jajce, that there were "two categories of British missions at the NOP headquarters — military intelligence service and the Intelligence Service."[404]

The SH was informed of Italy's surrender on September 8 at around 4:00 p.m., which was followed by gunfire in the town and on the frontline positions. Arso, at a hastily convened SH meeting, reminded everyone of the provisions of the secret London Agreement from April 1915 and stated that, once again, there were reasons to be wary "of the price of Italy's exit from the Axis." He added that it was also not in the spirit of Allied relations that the Anglo-Americans had not promptly (after the signing of the armistice in Syracuse on September 3) informed the SH about the date of the announcement of the unconditional surrender of the occupiers, who at that time had 18 complete divisions and parts of three divisions and three coastal brigades on Yugoslav soil. This could have partially prevented the Germans from disarming them. Tito expressed concern about Churchill's manoeuvres and, on the same day, complained to Dimitrov that "the English missions had received orders from Cairo to establish contact with the Italians and deliver war material to them. We demand that the material

[403] AJ, Fund of the CC CPY-KI, reg. no. 1943/300.

[404] J. Broz, *Collected Works*, Vol. 16, p. 153.

be handed over to us."[405] Commander of the 2nd Corps, Peko Dapčević, even wrote to the SH on September 30 that "the English and the Chetniks directed all forces to mobilize the Sandžak, Montenegro and Herzegovina to receive the Allies' landing." He added that Colonel Bailey and Chetnik Major Vojislav Lukačević had sent a "threat leaflet to Muslims, urging them to join the Chetniks" (and they — he added — had sided with the Germans).[406] On November 17, the highly influential newspaper *New York Times* "discovered" that "only Yugoslav partisans are fighting against the Axis powers," but it omitted what it certainly knew by then — that Draža Mihailović was intensively working on the mobilization of a "national army" loyal to King Petar and was openly collaborating with the Germans in the fight against the communists. There is no doubt that both British and American officers delegated to the Chetnik headquarters were aware of Draža's orders to his commanders to cooperate with the Germans in light of the imminent threat of the 2nd and 3rd NOP Corps penetrating into Serbia, and that they had informed their respective governments about it. Draža, in fact, at the time when Hitler said that "Serbia is the strategic object of the Balkans," wrote to Nikola Kalabić, commander of the "Mountain Guard of His Majesty King Petar," allowing him "all possible deceptions, but wisely and without compromise," and ordered Major Vojislav Lukačević, commander of Stari Ras, to accept cooperation with the Germans "because we must focus all our attention on destroying the communists and secretly and skilfully use all the advantages offered to us by the remaining enemies."[407] At the time when the *New York Times* quoted this, it was indeed the first time during the war that the truth about the partisans had been published, and it wasn't an exception in the growing number of democratic outlets, not just in the U.S. and the UK — official media outlets in London and Washington were trumpeting how the Drina, Sutjeska and Trebišnjica rivers were the borders "of two worlds" — between territories with the decisive influence of the NOP and the Chetniks. This emphasized the alleged peculiarities of "royalist Serbia," which — later revealed by General Nikolai Korneyev — was also accepted by the "Red Tsar from Moscow" (as Roosevelt called Stalin). On November 9, the news arrived in Jajce that UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) had been established in Atlantic City (USA), an official institution of the United Nations aimed at aid and reconstruction, which united 44 countries, including Yugoslavia. However, it was too early for the NOP leadership to rejoice — the state would still be represented for a long time by the royal government.

At the core, the leadership of the National Liberation Army (NOJ) in Jajce spent three autumn months focused on: September — fighting to disarm Italian units; October — strengthening the armed forces based on the gains of the September battles; and November — preparing for the 2nd AVNOJ session, which was also the introduction to the final stage of the great battle for the international recognition of the new Yugoslavia and its armed forces.

[405] DJ, Fund of the CC CPY-KI, reg. no. 1943/232.

[406] AVII, file 394, reg. no. 8/2.

[407] For more details: J. Radovanović, *Draža Mihailović in the Crossfire of Historical Documents*, Belgrade 1986.



In liberated Jajce: from the left, Milovan Đilas, Koča Popović, Arso Jovanović, Aleksandar Ranković and Mijalko Todorović.

Four complete divisions, the main forces of three, and parts of eight Italian divisions were disarmed, and the "Venice" division and part of the "Turin" division joined the side of the NOJ. From them, the Italian partisan division "Garibaldi" was formed on December 2 as part of the 2nd Assault Corps of the NOJ. For negotiations regarding the disarmament of the "Bergamo" division, the SH sent Lola Ribar and Koča Popović to Split, along with, upon approval of the SH, Major F.W. Deakin, and all three of them signed the document about it. The Adriatic coast, from Opuzen to Sušak, with an air line distance of 500 km, was free except for the strong enemy garrisons in Split, Šibenik and Zadar, which the Germans had seized. From Rama on the Neretva to Gorica on the Soča, the roads in the central part of the country were free, covering about 800 km. Slovenia, the Croatian coast, Gorski Kotar, Dalmatia, Herzegovina, Montenegro and the Sandžak were liberated. There was a mass uprising, mobilization was declared, and the Domobrani and Chetniks were called to join the side of the NOJ. The result was around 80,000 new fighters, which, along with the vast amount of weapons obtained from disarming Italian divisions, laid the foundation for the formation of ten new divisions and four corps of the NOJ. In Gorski Kotar alone, 80 guns, 16 tanks, 500 machine carbines and 400 machine guns were seized. About a hundred radio stations were also obtained, which meant new opportunities for the head of the General Staff to develop direct command communication links with the headquarters of operational formations and tactical units on the main fronts and tasks,

but also exposed the risk of German interception of the cipher system, especially due to the lack of experts and the activity of espionage agencies.

One of the consequences of Italy's capitulation was a strong German offensive operation in Slovenia, which was withstood with extreme effort. When they feared a new offensive there at the end of October, General Jaka Avšič was quickly sent to the Supreme Command of Croatia to plan the potential reception of Slovenian units. Thus, albeit with an eight-month delay, Arso's alternative to failure on the battlefield was accepted. Tito, in Jajce on September 5, wrote to the Supreme Command that it would be "good to send at least 1,000 people from Slovenia to reinforce our Proletarian brigades, because we still don't have enough Slovenians." The Supreme Command intended to create a "Proletarian corps from the existing brigades of at least 10,000 fighters," with which weapons would be captured, "otherwise, we will depend on the English, who are reluctant to provide them. Send workers first."[408] This referred to the 1st Proletarian Corps,[409] but no one arrived from Slovenia, and even later, although Tito "on several occasions demanded that several hundred fighters be sent from Slovenia for the Proletarian units. However, the SH of the NOJ in Slovenia informed him that sending this manpower would significantly weaken the striking power of the NOJ divisions in Slovenia. So Tito withdrew the request."[410] However, the head of the Supreme Command would not abandon the order to move the 18th Slovenian Division to the "vacant" Gorski Kotar, as the units of the Supreme Command of Croatia were engaged along the Adriatic coast to secure ports necessary for the transport of wounded soldiers and the reception of allied aid arriving by sea. They would remain there, guarding important communications, from mid-December to mid-February. The Supreme Command of Slovenia was repeatedly requested to return to "its" territory, as it was allegedly impossible to manage without it. It was also requested that food and clothing from allied aid be provided to the units, even outside the criteria for the other NOJ units.

From the very beginning of the stay in Jajce, the Supreme Command aimed to strengthen the organization of the army and establish order within it. On September 1, it was reported to G. Dimitrov that, based on the decree of the Supreme Command from May 1, "about 5,000 officers (some sources say 3,699) had been promoted and appointed in the NOJ, including several generals."[411] Along with the first ten generals "named" in Petrovo polje, the name of Jaka Avšič, a pre-war cavalry colonel and now a member of the Supreme Command of Slovenia, appeared in Jajce. Soon, former major Rudolf Primorac, the Chief of Staff of the 2nd Assault Corps, was promoted to the rank of colonel, and his commissar, Mitar Bakić, was instructed not to "prepare the insignia for the general's rank," which he would, for unknown reasons, wait a long time to receive. Two officers of the Yugoslav Army also arrived, who, as the first wartime generals in their respective branches, would lead the Air Force and Navy: Colonel Franc Pirc and corvette captain Josip Černi. The Air Force Department was formed in the Supreme Command, and in Livno (again) the 1st Air Force Base was established, where around 200 aviators of all specialties would soon gather. Meanwhile, the Navy, within the Defence Staff for the Islands and in cooperation with the allies, was gaining increasing importance. From Jajce, in September and October, along with the new ten divisions and four corps of the NOJ, the first artillery, tank, engineering and motorized units were formed as the backbone of the NOJ's branches. Issues such as the supply of food for headquarters and their security, mutual relations, salutations (without the clenched fist) and the behaviour of military personnel in public places were regulated. Moreover, the rights of officers to ride horses, the education and promotion of non-commissioned officers, and the establishment of a unified and comprehensive registry for the living, wounded and fallen were organized.

In the Operational Department of the Supreme Command, efforts were focused on forming larger units. This ongoing process was stimulated by the decisions made at the Supreme Command meeting on October 5, where, within the framework of analysing the military-political situation in the country and the Mediterranean — led by Arso's introductory remarks — decisions were adopted regarding the formation of the 1st Proletarian Corps and the 1st Air Force Base, staffing solutions for all eight corps, and the establishment, through the action of the 2nd and 3rd Corps, of the operational foundation for shifting the focus of operations into Serbia. In connection with this, preparations were made for the movement of the 1st Corps towards the east, with Tito accompanying it, and the urgent dispatch of the 5th Division to the Sandžak, at the junction of the corps deployed towards Serbia. After directives were sent to the Supreme Command of Serbia on August 28 for the formation of brigades and divisions, with a group of military leaders to assist in this process, a "directive on further military activity" was sent on October 9. The directive emphasized the formation of new units, up to the division level, and intensifying combat operations in the Morava-Vardar valley. It was noted that, on the western front, "the people in masses are joining our army, while the enemy is experiencing increasing demoralization and exhaustion." From the last sentence of the directive that "it is now time for Serbia to take this path," and the fact that five numbers (21-25) were already reserved for Serbian divisions in a previous directive, it could be concluded that the situation was critical.[412] On November 2, in accordance with his plan for a quick breakthrough into Serbia, Tito called the Secretary of the Party Committee of the CPY for Serbia, Blagoje Nešković Mihajlo, via *Slobodna Jugoslavija*, to "immediately move from Serbia with the 1st Šumadija Brigade to meet the 2nd Proletarian Division in the Sandžak."[413] Soon after, he also called Momo Marković Vuk to take the 1st South Morava Brigade along the same path with the same task, in order to reinforce the grouping for the planned offensive operations on the Eastern Front. The task was carried out, but this move would turn out to be

[408] J. Broz, *Collected Works*, Vol. 16, p. 167.

[409] Formed on October 5, 1943, from the 1st Proletarian and 6th Lika Proletarian Divisions.

[410] Note 261 in Volume 16 of Tito's *Collected Works*.

[411] A total of 11 generals and 8 colonels are listed by name.

[412] AJ, Fund of the CC CPY, reg. no. 6920/1V, 1-7(43).

[413] AJ, Fund of the CC CPY, reg. no. 1943/347.



With the council members of Montenegro in Jajce.

a major mistake, as both brigades suffered heavy losses at the very beginning of the German winter operations. The operational area from which they were extracted was left without strong bases for combat operations and the creation of new units. The Supreme Command of Serbia was increasingly tasked with combat coordination with the leadership of the NOP in Macedonia, particularly Bulgaria, and also Kosovo and Vojvodina. Certainly, cooperation with the headquarters of the 2nd and 3rd Corps of the NOJ in the Sandžak and eastern Bosnia, to which the 5th Krajina Division was also sent, would not only be useful but essential, especially since it was announced that Tito would join them "with two divisions" for the breakthrough into Serbia. However, all of this was still just a political concept without any real chance of being quickly realized.

In Jajce, on September 15, the Higher Course of the Supreme Command's Officer School began operations, with Colonel Branko Poljanac appointed as its commander. After five days, 20 officers from the logistics branch joined the group of 141 students, thanks to Arso's intervention. The course ended on October 17, and the first reading material for the students was Arso's essay on the officer of the new people's army, written in the Dolomites bunker. Here in Jajce, it was reproduced on a Gestetner machine and sent to the operational unit headquarters, along with the first orders for promotions. The majority of the "graduates" were sent to the Eastern Front, to units oriented towards the Lim and Drina regions.

By the night of November 29, 142 delegates had gathered in Jajce, out of the 250 selected. Eleven members of AVNOJ from Montenegro, whose mandates had been

verified in Kolašin, arrived after walking for 11 days, and were joined here by another six delegates, including General-Lieutenant Arso R. Jovanović. In a photograph taken during the opening, formal part of the historic session, Arso is seen in the front row, right next to Tito, indicating his rank at the time. During this part of the session, after A. Ranković, who greeted the delegates on behalf of the CC of the CPY, Arso spoke on behalf of the NOP, which at that time consisted of eight corps, 29 divisions, ten independent brigades and 108 partisan units. While he was speaking, applause and cheers for the people's army, the Supreme Commander and the Chief General echoed through the hall. In fact, this scene repeated what had happened five days earlier in Mrkonjić Grad, when, also on behalf of the NOP, he greeted the delegates of ZA-VNOBiH, 247 people's representatives, from where, after meeting and talking with



Lieutenant General Arso Jovanović, on behalf of the Supreme Headquarters, greets the participants of the ZAVNOBiH session in Mrkonjić Grad.

him, and hearing his inspiring speech, poet Branko Ćopić wrote enthusiastically in his letter to Jela Perović and "delegate from Drina" Pero Đukanović wrote in his war diary. The first — a student from Hašani, a cadet of the 4th Student Battalion who heroically fought against the Ustaše and Germans in April 1941 — the renowned partisan poet, wrote on December 6, 1943, about the impressions from the historic gathering in Mrkonjić Grad, including this one: "From the chair in the front row, General Arso Jovanović, from the Supreme Command of the National Liberation Army, stands up and extends his hand to me. Where would a Yugoslav royal general stand to greet a poet?!" (Letter from the manuscript collection of Nevenka Novaković from Belgrade).

From both of the ceremonial gatherings, in Mrkonjić and Jajce, photographs re-

main of the Chief of the General Staff in the front row and at the podium, as well as group portraits of the most prominent delegates, where in the centre stands the figure of the well-built, elegantly dressed and properly armed first in rank, General Arso Jovanović of the NOVJ. The enthusiastic representatives of native Montenegro, clearly aware of the importance of the moment, literally embraced him in front of the camera.

Let us focus here on two undeniably historic and pivotal events at the end of the war in 1943. One took place in Jajce (November 29-30) on the domestic scene, and the other in Tehran (November 28-December 1) on the international stage. These events were of exceptional importance for the further strengthening and military engagement of the Anti-Fascist Coalition, and especially for the course and outcome of the liberation struggle of the people of Yugoslavia and their armed forces. This is how Arso — the Chief of the General Staff of the NOVJ, a delegate of the AVNOJ, and recently promoted to the rank of lieutenant general — understood and deeply experienced these events.

Participating in the work of the "war parliament" convened in the ancient city on the Pliva River, as he told delegate Pero Krstajić under Durmitor, he realized that with the establishment of AVNOJ as the "supreme legislative and executive representative body" and the election of the National Committee for the Liberation of Yugoslavia "as an organ with all the characteristics of a people's government," state institutions were being created that would relieve the operational unit headquarters and their bodies of many tasks. These included mobilizing all resources for the fight to liberate the country, supplying units, caring for the wounded and sick, protecting the territory, etc. These responsibilities had been the domain of the central military institution, the Supreme Command, which he led in an operational sense. Undoubtedly, these tasks burdened him, or at least temporarily distracted him from his main function, i.e., organizing and conducting military operations. One of the documents unanimously adopted in Jajce, titled "Decision on the Recognition and Gratitude of the National Liberation Army," he understood as a high recognition of the NOP's armed forces, but also as an even greater obligation. He saw his own responsibility, especially in the final sentence, which stated that AVNOJ firmly believed that the highest military leadership would continue to lead the NOP "from victory to victory, until the final expulsion of the occupiers from our land and the destruction of their collaborators." These words, heard in a packed hall from the front row, resonated with him like a warning, a duty, a vow. Even the proclamation of Tito as Marshal he understood as a form of recognition for the Supreme Command, though he knew that this title was not part of the tradition of either the Serbian or Montenegrin people's armies, nor of contemporary liberation movements. He understood, particularly from the commissar's speech, that the NOP was moving toward further politicization, which, as a professional, he found difficult to accept, but there was no alternative.

The decision by Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill, gathered in Tehran — that "the Yugoslav partisans should be provided with as much war material as possible, as well as assistance in commando operations" — Arso understood not only as a high international recognition for the army whose Supreme Command he led, and for its contri-



At the session in Jajce, during the playing of the anthem.

bution to the allied efforts and victories, but also as a great obligation to the coalition, and certainly as a herald of better days in establishing mutual ties and, particularly, in receiving air and naval support, war material supply, treatment of wounded soldiers and training of personnel. The agreement of the "Big Three" that "Yugoslavia as a state will be restored in full territorial integrity and independence" he understood as recognition of the achievements of the NOP's armed forces, whose combat operations he, in his capacity as the Chief of the General Staff, planned and directed. The decision by the State Defence Committee of the USSR "to send a Soviet military mission to the Supreme Command of the National Liberation Army and National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia" he considered a first-rate action by this key ally in defeating the Third Reich.

With these two new, extremely important events — the 2nd Session of the AVNOJ in Jajce and the Tehran Conference — Arso planned to increase his involvement in the increasingly dispersed and specialized Operational Department of the Supreme Command. He intensified contacts with professional soldiers he had long known and cooperated with throughout the war years. He could rely on them in matters of staff work and professional tasks, although most of them were far away, spread across the battlefield: Major General Velimir Terzić — Chief of the Main Staff of Croatia; Colonels Pavle Ilić Veljko — Commander of the 8th Corps, Jovan Vukotić — Chief of Staff of the 3rd, and Rudolf Primorac — 2nd Corps, divisional commanders — Vaso Jovanović of the 1st Proletarian Division, Gligo Mandić of the 17th Eastern Bosnian Division and Niko Martinović of the 26th Dalmatian Division, Branko Poljanac —

Chief of the Officer School of the Supreme Command, Ljubo Vučković (from December 14) — Commander of the 2nd Proletarian Division, and Rade Hamović — Chief of Staff of the 29th Herzegovinian Division, Rajko Tanasković — Commander of the 7th Corps in Slovenia...

The help of each of them in the work of the Operational Department of the Supreme Command, particularly in the constant monitoring of developments on the Yugoslav front, continuous assessment of the situation and formulation of decision variants, as well as sending them as delegates to specific battlefields and high commands — would be invaluable for leading both offensive and defensive operations across the battlefield. However, no less important was that, most often at his suggestion and initiative, they were found where the decisions of the Supreme Command adopted in Jajce were being executed.

At that time, the NOVJ, with eight corps and 26 divisions, totalling around 300,000 fighters, represented the decisive military force of the Anti-Fascist Coalition in the Balkans. The forces of the NOVJ held around 650,000 enemy soldiers, of which only 250,000 were German, corresponding to 19 divisions of the Wehrmacht. Both the Allies and the enemies acknowledged the armed forces of the NOVJ. The latter due to preparations and the execution of winter operations on the Yugoslav front.

During this period of the NOB, the Supreme Command particularly focused on the NOVJ units planned to carry out the upcoming operation towards Serbia, coming from the territories of Montenegro, the Sandžak and eastern Bosnia. To this end, the Supreme Command planned to transfer the 1st Proletarian Corps to these units from the western parts of the country, and, if necessary, some other units as well. These were the war days in Yugoslavia when over 130,000 km² of territory was liberated.

The breakthrough into Serbia was, for the Supreme Commander, "the most important strategic-political task — to prevent Draža," while for Hitler, "Serbia was the most important object for the defence of the Balkans." Marshal Tito, with the breakthrough of the NOVJ forces to the east and the shift of the focus of combat operations towards the eastern part of the Yugoslav front, was in a hurry. The essence of this plan was driven by the fear that the Western Allies would isolate Serbia and strengthen the forces and position of Draža Mihailović within it, especially due to their plans and combinations with Yugoslavia. Therefore, Tito's motives for a swift advance into Serbia were politically driven.

Having aligned their political and military plans in Tehran, the Allies continued with their strategic initiative for the "winter campaign" — executing offensive operations of strategic scale: the Red Army moving towards the Ukraine, and the Western Allies, particularly their 15th Army Group, along the "Italian boot" towards Rome, firmly resolved to finally open the long-awaited and often promised Second Front in Europe in the spring. Preparations for this historically and decisively significant event continued with intensive strategic bombing of cities and all resources working for the Third Reich, constantly heating up, particularly in Churchill's plans, the invasion of the Balkans, for which Roosevelt could not be convinced.

Assessing that the Anglo-American forces could not open a front in Western Eur-

ope before the spring, and that the invasion of the Balkans would likely follow with an attack on the Adriatic coast, the German Supreme Command accepted the initiative and plans of the Southeast Commander, Field Marshal Maximilian von Weichs — to carry out consecutive operations in winter conditions, under the command of the commander of the German 2nd Panzer Army, General Lothar Rendulić, to prevent the breakthrough of NOVJ forces into Serbia.

From the analysis of the situation in the central part of the Yugoslav battlefield (especially the movements and positioning of units), as well as the timely decryption of the contents of dispatches sent from the Supreme Command to the operational unit headquarters and vice versa, concerning preparations for upcoming actions, the commander of the German forces in Southeast Europe concluded that the main forces of the NOVJ planned to execute two tasks: the first — a breakthrough into Serbia to eliminate the Chetnik armed formations as the most dangerous opponent and a support for counter-revolutionary forces, while also creating the possibility of connecting with the forces of the NOJ in Macedonia, as well as in Albania and Bulgaria, and with the units of the Red Army that were advancing from the east towards the Danube, and the Yugoslav front; the second — to hold the Adriatic coast for receiving material aid from the Allies and, especially, support for possible amphibious landings by them. This was because the German command for Southeast Europe considered that the NOVJ forces in central Yugoslavia "already represented an Allied landing army." Official Berlin, for a good reason, feared the Allies' landing on the Balkans, followed by a push towards Romania to establish a connection with the Russians, which would have dislodged Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey from Hitler's war efforts. Namely, there had been noted "some hesitation" from all three countries, so it was necessary to eliminate resistance to the Third Reich in the central part of the Balkans. This was the time when the Red Army, after successfully concluding the Battle of Kursk, had advanced 600 km west, after six months of offensive operations across a 2,000 km front. Thus, the "Russian steamroller" had to be opposed with a decisive defence of the Balkans, for which it was first necessary to defeat the NOVJ forces. The German Supreme Command for Southeast Europe assessed that the situation of the Wehrmacht would deteriorate severely with the NOVJ's breakthrough into Serbia, as they believed that "Serbia is the key to dominating the entire Balkans."

Therefore, all of this occurred during the time of the 2nd AVNOJ session in Jajce and the Tehran Conference, when the Supreme Command was preparing two NOVJ corps and new units for the breakthrough into Serbia. About this, in a careless manner, the Supreme Command sent dispatches to the commanders of the 2nd and 3rd Corps, generals Peko Dapčević and Kosta Nađ, not knowing that this very intense radio communication was continuously monitored by the German intelligence service, "catching" and deciphering all the directives and orders from the Supreme Command of the NOVJ. Thanks to this, the German command for Southeast Europe, being informed of the plans of the Supreme Command, was determined to prevent the NOVJ's breakthrough into Serbia. In this regard, Field Marshal von Weichs gave assignments to the commanders of the corps and divisions at a final conference on November 7,

and the most important and urgent task was to begin the cycle of carefully prepared winter operations on December 4 or 6, with the forces of the 5th SS Mountain Corps (four German and occupation Bulgarian divisions) in the "Lightning Flash" (Kugelblitz) operation in the Sandžak and Montenegro, then in eastern Bosnia, and the 15th Mountain Army Corps (also four divisions) in the "Citen" operation in central Dalmatia, and from December 7, "Panther" in Kordun and Banija to the northwest. An experienced warrior and a good connoisseur of partisan warfare, an outstanding Wehrmacht commander, realized and presented to Berlin that military operations on Yugoslav soil could no longer be conducted with the goal of achieving the "military destruction of the NOVJ." Such operations, as it was written for the first time from Yugoslavia to the Wehrmacht high command, "must be considered unfeasible due to the expansion of the movement across large territories," and instead, operations must focus on "constantly striking at the core of Tito's forces to weaken him militarily and prevent him from achieving his goals."[414]

The actions of the German army corps, reinforced with three divisions "pulled" from other fronts (1st Mountain from Greece, 317th Infantry from France and the 392nd Croatian "Blue" Infantry from Austria) began simultaneously — in the Lim valley and in the Adriatic area. These offensive operations, carried out brutally, with the initial battles in the "Kugelblitz" and "Citen" operations, began at both ends of the central part of the Yugoslav front. The start of these operations completely surprised the NOVJ units that were engaged in entirely different operational tasks. As a result, the course of the events became more dramatic for them, and the outcome even more disastrous. From a strategic level, the Supreme Command had — due to weak intelligence activity, the unstructured collection of incomplete and unchecked data — an inkling that some "offensive" was being prepared on NOVJ units in Lika and western Bosnia. Thus, on December 1, the Supreme Command of Croatia ordered the Croatian Headquarters to "immediately neutralize" the Bihac-Knin communication, as it was "indicated that an offensive was being prepared against us."[415] The Chief of the Supreme Headquarters wanted to deprive the German 2nd Panzer Army commander of control over this crucial communication and prevent his divisions from intervening from the interior toward the Adriatic.

As part of the preparations of NOVJ forces to counter the potential enemy offensive, Arso temporarily removed the 11th Division from the 3rd Corps and placed it under the command of the 5th Corps of the NOVJ. The 5th Corps' units, along with the main forces of the 1st Proletarian Corps, were stationed in central and western Bosnia, serving as a strategic reserve for the Supreme Command. It was also ordered that the 11th Corps move the 19th Dalmatian Division closer to the focal point of the expected events, in the area of Bosansko Grahovo. Regarding the assessment of the potential German offensive, it was, it seemed, absent both in the Supreme Command and in the 2nd Corps Headquarters. This is evident from the quite routine orders

[414] J. Broz, *Collected Works*, foreword to vol. 18, IX.

[415] AVII, box 119/2, reg. no. 4/1.

issued in the first two to three days of December: for the 2nd Proletarian and 5th Assault Divisions to continue their planned offensives on their assigned axes — the first toward Ivanjica, Guca and Cacak, and the second across Zlatibor towards Užice; for the 2nd Dalmatian Brigade (about 700 fighters and commanders) to move from the Plevlja and Cajnice areas to Herzegovina to reinforce the coastal sector Boka-Trebinje-Metkovic, where the Chetniks, who had been gathered from Montenegro and Herzegovina, could pose a significant threat to the NOVJ, particularly in the expected Allied invasion of the Adriatic; for the Italian partisan "Garibaldi" Division (about 11,000 officers and soldiers) to be provided food, as well as the combat units of the 2nd Assault Corps (about 10,000 fighters and officers); and to secure the landing of the six-member British military mission led by Major Anthony Hunter at the auxiliary airfield in Plevlja, headquarters of the 2nd Assault Corps, on the night when the Germans prepared to begin their "Kugelblitz" operation. The warning to the 2nd Assault Corps Headquarters that "the defence of Prijepolje," as it appeared from Jajce, was left only to the 2nd Proletarian Division, "which already holds a large area up to Užice," came too late — on December 5, a day after the German 1st Mountain Division and the 2nd Brandenburg Regiment, reinforced by Muslim militias, completely surprised the 2nd Proletarian and 1st Šumadija Brigades, inflicting heavy casualties. Moreover, on that day, German tanks and motorized units broke through into Plevlja at 1:30 p.m., and the 2nd Corps Headquarters, losing radio contact with the Supreme Command, began to retreat toward Kolašin, and this "confusion" would last for five days. Thus, the Supreme Command did not comprehend, in the first two to three days, that the Germans had committed very strong forces and were carrying out a large operation across the Lim river. In fact, on December 6, 1943, as if nothing was happening near the Lim river, the Supreme Commander wrote to General Dapčević that they should prepare for an imminent breakthrough to the east, because "the regions of Serbia, Metohija, Kosovo and Macedonia represent large reserves for mobilizing new forces, which we must accept and rally in time."[416] He would write to Dapčević on December 7 — probably also to Arso — that the "German breakthrough from Sjenica is temporary," and that the news of the "Citen" operation was rather superficially evaluated. But when information started arriving on the evening of December 6 about the German attacks from Imotski and Sinj, and through Bosansko Grahovo on the forces of the 1st Proletarian and 5th Corps, that Bulgarian units were advancing from Užice through Zlatibor and Kreman,[417] and that the 7th SS Division was pushing through the Gacko-Nevesinje line, the Supreme Command concluded that this was a broader, more comprehensive operation...

Engaging eight German, one Bulgarian and three legionary divisions, along with

[416] J. Broz, *Collected Works*, Vol. 18, p. 25.

[417] *Ibid.* In the directive of December 6, Tito wrote to the 2nd Shock Corps Staff that "only in Serbia can a hand be extended to the brotherly Bulgarian people, whose army can play a primary role in the development of Balkan events. This army has so far remained untouched. Our first contacts with this army are already characteristic and promising of great success. In a more favourable situation, this will proceed at a faster pace."

the "Brandenburg" division, Field Marshal von Weichs began operations "in grand style, engaging all available reserves," as he had promised Hitler. He found the armed forces of the NOVJ in an offensive mood: the 2nd Proletarian and 5th Krajina Divisions were heading for Serbia, with the 16th Vojvodina Division preparing to cross the Drina River; the 17th Division was oriented toward Tuzla, while the 27th Division was at the gates of Sarajevo; the 3rd and 29th Divisions were engaged in fighting the Chetniks and building the military rear organization and overall "rear area management" in Montenegro and Herzegovina; the 1st Proletarian Division was preparing for an attack on Travnik; the divisions of the 8th Corps were positioned along the Adriatic coast, particularly defending the islands; the divisions of the 5th Corps were stationed in the western and central parts of Bosnia; partisan units in Macedonia, including the 1st Macedonian-Kosovo Brigade, were preparing, under the command of Svetozar Vukmanović-Tempo, a representative of the CC of the CPY and the Supreme Command, to conduct a manoeuvre that would shift combat operations to the communication lines between Skopje and Salonika; partisan units in Toplica and Jablanica were rising in strength; in Slovenia, five divisions and 26 partisan detachments were fighting against the Germans, as well as the Slovenian Home Guard, which had been formed by the divisional general of the Yugoslav Army, Lav Rupnik, a former teacher of Arso during his general staff training.

The surprise inflicted by the German operations came at a great cost, primarily due to the high casualties. This surprise was mostly due to the overconfidence in their own successes, the lack of vigilance in command at all levels, the underdevelopment of the intelligence service and the underestimation of the enemy. For instance, in Prijepolje, due to carelessness and the stretched-out deployment of units, the 1st Mountain Division and motorized elements of the "Brandenburg" regiment, supported by the Muslim militia, surprised the 2nd Proletarian and 1st Šumadija Brigades. In the fierce battles, 539 fighters were put out of action (339 killed or missing, and about 200 wounded), and then, with a rapid advance toward Jabuka, they surprised the corps artillery and headquarters, smashing them.[418] The Italian "Garibaldi" Division's labour and unarmed units also suffered, with 350 to 400 Italian soldiers captured, and the labour units sent from Montenegro to eastern Bosnia for food supplies had no better luck. The corps headquarters was forced to abandon Plevlja in disarray, and a large amount of war material from the corps depots, from Djurdjevića Tara to Čajetina, was either destroyed or fell into German hands.

In a surprise attack at the other end of the front, in Livno, German units, after two days of fighting in the "Citen" operation, disrupted the leadership, revealing that the headquarters of the 8th Corps was unprepared for such a complex situation.

Based on the reports received from the 3rd and 11th Corps headquarters (communication with the 2nd Corps headquarters remained interrupted until December 10, when the headquarters arrived in Kolašin) and divisions with which direct radio communication had been maintained from Jajce (for instance, the 5th Assault and

[418] Isidor Đuković published a list of 497 fallen fighters and officers in *The Battle of Prijepolje*, Belgrade 1999.

16th Vojvodina Divisions), the Chief of Staff analysed the causes of these two failures and reported them to the Supreme Commander, highlighting the surprise and superiority of the enemy, as well as the disorganization of the NOVJ units' headquarters. By virtue of his duty, he also proposed urgent measures to "address the situation in the headquarters of these units," seeing them as one of the key prerequisites for success in breaking the German offensive operations, which were carried out along two completely separate operational directions but based on a unified strategic approach. From the proposed urgent measures, he formulated and, by December 10, transmitted via direct command communication and through *Slobodna Jugoslavija*, the daily order of the Supreme Commander — that the corps and divisions exposed to superior German attacks, particularly the 3rd and 11th Corps and the 5th and 16th Divisions, should not allow themselves to be trapped in a narrow space, but instead, their headquarters should move the units, stretch out the enemy's attacking columns and counter them with active defence, flanking them whenever possible, so that, once operational conditions allowed, they could take the initiative with a counter-offensive and reclaim the occupied territory. At the same time, "all military units located in territories where the enemy has not yet launched an offensive" were ordered to "immediately begin offensive operations against the most important enemy strategic locations."[419] In the British National Archives, there is also Tito's personal appeal dated December 10, sent to General H.M. Wilson, Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in the Middle East — requesting, "in these difficult hours of our life-and-death struggle," that aerial support be provided to the NOVJ units "attacked from Karlovac in Croatia to the Sandžak" by forces "around 12 German divisions and several Ustaša and Domobran divisions." The priority, he wrote, was to bomb Bihać, "where about 20,000 soldiers of the 373rd and 114th German fighter divisions are stationed," followed by "destroying all communications leading from Knin and Serbia," then "attacking Livno and Duvno, the airport in Mostar, Nevesinje, where the "Prinz Eugen" division is deployed, and Travnik, the suburbs of Sarajevo, Butmir and Ilidža, the Banja Luka area, Rogatica and Plevlja." In the last sentence, he stated that this would, as an Allied support, "have an enormous impact on the outcome of our current difficult battles."[420]

As part of the urgent measures, on December 10, an order was issued to the Main Staff of Croatia to urgently transfer all heavy casualties from the threatened areas to the islands, primarily to Vis, from where they would be transported to Italy.

The Supreme Command also took urgent measures to reorganize the disorganized command in two operational units: to Livno, to the headquarters of the 8th Corps (comprising four divisions, 12 brigades and 12 partisan detachments), Sreten Žujović was sent with the authority to remove the previous commander, Colonel Pavle Ilić, and temporarily take over command of the corps, strengthen its defence by engaging the main body of the 1st Proletarian Corps and parts of the 5th Assault Corps, with the task of preventing the Germans from advancing from Livno. The assessment (made by

[419] AVII, file 7/A, reg. no. 44/1.

[420] BCDA, Fund UO, reg. no. 202/391, the English original was published in vol. 18 of *Collected Works* by J. Broz, 40.

the General Staff after the first, extremely unfavourable reports from the area under the responsibility of the 8th Corps, particularly from Livno) was that its headquarters, "instead of maintaining firm control of the units in its hands at a time when the difficult situation arose, displayed indecisiveness, slowness and even laxity in interventions aimed at preventing the atmosphere of wavering among the troops,"[421] leading to panic among the rear security commanders, and large losses were recorded by the 1st Air Base exactly when, under the command of Colonel Mila Pavičić, it was gathering airmen for transfer, via Vis, to Allied training centres in the Mediterranean. As the most responsible for this situation, Commander Pavle Ilić and Chief of Staff Maximilian Max Baće were removed.

At the other end of the attacked territory, in the Sandžak, the commander and political commissar of the 2nd Corps — General Peko Dapčević and Colonel Mitar Bakić — were punished on December 14 with a "military reprimand" due to "complacency and lack of vigilance," which had led to irreparable losses in both personnel and equipment. Based on a commission investigation and on General Dapčević's recommendation, the staff of the 2nd Proletarian Division was "relieved of duty" — including Commander Ljubodrag Đurić, Commissar Slobodan "Krcun" Penezić and Chief of Staff Stojadin Soldatović.[422]

The punishment of senior figures in the staffs of the 2nd and 11th Corps and of the 2nd Proletarian Division was indeed harsh and unprecedented at the time. However, the losses in men and material were also severe and were primarily caused by command failures. In Pljevlja, where the 2nd Corps Headquarters was based, life was relaxed and comfortable — almost peacetime-like. In a town filled with headquarters, units, hospitals, wounded and warehouses of food and weapons, a military parade was held for the anniversary of the October Revolution. Cultural events were organized, soldiers attended church on Sundays, football matches were played and a brass band performed in the town square. Warnings about the risk of a German offensive were not taken seriously — neither in Pljevlja nor in Prijepolje — as if anything other than a rapid German advance with bloodshed and destruction could be expected. Nor were they more alert in Livno. The price of this complacency and lack of vigilance — and thus the surprise experienced by the command — was extremely high and paid with hundreds of lives. Still, even those mildly punished officers were soon rehabilitated. The penalties for General Dapčević and Colonel Bakić were not even communicated to them — intentionally omitted by their code clerks. Colonel Ilić was, after a short interval, reassigned to duties in Jajce. Lieutenant Colonel Baće was appointed commander of the 26th Division on the island of Vis, replacing the fallen Niko Martinović. The commander and political commissar of the 2nd Proletarian Division were given new, higher posts as early as January — S. Penezić would be promoted to major on April 10, 1944, and appointed "intelligence officer of the Main Staff of Serbia." Colonel Pavle Ilić was soon promoted to the rank of major general. At the end of December, a personnel plan was in place that, after helping stabilize the difficult situation in the 11th Corps — which he had largely contributed to — he would move to replace V. Terzić as Chief of the Main Staff of Croatia, and Terzić would become commander of the 11th Corps. However, on the proposal of I. Gošnjak and I. Rukavina, and with the support of other "our Spaniards" in high and influential positions, it was decided instead to appoint Colonel Vlado Ćetković — a Spanish Civil War veteran and former commander of the 8th Kordun Division — to lead the unit. Ilić was reassigned to work at the SH.

For the post of commander of the shaken 2nd Proletarian Division, Arso — after a discussion with A. Ranković — proposed Ljubo Vučković, who had previously commanded the 4th Proletarian Brigade, which was part of the same division. For Chief of Staff, he nominated Lieutenant Colonel Savo Drljević. At Ranković's recommendation, Milosav Milosavljević was appointed political commissar of the division, and Milinko Đurović became head of the Political Department. In connection with these staffing changes, Arso also proposed that a Dalmatian be appointed as commander of the 2nd Dalmatian Brigade — ahead of its transfer from the Sandžak to the Boka-Trebinje sector — suggesting Obrad Egić. The brigade's current successful commander, Savo Burić, would then become deputy to Colonel Rudolf Primorac, Chief of Staff of the 2nd Corps — a proposal that was accepted.

After "Kugelblitz" and "Zitern (or Citern)," in December 1943 and January 1944, the operations followed one another, either consecutively or overlapping in time, with operations such as: "Schnesturm," "Pinter," "Waldrausch" and "Jajce"... A total of 13 operations in the cycle. Arso, with little help (due to the replacement) from the completely depressed P. Ilić, led the defensive operations of the corps on the main fronts of the German advance. He paid special attention to actions against German forces in eastern Bosnia, which were trying to surround and destroy the group of four NOVJ divisions (two from the 3rd Corps and the 5th Assault and 16th Vojvodina Divisions), in order to prevent the possibility of their breakthrough into Serbia. Although aware of the complexity of the situation, he tried to remain and act solely as the Chief of Staff: he collected data, analysed the situation, drew conclusions, and proposed decisions and formulated orders, then — based on the broad powers granted to him by the Supreme Commander, who was preoccupied with the revival and international affirmation of the National Committee (NKOJ) — he led the combat actions to break the synchronized German operations, reinforcing individual corps, demanding the defence of specific areas and routes, ports and islands.

Following the course of the battles for the Adriatic, Arso proposed to the Supreme Commander Tito that Vis — the last island (apart from Lastovo and Biševo) that the Germans had not yet captured — be defended decisively, with the entire 26th Dalmatian Division and the NOVJ Navy under the command of Josip Černi, a former corvette captain and colonel of the NOVJ, who, at Arso's suggestion, arrived at Vis from his position as Chief of Staff of the Coastal Operational Zone in Slovenia. The decision, adopted and communicated on January 20, 1944, was a turning point in

[421] AVII, box 119/2, reg. no. 4/1.

[422] AVII, file 394, reg. no. 4/2.

terms of the further liberation struggle in the Adriatic.[423]

Thinking about countermeasures to weaken the pressure on the NOVJ units in eastern Bosnia and improve their severely threatened position, Arso, at the end of December, in order to divert some German forces to the other side of the theatre, and after consulting with the headquarters of the 1st Proletarian and 5th Bosnian Corps, proposed launching an offensive operation on Banja Luka. The units of Colonel Slavko Rodić would carry out the combat actions, General Koča Popović would assign two brigades to this offensive operation, and other forces would carry out demonstrative attacks on a wider area. In this operation, part of the units, mainly indirectly, would be supported by the 6th Slavonian Corps.

For the attack on the defence of the city on the Vrbas, eight brigades, five partisan units and two artillery regiments were engaged, amounting to around 13,000 fighters, making it the largest NOVJ force ever assembled for an attack on a populated area.[424] In these offensive operations, the significantly strengthened 5th Corps was not only facing the 4,500 soldiers defending Banja Luka and the Zaluzani airport, but also German and quisling forces in Bosanska Gradiška and surrounding strongholds. In total, there were 9,500 soldiers, half of whom were defending Banja Luka. The force ratio, estimated by the number of soldiers and considering the fortifications in the city, did not favour the attacker. However, it was assumed that the enemy was spread out across a large area from the Adriatic to the Drina and could not be equally strong everywhere, and thus not strong enough to defend Banja Luka and its surrounding strongholds, which were mostly defended by second-rate enemy units — quisling, German and other occupying forces. The assumption was that the capture of Bosanska Gradiška would precede the attack, with the additional goal of blocking Prijedor and certainly destroying the pontoon bridge across the Sava River near Slavonski Brod. This plan was firmly agreed upon in the Supreme Command with Colonel Slavko Rodić and his associates, who, in front of Arso, argued that carrying out all these tasks was entirely feasible. The idea was that by capturing Bosanska Gradiška, blocking Prijedor and cutting off the only crossing over the Sava River, which was suitable for transporting heavy war machinery, the strengthening of Banja Luka's defence would be prevented. Orders were issued to the units accordingly. However, forewarned about the upcoming attack, General von Heisen, the commander of the 15th Mountain Corps, reinforced the defences of Bosanska Gradiška and Prijedor and ensured the bridge on the Sava was ready to facilitate the passage of heavy motorized units and was prepared for decisive defence. Due to this, and with reinforcements sent in advance, the attack on the city failed just before the operation began. Banja Luka was intended to be captured by employing tactics of decisive, fast and powerful breakthroughs towards the city centre, with the goal of breaking the enemy defence system. However, the Chief of Staff ordered that the city should be attacked decisively to draw German forces from eastern Bosnia and Posavina, but not at all costs. A three-day attack on the city was conducted

[423] AVII, file 2072, reg. no. 13/2.

[424] For more details: M. Colić, *op. cit.*, pp. 166-173.

with considerable success — starting on December 31 at 10:00 p.m. and lasting until the morning of January 2, when the majority of the city was liberated. However, there was one crucial "but" that followed the operation: a German 901st Panzer Grenadier Regiment, arriving from eastern Bosnia through Slavonski Brod, broke through, disrupting the combat order of NOVJ units and significantly undermining their advantages. As a result, the attack was halted by Colonel Rodić's order.

In the subsequent analyses carried out by the headquarters of both corps and later by the Supreme Command under Arso's leadership, it was pointed out that the surprise attack on the city (for reasons unknown at the time) was not achieved. The delay in gathering the brigades for the attack worked to the defender's advantage. Cooperation between units failed, heavy weaponry for destroying fortified strongholds and fire points was lacking and the bridges over the Vrbas were not captured. The defence, well-equipped and fortified, held firm, and at a critical moment, strong reinforcements arrived. The order to halt the attack was given at the last moment, as, besides parts of the German Cossack Cavalry Brigade and two Domobran regiments from the Posavina garrison, the German 1st Mountain Division and the 92nd Motorized Grenadier Regiment — previously engaged in eastern Bosnia — were also in motion toward Banja Luka.

The city on the Vrbas was not captured, but the primary objective of the attack on Banja Luka was achieved, although the movement of German units from eastern Bosnia towards the Vrbas valley did not significantly affect the outcome of the ongoing operation in the area. The casualties were heavy — just the 5th Corps units had around 600 casualties, while the defenders, according to NOVJ reports, suffered three times as many losses. Although General Lothar Rendulić, forced to shift stronger forces from eastern Bosnia to prevent the capture of the command centre of one of his corps, certainly the strongest garrison in the Bosnian Krajina and central Bosnia, had to contend with the consequences of this operation, the NOVJ's victory here did weaken the occupying and quisling military-political positions and influence in the region. The relatively unfavourable result of the "first Banja Luka operation"[425] for the Germans was all the more significant because it occurred just as the 2nd Panzer Army was regrouping its forces for the largest operation of the cycle, named "Waldrausch." The goal of this operation was to break up the 1st Proletarian and 5th Krajina Corps and push the NOVJ forces out of the mountainous areas of central and western Bosnia, thus depriving them of the extensive operational-strategic base from which they had been acting for over a year along major communications routes through the Sava, Bosna, Neretva, Una valleys, and toward the central Adriatic. The attack on Banja Luka partially weakened this operation, which was scheduled to begin on January 3.

However, the operation against the Germans on Korčula was neither anticipated nor prevented, which resulted in NOVJ units, primarily the 13th Dalmatian and 1st Overseas Brigades, along with the naval forces, suffering losses of 1,150 dead and captured. The German airborne assault completely surprised the two inexperienced brig-

[425] The 5th NOVJ Corps will execute this from September 18 to 28, 1944.

ades, with the 1st Overseas Brigade being in a particularly difficult situation. The rushed deployment of the 26th Division was only able to mitigate the situation on the island, evacuating hundreds of wounded and pulling units out of combat contact, but the expected help from the Allied naval and air forces, which had been arranged in a meeting with the British brigadier Mayles, failed to materialize due to poor weather conditions. According to German sources, their losses were only around 100 killed and wounded. The defeat on Korčula — undoubtedly a result of poor intelligence, an underdeveloped staff service and underestimating the enemy — became another reason why the Croatian Supreme Headquarters and some high-ranking military and political leaders, unlike the Dalmatian Regional Committee and the 26th Division Staff, doubted the possibility of executing the Supreme Command's orders to defend the island of Vis with two brigades. The decision to fortify and defend the island with respective NOVJ forces motivated the Allies to relocate, according to an agreement with the Supreme Command, first part of, and then the entire, British 2nd Commando, 550 soldiers, along with some naval forces and fortress and anti-aircraft artillery. In line with Allied wartime technology, an airport was also planned to be built, initially for the emergency landing of "flying fortresses" on their way to carry out bombing missions to military and industrial centres across Europe, incapacitated by German anti-aircraft fire.

The cycle of winter operations by the German 2nd Panzer Army and the corresponding defensive actions of the six NOVJ corps (1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th and 8th) was drawing to a close, mostly unfavourable for both warring sides. It should be noted that the leading generals, Arso Jovanović and Lothar Rendulić, both students of two renowned military schools, undisputed experts in military strategy, and experienced warriors and staff officers, were unequal in their strategic and operational play: the latter, in addition to having better equipment and, on selected routes, a greater number of units, had all the orders and directives of the former, because the German intelligence service had promptly decrypted all directives sent by the Supreme Command to subordinate headquarters. This, objectively, significantly reduced the chances for greater success of the NOVJ units, particularly in areas that the Germans were especially interested in, including the wider Banja Luka region.

The Germans, however, did not manage to stop the process of forming new and strengthening existing NOVJ units. During the course of repelling these German successive offensives on a large part of the front, three new corps were formed: the 9th Slovenian Corps, the 10th Zagreb Corps and the 11th composed of Lika, Gorski Kotar and Istrian units. In Montenegro, a Naval Operational Group was formed with the strength of a division for operations along the Montenegrin coast, which the Supreme Command was particularly interested in for the decisive defeat of Draža Mihailović's Chetniks before the Allies' landings, as well as for receiving Allied aid and coordinating with their expected landings.

By the end of these German winter operations, more precisely in the last days of January 1944, the NOVJ had 11 corps and over 310,000 fighters. Not coincidentally, towards the very end of this period, in the following month, the marches of NOVJ

operational units began, or coincided: the march of the 14th Slovenian Division from Bela Krajina to Styria (January 6-February 24) and the "February March" of the Battalion Group and two brigades from the south into eastern and central Macedonia and the Vardar valley (January 21-February 24). In both cases, the operational focus shifted to other parts of the Yugoslav front. The Supreme Command had no direct influence on either march and was late in receiving reports due to irregular communications. However, both were carried out in accordance with its appeal of December 10, 1943, to carry out offensive operations to ease the situation of the five corps in the central part of the Yugoslav front.

The 2nd German Panzer Army, reinforced with units outside its command and from the ranks of quislings, surprised the staffs of the 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 8th NOVJ Corps, especially with the power of the initial strike and the speed of their penetration. But the Germans' undeniable successes were neutralized by the late rectification of command weaknesses, the restructuring of units and their mutual coordination, which was an immense task, largely carried out by the head of the Supreme Command. The fact that the Germans decrypted telegrams was not his fault; a special service, under Ranković's leadership, developed the cipher and set its protection measures, regulated the radio characteristics, communication protocols, and methods of encryption and decryption. In terms of expertise, this was long the responsibility of Pavle Savić and later his wife Branka. The responsibility of the head of the Supreme Command was to write telegram texts (radiograms) following a precise methodology and, according to the established procedure, submit them to the head of communications of the Supreme Command, Major Veljko Dragićević, and also, from time to time, via radio communication, strictly remind the main staffs and the staffs of corps and individual divisions, with whom he communicated directly via the command line, to carefully control and ensure the secrecy of radio communications, to organize the training of radio-telegraphists according to special criteria, insisting on the strict selection of personnel. This was relatively easy while there were only about a dozen radio stations across the entire NOVJ, from the Supreme Command to the main staffs and staffs of two corps and a few operational zones and divisions. But the situation became more complicated and largely out of hand when, following the surrender of the Italian army and the intensification of Allied military aid, this number began to grow rapidly. By September 7, 1943, the "German factor" had started to actively interfere, after which two radio interception battalions began working for the 2nd Panzer Army Headquarters in Belgrade, feeding General Rendulić with decrypted documents from the opposing side, and the Supreme Command was unaware of this, and the situation continued to deteriorate, especially as these were crucial operations and strategically significant matters. In the NOVJ headquarters at all levels, until September 1944, when Soviet experts took over the ciphering and protection of the NOVJ cipher, it was handled in whatever way was known and possible, mostly with a great deal of improvisation. This did not ensure the secrecy of command communications, which are generally considered to be among the most carefully guarded secrets and are often a precondition for achieving surprise, which always means half the victory in war. In

this regard, it is interesting to note the observation of the well-known commander of NOVJ operational units and Chief of Staff of the Croatian Main Staff and the 4th Yugoslav Army, General Pavle Jakšić. This pre-war professor of physics, optics and celestial mechanics, certainly the most qualified participant in the NOB in the field of cipher work, was puzzled and asks in his war memoirs: based on which professional criteria did Pavle Savić, with his top qualifications as a physical chemist, become the main cryptographer, i.e., "the cipher master and creator of the partisan cryptographic system, for which in-depth and creative knowledge of higher mathematics — particularly its statistical areas — is necessary"? He does not question Savić as an atomic physicist, anti-fascist and patriot, nor his good will to properly perform this crucial task for the success of the NOB, but he questions his qualifications for this particular role, which was decisive. Because the Germans "not only intercepted and radio-monitored our headquarters with radio stations, but they, as it is now known, quickly decrypted our telegrams in their decryption bureau." He provides data that the "German listening service within the air force intercepted Allied missions, and the NA service, within the Ground Army, intercepted the NOVJ, quislings and Italians."[426]

The documents submitted to the ciphering service carried the signatures of the Supreme Commander or the Chief of the General Staff; the latter, Arso, more often when military matters were concerned. However, these signatures were frequently omitted during encryption or decryption, meaning that most documents from this period, especially those related to military operations, were largely incomplete. Some editors of Tito's *Collected Works* interpreted this in such a way that they classified these documents as his own works, acknowledging in the prefaces to volumes 18 to 22, covering the period from December 1, 1943 to August 20, 1944, that it was often "not at all simple to determine what originated from Tito." In all of this, there is no dispute that Marshal Tito, particularly immediately after the 2nd AVNOJ session — as a military expert and a person of high trust — gave the highest powers to Arso to independently lead operational matters within the General Staff. This meant overseeing the armed struggle and breaking the winter operations of the German 2nd Panzer Army. This allowed Tito to have more time to focus on matters of high politics, in his capacity as the General Secretary of the CC, Supreme Commander of the NOVJ, and especially as the President of the National Liberation Committee of Yugoslavia. His focus was primarily on engaging with democratic movements, peoples and states, and, most notably, with the most influential leaders in the Anti-Fascist Coalition, so as to gain their support and favour, which included conducting intensive correspondence with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, which began at this time.[427]

Fully aware of his responsibilities to his superior, Arso, within this framework, was always correct and loyal, constantly keeping in mind the nature of his own relations with the commanders of corps and main headquarters. He addressed senior military personnel with respect, regularly doing so with knowledge and under the orders or

[426] P. Jakšić, *Beyond the Memories*, Belgrade 1990, Vol. I.

[427] Tito to Churchill on December 27, 1943, while recovering in Marrakesh (Morocco); Churchill's reply was on January 8, and Tito's reply to Churchill on January 28, 1944...

authorization of the Supreme Commander. He was precise in issuing orders and directives and strict in requiring them to be executed, with reports or written updates being provided to him at the appropriate time and according to the established procedure. He gave commanders the space to demonstrate initiative but insisted on their full responsibility for the agreements and orders made. Some individuals, hiding behind the "broadness of Comrade Tito" and "the specifics of the partisan way of war," were reluctant to accept this, seeking rights while avoiding responsibility, something the Chief of the General Staff did not accept due to the great seriousness of the matters they were collectively dealing with.

Had he not commanded the 11th Corps units of the NOVJ during the 13 consecutive offensive operations of the German 2nd Panzer Army, the outcomes would likely have been different, and far more unfavourable. One can only speculate on the new and increased efforts and sacrifices, especially political ones, that would have been needed to explain and defend the decisions made at the 2nd AVNOJ session before the world, to seek political support, and request military aid and cooperation from the Allies in line with the decisions made at the Tehran Conference. It was at this conference that the "Big Three" publicly and unanimously supported the side of the NOVJ — in the case where the main NOVJ forces engaged in the central part of the front had suffered defeat.

The Supreme Commander of the NOVJ referred to these actions as the "sixth enemy offensive" — taking into account the forces and resources engaged, the number of operational objectives, the efforts invested and the losses sustained. He assessed the operation as unsuccessful for the Germans, a view that was later confirmed by the German envoy in Zagreb, Siegfried Kasche, in a report dated February 29, sent to von Ribbentrop, stating that the armed forces of the NOP "have not been seriously weakened. They now show increased activity and continue to expand." It is true that the Germans, for example, were unable to break the 1st and 5th Corps, or the 4th Corps in the Kordun, and thus failed to "prevent them from attacking the main communication routes along the Sava, Una and Bosna rivers"; they were also unable to dislodge the NOVJ forces from the Gorski Kotar, where, in the end, a Slovenian division participated in the fighting. However, over two months of fighting and combat in the harshest operational, geographic and weather conditions, they achieved two strategic objectives that they had set out to accomplish in that cycle of operations: first, they firmly established control over the Adriatic coast, preparing for the expected Allied invasion in the spring; and second, they disrupted the concentration of NOVJ forces, preventing them from launching a breakthrough into Serbia, which was delayed by this offensive. In fact, the 5th Division, which was ambushed in December, had to retreat from Zlatibor back into eastern Bosnia, where, along with the 1st Southern Morava Brigade, it faced heavy struggles amidst the winter operations of the German 2nd Panzer Army. The 2nd Proletarian Division, in early January, advanced to Ivanjica but, in a brutal clash with the Chetnik propaganda and under pressure from the Axis forces, especially the Bulgarians, retreated across the Lim River. These two NOVJ divisions, together, would march from the Lim to the Ibar, and from there to the moun-

tains of Povlen, Maljen and Tara, in mid-March, but would return to the Vasojavići region on May 20, after 67 days of exhausting operations across Serbia, mostly without achieving their objectives. The breakthrough into Serbia, with significantly stronger forces, would only succeed in August, meaning that the task, as a result of the German winter operations, was postponed by at least six months...

To conclude the discussion of Arso's involvement in the most important operational matters in Jajce, one "incident" is worth noting, where the main actor, due to wartime circumstances, was an officer of the Royal Yugoslav Army, originally from the Piperi region. On December 17, a dispatch from the Main Staff of Croatia arrived in Jajce, addressed to the Chief of the General Staff. It reported that aviation captain Milivoje Mušikić, who had been working illegally for the NOP among the Air Force personnel of the NDH, had arrived through established channels from Zagreb. The dispatch stated that a plan had been prepared for the transition of NDH aviators to the side of the NOVJ, with 50 aircraft, and it was proposed that "the transition take place on the islands of Lastovo and Vis." Arso immediately informed the Supreme Commander about this, expressing his reservations about the number of planes. However, the Supreme Commander, excited about the prospect of so many planes being transferred from Zagreb, a city from his revolutionary youth, to the free territory, ordered that the Naval Command be instructed to urgently prepare airports on Lastovo and Vis for their landing. The younger officer had no objections and the radio message was sent on December 19, but in consultation with Ranković, Arso sought to verify the number of planes without causing a stir and to bring Captain Mušikić on board as a collaborator. In their first conversation, Arso quickly established that there had been a mistake: a material error had been made when composing the radio message in the Main Staff of Croatia, which completely altered the nature of Mušikić's information. There was no talk of 50 planes, but rather that many aviators of different specialties, according to the information from the Local Committee of the Communist Party of Croatia in Zagreb, in connection with the General Staff's request of November 9, 1943, had expressed their readiness to be transferred to the free territory with several planes. Since the airfield in Glamoč was prepared to receive an aircraft for the announced American military mission, airports on the Adriatic were being sought for safety reasons. In fact, the Naval Staff, after a three-day data collection period, reported that there were no conditions to build an airfield on Lastovo, but there was a 60-hectare area on Vis that could be prepared for a military airfield in 15,000 workdays using technical resources. Additionally, the British had promised to provide the necessary technology and expert supervision. In a follow-up dispatch, Vicko Krstulović stated that the physical work could be completed during the youth competitions leading up to the scheduled 2nd Congress of the USAOJ. However, the very next day after the initial radio message was sent from the Croatian Main Staff, the commander of the German 2nd Panzer Army had a document on his desk, marked "from a verified source," which meant it had been decrypted by the highest NOVJ command — stating that 50 planes of the NDH Air Force were ready to join the NOVJ. This data, which was considered reliable, was promptly transmitted to the German military administration in Zagreb. A series of

measures were swiftly taken, starting with the suspension of all NDH flights (under the pretext of performing a "thorough technical inspection"), the relocation of aviators (for "broader mutual acquaintance") and the insertion of trusted individuals into the crews. This delayed the organized defection of this group of aviators from Zagreb to the free territory.[428]

Potoci *(January 7-27, 1944)*

After 133 days of operations from Jajce, on the evening of January 7, the Supreme Command, under pressure from the German offensive operation "Jajce," left the city of Jajce and, together with the highest institutions of the NOP and the Anglo-American military mission, headed towards the Klekovača mountain. There, on its eastern slopes, near the Potoci railway station, its backup command post had been prepared. From the marching goal, the members of the presidency of the AVNOJ and the National Committee, led by Kardelj, headed towards the headquarters of the Croatian Main Staff, while the Supreme Command split into two groups. The first group, including Tito, Arso with the necessary operational staff, and Ranković with Maclean's mission, remained in Potoci until January 27, from where it would, as much as possible under the disrupted communication system and the pressure of the German offensive operations, influence the course of defensive actions across the front. The second group, under the leadership of S. Žujović, continued towards Drvar.

From Potoci, the Supreme Command directed the actions of units in western Bosnia, along the Adriatic, in Lika and Gorski Kotar. Two German divisions operated in the coastal area, finishing the occupation of the central Dalmatian islands of Brač and Šolta, while four divisions were engaged against the 1st, 5th and 8th Corps, pushing into northern Dalmatia, and one division was advancing from Knin towards Lapac. Tito's assessment, expressed in messages to Dimitrov and in talks with Maclean, was that the German winter offensive operations were "wearing out," "exhausting themselves," and "weakening more and more," while the NOVJ units were "conducting a strong counter-offensive, liberating territories from the occupiers." A more complete assessment, however, would show that the impressions of the weakening offensive and successes of the NOVJ could not withstand the reality: the divisions of two NOVJ corps (the 2nd and 3rd) on the operational basis for the breakthrough into Serbia were incapacitated for more pronounced offensive actions, especially on the planned axis of advance towards Toplica and Šumadija; the units in Montenegro, Herzegovina and eastern Bosnia were tangled in battles against the Chetniks, Muslims and Albanians; the forces in the Adriatic, western Bosnia, Lika, Gorski Kotar and Slovenia were completely tied down with defensive actions, and in the most difficult tactical, climatic and economic conditions. In January, the Germans, advancing along the Vrbas valley and through Lika and Gorski Kotar, and using previously secured routes through Mostar

[428] Captain M. Mušikić was promoted to the rank of major and would lead the meteorological service in the Air Department of the General Staff.

and Knin, opened three additional communications for linking with the Adriatic, where they began fortifying the islands and coasts. Meanwhile, the command of the NOVJ at all levels was heavily burdened by a large number of seriously wounded soldiers and the lack of Allied aid to the army and people across most of the front. In fact, aside from the "crumbs" sent from Vis, through the ports of Senj and Sveti Juraj, to the headquarters in the interior of Croatia and Slovenia, it is recorded that only three aircraft dropped supplies near Šekovići at the end of the month, while Italian planes delivered some food and medicine for their fellow countrymen in the "Garibaldi" partisan division (about 4,000 fighters) and five work battalions (about 5,000 people). During this time, G. Dimitrov continued to receive requests, proposals and demands from Tito in Moscow, often seeking precise positions for dropping aircraft and parachutes, as well as recognition signals, but no help would arrive from the East until mid-March.

Seen from Potoci as well, the problem of caring for severely wounded fighters was becoming increasingly difficult and hopeless. True, in Bari — following an agreement reached at the SH and the efforts of the NOVJ Medical Commission sent to Italy, led by Colonel Dr. Đuro Mešterović — a permanent Allied hospital was established for the treatment of severely wounded NOVJ fighters. This hospital would soon become the backbone of a network of about ten similar hospitals in southern Italy, which would treat around 12,000 (and according to some sources, as many as 20,000) wounded and sick soldiers. The hospital's commissar was Arso's sister, Miluša, better known by her nickname "Igmanka." Wounded fighters from Croatia and Slovenia were transported to the still-free ports on the Adriatic, and from there — via Vis — transferred to Italy. Those from western Bosnia were taken in under extremely difficult conditions by Dalmatian units and brought to Vis. Some of the wounded from the units of the 2nd Shock Corps were treated at the Corps Hospital in the Morača Monastery, and only near the end of the month did their transfer begin from the airfield in Berane. Around one thousand fighters of the 2nd Proletarian Division carried their 152 wounded comrades — who were a "stone around the neck" of the proletarians during their grueling push through southwestern Serbia. To guard a large number of the wounded from the 5th Shock Division, the entire 4th Krajina Brigade was engaged. Wounded from the units of the 3rd Corps were sheltered in underground bases, particularly in the Trnovo hospital and across the slopes of Majevica, where they were wiped out by punitive expeditions of the 13th SS Division. The already overburdened Headquarters of the 2nd Corps was repeatedly warned via radiogram from Potoci to prepare in time to receive 302 wounded fighters of the 2nd Proletarian and 5th Shock Divisions before their next movement across the Lim River.

In the domain of relations with the Allies, there was also the issue of sheltering tens of thousands of civilians gathered on endangered islands. Based on an agreement with Allied representatives reached at the SH, the evacuation by sea of around 34,000 refugees from Vis, through southern Italy to North Africa, began. This resolved their housing problems and allowed for the fortification of Vis for the last-ditch defence, which the SH — from Potoci — firmly committed to, initially allowing the landing

of about one thousand British commandos and the deployment of heavy weaponry. In coordination with the Allied command, the 1st Air Base of the NOVJ — consisting of 250 specialists — was relocated from threatened Livno to Valletro (near Bari) for training in Allied centres. Around one hundred selected fighters also arrived in Bari — they would, half a year later (on July 16), after training and arming in Italy and North Africa, become the core of the 1st Tank Brigade of the NOVJ.

Thanks to the SH's radio centre, news reached Potoci on the eve of the "Serbian" New Year from North Africa: in El Arish and Cairo, in the garrisons of the army of the exiled royal government, a mutiny broke out on Christmas Day under the leadership of NOP supporters. On that occasion, 567 soldiers, 32 non-commissioned officers, 137 aviation technicians and 87 officers and aviation NCOs — encouraged also by the presence of the head and a member of the Military Mission in Cairo, Colonel V. Velebit and Lieutenant Colonel M. Milojević — declared their support for the NOVJ. At that time, it was not yet known that the uprising would be brutally suppressed by the harsh intervention of Allied commands...

Beneath Klekovača, responses were dictated to several "secondary" questions regarding current relations with the Garibaldi Partisan Division. The Chief of the Supreme Headquarters made every effort to respond to the inquiries from its superiors — the Headquarters of the 2nd Corps — with as much care, dignity and professionalism as possible, maintaining a knightly tone. This was because the division's officers had consciously and voluntarily, in a moment of revolutionary war upheaval, chosen to fight against fascism — far from their homeland, and with the risk that they might never live to see it again. Thus, at the request of the Italian Supreme Command and his personal wish, permission was granted for the division's commander, General G.V. Battisti, to return to Italy. His post was taken over by his former deputy, General Lorenzo Vivaldi. General Peko Dapčević was advised to very tactfully refuse the offer of a high Italian decoration, and, if necessary, to "pass the hot potato" to the SH. It was approved for Italian aircraft to land at the Berane airfield to deliver medicine, clothing and food for the "Garibaldini," to bring doctors and evacuate severely wounded soldiers.

Efforts were also made to establish stronger military and political relations with the leaders of the NOP of neighbouring countries. With the Fatherland Front of Bulgaria, through Dimitrov's mediation, the stance on the Macedonian question, which Tito considered "completely incorrect," was clarified. This stance had been expressed in a January proclamation. With the SH of the Albanian NOP, a radio link was established, insisting on its autonomy and requesting a liaison officer at the Supreme Command of the NOP of Yugoslavia. General Tempo was once again reminded that the creation of a Balkan Headquarters was out of the question, as it would be detrimental to the achievements of the highly developed NOP of Yugoslavia and would likely be "playing into the hands of the English."

In January, the Supreme Command of the NOP and the NOVJ adopted a firm stance that the military victories of the Western Allies should no longer be underestimated, but instead affirmed through the press. This was all the more significant

because, at the time, there were instances of gross deviations in radio broadcasts and publications of the NOP, even leading to open accusations of Versailles in the *Vjesnik* newspaper. This was a return to Comintern positions from 1935 and, objectively, a call for separatism and the disintegration of Yugoslavia.

Viewed from Potoci, the two most pressing issues on the Yugoslav front were: the "complete destruction" of the Chetniks in Montenegro and Herzegovina, and the reinforcement of the units intended for the breakthrough into Serbia, particularly the 2nd Proletarian Division. The first issue was addressed by blocking the Chetnik routes of advance from eastern Bosnia through Kalinovik and Jahorina, from Montenegro through Vilusi, and from Herzegovina through Grude towards the potential landing area for Allied forces on the eastern Adriatic coast. Although the Chetniks fought fiercely, they were defeated, with only around 5,000 remaining in the forests, which led the Supreme Command to apply new tactical measures in the continuation of the battle. As for the second issue, just a few days before the 2nd Proletarian Division's movement towards Serbia, it was estimated that "the conditions for mobilization were excellent," but in reality, after twenty days of fighting along the route to Ivjanica, very few locals had joined the division. Interestingly, Blagoje Nešković was an overly optimistic figure in this regard; when asked on January 15 by the Supreme Command "how the 2nd Proletarian Division could be reinforced with personnel from Serbia," he replied from the staff of Kosta Nađ that "it should be connected with Jablanica and Toplica, and that reinforcements should be organized from those regions, with mobilization in the Ivjanica area carried out by the local NOP."[429] All of this, in the given circumstances, proved to be extremely unrealistic, especially since strong German and Bulgarian units, as well as collaborators of various kinds, had joined forces against it — along with the division, which was reduced to around a thousand fighters burdened with carrying 209 wounded and sick soldiers.

In the work of the Supreme Command (SH) on restoring the disrupted command system, there were particular reasons for dissatisfaction with the radio communication from Potoci, and soon from Drvar, with the Main Staff of Slovenia, which was, so to speak, pointed out day by day. At that time, the head of the Communications Department of the General Staff was engineer Stane Oswald, a well-known pre-war member of the Party, who had been interned in Dachau at the beginning of the war, reportedly recruited by the Gestapo while in the camp, and then placed in one of the most confidential positions in the military leadership of the NOP. From there, he could leak secrets, some of which slipped through various channels, while communication with the SH and the staffs of the corps and divisions was maintained in a completely disorganized, unqualified and unprofessional manner. All this was attributed to Oswald when his spy work for the Gestapo was discovered, though it happened right at the beginning of the post-war period.[430]

From Potoci, the 2nd Congress of the USAOJ was postponed for the third time,

[429] J. Broz, *Collected Works*, Vol. 18, note 448, p. 329.

[430] Condemned to the harshest punishment and executed in 1948; what the truth was and what (possibly) was political manoeuvring remains unresolved to this day (2000).

citing the German offensive and severe winter conditions, with an insistence on gathering — as announced by the SH to Peko Dapčević — "Draža's Englishmen": tens of Anglo-American intelligence groups that, based on the Tehran decision and the December order from General H.M. Wilson, were withdrawn from the Chetnik headquarters. At that time, there were 54 such groups. During those January days, nine of their members gathered in the 2nd Proletarian Division Headquarters, led by British and American mission lieutenant colonels Billy Hudson and Albert Saits. They, along with all those who decided to return, were supposed to gather in the 2nd Corps Headquarters, and from there, be transferred by airplane from the Berane airport to Bari. For those officers who did not choose this method of withdrawal to Italy, two options were given: to "organize locally through Chetnik headquarters" and travel through Kalinovik, Jahorina and Herzegovina to the Adriatic south of Cavtat, from where they would be transferred by British ships to their own, or to stay for the time being, with Brigadier General C.D. Armstrong, in Chetnik headquarters until the end of May.

This time also saw the so-called "Chetnik congress in the village of Ba" (near Valjevo), held from January 25 to 28, known in the press by the epithet "Svetosavski" (Serb Orthodox). From both a political and military standpoint — especially in light of the Tehran decision to restore Yugoslavia in its territorial integrity — it was intended to challenge the decisions adopted in Jajce. It was attended by 274 delegates, including representatives of former political parties from nearly all parts of Yugoslavia, and Captain Walter Mansfield, a member of the U.S. Military Mission to the Chetnik Supreme Command. According to the adopted documents, these parties joined the Chetnik movement in the "Yugoslav National Democratic Union" against the decisions of AVNOJ and communism in general. They expressed deep regret that the Western Allies were helping the NOP and emphasized their commitment to organizing Yugoslavia on a federal basis (Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia), as a constitutional monarchy. The essence of the meeting was to defend the old state order and once again challenge the legitimacy of the AVNOJ decisions. The content of the decisions and the propaganda surrounding them in Serbia and foreign circles raised new, certainly complex, questions of inter-allied cooperation and political and military preparations for the impending breakthrough of a group of divisions into Serbia and the shifting of NOP operations toward Serbia.

From Potoci, just a few details about the return of British Brigadier Fitzroy Maclean to the Supreme Command. With his new colleagues, he waited in Bari for ten days for the "conditions" to be created for landing at one of the partisan airfields in the wider area of the new Supreme Command headquarters, constantly emphasizing in his messages to Tito that he carried "very important and urgent messages." The Supreme Command was in a hurry, but the most important cards — due to the uncertain course of German operations and the severity of the winter — could not "fall into place," and the brigadier's landing was delayed near Bosanski Petrovac or Bugojno, at Krbavsko polje. Eventually, a transport "Dakota" took off from Bari, escorted by ten "Thunderbolts." The paratroopers landed on Medeno Polje near Bosanski Petrovac on January 20 and, accompanied by Colonel Slavko Rodić, arrived at Potoci.

On that day, based on the decision of the State Defence Committee of the USSR, a Soviet military mission took off from Moscow towards the SH of the NOP. The mission, which would travel through Tehran, Cairo and Bari, remained in transit for over a month — a duration that was quite long even for wartime standards. If this news from Moscow, which had been eagerly awaited for at least two years, had been known earlier, it would have made the January days in Potoci easier to bear, where the pressure from the German divisions commanded by General Rendulić and the winter that, like never before, had frozen the mountains and waters, made the situation even harder...

In Potoci, Arso participated in discussions on two January wartime nights with Marshal Tito and Brigadier F. Maclean, who arrived with two majors: American Linn Farrish and British Randolph Churchill. The first was a career intelligence officer and an old acquaintance of the SH, and the second was the son of Prime Minister Winston Churchill and a member of the House of Commons. On the evening of January 20, Marshal Tito, with the chief of the SH and the commander of the 5th Corps, received Maclean and his colleagues. The brigadier handed Tito a letter from Prime Minister Churchill, written on January 8 in Marrakech (Morocco). Tito read the letter immediately and, for good reason, was elated — not only because it was personally addressed to him by Churchill, but also due to the content, especially the passage which read:

"I have firmly decided that the British government will no longer provide any military aid to Mihailović, and aid will only be given to you. We would be pleased if the Yugoslav royal government would remove Mihailović from its ranks."[431] He said that he felt great satisfaction receiving such a personal letter from Churchill, and then, feeling self-satisfied, spoke to the British brigadier about the sure defence of Vis, which the Allies could rely on; the victorious outcome of the NOP's struggle against the ongoing German offensive operations across parts of the battlefield; the great effects of material support from the Allies, which the Germans had temporarily hindered by closing main supply routes from the Adriatic to the interior, but that this would soon be resolved. Acknowledging the possible political reasons for his superior's words, General Jovanović allowed him to express his thoughts fully, and then, calmly and with the use of argumentation, spoke about the real and potential difficulties in organizing the defence of Vis, where air and naval support from the Allies were certainly necessary, without overlooking the possible scenario in which the island would have to be abandoned and where support and assistance from the Allies would be crucial during the evacuation to land. He also added that the newly arrived British commandos would be a great help to the NOP forces for defending Vis and carrying out landings on other islands. He mentioned that he personally had difficulties in cooperating with Lieutenant Colonel W. Street when it came to joint operations of Allied aviation and planning and delivering supplies, particularly by air, and pointed out the scope of the ongoing German offensive in southwestern Bosnia. He explained that the enemy had taken control of Bosanska Gradiška, Livno, Duvno and Šujica, significantly increasing the depth of the defence along the coastal area, but had not penetrated Kupres and

[431] AVII, file 17, reg. no. 1/3-6 (translation from English).

Bugojno. He attributed the observed movements of large German units towards Istria, and likely Italy, to the need for the German High Command to relieve the situation in Anzio. The Supreme Commander allowed him to finish his thought and then interrupted with words of gratitude towards the Allies and optimism. The Chief of Staff would then take the floor, presenting his figures, analysis conclusions and proposals for cooperation. Colonel Rodić remained silent, evidently angry because Arso — Chief of Staff — was, in a way, contradicting the Marshal in front of a foreigner, while Maclean smiled more often, having confirmation of his earlier impression of General Jovanović.

Only four nights later, conditions were met to organize a dinner in honour of the newcomers from the Anglo-American military mission. The host spoke on the most appropriate topics for the occasion: Allied military aid, the outcome of the German offensive cycle, Churchill's noble gesture of sending his son among the partisans, believing it was a good omen for continued cooperation between the NOP's armed forces and the Allies. The Supreme Commander spoke with enthusiasm about the results of the cooperation with the Allies and its expected course, and about the German offensive operations, which had been ongoing for more than a month, saying that "the forces have been exhausted and are waning, without the results that General Rendulić expected."

That night, the Chief of Staff mostly remained silent, politely listening to his superior and Churchill's son, who, "well-warmed" by a strong drink, could hardly be interrupted, while Major Linn Farrish, called "Comrade Slim" in Jajce, mostly kept quiet, carefully noting the details of the conversation, as he had during previous meetings. It was known that, in early November, through his superior, General W. Donovan, he had reported to President Roosevelt on the situation in the Yugoslav theatre of war. Naturally, the details of that report were not known, but it was clear that, in this report to his Supreme Commander and a highly influential leader of the Anti-Fascist Coalition, just before the Tehran conference, he had, "as an observer" and "based on personal observations," without intending to judge, written in the very first sentence that "the partisan movement has greater military and political significance than is usually thought in the outside world." The report continued with a detailed, insightful and impartial account, in which, among other things, it stated that there was no doubt that "the partisan forces have been completely dedicated to fighting the Axis from the very beginning, that they have fought against it all the time, and that they will continue to fight until the end. At the same time, their daily battles surpass human imagination." Considering the breadth of this struggle and its results, the observer noted that "if any movement ever had an unbreakable will and courage to create great things, such a movement is now in Yugoslavia." The report went on with appropriate reasoning. Major L. Farrish, however, wrote that Draža Mihailović's Chetniks "never fought effectively nor did they ever try," being more afraid of communism than the Germans, and he referred to the Ustaše as "Himmler's terrorists." His observations were grouped into 19 points, each equally well-intentioned, analytical and open, despite the fact that they might not have pleased Roosevelt, who still had open sympathies for Mihailović and was determined to preserve the monarchist structure of Yugoslavia. This report

on the situation in Yugoslavia was sent, he emphasized, "in a dual capacity — both as an American observer and a member of the Allied Military Mission, with Brigadier Maclean at the head." He advocated "immediate and optimal" supplies for the partisan forces, "180,000 men organized into 18 divisions," as winter and tough battles with the Germans were approaching. For the third time, he repeated that the partisan movement represented much greater military power "than is generally known in the outside world."[432]

In Potoci, the contents of Brigadier Maclean's report, submitted on November 6 to the Allied Supreme Commander in Cairo, General H.M. Wilson, and intended for Churchill, were not known either. In his lengthy, analytical and open report on the military-political situation on the Yugoslav front, Maclean emphasized that the partisan forces numbered about 220,000 fighters organized into 26 divisions, and up to that point, all Allied aid had amounted to barely 150 tons of material. He mentioned the (earlier) cooperation of Chetnik commanders with the Italians, and even (currently) with the Germans, taking as an example M. Đujić, who openly cooperated with the occupiers and commanded around 3,000 soldiers of the Dinaric Division, but that Draža could not discredit or replace him because he had nominated him for the Order of Karađorđe's Star, which had been widely publicized through the BBC, and he had celebrated it with the Italians in a café in Knin. He then made the following recommendations:

"1. To stop supporting Mihailović;

"2. To immediately increase aid to the partisans;

"3. To particularly, without further delay, organize an effective maritime supply system on a large scale;

"4. To attack suitable targets in Yugoslavia from the air whenever possible;

"5. To ensure that BBC broadcasts and other publications align with the policy of His Majesty's government."

When making decisions on these matters, the situation — emphasized — must be analysed from two important perspectives: the immediate support of the NOP by Allied efforts and Great Britain's strategic interests in the Balkans. Neither of these is in dispute, with the statement that "a comparison cannot be drawn between the partisans and the Chetniks. The partisans are between 10 and 20 times more numerous, infinitely better organized, better equipped and have better discipline. Furthermore, they fight against the Germans, while the Chetniks either help the Germans or do nothing."[433]

The Chief of Staff, Arso Jovanović, had no reason to doubt the humanity and dedication to the truth of these two prominent Allied officers. If he had known the contents of their recent reports and their influence on the thinking, behaviour and decision-making of the most influential individuals and relevant Allied circles, he would

[432] David Martin, *The Network of Disinformation*, Belgrade 1991, Chapter "Farrish's Reports," pp. 256-262.

[433] *Collection Tito-Churchill, Strictly Secret* (compiled and edited by Dr. Dušan Biber), Zagreb 1981, pp. 129-137.

have quickly forgotten, or at least easily pushed to the back of his mind, the daily "nagging" with the grumpy and arrogant Lieutenant Colonel W. Street over every "item" of inter-Allied cooperation. He would have forgotten the sleepless nights over the operational maps, the tension due to unreliable communication, the concern for the safety of the wounded and the uncertainty about the outcome of certain battles of NOP units from Lim to the Soča and from Orjen to Fruška Gora, which would certainly have been much more favourable had there been air support.

Thus, he carefully listened and wrote down some notes, as usual, with green ink in a notebook with a hard cover that he never parted with. About Churchill Jr., the Allied officer and, undoubtedly, a welcome guest, he formed his first impression: quite self-confident, somewhat cynical, and a supporter of dark humour with an open antipathy toward professional soldiers. He was aware of the advantages granted to him by his "blue blood" and that behind him stood his father, of immeasurable power, and that he had come on a mission that the Supreme Command held in high regard, especially in such a difficult (not only material) situation. This impression would be confirmed in every subsequent meeting with Major Randolph while he was at the Supreme Command's headquarters, and later, when he came for debriefings with General Maclean in Drvar, where, at the opening of the 2nd Congress of USAOJ on May 2, he would sit in the place of honour between Marshal Tito and General Jovanović. In Drvar, invited to Tito's celebration, he would find himself amidst the German airborne assault on May 25.

Part Eight

SACRIFICE FOR THE MARSHAL

- *Donning Russia at Medeno Polje*
- *Deep and sincere friendship with General N.V. Korneyev of the Red Army*
- *Concern over the outcome of the second breakthrough into Serbia*
- *Letter to the Marshal from May 9*
- *Two flights to Šekovići, Nađ and Lekić*
- *Caring for the wounded — an operational task of the highest priority*
- *Formation of the corps and decree on military courts*
- *Russian aid arrives from Kalinovka, Bari and Persian ports*
- *Easter bombing raids over Serbia and Montenegro*
- *And then, on May 25, the sky over Drvar turned white!*
- *With Ranković and Žujović, defending Tito in the cave*
- *Through Vittorota, Kupreško polje and Bari — to the "forward Adriatic fortress" Vis*
- *Key role of the Russians*

Drvar *(January 28-May 25, 1944)*

On January 27, late at night, the Supreme Command, with Brigadier F. Maclean's mission, headed for Drvar aboard the partisan train of the forest railway, travelling over Mount Struganica and the Oštrelj station.

On the first day of the war in the new headquarters, Tito, from a small house below the cave by the Una River, where he had settled with Generals Jovanović and Ranković, replied to Churchill's letter from January 8.[434] The next day, he chaired a Political Bureau meeting, in which Ranković, Đilas, Milutinović and Žujović participated. From the conclusions of that meeting, the Chief of Staff could judge from the requests made to him: do everything to improve relations with the USA and Great Britain, emphasizing their historical contribution in the fight against nazi-fascism, praising their assistance to the NOVJ of Yugoslavia and not criticizing their social system; refrain from attacking King Petar, but expose the concrete issues of the émigré government, particularly its minister, Draža Mihailović, "as a collaborator with the occupier and a war criminal." Regarding the new winds in relations with Western Allies, Arso was tasked with coordinating with the Main Staff of Slovenia to address the issue of sending aviators, drivers, tankers, mechanics, and sailors for training and schooling in Allied centres in the Mediterranean and North Africa; coordinating with the Operational Headquarters for the defence of the islands on the matter of "landing

[434] *Collection Tito-Churchill, Strictly Secret*, p. 81.

Allied forces on our islands"; and with the Headquarters of the 2nd Corps, tightening the demand for the correct treatment of "Draža's Englishmen" who were gathering there for transport to Italy...

During these days, the Croats and Slovenes raised two, at the very least, indicative matters: The Main Staff of Slovenia reported to the Supreme Command that a group of officers from the former Royal Yugoslav Army had arrived in their units, having defected from internment, asking, "Can they be retained in their units, even though they are not Slovenes by nationality?" The Main Staff of Croatia issued a command to all their operational headquarters to "in case of danger, surrender captured Germans on a reverse exchange to the nearest German command," for later exchange for their own fighters in captivity. The first was responded to by saying that these officers could be retained and assigned appropriate tasks, noting that in about ten days, they could "count on their 18th division," which had been engaged in the Gorski Kotar region by order of the Supreme Command. The second was warned that no one has the right to authorize such "reverse exchanges," so the order must be immediately revoked.[435]

Colonel Milutin Morača, the commander of the 5th Shock Division, was ordered through the Headquarters of the 2nd Shock Corps to temporarily place the 2nd Proletarian Division under his command and prepare it to attack the "concentrated Chetniks" from the Čajniče-Goražde line when "they cross the Lim in the upcoming offensive on the Sandžak." At Tito's insistence, the Headquarters of the 3rd Corps was ordered to quickly send stronger forces to the Kalinovik and Jahorina sectors to prevent the establishment of a stronger Chetnik stronghold in this deep and significant rear area of the coastal zone, especially in early spring, when the Supreme Commander planned a breakthrough with two divisions across the Lim and Drina rivers into Serbia, which would leave the defence in this area thinly spread.

For the SH, and especially for its operational part, these were days and weeks of very intensive work preparing the divisions of the 2nd and 3rd Corps for the spring breakthrough into Serbia. This included the arrival of Allied military aid to the airfields in Berane, Smailagić Polje (Kolašin), Žabljak and Osmači; the formation of four new divisions and three NOVJ corps; the organization of the 1st Engineering Brigade; the sending of new personnel for technical branches of the NOVJ to training in Italy. A protocol on "the training of Yugoslav pilots and other aircrew and the formation of Yugoslav fighter and bomber squadrons by the British Royal Air Force"[436] was signed in Drvar on March 12.[437]

New auxiliary airfields were being intensively constructed for receiving missions and the delivery of Allied military aid, as well as for the further evacuation of the wounded and sick. This process began well, as by February 1, over 1,500 wounded were transferred and treated in Allied hospitals in Italy, mostly by ship, but also by plane. By the end of that month, around 10,000 women and children, mostly from Dalmatia, were

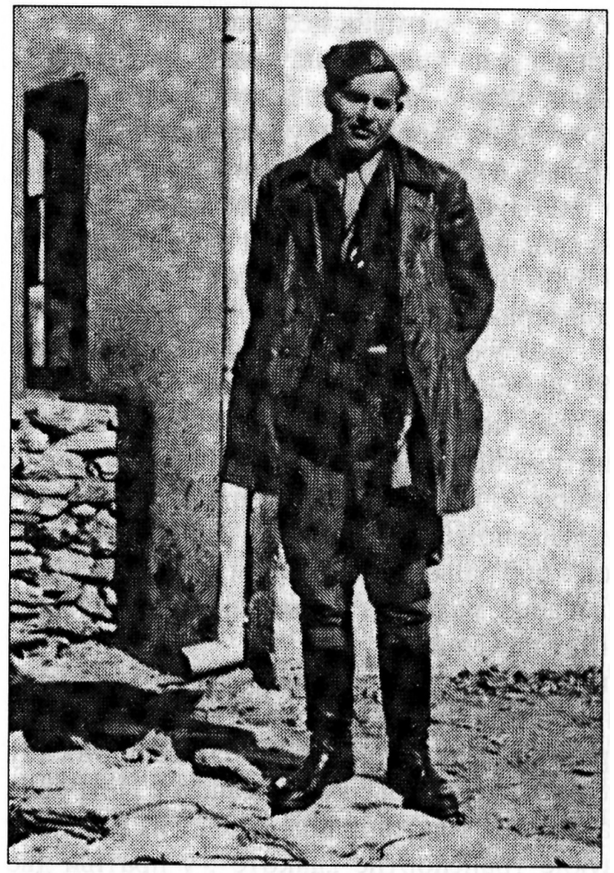
[435] AVII, file 119/1, reg. no. 1/2.

[436] The 1st Hunting Squadron of the NOVJ was formed on April 22, and the second on July 1, 1944.

[437] AVII, file 15, reg. no. 6/1-1.

evacuated and transported to the English military camp El Shat in Sinai.

A great help and strong support for the further development of the National Liberation Movement, especially its military component, came from the arrival of the Soviet military mission at the end of February and the departure of the NOVJ military mission to Moscow at the beginning of April. The first landed on Medeno Polje near Bosanski Petrovac on February 23, with the help of three gliders that brought transport "Dakotas" from Bari in two hours of flight, accompanied by two squadrons of fighters. The mission was led by General-Lieutenant Nikolai Vasilyevich Korneyev. On the evening of February 24, the Soviet military mission, along with the Anglo-American mission, attended a formal dinner in Drvar.



Long-awaited Soviet mission at Medeno Polje: General Sreten Žujović-Crni.

The reception upon landing and in Drvar — as recalled by then Lieutenant Colonel Miladin Ivanović, who was directly responsible for the technical matters concerning the reception of the "brother Russians" — was very cordial. On behalf of the Supreme Command, the Russians were warmly welcomed by Lieutenant Generals Arso Jovanović and Žujović, and this was fondly remembered four decades later by the Deputy Head of the Mission, Major General Anatoly Pavlovich Gorshkov.[438] The mission consisted of 22 members of the Red Army: two generals, one colonel, three lieutenant colonels, six majors, two lieutenants, and eight second lieutenants and non-commissioned officers. The generals, N.V. Korneyev (1900), an officer from

[438] *Collection Tito in Vršac*, Vršac 1984, editor Milovan Dželebdžić.

the October Revolution and a general from the Battle of Stalingrad, who was severely wounded in his leg, would prove to be a resilient man, reserved in conversation and official relations, strict in evaluations, but favourable toward the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, Arso, due to their shared experience as military school lecturers before the war and their common authorship of several books on military art. During the war, Korneyev held high staff positions, so he appreciated Arso's professional attitude toward his duties and his sense of cooperation. Korneyev had vast life experience and extensive military knowledge, was skilled in diplomacy, principled, with a strong sense of duty and responsibility. His deputy, A.P. Gorshkov (1908), had experience in partisan warfare from the Urals to Byelorussia. He proved to be open, sociable and fit for cooperation, still skilled in military matters and adept at staff work, which particularly interested Arso, as the two of them collaborated daily in Drvar and on Vis, working primarily on issues related to Soviet military aid to the NOP forces.

The mission left for the headquarters of the Supreme Command of the NOP, based on the conclusions adopted in Tehran and the decision of the State Defence Council of the USSR from December 14, 1943, on January 19, following the Moscow-Stalingrad-Astrakhan-Baku-Tehran-Baghdad route. It arrived in Cairo, where it stayed for over a month, waiting for an Allied plane. From Cairo, the mission finally arrived in Bari at the beginning of February, but its flight to Yugoslavia was delayed several times by the British military authorities due to bad weather conditions, low cloud cover, unfavourable winds, and especially a snow-covered runway. M. Ivanović would remember how, with the assigned unit, he fruitlessly tried to clear the snow — what they cleared with great difficulty during the day was covered by winds at night, and this lasted almost a whole month. Annoyed by the prolonged waiting and frequent promises from the British, and unable to parachute due to his own disability, Korneyev decided to have the mission flown from Bari to Medeno Polje, near Drvar, in three large gliders pulled by aircraft. This same airfield had earlier been used by British Brigadier F. Maclean and U.S. Army Major L. Farrish, who parachuted into the area, a method Arso considered more soldierly than the gliders. Ivanović remembers discussing this with S. Žujović while watching the officers of the Red Army emerge from the belly of the gliders after such long delays. Later, after being fully informed of the general's injury, Ivanović approved the mission members' solidarity with their chief, who, due to an unhealed wound on his leg, could barely move. However, he would later confide to General Terzić, while preparing for his journey to "the first land of socialism" as head of the NOP mission in Moscow, that he felt wronged because Marshal Stalin and the General Staff of the Red Army had sent a severely disabled general to the Supreme Command of the NOP. Every day, Ivanović met with the mission members — both officially and privately — and in the company of close friends, he would express his wish that some of them drank less, including General Korneyev, that they maintain a more respectful attitude toward non-commissioned officers, and that they "attack" the attractive partisan women less often, or at least in a more refined manner. The dissatisfaction with certain behaviours toward the partisans had to be carefully subdued by Mitra Mitrović-Đilas, who later recorded it in her war memoirs. As for some uncomfortable questions about the excessive involvement of the Red Army representatives in the internal relations of the NOP, from the basic units to the SH, Ivanović sought answers within himself and for himself, as a witness to how, soon after their arrival and under their direct influence, a special kitchen was established for the headquarters, a new form of greeting was introduced, and subordinates were required to address their superiors with "*vi*" (a formal, respectful form of address). This could have meant an introduction of order in the operational army, whose soldier — very strict both with himself and others — was Arso, the Chief of Staff, but it was, somewhat unexpectedly, out of step with the good traditions of the national Serbian and Montenegrin army, and even called for a break with the healthy and amicable relationships between partisans, who, even when they appeared non-military, always ensured the completion of all tasks. Even the toasts of Marshal Tito and General Korneyev, both obviously unskilled speakers and not particularly good at constructing logical and "digestible" sentences, uttered during the first joint dinner in Drvar, did not sound particularly festive or thunderous, as, according to Montenegrin views, such an important and long-awaited moment would have deserved.

These were, however, only the first, generally superficial impressions, mostly kept to himself, and what was most important, he told his comrades, was that the Russian brothers had arrived once and that it would never be the same again — it could only get better, as it would now be easier and more direct to negotiate with the generals of the Red Army on the treatment of the wounded, receiving weapons and other material aid, and soon — he hoped — on combat cooperation. But on April 1, Churchill, wary of a "Russian invasion in Bosnia," wrote to Anthony Eden that the "grand Russian mission had arrived in Tito's headquarters," emphasizing how unlikely it was "that the Russians wouldn't do everything for the establishment of a communist Yugoslavia under Tito's rule." Official America, as General Gorshkov writes, was bothered by the fact that two generals were sent before the Soviet mission, seeing in it some "Russian imperial interests," while Churchill, he says, would also be bothered by the fact that Yugoslavia sent two generals (Terzić and Đilas) to Moscow and only one (Vlado Velebit) to London.

Right after the Soviets' arrival in Drvar, the question of sending the NOP Military Mission to Moscow arose. In the "first circle" of the Chief of Staff, no one consulted about its possible composition, but there was consultation about its tasks; the Supreme Commander tasked him with preparing a list of questions the Mission would address, ranked by priority, so that, after its adoption, he could prepare individual members for specific tasks. Soon, what seemed most natural was done — the selection of the head of the mission and some key members was consulted, and the reasons for that will be explained. At the Political Bureau meeting, Đilas said that the head of the mission and its main "departmental" figures should be educated officers of high rank, because solving problems related to military cooperation — especially issues such as the treatment of the wounded, providing material aid in weapons and equipment, training personnel, forming different types of units, etc. — required highly skilled officers, people who could discuss knowledgeably and represent the NOP in high-level military staff and



The Russians have finally arrived: from the left, General Korneyev, Tito, General Gorshkov and Arso Jovanović.

ministries. He added that "we have enough politicians and communists there." This criterion was accepted, with the conclusion that the head of the Mission should be an officer of the Yugoslav Royal Army, so as not to irritate the Western Allies, whose relations were also very important to Moscow. The Chief of Staff was already consulted, and after being given some time to think, he proposed a calm, methodical, diligent, organized, persistent and educated general, Velimir Terzić, as the head, and for his deputy in aviation matters, Colonel Milo Pavičić, an officer of the Yugoslav Royal Army from Srebrenica, a good specialist and patriot, who, in German captivity in 1941, rejected the opportunity to join the Ustaša army, as he was a Croat born in the NDH territory, and stayed with his fellow Serbs, waiting for the first opportunity to escape to join the insurgents. After serving as commander of the 1st Air Force Base of the NOP, he was now part of the Mission led by V. Velebit in the Mediterranean. After a consultation with Major General Dr. Gojko Nikolić, they also added Colonel Dr. Đuro Mešterović, a dedicated partisan surgeon, then head of the NOP's Medical Mission in Italy, and for logistical issues, Lieutenant Colonel Stanko Danilović, a graduate economist and lawyer, a recognized expert in supply at the Supreme Command. It was proposed that no representatives for naval issues should be sent, as these relations would develop with the Western Allies in the Mediterranean. It was also added that General Terzić was well-versed in the technical equipment of the ground forces, so no special expert was needed for this issue either.

Following Arso's order, the other members of the Mission at the Supreme Command would be gathered by March 22, during which two more issues were resolved:

General-Lieutenant Milovan Đilas was appointed as the political representative of the National Committee within the Mission, tasked with returning to Drvar after "opening the main doors for Terzić and his collaborators" in Moscow; instead of General Terzić, Pavle Jakšić, until then the commander of the 11th Corps, was appointed as the Chief of Staff of the Croatian Supreme Command.

After proper preparations at the Supreme Command, the NOP Mission, consisting of 11 members, would be transferred by Soviet plane via Bari, Cairo and Tehran, and would arrive in Moscow on April 12, 1944.[439]

General Terzić would already activate the document prepared under the leadership of the Chief of Staff of the Supreme Command on April 28, after a series of discussions at the State Defence Committee and General Staff. From the "Plan of Needs for NOP" formulated in Drvar, it was narrowed down to the "Plan of Urgent Needs" for each main staff and corps. Considering the armament, clothing and footwear for an army of 300,000 soldiers, the "items" ranged from 54,000 rifles, 11,900 submachine guns, 3,950 light and 610 heavy machine guns to 2,100 sniper rifles and 120 small and large rubber boats, as well as "urgent needs" for food for 300,000 people and clothing for 56,000.[440]

The mission of Colonel Dr. Vladimir Velebit, sent on December 4, 1943, from Jajce to the Allied Supreme Command, was only filled with the appropriate specialists in April and renamed the NOP Military Mission, with its leader promoted to the rank of major-general. It was sent to Cairo on April 15, and the criteria for its staffing were in accordance with the nature of relations with the Western Allies: at the head, a person trusted by Tito; an experienced negotiator and skilled diplomat; an excellent knowledge of the English language, with assistants being the corresponding military specialists. Hence, two pre-war active officers were in the Mission: Colonel Božo Lazarević for aviation and Colonel Miloje Milojević for the ground forces. The primary task of Colonel Lazarević, Arso's comrade from the insurgent days, was to gather previously scattered aviation personnel across the Mediterranean and southern Africa, organize training for pilots and other specialists in Allied schools, and expedite the formation of a fighter and fighter-bomber squadron of the NOP in the Royal Air force (RAF). Colonel Milojević, a national hero since November 1942, was gathering artillerymen, tankers, drivers, and other specialists (from the country and Allied units and institutions) and organizing their training, then, through the NOP Base in Bari, transporting them to Vis, where, according to the plans of the Supreme Command, they would be sent to the headquarters of operational units. The main task for all members of the Mission, as well as for all NOP institutions in the Mediterranean, was the gathering of those Yugoslavs who, especially after the Italian capitulation, expressed the desire to return to the homeland and join the fight. According to the data from the Supreme Command, there were around 30,000 to 40,000 of them in the labour camps in Sicily

[439] Along with Generals V. Terzić and M. Đilas, Colonel Velimir Stojnić, Dr. Đ. Mešterović and M. Pavičić, Lieutenant Colonels Vinko Švob and Stanko Danilović, Major Pavle Savić, sculptor Antun Augustinčić, Lieutenant Bogdan Popović and Second Lieutenant Marko Popović.

[440] *Collection of Relations Between Yugoslavia and Russia (USSR) 1941-1945*, Belgrade 1996, p. 402.

and Sardinia, and thousands of them would join the new overseas brigades of the NOP.

For almost a year, the planned and ever-current offensive of the NOP operational forces into Serbia was not only pursued after the failed attempts in the spring and early winter of 1943, but the preparations for it were intensified within the framework of the "spring offensive campaign," with the goal of ensuring the conditions for successfully shifting the focus of operations to the eastern parts of the Yugoslav battlefield, relying on significant Soviet military aid. The Chief of Staff, along with his associates, was tasked with maintaining constant communication with the staffs of the 2nd and 3rd Corps and the 5th Krajina Division (at their junction), ensuring the operational-strategic foundation in the area of eastern Bosnia, northern Montenegro and the Sandžak, from where forces of strategic importance would be sent towards Serbia. The breakthrough would lead, via Lim and Ibar, through Kopaonik, towards Toplica and Jablanica, or via Drina, western Serbia, towards Šumadija.[441] The difficulties were even greater because the resources for reinforcements and other wartime needs of these units in the areas where they were operating had been completely exhausted, and the possibilities for assistance from Serbia were still excluded, partly because there was no direct communication between the Supreme Command and the Main Staff of Serbia. In fact, the latter was virtually inactive, as its two top leaders — Commander Petar Stambolić and political commissar Moma Marković Vuk — had been at opposite ends for months, without any communication. Stambolić was in occupied Belgrade, while Marković Vuk, along with the secretary of the CPY Provincial Committee for Serbia, Blagoje Nešković Mihajlo, was stuck in the headquarters of the divisions preparing for the breakthrough into Serbia. Even these two, Mihajlo and Vuk, were disunited and deeply dissatisfied with wasting time so far from the focal points of the liberation struggle in Toplica and Jablanica. To make matters worse, the German radio intelligence service was still supplying operational command with decrypted radio messages between the Supreme Command and the staffs of the 2nd and 3rd Corps. As a result, they were informed about the intentions and plans from Drvar, including the beginning of the breakthrough into Serbia, and they promptly took appropriate measures. Among other things, they concentrated superior forces in the valleys of the Ibar, West Morava and Đetinja rivers, which, under the command of the German commander of Serbia, would oppose the NOP's group of divisions. On the northern flank, mainly in eastern Bosnia, the Germans would conduct several offensive battles and operations with the same goal — by deploying significantly superior forces (including, among others, the 7th and 13th SS Divisions) — to tie down the majority of the 3rd Corps and prevent the transfer of NOP divisions across the Drina and the opening of the front in western Serbia. This would be made more difficult by their police forces, Bulgarian divisions, Nedić's regiments and Chetnik corps.

On February 18, a radiogram arrived at the Supreme Command, in which the staff of the 2nd Proletarian Division and Blagoje Nešković proposed that they immediately set off for Serbia. However, there were several reasons for postponing this move: waiting for the firmly promised Allied military assistance, which still had not arrived; the enemy offensive in the Sandžak, which showed no signs of abating; deep snow on the mountains that had to be overcome on the march towards Toplica; the strength of the enemy along the breakthrough route; waiting for the arrival of the British military mission, which, according to an agreement with Brigadier Maclean, was supposed to travel with this group to the Main Staff of Serbia. For these reasons, the Chief of the General Staff of the NOVJ deemed it necessary to wait for at least twenty more days before moving, and he suggested this during his report. The Supreme Commander, however, primarily for political reasons, was in a hurry to have the 2nd Proletarian Division and Nešković immediately move towards the Toplica region, while the 5th Krajina Division would wait for the British mission, which was expected to arrive at the Lim river in about ten days, after which it would also head to Toplica, where the delegate from the General Staff, Major General Pavle Ilić, would meet them, having been dropped by parachute. The response to the 2nd Division Staff was an opportunity to inform them that the other operational group (16th and 17th Divisions) would also head to Serbia "in the spring, as soon as the conditions permit." Tito assigned tasks to B. Nešković Mihajlo — "to mobilize the entire party and military apparatus of Serbia for the urgent mobilization of manpower, for the formation of new units and the creation of staffs." He suggested that the Main Staff be filled in Toplica, and that the issue of its commander and Chief of Staff "would be resolved by agreement as soon as you arrive in Serbia," which implicitly ignored Nešković's proposal for this position to go to Lieutenant General Koča Popović.[442] Such a telegram was sent, by order of the Supreme Commander, to Mihajlo and Colonel Ljubo Vučković on February 20, and it was immediately intercepted by the German listening service, decrypted and delivered to the Staff of the 2nd Panzer Army in Vrnjačka Banja, which responded by moving its units. However, the breakthrough by the 2nd Proletarian and 5th Assault Divisions was delayed for about twenty days due to the extremely unfavourable situation at the Lim river crossing. This delay was used by Arso to ensure the supply of the long-promised and necessary ammunition, boats for crossing the Lim and later the Ibar, and to await the delegate from the General Staff, who, unable to be transferred by air to Toplica, started on foot on February 29. General Ilić, in fact, waited in Drvar for the promised Allied aircraft to transfer him to Toplica by parachute, but on the last day of February, along with the member of the CC of the Bulgarian Communist Party, Shteryo Atanasov, and a group of leaders, he started, following Arso's order, on a march from Drvar to Rudo, accompanied and welcomed by NOVJ units. They marched for 15 days, reaching their destination just before the Lim was crossed (March 15), which was secured by the newly formed "light" 37th Sandžak Division.

The relationships in the command and leadership of this operational force were structured so that the command over both divisions was held by Colonel M. Morača, placed under the direct command of the General Staff, specifying that he "coordinates

[441] For more details: Petar Višnjić, *Operations for the Liberation of Serbia 1944*, Belgrade 1972.

[442] The decision will be delayed for almost five months due to Tito's political and personal combinations.

operations with the Main Staff of the NOV and PO of Serbia, and everything is agreed with us." To clarify his authority to Nešković, it was stated that the party organizations of both divisions "fall under the direct control of the Provincial Committee of the CPY for Serbia."[443]

These two divisions, in the role of the vanguard, moved to break through and establish footholds for receiving the remaining units designated to shift the focus of operations to Serbia. The same objective was set for the northern group of divisions, whose breakthrough, from eastern Bosnia across the Drina, into western Serbia, would follow a bit later, to reach the operational objective — Šumadija. This was the time when the occupying-collaborator forces in Serbia numbered more than 110,000 soldiers.

The uncertainty was great regarding the deployment of about 5,000 poorly equipped fighters, across the Lim and Ibar rivers, or across two large, well-defended water barriers. In addition, the completion of tasks was made more difficult by the snowbound mountains of Zlatar, Golija and Kopaonik. The task of these NOVJ forces was to break through into the territories of Jablanica and Toplica, which were the strongest centres of the NOP in Serbia, where until then five southern Morava brigades and four detachments had been operating. Their goal was to create a free territory in southern and southeastern Serbia, in cooperation with other Serbian and Macedonian NOVJ units. This territory would serve as a foundation for transferring the combat operations of the NOVJ towards eastern Serbia, Šumadija, Kosovo and Macedonia. This operational plan corresponded with the advance of the Red Army forces towards the Danube, which was supposed to establish combat contact and cooperation. Moreover, transferring the focus of combat operations aimed to prevent the unhindered withdrawal of Wehrmacht forces from southeastern Europe. It was also uncertain to send, across the Drina, into western Serbia, slightly younger, less experienced and understrength NOVJ units: the 16th Vojvodina and the 17th Eastern Bosnia Divisions, with a very ambitious goal — to establish an operational base for transferring operations towards Šumadija, where the Šumadija and Kosmaj NOP detachments were operating. The commanders of the NOVJ divisions on both routes, Colonels Milutin Morača, Ljubo Vučković, Danilo Lekić and Gligo Mandić, along with the brigade commanders, were seasoned, brave and determined leaders. The first two were accompanied by the delegate of the General Staff, General Ilić, as well as the highest-ranking Serbian political and military leaders, Mihajlo and Vuk, men whose determination and desire to reach the warfronts in Serbia as soon as possible could not be questioned. Also with the operational group were Dimitrov's chosen one, S. Atanasov, who was in a hurry to get to Bulgaria, and the Soviet military representative, a major by rank, who continually promised military aid, especially ammunition, boats and clothing.

Had the 1st Šumadija and 1st South Morava Brigades not been, by Tito's reckless decision in November 1943, withdrawn to the west, across the Lim and Drina rivers, and as a result tragically lost at Prijepolje and Devetak — they would have, in

[443] AJ, Fund of the CC CPY, Collection Serbia P/179.

March 1944, been in their own operational area with other units, where they would have awaited the larger formations and, together, formed the backbone of new brigades and divisions in Serbia. As it was, these two brigades returned literally halved, united under the banner of the 3rd Serbian Assault Brigade, with provincial leaders who brought them from Serbia, and they waited in vain for a full four months in the Sandžak and eastern Bosnia, not resolving a single essential issue for which they were likely called there.[444] Now, the Assault Group of divisions, with Mihajlo (Nešković) and Vuk (Marković), was advancing across the snow-covered mountains, starting from Zlatar, constantly met by ambushes and attacks from German, Bulgarian and collaborationist units. Relentlessly, day and night, suffering losses due to hunger, exhaustion and especially the scarcity of ammunition, carrying about 400 wounded, the units, following the operational plan of the Supreme Commander, were pushing towards the Ibar river, which, according to the adopted plan, they were supposed to force on the night of March 30. They were stopped in front of the water obstacle, which, at that time of the year, was impassable without means of transport, and were met with prepared fire from trenches dug into the banks, from concrete bunkers and armoured vehicles. After informing the General Staff, the units were forced to remain for several days under enemy attacks from Ušće, Raška, Sjenica and Ivanjica, before pulling back into the Studenica River basin, into Dragačevo, and towards the approaches to Ivanjica. In that area, repelling attacks and facing increasing danger of being surrounded and destroyed, they remained for about twenty days. Commander Morača and delegate Ilić were in constant communication with the General Staff, reporting on the dramatic situation the units had fallen into and their ideas, insisting on help from the Allies, especially ammunition and boats, while receiving directives and orders from Drvar. All of this was intercepted by the Germans, who took timely countermeasures. On April 4, angry at this failure, the Supreme Commander demanded (via radiogram) a more detailed report on why the units could not cross the Ibar, adding: "You should have first sent one or two light battalions to take the bridge over the river."[445] General Ilić replied: "We were unable to cross the Ibar due to a shortage of ammunition and high water levels." In response to Tito's repeated question, Colonel Morača answered on April 9: "We have 10 bullets per rifle and 100 for the machine guns. We request that the Russians send us ammunition immediately." He could have added that the units under his command on the designated crossing section were met by 14 battalions of German and collaborationist forces, reinforced with artillery and tanks, and two armoured trains, determined to prevent the transfer of the operational focus of this NOVJ group to the east, an operation personally commanded by the general of Serbia. He could have also mentioned that the local population, deceived by enemy propaganda and frightened by the threat of retaliation, did not provide volunteers for unit reinforcements, nor food, clothing, etc. After analysing the situation, the General Staff sent two orders: one to General Ilić to keep the divisions "in place" on the

[444] J. Broz, *Collected Works*, Vol. 18, note 423, p. 324.

[445] AJ, Fund of the CC CPY, Collection Serbia II/179.

Ivanjica-Ariile-Užice sector, emphasizing: "Here, lay firm foundations for pushing into the interior of Serbia. Do not fragment your forces too much. Ensure the deployment so that you can break any concentration of the enemy directed at you"; and one to General Đapić to "go on the offensive on all sectors" but also to secure "an operational group on the Zlatibor-Priboj-Rudo sector," ensuring that the experienced commander would understand that this unit, in this case, the 37th Sandžak Division, should bind as many enemy forces (more than 5,000 Germans, Chetniks and Muslim militia members) as possible and, even more importantly, organize, "God forbid," the reception of the Assault Group of Divisions, following the principle that a good commander always has a prepared response for any possible tactical situation.[446] To avoid any misunderstandings, two or three days later, a radiogram clarified the role of those forces "on the Rudo sector" — "as a bridgehead in case of withdrawal of the 2nd and 5th Divisions." At the same time, Tito, still believing that the radio communications of the command were secure, warned Colonel Morača: "As soon as an opportunity presents itself, your main task is to reach the Jablanica-Toplica area," instructing him on operational masking measures: "Deceive the enemy with all actions as though you are heading for Šumadija." Two days later, on April 12, dissatisfied with the "manoeuvring" of the Assault Group, he sent Ilić and Morača a radiogram: "You cannot abandon that sector because of any pressure from the enemy, who is three times weaker than your forces. That would be a political blow to us. We require unity of opinion on this issue, for which all political and military leaders of both divisions must advocate. In that area, you have enough space for manoeuvring. Do not yet move deep into Serbia due to the Bulgarian forces, except in the case if circumstances force you. A new crossing of the Ibar, which would have no severe consequences, would positively affect not only the morale of the units but also politically."[447] Unaware that in front of them, with the river as support, the enemy was at least four times larger and significantly better armed, determined to decisively defend, the command of the divisions, urged by the Supreme Commander's request, tried another breakthrough, but despite the bravery and determination of the units shown in five days of combat, they failed to force the swollen Ibar. The divisions were subjected to attacks by occupying and collaborationist units, including two German and four Nedić's regiments, parts of the 1st Bulgarian and about six Chetnik corps, as well as bands of Muslim militia from the Sandžak and Albanian bandits from the Ibar valley. The request made by Generals Ilić and Mihajlo (Nešković) to the General Staff in Drvar for the main forces of the Main Staff of Serbia to seize Kopanik and exert pressure on the Kraljevo-Kosovska Mitrovica communication, or to defend the Ibar line, in order to make it easier for the Assault Group to force the river, remained an unrealistic wish...

Unable to overcome the Ibar, the Assault Group, on April 21, after approval from the General Staff, headed towards the area "north of the Požega-Užice line," with the "footholds to be Suvobor and Medvednik," where, as firmly promised, "two divisions

[446] AVII, file 394, reg. no. 21-1/2; note 376 in Vol. 19 of Tito's *Collected Works*, p. 335.

[447] AVII, file 184, reg. no. 9-1/1.

from eastern Bosnia" would cooperate. Arso, understanding the gravity of the situation for "Morača's group," would insist day by day, seeing a certain prospect of success in breaking through to the Strategic Ridge.[448] The 2nd and 5th Divisions, after ten days of movement and fighting and covering 160 km, reached western Serbia, at the Povlen mountain. Before the movement, two Soviet and British aircraft, following the persistent insistence of the Chief of Staff with the Allied missions, dropped some ammunition and clothing, as well as ten rubber boats — when they were no longer needed. According to the General Staff's directive, part of the forces was to divert the main enemy forces as far from the Drina as possible, to facilitate the easier transfer of the 16th and 17th Divisions, under the command of D. Lekić, to the Bajina Bašta-Drinjača sector. However, nothing went as planned in Drvar: due to the strong enemy pressure, the transfer of two divisions from eastern Bosnia, previously intended for operations towards Šumadija, had to be abandoned, and the Assault Group, exposed to attacks from enemy units ten times more numerous, commanded by the military administrative commander of Serbia, General H.G. Felber, was forced to move to Tara Mountain, reporting on May 7: "We were unable to carry out the plan. The enemy concentrated German and Bulgarian divisions, Nedić's forces and Chetniks. We have retreated to Tara, which we must abandon. Immediate cooperation with Kosta and Peko is urgently needed, as we are in a difficult situation. We will aim to reach the Golia sector. If the offensive continues, we will have to rely on Peko."

Thus, the Supreme Commander's (unconvincing) assessments of the real possibilities for the NOVJ division group to break through into Serbia fell through, where he expected the "likely imminent" surrender of Bulgaria, which was supposed to be "maximally exploited." He communicated this to Kosta Nađ on April 29, insisting that the two divisions be transferred to western Serbia for the development of an offensive in Šumadija, reminding him and the Staff that "today, the primary importance for the entire liberation movement in Yugoslavia is Serbia. The question of the liquidation of the refugee government and the recognition of the National Liberation Committee of Yugoslavia depends on Serbia, i.e., on our strength in Serbia. Coordinate accordingly."[449]

General Felber knew this well and certainly "coordinated accordingly," along with the Bulgarian imperial divisions for the next four full months. The Red Army, despite its powerful breakthrough through the Ukraine, was too far away, and the consequences of the Allied bombing of Serbian cities, including Belgrade (on Easter), had no significant impact on enemy forces. Therefore, what Tito and the leadership of the Assault Group of Divisions had seriously counted on did not happen: they had estimated that the mere presence of NOVJ units in Serbia would "cause real panic within the ranks of the Chetniks." General N. Korneyev, on the other hand, emphasized Stalin's assessment that the situation in Serbia was not yet ripe for the wider acceptance of the NOP, while Churchill spoke not only about the "royalist sentiment" of the majority of

[448] In military geography and warfare, a Strategic Ridge refers to a mountain range that starts from the Drina and extends, through Povlen, Maljen and Suvobor, to Rudnik.

[449] AVII, file 408, reg. no. 2-29/8-1.

the Serbian people but also about "200,000 Serbian households" who were ready for anti-fascist struggle, but not under communist leadership. It was clear that Marshal Tito was eager to show that they were wrong...

In contrast, the caution of the Chief of Staff, expressed through the order for



They wrote to the Marshal on May 9: Generals Arso Jovanović and Srećan Žujović-Crni at lunch with Tito.

the 37th Division to orient towards Golija and Zlatar, proved to be justified. In this situation, it was ordered from Drvar to free around 400 wounded soldiers, entrusting

them to one of the six brigades, ensuring that, despite their small numbers and lack of equipment, they would operate together and not in separate brigades or on different fronts, as suggested, and even pressured, by Vuk and Mihajlo, who were eager to reach the NOP hotspot in Serbia. In that context, the 5th Division moved from Tara towards Golija, while the 2nd Proletarian Division was to hand over the wounded to the 4th Proletarian Division and, along with the 2nd Proletarian and 3rd Serbian Assault Divisions, march through Povlen and Maljen towards Šumadija.

In the midst of such an extremely uncertain, or rather critical, situation, two members of the smaller, operational part of the General Staff, who had the greatest understanding of military skills and military affairs in general — one a General Staff officer and the other with experience as the commander of the Main Staff of the insurgent Serbia, Generals Arso Jovanović and Sreten Žujović — each wrote letters to the Supreme Commander, individually and without any trace of prior agreement between them. They wrote, while the Supreme Commander sat next to them in Drvar, making decisions about the breakthrough into Serbia not only without consulting them but also without informing the General Staff members, and evidently also the Political Bureau, of which Žujović was a member. They, therefore, were unaware of the political manoeuvres of the Allies and Tito's plans and intentions regarding the further "battle for Serbia," and, deeply concerned, primarily as soldiers and patriots, for the fate of the 5,000 fighters who, weakened and deprived of basic military needs, had been prematurely and without proper expert assessments of the military-political situation, pushed into the jaws of a powerful and enraged enemy. Both knew the leadership abilities and characteristics of the commanders of both divisions, Colonels Morača and Vučković, two excellent officers, but in that situation, exposed to constant enemy attacks and "led" from Drvar, there was little that could depend on them. All others who had the most immediate influence on the command — B. Nešković, M. Marković, P. Ilić and S. Atanasov, each for their own reasons — were hastening towards the east, each influencing the command from the positions of the institutions they represented. To make matters even more difficult, these individuals, divided among themselves, had differing opinions on many matters, and were still uninformed about what was really happening both ahead and behind them.

Realizing that this honourable and courageous act — the breakthrough of the best NOVJ divisions into the eastern part of the battlefield — had already been greatly compromised by the outcome of their two-month actions, and that unless something urgent, immediate, radical and effective was done, they were at risk of being shattered, the two generals wrote a letter to the Supreme Commander on May 9, offering their knowledge, skills and even their lives as a stake to save the honour of anti-fascist Serbia and the lives of thousands of comrades.

The letter from the Chief of the General Staff, typed and signed with the recognizable Cyrillic "Arso R. Jovanović," reads:

"Comrade Marshal,

"I do not know the exact position of our mobile operational groups and your further intentions regarding operations in Serbia and the Sandžak. Considering the

development of the situation, regardless of the regulation of the command of this group, I believe that someone from the General Staff should convey your directives and orders. It has been proven that this cannot be successfully resolved by radio dispatches, especially since they could be intercepted by the enemy.

"My opinion would be that you send me to that sector. It would be good if a Russian, for example, General Gorshkov, would also go there. We would travel by plane, provided either by the British or the Russians. My stay in that area would depend on your intentions and decisions. Here, I would be represented by General Koča (or Klišanić), who is already with the General Staff."[450]

Žujović wrote to the Marshal by hand, in ornate handwriting, with green ink:

"Comrade Tito,

"I believe that the question of successful operations in Serbia is dependent on, and cannot be resolved without, the connection and coordination of the actions of our units operating there, and depending on flexibility in tactics and manoeuvring. For this, clarity and firmness in command and decision-making are essential from the local leaders when setting and executing operations.

"This, in particular, Veljko cannot implement.

"On the other hand, it is necessary to properly position, utilize and further develop the political influence of our party among the Serbian masses, and in this sense, maximize the organizational activity of our party organizations to unite the Serbian people and to ensure their active participation in the NOB.

"Neither of these has been sufficiently expressed in the work of our current responsible comrades and military leaders, despite visible occasional successes.

"However, this can be achieved.

"I propose that I personally go to Serbia to carry out this task, which must be completed with regard to the importance of Serbia itself and its role in the further development of events.

"Technically, the issue of departure could possibly be resolved by parachuting near Peko, or even better near Lekić.

"With comradely greetings, Crni."[451]

Both letters, therefore, bear the same date. There is no reason to doubt their authenticity, and the reason why they were not published and commented upon in domestic historiography until 1996, when they were cited by Mr. Milan Terzić, may lie in the fact that, according to the logic of those who favoured monolithic rule and servility, they could have implied a blow to Tito's authority and an open objection to his criteria for selecting personnel. Additionally, it could be explained by the fact that both authors, who shared the same animosity towards Tito's autocracy, were liquidated in 1948: Arso physically and Žujović politically. It is pointless, after so much time and without the testimonies of crucial witnesses, to seek an answer to the question of why these letters were even written and signed, especially on the same day and, particularly,

[450] AVII, file 2215, reg. no. 8/4.

[451] *Ibid.,* reg. no. 9/4.

with similar content and messages. However, it should be noted that in Drvar and Bari, as well as in the offices of the Allied governments and high commands, there was talk of the imminent fall of the Purić government in London, and thus the political and military liquidation of Draža Mihailović, after which General Bora Mirković or Dušan Simović would be appointed to lead the group of assault divisions in the breakthrough into Serbia, possibly in a deal between King Petar and Tito. The first solution was "pushed" by the king and the Allies, but it was unacceptable to Tito, unlike the second, more compromising one. In the case of Simović, General V. Velebit recalls that at a secret meeting in London he delivered Tito's letter, which contained either an offer or a statement of consent, relying on Simović's reputation among the Serbian people stemming from the March 27 coup and his firm stance against Hitler's pressure prior to the April War.[452] The name of the uncompromising General Đorđe Glišić, military attaché of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Paris, was also mentioned in these combinations, whom Živko Topalović had proposed as his candidate. Here, however, the most important point is that the General Staff, as the highest collective command body, had no idea about these, more or less compromising combinations, or even intrigues and games. Not even the part of the General Staff that was physically present with Marshal Tito around the clock had any knowledge of them. Serbia was, for Arso and Crni, who were writing to Tito, a shared concern, love and destiny.

It is not difficult to answer the question of why Arso did not raise the issue presented in his letter during regular briefings with the Supreme Commander, which he attended at least twice daily, and why Crni had the opportunity to meet with his superior both officially and privately every day, especially since he was engaged in resolving the most complex military problems. In other words, the conditions for this were not created. This is reflected in their choice, which, in any case, speaks more about Marshal Tito — who distanced himself from his closest associates and behaved autocratically. The letters certainly speak of their authors, fighters and patriots who sought nothing for themselves except new duties, laden with great responsibility and even greater risk, taken up with the Supreme Commander in an attempt to correct his mistake made where it should not have been repeated — the breakthrough into Serbia, after two or three failed attempts.

There are no preserved traces indicating that the Supreme Commander "took note" of not only the content of their "petitions" but also their actions. However, it is clear that such initiative reflected their personalities. Here is an example recorded around those days. When there were difficulties in sending "an assault group of divisions" across the Drina, Arso proposed to the Supreme Commander that he be granted permission to transfer to the airport in Šekovići so that, at the 3rd Corps Headquarters, he could participate with General Danilo Lekić and Colonels Jovan Vukotić and Gligo Mandić in finalizing the plan and organizing the breakthrough of that operational

[452] Velebit omitted these meetings in his *Memoirs* (Zagreb 1983), but later, for Milan Terzić's master's thesis *The Mission of Vladimir Velebit*, he recounted them in more detail. The author, after defending the thesis at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade, would publish it in *Historical Records* 1-2/1996 and VIG 3/1998.

group into western Serbia. This was approved, upon his insistence, when the situation on both sides of the Drina became so "tense" that it was impassable, and he returned from that war mission in eastern Bosnia to Drvar on the same day (May 10). The partisan airport in Šekovići was in a zone of intense military operations, and no one, except for his own conscience, was forcing General Jovanović to land and take off from there, with a great chance of losing his life. However, he deeply felt the sacrifice of these units for the success of the highly desired and planned breakthrough into Serbia, so he went to, as the most responsible military figure, help resolve the highly tense situation.

In both his letter to Tito and his trip to Šekovići, Arso expressed his dissatisfaction with the way the division groups were being led, only partially aware of the contents of the radiograms Tito was sending them, often as many as three per day, and sometimes even contradictory to each other. Over there, with the southern group, Colonels Morača and Vučković, General Ilić, the delegate of the General Staff and, from a higher level, B. Nešković, M. Marković, and even the trusted man of the Executive Committee of the Comintern, S. Atanasov, were influencing things. Each of them had a radio station, and when theirs failed, they would take one from the Group Commander; each would report directly to Tito, offering their assessments and proposals, often lacking fundamental intelligence data about the situation in Serbia, and frequently violating command principles where Arso's stance was unequivocal: when two people command, there is neither effective command nor any prospects for success.



In front of the cameras of Allied reporters, on the terrace of the villa above Unac.

By reviewing the radiograms sent to the Assault Group of Divisions and, directly related to its combat operations, the units under the command of General Danilo Lekić, sent at the end of April and the beginning of May, it is easy to see that the whole operation could not have ended in any way other than failure. Improvisations and lack of professionalism in leading this strategically significant task are easily revealed. As evidence, we cite just two or three radiograms sent on the day when Generals Jovanović and Žujović offered their services to the Supreme Commander for the success of the NOVJ units in the breakthrough into Serbia. Tito informs the Assault Group's Headquarters: "Two divisions have already started from eastern Bosnia towards the area where you gave them the possibility of crossing over the Drina (Stari Brod).

"Send patrols to the bridgehead just in case. Inform us of the actions taken.

"Let us know how the mobilization is progressing."[453]

Regarding the "actions taken" and "the progress of mobilization," M. Morača responded on the same day, stating that the 5th Division, with General Ilić and Commissar Marković, had moved to Zlatibor, while the 2nd Proletarian Division, with B. Nešković, remained on Mount Tara. As for the mobilization, which Ilić and Morača had predicted good prospects for in a radiogram four days earlier, almost nothing had been achieved: due to daily combat and the brief stay of the brigades in populated areas, as well as anti-NOP propaganda, "the planned objectives were not realized."

On the same day, Tito informs General Lekić: "Morača is retreating towards Golija over Mount Tara under strong enemy pressure.

"You are late for that location. If you cannot cross near Stari Brod, then cross further south.

"If possible, break the enemy on the current sector.

"Report on the situation."

General Lekić, in turn, reported: both divisions, under heavy enemy attacks from the fronts and flanks, were pushed back from the Drina towards the central part of eastern Bosnia, where, exhausted and starving, they were regrouping and preparing for further action "in a certain direction," although due to poor food and exhaustion, "there have been several deaths."[454]

Also on May 9, the Supreme Commander informs Pavle Ilić and Milutin Morača: "Lekić and his divisions will not be able to arrive on time, as they encountered stronger enemy forces, with whom they are fighting on the Kasaba-Sokolac sector. Therefore, try to cross to Golija and rely on Peko, who has already cleared almost all of the Sandžak."[455]

---

[453] AVII, file 184, reg. no. 9-11/1.

[454] Note 109 in Vol. 20 of J. Broz's *Collected Works*, p. 274.

[455] AVII, file 184, reg. no. 9-11/1.

Finally realizing that the operation had ended in failure, Tito, two days later, informed Nešković and Marković, who were then with the 2nd Proletarian Division's Headquarters on Mount Tara, to pass the message of the Main Staff of Serbia to Jablanica: "Our group could not cross the Ibar and has instead crossed into western Serbia. Therefore, the Morava units (this refers to the 2nd, 3rd and 4th Southern Morava Brigades of the Main Staff of NOV Serbia) should operate at their discretion.

"It would be good to break the Chetniks on Kopaonik and cut off the Ibar railway line."[456]

On the same day (May 11), the message was conveyed to the Commander of the General Staff, Petar Stambolić (in Jablanica since mid-March), and to the delegate of the General Staff, General Tempo, who arrived that day. The two of them jointly reported the next day:

"For Tito. We can clear Kopaonik in the shortest time. It is necessary for you to send us Russian assistance." They provide the exact coordinates of the village of Orane (near Lebane), noting: "We will take the signs from the English, who drop their material at the same location."

On May 11, a message left from Drvar for the Assault Group's Headquarters: "It is incorrect and dangerous to keep the 2nd Division on Mount Tara. The 2nd Division should immediately move towards the 5th. The 5th Division should support it during the crossing of the railway line.

"Inform us of the location for receiving supplies."[457]

The next day, the Supreme Commander informed the 2nd Corps Headquarters that the 2nd Proletarian and 5th Assault Divisions, "due to extreme exhaustion had to retreat towards Zlatibor. They will rely on you. Give them the opportunity to rest, and we will try to provide them with shoes, clothing and other supplies. Soon, the 17th Bosnian Division will arrive in that sector, and later the 16th Vojvodina Division, to create a stronger group for the breakthrough into the interior of Serbia." He also revealed his intention to "give command of this group to Lieutenant General Peko Dapčević, as I am confident that Peko will manage this great task. Peko will maintain his old position, but will be replaced by someone else, such as Radovan (Vukanović), with Rudolf (Primorac) and Mitar (Bakić)."[458]

It is difficult, without original documents and witnesses, to say what this decision of Tito's meant: acknowledgment, at least to himself, that the breakthrough into Serbia with two divisions had been a mistake, or at least that General Ilić and the Assault Group Headquarters had not "managed this great task"; a compromise with A. Jovanović and S. Žujović; giving another high commander from outside Serbia the chance to solve the "Serbia issue" as the central political and military problem in the Yugoslav theatre of war at the time. In any case, the main reason for the withdrawal of the divisions was not "extreme exhaustion" but rather the strength of the units under

[456] *Ibid.,* file 184, reg. no. 33/1.

[457] *Ibid.,* file 783, reg. no. 12/4.

[458] *Ibid.,* box 26, reg. no. 10-8/13.

the command of the German commanding general and their determination to prevent the breakthrough into Serbia. Tito's assessments of the combat value of the Chetniks, the willingness of Bulgarian units to surrender or even cooperate with the NOVJ, the reality of mass mobilization of fighters, and the possibility of immediate cooperation with brigades and detachments from Jablanica and Šumadija were all proven unrealistic. The operational route, for such ill-equipped units, proved too long, especially with constant combat along the way, and the number of operational tasks was too large, requiring constant combat actions for which there was no "material support." There was also hesitation, mistakes in command and confusion in situations far more complex than anticipated.

What is known for certain is that after issuing Tito's order on May 12, the preparations for the next breakthrough into Serbia — completely organized by the General Staff — proceeded according to plan, systematically and thoughtfully, following tested staff procedures: the brigades of the 2nd Proletarian and 5th Assault Divisions were, on May 20, after 67 days of combat in Serbia, received on the Lim (near Brodarevo) and organized for rest; emphasis was placed on replenishing them with manpower and supplying them with material assistance from the Allies; the 17th Division was integrated into the 2nd Assault Corps, designated for the next breakthrough into Serbia; on July 1, the 16th and 36th Vojvodina Divisions formed the 12th Corps under the command of General D. Lekić, intended for the breakthrough across the Drina into western Serbia; General P. Dapčević, following the directives of the General Staff, carefully prepared the Operational Group of Divisions (2nd Proletarian, 5th and 17th Assault Divisions) for the breakthrough across the Lim and Pešter towards Kopaonik; command of the 2nd Assault Corps was taken over by General R. Vukanović. Clearly, the work was professional and responsible, based on analyses of the military situation, choosing the most acceptable decision variants, with each person, under the skilled leadership of General A. Jovanović, doing their job and bearing their own share of responsibility, all — according to military order — under Tito's command.

Soviet military aid to the 2nd and 3rd Corps was increased, delivered to auxiliary airfields by "airplanes of the 5th Corps for long-range operations" from the special base in Kalinovka near Vinnitsa, the Ukraine. However, English assistance from Mediterranean bases was significantly reduced, conditioned by the stipulation that it would not be used against the Chetniks in Serbia.

During this time, efforts intensified, driven by military missions from Drvar and Moscow, to establish a Soviet base in Bari to support the NOVJ, which would significantly improve the supply of the NOP across the entire battlefield, especially its eastern part.

Work was also underway with Soviet experts on creating a new, more secure code, as it was recognized from battlefield experience that the existing code had been "compromised." Recognizing that command, like armed combat, could not wait for the new code, the Chief of Staff, on May 14, issued the following instructions to the operational units directly in radio contact with him: "Do not share military secrets using

the previous codes. For now, communicate important matters in a coded form."[459] It was announced that instructors from the General Staff would soon arrive with new codes being developed "with the help of specialists." There was neither time nor experience for more complicated encryption, but there was a good will to work around it. Thus, General Dapčević, on the very next day, May 15, in a dispatch regarding a possible direct breakthrough into Serbia, which he had been informed he would command, instead of using the term "Serbia," used the phrase "Marko's homeland" (Marko being A. Ranković), and referred to the Assault Group of Divisions as "Morača's group." However, this was an improvisation, not advisable at the approaches to the Lim and Drina, where, along the paths to Nova Varoš and Prijepolje, strong Chetnik forces were expected to be routed, as M. Marković had informed, towards Montenegro. Thus, the Supreme Commander, on May 14, ordered General Dapčević: "Do not allow those Chetnik forces to cross the Lim. They must be broken in Serbia, at the border. Draža Mihailović is with the Chetniks."[460]

From Drvar, military actions were directed, and operations of eleven corps and seven main staffs were consolidated, with the primary efforts of the General Staff focused on preparations for the imminent, and with good reason believed to be the last and successful, breakthrough into Serbia. As part of these measures, the supreme military leadership was preparing for an operational leap with the divisions of the 1st Proletarian Corps, closer to the location of the event's climax, for a start in the operational area of the 2nd Assault Corps, or, as it was unofficially referred to, "near Peko and Mitar." At that time, everyone — Allies, enemies, friends and "the others" — understood the significance of Serbia in the strategy of the anti-fascist struggle, spoke and wrote about it, thus either easing or complicating the position of the NOP within it. On May 1, Đilas and Terzić, from the Red Square in Moscow, wrote that Serbia was "the key to the Balkans" on their long journey "from Cairo, through Tehran, to Moscow." In Serbia, under the orders of General Tempo, a total of four Serbian NOVJ divisions were formed. The issue of Serbia and its loyalty to D. Mihailović led to the fall of Prime Minister Božidar Purić (on June 1) and the appointment of Dr. Ivan Šubašić, who was the Ban of the Croatian Banovina just before the 1941 war, under pressure from official London. In the increasingly intense correspondence between Tito and Churchill, the fate of Serbia remained a decisive issue. In the breakthrough into Serbia, Tito saw an opportunity "to get closer to brotherly Bulgaria, whose army was still intact," and on April 29, he wrote to Kosti Nađ that Serbia "is of primary importance for the entire liberation movement in Yugoslavia today."[461] On the other hand, judging by both the operations undertaken and those planned, mostly offensive, one could gauge the enormous importance the Germans and their allies attached to the defence of Serbia.

[459] *Ibid.,* file 408/A, reg. no. 2-124/8-1.

[460] The situation in the Lim Valley was dramatic, with the Chetniks persistently waiting for the units of the 3rd NOV Division on the right bank of the river, but General Mihailović was still at Ravna Gora.

[461] AVII, file 408/A, reg. no. 2-29/8-1.



In Drvar, with Ivan Milutinović and Krsto Popivoda.

The medical issues of the NOVJ (National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia) were managed by Dr. Gojko Nikoliš from the early days in Užice in 1941, and were highly regarded as very successful. Agile, resourceful, initiative-driven, with wartime experience from Spain, forged in Užice and Foča, and later in Neretva and Sutjeska, this general from Jajce, engaged within the Operational Section of the General Staff,

worked responsibly and conscientiously, guided by the principles of medical ethics and humanitarian warfare. A deeply emotional and proactive man, particularly proud of his participation in the Spanish Civil War and rightfully placing exceptional importance on the tasks he carried out, he frequently "clashed" with Arso, especially when resolving specific issues, believing that his superior, occupied with "more important" tasks and burdened by the views of "former army" officers, did not pay enough attention to the problems of partisan medical care. Choosing, often, between leading an operation involving tens of thousands of fighters to achieve an important operational goal, or engaging in the evacuation of even a hundred wounded soldiers, the Chief of Staff, in principle, opted for the former, convinced that the problem of caring for the wounded — by building a dense network of around thirty partisan airfields, securing planes for evacuation and establishing the medical mission of the NOVJ in the Mediterranean — was fundamentally solved, and that everything else fell under Dr. Nikoliš's responsibility and his team, who developed a network of medical personnel and health care facilities suited to partisan warfare conditions. It was required that the care for the wounded, sick and the overall medical protection of the units be of the highest priority for the staff at all levels.

In line with respecting these principles, the Chief of Staff knew how to raise very uncomfortable questions, even reprimands, with the main and corps staffs from Drvar, demanding that diseases be localized and the number of wounded be reduced. On April 8, he asked the 3rd Corps Headquarters to investigate and report why, according to the medical report from April 3, out of a total of 3,261 wounded and sick soldiers, as many as 1,334 were suffering from typhus. The next day, the Headquarters replied that the typhus had been "brought into the unit" by Italian soldiers from the "Garibaldi" partisan division, who, under the orders of the General Staff and in order to survive the famine affecting the population and units in the Sandžak and northern Montenegro, were transferred as labour units to eastern Bosnia, and that the epidemic had been halted. Unhappy with that report, the Chief of Staff requested a precise answer about the number of "typhus patients," to which, on April 20, he was informed: "There are 534, not 1,334, as initially reported." Now, the Chief of Staff demanded an explanation on who was irresponsibly reporting on such a sensitive area of the unit's life. Finally, a response came from Šekovići stating that the mistake occurred in the radiogram from the 16th Vojvodina Division's Headquarters, where instead of 144, the number of sick soldiers was reported as 944. Two more questions were raised: first, how such a large number of wounded appeared in the corps, and the answer was that these were fighters from Vojvodina units and "comrades who had lagged behind after the Battle of Sutjeska." The second question was how many doctors were needed for the corps, and the response was six for the brigades, and three general practitioners and surgeons for the divisional hospitals. In response, specialists from the Allies' "reserves" were promptly dispatched, with a surgical team led by Major Dr. Forster, who would descend to Majevica. This "case" from the 16th Vojvodina Division was more thoroughly cleared by Arso, who remembered that this unit had, in mid-January, had

693 fighters in the divisional hospital.[462] The General Staff also warned General Nađ that it was unfair to "push the Vojvodina fighters into all the battles in that terrain," especially given the large number of wounded.

It may seem like nitpicking or overthinking to some, but the essence is that the Chief of the General Staff, a man of order and responsibility, aware that this was a life-and-death issue for the military organization, sought order and responsibility from others, particularly from the staff. Whether he always had understanding for all the other duties of the staff, and how much bitterness the corps commander showed in signing several radiograms over five or six days on the same issue, is another matter — just as it is another question how much resentment the Chief of Staff spoke of this "nitpicking" to the Supreme Commander.

In Croatia, for months, misunderstandings had been smouldering — not just smouldering, but flaring up — starting with the arrival of Colonel Dr. Borisav Božović as the Chief of Medical Services in the General Staff. This veteran of the 1st Proletarian Division from Rudo was a recognized health expert and experienced organizer of efforts to care for the wounded and combat diseases. He was known as a man "without a filter," which was reflected in his blunt statement to Tito and Arso during a meeting in Foča, where he publicly said that it was "unacceptable from both a professional and political standpoint" that the statutes of the Proletarian brigades made no mention of military health care, which was true. Tensions were constant, particularly in his relations with A. Hebrang, who "loudly thought" that "at least for that position, a proletarian, especially a Montenegrin, was not necessary" alongside the 200 doctors who were, in fact, actively working in the NOP of Croatia. The SH, and Dr. Nikoliš, supported Božović, seeing him as a successful personnel solution for the operational army. Božović, along with Dr. Grujića Žarković from the medical service of the NOP in Slavonia, organized the first congress of Croatian doctors who participated in the NOP, held in February. It began in Glina but was moved to Topusko and then to Slunj due to the advancing Germans and Ustaše.

It was in preparation for this gathering of doctors that on February 3, General Major Dr. G. Nikoliš came to the Chief of Staff, presenting the main report and requesting suggestions for drafting a directive for long-term health care operations. He found him, as noted in the memoirs, just outside a cave above the Una river. They walked in the warm sunlight and talked. "He was in a good mood. He explained to me (this is one of the rare moments when he explains something to me himself) the new organizational changes in our army. Corps military areas are being formed: medical services, mobilization, nutrition and the organization of the rear. Once the corps moves from its area, the deputy remains with the services. The medical officer of the corps will go with the corps commander, and his deputy will remain on the territory. In this regard, it is necessary to:

"a. Strengthen the medical organization of the rear and prepare the personnel;

"b. Expand the Medical Department of the General Staff into specific sections:

[462] In just three days in January, in the battle for Tuzla, the 16th Vojvodina NOV Division suffered 108 killed and 360 wounded.

personnel, epidemiological, pharmaceutical and propaganda.

"So, even propaganda! This is what I proposed back in the fall of 1942! And Cana (Babić) came and said, 'Your agitprop should be liquidated!'"

Now, he immediately went to Cana and told her that propaganda was being introduced into the Medical Service, criticizing her and the head of the Political Department of the Central Hospital, Mileva Vuković, for not understanding it at the time.

The next day, as agreed, he returned to get suggestions for the directive that the Congress would adopt. Arso formulated them into four points:

"1. The rapid training and specialization of personnel must be accelerated;

"2. There is a possibility of greater concentration of the wounded, with better material and food, and therefore the demands on the medical personnel are being increased to return as many wounded as possible to their units;

"3. Larger battles are expected, and the existing units will need to be increased: the 11 corps on this side of the Drina represent the skeleton of our army that must now be filled;

"4. Assistance to Serbia, Macedonia and Albania."[463]

The Chief of Staff made a note to himself to again discuss with Brigadier F. Maclean and (now) Colonel W. Street the fate of hundreds of tuberculosis patients from Yugoslavia in hospitals in southern Italy. Their accommodation and treatment were something no one wanted to take on, and the mortality rate was high. This seemed, at first glance, like a "non-military" issue, but certainly a big and human one, and Arso took responsibility for it. And it was resolved — favourably.

The formation of the corps staff was designed to make this institution as rational and professionally rounded as possible, focused on operational issues, primarily the use of units in conducting operations. To free it from anything that could potentially restrict it, a corps military area was established, and from this, "divisions were formed," extending down to the commands of the towns in municipal headquarters, where conflicts between the military and civil authorities often arose. The civil authorities and party leaderships often overstepped their bounds, either encroaching on the military organization's competencies or trying to influence it, leading to misunderstandings that the General Staff resolved by defending the autonomy of commands in decision-making and recognizing their organizational ties exclusively to their superiors. There were also attempts by regional, provincial and narrower party leaderships to control the CPY and the SKOJ (Union of Communist Youth) organizations from within the units, a situation which A. Ranković effectively handled. The Chief of the General Staff did not consider this exclusively a political matter but also a fundamental military issue, as he advocated for strict subordination. For similar mistakes, individuals such as Blažo Jovanović, Dr. Blagoje Nešković, Andrija Hebrang, Vicko Krstulović and others were called to account in the Political Bureau. Political commissars from the 2nd and, particularly, the 3rd Corps, Mitar Bakić and Vladimir Popović, and from the 26th Assault Division, Vojin Popović, were also criticized. The latter died in a "general

[463] G. Nikoliš, *op. cit.*, pp. 579-580.

purge" at the 26th Dalmatian Division Headquarters, carried out by Tito's order on March 20, 1944. The headquarters was dismissed "due to incompetent leadership of the units, negligent attitude towards the orders of higher headquarters (even hesitation in carrying out the Supreme Commander's orders), improper (dismissive and contemptuous) behaviour towards the British units arriving at Vis, insufficient cooperation and suspicion towards the Navy General Staff, with a significant level of disunity among the members of the division's staff." Particularly with the division's previous commander, Maximilian (Max) Baćo, there was pronounced chauvinism both towards the non-Dalmatian cadre and in regard to sending war material for units outside the 8th Corps. For the new commander and commissar of the division, two veterans from the 1st Proletarian Division were appointed: Colonel Božo Božović, formerly the Chief of Staff of the 6th Lika Division, and Dušan Korać, with Major Ante Bičić, formerly the Chief of Staff of the 19th Dalmatian Division, appointed as Chief of Staff. Those who were dismissed were assigned to other duties: Commander M. Baćo to the Croatian Main Staff, Commissar V. Popović to the Supreme General Staff, and Chief of Staff Stanko Parmač to the 8th Corps Staff.[464] During the preparations for the defence of Vis and the construction of the airfield there (to be completed by the end of April), influential members of the Dalmatian Regional Committee and the Navy Commander, Colonel Josip Černi, were significantly involved. In any case, innocent victims emerged, such as Vojin Popović, Arso's first party secretary, whom Ranković immediately directed from Drvar, upon taking over as Chief of Staff, to a high post in eastern Bosnia, and later to the political commissariat at the Officers' School of the General Staff in Vis, and the 23rd Serbian Assault Division, whose commander was Colonel Miladin Ivanović.

The "cases" of Blagoje Nešković and Vladimir Popović also stemmed from the "Drvar days," and were essentially of the same nature — they dared to take "military steps" from their high political functions.

On April 16, while the Assault Group units were resisting the enemy in the Studenica Valley, Nešković received a radiogram from Drvar which stated: "Neither the Political Department nor you can assess the military capabilities of the units. Only higher headquarters can do this. Inform us which unit it concerns.

"Do not interfere with military-operational matters, as this could only cause harm. Mihajlo and the Political Department should take care of the party work. Only higher headquarters can withdraw commanders. Inform us about the unit."[465]

This was a response — drafted based on Tito's suggestion and fairly sharp — that was made to be signed by the loyal and party-affiliated A. Ranković, due to the sharpness of the message and the usual custom of having others handle the difficult tasks. It was in reply to Nešković's report from April 8. Mihajlo had reported that in the 2nd Proletarian and 5th Krajina Divisions, "there is a looseness of the units from a military standpoint; there is indecision and unjustified fear of a deeper breakthrough

[464] J. Broz, *Collected Works*, Vol. 19, note 230.

[465] AJ, Fund of the CC CPY, Collection Serbia 11/179.

into Serbia among some of the military and political leaders of those divisions; both divisional committees of the CPY have come to the same conclusion: 'weak military preparedness of the units.'" In Drvar, it was assessed that the "weak military preparedness" had been improperly addressed in Nešković's report, particularly regarding the relationship between the party and military leadership of the NOVJ divisions. On the same day, Nešković responded via his radio station "Rudnik," clarifying that the assessment he had sent to his CC of the CPY was not only his own but was shared by the headquarters of both divisions, as it had been presented by the political commissars of the divisions at a meeting of the divisional CPY committees. The goal, he explained, was "for the party to help the headquarters in the military improvement of the 2nd and 5th Divisions."[466] In response to the repeated directive not to interfere "in military-operational matters," Nešković replied that neither the divisional CPY committees nor the Political Departments (where Milinko Đurović played a leading role) nor the Provincial Committee of the CPY for Serbia interfered in military-operational issues, "but only discussed military matters as part of party work during divisional committee meetings." He felt it was his duty to inform the CC of the CPY about the military situation of the units: "I felt responsible to you for the fate of the 2nd and 5th Divisions. I do not interfere in military-operational matters, but through Comrade Pavle (Ilić), or when approached directly, I provide my opinion to the 5th Division Headquarters." This experienced communist and revolutionary, a participant in the Spanish Civil War, and above all a respected Serbian intellectual and democrat, added to his controversial report of April 8: "We have started the process of removing commanders, commissars and deputy commissars of battalions who stood out and outgrew their roles. They are now receiving positions in brigade and divisional staffs and will serve as reserve personnel in Serbia." Irritated by the warning from Drvar that "commanders can only be removed by higher headquarters," he responded: "The removal of battalion commanders and commissars was carried out at the discretion of the divisional staffs, based on proposals from the brigade staffs. We only gave them the idea, because there are battalion commanders and commissars who have been in these positions for over a year, dying unnecessarily, as they have good replacements." He specifically referred to the commanders and commissars of the 2nd Proletarian and 5th Krajina Brigades.[467]

Believing deeply that he was right in reporting to his CC about the results of a constructive idea — especially since he knew well what staffing problems awaited him in Jablanica and Toplica — Mihajlo did not feel the need to justify or apologize to anyone, a stance that required courage, which some did not have. After all, when moving towards Serbia, he had been tasked "to mobilize the entire party and military apparatus of Serbia for the urgent mobilization of personnel, to form new units and create headquarters," and he considered it his obligation to resolve certain staffing issues while on the move, reporting them to his CC as he saw fit. However, this right

[466] J. Broz, *Collected Works*, Vol. 20, note 329.

[467] *Ibid.,* note 332; AJ, Fund of the CC CPY, Collection Serbia P/179, reg. no. 12.

was, at the very first step, very roughly contested, probably because his assessments called into question the real capabilities of those two respected divisions to carry out such an overly ambitious task, and it was well known who had assigned it to them.

On May 9, the Commissioner of the 3rd Corps, Vladimir Popović, wrote a "personal letter to Comrade Marko" explaining why the 16th and 17th Divisions could not cross the Drina, which Tito had unequivocally demanded from them in Drvar, and instead had to "accept battle and postpone the transfer." He described the intensity of the offensive and tried to justify the commander Kosta and himself: "We have been informing you every day about the situation. In the meantime, we received several messages from which it can be concluded that you were not properly and timely informed about the situation on our side. Some of these messages may suggest that we are solely responsible for the failure of the transfer. This hurts us. We are aware of the difficulty of the task entrusted to us and are prepared to take responsibility for all previous actions, but I ask you to consider the situation in order to make a more complete conclusion." Extremely sensitive, Commander Nađ undoubtedly "pushed" his comrade from Spain and the Corps Commissioner to, through Ranković, at least attempt to soften the Supreme Commander's anger and, in this case, his overly harsh judgement. On May 10, Tito, angered that someone had complained to him about others, reacted with a radiogram addressed to the 3rd Corps Headquarters: "I strongly condemn the actions of V. Popović, who sent a message to Comrade Marko in protest against my sharp criticism of the Corps Staff for failing to complete the assigned task on time. For such conduct, I will take measures that are customary for maintaining discipline and submission to higher authorities."[468] The mistake was made because two prominent "our Spaniards," General Nađ and Colonel Popović, at one point suspected that the Chief of Staff was not forwarding their military reports to the Supreme Commander. So, instead of addressing the radiogram to the "Supreme Headquarters" (as required for military reports), Popović addressed it "to Comrade Marko," meaning the CC. They were wrong — Arso immediately handed the incoming radiograms to Tito, as he did with any that arrived. He was not an officer who, in the role of Chief of Staff, would hide incoming radiograms from the Supreme Commander to avoid irritating him with their content; he could not, because all radiograms, upon receipt for decryption, were strictly recorded at the Communications Centre and handed over with a signature. He was not the kind of person who would do that to preserve the peace of his superior, especially since these were strategically important issues — the breakthrough into Serbia across the Drina. Tito was nervous during these days, perhaps also because of the letters from Generals Jovanović and Žujović, so all associates avoided encounters with him except for the Chief of Staff, who, by the very nature of his function, had to report to him at least twice a day, and as needed, at any time, including bringing in incoming radiograms, proposing possible solution variants, decisions and forms of his own engagement. And never, either in Drvar or on Vis — according to members of the General Staff A. Ranković and Commander of the Escort Battalion M. Janković, as

[468] AVII, file 408/A, reg. no. 2-124/8-1; response from V. Popović in AJ, Fund of the CC CPY, 1944/634.

well as noted by M. Đilas and Branka Savić — did he ever raise his voice, while everyone else, from time to time, "took the heat," often without valid reasons, especially in the mornings, until they were fully awake.

The position of the General Staff was that both the party and military organizations of the NOVJ had to establish correct cooperative relations with the party leaderships and authorities "on the ground," but that party work in the units, through the Political Departments in the divisions and brigades, should be managed exclusively by the CC of the CPY, and within it, by the authorized member of the Political Bureau, Aleksandar Ranković. Therefore, no acceptance of tasks from regional or provincial party leaderships, let alone submitting reports to them or giving evaluations of each other, especially influencing (except with suggestions) personnel decisions. Tito, judging by the preserved documents, did not have favourites in this regard; he was wary of precedents that, from a subordination standpoint, would lead to a bad practice. The Chief of the General Staff accepted the existence of the Political Departments, from the "highest observation point," as a necessary evil because they politicized the army and introduced parallelism in evaluating combat readiness, morale, the course and outcome of battles, and the elements that make up the combat capability and value of the units, which, by the strict standards of a regular military organization, should be the right and duty of the command, based on uniform criteria. Still, he considered it more acceptable for this to be handled by political bodies within the party rather than by regional, provincial and district party committees. The Central and provincial committees, or strictly their political secretaries, were authorized, for example, to handle the exchange of prisoners, but nothing in that regard could be decided without the approval of the General Staff. Even someone as powerful as Andrija Hebrang, in collaboration with Stevo Krajčić, had to comply with this request, obliging the "permanent negotiator" Marijan Stilinović, who had to go to Drvar more frequently for reports and new tasks. And Hebrang held significant powers — such as "coordinating the exchange of captured Germans for arrested or detained members of the NOP."

Hunger, at the end of the long winter and early spring, ravaged a large portion of the liberated territories, particularly in the Sandžak, northern Montenegro and eastern Bosnia, affecting both the fighters and the civilians equally. On April 13, Peko repeated that "some units were literally starving," that hunger had "affected certain districts," and that "the entire Allied food aid barely met the needs of the corps hospital," asking that the General Staff "intervene with the Allies to save the army and the people from starvation." The situation was even worse because the 9,000 Italians had to be supported by the almost completely empty resources of the 2nd Corps. Peko proposed measures to alleviate the situation to avoid being "brought into an impossible position," adding that "the people are otherwise loyal to the NOP, but they are now completely impoverished and already protesting, as they are utterly exhausted." Four days later, Peko and Mitar became even more precise and convincing, stating what was already known in Drvar: "Most of the units and all the hospitals of the 2nd Assault Corps are in an area that is completely exhausted. We have brought the people into a very difficult (economic) position, and we have nothing left to take from them. We

can't obtain food from either side. Our army has been physically weakened due to poor nutrition, and on top of that, they are naked. We have about 800 wounded and sick soldiers, without the 2nd Division.

"The aid from the Allies is minimal, and there is almost no food.

"We ask you to intervene with the Russians and the Allies to begin supplying us with a larger quantity of food immediately."[469]

Arso, having known hunger since his childhood, and from his own sad experiences and military geography, was well aware of the modest economic potential of Montenegro and the Sandžak. Hour by hour, he followed the course of offensive operations against those forces that had caused such great difficulties, as reported by Peko and Mitar, unaware, as they were, that these reports, undoubtedly within the strictest military secrecy, were immediately decoded by the enemy and acted upon. He sympathized with the commanders, seeing the strength of their units melt away, but he couldn't help them. At times, announced or unexpectedly, day or night, with Tito's approval, he would visit the heads of the Allied military missions — General N. Korneyev and Brigadier F. Maclean — and their deputies, General A. P. Gorshkov and Colonel W. Street, insisting on aid. He also reached out to General Velimir Terzić in Moscow and Colonel Milentije Popović in Bari. Always maintaining his own dignity and the reputation of the institution he represented, but confronted with the hardships of an army fighting for freedom, which also provided significant aid and support to the Allies, he referred to agreements, promises and obligations, demanding, proposing and pleading, stressing mutual interests.

Things were no better in other parts of the central front, but at least they didn't have "their own Italians." A few days later, through his superior officer, General Koča Popović, the commander of the 6th Lika Division, Colonel Đoko Jovanić, raised the alarm: "Food is very scarce — there are people fainting from hunger." The Main Staff of Croatia reported that units of the 11th Corps had only two days' worth of food left, and asked the SH to intervene with the Allies. The commander of the 12th Corps, Danilo Lekić, just before the movement of his divisions toward the Drina River in order to enter western Serbia, reported that there were cases of fighters dying of hunger.[470] Both the Supreme Commander and the relevant commissioners of the National Committee requested help, as did the heads of the military missions — always mindful of maintaining the dignity expected of an Allied army. While this was understood, they also received stern responses from Allied commands in the Mediterranean, such as: there could be more "food drops," but only at the expense of the already firmly scheduled flights for delivering weapons and military equipment, and even for the evacuation of the wounded. Those flights, too, were being delayed, reduced or cancelled for various reasons. Faced with the iron logic of Allied command and the impossible dilemma — bread or ammunition — those who had to make the decisions were left breathless. Foremost among them, due to Marshal Tito's preoccupation with high-

[469] AVII, file 394, reg. no. 36-42/2.

[470] J. Broz, *Collected Works*, Vol. 20, note 109, p. 274.

level political matters, was the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters. He was forced to improvise — often begging those much younger than him in both age and rank for a few tonnes of food, a load of ammunition or a package of medicine for the units headed toward Serbia. But the "Westerners," bound to King Petar and sympathetic toward "royalist Serbia," were increasingly reluctant to comply.

The Soviet military mission — or the "Russian brothers," as they had been called in Drvar from the beginning — did not need to be pleaded with for help. Nor did they need to be reminded of their obligations. General N.V. Korneyev, along with his associates — especially his deputy, General A.P. Gorshkov, the air force liaison Colonel S.V. Sokolov, and the mission secretary, Major Sakharov — did their best with the State Defence Committee and the General Staff of the Red Army to provide as much support to the NOV as possible under the circumstances. And more was becoming possible — though everything had to proceed institutionally and administratively in proper order, based on decisions by the relevant authorities and in accordance with wartime law, as was fitting for a well-organized state and its armed forces.

The mission also delivered aircraft guidance equipment and installed it at Medeno Polje, where on the night of March 13-14 the first Soviet shipment arrived — mainly consisting of weapons and medicine. Over the next two months, supplies would "trickle in" at one of dozens of established "points for receiving Allied aid," including Njegovuđa below Durmitor, and areas near Glamoč and Bosanski Petrovac. A unique contribution to this effort came from 20 Soviet specialists of various fields who — as recorded by the elderly Dr. Josip Smodlaka in his *Partisan Diary* — soon arrived via Bari to the Military Mission attached to the SH. On the night of April 10-11, ten large supply crates were dropped over Medeno Polje, including parts for five heavy machine guns for the anti-aircraft defence of Drvar, which was increasingly being flown over by German and Ustaša aircraft. However, the crates were dropped from high altitude, scattered on impact — and one crate "completely disappeared." Of the five dropped machine guns, only two were usable — becoming the core of the Machine Gun Company of the Escort Battalion.

The units on the eastern part of the front, starting along the lines of the Lim, Tara and Drina, supplied — amid fluctuating weather conditions and German defences — aircraft from the 4th long-range bomber corps, which took off from the Kiev area, nearly 2,000 km away. The Supreme Command had, exclusively for the supply of the NOVJ, formed the "Southern Air Group for Long-Range Operations" in December 1943, tasked with delivering supplies by air. However, throughout the operation, despite determined crews and mutual goodwill, there were unprecedented difficulties: the distance was great, and the operational range of the aircraft was limited, especially under heavy loads, as well as with fighter escorts for their protection; communications were irregular and highly unreliable, so flights were undertaken with great risks, without reliable meteorological data, without fuel for potential refuelling, in great tactical uncertainty, all while facing strong German anti-aircraft defences from the regions of the Ukraine, Romania and Banat. It often happened that dozens of brave pilots returned without completing their missions, and some "never made it back."

By the decision of the State Defence Committee, on May 6, a Special Base was established in the village of Kalinovka (60 km from Vinnitsa in Ukraine), approximately 1,300 km from Belgrade, dedicated exclusively to supplying the NOVJ from the air. From this location, in the next two months, 1,930 flights were made by aircraft from the "5th Air Division for Long-Range Operations," delivering 1,768 tons of weapons, ammunition, communication equipment, medicines, etc., to the NOVJ. Only in August, 345 transport aircraft flew from this base to the organized supply points in the eastern part of Yugoslavia, of which only 146 successfully completed the mission, 147 turned back due to extremely unfavourable weather conditions, especially above the unpredictable Carpathians and the mountainous regions of Montenegro, 34 failed to spot the contracted signals, 11 returned due to technical engine failures, one was shot down, and six were lost without a trace.[471] However, despite the distance and all the difficulties on the route, Kalinovka did not falter, even when, in July, the Soviet base in Bari was established, which, due to its proximity to the battlefield and more favourable geographical and tactical conditions, would take over the main responsibility for supplying the NOVJ. In the first ten days of September, 115 transport aircraft flew from the east, delivering 102 tons of material.

The Bari base was, in fact, a rear institution of the Soviet military mission at the NOVJ General Staff. It was commanded by Colonel S.V. Sokolov, the assistant to General Korneyev for aviation. According to General Gorshkov's recollection, the formation of the base was based on 12 Soviet transport aircraft, accompanied by 12 "Yaks," which flew from the Poltava region to Bari, with a crew of 250 Red Army members. These aircraft, in 1,500 flights for the needs of the NOVJ, would transport over a million tons of various equipment to 52 organized points, and with 32 improvised airfields, they would evacuate the wounded, transfer staffs, officer groups and couriers. Only in August, 221 take-offs were made from this base over the Adriatic; 183 crews completed their tasks successfully, 16 turned back due to bad weather, 22 did not find the agreed signals; 293 tons of material were transported, and 3,280 wounded were evacuated.[472]

These and other data, carefully recorded by General Korneyev in Drvar and Vis and Terzić in Moscow, were entered into the General Staff's logbooks, while Arso recorded them in his "personal" notebook. One entry, made on October 25, 1944, for the first report to the Supreme Commander in liberated Belgrade, testified that Soviet aircraft had transported 11,030 wounded and sick soldiers from the Yugoslav battlefield to Allied hospitals, which Arso considered "an immeasurable and lasting debt in blood to our brotherly Russia."

With the Western Allies, however, the situation was quite different: despite all the gratitude for what was received, much had to be asked for again and persistently, with understanding and patience required for delays, setbacks, bureaucracy and administrative tangles.

---

[471] General A. P. Gorshkov in *Collection Tito in Vršac*.

[472] *Ibid.*

The only area where Anglo-American headquarters did not need to be asked was the bombing of Yugoslav cities; only the request from the Supreme Command was awaited, delivered via the "technical section" of the Anglo-American military mission stationed in Bari, where it was processed and then handed over to the headquarters of the 15th Air Army of the USA and the Balkan Air Forces (BAF). Soon, from one of the 19 airfields around Foggia (south of the Apennine Peninsula), the bombers would take off, escorted by fighter squadrons, and in no time, "jumping over the Adriatic," would rain bombs on various cities, railways, roads or factories. There were also cases where such calls from Drvar or Vis were not even awaited, and liberated cities (Niš, Bijelo Polje, Zadar, Užice, etc.) were bombed.

The intensity of Allied bombings of cities and facilities in the unliberated parts of the Yugoslav battlefield began in the spring of 1944, resulting in extensive destruction of non-military targets and mass casualties among innocent civilians. For the losers, a small consolation was the fact that on March 8, 1,543 Allied bombers destroyed Frankfurt;[473] after all, it was an industrial centre and the largest air hub of the Third Reich, so, if there is such a thing as justice in war, it was deserved. The same fate befell the petrochemical complex in Ploiesti, Romania, which provided 60% of the Wehrmacht's fuel needs, and was located in a country fighting on the side of the Axis, with 18 divisions in the German "West Ukraine" group. However, places like Leskovac, Belgrade and Podgorica were quite different...

The Allied bombings of Yugoslav cities were part of the general plan adopted at the five-day military-political conference between Roosevelt and Churchill held from May 12 to 17, 1943, in Washington, where guidelines for further prosecution of the war were set. This bombing plan for "Germany and occupied Europe" was operationalized by expert military teams from the two allies by June 10, and just a month later (on July 10), the Anglo-American armies began the air-naval landing on Sicily, which changed the strategic situation in the Balkans. The purpose of bombing cities and military targets in the region was to achieve at least two goals: first, to confuse the Germans about the area and time for the opening of the Second Front in Europe; and second, to prevent the realization of the German plan to establish a front from Tirana to Skopje, Niš, Đerdap and Timisoara, particularly by destroying cities, objects and communications in the Morava-Vardar valley, thus weakening the preparatory German efforts. This meant that strategic objects had to be destroyed up to Ploiesti, the limit of the range of "flying fortresses." The Yugoslav theatre was included in these "air operations" by the end of October 1943. On October 25, Podgorica was bombed at 1:00 p.m., killing 150 to 200 Germans and Chetniks and a significantly larger number of civilians; the German military airfield was disabled, and one Allied plane was shot down.[474] Two days later, Skadar and Bar were bombed. The Supreme Commander then, on November 1, sent a radiogram to the main headquarters and the headquarters of some corps, asking them to urgently report "which places should be bombed." In response, the Croatian Main Staff "named" Gospić, Bihać, Sisak, Karlovac, and the railway stations in Zagreb and Novska, while the 2nd Assault Corps Headquarters named Cetinje, Podgorica and Nikšić. On November 3, the 3rd Corps Headquarters reported that two of its divisions had advanced to the eastern approaches of Sarajevo and proposed bombing the military camp in the city and the airport at Butmir, as well as Doboj, Brčko and Brod. Sarajevo was bombed on November 29, but the military targets specified by the Supreme Command were not hit; instead, according to the reports from the NOP's intelligence service, "several residential neighbourhoods" were bombed.

On November 5, 1943, the Supreme Commander of the NOVJ informed Dimitrov that the German military formations were retreating from Greece and Bulgaria via Serbia, and for this reason, "the railway junctions: Niš, Planu, etc., should be bombed."[475]

The bombing of targets in Yugoslavia became a significant issue in connection with the decision made at the Tehran Conference (December 2) to open the Second Front in May 1944 in Western Europe. To mislead Germany about the location and timing of the invasion, the Balkans were to be exposed to aerial operations. This, as a very near prospect, was communicated openly by Colonel W. Street on December 8 to General Jovanović, explicitly stating that the Allied command, "like with other resistance movements in Europe," was not obligated to request permission for bombings, but that General H.M. Wilson was willing to cooperate on this matter with the NOVJ General Staff via the Mission.[476]

In response, on December 9, Tanjug issued a "Statement from the Supreme Command of the NOV and POJ," warning all residents of cities in Yugoslavia that, due to the "daily cooperation of Allied aviation with our units," they should "timely leave all areas and parts of cities where enemy military objects and enemy units are located." All railway workers and "workers from various factories working for enemy military purposes" were also urged to leave their workplaces. It was emphasized that citizens had an obligation to provide "accurate information about the locations of enemy objects and units" and the movements of enemy troops to prevent harm to the civilian population.[477] Two days later, the warning was broadcast by *Slobodna Jugoslavija*, along with radio stations in Moscow and London, the Allied media in the Mediterranean, and especially the illegal NOP network, so it reached most of the population.

[473] D. Brajušković, *Introduction to Vol. 19 of J. Broz's Collected Works*, p. VII.

[474] Podgorica was bombed "more than 78 times" from October 25, 1943 to November 18, 1944 — according to Professor Dr. Branisav Kovačević — destruction by air was the fate of every major city in Montenegro except Cetinje, which, according to Đurica Labović in a serialized article in *Dnevnik* from August 27, 1999, was spared by General A. Jovanović "because of the valuable museums, archives, historical monuments, monasteries, and galleries," even though that city was the seat of the Regional Command; I have not found written traces of this in domestic, allied or German sources, but if it is partially true — he had something to protect.

[475] Some historians suggest that Tito, through this, "tested official Moscow to see if they would approve his requests from the Western Allies for bombing cities," to which Moscow, by not responding, silently agreed.

[476] By the end of the NOB, there were few instances where such cooperation was not achieved, especially when it came to bombing targets of operational and strategic importance — despite all the risks, mistakes and casualties that were to be expected.

[477] *Tanjug* Bulletin, no. 28 from December 9, 1943.

A similar warning to the population in the occupied territory was broadcast by *Slobodna Jugoslavija* on April 6, with the warning that in the coming days, "very frequent bombings by the Germans of various places in all areas of Yugoslavia" would be followed by "stronger attacks by our Allied aviation." For this reason, "the population of cities and places where the Germans, Ustaše and Chetniks have their bases" was warned to "immediately leave these areas. Workers should immediately leave all factories and enterprises, especially the railway lines."[478] On that day, the "season" of intense spring bombing of Yugoslav cities in the war of 1944 officially began.

On April 6, 35 bombers, escorted by fighters, bombed the Zalužani airfield near Banja Luka, destroying 27 and damaging 20 German aircraft. In the following days, Allied aviation carried out operations along the Adriatic coast. On April 12, at 11:00 a.m., 200 bombers began bombing Nova Gradiška, Nova Kapela, Slavonski Brod and Banja Luka, with the aim of destroying enemy garrisons in these areas and military targets on the communications between them. Later that day, an hour later, five Allied squadrons attacked the Borongaj airfield and freight station on the outskirts of Zagreb. The following day, 35 planes bombed the railway junction at Slavonski Brod, 37 bombed the cement factory in Kaštela, and 60 targeted sites in Omiš, Makarska and Metković...

The headquarters of the 2nd Assault Corps repeatedly requested from the Supreme Command at the end of March that the Allies bomb Nikšić, which was carried out on April 7 and 8, seemingly not coincidentally on Good Friday and Great Saturday. Civilian casualties on the first day amounted to 178 killed, and several public buildings (Gymnasium, the "Kosovka devojka" home, etc.) and private homes were destroyed, while only 81 enemy soldier was killed. The following day, bombs from 11 "Liberators" killed "a certain number" of the occupier's soldiers, but Nikšić "suffered severe destruction." This information was sent to the Supreme Command on April 11 at Arso's repeated request.

On April 16 and 17, there was heavy bombing of the Zemun airfield, which played a central role for the Wehrmacht on the Balkan front.

Also, on April 16, 400 Allied bombers bombed Belgrade, the seat of the Southeast Command, a significant Gestapo centre and an important transportation hub. The formations of "Liberators" or "flying fortresses," coming from the south and escorted by fighter squadrons, covered Belgrade with "carpets" of devastating bombs on a Sunday, the greatest Christian holiday, Easter, when Belgraders, apparently unaware of the danger, were in churches, on the streets, in parks and hospitals. There are no answers in the archives as to why the warning about the danger did not reach the citizens of Belgrade, so what they experienced on "Bloody Easter" strongly reminded them of the enemy's bombing of the "open capital" on April 6, 1941 in Hitler's operation "Punishment." According to newspaper reports, 1,160 citizens were killed on Easter, and more than 1,400 were severely wounded. The bombing of the capital continued the next day. The Nedić government's *Novi vreme* noted that the Old Fairground, where 150

[478] According to a confidential German report, "some cities were abandoned by up to 50 per cent, and Šibenik by 60 per cent of the population."

prisoners were held, was also hit, as well as a psychiatric hospital and a maternity ward with 15 mothers and babies. The pilots, indeed, had precisely marked sketches of the locations of German and quisling units, as well as factories and other facilities supplying them with weapons and equipment. However, the damage to the enemy, in relation to the number of civilian casualties and the destruction of the city, according to the reports from the NOP leadership, was not great. The crews, flying in tight formations, bombed from high altitudes, primarily to avoid strong and fairly accurate German anti-aircraft defence, mostly consisting of highly effective "Flak" units. From that height, despite their expertise, the mission briefing, and their intention to hit the right targets, it was not only difficult but impossible to precisely direct bombs and control their effectiveness. This would have been possible from an altitude of 600 or even 900 metres, but the crews of the "Liberators," "Baltimores," "Flying Fortresses," and other bombers, in no case, at least on the Yugoslav front, would descend lower than 3,000 metres, and sometimes even operated from 7,000 metres. Using the "carpet bombing" method from that height, they would indiscriminately "cover" an entire quarter of the city, so that the civilian population, hospitals, schools and citizens' property ended up as the largest, and in many cases the only victims. In the case of "Bloody Easter in Belgrade," as reported by D. Mihailović, "both hospitals and sanatoriums" were hit, and the most severely damaged were areas of the city where there were no military targets. In fact, as historian Dr. Branko Petronović notes, the only targets from this category of objectives that were hit were "the railway station, one military hospital and the Gestapo building in Dorćol."

Accepting the report from D. Mihailović as credible, the ambassadors of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia to the British Court, Bogoljub Jevtić, and the royal military envoy in Washington, Colonel Živan Knežević, sharply protested against the destruction of Belgrade.[479] Due to the Allied bombings of Croatian cities like Zagreb, Omiš, Slavonski Brod, etc., ministers Krnjević and Šutej, Archbishop Stepinac, and, at his urging, the Holy See also strongly protested.

The bombing of Belgrade did not cease — on April 24, June 6, July 3, September 8 and 17, 1944. So, 11 times until the end of the war...

Bombings of cities in Yugoslavia continued according to the agreements made between the Supreme Command and the Allied command, specifically Marshal Tito and Brigadier Maclean, with the implementation of these agreements "transferred" to the responsibility of the heads of their respective staffs. What they determined, often after very intense debates, was sent to the professional staff in Bari.

Being thoroughly informed about the results of these bombings and faced with protests against them, the Chief of Staff, obviously unimpressed as a professional soldier at a high position with the data on enemy losses, but deeply irritated as a human being by the heavy losses of his own people and the destruction of their property, insisted on reporting to the Supreme Commander on April 18 — seeking support from

[479] In the bombing of the capital, Ž. Knežević's mother and sister were killed. General D. Mihailović, in telegram no. 857 from October 25, 1942, asked Dr. Slobodan Jovanović to "work on organizing the bombing of Belgrade from the air."

the most influential people around him, primarily Žujović and Ranković — to establish strict order in this highly sensitive area of Allied support. Among other things, he demanded that priorities be specified, and the objectives of the attacks be clearly defined. With Tito's approval, he spoke with the rational and pro-NOV brigadier Maclean and, the following day, flew with Colonel W. Street from the Medeno Polje to the "technical headquarters" of Maclean's mission in Bari, where several experienced experts and sympathizers of the NOV operated. After establishing the foundations for further cooperation, the chiefs returned to Drvar that same day, where Arso, after reporting on the agreement in Bari, received a dispatch from Tito to inform Peko "which places should be bombed," warning him: "Know that I am again taking responsibility for this, and therefore only important military objectives are considered."[480]

After these, often sharp, discussions with the Allied "factors," on April 20, the official act of the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters was issued, signed by the Supreme Commander's authorization, and sent to the Anglo-American military mission. It was, in fact, a "cumulative request" for the bombing of the most important strategic targets. Out of the 44 locations listed, 22 were marked in red with an emphasis that they were "of priority importance." Belgrade was marked in red, and on the attached sketches, the military objects or factories working "for the German war machine" were precisely identified.

The bombing of their own cities, as well as the destruction of factories, bridges, railways and roads, was, according to Arso, speaking to friends and colleagues, an "inevitability and misfortune, part of the great and unavoidable drama and fate of the people," and for that reason, it was essential to be "rigorous in their selection, precise in requests to aviators and strict in adhering to the rules established with the Allied commands." At night, General Savo Orović recalled, he couldn't sleep when he heard about the mass death of innocent people in Podgorica who were seeking shelter from the war in caves in the bed of the Ribnica River, where hundreds perished during the bombing. It was also the city of his barefoot youth and first apprenticeship, and there, at the 11th kilometre, were his little daughters, mother and sisters; he painfully experienced all of this, yet the war had to continue.[481]

However, not everyone was treated equally in this sacrifice for victory. In the Book of Incoming Telegrams of the Supreme Command, it is noted that on July 2, a telegram arrived from the Main Staff of Slovenia with a proposal to bomb the "Ljubljana railway station." It was explained that this was "very important due to the current situation in Ljubljana and the overall military situation in Slovenia." It was emphasized that the proposal was supported by the CC of the CP of Slovenia, so they requested to know whether the Main Staff could submit such a request to the Allied air force through the Anglo-American military mission in Slovenia. According to the established procedure, Arso, during his first report, informed Tito of the proposal, and, contrary to the established practice, Tito kept the telegram "until a decision" was made. After consulting

[480] AVII, file 394, reg. no. 21-4/2.

[481] From a conversation with General S. Orović, June 1972, in Belgrade.

with Kardelj, Tito gave his response: "I do not agree that you request the bombing of Ljubljana. Allied aviation bombs from high altitudes, and because of this, there can be many civilian casualties. This small railway station is not of particular importance, as it is not a major crossroads."[482] This proposal from Slovenia was the reason Kardelj, in his characteristically long letter to the comrades, sharply reprimanded both the Main Staff of Slovenia and the "agreeing" CP of Slovenia, asking them again: "In whose interest would the bombing of Ljubljana serve? The enemy would not suffer any losses, but a thousand of our people would die, which would harm us," emphasizing that "we have experience from all over Yugoslavia" (?!). He advised them to propose "such points where bombing is necessary for military reasons, and even then, as little as possible."[483]

Cities and other targets in Slovenia were later spared from Allied bombing, all thanks to the personal request or blessing of E. Kardelj, such as the large viaduct in Zagorje over the Sava River during the "Ratweek," or the bridges over the Soča River during the dramatic May Day operation of 1945, or Maribor in the last days of the war. And Zagreb was spared on Tito's personal request. Historian Milovan Dželebdžić, who thoroughly studied the issue of Allied bombings across the Yugoslav battlefield, claims that there are documents in which Tito requested from the Allies: "Just don't touch Zagreb, Ljubljana and Maribor!" adding that they are "kept in one institution behind seven locks."[484]

It is hard to say whether these prohibitions were the result of the Supreme Commander's compassion and political considerations toward Croatia and Slovenia, in contrast to Serbia and Montenegro, whose thirty or so cities, based on his assessments and requests, were ruthlessly bombed (every sixth city, and around ten cities bombed multiple times, and every fifth one reduced to rubble), or his tragic late realization that the economic and political damage from Allied bombings outweighed the military benefit. What is certain is that the Supreme Commander's Chief of Staff was promptly and accurately informing him about the outcomes of the Allied bombings and warning him about the great responsibility for such decisions. Hence, alongside asking commanders for proposals about which cities should be bombed, there were his reminders that the decision would be made "at his own risk," that "only important objectives and enemy groupings" should be proposed, and that they, with their "allied liaison officers," would decide on bombing tactical targets, reporting back to the Supreme Command.

Likely burdened by personal responsibility for issuing the bombing requests — and especially for the civilian casualties and destruction they caused — Tito instructed the editor of Volume 20 of the *Collected Works* to record in the chronology, clearly with the aim of sharing responsibility, that on April 17 he had "ordered the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters of the NOV and POJ to, in his name, request via the deputy head

[482] AVII, file 60/C, fund 1.

[483] The letter is dated July 29, 1944.

[484] M. Dželebdžić does not reveal (publicly) which institution has held a monopoly on preserving the truth for five and a half decades, and the questions multiply: will the documents be preserved in that archive; when will those locks be loosened; who will find the truth about this relevant at the beginning of the third millennium...

of the Anglo-American military mission (Colonel W. Street) that the Allied Supreme Command in the Mediterranean have Allied aviation bomb enemy concentrations in Nikšić, Podgorica, Bijelo Polje and Brodarevo."[485] The Chief of the Supreme Headquarters did, based on assessments and proposals from the main staffs and corps staffs with direct communication (1st, 2nd, 3rd and 5th Corps), compile unified target lists for the entire front and, based on intelligence on enemy positions, submitted recommendations to the Supreme Commander on which towns and sites should be bombed according to urgency. However, Tito reserved for himself the absolute right to make the final decision — circling the list numbers in red or blue pencil. Any town that got a red circle could expect the "Liberators" overhead the very next day. It is undeniable — as demonstrated by the request from the Main Staff of Slovenia to bomb key enemy facilities, especially Zagreb — that Tito did not apply the same criteria to what should or should not be bombed.

Unlike Belgrade, which was bombed on Easter Sunday — "a sacred day" — Podgorica was hit on May 5, the day before Đurđevdan, the patron saint's day for half its residents. Among other consequences, bombs dropped from 120 Flying Fortresses reduced 60 per cent of the city to rubble. The attack, with heavy civilian losses, outraged the local population, who — according to all available research — were not warned of the impending danger. But even if they had been, the Germans and Chetniks, who used civilians as de facto hostages, would not have allowed them to leave the city beneath Gorica hill. In the devastated city, in contrast to the mass civilian casualties, only 15 Germans and the Chetnik commander for Montenegro, General Staff Major Đorđije Lašić, were killed.[486]

The 2nd Assault Corps Headquarters, aware that its units were constantly under enemy offensive pressure aimed at preventing their breakthrough into Serbia, requested — during the "Seventh Enemy Offensive" — that Allied aviation urgently bomb Sjenica and, if possible, Podgorica. For the other garrisons, the report stated that the "situation remains unchanged," meaning they were still targets for bombing. Other commanders made similar requests. The Allies would go on to support these defensive battles with nearly one thousand air sorties.

The SH — especially its Chief — had spent the past eight months, during which bombings of unliberated Yugoslav territory were taking place at varying intensity, trying to establish a coherent policy and enforce order in its execution. However, this was difficult to achieve, mainly because of the deteriorating (for the Partisan movement) situation on the battlefield. In efforts to improve the position of individual operational units, urgent air support often had to be requested without the conditions in place for

[485] J. Broz, *Collected Works*, Vol. 20, p. 320.

[486] Born in 1906, a man raised in a patriarchal manner, a career officer of great reputation, and loyal to both the dynasty and his profession, although deeply involved in crimes against the communists, he also made significant contributions to the NOP, of which we will only mention two here: the young daughters of the Chief of the NOVJ General Staff and his godchild were kept in Zavala, a village near Podgorica (which was known to both B. Stanišić and P. Đurišić), and "nothing happened to them"; he saved the life of the famous partisan doctor Saša, daughter-in-law of a family friend Risto, and the wife of the General of Health Services in the NOVJ, Borislav Božović, at Jabuka.

structured implementation. Only after the move to Vis and the establishment of more direct contact with Allied commands — particularly with the creation (on June 12) of the BAF Command under British Air Marshal W. Elliott — could more influence be exerted on this and other matters.

It seemed that the SH had to "sail into" the Mediterranean, that Rome had to be liberated, and the Second Front in Europe opened, before a more systematic and coordinated approach could be applied to the bombing of targets in Yugoslavia. These strikes were now aligned with the ambitious Allied strategy of destroying economic infrastructure across Europe that served the Third Reich. At that point, the SH could inform operational units that "Allied air support to our forces will now increase." And it did — coordinated from Vis, technically prepared in Maclean's operations hub in Bari, led by two veterans familiar with the Yugoslav front, Peter Moore and John Clarke. Execution occurred at the strategic and operational levels in the 15th Air Force Headquarters (under General Nathanael Twining) and at the tactical level in the BAF command (under W. Elliott). From then on, commanders like Koča and Peko — particularly Koča, as head of the Main Staff of Serbia, and also Kosta Nađ from eastern Bosnia — would race to submit the most bombing requests to improve their troops' precarious positions as quickly and decisively as possible. It was especially important to them that the Germans, Bulgarians, Chetniks, Nedić's men and other collaborators see who the Allies were supporting. And when these requests were coming from "Serbian commanders" — and when the Supreme Commander acknowledged and forwarded them to Allied command — it raises a logical question: Why should the Americans and British care more than those commanders themselves about the safety of Serbian civilians or the protection of property? That might also answer the question of why the Allies bombed 25 Serbian cities during the war — levelling entire districts with "carpets" of bombs. Niš was hit 15 times, Belgrade 11, Kraljevo 6, Zemun 4, Novi Sad 3, Ćuprija twice. The strikes conducted in July and August 1944, as noted by Colonel Dr. Slobodan Branković, were justified by claims that "large concentrations of enemy forces" were present in those cities. As commander of the Main Staff of Serbia, Koča Popović regularly called for "most urgent," "pressing" and "serious" bombings of an ever-growing list of Serbian towns: Prokuplje, Priština, Raška, Podujevo, Kosovska Mitrovica, Kraljevo, Leskovac... The bombings of Belgrade and Niš seemed to become routine. The bombing of Kragujevac, Kruševac, Velika Plana, Ćuprija, Peć, Novi Sad, Veliki Bečkerek, Alibunar, Markovac... was difficult for citizens to comprehend.[487]

The telling of this phase of the Allied destructive bombings concludes with a note from Professor Dr. Branko Petranović about how the leaders of the Allied forces, particularly Churchill and Stalin — according to some opinions highlighted by the author — had a common strategic interest in continuing the bombing of cities in Yugoslavia: the British Prime Minister "wanted to use air superiority, backed by inexhaustible American war supplies, to prevent the Germans from assisting Field Marshal Kesselring in Italy through constant bombings"; while the Soviet leader, on the

[487] Contribution in the *Collection of Reports from the Scientific Conference on Allied Bombing of Serbia*, Leskovac, September 1994.

other hand, "wanted the Germans to remain in Yugoslavia, Greece and Albania for as long as possible, so they could secure the German rear in Italy, thereby preventing the Western Allies from advancing into Central Europe before the Red Army."[488] Our historian did not directly comment on these theses from other authors presented in the study *Serbia in the Second World War 1939-1945,* and since he passed away in the meantime, we are forever deprived of his personal opinion. However, he did record the lament over the heavily wounded Belgrade from its steadfast and dignified, yet loyal and brave citizen, the writer Isidora Sekulić. The writer, horrified by the Easter drama in her city, wrote — how Belgrade, exposed and growing more so if it resisted more, is vulnerable because it can't protect itself. "Such cities," wrote this intelligent citizen of the world, a gifted literate and proven patriot, "are like large birds that live on cliffs and endure every misfortune without shelter. Belgrade's exposure is its danger. Everything in Belgrade, and the citizens of Belgrade, has something of a voluntary tendency to stand exposed, to come to light and to the arena."[489]

One of the "hot potatoes" that the Supreme Commander transferred to the hands of the chief of staff was the fate of the captured Germans. This issue, which arose in mid-April, became a matter of inter-Allied relations, following the first joint battles and actions of the Navy units of the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia (NOJ) and the 26th Division and British commandos and fighting boats. From that point on, British officers had closer insight into the activities of the NOJ units and, therefore, the fate of the captured Germans. The issue was raised in correspondence with Marshal Tito by Prime Minister Churchill, Minister Macmillan and General Wilson, and soon, by the orders of their superiors, by Brigadier Maclean. They demanded that the execution of captured Germans cease, even if they were hardened war criminals, particularly those captured in joint actions of the commandos and the NOJ. They argued, in defence of the lives of captured Germans, for at least two completely rational reasons: first, around a hundred thousand Britons were in German captivity, so everything that might irritate their captors needed to be avoided; second, Great Britain, "for civilizational and ethical reasons," wanted to maintain the reputation of a consistent adherent of the Geneva Convention, which obliged wartime participants to treat prisoners of war correctly. As for the headquarters of the NOJ units, they behaved humanely toward the captured Germans during the months of the uprising, but when their command, despite clear warnings, continued executing prisoners, weak and wounded fighters, and carrying out mass liquidation of the population, countermeasures were taken. During the "triage" of prisoners, those who were determined or presumed to have committed crimes were immediately executed without a trial or evidence process, while the others were handed over to the Permanent Commission for the Exchange of German Prisoners of War, led by Andrija Hebrang with the authorization of the CC of the CPY and the Supreme Command.

The issue was officially raised by General H.M. Wilson in a letter sent to Tito on

[488] B. Petranović, *op. cit.*, p. 615.

[489] *Ibid.*

April 13. He was informed by British officers at the NOJ Navy Headquarters that a large group of Germans, captured on Korčula, had been executed. He wrote:

"I have been informed that your forces stationed on Vis have regularly executed some German soldiers as war criminals. I strongly protest against such actions and must ask that in the future, you take steps to ensure compliance with international conventions in such matters. I must draw your attention to the fact that, as commander of the area, if the Germans raised this issue, I would have to deny responsibility for such actions regarding soldiers held by your forces. Furthermore, I would like to emphasize that such activity by your forces negatively affects the good relations that currently exist between my forces and yours on the island of Vis."[490]

Tito demanded an immediate response to this issue. General S. Žujović from Vis, where he was participating in the planning and execution of landing operations on the islands of Mljet and Korčula, replied: In these actions, he reports, 39 Germans were killed and 505 were captured, with a larger number of those executed after being "discovered as criminals." These were members of the German 118th Fighter Division "with oak leaf insignia," who had committed atrocious crimes in Dalmatia and Herzegovina. A few days later, Žujović, unaware of the correspondence between the supreme commanders, reported that all the (non-executed) prisoners had been transferred to the island of Biševo, adding: "We will interrogate them individually and execute all those who participated in crimes against the population. Let us know what to do with the others: keep them or hand them over to the British." The response was: all prisoners "who are not determined to be criminals" should be kept on the islands, as the British "have nothing to do with them," and "for the criminals, organize a trial and bring witnesses."[491] But that could not happen: General Wilson, the commander for the Mediterranean, considered himself responsible for the Adriatic part of the Yugoslav front and was clear in his next protest: no executions of war criminals! Confronted with the consequences of not fulfilling such a request, Tito ordered the Navy Headquarters and the 26th Division on May 9 to "immediately transfer all war criminals," with accompanying documentation, to the Supreme Command, where they would be tried. Four days later, he signed a telegram: "Keep all prisoners on Vis, and if you identify criminals among them, send them to our headquarters for investigation. You must not execute anyone, as you have already caused us much trouble. I have made this commitment to the Allies on this matter."[492]

Such a stance towards German prisoners of war, which was deemed satisfactory by the British, was communicated by Arso, following the established "chief of staff procedure," to Colonel W. Street, who informed General Wilson by telegram.

Prime Minister Churchill, in a "personal message" to Tito, "requested": "In any operation where your forces are cooperating with British units, we ask that you treat Germans who surrender as prisoners of war in accordance with international laws. War

[490] *Collection Tito-Churchill, Strictly Secret*, p. 136.

[491] AVII, file 523, reg. no. 21-24/1.

[492] *Ibid.,* file 523, reg. no. 21-46/1.

criminals can be tried only in a later phase of the war. We have always strictly adhered to the Geneva Convention not only because the Germans hold 100,000 British prisoners, but also for principled reasons. In this regard, we cannot allow our position to be questioned. Therefore, we request that you issue strict and clear orders to all your officers who have been or might be engaged in any operation with our forces in accordance with the above-mentioned matter. It would be a great loss if our operations on the islands and along the coast could not be expanded, as General Wilson plans, and become significant and effective, simply because we do not agree on this important issue..."[493]

Informed that General Wilson's protest regarding the execution of captured war criminals "had not achieved the desired effect," the British government intervened. However, in order to avoid appearing to officially recognize the National Committee, it was decided that the British position would be conveyed through a personal message from the Prime Minister. Tito replied on May 23, stating that he had already "issued orders to all our military authorities in the zone of joint operations that no more prisoners of war should be executed — even if it is proven that there are war criminals among them. For those who are, based on indisputable evidence, indeed war criminals, I have decided, as you suggest and desire, that they will be tried at a later time. Until then, such prisoners will be held under guard either by your or our military authorities, so that they cannot escape their deserved punishment."[494]

However, in a conversation with W. Street, Arso had said that "the particular character of the war in Yugoslavia made it entirely impossible to postpone all punishments until after the war." Around that time, the Navy Staff wrote to the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, requesting that a location be urgently designated for housing hundreds of captured Germans. Facilities for food and accommodation on Vis were minimal, and transferring and housing them on Biševo was insecure, as there was a risk the enemy might "liberate" them through a sudden raid on the island. The proposal was to establish, in agreement with the Allies, a prisoner-of-war camp in southern Italy or North Africa — effectively returning the favour to the British, at least in terms of sparing war criminals from execution, even though, according to witnesses — and by their own admissions — many of them had the deaths of dozens of civilians on their hands.

The commanders of the uprising forces in Serbia and Montenegro in 1941 — Sreten Žujović and Arso Jovanović — who had personally witnessed mass atrocities by the occupiers against civilians and captured fighters, always stood by the view that if the Germans could not otherwise be brought under the rule of civilized conduct and laws of war, then they should be answered according to the time-worn principle: "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." To the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, however, it was clear that such a harsh stance toward German prisoners — even if they were war criminals — had to be abandoned for political reasons. Still, he struggled

[493] *Collection Tito-Churchill, Strictly Secret*, pp. 148-149.

[494] J. Broz, *Collected Works*, Vol. 20, p. 125.

to comprehend how the Wehrmacht, driven by revenge and Germanic exclusivity, refused to acknowledge the actual conditions on the battlefield — that the NOVJ was an organized military force, an operational structure founded on strict hierarchy and accountability of lower to higher command, with a functioning military judiciary, visible insignia and other attributes obligating it to observe the rules of war — including the Geneva Conventions and the standards governing treatment of prisoners of war. Thus, his decision was that the dignity of his people and its army must also be defended by deterring the occupier from committing crimes — pre-emptively, through retaliatory measures, essentially by using their own methods. In doing so, he intended to teach them a lesson, make them "aware of justice and duty." He once told General Savo Orović how, during his years of schooling and "on the job," he had studied the classic military theorist Carl von Clausewitz in great detail — especially his writings on people's wars. He remembered one passage in which Clausewitz claimed that only wars waged by educated nations were not particularly brutal, while less cultured peoples destroyed more. He never believed that — and during this war, especially on the Yugoslav front, everything had been turned upside down. In fact, it probably was never true to begin with, but rather a reflection of class and racist ideology. Everything he knew about a people's army and a people's war suggested that the so-called "barbaric" and "uncivilized" nations — as Clausewitz's descendants referred to them — like the Serbs and Montenegrins, actually excelled in ethics, particularly in their treatment of prisoners, the wounded, women and children, and in their respect for civilian dwellings. They upheld traditional moral codes, a sense of justice, established rules of warfare, and accepted agreements and conventions.[495] Since the "Foča days," the SH had been working on legally regulating military judiciary and tightening disciplinary accountability for staff, command personnel and soldiers. In Drvar, only the existing regulations were further refined[496] — specifically, those governing the organization of military courts, their jurisdiction and the disciplinary responsibility of military personnel. These documents had already existed and were binding on all relevant institutions and individuals, but they had not been as comprehensive or precise. The person primarily responsible for formulating them was Dr. Josip Hrnječević, who had succeeded Dr. V. Velebit as head of the Military Judiciary Department of the SH. The Chief of the Supreme Headquarters himself — as he had also done in Foča — was directly involved in shaping the organization of the courts and their jurisdiction, classification of offences, punishments and protective measures, procedures for sentencing and execution of judgements, legal protections for the accused and convicted, and so forth — always from the standpoint of military command.[497] In February, he also drafted the formation plan for corps headquarters and corps military districts, in

[495] As a General Staff officer, he knew the contents of the "Hague Convention on the Laws and Customs of War on Land" from 1907, which calls for and obliges the right and customs among civilized nations, as well as the laws of humanity and the demands of human conscience; he respected this, but he clashed with the warring side that did not adhere to it at all.

[496] AVII, file 15/A, reg. no. 2-44/7.

[497] From a conversation with A. Ranković, October 1973, in Belgrade.

which, instead of the previous courts attached to military area commands, brigades and detachments, he introduced a Corps Military Court and a Corps District Court. These courts would preside in the first instance over all offences except those deemed severe enough to fall under the jurisdiction of the Higher Military Court at the SH. The Corps Military Court would try military personnel from the operational army, while the Corps District Court would handle all offences committed on unliberated or temporarily abandoned territory. A 35-article document precisely outlined who would try whom, for what offences, and how. It also specified that the death penalty (by firing squad, or by hanging in particularly serious cases) and stripping of rank or title from officers could not be carried out without the approval of the Higher Military Court. All military courts, at all levels, were required to regularly report their activities to the SH. To ensure impartiality, courts were obligated to rule in panels and issue verdicts only after closed deliberations. The Corps Military Court was to have one court panel at the headquarters and one in each of its divisions, while the Higher Military Court would have permanent court panels at main headquarters and at a corps staff, or assembled for specific "cases."[498]

All breaches of military duty that, due to their less serious nature, did not fall under the jurisdiction of the Military Courts Decree were addressed under the Order on Disciplinary Responsibility of Military Personnel, which included a wide range of punishments — from formal warnings to demotion in rank.[499] Both documents were signed on May 24, thus completing the legal framework for the operational army.

The legal regulation of relations within the units of the NOV and Partisan Units (POJ) of Yugoslavia, both on the liberated and occupied territories, was also meant to be contributed by a document establishing a strictly centralized counterintelligence service — the Department for the Protection of the People (OZNA), implemented by the National Committee, through the main staffs, down to the corps headquarters and military districts, with its collaborators in enemy state institutions and units on the occupied territories, in the tactical units of NOVJ, and in the local commands.[500] The Chief of the Supreme Headquarters highly valued the struggle against foreign agencies, spies, saboteurs, terrorists and other "anti-national elements," deeply believing that it was a very important and inseparable part of the overall struggle for the country's liberation. This service was led by A. Ranković, who, in several briefings with the Supreme Commander, advocated for their centralization and, certainly, the separation of the military-operational intelligence function, so that, as a command function, it could effectively focus on gathering data necessary for making assessments and decisions. This was somewhat acknowledged in the document. Moreover, Russian influence was evident not only in the tasks of the OZNA at all levels but also in the formulation regarding the perspective of forming "front and army headquarters."

Aside from liberating the military operational intelligence service from the increasingly offensive counterintelligence function, Arso considered one of the good aspects of this decision — which, overall, he found unacceptable, as the OZNA was detached from the sphere of command and exempt from responsibility to the commander — to be the establishment of the so-called "fourth section" of the OZNA at the highest level, which included the issues of codes, secret letters, etc. This was all the more important given that the issue of protecting codes in radio communication was becoming increasingly complex, as already by then, in the NOVJ units, from brigade headquarters to the SH, about 120, and by September more than 200 radio stations, mostly of Italian (from war booty) and Polish (from Allied aid) origin, were in operational use. As shown by the data kept by the Head of the Cipher Department at the SH, Captain Branka Savić, at least one third of these stations were not recorded. General Jovanović had long suspected that the Germans were decrypting orders and messages sent from the SH to the unit headquarters on direct connection and vice versa. He had voiced this suspicion during regular briefings, and clearly emphasized it in a letter to Marshal Tito on May 9. Six days later, all operational staffs of the NOVJ received an assessment from the SH: "All of our codes are weak and insecure."[501] This assessment led to further obligations for the staffs.

The sudden increase in radio communication, which began in the fall of 1943 with Italian spoils and Allied aid, was something that the SH's corresponding service was neither organizationally nor, especially, technically and experientially prepared for. Communications in the SH were managed by Major Veljko Dragićević, a highly competent and responsible person, and the cipher was, as mentioned, overseen by Captain Branka Savić, the wife of Major Pavle Savić (who had been a member of the Military Mission in Moscow since early April 1944). In the radio message of May 14, sent to all operational staffs, Arso added, after the assessment that "all our ciphers are weak and insecure," that: "We are creating new ones with the help of specialists. An instructor will come to you." The following order was issued: "Do not give military secrets using the old cipher. For now, communicate important matters in an encrypted form." This was an expression of extreme necessity until a more reliable solution could be adopted. The General Staff officer and Chief of the Supreme Headquarters knew the importance of organized and successful radio communication, and understood its necessity for commanding troops across the battlefield. The Germans, on the other hand, had very well-developed special units trained for eavesdropping on enemy radio stations and decrypting intercepted coded radio messages. According to the research of Dr. Dimitrije Brajišković, one such unit was added to the Southeast Command, based in Belgrade, and it was called the 4th Wehrmacht Radio Reconnaissance Command. It consisted of two radio reconnaissance battalions and several independent companies. Due to the inadequacy of the ciphers used by the NOVJ units, by the end of September 1943, the Germans had been able to fully track the entire radio correspondence of the SH of the NOV and POJ of Yugoslavia with subordinated staffs and vice versa. With the acquisition of better and more powerful radio stations through Allied shipments

[498] In one court panel from April 1944, besides the recorder who was a second lieutenant, General Major Branko Poljanac and Dr. Vladimir Bakarić were present.

[499] AVII, file 109/C, reg. no. 11-4.

[500] J. Broz, *Collected Works*, Vol. 20, pp. 90-93.

[501] AVII, file 108/A, reg. no. 2-124/8-1.

of military equipment, almost all communication within the NOVJ units took place via radio. The decrypted messages provided extraordinary intelligence to the German operational commands about everything that was considered the greatest military secret — the organizational structure of the units, their strength, armament, tasks, directions of movement, positions held, etc. These valuable pieces of information were used by the Germans in planning and executing their combat actions. Some of this intelligence was relayed, through liaison officers, to Bulgarian and collaborationist staffs, and also to the Chetnik High Command when their units were engaged in combat against the NOVJ. The SH became aware that the Germans were somehow deciphering the contents of the radio messages exchanged by the SH and the operational units by analysing captured German command orders, which is why Tito issued this warning.[502]

New ciphers were announced and adopted, but the Germans quickly decrypted them as well. As a result, other ciphers were created, this time with the help of Soviet military specialists, and they were delivered, through "special couriers in aircraft," to the main staffs and corps headquarters, departing from the NOVJ base in Bari. The Chief of the Supreme Headquarters delivered them, sealed in envelopes with the names of the commanders, by special liaison aircraft to Major General Branko Poljanac, who, unopened and with signatures, entrusted them to the liaison officers. According to preserved documents, these ciphers were harder to decrypt, but even Soviet specialists, who were well-versed in German technical capabilities, were not entirely certain of their complete reliability.[503]

On May 20, the SH warned that "the Germans are opening our dispatches and know everything," and the staffs managed as best they could, mostly without much experience and relying on improvisation: geographic names were substituted with the birthplaces of well-known individuals, and units were named after their commanders. To ensure greater secrecy for signals guiding Allied aircraft, the SH agreed that these be communicated by Allied liaison officers rather than using their own radio messages. Encrypted codes were introduced for certain locations and objects, and on June 11, the Supreme Commander, using General N.V. Korneyev's communication, reported to General Terzić that he had "moved to the KKK island," a code for Vis. However, from the further text, it would easily be deciphered which island was meant, as it stated: "We travelled via Bari, where the English gave us two minesweepers. All of this remained completely secret. Here we stay until bases on the other liberated territory are prepared."[504] One example of a relatively successful attempt to maintain secrecy was the radio message sent on June 14 from Vis to the Staff of the 2nd Shock Corps, which read: "Secure Njegovuđa. Your proposal for operations in a certain direction aligns with our view. First, we need to accumulate enough war material and supply the units.

[502] Note 134 in Vol. 20 of J. Broz's *Collected Works*, p. 278.

[503] Branka Savić remembered that "even General Korneyev said there was no cipher the Germans couldn't decrypt very quickly, but the experts of the Red Army could do it even faster."

[504] AVII, file 57/4, reg. no. 4-1/1.

All Allies have promised the material. Koča will also come to this sector."[505] Here, only the name Njegovuđa was openly given, but there was no need for special secrecy as the airport, with significant sacrifices, was defended by the 5th Krajina and 17th Eastern Bosnian Divisions, and it was significant because valuable Allied aid was received and hundreds of wounded were evacuated from there.

The proposal mentioned in the radio message was sent on June 5, and it was drafted by the core group of the 2nd Corps Staff (Generals P. Dapčević, R. Vukanović and Colonel M. Bakić), delegate of the SH Major General P. Ilić, Secretary of the CPY Provincial Committee for Serbia B. Nešković, Political Commissioner of the Main Staff of Serbia M. Marković, and member of the Provincial Committee Ljubinka Milosavljević. In the radio message to the SH, they stated the opinion "that for transferring the combat operations to Serbia, five divisions are needed, which should first take control of the Pešter Plateau and the mountains of Golija and Zlatibor, thus creating conditions to disable the use of the Ibar and Višegrad railway lines and enable a quick connection with all forces from Serbia; that the units tasked with this operation be well supplied with ammunition, explosives and other equipment; that a unified command over all forces in the Sandžak, Herzegovina, Montenegro and forces advancing into Serbia be established; that urgent measures be taken with the Allies to evacuate 400 severely wounded soldiers; and that for executing these operations, cooperation with the units from the main staffs of Kosovo and Metohija, Macedonia and Serbia be organized, as well as carrying out demonstration attacks by the units of the Main Staff of the NOV and PO of Vojvodina and the 3rd Corps of the NOVJ on the Sava, i.e. the Drina river."[506]

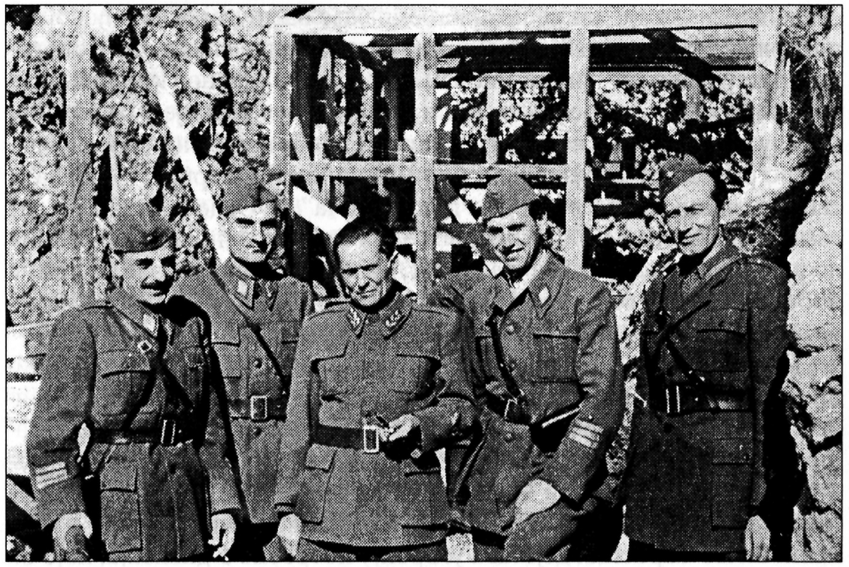
The announcement of Koča's arrival hinted at the approaching deployment of the 1st Proletarian Corps at the gates of Serbia to participate in shifting the focus of operations to the eastern parts of the country. Its commander had just been at the SH, where he reported on the recent enemy offensive operation and received assignments regarding the advance into Serbia, but, due to the development of events, he would no longer return to his proletarians.[507]

Due to the lack of training of radio telegraph operators, and especially the cipher experts, outdated equipment, scarcity of spare parts, and particularly due to improvisation and the deteriorating technical conditions for maintaining radio communication, there were many deficiencies in both encryption and, even more, in decryption. As a result, radio messages were full of ambiguities and illogicalities, sometimes even words and sentence structures that confused the commanders and sometimes led them to make incorrect moves. This remained evident in the preserved documents, both domestic and Soviet in origin, especially in the telegrams of the Executive Committee of the Comintern and from Dimitrov himself until the end of February 1944, after which communications with Moscow were carried out via radio communication with Gener-

[505] *Ibid.,* file 394, reg. no. 21-15/2.

[506] Note no. 259 in Vol. 20 of J. Broz's *Collected Works*, p. 297.

[507] As the commander of the Main Staff of Serbia, he would arrive in the free territory of Jablanica via an Allied airplane on July 10-11, 1944.



Agreement on the breakthrough into Serbia: Generals Koča Popović, Arso Jovanović and Pavle Ilić, and the commissar of the 1st Proletarian Corps, M. Todorović Plavi, with the Supreme Commander.

al Korneyev. It was necessary to first translate the messages into Russian, then encrypt them, and afterwards, in the corresponding services of the General Staff of the Red Army, decrypt and type them again. During this process, inconsistencies, ambiguities and "gaps" were prevalent, traces of which are still visible in Tito's *Collected Works,* and those passages were carefully checked and, with the help of authors and witnesses, supplemented with corrections, notes and explanations. The most important thing, however, is that, as far as is known, these kinds of deficiencies did not lead to significant political or military harm, for which the cipher service and the Communications Centre of the SH bear great credit, as these two bodies of the Supreme Command were organizationally directly linked to General A. Jovanović, and in the relatively favourable working conditions in Drvar during the war.

The credit goes to the communications service of the SH for the fact that May 1 in Drvar dawned with good news: Marshal Tito's praise, via *Slobodna Jugoslavija*, to the "combat and leadership personnel of the 26th Division and the Navy of the NOVJ for the successful attacks on the islands of Mljet and Korčula"; a radio message from Tempo announcing that "the 1st Macedonian Assembly should take place within the next 15 to 20 days"; and the message from Generals V. Terzić and M. Đilas from Moscow stating that they had met "with all responsible people," that the opening of the NOVJ air force and tank school in the Soviet Union had been approved, and that the Soviet authorities would "support NOVJ and others in all aspects of supply."[508]

[508] *Collection of Relations Between Yugoslavia and Russia (USSR) 1941-1945*, pp. 394-401.

All three pieces of news were indeed May Day-related, with the one about the attacks being enhanced by a message of congratulations sent by the Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in the Mediterranean, General H.M. Wilson, to Marshal Tito: "I greatly appreciate the work of your forces in the attack on Mljet and Korčula. I would be grateful if you would convey my congratulations to the commanders and fighters for their successful battle."[509]

The landing assaults coincided with the cessation of the repeated insistence (from March 17 to April 13) of the "commanding admiral of the Adriatic" Litzmann — calling for German troops to land on Vis, but at that time, there were neither forces nor resources, and after that, it was too late, as the NOVJ and the Allies had firmly occupied and fortified it for decisive defence. The island of Vis, covering an area of 90.3 km² (16 km long, 7 km wide, with its highest peak, Hum, at 587 metres) and a non-coastal 55 km shoreline, had strategic-operational significance during this period, and later became even more important for the Allies, gaining strategic importance from the standpoint of the NOVJ's organization and supply.

From May 2 to 4, the 2nd Congress of the USAOJ was held in Drvar, half a year before it was scheduled for December 1943 in Jajce, three times postponed due to enemy operations. During the formal part, in front of representatives of the youth of allied countries and 816 delegates, in the name of the NOVJ, the Congress was opened after Marshal Tito's speech, which was met with cheers for the army, the struggle and freedom. According to Generals Terzić and Đilas from Moscow, news of the Congress also reached Stalin, whose representative, Major Sakharov, the secretary of the mission, was also present, sitting to Tito's left in the front row, while between Tito and General Jovanović sat Major Randolph Churchill.

Before and during the breaks of the Congress in Drvar, through the personal efforts of General A. Jovanović, mass sports competitions were organized between the delegation teams and locals, the SH and the Support Battalion, the Officer's School and the allied military missions. The teams competed in football, running with wartime equipment "on medium tracks," long and high jumps, stone and bomb throwing, climbing slippery poles, leaping over sacks, horseback riding skills, etc. These competitions, between the fighters and the people, were also held in NOVJ units across the front, at the initiative of the SH and organized by the SKOJ. As an active athlete, Arso knew well how sports, in a psychophysical sense, influenced the strengthening of the collective spirit and the determination of individuals and units in battle, so he persistently advocated that, as much as possible under wartime circumstances, constant and as much attention as possible be dedicated to this activity. This spirit, supported by Tito, was imaginatively and resolutely spread throughout the SH and the institutions around him.

One of the issues that the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters in Drvar was constantly engaged with was maintaining communications with the military representatives of the NOVJ with the Allies: the NOVJ Base Staff in Bari and the military

[509] Note 60 in Vol. 20 of J. Broz's *Collected Works*, p. 266.



Guests of the 2nd Congress of USAOJ (Drvar, May 2-4, 1944) during the playing of the anthem: from the right, Major Sakharov, Tito, Randolph Churchill, Arso, Kardelj, V. Bakarić, R. Čolaković, Koča Popović.

missions with the Supreme Command of Allied Forces in the Mediterranean and in Moscow, and he was also involved in preparations to send a Military Mission to the United States.

The NOVJ Base, headquartered in Bari and commanded by Colonel Milenko Popović, from May 8 unified "all services and institutions in Italy," and was "an integral part of the Military Mission of General Velebit" sent on April 15 to the headquarters of General H.M. Wilson.

The responsibility for handling the representation of the NOVJ abroad, with the Allies, in the most important matters and decisions, rested with the Supreme Commander, just as was the case with relations with the Allied military missions. However, the Chief of Staff, by the nature of his duties, was obliged to prepare all the "papers" with requests for military assistance, for the care of the wounded, for the schooling of military personnel, for the transfer of commanders and delegates from one end of the battlefield to the other and to Allied headquarters, etc. He was also authorized to contact the heads of missions and their respective "departmental" members directly. All of this was done rationally, based on analysis, precisely formulated and firmly requested from the representatives of the NOVJ, always with dignity and consideration for the interests and reputation of the homeland and its military. The results became increasingly evident: new tons of supplies, hundreds of wounded taken care of, thousands of Yugoslavs gathered in the Mediterranean and the Soviet Union, now fighting for the liberation of their homeland. Every volunteer was welcome, every skill was valuable

and any help was accepted if it was deemed that it would contribute to victory. Centres were opened for training and educating tank crews in Katadbi in northern Africa, and in Karavine and Gravina in southern Italy; airmen in Benin, Libya; artillerymen near Suez. In the Soviet Union, a NOVJ brigade consisting of about 1,700 officers and fighters was formed, trained and prepared for deployment to the Yugoslav front, with a group of commanders and political commissars from the Proletarian units sent by plane on August 23.[510] Meanwhile, 527 airmen were sent for training and advancement at the Red Army centres (via plane and ship) from Bari.

This was also the time of the battle at Allied commands for increased supplies in weapons, food, and equipment, where the Chief of Staff signed requests for millions of rounds of ammunition, kilograms of food, thousands of pieces of weapons and tools as the most urgent needs. For the needs of the 1st, 5th and 11th Corps, around six million rifle rounds of various calibers had to be secured, along with more than 17 different items, including 1,110 shells for the 75 mm mountain gun.[511] In this request, the Chief of Staff, considering the capabilities of the Allies and the obligations undertaken, made some adjustments, then signed it, and, as an official document, sent it to Brigadier Maclean with a request for it to be taken into account and implemented.

Among the "items" was equipment for anti-tank warfare, the first shipment of which would be delivered by Soviet pilot Captain A.S. Shornikov via transport "Dakota" from Bari. It was a hand-held anti-tank launcher known as the "PIAT." His combat characteristics, handling, and firing descriptions were theatrically demonstrated by Colonel W. Street's staff, and Tito, impressed by the weapon, instructed the Chief of Staff to "demonstrate" the handling and conduct a live fire demonstration with the "PIAT." General Jovanović then called Captain Milorad Janković and ordered him to select two non-commissioned officers who, along with the commander of the Technical Workshop, would carry out the demonstration before the assembled military and political, both foreign and domestic, "establishment." Rankević later recalled — three decades later — that he feared Tito's reaction, but Tito "fortunately remained silent." However, the Supreme Commander and the Chief of Staff would return to this "incident" in liberated Belgrade when they read the report from the investigative commission about the death of the Commander of the Slovenian Main Staff, General Franc Rozman, "while testing a new English light mortar," when "a shell exploded in the barrel." Arso then reminded Tito of Drvar and the "PIAT" on one of his meadows, saying that every life is valuable, but that everyone knows their own job, as the saying goes, "who cuts and who carries the water." He sincerely mourned his acquaintance from the early days of the war, the popular Slovenian commander Stane, but said that on November 7, he had taken on a job "that was really for a sergeant." Once again, Tito, as recalled by the present Ranković, remained silent, surely saddened by that loss

[510] The group included: Đuro Lončarević, Ivan Romac, Mašan Milutinović, Gojko Žarković, Mihailo Bebo Brajović and Sulejman Suljo Mehmedbašić.

[511] The elaboration was prepared and handed to the Chief of Staff on May 14 by Colonel of Engineering M. Ljubičić, Head of the Department for Armament and Ammunition in the Economic Department.



With Tito and Allied reporters J. Talbot and S. Pribićević (far left).

but probably now convinced that Arso was right.[512]

From Drvar, through Bari, requests were also sent for expanding the capacity in the Mediterranean for the treatment of the wounded and sick in Allied hospitals, for sending surgical teams, corpse doctors, medical supplies, etc. The requests were "submitted" to General Korneyev — in May, a summary was provided by the main headquarters and corps headquarters, requesting: two "experienced surgeons for work in hospitals," "eight surgical teams of four members," 12 corpse doctors "for organizing the sanitary service," ten medical assistants for hospital work, a large quantity of medical supplies, and medicines. On May 18, this was accepted in Drvar as a rational request, which was then sent to Moscow. There, the head of the main medical administration, Lieutenant General Dr. Smirnov, in a conversation with Colonel Dr. Đ. Mešterović, a member of the NOVJ Mission, promised that the request would soon be fulfilled, adding that the transfer of the wounded to the Soviet Union "was not feasible at the moment due to the great distance," so it was left "for a time when the Crimea would be liberated, or when the Red Army advances closer to the Danube."

This period also marked the formation of new units, the operation of an increas-

[512] From a conversation with A. Ranković, October 1973, in Belgrade.

ingly branched network of officer schools at the main headquarters, courses at corps and division headquarters, the inclusion of commanders in special duties, etc. In other words, large personnel movements, which were a primary concern and duty of General A. Ranković, the head of the Personnel Department at the Supreme Command. As he recalled in October 1973, "it was unthinkable to appoint someone to a significant command or staff position without consulting the Chief of Staff, which was an everyday practice." The final decision on every significant personnel matter was made by the Supreme Commander, but the "first personnel officer" could not recall an instance where he had refused a well-reasoned proposal from them. Arso — this witness recalled — valued personal and command bravery, decisiveness and expertise in commanders, while patriotism and concern for the people were simply assumed. Perhaps he particularly appreciated the wartime comrades who had been officers of the Yugoslav Royal Army, unquestionably talented for staff work, citing Generals V. Terzić, J. Vukotić, R. Primorac, P. Ilić and R. Hamović as examples, while speaking with special respect about the generals and "elderly men" Sava Orović (1888), Jaki Avšič (1896), Josip Černi (1903), Josip Škorpik (1892), Nikica Knežević (1889) and Veko Bulatović (1884). "He valued" — he said — "those old men, but he loved the young commanders who did not shy away from difficulties, rationally assessed the situation, made decisions thoughtfully, and were ready to take responsibility and reasonable risks. Such individuals he proposed for training and promotion, and almost without exception, he was right."[513]

In Drvar, during the war, life was lived to the fullest: conversations were held with heads of foreign military missions and special emissaries, with journalists and photojournalists from global agencies; Tito insisted that he and Arso be "photographed" in front of the cave above the Una River with journalists John Talbot and Stojan Pribićević, the first Western correspondents in Drvar. The Officer School of the Supreme Command was working, and the institutions of the military-backward organs were operational. In Drvar, Milutinović, Đilas, Ranković and Žujović received the rank of lieutenant-general. Films and evening performances were watched, chess matches and sports competitions were organized. So, the soldiers would occasionally relax, starting to address each other by rank in accordance with the adopted regulations, sitting according to protocol, greeting their seniors in a mandatory and formal manner. Receptions and dinners were organized for foreign dignitaries, standing in front of film cameras and signatures were practiced, so it sometimes happened that the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters would find the Supreme Commander working on a sheet of paper, practicing writing his characteristic "TO" a hundred times, and since the days in Jajce, he had known how to pose for hours for sculptors, painters and graphic artists. The Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, however, had no time for this, aside from a game of chess with Ranković or Tito, a polite salute and a restrained smile for the foreigners — he was engaged in operational tasks, the realization of inter-allied cooperation and the drafting of important military normative acts. Still, the constant

[513] *Ibid.*

monitoring of the work of the main headquarters and the actions of the corps and divisions on the main fronts — according to radiograms and operational maps spread out on desks and walls — was his primary concern, the greatest responsibility, and the area of his day-and-night engagement.

Drvar was constantly buzzing with activity, especially in the cave, as Tito's office and Arso's working room — according to the recollection of Lieutenant Colonel Božo Lazarević, who stayed there on April 6 and 7 — were located next to the "staff area, then the operations room, a little further the rooms for cipher clerks and translators, and finally, the dining room for a select few. There was also a room for couriers and duty officers. In the rooms where Tito and the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters worked, there were also beds for sleeping..."[514] In the operations room, there was a genuine staff atmosphere: geographical maps of different scales on the walls, "specials" spread across tables with frontlines and unit positions, including divisions, command communication schemes, sketches, excerpts from the most important directives and the latest orders. For Arso, this was the perfect working environment.

Then came May 25...

The Landing *(May 25, 1944)*

The previous afternoon, the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters had a busy schedule: together with Colonel V. Klišanić, he analysed new intelligence reports about the strength and movements of the Germans in Istria and Slovenia; with General G. Nikolić and Colonel W. Street, he determined the dynamics of evacuating wounded soldiers to Vis; he discussed the possibility of supplying the 2nd and 3rd Corps with General Gorshkov; and in the evening, he briefed the Supreme Commander on the responsibilities of the Supreme Command regarding the preparations of the "Northern Group" for an advance into Serbia, as had been determined three days earlier in Šekovići and then formulated in Drvar. The issue was that, after the return from Serbia of the "Moračina Group" on May 21 — having failed to complete the task and the unsuccessful attempt to transfer the "Lekić Group" across the Drina River — the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters had been allowed, for the second time in ten days, to take a "one-day" flight by plane to Šekovići, to the 3rd Corps Headquarters. There, together with the Corps Commander and the Chief of Staff, Generals K. Nađ and J. Vukotić, and the Group Commander, General D. Lekić, he coordinated the actions of the divisions in eastern Bosnia concerning the next advance across the Drina. The breakthrough was planned to involve units from the Main Staff of Vojvodina, the 3rd Corps Headquarters and the Operational Group. He outlined the strategic plan for the next "decisive and final" breakthrough from this area into Serbia with "at least four divisions," specifying, based on the latest and grim war experiences, the obligations of the operational units, securing their rear, the crossing points of the Drina, the directions of the advance, and how to achieve cooperation with the units advancing toward

[514] B. Lazarvić, *op. cit.*, p. 256.

Šumadija, along with other matters that needed to be resolved for such a strategic advance. He also specified the responsibilities of the Supreme Command: the transfer of one division each from Slavonia and central Bosnia, which, along with two divisions from Vojvodina, would participate in the breakthrough; the establishment of priorities for supplies from the allies;[515] and the improvement of command communications. This was now verified with Tito.

In the shared dining room in the cave, he had dinner with secretaries, typists, translators and couriers who worked for the Supreme Commander and himself, then retired to his small room, intending to continue working immediately. He was interrupted by Tito's nephew and guard, Branko, who informed him that the Supreme Commander was expecting him at the "film screening." This could not be refused, and the famous Soviet film *Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya*, a story about the most famous heroine of the Great Patriotic War, was being shown.

He went to bed late, but as usual, woke up early; by 5:00 a.m., well-shaven and properly dressed, he was at his desk. However, he could not focus...

At 6:35 a.m. on May 25, 1944, Drvar was bombed with bombs ranging from 250 to 500 kg, followed by heavy machine-gun fire. During the first attack, the Chief and two members of the Supreme Command, Lieutenant Generals Arso Jovanović, Sreten Žujović and Aleksandar Ranković, armed with personal weapons, jumped out of the cave, where the highest political and military leadership of the National Liberation Army was located. They surveyed the situation over Drvar, ordered action by the Machine Gun Platoon with its two sections of anti-aircraft machine guns, decided who would organize the defence of which part of the positions, divided the personnel of the Escort Battalion (Commander and Commissar, Captains Milorad Janković and Drago Božović), who were on guard and in nearby buildings around the cave and organized the defence. The Commander of the Escort Battalion recalls that they did all of this "quickly, skilfully and bravely." Arso, with his platoon, took a position on the right bank of the Una River, east of the cave; Žujović, also with a platoon, was on the west side, closing off the approaches to the cave from the Pilana and Mandić bridges; Ranković, in constant communication with Arso, was positioned above the cave.

The behaviour of the three generals and members of the Supreme Command is described in more detail in the memoirs of Ladislava Slavka Becele. She was one of the 11 people trapped in the cave by the bombing — along with Tito, I. Milutinović, A. Jovanović, S. Žujović, A. Ranković and E. Kardelj, as well as the "technical staff": translator Olga Humo, secretary Davorjanka Paunović, driver Nikiča Prlja, radio telegraph operator L. Becele and attendant Vlado Miklovac. After the war, the wife of A. Ranković, in her book *Life with Leka*, mentions how the "comrades from the Supreme Command" (specifically A. Jovanović, A. Ranković Marko and S. Žujović-Crni) from the start of the landing "suggested to Tito an urgent exit from the cave, but he, with noticeable agitation, firmly refused, explaining that he did not want to step out in front of German machine guns." Realizing that Tito would not change his mind, they took

[515] The choice would fall on the 11th Krajina Division (Commander Colonel Miloš Šiljegović) and the 28th Slavonian Division (Commander Lieutenant Colonel Radojica Nenezić).

up their weapons and went outside, though just before leaving the cave, "they spoke to Tito again about exiting. Arso, in particular, was persistent and began to beg him to decide to leave. In Arso's voice, there was both a note of pleading and a warning about what might happen if the Germans managed to break through to the cave. However, Tito remained determined to stay where he was." According to Becele, at one point, Arso met with Marko to discuss the defence of the Supreme Command's headquarters, confident that Tito, "due to his special attachment to the cave," would not leave quickly or easily. Suddenly, a plane appeared and opened fire with machine guns. Together, they "found some uncertain shelter from the German machine guns, while Crni, with a platoon, was somewhere above the cave." At 10:30 a.m., Žujović entered the cave, bringing Tito brief reports from Marko and Arso. All three insisted that Tito leave the cave immediately, and Žujović indicated the path he should take, using a rope made from parachute cords, to "descend through a crevice to the waterfall." However, Tito procrastinated for another full hour. According to Becele, later stories about Tito requesting a sniper rifle and shooting at the Germans "do not fit into the reality of events in the cave during the landing," where many "fabricated stories about heroic feats of some individuals who did not exactly stand out for their bravery" originated.[516]

Many books have been published about that day and the undoubtedly dramatic operation that started on it, with numerous "scientific conferences" and "round tables" organized, leading to the publication of collections of papers, the writing of songs and the composition of many school essays. Therefore, for this occasion, regarding the German airborne landing known as "Roselshprung," only as much as is relevant to the topic. The first wave, consisting of 654 members of the 500th SS Paratrooper Hunting Battalion (314 paratroopers and 340 specialists transported by gliders), landed in about 15 minutes, after which the "glider troops," divided into six combat groups, rushed toward their attack objectives. It would take quite some time under these dramatic circumstances before the Germans learned where the Supreme Command headquarters was, and only then did they direct their main assault toward the right bank of the Una River. There, evidently too late, they encountered decisive resistance from the Escort Battalion and 127 listeners from the Officer School who had arrived from Šipovo, under the command of Major Branko Duda. This defence was confidently held by A. Jovanović, in cooperation with Generals A. Ranković and S. Žujović.

Meanwhile, strong and well-prepared German mixed tactical units, in combat groups, approached Drvar concentrically. This marked the beginning of the German corps' offensive operation (with the core of the unit being the 15th Army Corps, combined with airborne forces), whose plan was undoubtedly well-constructed, and the engaged units were strong (about 16,000 soldiers), well-armed and precisely directed at attack objectives throughout the operational area of western Bosnia. The commander of the 2nd Armoured Army, General Lothar Rendulić, did not account for the decisive factor — the determined defence of the 1st Proletarian and 5th and 8th Shock Corps, and in Drvar, the strong resistance of the people, the Escort Battalion and the Officer

[516] S. Ranković, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-63.

School — under the command of Branko Poljanac, Commissar Vlado Dapčević and the very quick arrival of reinforcements for the Supreme Command from positions 25 km away from the city. He also did not account for the strong Allied air support for the units of the National Liberation Army, where the strategic aviation squadrons of the 15th Air Force would, over five days of flights, with hundreds of sorties, bomb primarily airfields, railway and road communications, and populated areas with strong occupation forces. The aviation, particularly Soviet planes from the "Sokolov" group, which included Dakotas delivered to the Russians under the Lend-Lease Agreement and stationed at the Bari airfield, would drop significant material aid, which many claim was more generous than ever before or after. Regarding the Allied air support, which was undoubtedly crucial in breaking the German operation, we quote two sources: in the official history of the British intelligence service in the Second World War, it was recorded that it assessed that in the first two or three days, the superiority of the German air force over the area affected by the operation was paralysed, after which Allied aviation focused on the airfields from which German planes had taken off, destroying 45 planes on the ground and heavily damaging 96, thus "removing the German air force as a combat force in Yugoslavia."[517] Another source is the memoir of General V. Velebit, *Memories*, where he writes: "In the ten days the operation lasted, the Germans were almost paralysed. All communication on those routes was blocked. As soon as a convoy appeared on the road, it was attacked, bombed and machine-gunned. Tireless British aviators scattered every enemy attempt to move. The Germans lost many trucks and guns, as well as some armoured vehicles. A wagon with draft horses, mainly used by the Domobrani and Ustaše, was also destroyed. The enemy had no chance to carry out their plan of encircling and pursuing partisan units."[518] This created an even more difficult situation for the Germans than the one they had been facing, when their command reported that the railways in central Yugoslavia, due to the threat from partisan actions, were "permanently blocked."[519]

There is no doubt that, in those few days, prompted by "Roselshprung," or, as Tito referred to it, the "seventh enemy offensive," a very successful joint operation of the Allied aviation and the units of the NOVJ took place. Only the forces of the newly established BAF,[520] under the command of Air Marshal W. Elliot, flew more than a thousand sorties for air support of the forces under the command of the Supreme Command in seven days of flights, while the squadrons of strategic aviation of the 15th Air Force carried out hundreds of sorties in five days.[521]

The units of the three NOVJ corps, deployed in an area with Drvar at its centre, found themselves — not coincidentally — in a favourable arrangement, with the 1st

[517] Report by Colonel V. Street, dated June 10, 1944, in the collection *The Drvar Operation*, 689.

[518] V. Velebit, *op. cit.*, 233.

[519] According to German data, their fuel transport took 18 days to reach Novska from Slavonski Brod, while a train carrying hay took as many as 28 days to travel from Zagreb to Banja Luka.

[520] Balkan Air Forces; formation dates vary, but they were certainly active during the Drvar Operation.

[521] Colonel Vaso Radulović in the *Collection of the Drvar Operation*, p. 702.

Proletarian Corps Headquarters (commander K. Popović, commissar M. Todorović and chief of staff Karlo Lalić) in Mokronoge, and the 5th Shock Corps (S. Rodić, I. Došen and Velimir Knežević) in Donji Ribnik. Meanwhile, part of the 11th Corps (V. Ćetković, B. Šiljegović and Milan Kuprešanin) operated in the deep rear of the German-collaborator forces engaged in this operation. The divisions of the 1st and 5th Corps were, in fact, not in Drvar, nor even at its immediate approaches, as there was no operational need for that, but were spread across a wide area, positioned in such a way that they could quickly block the main routes towards the Supreme Command headquarters, foreign military missions, and other towns and crossroads of strategic significance for the Partisans. While the units of the 11th Corps operated in the deeper rear of the enemy, the divisions of the 1st and parts of the 5th Corps were attacking columns of combat groups on the main routes leading to Drvar. Two divisions were in the first line of defence: the 1st Proletarian Division, with most of its forces, closed off and defended the routes from Jajce and Mrkonjić Grad, via Mlinšte, towards Drvar, while the 6th Lika Division defended the routes from Srb and Bosansko Grahovo to Drvar. Indeed, two brigades of that division, the 2nd and 3rd, rotated for a long time in positions immediately around Drvar, equipped and ready to conduct anti-aircraft defence, but on April 28, the Supreme Commander assessed that the priority was to focus on battles in the upper reaches of the Una River...

Regarding the immediate events related to the defence of the Supreme Command headquarters on the morning of May 25, there remain only two original documents — reports written to Tito by hand by A. Ranković and A. Jovanović. We present them in full, with necessary explanations of the content.

A letter from A. Ranković, a member of the Political Bureau and Supreme Command, reads as follows:

"Comrade S. (Tito's nickname)

"I have sent couriers to Oštrelj to call Potoke to send two battalions of the Engineering Brigade by train, which is apparently located there. Also, the battalions in Petrova have been instructed to come here. The situation from Oštrelj is to be reported to Ribnik so that measures can be taken. I have sent couriers to Koca to drop everything they have on Drvar. The Officer School has been called and is already heading along the tracks toward the cave.

"Arso just informed me that he has sent couriers to Đoka Jovanić. I am located above the cave near the railroad and am in contact with Arso. The troops are gathered and we are still gathering them, organizing them to defend the approach to the cave. I hear that Crni is with a platoon to the right of the cave.

"I think we should organize your withdrawal; let me know how and what we should do, aside from what we've already done. The work force in Drvar has been pretty scattered. We cannot yet confirm anything regarding our tanks.

"25. V 44. 9:45 a.m.

"Greetings, Marko."[522]

[522] AVII, file 15, reg. no. 16/2.

Necessary explanations: The two battalions of the Engineering Brigade of the Supreme Command, which were more of a labour than a combat unit, found themselves in Drvar, and the reference to the "labour force" concerns them. The third battalion was finishing barracks near Potoke for a reserve command post of the Supreme Command and building a secret shelter for material reserves, primarily medical supplies. The fourth battalion was servicing the makeshift airstrip at Medeno Polje. The train mentioned was a composition of several wagons from the "Šipad" railway found in Oštrelj.

Reporting that by 9:45 a.m. he knew nothing about the fate of the tanks, Ranković was referring to two Italian-made armoured fighting vehicles that made up the Tank Platoon of the Escort Battalion. Both had been at the Technical Workshop for repairs. Attempting to bring them into the fight against the airborne assault, the political delegate Dragoslav Radosavljević managed to get only one of the tanks running. With its determined crew, it charged into the German positions in the town and began driving them out of their cover with fire. One paratrooper managed to throw a blanket over the observation port, blinding the crew completely. Among the captured Drvar citizens was sixteen-year-old Mika Bosnić, who jumped onto the tank and removed the blanket, costing her her life, but making her the youngest national hero of Yugoslavia. Meanwhile, the severely wounded crew was rendered incapable of continuing the fight.

The report from the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters was short and precise, fitting the conditions under which it was written — with a graphite pencil, in Cyrillic, and on his knee:

"Comrade Marshal,

"1. We hold positions below the cave.

"2. The Officer School has engaged. The 6th Division has not yet appeared.

"3. There are about 400 Germans. They are mostly moving toward the cemetery. They do not cross to this side of the river.

"4. Investigate the possibility of leaving the cave.

"10:00 a.m. Arso."[523]

The position "below the cave" was held at that moment by a platoon and a half, or around one hundred members of the Escort Battalion, part of the Officer School listeners, and several small groups of fighters from the Engineering Brigade, all under the direct command of the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters — specifically, S. Žujović — west of the cave, while A. Ranković, with a group of fighters mainly from the Machine Gun Platoon and officers, held the position "above the cave." All three maintained communication with each other and sent messages to the Supreme Commander in the cave via couriers.

The headquarters of the Officer School of the Supreme Command was located in Šipovljani, 5 km from Drvar. There were 127 listeners in training, all selected officers, chosen for their wartime merits and personal qualities, who were expected to rise to higher positions. They were organized into two platoons and a battalion, quickly

[523] *Ibid.,* file 27, reg. no. 1-1/4.

arrived, and decisively engaged in the defence of the Supreme Command headquarters. They fought very bravely, though hampered by being mostly armed with pistols and revolvers. With them were groups of listeners from the party and radio-telegraph courses, as well as a dozen workers from the CC CPY printing house, armed with rifles and ample ammunition. The examination of the "possibility of leaving the cave" took some time and was related to the evacuation of the Supreme Commander with E. Kardelj and a group of men and women.[524] They would leave the cave under dramatic circumstances shortly after 11:00 a.m.; they descended through the dry streambed beneath the cave, then turned left, protected by fire and bodies, and at one point, the Supreme Commander was carried in the arms of people from positions under the command of the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters. They reached the plateau, where the defence had been organized by A. Ranković. Then, a new German airstrike followed, and at 11:50 a.m., a second wave of 171 paratroopers was dropped. However, General Rendulić's delay proved to be irreparable.

Potoci-Bari, via Kupreško polje *(May 25-June 6, 1944)*

The column of the Supreme Command and its diminished Escort Battalion, at the end of the most dramatic day of the war, was retreating towards Potoci. Drvar was the last to be evacuated, said the battalion commissar Dragoslav Božović, after General Jovanović had given assignments to Colonel Đoka Jovanović and the other senior officers of the units engaged in the fighting in the town and around it, loyal to the principle: first in the assault, with the call "follow me" — last in retreat.

The survivors were left to remember and write history...

Remembering those dramatic hours in the cave, as his loyal comrades fought and died around him defending it, Marshal Tito, in a text published in the introduction to the publication *Drvar Operation — Participants Speak*, dedicated a total of 56 lines, seven each, to his faithful dog Tigr and the jeep, a gift from Brigadier Maclean (the dog, loyal but mischievous, had been with them in the cave, and the jeep had watched as the Germans took it, hesitating "whether to shoot at them with a sniper"). There was no mention even of the name of the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, except once, in a completely negative context: fearing an airstrike on Drvar, Tito ordered that trenches be dug near the lake in front of the cave, but Arso, allegedly, did not follow the order. However, he does not mention that Arso, precisely for security reasons, opposed the idea of gathering the highest military, Party, AVNOJ leadership, accredited foreign military missions, journalists and others in Drvar. He did not mention that he reprimanded Captain M. Janković, the Commander of the Escort Battalion, for not hurrying to dig trenches and set up weapons to defend the approaches to the headquarters of the highest leadership, and then, at the same meeting, ordered his assistant,

[524] Some sources state numbers: eight men and twelve women, while the only surviving witness, Slavka Becele Ranković, lists only 11 people by name — 8 men and three women. The misunderstanding likely arose because some included the team of technicians, mostly women, from the small hut built below the cave, in "Tito's group."



They defended Tito with determination.

General Pavle Ilić, a pre-war engineering officer, to issue the necessary orders to the commander on the ground (which had to be done before Ilić's departure, as a delegate of the Supreme Command, to the Sandžak, on February 29). General Jovanović, also

for security reasons, delayed the execution of Tito's order to "immediately withdraw" the Lika Brigade from the positions securing Drvar, and instead hastened the completion of the reserve headquarters in Potoci, so that at least part of the highest military leadership could be moved there as soon as possible. This was all the more urgent given the warnings that had been arriving since the beginning of the year about a possible German airborne assault on Drvar, as well as several symptomatic overflights of Drvar by German reconnaissance aircraft from May 19 to May 23. But, as long as everything was fine, the leader enjoyed the vanity of commanding and leading from a city in the new Yugoslavia, surrounded by a retinue, receiving military missions, giving interviews to world newspapers, hosting lunches and dinners, sending his missions to the Allies, maintaining contact with Moscow and Cairo, and feeling safe in two caves that, with his long-time collaborators, probably reminded him of the times of illegality and conspiracy. After all, he himself would say in a speech delivered on May 25, 1974, in Drvar: "Ten or 12 days before the landing, I sent the Lika Brigade, which had been available here for the defence of Drvar, back to the front, because the Germans had heavily pressed from the Lika side." Kardelj, in an article published in 1975 in the Ljubljana magazine *Borec*, wrote that there were reports about a possible airborne assault, but nothing happened, and he admitted that "from time to time, they began to doubt the truth of the reports." In the next, three times longer article also published in *Drvar Operation*, Tito mentions Arso twice again, this time in a negative context: first, how Arso had told him, ten days before the landing, to "place machine guns by the Una River, on our side, just in case the enemy sends paratroopers," but Arso "didn't do it" because he was "a strange man, self-assured and supposedly brave," and had two or three machine guns been dug in, "no paratrooper would have been able to land in that area, and none would have survived." As if forgetting to mention that Arso had personally, as the Commander of the Escort Battalion recalls, been responsible for organizing and ensuring the internal security of the highest leadership of the National Liberation Army. Of course, this responsibility did not absolve the Chief of Staff, but, by virtue of his position and internal organization, he was primarily responsible for maintaining operational communications with the headquarters directly connected to Drvar, which involved monitoring and analysing the situation on the battlefields, proposing decisions, leading operations aimed at breaking enemy offensives and shifting the focus of combat actions, as well as evacuating the wounded, providing Allied aid, and so on. The second mention of Arso comes when the column, with Tito at the head, moves towards the Tator Mountain; Tito, the Supreme Commander, arrived with his group before the sun, while Arso "got lost, arriving only at 10 or 10:30 a.m.," and "forgot" that in the following eight days and nights, especially when something needed to be consulted or decided, he did not separate from A. Jovanović, A. Ranković, S. Žujović and K. Popović: the first, because he was a first-class professional and a brave soldier; the second, because he was his most loyal; the third, because, along with Arso, he was considered a leader in critical situations; and the fourth, because he skilfully and decisively commanded the units directly securing that column, which spent days and nights struggling through the mountain wilderness, often exposed to attacks from

"Prinz Eugen" units and other German divisions. Tito never acknowledged this, but he did tell, in front of a delegation from Drvar, another story about his dog Tigr, and another "small episode" which, according to him, shows "what kind of bravery Drvar citizens had," how "heroically and bravely they held their ground: during the battle, a young girl, knowing my horse, managed to lead him across the bridge between the Germans, so that I got my horse back."[525] Thus, Tigr the wolfhound was saved, the "Little" mule was saved, and somehow, the jeep managed to be a "dear" relative, especially since it couldn't be used in Vitorog, but loyal companions remained. And when this was being told, all four of the named, as well as many others, were either dead or politically written off, thus deprived of the ability to testify about their efforts and their own lives to save the leader of the movement in whose closest leadership they had been.

The Supreme Commander, along with his collaborators and escorts, was faithfully and selflessly secured by the units under the command of K. Popović and M. Todorović, primarily the 1st Proletarian Division — commanded by Vaso Jovanović, with Commissar Vlado Tčević and Chief of Staff Momo Đurić. This division was responsible for securing the column, which was moving through the wilderness of Klekovača, Tator and Vitorog, and would only reach Kupreško polje on the evening of June 3. All of this has been literally described and illustrated in numerous books, and there is no need to further discuss it here. For the reader, the most concise information about this can be found in the notes accompanying Volume 20 of Tito's *Collected Works* (pp. 315-320), compiled by historian Dr. D. Brajushković, especially since all the very detailed explanations (in the absence of preserved documents) were provided by the key witness and participant, A. Ranković. But let's focus on just a few details.

General Savo Orović recorded in his *War Diary* that on May 25, about 60 officers and soldiers from the Escort Battalion (out of a total of 400) were taken out of action; that seven listeners from the Officer School of the Technical Unit were killed and 13 wounded (out of 127); and that over 400 soldiers and civilians fell in Drvar.[526] Among the dead were 22 fighters from the Engineering Brigade (commander Dušan Novaković). The total losses sustained in Drvar on May 25, according to historian Colonel Prof. Dr. Mladenko Colić, were: 179 killed, 63 wounded and 19 missing.[527] According to research by Colonel Dr. Dragoljub Tmušić, the total losses of five NOVJ divisions (about 17,000 fighters and officers) engaged in breaking the German operation (May 25-June 5) were: 247 killed, 470 wounded and 85 missing.[528]

A considerable number of those killed and wounded in Drvar fell while, under the command of the Chief of Staff and members of the Supreme Command, A. Jovanović, S. Žujović and A. Ranković, they fought for four hours, literally with their chests, to defend the approaches to the cave where their Supreme Commander, with his collaborators and two of his sons, had taken refuge. Among the dead was Major Veljko

[525] *Collection of the Drvar Operation*, p. 32.

[526] S. Orović, *op. cit.*, p. 513.

[527] M. Colić, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

[528] *Collection of the Drvar Operation*, p. 90.

Dragićević, the Supreme Command's communications officer; one version states he was captured and immediately executed by the Germans, while another version says he was seen fighting the paratroopers from a culvert, where he allegedly remained forever. In both "versions," the Germans — according to the then lieutenant colonel and head of the OZNA at the Supreme Command, Jefto Šašić — did not know who he was or manage to find the codes he undoubtedly knew and kept, which the enemy was believed to have highly valued. Along with Major Veljko, his wife, and loyal comrade Zora, a radio-telegraphist from Foča in the communications unit, who alternated between working as a cook for the Supreme Commander and a radio-telegraphist, also disappeared.[529]

At the same time, all five radio stations used by the Supreme Command to communicate with subordinate headquarters and the *Slobodna Jugoslavija* Radio Station were destroyed, leaving only the one detached at Medeno Polje. Four radio-telegraphists were killed near them, and the fifth was seriously wounded. Almost all the codes in active use were destroyed by the head of the Cipher Section, Branka Savić. However, when the Supreme Command had moved out of Drvar, there were concerns that the Germans might capture the undestroyed codes and decrypt them using documents they had seized. As a result, on May 28, a strenuous search for them began, which, thanks to the expertise and composure of the Chief of Communications of the 2nd Corps, Major Pavle Bojčević, ended successfully with the establishment of communication with General Peko Dapčević.

After establishing communication, on the evening of May 29, an order was issued from the Mla Lušnjevača mountain to "all NOV and POJ units on all sections where the Germans have weakened their garrisons to immediately take decisive action against the most important enemy strongholds and military facilities. It is especially important to destroy railway lines, communications and other key military facilities."[530]

The safeguarding of the code at the Supreme Command was, for understandable reasons, an extremely sensitive issue, which the Supreme Commander continually emphasized. Thus, on the night before the actual airborne assault, he sent a radiogram to Colonel Milenko Popović, urgently requesting him to inform him from Bari "who this Lieutenant Colonel Bjelica is, through whom you intend to establish a connection with the 2nd Corps, and why you need this connection." This concerned the fact that on that day, the Chief of Staff and a member of the Supreme Command, A. Jovanović and A. Ranković, had sent Lieutenant Colonel Jevrem Bjelica, an officer in the Air Force Department, along with a radio-telegraphist, by plane from Medeno Polje to Bari. The plan was for them to then be transferred as quickly as possible to the territory of the 2nd Shock Corps to organize airfield services for the orderly reception of war ma-

[529] The commission formed on September 1, 1944 by A. Ranković — composed of Lieutenant Colonel Jeftimije Jefto Šašić and Majors Branka Savić and Slobodan Nakićenović — determined that the Germans had not found any codes even on the bodies of Veljko and Zora (AVII, box 60-B, reg. no. 1-1/6).

[530] AJ, Fund "Slobodna Jugoslavija," microfilm 17, roll 45, frame 748, broadcast no. 174 from 31 May 1944.

terial. This was an important and urgent task, especially emphasized by General Gorshkov. The Marshal was at a reserve command post near Bastashki Vrelo, and when he returned to the cave above the Una River in the evening, he found a radiogram in which Colonel Popović asked whether the Supreme Command would allow him to establish a radio connection with the 2nd Shock Corps through Lieutenant Colonel Bjelica and use the code currently in use for communication with the Supreme Command. Although he knew well who Lieutenant Colonel Bjelica was, Tito, known for his hypersensitivity to decisions made without his approval, asked Colonel M. Popović as he did.[531] At that moment, neither of the two generals were present at the Supreme Command headquarters to explain the situation to him, as they were on a tour, inspecting the increased security of Drvar and its facilities — just before the celebration of Tito's birthday the following day.

By the grace of wartime luck and the protection of the Escort Battalion members — some heading toward Vitorog, others toward Tičevo — many of the members of the Allied military missions survived, including the son of the British Prime Minister, Major Randolph Churchill; four accredited foreign journalists, among them Dr. Stojan Pribićević; and about 30 Russians, who, unfortunately, lost their radio station and nearly all their technical equipment. General N.V. Korneyev, a heavy invalid, moved with the Supreme Command through the mountainous wilderness with great difficulty, which led him to request on June 1 from Tito that, with part of his mission, he



A break on Mount Šator.

[531] AVII, file 2125, reg. no. 1-16/10.

be temporarily evacuated to an area outside of this evidently wide and heavy German offensive. After a brief consultation with Generals A. Jovanović, S. Žujović and A. Ranković, held at an altitude of 1,654 metres, Tito agreed with Korneyev to have him evacuated to Bari.

While the decision for "takeoff" had not yet been made, though it was fervently supported for the direction toward the liberated territory of the 2nd Corps, Arso, on May 31, wrote on a small piece of paper, with a graphite pencil and Cyrillic script, responding to the inquiries from the heads of the Allied missions about possible "nearby airfields." Being well-informed about the events in the wider operational area, he wrote:

"Comrade Marshal,

"I remind you that airfields can be organized:

"— at Blagaj

"— at Kupreško polje

"— at Vukovska and, probably,

"— at the village of Ravno."[532]

In a verbal explanation before Korneyev, Arso personally chose Kupreško polje, and there, immediately after receiving Tito's approval, he sent — according to General Gorshkov's later recollection — a group of his and allied officers to scout the terrain and ensure the necessary preparations for the airstrip.

The location of the makeshift airfield and the time of the planes' landing were provided by the Supreme Command after Miladin Ivanović, an officer for liaison with the Soviet military mission, returned from Kupreško polje with two British and one Soviet officer and reported that an airfield had been found and, at the very least, prepared for landing near the village of Bajramovci. Whether Tito had intended to use that plane to evacuate Kardelj, Bakarić, and a group of older and exhausted members of the National Committee and the Presidency of AVNOJ remains speculative, though it is likely. There are no written sources for a definitive answer to whether, by the evening of June 2, it had already been decided that Tito and the closest members of the Supreme Command would be evacuated to Vis from Kupreško polje. Key witnesses such as A. Ranković, K. Popović and others, including retired General Miladin Ivanović, believed until their deaths that Tito had not intended to evacuate or had not spoken of it until the noon of June 3, after a meeting with the members of the Political Bureau of the CC of the CPY held earlier that day on the Vitorog mountain. Tito shared with them what he had agreed upon with General Korneyev, and all present (Kardelj, Milutin, Ranković, Crni and Bakarić) told him that it might be problematic for only the Russian to go, and that even if it wasn't requested, the Englishman should also go. When he told them to send Kardelj, Bakarić, Orović and those National Committee members who had difficulty walking under fire with Korneyev, and that everyone could go except for him, Arso and Crni — everyone unanimously insisted that he should also go to Vis, from where, once conditions allowed, he would be sent to the

[532] *Ibid.,* file 13, reg. no. 21.

liberated territory of the 2nd Shock Corps to more directly influence the accelerated development of the National Liberation Army in Serbia. This would also allow them to advance into that area when the 1st Proletarian Corps arrived in the Sandžak, where S. Žujović had already been assigned to the Corps Headquarters. They were unified and determined, and Tito resisted but eventually relented. Based on their unanimous decision, around noon, he asked Colonel W. Street, the head of the Anglo-American military mission at the Supreme Command (Brigadier Maclean was somewhere on the way from London, after reporting to Churchill, along with V. Velebit), to send a message to Bari using his radio station, instructing them to make urgent preparations for the transfer of about 120 people to Bari and then to Vis, from the improvised airfield at Kupreško polje, specifying the time — night of June 3-4.

Colonel W. Street conveyed Tito's request by radiogram to B. Deakin in Bari, who then sent it "via a double channel" to Algiers, specifically to General H.M. Wilson and the Resident Minister to the Supreme Command, H. Macmillan. General Wilson immediately informed Prime Minister Churchill in London about Tito's request,



Key role in the evacuation of the Supreme Headquarters and Allied missions from Kupreško polje to Bari (Italy): Generals and close associates A.I. Gorshkov and A.R. Jovanović.

with an unequivocal recommendation that it should "certainly be approved, as this is Yugoslav territory," emphasizing that this stance was also supported by the Prime Minister's trusted man, Brigadier F. Maclean. The circle of relevant authorities was closed, the bureaucracy at all levels did its "best," and the approval from London arrived at Vitorog that same evening, approximately five hours after the request was made. General A.P. Gorshkov would later (in memoirs written in 1984) attribute the key role

in the operation to evacuate Tito from Vitorog to the Soviet military mission, and to himself, claiming that through Bari, he consulted Moscow, which then approved and organized the operation. On the other hand, Stalin's NKVD chief, Lavrentiy Beria, reportedly cursed himself before his "master" during the Cominform Resolution period, as noted by his son Sergo, for personally having saved Tito's life at that time.[533] It is impossible to verify both versions for now, but the essence is that the Russians played a decisive role, while the "English were just a service." The truthfulness of the second story is particularly questionable, but it is worth considering that in intelligence work, especially during wartime, literally anything is possible. Regardless, it was only then that the Supreme Commander — via the radio station of the 11th Corps — ordered the 26th Division and the Navy of the NOVJ to "take the strictest measures to ensure the landing of a Soviet aircraft on the island of Vis tonight, June 3-4."[534] Meanwhile, the military aviation authorities in the Mediterranean had done their part, and around 9:00 p.m., A.S. Shornikov landed near the village of Bajramovci, piloting a DC-3 aircraft from the "Sokolov" group in Bari. According to an authentic British report, he transferred Tito and 25 leading figures of the National Liberation Army, four Russians and one Briton. Soon, two British planes flew over Kupreško polje, but they could not land due to the dense low clouds covering the field and the runway. Before dawn, Shornikov, once again piercing through the thick clouds, returned for the second group, led by the Chief of Staff, and then, on June 4, three Western Allied aircraft transferred the third group — 51 partisans, 14 Russians and 9 Britons — to Bari.

On the night of June 5-6, 77 wounded soldiers from the 1st Proletarian Corps and the 10th Krajina Division, as well as 56 staff members of the Supreme Command, were evacuated from Kupreško polje by Allied aircraft, at Arso's insistence.

At Kupreško polje, with the 1st Proletarian Corps Headquarters, remained Political Bureau and Supreme Command member and National Committee Commissioner Sreten Žujović-Crni, an authoritative member of all three leaderships and a man who, due to his military-political assessments and outstanding understanding of military craft, was regarded as Tito's deputy. He was certainly a strong and courageous personality, calm and resourceful in difficult situations, open and decisive, and undoubtedly a respected figure. Angry with the Supreme Commander for having entrusted him with guarding his "guard" and the horse "Mali," Žujović later recorded that he personally — convinced that the time had truly come for an eastern breakthrough — proposed to stay there with the Proletarians. Colonel W. Street, in his report about this operation, noted that he was "the only member of the Supreme Command who

[533] S. Beria, *op. cit.*, pp. 372-373. The Generalissimo allegedly said, in front of a large group of collaborators: "It was in vain that we saved him (Tito); it should have been that the Germans, at that time, liquidated Tito, together with his entire staff. Today, we would have fewer problems." Already earlier informed "by a certain intelligence service" of the upcoming German airborne assault on Drvar "to abduct Marshal Tito and his staff," L. Beria, as the author heard and later wrote, personally participated in his rescue, which was carried out by "the crew of the airplane in which my father was flying. The commander of the crew and his pilots preempted the Germans, managing to take off from a small field. The crews of the remaining (Russian) aircraft also succeeded," thereby "foiling the German operation."

[534] AVII, file 523, reg. no. 21-26/1.

truly functions when things get tough."[535] Here, he was assigned, in his capacity as a Supreme Command delegate with full authority, to coordinate the actions of the units of three NOVJ corps (a total of 13 brigades and four partisan detachments) in the area affected by the German operation "Roselshprung," until a radio connection was established with Vis, after which he would, with the 1st Proletarian Corps, break through to the liberated territory "near Peko and Mitar" where, once the conditions for safe accommodation were confirmed, the Supreme Commander would be transferred with the Supreme Command — for the purpose of breaking into Serbia. Key witnesses claim that Tito truly intended to stay at the new location only long enough to secure the necessary conditions for his transfer "to the responsibility zone" of the 2nd Corps. From the meeting on Vitorog to the farewell on Kupreško polje, all present left with the unmistakable impression that this was his intention and that he personally believed it would soon happen. After all, he firmly believed that returning to Serbia, as a victor, was an old and constant obsession. Thus, he was reluctantly parting from his Proletarians, determined to stay in the Mediterranean with the Supreme Command, only briefly, "until Peko's call," and — according to some witnesses — not on the "outlying Adriatic fortress" of Vis, but at the NOVJ base in Bari, from where he would then be moved to the free territory of the 2nd Shock Corps.[536] This was also what he had predicted and spoken about, and the Supreme Command, in messages sent from Vitorog, particularly emphasized the offensive actions of the 2nd and 3rd Corps in eastern Bosnia, the Sandžak and Montenegro, calling this area the "launch pad for the breakthrough into Serbia."

Related to this, and to the military-political situation, it is not at all coincidental that the German Supreme Command, under the pressure of the Allied offensive on all fronts, particularly in Russia and the Mediterranean, still facing the inevitable — what was believed to be a very close — opening of the 2nd Front in Europe, left no room for a rapid and successful advance of the NOP forces into Serbia, at least not within the next two months. Those with whom Arso discussed this assessment of a rapid advance into Serbia remember how confident he was that this would require a broader analysis of the military-political situation, larger units, and their good "preparedness" for an operation of such scale and significance, placing it in the context of the offensive across the entire Yugoslav territory. From the three variants that the Supreme Commander and he had arrived at in their assessment of the situation on Vitorog — the first, stay in that area; the second, move to General Dapčević's location; the third, reach Vis via Bari — he firmly supported the second, confident that it was the path to Serbia, but without haste and improvisation. Tito, surely under the pressure of the Allies,

[535] Report by Colonel V. Strit on events related to the Drvar landing (May 25-June 3), written on June 10 in Bari, *Collection Tito-Churchill, Strictly Secret*, p. 171.

[536] In the debate following the serialized article in *Politika*, General Pavle Jakšić, who was the Chief of Staff of Croatia during the Drvar drama, wrote in the August 16, 1998 issue that Tito, by leaving Kupreško polje for Bari, "abandoned Yugoslavia and the ranks of the NOVJ." By analogy, a greater mistake would have been that, for about twenty days during the operation for the final liberation of Serbia, he commanded from Craiova (Romania), in the organization of the General Staff of Marshal F.I. Tolbukhin, Commander of the Red Army Front.

decided on the third option, which is also said to have been a temporary solution. As a responsible soldier and also a member of the Party, Arso accepted the Political Bureau's decision in a disciplined manner and drew tasks from it, experiencing Drvar as a personal loss. However, many have written, with varying levels of knowledge of the events, about who proposed what and behind which variant for solving the problem of evacuating the NOP leadership and the Allied military missions from this dramatic situation. For the more curious reader, the most important information on this can be found in two contributions from domestic and foreign authors: the notes (according to A. Ranković's memory) from Volume 20 of Tito's *Collected Works* (pp. 315-320), and the contribution by Dr. D. Brajushković in the collection *Drvar Operation*; Colonel W. Street's report on the events from May 25 to June 3, published in translation in *Drvar Operation*, and the memoirs of General A.P. Gorshkov published in *Tito in Vršac*. In each of these, the name of the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters is mentioned between six and 23 times, but only once, in Strit's account, in a negative context — stating that, although Arso was "a brave man, he gets easily agitated and does not inspire much confidence."[537]

General Dapčević would report on June 4 that the enemy was concentrating strong forces along the route Sjenica-Prijepolje-Pljevlja and that another German division was arriving, with its arrival marking the beginning of a German offensive into the free territory of Montenegro and the Sandžak. Three days later, he reiterated this, adding that the German forces were also advancing into the territory of the 2nd Shock Corps from Podgorica and requested that the Supreme Command immediately bomb Sjenica, Prijepolje, Pljevlja and Podgorica. Realizing that the transfer from Bari to Montenegro had to be delayed and that he would temporarily move to Vis, the Supreme Commander, on June 4, sent a radiogram to Koča Popović: "The 2nd Corps reports that supposedly an offensive is also being prepared on their territory. Certainly, we will take that into account, so that neither we nor you get into an inconvenient situation unnecessarily."[538] He no longer insisted on the urgent movement of the Proletarian divisions (1st and 6th) toward Montenegro, but only left a hint to Koča and Black: "You have complete freedom of movement in terms of manoeuvring, and try to relieve yourselves as much as possible from unnecessary burdens and responsibilities."

[537] *Collection of the Drvar Operation*, p. 691.

[538] B. Lazarvić, *op. cit.*, pp. 279-282.

Part Nine

PARTNER OF THE ALLIED COMMAND

- *Further from the front, among the Allies*
- *The military angle of the Vis Agreement*
- *The exemplary directive for the third breakthrough into Serbia*
- *Messages from Vis: Who is General Staff Major Mihajlo Apostolski?*
- *Koča in Serbia, and Peko hurrying to meet him across the Kopaonik*
- *The battle to save 1,000 wounded below Durmitor*
- *The drama of the 12th Corps and the 6th Division on the Piva Plateau*
- *General Wilson Commends "General Jovanović's Brilliant Exit"*
- *Established cooperation in Operation "Ratweek"*
- *Insistence on breaking through to the strategic ridge from Cer to Rudnik*
- *Major Oskar Danon's report on the swimming match in Rome*
- *Tito bans the formation of the Šumadija Division*

Vis *(June 7-October 18, 1944)*

After a three-day respite at the NOVJ Base in Bari and separate informal talks between Tito and the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters with the Allied Air Force Vice Marshal and a group of generals, it was decided that the highest leadership of the NOP, along with the Allied military missions, about one hundred people in total, would be moved to the island of Vis. At that time, Vis housed approximately 5,000 Allied officers and soldiers, as well as 7,000 soldiers and sailors of the NOVJ. It is known that Moscow, for its political reasons, supported this solution, and on June 4, the 8th British and 5th American Armies captured Rome. It was then considered prudent to remain as close as possible to the unfolding of the events, "until a better opportunity arises." The task of transferring the NOP leadership to Vis was assigned to two British destroyers, which, followed by torpedo boats, set sail on the evening of June 6, when the announcement of the long-awaited "Overlord" operation — the Allied landings in Normandy — was heard, officially opening the "Second Front" in Europe. With General Savo Orović and delighted by this news, Arso carefully listened to the words of the Supreme Commander of the operation, General Dwight Eisenhower, addressed to every soldier of the 2,870,000-strong army, supported by 12,837 aircraft and 5,329 ships crossing the Channel. The message ended with a blessing to all those taking part in the invasion of Hitler's "impregnable Atlantic Wall," which was supervised by Marshal Erwin Rommel, and since January 1944, the commander of Army Group E, a worthy opponent, known as the "Desert Fox" from the North African campaign.

These two, the highest-ranking generals of the NOVJ, according to a third, A. Ranković, did not hide their envy of their colleague Ike and his assistants, the also

renowned military leaders Bernard Montgomery and Omar Bradley, who led the largest military operation in the history of warfare. Their "Supreme" invasion, from Avra to Cherbourg, entered history, ascending into legend. At the same time, with all the Yugoslavs aboard the destroyer *Blackmore*, all high military and political leaders believed that, through Vis — coming from the land whose capital, ancient Rome, had just been liberated — they were entering a new, higher, and final phase of the war to crush fascism and liberate the homeland...

Marshal Tito and his closest collaborators were given notable hospitality by the commander of the *Blackmore*, Lieutenant Commander Carson. He and his colleague on the destroyer *Eggesford*, along with their crews, skilfully manoeuvred during the voyage, avoiding "submarine attacks" while combining this with spectacular night artillery fire. On national soil, in the port of Komiža, the NOP leadership landed at dawn on June 7, 1944, where they were ceremoniously welcomed before heading to the "Czech settlement" in the village of Borovik. Soon after, Tito, following some adaptation work, settled in the larger of the two caves on Hum Hill above the village of Orlovica, with his closest security in the other cave. The wider security perimeter was the responsibility of the 26th Division (commanded by Colonel Božo Božović and Commissar Dušan Korać). A little further from the cave, tents were set up where the organs of the Supreme Command were stationed. Arso was in the closest one, from where he immediately took up his duties. First, it was necessary to immediately acquire five — and soon seven — powerful radio stations, install them, and establish a system of operational communication with the main headquarters and the corps headquarters, then with the leaders of the NOVJ military missions, and soon with the leaderships of the anti-fascist movements in Greece and Albania. Although this was not the sole responsibility of the Chief of Staff, for him, the communication links were the highest priority.

On the first day of their stay on Vis, the Chief of the General Staff's office received radiograms from the representatives of the NOVJ in the Mediterranean and in Moscow. Two aviation colonels of the NOVJ, the General Staff's representative to the Allies in the Mediterranean, Franjo Pirc, and member of the Velebit Mission Božo Lazarević, reported what they had observed at both ends of the Mediterranean front and the issues that were arising. Pirc stated that the training of the 1st Fighter Squadron of the NOVJ (formed on April 22) was progressing well and that he had requested that the remaining personnel, designated for various aviation specialties, be sent for schooling and further training as soon as possible. Furthermore, any personnel who have proven to be incapable of serving in aviation during their schooling should be immediately returned to the homeland, which had encountered difficulties. He asked for assistance and support from the Supreme Headquarters. Colonel Lazarević, on the other hand, complained that the Allied command in Cairo, despite firm promises made to General V. Velebit, persistently prevented him from visiting Rhodesia and South Africa, where "about 300 members of our aviation" are located, all "flying and non-flying personnel engaged in various Allied schools and military missions." Most of them had expressed a desire to join the NOVJ, but he reported that legal contact with

them has been obstructed, so he requested that the General Staff intervene to allow him to obtain permission as soon as possible. In a postscript, angrily, he added: "The villains Baćović and Lukačević, Chetnik commanders, walk freely through Cairo."[539] He neither requested nor suggested anything regarding the treatment of these two, but was evidently confident that the General Staff will protest to the Allies. These two, as opponents of the National Liberation Movement, were sent to Cairo on February 15 by General Mihailović, using the opportunity to transfer them with Colonel S. Bailey, to engage among the Western Allies and develop activity in support of the Chetnik movement. They were also to be transferred to London as Mihailović's representatives and attend the wedding of King Petar II Karađorđević. They completed the first part of the task with the assistance of Colonel Bailey, an active promoter of the Chetniks (for which he would, on Draža's proposal, be awarded the Karađorđe's Star), and the second part only partially — the stay in London was only allowed for Lukačević.[540] After returning to Cairo, both continued to agitate for political and military support for the Chetnik movement in the Herzegovina-Montenegro coastal area, for which the majors had prepared during a one-month paratrooper training in Haifa. A sizable group of royal officers, then stationed in southern Italy, became involved in the matter of aid to the Chetniks, including Lieutenant Colonel Vukašin Vukotić, the son of the famous Serdar Janko, who worked as a representative of the Šubašić government in the Allied Military Mission in Rome.

The Chief of the General Staff, through Brigadier F. Maclean and General V. Velebit, intervened to allow Lazarević to mobilize Yugoslav aviators in South Africa, and to obstruct the disruptive work of P. Baćović and V. Lukačević. However, there was soon no need for this second intervention — the Allied authorities, due to their relationship with D. Mihailović, ordered that Baćović and Lukačević be "immediately escorted to Serbia," as was carried out.[541]

General Terzić, meanwhile, reported good news from Moscow: he had delivered the General Staff of the Red Army "a plan for our needs in armaments, food, clothing and medical supplies." As far as quantities are concerned, he was told there were no problems, but the one-and-a-half-month deadline would be a bit more difficult, as "there are great, even insurmountable difficulties, since everything is now being done by airplanes." However, Terzić reported that things would soon improve: a Soviet base would open in Italy for supplying the NOVJ, and the maritime route, in addition to the air transport, would become a primary one, via the Persian Gulf to Bari, through which "we will receive everything we need for armament and equipment for our army." General Terzić also wrote about the good organization of domestic military schools for all technical work, to which Colonel Mile Pavičić added high praise for the pilot

[539] B. Lazarvić, *op. cit.*, pp. 279-282.

[540] In the presence of the wedding godfather of the newlyweds, King George VI, he was declared an honourary adjutant to King Petar II.

[541] First, they were "shipped" from Cairo to Bari, and from there — based on Mihailović's message: "You send me two of my majors — I'll send you your general Armstrong!" — they were dispatched to Prahovo.

fighter school in Krasnodar, and merely requested that the newly gathered personnel in Italy be sent for schooling as soon as possible (which would be radically resolved only on August 23).

In a special point, Terzić wrote about the composition and state of the Yugoslav brigade formed in the USSR, expressing a rather positive opinion, but also feeling uncertain about the outcome of this "Domobran gathering." He visited, together with Đilas, the positions of the 2nd Ukrainian Front on the sector towards Iasi, where Marshal I.S. Konev hosted them for dinner. He pointed out several operational and tactical experiences from the front, confident that the Chief of the General Staff would be personally interested in them.

From Toplica, General Tempo reported good news: On May 27 — acting as the General Staff's delegate — he issued an order for the formation of three new Serbian divisions: the 2nd, 3rd and 4th (the 1st had been formed on May 19), providing the composition of the units and their staffs;[542] on June 2 — he reported that the Serbian brigades and divisions had captured Upper Jablanica and Oruglica, thus expanding the free territories, and the Southern Morava group of Chetnik units had been completely destroyed. He also reported that General Staff Lieutenant Colonel Radoslav Đurić — who had participated in all negotiations between the Chetnik and Partisan leaderships in 1941 and was the "Chetnik commander of southern Serbia" (which included Kosovo and Macedonia), as well as a good military expert from the military academies — had crossed over to the Partisans' side with a group of officers and soldiers from the so-called Southern Front and, having received a guarantee for his life from General Tempo, had unconditionally placed himself under the command of the NOVJ.[543]

In the battles, Tempo reports, Captain Stojan Krstić, commander of the Chetnik Vardar Corps, was killed, while "several commanders of Chetnik corps and brigades" had crossed over to the NOVJ, naming them individually. The radiogram concludes: "Our forces are advancing towards Kuršumlija and Kruševac, where Kesević's bands are retreating." The next day, the delegate Tempo and Commander Petar Stambolić reported to the Supreme Headquarters: "In the Morava area, we have formed three divisions. The Chetniks are in complete disarray. In a short time, we will completely clear this entire area. We have also formed the 4th division, which has moved to eastern Serbia, to the Timok valley. We are preparing the 1st Assault Division to move into Šumadija. We need commanding personnel."[544]

This good news, in the context of the overall positive developments for the NOP in Serbia, was among the first prerequisites for success in the advancement of operational units into that battlefield, indicating the need for agreement in the Supreme

[542] Soon renamed into the 21st, 22nd, 23rd, 24th and 25th Serbian NOV Divisions.

[543] By the decision of the General Staff, on June 13, he was admitted to the NOVJ with the rank of colonel, and then, on the proposal of B. Nešković, appointed as Assistant Chief of the Operations Department of the Main Staff of Serbia.

[544] With the new commander Koča, about 70 officers from the Proletarian and Shock Units of the General Operational Group of the General Staff would arrive in Serbia.

Headquarters regarding the further development of the armed forces in that part of the front, particularly with respect to the formation of new operational units and the provision of assistance not only in leadership personnel. The Chief of the General Staff pointed this out in a report to Marshal Tito, and under the influence of this perspective, he ordered on June 11 that Tempo immediately head for Vis via Bari, and that General Pavle Ilić, the General Staff's delegate to the Main Staff of Serbia (still in the 2nd Corps Headquarters), should go to Toplica, where key events were unfolding from the standpoint of further NOP development and the successful execution of operations for the country's final liberation. The strategic importance of the developments in that part of Serbia was again emphasized by Tempo and Petar Stambolić in a telegram to Blagoje Nešković, then still at General Dapčević's headquarters, on June 4, stressing that they were preparing the 1st Division to "move into Šumadija after the liquidation of Kesar." "Joint coordination with your divisions is necessary," they stated. The issue of coordination, as a matter of military and political necessity of the highest importance, imposed obligations, and the SH ordered the 2nd Corps Headquarters to rest and supply the 2nd Proletarian, 5th Krajina and 17th Eastern Bosnian Divisions with war material, while the other operational units (the 3rd Montenegrin, 29th Herzegovinian, and 37th Sandžak Divisions and the Adriatic Operational Group) would maintain routes from Konjic, along the Adriatic, to Prijepolje. This made it clear to General Dapčević that, after their rest and reorganization, the three divisions would be used as a grouping for an advance into southeastern Serbia, and it was already known that he would be their commander. The 2nd and 3rd Corps Headquarters, as well as the Main Staff of Serbia, were asked to report to Vis on what war material "was most needed" and to designate permanent locations for its air drops, as well as for airplane landings. Meanwhile, on June 5, the "military-political group" from the 2nd Corps Headquarters sent a proposal to the General Staff regarding preparations for an advance of a group of five divisions into Serbia. The content of this proposal had already been discussed, and now, before the General Staff, the most pressing questions were being raised: two regarding inter-Allied cooperation — supplying these units with ammunition, explosives and other equipment, and taking urgent measures to evacuate 400 of their seriously wounded soldiers; one concerning command at the strategic level — to ensure the cooperation of the units of the Main Staffs of Kosovo and Metohija, Macedonia and Serbia during the execution of these operations, as well as conducting demonstrative attacks by the General Staff's NOV and the Vojvodina Partisan 3rd Corps along the Sava and Drina rivers, and the 6th Corps in Slavonia.

The proposal was made, so to speak, from the front line, where enemy forces in Serbia were viewed "through the sights," amidst the conditions of a new occupier-collaborator operation unfolding in that area and the presence of very strong Wehrmacht forces in Southeast Europe. Through its assessments and demands, the proposal set out a kind of condition from the General Staff for the success of shifting the focus of NOVJ operations, where failure was no longer an option. As for the previously announced imminent transfer of the 1st Proletarian Corps to the operational space towards Serbia, it was understood that this would not happen quickly or easily, but there

was no retreat. Also, the basic military-political conditions for the imminent relocation of the General Staff "near Peko and Mitar" had not yet been met, though this was not overlooked, as Tito would, on July 2, while warning that the allegedly prepared "airborne assault on Kolašin" must be neutralized, requesting that the 2nd Corps Headquarters "ensure Žabljak" because he intended "to transfer E. Kardelj, A. Ranković, Ivan Milutinović, Vladislav Ribnikar and other members of the NOP leadership there to prepare for the arrival of the entire NOP leadership."[545]

The Chief of the General Staff viewed the proposal of the "military-political group" as appropriate and well-argued, confident that its implementation, in the context of the increasingly favourable situation for the NOP in that part of the front, as well as the summer operations on the Eastern and Western fronts, would lead to success in the advance of the operational group of five divisions across the Ibar and Kopaonik, but not just them — also at least as many forces on the northern approaches, across the Drina into western and the Lim into central Serbia, with close coordination with the units mentioned in the proposal. Despite the fact that its authors had, objectively, ventured into the General Staff's competencies, he saw in the proposal an expression of initiative and readiness to engage in battles, combat and operations, satisfied that General Dapčević's assessment, the commander of the planned "southern group of divisions," aligned with the viewpoint earlier formulated by the supreme military leadership of the NOP. Peko was informed of this via a radiogram on June 14: "Your proposal for operations in a specific direction aligns with our viewpoint. First, we need to amass sufficient war material and supply the units. All the Allies have promised the material. Koča will also come to this sector."[546] This refers to the 1st Proletarian Corps, whose commander, General Koča Popović, had been at the new General Staff headquarters since June 9, where he was called to receive directives for the forthcoming shift of the NOVJ's combat focus into Serbia. On that day, he was transferred by plane from Vis to Bari, where he would wait for news about the availability of a free airport in western Bosnia in order to be transferred by Allied aircraft to the Corps Headquarters.[547]

For the technical preparations of NOVJ units for the upcoming, decisive operations, Arso ordered that, among other things, a prepared brochure (39 pages in small format) titled "Brief Overview of Enemy Forces — Occupiers and Collaborators in Yugoslavia, as of June 30" be multiplied and urgently delivered to the operational staffs. "The first draft" was written by Colonel V. Klišanić, a General Staff officer and intelligence officer with extensive experience in the General Staff, while Arso edited it and, in the accompanying document, emphasized the importance of one of the key principles of military art at all three levels: "Knowing the enemy, thoroughly and completely, means having one of the most important elements for a proper assessment of the situation, for making a correct, confident and quick decision. Therefore, it must be the first concern of all staffs, particularly higher ones, to collect, organize, study and

[545] AVII, file 60/C, fund 1.

[546] *Ibid.,* file 394, reg. no. 21-15/2.

[547] He would wait until the end of June, when Tito, after negotiations in the Political Bureau with the Serbian party leadership, would appoint him as the commander of the Main Staff of Serbia.

make the best use of data on the enemy — before battle, during battle and after battle. Knowledge of the enemy is based on actual facts and accurate data, not assumptions and unreliable information, which is why all data that appears uncertain must be verified."

The Arrival of Dr. Šubašić (June 14-18)

Preoccupied with the administrative tasks of resolving military issues on the operational and strategic levels across the engaged front, the Chief of the General Staff was not informed about the upcoming talks on Vis between Tito and Dr. Ivan Šubašić. He knew nothing in detail about the content of the recent correspondence between Tito and British Prime Minister Churchill,[548] the diplomatic games and manoeuvres surrounding Serbia, the arrival of King Petar II in Malta accompanied by Colonel Bailey, who was ready to offer Tito, in the name of reaching an agreement to preserve the interests of the Kingdom, the "position of Supreme Commander," and to make available to the NOP the ships of his "own" navy scattered across Allied ports and convoys, as well as the issue of the gold from the National Bank deposited abroad, which he planned to resolve in a way that would serve the NOP. The Chief of the General Staff saw that sessions of the National Committee and the CC of the SH were being held and heard something about the agreements made concerning the upcoming visit of an unusual guest, but no one officially asked or informed him about it. He viewed this situation as a sort of personal advantage; he focused on his duties as the head of the Supreme Command, which he considered his primary obligation, also known for his loyalty to the principle of not pushing where superiors, for any reason, believe it is not necessary.

Thus uninformed, he was surprised when, on the evening of June 13, he was summoned by Supreme Commander Tito, who, without introduction, told him that the National Committee had decided that he, on behalf of the General Staff, would welcome the President of the Royal Government, Dr. Ivan Šubašić. Tito added that the upcoming talks with him were very important from the perspective of international recognition of the continuity of the state with all its attributes, including the army, and that the trust established with Prime Minister Churchill must not be jeopardized, nor should Stalin's hopes be betrayed. He told him that Dr. Šubašić, with a large entourage, was setting out from Bari on a British destroyer and would arrive the next day before dawn in the port of Komiža, where he should be greeted "cordially and attentively," along with National Committee Vice President Vladislav Ribnikar.

The already "rehearsed" team of people from the National Committee President's "circle" familiarized him with the established protocol on the coast: the Prime Minister was to be greeted and saluted by an honour guard; the usual marches were to be played, but neither the AVNOJ nor the royal anthem; the national flag was to be a tricolour without the red star and coat of arms; the Chief of the General Staff was to

[548] Letters from May 17, and June 7 and 10.

be "in uniform, with a belt and decorations, unarmed."

Dressed in a new uniform, with polished boots, "decorated" with seven orders and accompanied by a group of politicians, he welcomed the guests from London, including the Prime Minister, Ambassador R. Stevenson, the head of the Prime Minister's cabinet Dr. Dragovan Šepić, and Arso's trusted acquaintance, Lieutenant Colonel Gavro Filip Škrivanović, introduced as the King's adjutant, with whom he warmly greeted at the mole, where the welcome was carried out according to plan, without a single protocol "mishap." An interesting detail is that Dr. Šubašić greeted the unit, to much surprise, with "Death to Fascism," after which the hosts, the minister and the general, escorted him, with the closest entourage, to the "Martinis" villa in Dračevo Polje. In the evening, a formal dinner was held with a large number of guests, during which Lieutenant Colonel Škrivanović expressed his wish to General Jovanović to have an unofficial conversation within the next two or three days, which was agreed upon.

The following day, Arso and Ribnikar took the rested newcomer to the Orlovica cave, where the host was already waiting for him, according to the established protocol. However, halfway to the cave, something occurred that was evidently not foreseen by the protocol: the royal Prime Minister was greeted by Lieutenant General Savo Orović, who saluted him in a military manner, stood to his left and immediately began a conversation, emphasizing, as he recorded in his *War Diary,* that "any policy that does not align with the aspirations and interests of the people is wrong and doomed to failure, which is why it is always with the people and for the people."[549]

After handing over the royal Prime Minister, who was visibly impressed by the events, to the Supreme Commander, the Chief of the General Staff, after answering a few conventional questions, politely excused himself due to urgent duties and discreetly withdrew to his tent. As he left the "lounge" in the Orlovica cave, he heard Tito's words addressed to the somewhat "lost" Prime Minister: "You will not return to London with unfinished business." Upon hearing this, the Chief of the General Staff was confused, especially since he was unaware that M. Đilas, just arriving from Moscow, had informed Tito of Stalin's and his associates' views on the meeting, that Dimitrov had also given him "precise coordinates for behaviour towards the British and those in their favour," and that General N. Korneyev had shown Tito a copy of Molotov's reply to Dr. Šubašić's letter, "which should have been an indication for Tito on how to behave," as Dr. B. Petranović notes.[550] Tito was well-informed from the most relevant sources about Stalin's positions and Churchill's policy, which strengthened his negotiating position.

The Foreign Affairs Commissioner, the veteran lawyer and politician Dr. Josip Smodlaka (1869), recorded in his *Partisan Diary* that Arso Jovanović, at the welcome for Dr. Šubašić (which he, "due to being delayed," did not attend), "was at the height of the first soldier of the General Staff of the partisan army." Arso, however, understood

[549] S. Orović, *op. cit.*, p. 521. General Orović also noted that the elderly J. Smodlaka told the Prime Minister: "And now, you, who have no people, no army, no territory, would like to dictate terms for a joint government. There is no basis for negotiations on this!"

[550] B. Petranović, *op. cit.*, p. 602.

this delicate and unappealing role as part of the policy — to show the Western Allies and their pawn, King Petar: here is the former general staff captain and now a partisan general and Chief of Staff of the NOVJ; he, on behalf of the armed anti-fascist force, greets the royal Prime Minister, expressing the essence of the relationship in the NOP and proving its breadth, which guarantees that, after the war, the democratic will of the people — guided by the Atlantic Charter of 1941 and the decisions of the AVNOJ from November 30 and the Declaration of the Tehran Conference from December 1, 1943 — will determine the state organization of Yugoslavia.

As for the desire of Lieutenant Colonel (Dr. Šepić would later write in his memoirs from Vis, referring to him as Colonel) G. Škrivanović, the Chief of Staff would inform the Supreme Commander at the first briefing, and after consultations with Generals Ranković and Đilas (and probably Korneyev), the Supreme Commander would approve such contact, emphasizing that knowledge and observations about the military strength of the NOP should leave a strong impression on the members of the delegation and serve the success of the negotiations, and that the details should be worked out with Ranković. From Ranković, he learned details about this interesting personality, some of which he had already known: a Serbian of Catholic faith, born in 1900 in Omiš, he had reached the rank of Lieutenant Colonel by the April War, serving as an air attaché in Rome; later, in emigration, he became a liaison for aviation in the Military Cabinet of the Prime Minister in London, then a pilot in the RAF and an inspector of Yugoslav aviation in the Middle East; later, he was the King's adjutant, a position he held when he arrived in Malta and, accompanied by Dr. Šubašić, came to Vis, undoubtedly at the sovereign's request.[551] It was recommended that Arso speak to him as a colleague and anti-fascist, discussing military matters that were not military secrets but affirmed the NOP. In fact, he would meet with him twice, but having learned from some unfortunate experiences — in his working office and in the presence of General Savo Orović, which did not bother the King's adjutant. Cautious and experienced, he inquired about the organization of the NOVJ, the specifics of partisan units, the role of political commissars, the planning of operations, the distribution of war aid, and overall supply of units, the system of military education for training pilots and aviation personnel in general, cooperation with the Allied air forces, the decision-making process for bombing cities and so on. All questions were politely formulated, without insisting on answers or, especially, data. The questions and answers were, on both sides, correct, free of cleverness, political "excursions" or attempts to enter the "zones" of military secrets. General Orović occasionally interjected, as the testimony goes. At the final ceremonial lunch, held on June 18 in a house in the village of Borovik in honour of the President of the Yugoslav Government and to celebrate the successful outcome of the talks, Arso and Lieutenant Colonel Škrivanović exchanged

[551] Dr. D. Šepić would, in the book *The Government of Ivan Šubašić,* note how in London "the need arose" for Colonel G.F. Škrivanović — an officer with the highest military education, an history graduate and an experienced intelligence officer — to "gather as many observations as possible about the military organization of the NOP," with the expectation that his contacts with his acquaintance and younger colleague A. Jovanović, the Chief of the General Staff, would also be valuable.

just a few conventional sentences, and at parting, he presented him with several military publications published by the General Staff, with contributions about the results of the anti-fascist struggle.[552]

The meetings, talks and the "Tito-Šubašić Vis Agreement" were within the competence of the National Committee and its president, while the Chief of the General Staff had only a few, what could be called, protocol obligations. After the ceremonial dinner held on June 14, he attended, two days later, an "intimate dinner" in connection with the recently signed "Vis Agreement" between Tito and Šubašić, in which the Prime Minister committed to issuing a declaration in which, among other things, he would "give full recognition to the fighting people's forces organized in the NOV," condemn the traitors of the people's interest and "call on the entire people to unite all fighting forces with the NOV into one united front."[553] Two days later, on June 18, he attended the final, ceremonial lunch organized in honour of Dr. Šubašić and his entourage, with a group of generals and senior officers of the NOVJ. As a mark of attention, they discreetly gifted him: Lieutenant Colonel Škrivanović a study of K. Clausewitz's *On War* in French, and Miss Margaret Magaziner men's perfume.[554]

The following day, the guests were escorted from the mole, from where they travelled to Bari and then to Caserta for a meeting with King Petar and a report to General H.M. Wilson on the achieved agreement. It remained for him to ensure the notification of all operational staffs and other military and civilian institutions with which, directly or indirectly, radio communications were maintained from Vis — about the outcome of the Tito-Šubašić meeting held "at the request of all the Allies," where "an agreement was made for cooperation in the fight against the occupier and in the reconstruction of the country."[555]

There was a sense of relief on Vis; everyone more informed felt that something important had happened, but everything remained at the level of impressions: regarding the other side, which, through its composition, wanted to leave as strong an impression as possible; regarding the course of negotiations; regarding the relatively easily achieved agreement. Those who had time and responsibility tried to make the first analyses, while some also spread gossip, sowing doubts. However, the Chief of the General Staff did not have time for all of that, but it so happened that Dr. Josip Smodlaka visited him in his tent — after a conversation with Kardelj and a group of his closest associates from Slovenia, held immediately after Dr. Šubašić's departure, regarding the prospects for the future of the "Vis Agreement." He told him that, "as the Chief of the General Staff," he should expect "a war after the war," because the Slovenes, aside from their liberation and just goals, also had imperial ambitions — to annex parts of Friuli and Carinthia, foreseeing a special status for them, especially for the city of Trieste, which "will not be achieved without bloodshed." Only partially informed about Kardelj's ambitions, Arso gave a faint smile.[556]

[552] In August 1944, G. Škrivanović, holding the rank of lieutenant colonel, was appointed as the military representative to De Gaulle. Between 1945 and 1946, he served as the head of the Educational Department of the Air Force Command of the Yugoslav Army, before — at the age of 46, due to "eternal disputes with the commissars" — being demobilized. He turned to history, earned a doctorate and built a distinguished academic reputation.

[553] AVII, file 15/A, reg. no. 6/4.

[554] In her role as stenotypist in the Prime Minister's team, she would tell the king's honourary aide-de-camp, Marquis De Bon, how "this gentleman, the partisan general," dresses elegantly, dances wonderfully, behaves with dignity and "is the only one who knows how to dine on lobster and turbot according to imperial etiquette," as she enthusiastically recounted to Višanka Mima Dorotić, "the cook for the closest part of the General Staff, the mother of two fallen partisans." The ambassador R. Stevenson would inform Prime Minister W. Churchill about General Jovanović's elegant uniform and dignified behaviour during the welcome of Dr. Šubašić and his entourage (*Collection Tito-Churchill, Strictly Secret*, p. 211).

[555] AJ, Fund NKOJ, No. 1944/34.

Directive for the Advance into Serbia

Together with Đilas, Žarko Broz, Tito's son from his marriage with Pelagija Belousova, arrived at Vis from Moscow, following his own wish and on Terzić's suggestion.[557] He quickly became known as a rather conflict-prone individual, frequently moving around his father's "residence," where Tito's secretary, Zdenka, was even more contentious, which led to sharp verbal confrontations between her and Đilas, Žujović, Koča and others.[558] Arso, however, did not engage with either of them, focusing on his own work and avoiding opportunities for conflicts, telling Ranković that, after all, it takes at least two people to have an argument. Žarko, too, would soon leave for Serbia — when Zdenka could no longer be moved by anyone — so the story went with Krčun.

In June, a month of hope and optimism, several good news arrived from Bari. There, members of the Allied military missions, who had been attached to the 8th Corps Headquarters before the "Roselshprung" operation, as well as personnel from the missions at the SH who had independently made their way to Tičevo on May 25 and 26, or had been sent there on May 31, were finally transferred by plane from the auxiliary airfield near Veliki Tičevo. Among them were Major Randolph Churchill and journalist Stojan Pribićević, whose fate had been of particular concern at the General Staff and had even caused panic in the Allied commands.

Another piece of news was that the "Soviets in Italy" had established an airbase "to more efficiently deliver military aid to the NOVJ units," which opened a more favourable perspective for the evacuation of seriously wounded and sick soldiers, an ongoing concern on Vis. From there, Arso instructed all operational staffs to urgently send "exhausted doctors and nurses who are veteran partisans" to Italy for permanent work, and young surgeons and nurses for a one-month advanced course. Following his orders, General Gojko Nikoliš, the head of the Medical Department of the General Staff, spent two weeks inspecting hospitals in five locations in southern Italy. At

[556] For a full 50 days after Victory Day, he will lead the Yugoslav Army troops in a decisive battle for Trieste and part of Carinthia, while Kardelj "set his sights" on "Venetian Slovenia."

[557] In an offensive near Moscow, he lost a hand, was awarded the Medal for War Merits, and demobilized with the rank of lieutenant in the Red Army.

[558] K. Popović, *Notes on Warfare,* p. 261.

that time, 3,000 seriously wounded NOVJ fighters were being treated in this part of the Mediterranean, with the number expected to increase rapidly. An agreement was reached to accept an additional 5,000, and there was expressed readiness to send three hospitals with 600 beds each to Yugoslavia as soon as possible. Measures were also taken to engage Italian and Palestinian doctors to treat Yugoslav soldiers, including through the Yugoslav Friends Society, and to obtain approval from the Italian government to transfer a sanatorium for the treatment of tuberculosis patients from NOVJ units. The Russians had also announced their assistance in caring for the wounded. Resolving this issue successfully, Arso was pleased with the increased prospects for the operational mobility and overall combat effectiveness of the units, as well as the boost to the morale of their personnel. In this regard, he instructed the staffs of the 8th and 5th Corps, when new German operations were anticipated, to gather their wounded — first on Vis, and second at local partisan airfields — for evacuation to Italy, with the evacuation of 400 of the most seriously injured (out of about 2,000 "ordinary" casualties) from the 2nd Corps being tied to the securing of the airfields at Njegovuđe under Durmitor and Berane, which were under attack by strong German forces. Colonel Ljubodrag Đurić, appointed as the deputy commander of the Main Staff of Serbia,[559] had brought news of the jeopardized Berane airfield to Bari, and on June 30, Colonel Milentije Popović carried the news to Vis. Two days earlier, the General Staff had informed General Dapčević, reporting how the Germans were applying strong pressure on the right bank of the Lim River, where the Berane airfield was located. In connection with this, they insisted with the British that aircraft from Bari immediately fly to pick up the leaders who were to "arrive in Serbia from Montenegro." This referred to "several dozen" military and political leaders who had been selected from the 2nd Assault Corps units, mainly from the 2nd Serbian Proletarian Brigade, to be sent to positions in newly formed brigades and divisions in Serbia. Even the 2nd Corps commissar, Mitar Bakić, aware of the potential dramatic consequences of losing the airfield, reported to the General Staff that a "group of Serbs had gathered in Berane," and that Allied aircraft, fearing a German offensive, had to be quickly transferred. After Arso's usual "negotiations" with the English, they were transferred to Bari, since conditions for direct flights to Toplica were not yet in place. While waiting for ten days in vain in Bari, the Chief of the General Staff, through the 2nd Corps Radio Centre, insisted to the Main Staff of Serbia: "The airfield must be found and secured as soon as possible. Demand from the English a swift transfer of comrades from Italy." In response, Commander Petar Stambolić reported that he was at the airfield at Avdilovac in Toplica with the General Staff and that aircraft could land there. He was instructed to have "Mihajlo and the comrades" wait at the airfield starting from July 5, giving the agreed-upon signals. In the meantime, the British repeatedly refused to transfer them, sometimes claiming they had information that the airfield in Toplica had been taken by the Bulgarians, other times stating that "several days were needed to arrange the signals," and sometimes citing mechanical failures with the aircraft or storms over

[559] In the "first lineup," Colonel Lj. Vučković was originally slated for this position, but that was abandoned, and he would later become the commander of the 13th Corps in September.

the Adriatic and Serbia. Frustrated by the long and fruitless waiting, and having been warned by Petar Stambolić in direct radio contact on July 3 that the airfield could soon be threatened by an impending enemy offensive, Commander Koča from Bari requested that the Chief of the General Staff intervene with Maclean to prioritize the flight. Struggling with the situation, Koča suggested in one radiogram that six British planes fly to Toplica to pick up the wounded, confident that they could be obtained for this purpose, which would be the main reason for transferring him and his comrades, who had been kept in uncertainty and nervous tension in vain. Arso took it up vigorously, and the waiting finally came to an end — on July 11, Colonel M. Popović sent a report from Bari to Vis that Koča Popović and Blagoje Nešković Mihajlo, along with their associates, had finally arrived the previous night at the Avdilovac airfield, thus reaching the free territory of Toplica, and that four Allied planes had evacuated the wounded from there on their return. Koča and Mihajlo, along with their comrades, had been transferred to the airfield in Toplica, and Tempo, along with a group of commanders sent to Macedonia, also joined them. Thus, Mihajlo and Tempo, with their associates — after several days of stay on Vis and directives for further development of the NOP and its large units on the Serbian and Macedonian fronts — entered the operations for the final liberation of the country.

In a conversation with Tempo on Vis, Arso inquired about the commander of the Main Staff of Macedonia, M. Apostolski, who had recently been promoted to the rank of major general. He was first mentioned on November 4, 1943, in relation to the second liberation of Kičevo, in Tito's telegram to Dimitrov. At Arso's request, on November 6, Tempo was instructed to "immediately report details about Commander Apostolski: his full name, surname and characteristics for promotion." It turned out that neither Arso nor the "former officers" around the General Staff were familiar with a major by that surname. Tempo later reported that his full name was Mihajlo Apostolski, previously General Staff Major Mitić; before the war, he was "in connection" with Mitar Bakić, a collaborator of the NOP in occupied Skopje. From 1942, he had been the commander of the Main Staff of Macedonia and had been "accepted into the Party." Why and how he had not been known in the General Staff until November 4, 1943 was not mentioned in Tempo's radiogram. However, the information provided was enough: after that, the commander of the southern front was promoted quickly and successfully — up to the rank of lieutenant general, a rank held by the commanders of other national main staffs and the Chief of the General Staff. In the newly liberated Belgrade, Arso, along with Terzić, Hamović and Primorac, would later choose him as his assistant in the General Staff.

Arso did not influence the selection of Koča Popović as the commander of the Main Staff of Serbia, as the decision was made by the Political Bureau, based on a proposal by B. Nešković. However, he considered it a very successful personnel move and did everything he could to ensure that Popović was transferred to Serbian soil as soon as possible, to establish at least the basic prerequisites for a successful start, which would ease the General Staff's position in the highly significant Eastern Front. Brigadier Maclean, as he wrote to General H.M. Wilson, considered the choice to be

"excellent. General Popović has proven to be a very successful corps commander and is fully capable of handling the important military and political problems he will face in his command position."[560] The brigadier also wrote that Tito had approved for him to go to Serbia with Koča, which Churchill, at the insistence of his superiors, also approved. On August 30, Maclean, along with General Žujović, journalist Pribićević, and a group of his radio-telegraph operators, was transferred by plane to Toplica.

Also, by his own wish and with the approval of the General Staff, Major General A. Gorshkov, along with a group of officers from the Red Army, went with Koča. General R. Primorac was assigned as the Chief of the General Staff.

Arso did not influence personnel decisions in the military leadership of Macedonia. In fact, although Tempo was a member and delegate of the General Staff, his work was reviewed only by the closest party leadership based on his reports. Since neither the report nor any minutes from the meeting were preserved, for this occasion, lacking a primary source, we rely on a passage from the first book of his memoirs *Revolution in Progress,* where he mentions: "When we discussed the measures to be taken in Serbia, Tito emphasized how he had always believed that the change in the situation in Serbia would be the result of internal action, not the intervention of our divisions outside of Serbia." Regarding his assessment that "the command staff had not yet mastered the skill of commanding larger military units," he ordered that "the necessary middle and higher command staff be transferred from the Proletarian units by plane." In connection with Tempo's insistence on "strengthening the core of the military leadership of the NOVJ in Macedonia," Tito, along with Commander Apostolski, appointed Major General Pavle Ilić as the chief of staff, overturning the previous decision for his departure, by personal request, to eastern Serbia. Ilić learned of the new decision in Bari, from the signed order. Reacting to this, he, confident that at least his direct superior, General Jovanović, would "be of help," sent a radiogram to the General Staff, in which he, among other things, requested that the earlier decision for his departure to eastern Serbia not be changed, adding: "I feel that I am going to Serbia with great enthusiasm, while I could not agree with the assignment in Macedonia, despite my best efforts."[561] With Ilić's radiogram in hand, Arso intervened with Tito, urging him to comply, pointing out the importance of the planned events in eastern Serbia, near Romania and Bulgaria, especially regarding the advance of the Red Army fronts toward the Danube. However, the Supreme Commander refused to even hear it, highly sensitive to the mere thought that someone might refuse to carry out his orders. On July 1, he sent a radiogram to the newly appointed Main Staff of Serbia: "The position of General Veljko is scandalous in his message. This is not how a soldier behaves. Of course, I am against him going to Macedonia without his will. But he cannot stay in your headquarters after this. Assign him to a unit."[562] General Ilić was deeply affected by Tito's criticism, sincerely regretted it, and told Tempo that he

[560] *Collection Tito-Churchill, Strictly Secret*, p. 205.

[561] AVII, file 2125, reg. no. 1-32/10.

[562] *Ibid.,* file 2125, reg. no. 1-33/10.

agreed to go to Macedonia. On July 13, from Serbia, he informed the Supreme Commander: "Veljko has realized his mistake. Do you agree that he should go with me to Macedonia?" The response was affirmative.

Mid-July marked the alignment of NOVJ operations with the "summer campaign" of the 11 Red Army fronts, particularly the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian fronts, and the advance of the 15th Army Group, under General H. Alexander, toward the German "Gothic Line," which, north of the Arno River, connected the Adriatic and Ligurian seas. It was also the time when the General Staff's intelligence service[563] assessed that Draža Mihailović in Serbia, in terms of numbers, "could not have strong forces," which also applied to Nedić's Serbian State Guard, Ljotić's Serbian Volunteer Corps and the Russian Protection Corps. More precisely, the leaders of the intelligence service estimated, based on the data at their disposal, and reported to Arso, that in terms of both numbers and combat quality, these forces were not ones to seriously contend with. However, the occupying forces on Serbian soil were considered strong: a large part of the Wehrmacht's 2nd Panzer Army, the entire 1st Bulgarian Occupation Corps with five divisions (and in neighbouring Macedonia, the 5th Army), and four incomplete Hungarian divisions in Bačka and Baranja. Meanwhile, in western Macedonia and Kosovo and Metohija, nearly 30,000 militarily organized Ballists were active, and shortly before, the 21st SS "Skanderbeg" Mountain Division was formed, consisting of around 10,000 Albanians; in the Sandžak, Muslim militia units fought against the NOP. German forces, in operations on the approaches to Serbia (in eastern Bosnia, Slavonia, Srem and elsewhere) could receive support from numerous and very strong Ustaša and Domobran forces from the NDH, which bordered the Drava, Danube to Zemun, and the Sava, then the Drina. These were the circumstances in mid-July when planning the advance of the strategic formation of the NOVJ into Serbia, which was a top priority for the General Staff. Tito, as the President of the National Liberation Committee of Yugoslavia, was fighting for international recognition, and, in his capacity as Supreme Commander, was deciding on strategic, political and military matters in Serbia and Macedonia. During this time, the Chief of the General Staff, along with his closest associates — among whom General Major Dušan Kveder arrived from Slovenia on July 19 and was appointed as Arso's first assistant[564] — addressed the operational issues of the NOP armed forces, discussing, at appropriate levels, the advance of the strategic formation of the NOVJ into the eastern part of the front. This was a time when the units of eight main staffs and the staffs of 12 NOVJ corps, in direct communication with the General Staff, were carrying out combat operations across the front, and the operational situation was being closely monitored around the clock. Directives were issued, reports were requested, and questions about supplies from Allied assistance, the treatment of wounded soldiers, personnel training and air support for

[563] The head of the Intelligence Department of the General Staff, Major General I. Rukavina, was soon replaced by General Staff Colonel V. Klišanić.

[564] An intellectual with two university degrees and a participant in the Spanish Civil War, he would arrive at the General Staff from the position of Chief of the General Staff and remain only three months before taking the position of Commander of the Main Staff of Slovenia.

the units were addressed. It was also a time for more frequent briefings at the General Staff, where, at the request of General Jovanović, commanders from the main staffs and corps staff from all fronts were summoned to report, with the conclusions typically provided to the Supreme Commander in summaries, as needed or upon his request. Otherwise, everything was within the competence of the Chief of the General Staff.

On June 21, the Chief of the General Staff had a conversation with Air Commodore A. Lim and the commander of the British land forces in the Adriatic, General G.N. Davy, who, by order of General H.M. Wilson, visited to inspect the Allied units involved in the defence of the island of Vis. In an atmosphere of understanding and mutual respect among high-ranking military professionals, the Chief of the General Staff, like Tito, confident in the reliability of the defence of Vis and the "possibility of the quick liberation of some other islands," mentioned that the new operations of the NOVJ units, especially the Navy, required increased air and naval support from the Allies, outlining specific requests and expectations. Two days later, on June 23, Marshal Tito, along with the Chief of the General Staff and accompanied by the commander of all Allied forces stationed on Vis, Brigadier Tom Churchill, inspected the 2nd Command of the Army for Special Purposes, and a group of British and American pilots at the Vis airfield.



On Vis, with Allied commanders, June 22, 1944: from the left, seated are General Korneyev, Brigadier Charles, Admiral Kevin, Tito and Admiral Morgan.

At that time, there were three commando units on Vis, each consisting of 444 commandos (soldiers) and their commanders, along with artillery, mountain, invasion, operational, light naval and various auxiliary units, totalling about 5,000 Allied soldiers and officers, armed with, among other things, 104 artillery pieces of various calibers. From the NOVJ forces on Vis, there was the complete 26th Dalmatian Division with around 5,000 well-armed fighters for those conditions,[565] NOVJ Navy units with about 2,000 fighters, as well as various auxiliary and training units.

Maintaining radio communication between the SH and the eight main NOV and PO headquarters, the staffs of all 12 NOVJ corps, and divisions on main fronts, with the Navy Headquarters, the Bari Base, and Yugoslav military missions and other representations abroad, was becoming increasingly complex. As the Chief of the General Staff informed all the headquarters on direct radio connection, "wide application of radio communications was foreseen, down to battalion and battery levels, as well as for intelligence and other services." He demanded the immediate establishment of radio-telegraph courses. On July 6, he instructed operational headquarters to "clearly outline combat actions across the entire operational area in their daily reports," as without this, it was impossible to track the situation comprehensively, analyse the flow of both own and enemy operations, and issue public and internal reports. Radio communication was the most efficient, but still, under the existing conditions, it was an insecure method of communication between headquarters, as the enemy continued to rapidly decrypt radio messages, despite all the encryption protection measures taken. Courier mail, on the other hand, was the most secure but, under the prevailing conditions, irregular, as it depended on Allied aircraft. When an aircraft landed to collect the wounded or bring supplies, it would transfer the courier to Bari, where, at the Base Headquarters, the mail would be handed over and quickly and reliably sent by aircraft from the General Staff's communications squadron (six planes) received from the Red Army, to Vis. This system worked for official mail, publications, propaganda materials, reports and the like, but daily combat reports for the General Staff had to be sent by radiogram, as there was no delay in them. The Chief of the General Staff returned to this issue frequently, and on July 7, with a sent instruction, he reminded the headquarters that the daily combat report "must be written in a lively manner, with a certain military idea and perspective. Highlight the importance of operations, list the officers and fighters who stood out. Cover all areas and units. This will be the measure of their activity, and it will affect promotions, awards, recognitions, etc."[566] He also advised them to study the instructions and demanded an urgent response to confirm their understanding. There were no reasons for them not to understand it, though only the operational staffs reluctantly accepted it, with some considering it bureaucratic and redundant. The essence, however, was that without these documents, it was impossible to get a full picture of the events, compile an overview of the staff maps of the forces and the front, and command competently. On the same day, the Chief of the General Staff asked all operational headquarters of the NOVJ to respond whether they had "radio communication with all their units and operational areas."[567] The 2nd Corps headquarters responded that it had communication with all units and operational areas, the 5th Corps with all of its divisions, and the others with their brigades.

[565] Among other things: 78 howitzers and guns of various calibres and purposes, 55 PT weapons "piat," and 20 PA machine guns.

[566] AVII, file 60/C, folder 1.

[567] *Ibid.*

Without neglecting any front or the development of the NOVJ's military actions on it, the operational section of the General Staff — though still numerically small but professionally strong and well-organized — focused its efforts on preparing operational units for the advance into the eastern part of the country. The Supreme Commander also estimated that the leadership of the NOVJ would soon move from Vis and begin focusing on the western borders of Serbia, which he expressed in a radiogram on July 3 to the Headquarters of the 1st Proletarian Corps, which was still moving with S. Žujović, stating that "Bevc and the others" would soon arrive near the Foča sector.[568] However, the unfolding events delayed this: in Serbia, the offensive operations "Triumph" and "Keraus"[569] unfolded one after another in July, involving around 35,000 occupying soldiers allied with Chetniks, Nedić's forces, Ljotić's Serbian Volunteer Corps and White Guard units, against five newly formed NOVJ divisions and other units under General Staff command. The situation in the Lim Valley was very difficult, with strong attacks from German and collaborator (Albanian and Muslim) forces, but the 3rd Assault Division units stood firm, and the Supreme Commander praised their resilience. In eastern Bosnia, the offensive actions of the occupying-collaborator forces against the units of the 3rd and 12th Corps continued.

Even the much-needed, firmly agreed-upon and often promised Allied assistance in arms, food and clothing arrived irregularly, and there were also reasons for dissatisfaction regarding the evacuation of the wounded from 52 organized partisan airfields. Indeed, on July 3, General Terzić reported from Moscow that the Soviet government had sent "3,000 tons of various supplies" for the NOVJ, shipped from the Persian Gulf under the American flag, which was a large and commendable amount. However, it would take a long time for the ships to reach Bari and then Vis, from where the supplies would be transported to units deep inside the country, in conditions of extreme shortages of transport means, broken roads and the dangers posed by the enemy. Furthermore, the ships would not even depart until July 14, and by the time the aid reached some of the units, as reported by the corps commanders, it was too late for them to be of much use.

A notable document from this period is Tito's letter to J.V. Stalin, written on July 5 and sent to Moscow on July 14 via General Korneyev. In it, Tito highlights the main issues facing the NOVJ: arming new fighters, especially those in Serbia, to resolve the situation there in favour of the NOP as quickly as possible, which was crucial for the ultimate success of creating a new Yugoslavia; equipping the NOVJ with technical combat means, particularly tanks and aircraft; preserving the political and military independence of the NOP in Yugoslavia amidst attempts by Western Allies to interfere in Yugoslavia's internal affairs. He also outlined the conditions he would set for the Allies if they requested to land on Yugoslav soil. Regarding all of this, Tito asked Stalin for the Soviet Union's support for the NOP, stressing that the strongest support would come if the Red Army advanced through the Carpathians and Romania toward

[568] *Ibid.*

[569] For more on the Toplica-Jablanica Operation: M. Čolić, *op. cit.*, pp. 208-214.

the south. Finally, he proposed that he come to Moscow to present orally some major issues on which positions should be taken "before peace negotiations," which would be "in the interest of the Balkan countries and the Soviet Union."[570]

Soon, new problems emerged, linked to the beginning of very strong German offensive operations, particularly "Draufgenger" (Andrijevica) and later "Ribecal" (Durmitor), designed to prevent or at least slow down the advance of the NOVJ operational forces into Serbia. Additionally, the operations of the Allies on both the Eastern and Western fronts proceeded much slower than anticipated, especially after the furious start of Operation "Overlord." These were some of the reasons why the NOP leadership would delay its transfer from Vis until October 15, 1944. However, this did not absolve the General Staff of its obligations, particularly its operational sector, which continued to do everything possible to ensure the success of the NOVJ units' advance into Serbia, and then to coordinate with the five newly formed divisions — renamed on July 3 as the 21st, 22nd, 23rd, 24th, and 25th Serbian Divisions. With the full establishment of the Operational Group of Divisions, the General Staff required the corps headquarters oriented toward Serbia to identify locations for the airdrops of food and supplies, or the landing of aircraft that were awaited around the clock. On July 8, the Headquarters of the 1st Corps reported that all the brigades of the 1st Proletarian Division had already crossed to the right bank of the Drina River, and a permanent location for the delivery of war material had been secured in the village of Ponikve (near Užice). In the following days, the General Staff communicated from Vis, directly and via Bari, requesting that food and war material be delivered to the 1st Proletarian, 5th Assault and 17th Eastern Bosnian Divisions. On July 8, the commissar of the 1st Proletarian Corps, Colonel Mijalko Todorović Plavi, reported from the right bank of the Drina: "This sector is completely exhausted of food. For tomorrow, we have no food for any unit. The English supply is so weak that it cannot be considered."[571] Todorović also reported that the number of fighters in the 1st Proletarian brigades had significantly decreased, and the situation was no better in the 6th Lika Division brigades. The issue of insufficient unit reinforcements was raised earlier at General Staff meetings by Koča Popović, who suggested at Vis that the replenishment be carried out with "several thousand volunteers" from the military gathering camps in Italy. The Chief of the General Staff was inclined to approve this for two or three thousand volunteers, but the Supreme Commander vetoed it, stating that "this cannot be accepted, as many are attacking the personnel from those camps, and the contingent is limited." The reinforcements from the field and mobilization were sluggish, and from the right bank of the Drina, at the gates of Serbia, it was reported that the Proletarian battalions had dwindled to 15 to 30 fighters, with the note: "The machine guns are being carried by comrades too. If the reinforcements don't arrive, we will have to surrender some automatic weapons."[572] The response from Marshal Tito to Vis was principled, but it did not address the core

[570] AJ, Fund CC of the CPY, No. 1944/874 (according to the original in Moscow).

[571] AVII, file 372, reg. no. 33-17/1.

[572] *Ibid.,* file 372, reg. no. 33-18.

of the problem: "Develop political work in the field to replenish the units with local manpower. For now, this is the only option."[573] This suggestion was of little use in that area, and the divisions of the 1st Proletarian Corps would only be properly reinforced in central Serbia.

The volunteers from Italy were also counted on by Peko and Mitar who, from the headquarters of their Staff — at the Monastery of Morača — reported that they could not engage the 2nd Proletarian, 2nd Dalmatian and 3rd Serbian Brigades, as the first two had "been reduced to party activists," and the third had about 300 fighters. The Montenegrin brigades had also "thinned out" and there was no possibility of reinforcing them, while the 3rd Division had lost 627 men from its ranks since April, which was also the situation with the 5th Division. The lack of reinforcements in the aforementioned units was, they wrote, "a large and serious problem," so they requested that the General Staff address it by "transferring four to five thousand fighters from Italy. We will accept these personnel in Konavle."[574] Tito responded to them, as he had to Plavi: "For now, reinforcements from Italy are not an option. Develop action for new mobilization on your terrain."[575]

Not waiting for others to resolve these and other issues, Peko and Mitar sent a radiogram to the General Staff on July 8 with a new initiative concerning the advance into Serbia and the replenishment of their own units. The message was military, thorough and precise:

"Accelerating the movement into Serbia is necessary for the following reasons:

"First: By launching our current incursion into Serbia, we take the initiative in our hands and prevent the enemy from imposing battles on us and the units in Serbia, which would delay our plans and complicate the situation for us and the units in Serbia.

"Second: Connecting our forces with those in Serbia will allow for the strengthening of the NOP and the necessary replenishment of our units.

"Third: The provision of food for our units will be resolved.

"Attack Plan:

"1. With the 2nd, 5th and 17th Divisions: the route Berane-Rožaje-Novi Pazar-Ibar-Toplica, in cooperation with Toplica forces.

"2. With the remaining forces: the Priboj-Užice-Čačak route. This column should be supported by forces from eastern Bosnia.[576]

"3. The rest of our forces must be kept in the military area of our corps."[577]

As a response to this certainly useful initiative, the Chief of the General Staff, on July 9, after further analysis in the Operational Department and consultation with the Supreme Commander, wrote a directive to the 2nd Corps Headquarters regarding

[573] *Ibid.,* file 60/C, folder 1.

[574] J. Broz, *Collected Works*, Vol. 21, Note 126, p. 315.

[575] AVII, file 60/C, folder 1.

[576] Two divisions from Vojvodina and two more from the interior of the battlefield, while part of the forces of the 3rd Corps would remain as a strategic reserve.

[577] More on this: R. Vukanović, *The Second Strike Corps,* Belgrade 1982, p. 217.



Agreement on operations for the liberation of Serbia, June 28, 1944 on Vis: seated from the right are Blagoje Nešković, Tito and Moma Marković; standing are Generals A. Jovanović and M. Đilas, Colonel Miodrag Lozić, Lieutenant Colonel Slobodan Penezić and General Aleksandar Ranković.

the preparations for the advance of the NOVJ forces into Serbia. The directive began with a warning: "The distance of our bases and the lack of knowledge about enemy forces in Serbia, our insufficient armament, the disorganization of our forces and the still unsettled command in Serbia all require caution. We must approach carefully, secure footholds and deploy strong forces to strike from multiple directions." This was consistent with his assessment that, this time, the advance into Serbia should happen from several directions, from Komovi to Cer, via Lim and Drina, in close cooperation with the NOVJ divisions already formed in Serbia, which would, in the meantime, be organized into corps. The directive largely validated Peko and Mitar's proposal:

"A. Until further notice, take command of all forces in that sector immediately.

"B. Move the 5th and 17th Divisions, under the command of the 5th Division Headquarters, to the Studenica, Golia, Javor sector, with one division acting toward the Ibar Gorge and the other toward Dragačevo, Moravica and Western Morava. In this area, they should create a foothold for a quick advance into Serbia when ordered. Do not allow rigid front lines. In our opinion, the best direction of movement is between Zlatar and Sjenica.

"C. The 37th Division in the Nova Varoš-Zlatar sector must secure the left flank of the Moracina group.

"D. When the Moracina group is positioned in the specified sector, direct the 2nd Proletarian Division toward Toplica, via the route you proposed. With Toplica forces, it will form the core of the operational group at Kopaonik. The Moracina and this group should cooperate to eliminate the railway line at Ibar from use. In Toplica, the forces should be at least 4,000 fighters strong.

"E. The 1st Proletarian Division remains as a strategic reserve in the western Sandžak, protecting the route to Tara. Attempt to replenish it and place some Sandžak units under its command.

"F. We are still gathering forces, so the advance into Serbia will also come from eastern Bosnia and the Toplica sector. There are five divisions in Toplica. Gathering stronger forces is dangerous. The enemy has large forces in this sector.

"G. Establish radio communication with all divisions and develop a wide intelligence network."

"In the directive, General Hamović was designated as the head of the operation (General Major Rade Hamović, a member of the General Staff, and until then, the head of the 29th Herzegovinian Division Headquarters — *I.M.*).

"H. To achieve this directive, we leave you the freedom to operate and act independently, with the condition that the moving divisions should not be engaged in heavy combat. You are allowed to direct the Moracina group differently to enable the movement of the 2nd Division. The timing of the movement is up to you, provided the units are supplied with the material they have ordered. Report to us in a timely manner so that we can coordinate your actions with the Serbian and other forces.

"In this sense, directives were issued to the Main Staff of Serbia and forces in eastern Bosnia and Vojvodina."[578]

The forces in eastern Bosnia and Vojvodina referred to in the directives were the headquarters of the 3rd and 12th Corps. The 3rd Corps, reinforced by the 11th Division from the 5th Corps, was tasked with the advance into Serbia. On July 11, it was directed to have "at least two divisions ready for the advance into Serbia," ensuring operational secrecy by establishing "operational sectors from which they can quickly advance" across the Drina, with 20 boats provided by Soviet military aid. The headquarters was also warned of the need to maintain reliable communication with those divisions, organize a wide-ranging intelligence service and, due to the "enormous importance of the task," ensure complete readiness to "execute the movement at the given signal, even if it means leaving small (partisan) units behind in your sector."[579]

This was now a directive and an "undertaking" that it imposed, with the full expertise and responsibility of the SH and its Chief — unlike the earlier proletarian advance into Serbia. Hence, the work was done systematically and thoroughly: through the missions in Vis, Toplica and Moscow, constant requests were made to the Soviets for "food and material for the units"; on July 18, the 6th Lika Division was sent on a march from the Glamoč area to the Sandžak; direct radio communication

[578] AVII, file 60/C, folder 1.

[579] *Ibid.*

was established between the headquarters of the 1st and 2nd Corps; priorities for replenishing and supplying units along the Lim and Drina rivers were set; and the staff of General Lekić was reinforced, along with the "equipped" headquarters of the 16th and 36th Vojvodina Divisions (commanded by Majors Marko Peričin and Radosav Miško Jović).

The supply of units prepared for the advance into Serbia — primarily from Soviet aid, as the Anglo-Americans, mainly due to political considerations regarding the "Serbian royalist forces," obstructed it — was given the highest priority in engaging General Jovanović. The issue was even more complex as General Korneyev (since July 14) had been in Moscow for a debriefing, where he would remain for two months, and General Gorshkov, along with Koča, was in Serbia. Thus, efforts were expedited through General Terzić in Moscow and Colonel Stefan Sokolov, the commander of the Soviet base in Bari. At the same time, General A. Ranković was in Italy for "the matter of Serbia," insisting on the evacuation of wounded soldiers and the supply of ammunition. He also visited some Yugoslav units, including the 1st Tank Brigade of the NOVJ in formation at Gravina, where he found 1,644 tank crews. According to the agreement, they were supposed to receive 144 "Stuart" tanks, 216 trucks and 24 armoured cars, but by July 8, only half of the required supplies had been delivered. In the final note from a meeting with the tank commanders, the notoriously pragmatic Ranković outlined five issues that the General Staff should resolve immediately, starting with the request to the Allies to supply the unit with appropriate armament and concluding with a suggestion to "find" about 350 additional fighters for its replenishment, ensuring the reserve was covered.[580] Since this was an elite unit of the NOVJ, which was supposed to arrive in Vis on July 16 and initially secure the General Staff, General Jovanović took responsibility for effectively resolving all the issues raised by A. Ranković. On July 10, he sent the tank staff the formation agreed upon in the General Staff "during discussions with English experts," noting: "Although the English said that the Sherman tanks were too bulky for our roads, they are still good combat vehicles, and they should be accepted (referring to completing the formation). If the English try to give you older types, like the 11-12 ton heavy ones, reject them."[581]

This period also marked the training of two NOVJ squadrons within the RAF for carrying out combat tasks on the Yugoslav front, as well as the schooling of hundreds of artillerymen, drivers, signalmen and other specialists at Allied training centres in the Mediterranean. Soon, 459 airmen would travel by plane and ship to Russia for training, forming the core personnel for fighter and assault regiments, while training for the 2nd Tank Brigade of the NOVJ would begin there.

While overseeing preparations for units on the critical front, "in Montenegro, the Sandžak and north of it," and ensuring that this sector was not weakened, even at the cost of diminishing the combat capabilities of the Naval Operational Group and the 29th Herzegovinian Division, Arso demanded that General Terzić urgently organize

[580] *Collection of Documents on the NOR,* Vol. II, Book 13, Document 190.

[581] *Ibid.*

the transfer of at least 20 boats to the Osmak sector near Vlasenica "for the 3rd Corps" — to cross the Drina (for the assault units of the 16th and 36th Vojvodina Divisions) — and to deploy two batteries of four mountain guns and a battalion of 12 heavy mortars, along with shells and mines, for the 1st Proletarian Division at the Njegovuđe airfield. On July 12, a radiogram from Vis reprimanded the commander of the 2nd Corps for not organizing the reception and distribution of war material received from the Allies: "We are about to solve the main task and you are showing carelessness. Remove the irregularities. Move the headquarters closer to the units. Report."[582] The next day, General Dapčević was ordered: "Report immediately what you have done for the movement of the 5th and 17th Divisions on the designated route."[583] On July 13, the 3rd Corps Headquarters was ordered to find and secure airfields for the transfer of more than 600 seriously wounded soldiers, sick, and invalids to Italy. The 1st Corps Headquarters was asked to send personnel to receive the "ordered" mountain guns and heavy mortars at the Njegovuđe airfield, but despite several urgent requests from Arso, the supplies did not arrive, as the Kalinovka base was far away and the weapons were heavy. By the end of July, the proletarians would only receive one battery (four guns) from Allied warehouses in Italy reserved for the NOVJ, while the arrival of the second batch was delayed by the "Ribecal" operation.

On July 14, the SH sent a radiogram to the newly formed Main Staff of Serbia: "Košta (Nađ) is preparing two to three divisions for operations in your direction. Peko must immediately advance with two divisions; the 1st Proletarian Division remains as a reserve in the Sandžak."[584] At the same time, the Croatian Main Staff (Commander Ivan Gošnjak, Commissar Rade Žigić) was ordered to prepare one division from the 6th Slavonian Corps (the 28th Division was selected) to be placed at the disposal of the SH, just as the 11th Division had been, to move "in the eastern direction to resolve tasks in Serbia."

On July 13, the Main Staff of Serbia began reporting on a large German offensive on Toplica and Jablanica, which was part of the "Triumph" offensive operation. On July 10, General Hans Gustav Felber, the military administrative commander, launched this operation with around 40,000 occupying and collaborator forces, with the goal of breaking the five Serbian NOVJ divisions in Toplica and Jablanica, which numbered 6,000-7,000 fighters. This offensive, codenamed "Keraus," would last until August 3 and take place in the area between Toplica, the South Morava and Jablanica. In domestic historiography, this offensive is known as the Toplica-Jablanica Operation. Koča, on July 13, reported his own plan for breaking the occupying-collaborator operation, which was supported from Vis, but he rightly relied on new, bold moves from the General Staff and his comrades from Spain — Peko, Koča, Kosta and Lekić. Aware that the next move was up to him, the General Staff ordered the 2nd Corps Headquarters the following day to have the 5th and 17th Divisions, with a bridgehead on the

[582] AVII, file 60/C, reg. no. 202/1.

[583] *Ibid.*; J. Broz, *Collected Works*, Vol. 21, p. 131.

[584] AVII, file 60/C, reg. no. 202/1; J. Broz, *Collected Works*, Vol. 21, p. 138.

right bank of the Lim, immediately advance toward southwestern Serbia — "to prevent any potential offensive on the Sandžak; in case of any 'offensive on the Sandžak,' the 1st Proletarian Division should not engage in frontal combat but instead retreat behind enemy lines and advance toward Serbia; the crossings to the left bank of Tara must be well secured, particularly toward Žabljak, to protect the Njegovuđe airfield." Meanwhile, General Terzić, from Moscow, reported to Vis that, in the first 14 days of July, only a symbolic portion of the requested supplies had been delivered to NOVJ units by planes from the Kalinovka base. Thousands of hungry, barefoot and ill-equipped fighters, deprived of basic combat necessities, were unable to advance toward Serbia with any realistic chance of success. From the approaches to Lim and Drina, the fighters looked eastward and to the sky — waiting for the long-awaited, believed-to-be omnipotent "fatherland" to arrive. However, it did not arrive, most certainly due to technical impossibilities, but who among the fighters, starving and poorly armed, could admit that? The proletarians waited for the guns, but there was no sign of them; the fighters were dying from hunger, convinced that in Russia there was an abundance of food, while here, there was nothing but roots left. Barefoot, with their feet bloodied, they hoped for at least a pair of sandals, convinced that every Russian wore boots; those without automatic weapons hoped for at least a hand grenade to defend themselves, and the miners hoped for a "class" dynamite. In truth, General Terzić had reported that "in the transport that was supposed to be delivered by ship this month," among a massive amount of material, there were also 100 light mountain guns, which, as consolation, would soon be delivered to the NOVJ units by planes from Bari. How-



On the island of Saint Andrew: coordination of naval target strikes.

ever, the anticipated ship from the Persian Gulf would, unfortunately, set sail much later, and its cargo would only be included in the Bari-Njegovuđe "airbridge" by the end of August, which the fighters in Serbia could hardly understand. This great human suffering, which was apparent in every word of the radiograms from Koča, Peko, Kosta and Lekić, was likely something no one at Vis, not even Arso Jovanović, a Russophile and military professional, fully understood and emotionally endured. He knew, from the map, how far it was from Durmitor to the Kalinovka base in the Ukrainian steppe; he was aware of the inevitable facts: the limited operational range of aircraft, the load on transport aircraft carrying fuel and weapons for self-defence, the weather chaos in the Carpathians, and the dense German air defence; he deeply believed in the good will and determination of the General Staff of the Red Army to assist the NOVJ, with Soviet pilots, like Shornikov on the evening of June 3 at Kupreško polje, doing the impossible, but also in the unpreparedness of his comrades on the ground — determined to fight, but hungry, barefoot and poorly armed — waiting long and in vain.

Arso's suffering could not be contained in radiograms, and he reluctantly made promises, but never misled anyone. In any case, the correspondence between Moscow and Vis continued: General Terzić kept sending optimistic reports about the aid being sent by ships and planes, but the majority of that aid would not arrive until the NOVJ divisions, advancing from the Lim and Drina sectors, had deeply penetrated into Serbia.

There was no time to wait for Allied aid, even if it came from the Soviets: on July 16, the General Staff ordered Peko Dapčević to "immediately advance with the designated divisions in the designated direction" because the pressure on the NOVJ units in Serbia had to be relieved. Kosta Nađ was tasked with crossing the Drina with three divisions "in 10 to 14 days."[585] Five days later, Koča was informed that Peko "had moved in the direction of Ibar, toward Golia," and that he would move the 2nd Proletarian Division into Jablanica, where "at least 2,000 fighters" had to be prepared for it. Meanwhile, Kosta still "had to wait until Peko reached the designated location." However, the General Staff, clearly misled by irregular communication and believing that its orders were being promptly executed, was mistaken: General Dapčević, along with the 3rd Assault Division, had to engage the entire Operational Group due to the scale of the German offensive operation "Draufgenger" (the Andrijevica operation), in which the commander of the 2nd Panzer Army had introduced the 21st SS "Skanderbeg" Mountain Division, the collaborator Albanian militia, and some Chetnik units, supported by tanks and aviation. Because of this, Dapčević could not disengage the Operational Group, which was supposed to carry out a rapid advance into Serbia, until July 26. This delay didn't help even though the General Staff had demanded that General Dapčević, first, "immediately move the 2nd Proletarian Division toward Koča due to the severity of the situation in Toplica and Jablanica, which are under strong offensive pressure," and second, that he not engage the other two divisions designated for the advance into Serbia on the Andrijevica sector, but instead "carry out the

[585] J. Broz, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

planned movement immediately," warning him that the Germans were "pressing at Andrijevica" and trying to prevent their "advance in the designated direction." There is no doubt that Peko understood the reasons for this General Staff order, but he also understood the goal of the German 2nd Panzer Army commander: to break up the Operational Group stationed at the Lim bridgehead and eliminate the threat of its advance into southwestern Serbia. In a radiogram sent on July 19, Peko reported that the Germans in the Andrijevica-Berane sector were very persistent, despite suffering significant losses, and that they were supported by 87 aircraft that day. Therefore, he deployed additional forces to prevent the enemy from expanding and launched a counter-attack, because the division "must resolve the situation before moving on to the task." He also reported that the enemy was still concentrating in Podgorica and Peć, and asked the General Staff to have Allied aviation bomb the two German garrisons "and their surroundings."

In the announcement of the (requested) bombings, the 2nd Corps Headquarters was asked for a report on the strength of the enemy in Pljevlja and Prijepolje. Colonel Vaso Jovanović responded: in Pljevlja, there were 800 Germans, 500 Chetniks and 200 members of the Muslim militia, and in Prijepolje, 600 Germans with 80 vehicles. He also provided details of their location, both during the day and night. On July 24, bombing followed; seven bombers, along with six Germans and 30 Chetniks, killed more than one hundred civilians in Pljevlja, and in the destroyed part of Prijepolje's market, 60 locals were killed.

Not fully understanding what was unfolding in the Lim basin and in the garrisons along the connecting roads, the SH warned all operational headquarters on July 21 to adopt a manoeuvre-based approach to warfare: "The enemy is launching attacks on certain sectors to weaken us, deplete our ammunition and cause disorganization. Many of our commanders fall into this enemy tactic and throw their units into difficult frontal battles from which we only suffer losses with no gain. Often, small parts of free territory, which have no operational significance, are defended at great cost. A more flexible approach to warfare should be applied and units should be protected from unnecessary losses." The directive concluded with instructions: "Keep the highest level of secrecy about your intentions, actions and movements. Do not share this information with the Allies."[586]

Commander Koča, also caught off guard by the strong enemy operation, reported on July 18 that, even in such a complex situation, another sixth Serbian division could be formed in Toplica and Jablanica, but there was a lack of personnel — "especially the division commander and commissar, as well as brigade staffs." He requested that these people be sent by plane (along with him, 71 officers had arrived). The General Staff understood that particular attention needed to be given to breaking up the Chetniks who, according to Koča, were considered the "main threat." Thanks to forced

[586] Unfortunately, this data was "given" to the Wehrmacht's listening service, which immediately passed it on to the Southeast command, which, according to its interests, selectively shared it with Bulgarian, Chetnik, Nedić, and other headquarters involved in battles and operations against the units of the NOVJ.

mobilization, there were about 40,000 Chetniks, organized into ten corps groups, and those classified as elite were engaged against the General Staff's units. The 21st Assault Division (newly commanded by Colonel Miloje Milojević) was deployed against them, and the introduction of the 25th Division was also planned. Koča concluded his report by saying: "We expect that Peko will relieve us with his appearance, which needs to be accelerated as much as possible."[587] He had been informed that not only the 2nd Proletarian Division but also, indirectly, the entire Operational Group would be arriving, and that 30 more leaders would be sent from the 2nd and 5th Corps via air to Serbia. At one point, overwhelmed by the offensive, Koča requested that the 2nd Proletarian Brigade be transferred by plane. It is also indicative that he questioned whether the official name of the General Staff was "General Staff of the NOV and PO for Serbia" or "General Staff of the NOV and PO of Serbia." He was told, "Your headquarters should be called the General Staff of the NOV and PO of Serbia."[588]

From daily operational reports received from the 2nd Corps Headquarters, the Chief of Staff concluded that the Germans had launched a much larger operation than the one they had been indicating for days, based on the actions near Andrijevica and Berane. The goal was to push the NOVJ forces off the Lim bridgehead, prevent their advance to the southeast, and shift the focus of the fighting to Montenegro and the Sandžak, as far from Serbia as possible. Based on this assessment, General Dapčević was reprimanded for delaying the ordered advance into southwestern Serbia, and he was again ordered to immediately move in that direction to relieve the difficult situation in which the majority of the General Staff's units (five divisions) in Serbia found themselves. Additionally, it was reiterated that no personnel from Allied missions should be involved in operations through Serbia, nor should they know anything about it. "Keep the movement in the greatest secrecy."[589]

The delivery of Soviet military aid to the NOVJ units preparing for the advance into Serbia was still slow: the ships carrying the promised material were not arriving; the transport planes sent to Bari had yet to take off for Yugoslavia, not even the two "Dakotas" that were a gift from the Soviet government to Tito. Despite the efforts of Colonel S. Sokolov and the apparent willingness of Vice Marshal W. Elliot for compromise, the NOVJ military leadership had not received the four light aircraft intended for the SH liaison squadron, as the RAF had strict rules regarding the takeoff of "foreign" planes from "their" territory, and the final decision on this had to come from London. London was far away, somewhat mysterious and certainly suspicious. The Russians — according to what Ranković, who was engaged in reorganizing the NOVJ Base in Bari, wrote on July 24 — "seemingly failed to inform the English that they would transport four small, disassembled planes to Italy in large aircraft." The people in the Base and around it hastened: eagerly awaiting the planes gifted by the Red Army, they visibly marked them with partisan insignia, and the pilots of the

[587] J. Broz, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

[588] AVII, file 60/C, folder 1.

[589] J. Broz, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

NOVJ flew them over Bari. This led to new misunderstandings with the vain English, and generals Ranković and Poljanac, along with air force colonels Zdenko Ulapić and Franc Pirc, had to intervene again, with the Chief of Staff finally getting involved. They did this with great disbelief in the professionalism and sincere alliance of the Anglo-American military authorities. This was also the time when Vis, to avoid offending the "hosts" (the British and Americans), had removed the red stripes from the trousers of NOVJ generals who were being sent to the Mediterranean on various missions.

The promised 20 rubber boats for the 3rd Corps units to cross the Drina had still not arrived, nor had the promised artillery, food and ammunition for the Proletarians. However, the air force base under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Jevrem Bjelica was operating effectively at Njegovuđe. Therefore, on July 24, General Terzić was asked to intervene regarding the boats and the urgent wartime needs for the 1st Proletarian Division — ranging from artillery and mortars to a million rounds of ammunition, 20 complete sections of maps of Serbia at a 1:100,000 scale and ten binoculars. Terzić, as always caught between a rock and a hard place, reported that the promised boats still had to be transported to Bari, and from there to eastern Bosnia, and that all the material for the 1st Proletarian Division, as promised, would "also be sent quickly from the appropriate location." However, he added that (both under Durmitor and at Vis) "it must be kept in mind that atmospheric conditions over the Carpathians or in Yugoslavia often completely disrupt the delivery of materials."[590] But, it was only Saint Elijah, and how could a hungry and barefoot "Mr. Five-Bullets" believe in that?!

Caserta *(August 6-12)*

On the other side, with the Western Allies, relations were becoming strained due to the cancellation of the scheduled meeting on July 18 between the Supreme Commander of the NOVJ and the Supreme Commander of the Allied forces in the Mediterranean, General H.M. Wilson. Resolving this politically-motivated dispute was not within the authority of the Chief of Staff, but it certainly affected him because the expansion of cooperation with the Allies was a strategically important issue for the NOB, and he himself, as a designated member of the delegation, was preparing seriously for this meeting between the two supreme commanders, ready to report on "the mutual cooperation of the allied forces in executing upcoming operations in Yugoslavia and Italy." In this context, he was preparing a "detailed explanation" of requests for a significant increase in the number of transport aircraft flights — 60 per day to supply the NOVJ units and at least 30 for civilian assistance; expanding the scope of supplying the NOVJ with equipment and combat means that would allow for its replenishment and modernization — armoured units with 80 more tanks, navy with ten fast motorboats, artillery with hundreds of guns and mortars; possible plans for Western allies' operations in the Balkans, which was Tito's test of their willingness to intervene militarily for the restoration of monarchist Yugoslavia.

[590] AVII, file 57/4, reg. no. 1-64/1, Radio telegram No. 70.

Prime Minister Winston Churchill, however, came up with something else at the last minute. General Wilson, without the knowledge or consent of the other side, altered the content of the meeting, which had been planned as an opportunity for discussions on exclusively military matters. Primarily with a political goal, he invited the President of the Royal Government, Dr. Ivan Šubašić, and "closely" involved King Petar in case he would also join the talks. This entirely new development, communicated from the liaison in London, was discussed on July 10 at a meeting of the narrow leadership of the NOVJ in Vis, and it was decided that under these conditions, the already prepared NOVJ delegation — Marshal Tito, Generals Ranković, Jovanović and Velebit, and Colonel Pirc — would not attend the meeting with Wilson. This decision, as the National Committee and the Presidency of the AVNOJ's, was communicated to Brigadier F. Maclean, with an emphasis that, due to the one-sided change in the meeting's agenda, this was no longer about a military cooperation agreement in Caserta, but about the obvious interference of the Allied factor in the internal political matters of the Yugoslav people. Thus, the much-needed inter-Allied agreement on military cooperation at the top was postponed for nearly a month. This was the time when the English — after Marshal Tito had rejected General Borivoje Mirković and King Petar had rejected General Dušan Simović — proposed new candidates, generals from the royal army. In certain political combinations with the "true Serbs" on the list of Dr. Šubašić's government, even the name of Živko Topalović, the president of the Chetnik Central National Committee of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, appeared.

On the military front, there were also efforts from certain Western Allied circles to attract some Chetnik forces into Herzegovina, encouraging them to carry out symbolic actions against the Germans, which would then serve as a pretext and basis for further interference in the internal relations of Yugoslavia — under the guise of supporting "other resistance forces against the Germans." The British SEO, through several of its emissaries, sought to rehabilitate the Chetniks and keep them as "the second anti-fascist side" in the country, using the Chetnik commander Stari Ras V. Lukačević and a group of his like-minded individuals, all high-ranking Chetnik commanders organized in the "Independent National Command of Resistance," who were allegedly ready to join the fight against the occupiers.

At that time, Lieutenant Timothy Pfeiffer of the U.S. Army, authorized to begin discussions about the arrival of a U.S. Military Mission to the NOVJ General Staff, was staying on Vis. This mission had been promised half a year earlier, still back in Jajce, but it had remained at the level of liaison officers. The decision was postponed again — until the meeting between Marshal Tito and the appropriate Allied commanders, which would take place on August 10 in Caserta. In the meantime, the time was used on Vis to select and prepare the NOVJ Military Mission to the United States, in case the U.S. government sent its own. General-Lieutenant Savo Orović was designated as the head of the Mission. Consistently diligent, he immediately began intensively learning English with his wife, Joška. Dr. Josip Smodlaka, then Commissioner for Foreign Affairs in the National Committee, was also to be included in the mission as the political representative of the NOVJ.

As the issue of sending the Military Mission to the United States was delayed, Tito suggested to General Orović, still "on duty" as the "first soldier of the NOVJ to Roosevelt," that he "work on organizing the Officers' School of the General Staff on Vis." The old general wrote in his war diary on July 14 that, in his opinion, it would be a school "for infantry, artillery and even tankers." The school would last for a longer period, at least three months, and remain on Vis even after the General Staff moved to the mainland.[591] Immediately, the diligent Orović selected suitable premises, made work plans, compiled lists of instructors, ordered some analyses and wrote requisitions for material needs, submitting them for approval from various General Staff members: plans to Arso, personnel matters to A. Ranković, logistics to Mitar Vujić. While they all respected his personal qualities and the issues he was dealing with, they could hardly accommodate him, as they were busy with strategic matters, in which the opening of a three-month officer training school at the General Staff was not a priority, especially given that there was no time for anything other than shorter courses. The old general, however, would struggle to understand this slowly, and would later write that "the Chief of Staff, Arso Jovanović, caused delays in this matter, and it was postponed until the liberation of Belgrade, where I, instead of the Officers' School, opened a Military School with more than 2,300 cadets." The reason for this was that the aforementioned individuals and leaders of the branches and the main arms of the NOVJ's armed forces did not consider the opening of the school at the General Staff on Vis a priority task, especially since the main forces were focused on breaking into the eastern parts of the country and establishing cooperation with the Allies, including training NOVJ personnel in the Soviet Union and in Anglo-American training centres in the Mediterranean. Additionally, for urgent wartime needs, there were about fifteen schools and at least three times that many courses operating at the main headquarters and corps headquarters, which would later train 28,030 officers by the end of the NOB. Some historians of the NOVJ military education system, without addressing the essence of the issue and the circumstances under which it occurred, would later classify this "hindrance" by General Orović — whom Chief of Staff Jovanović had always highly respected personally, due to his integrity, high moral standards, patriotism and bravery — as one of "the great wartime sins of Arso Jovanović" after 1948.

Under the pressure of Operation "Keraus," widely supported by the collaborators, and especially around 6,000 Chetniks attacking from Kopaonik, the Main Staff of Serbia was unable to maintain its positions in Toplica and Jablanica. In this regard, Koča reported to Vis on July 24 that he had decided to cross the Morava with three divisions, break through in multiple directions and enter eastern Serbia, which was then "the only free territory." In the following days, he reported: the situation is rapidly deteriorating and German troops are approaching Priština, so he considered "it necessary to deploy strong forces into Serbia from the west," especially via Kopaonik. In subsequent telegrams, he requested the bombing of several cities from Vranje to Belgrade, specifying military targets to be destroyed. The bombing was easier to arrange since

[591] S. Orović, *op. cit.*, p. 526.

British Commodore (rank of Brigadier) Gay Carter, an advisor on aviation matters in the Anglo-American military mission to the Supreme Command, was stationed on Vis.[592]

From regular reports and well-maintained maps, informed about the development of the situation in Serbia, the Supreme Commander, following Arso's proposal, warned Koča on July 25 of the need for an agreed operational plan: "You certainly had to orient towards Kopaonik, not towards Bulgaria," adding that the Supreme Command now, "because of the evacuation of Kopaonik," must suspend the movement of the 2nd Proletarian Division to that area, "as it could fall into a difficult position"; he confirmed the obligation for the Operational Group of Divisions to break through "to the agreed terrain on the left side of the Ibar" and suggested that the units of the Main Staff of Serbia, through Podujevo or Kuršumlija, "make a rapid manoeuvre towards Kopaonik and connect with the units that will, in the meantime, push westward onto the Ibar."[593] On the same day, he reprimanded Peko: "In Serbia, Koča is in an extremely difficult situation. He is retreating towards the Bulgarian border. His three divisions are surrounded on the Lebane-Medveđa sector. I have given an order to try to break through towards Kopaonik. Your hesitation has greatly contributed to this situation. It is dangerous to send the 2nd Division to that Kopaonik sector until the situation becomes clearer. Replace the Andrijevica sector with your Montenegrin units, and with the designated three divisions, immediately head to the specified terrain, as this will ease Koča's position and prevent the enemy from shifting the main battlefront from Serbia to Montenegro and the Sandžak, which he will certainly do if he defeats Koča."[594]

The next day, Mitar replied (since Peko was in position) that, according to the order from Vis, on July 19, they had already concentrated the 2nd, 5th and 17th Divisions for the advance into Serbia, but the Germans, with 4,000 troops, soon reinforced by another twice as many, motorized and heavily supported from the air, broke through via Andrijevica. Thus, the enemy's breakthrough "prevented the divisions from moving in the designated direction and forced us into battle." Citing the impressive results of the seven-day decisive fighting, he concluded: "We will immediately act upon your last order."[595]

Based on Mitar's and other reports, the SH sent Koča a rather optimistic picture of the unfolding events at the western gates of Serbia, but it would still be days before they had any direct impact on the dramatic situation he was facing. Kosta had begun advancing with three divisions to force a crossing of the Drina, but the Germans once again imposed combat. It was encouraging that "there were some signs the Germans might withdraw from Dalmatia" — but that was a long way from Toplica. Peko had

[592] He died on July 17, 1944, during an air landing near Topusko.

[593] AVII, file 60/C, folder 1.

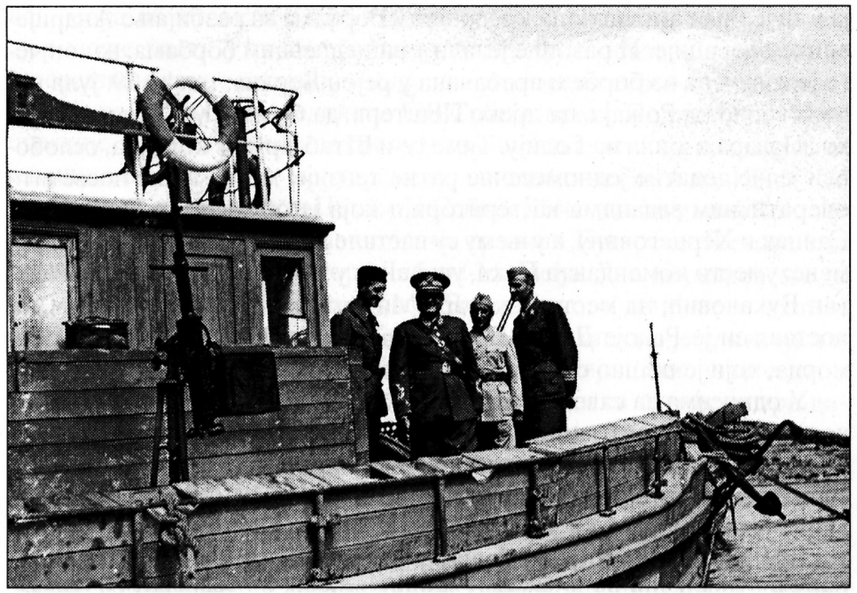
[594] *Ibid.*; J. Broz, *Collected Works,* Vol. 21, p. 240.

[595] AVII, file 394, reg. no. 36-74/2. This was the last report from M. Bakić from the front — on July 27, he was called to come immediately to Vis. He arrived the next day, by plane via Bari, and took up the position of head of the Cabinet of the President of the NKOJ.

crushed Operation "Draufganger," which involved 11,000 troops, and the 1st Proletarian Division was "operating successfully around Pljevlja," while both Pljevlja and Prijepolje were "heavily bombarded." That was indeed encouraging, but around Koča's position, Operation *Keraus* was raging, with 40,000 troops — and there was no help in sight, aside from advice coming from Vis. He was informed, as soon as the next day, that "Peko had moved in a certain direction," which was the most important, yet the only inaccurate, piece of information: the Operational Group of divisions was still engaged in the final battles of the Andrijevica operation. And they would defeat it — but only after several days of fighting, after which they were pulled from battle and transferred to the Berane region. It would only be on 29 July that they would head north from Rožaje, across Pešter, to break through toward Golija between Sjenica and Novi Pazar. This allowed the 2nd Corps Headquarters — relieved of an additional month-long war-related strain — to focus more on operational tasks across a territory that included Montenegro, the Sandžak and Herzegovina. Significant personnel changes also took place: in place of Commander Peko, who was sent to Serbia, Radovan Vukanović was appointed; as commissar, Radoje Dakić Brko replaced Mitar Bakić, who had been transferred to Vis; and General Rade Hamović replaced Chief of Staff Rudolf Primorac, who had departed with Koča.

In relations with the Allies, something was happening every day — not just in the realm of "high politics." The British military medical corps had its own exceedingly complicated administrative procedure for approving medical supplies, which was only reluctantly simplified under pressure from the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters. The Anglo-American military authorities showed no willingness to meet the request of Colonel Karel Levičnik, Head of the Artillery Department of the SH, to send artillery experts from various military camps in the Mediterranean to Vis. General Ranković, while visiting command centres, units and facilities linked to the NOVJ Base in Italy, reported to the SH that he had not found suitable personnel in the large military camp at Gravina to replenish new units — nor in the camps on Sardinia. He also raised, quite sharply, the issue of Allied collection and registration of Yugoslavs in Rome and elsewhere. A whole host of similar, seemingly minor issues were being resolved directly by the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters in talks with Allied generals from the missions, since those generals refused to deal with others — even officially authorized ones — in order to maintain protocol.

From Vis, Tito informed Ranković on July 28 that he would pass through Bari on his way to a meeting with General Wilson in Caserta, arriving around August 1. The next day, however, he postponed the visit to August 3 — but even then he did not depart, as the British were aligning the meeting date with the arrival of Prime Minister Churchill in Italy. Thus, Marshal Tito would travel directly to Caserta on August 6. On the list of delegates, he would name General S. Žujović as his deputy, instead of the previously announced Ranković. As part of preparations for that meeting, on July 29, Arso requested data from all operational NOVJ headquarters on the number of



With Marshal Tito and Admiral Josip Černi (between them) during a visit to the crew of the NB-3 "Jadran" ship in the Bay of Vis.

rescued Allied airmen.[596] He received immediate responses: from corps headquarters — 119 from the 2nd, 10 from the 3rd and 118 from the 5th; from main headquarters — 380 to 390 from Croatia, 90 from Slovenia and so on. That number would grow to more than 2,000 across the entire front by Victory Day.

The issue of caring for the wounded remained a constant priority on the agenda of the SH. Now, in preparation for the Tito-Wilson meeting, the Chief of Staff was examining it in detail with General G. Nikoliš, seeking data from both the head of the Medical Mission in Italy, Lieutenant Colonel Dr. Nikola Nikolić, and the member of the Military Mission in Moscow, Colonel Dr. Đuro Mešterović. The goal at General Wilson's headquarters — at the highest level — was to secure agreements regarding the Partisan Army's needs for evacuation and treatment of the wounded in Allied hospitals, the supply of medical materials and the care of refugees. For this, firm numbers with strong supporting arguments were required. At the same time, the Chief of Staff requested: from General J. Černi — elements for developing a SH strategy to demand naval vessels from the Yugoslav Royal Navy; from artillery officers, Colonels K. Levičnik and B. Obradović — proposals for forming and staffing artillery units and training personnel; from the Military Mission of General V. Velebit — a formal request for the return of Yugoslav citizens, especially those from Istria and Slovenia, into Partisan units, including precise camp locations and the number of locals in them; and from Colonels Ulepič, Lazarević and Pirc — data on the needs and requests of the

[596] AVII, file 2125, reg. no. 1-44/10.

air force. All of this was carefully gathered and expertly analysed within the SH, calmly and without haste, and then narrowed down to only the most essential and urgent matters. Among the questions concerning relations with the Allies, the document also included some "non-military problems" — for example, the care of children who, like the wounded, the sick, medical personnel, doctors and elderly Jews, were sent to Italy without the approval of the SH. In contrast, for everyone else there were strict criteria: for the wounded, immobility; for the sick, a valid diagnosis. The children — mostly war orphans — were kept in harsh conditions, where many died en masse. Those over the age of ten were transferred to Africa and exposed to harmful political influence. In an effort to protect them, Major Mato Jakšić, a member of Velebit's mission responsible for refugee accommodation, pleaded with Arso not to send children under the age of three, or those "suffering from lung disease," out of the country to camps. A note of optimism in addressing medical issues came with a radiogram from General Terzić, reporting that the following had arrived in Bari from Russia: 13 surgeons, 3 brigade doctors and 15 nurses, bringing complete instruments and equipment to form 13 surgical teams.[597]

For four days, Vis had no communication with the Main Staff of Serbia — likely because it was on the move with the bulk of its forces, four divisions, engaged in constant battle and heading toward Gnjilane, and also because its radio telegraphists were inexperienced. According to Koča, they were so unreliable — particularly in the divisions — that they "called into question the effectiveness of operational command." While on the move toward Kukavica, the General Staff was informed by the SH, on August 1 via the OZNA Serbia radio station that Peko had reached Koštam Field near Novi Pazar and that he was "heading straight for the Ibar, toward Kopaonik. The 2nd Proletarian Division will cross between Raška and Kosovska Mitrovica. Send a larger unit to meet them."[598] To Peko, with whom the SH had stable contact, it was reported that Koča was "fighting his way back toward Toplica," and that "some German concentration" was observed around Priština.[599]

At the same time as the launch of an offensive operation against the 1st and 2nd Partisan Corps in Montenegro, the commander of the 5th SS Mountain Corps — with the Prinz Eugen and Handžar divisions and supported by quisling units — imposed heavy fighting on the 3rd and 12th Partisan Corps in eastern Bosnia. The goal was to push them as far west of the middle Drina as possible, thereby preventing them from breaking through into Serbia. In connection with this, the SH informed Kosta that "continuous frontal combat should be avoided," especially when dealing with "troops assigned special missions" (i.e., a breakthrough into Serbia).

On the second-to-last day of July, General Lekić addressed the SH: "We beg you, if at all possible, help us with food. For more than three months our fighters haven't eaten bread. Their only food is meat and broth. The fighters are extremely exhaust-

[597] *Ibid.,* file 57/4, reg. no. 4-21/1.

[598] *Ibid.,* file 60/C, folder 1.

[599] This was the 1st Mountain Division, transferred from Greece to participate in the "Ribecal" (Durmitor) operation.

ed."[600] Knowing Lekić as an excellent commander and a dignified man, Arso believed the situation — caused by hunger and exhaustion — was even worse than he described. The next day, through an exchange of radiograms, it was confirmed that food would be airdropped to him in the village of Jelaške, on the right bank of the Krivaja River.

In Toplica and Jablanica, in the valley of the Lim, on the approaches to the Drina, and elsewhere, the NOVJ units faced tactical and operational surprises. The enemy's units were identified with significant delay, the enemy's plans were discovered slowly, and data from the Supreme Command arrived irregularly, so the responses were also slow. All of this indicated that the intelligence service was still unorganized and inefficient, thus being, as a primary component of command, unreliable. Because of this, it could not provide enough data for the "War Report of the Supreme Command of the NOVJ and POJ," which was compiled daily on Vis based on data received from operational headquarters, broadcasted via *Tanjug,* and then, two to three days later, by *Slobodna Jugoslavija* and subsequently picked up by the Allied agencies. In the sending of operational reports, the Slovenian Supreme Command was particularly disorganized, which, during these days (from July 28 to August 3), had remained silent. Meanwhile, the Supreme Command, ahead of the upcoming meeting in Caserta (where it was believed discussions on Istria, the Slovenian coast and Trieste would take place), was keen to know what was happening in this part of the front, so it could use it as an additional argument in its discussions with Wilson. Therefore, the Chief of Staff ordered his colleague, Colonel V. Klišanić, a General Staff officer with extensive experience, to draft a concept of instructions for the operational headquarters of the NOVJ regarding the collection, analysis and use of, as well as the delivery of, enemy data. The Chief of Staff would review it and then submit the final proposal for the Supreme Commander's signature. Everyone did their part, and the Instructions were delivered to all main headquarters and corps headquarters on August 1. These instructions comprehensively and precisely outlined the responsibilities of all levels of headquarters and commands and how their execution would improve the intelligence service as an element of commanding the units, which Arso had insisted on with commanders ever since Plevlja, Bugojno and Kupres.

At dawn, on St. Elijah's day, the Chief of Staff received Peko's deciphered question, posed from the southern approaches to Novi Pazar: "What is the situation on Kopaonik, in Toplica and Jablanica?" Then the explanation: "If the enemy has withdrawn its main forces and if the Chetniks have stayed on Kopaonik, we believe that with all three divisions we should go there, clear Kopaonik, help restore the free territory, reinforce the units, provide personnel for Koča's units, and then move with three divisions across the Ibar railway, between Raška and Kraljevo, into western Serbia. All of this will take 20 days. Reply urgently, as on the evening of the 3rd, I will strike the railway and destroy it."[601]

On the same day, he was given approval via radiogram to move all three divisions

[600] AVII, file 589/B, reg. no. 8-3/10, Radio telegram No. 13.

[601] For more details: Note 12 in Vol. 22 of the J. Broz's *Collected Works,* p. 340.

to the Kopaonik sector, but they could not stay there for more than 12 to 14 days, as staying any longer would "ruin Koča's operation. For us, western Serbia is now the most important. Try to fill all your units."[602] On August 2, at 11:00 p.m., Peko signed the order for the crossing of the Ibar, the destruction of communications between the section of the crossing from Kosovska Mitrovica to Raška, and for the advance of all three divisions towards Kopaonik — for the purpose of destroying the Chetnik group and establishing combat contact with Koča's units. Three days earlier, he had requested the Supreme Command to urge the Allies to definitely bomb this communication during August 3 and 4 "along the stretch from Raška to Kraljevo," including the two cities and the communication between Kosovska Mitrovica and Priština, also including both cities.

Informed (via decrypted radiograms) of the time and direction of General Dapčević's divisions' advance, German General Felber met them with over 20,000 soldiers, whose task was to decisively prevent their crossing of the Ibar, break them on the left bank and push them back towards Montenegro. For this purpose, he moved stronger parts of the 1st Mountain and 7th SS divisions into the Ibar valley. However, acting decisively and skilfully, the Operational Group, during the night of August 3-4, cut through the German defence along the Ibar river in multiple locations between Kosovska Mitrovica and Raška, continuing the next day by destroying the surrounded strongpoints, as well as damaging the railway, roads and fortified structures. By evening, leaving part of its forces facing the enemy, the Operational Group continued its advance towards the Kopaonik foothills, where the Bulgarian 27th Division and the Chetnik 4th Assault Corps, formally led by Chetnik commanders but essentially commanded by German Major Weiel, awaited them. The group was referred to as a combat group in German plans. In this regard, Peko was warned from Vis to be cautious due to the movement of strong forces of Chetniks and Bulgarians towards Kopaonik, and Koča was instructed: "Orient all forces to help Peko defeat the enemy on Kopaonik."[603] Koča replied the same day (August 5) with the only answer he could give: "Due to the ongoing offensive here, we cannot send units to meet Peko. The army is exhausted from continuous fighting and poor nutrition. There are many deserters in almost all units. Without a few days of rest, we cannot properly organize." For his units, he requested military supplies and suggested that the bombing of Priština, Kuršumlija, Podujevo and five to six other garrisons, as well as communications between them, would help "Peko's group."

Thus, by the inevitable course of war, the Operational Group of Divisions, understrength and exhausted, with around 7,000 soldiers deprived of all advantages over the enemy except for combat morale, engaged around 10,000 Chetniks from the 4th Assault Corps and part of the Rasina-Toplica group. By transferring the Chetnik corps to the Kopaonik area, General H.G. Felber objectively relieved the pressure on the Serbian Supreme Command units, as they had been fighting against them up until then.

[602] AVII, file 60/C, folder 1.

[603] *Ibid.*

However, he was convinced that these well-armed and ideologically poisoned forces were strong enough to stop and prevent a deeper advance by the Operational Group until the troops for their destruction were gathered. In the meantime, the Operational Group, in three days of fighting (August 6-8), skilfully and decisively applying both frontal and partisan forms of combat, completely took control of Kopaonik, and utterly disorganized the 4th Assault Corps, the backbone of the Chetnik movement in Serbia, inflicting such heavy losses on them that they would never recover to form a serious operational force again. This victory on Kopaonik created the conditions for the liberation of the Župa, Rasina, and the expansive territory between the Western Morava, the middle flow of the Ibar and Toplica.

The successful outcome on Kopaonik provided a convincing enough reason for the Supreme Command to place the 12th Corps, temporarily reinforced by the 6th Dalmatian Proletarian, under its command and order its commander, General D. Lekić, to urgently move "in a designated direction" — the breakthrough across the Drina and into western Serbia. These three divisions (16th and 36th Vojvodina and 6th Dalmatian) had defeated enemy forces in the Prača-Renovica area and were preparing to continue their advance towards Ustikolina after receiving promised food and ammunition drops by airplane.

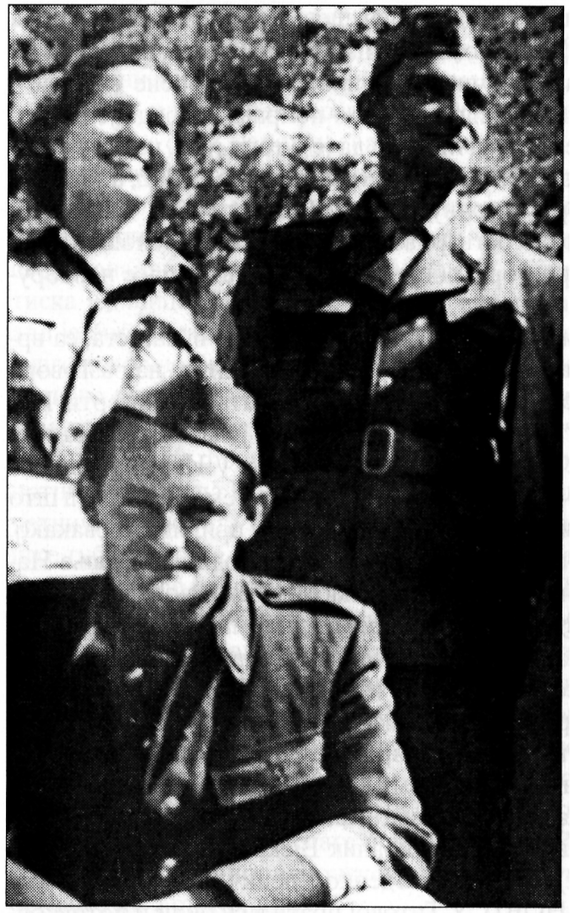
At the time when "Peko's group" was destroying the Ibar railway, an alarming report arrived for Arso from Moscow: General Terzić reported that, in recent days, "24 airplanes with supplies had been sent to Yugoslavia daily, but they had returned to the base (Kalinkovka) without delivering the materials due to bad weather." Concerning the weather over the eastern part of the battlefield, the Chief of Staff could do nothing but insist that the corps headquarters send, twice a day, weather data to General Branko Poljanac via radiogram: "weather, visibility, cloud height and wind direction," aware that "material dropping depends on it." Meteorological training had been organized in Italy and Russia.[604] Arso also had to act quickly and decisively in response to another of Terzić's radiograms, which stated that "there are seven points for material drops in Serbia, but none of them has provided correct coordinates and agreed-upon signals." Moscow requested, and Vis ordered, that this be corrected. Then, on August 7, the Chief of Staff was informed from Moscow that, during July, 20,342 tons of material had been delivered from bases in Kalinkovka and Bari to the NOP in Serbia, and 58,332 tons to the "border areas," Montenegro, eastern Bosnia and the Sandžak, which supported the implementation of the Supreme Command's plan to shift the focus of operations to the territory of Serbia, as well as to equip a mass of unarmed fighters.[605]

Filled with optimism, the NOP Supreme Command delegation, with the Supreme Commander Marshal Tito at the head, left on August 6 for talks with General H.M. Wilson, at his headquarters in Caserta. The invitation to Marshal Tito was delivered

[604] Closer monitoring of the meteorological situation gained special significance in connection with the beginning of the NOP's offensive operations in Serbia.

[605] At the request of the Chief of the General Staff, information was obtained that there were 3,000 unarmed in the 7th and 9th (Slovenian) and 10th (Zagreb) Corps, and even 7,000 in the IV Operational Zone (Dalmatia).

by Brigadier Maclean on July 31, marking the third attempt to bring the NOP leader to an agreement in Italy, this time with a greater chance of success — not because of the saying "no third without luck," but because a meeting with Churchill had also been set. This opportunity was certainly one to be used in the context of the struggle for international recognition of the National Committee, and it also pleased the partisan leader's vanity, as this was his first international contact and diplomatic mission. In the delegation, along with Marshal Tito, were the Chief of Staff and member of the Supreme Command, General-Lieutenant Arso R. Jovanović and Sreten Žujović-Crni (represented as the deputy Supreme Commander), Assistant Chief of Staff General-Major Ivan Rukavina (NOP liaison officer at the Allied Supreme Command for the Mediterranean), heads of departments: Artillery Colonel Karel Levičnik, Sanitary General-Major Dr. Gojko Nikoliš, Intelligence Colonel Vjekoslav Klišanić (Assistant Chief of Staff) and Colonel Zdenko Ulepić (Assistant Chief of Air Force of NOP). Tito's entourage also included Lieutenant Colonel Jeftimije Jefto Šašić, head of the Counter-intelligence Section of the OZNA Department, official translator Olga Ninčić Humo, reserve lieutenant of the Red Army Žarko Broz, and about twenty officers from the Cavalry Squadron for personal security. A stenographer, necessary for such occasions, either wasn't found or was forgotten due to lack of experience, so the members of Tito's delegation, unlike the interlocutors, "managed in a partisan way" — some taking notes as best as they could, while others relied on memory (which soon proved to be unreliable).



With Olga Humo and I. Rukavina before the flight from Vis to Caserta (Italy).

General Wilson sent a personal plane for Marshal Tito and the delegation, which transferred them from Plisko field to the Capodichino airport near Caserta. At the airport, the delegation was greeted by an honour guard, and, as the host representative, the Chief of Staff, General-lieutenant James A.H. Gammell. In the Hunting Lodge near Caserta, they were welcomed by the host — General H.M. Wilson.[606]

In a preliminary conversation with Wilson, only Tito, Jovanović and Žujović participated, but no documents of this discussion have been preserved. Later the same afternoon, the first conference of both delegations took place, the work of which, under the supervision of the Allied side, was recorded in a transcript and summary, the authenticity of which is confirmed by Tito's signatures. Based on these documents and the memoirs of some participants, it is possible to reconstruct these and subsequent events at the former royal castle.

After short protocol speeches, which were a routine formality between the two supreme commanders, the Chiefs of Staff took the floor. According to British documents, the following issues were discussed: "1. Cooperation of the BAF in operations conducted by NOP; 2. Operations on the eastern Adriatic coast; 3. Possibility of establishing a bridgehead on the Yugoslav coast for receiving shipments of war material by sea; 4. Further supply of NOP; 5. Types of equipment."[607] It was understood that these were general, ad hoc formulated issues, and each side could "broaden" the discussion to include problems that were particularly relevant to them. Incidentally, V. Velebit, in his *Memoirs,* writes that "the agenda for the planned meeting was not formally set, which allowed for flexibility in conducting the talks and the inclusion of new topics, should they be deemed useful to discuss." In the same place, General Velebit, undoubtedly well-informed, mentions that "there was not enough time to properly prepare for the military talks with the Allied commanders, so Tito decided to bring his closest advisors, who were familiar with the issues from their operational experience."[608]

General Jovanović, as usual, took out a notebook from his officer's bag, filled with data and neatly drawn and organized maps, with names and numbers written on the margins. He also presented documents with analyses, conclusions and proposals. He spoke the language of facts, opening several issues related to mutual cooperation, which seemingly confused General Wilson. After his Chief of Staff, General Gammell, presented what he had prepared, albeit with sparse data and in a disjointed manner, Wilson suggested to Marshal Tito that the official part of the talks be postponed "for a few days" while his associates provided answers to the questions raised in, as he said, "the excellent presentation by General Jovanović." As Arso later said to A. Ranković in Vis that evening, he had an unmistakable impression "that General Wilson, with that pause, wanted to gain time for some political objective." He had, in fact, returned to Vis with Colonel Street and courier officer Lieutenant Radonja Dodig on a special British aircraft, where urgent tasks awaited him, including informing the Supreme

[606] V. Velebit, *op. cit.*, p. 271.

[607] *Collection Tito-Churchill, Strictly Secret,* p. 259.

[608] V. Velebit, *op. cit.*, p. 268.

Commander of the NOP in Italy, based on the data collected and expert staff analyses in Vis, "about the situation with Peko and Lekić," but also about Istria, the Slovenian Littoral and the vast "Ljubljana Gate," a region Tito was especially interested in for the upcoming negotiations, trying to figure out whether it would be a route for the Anglo-American advance towards Vienna.

The next day, the Supreme Commander of NOB, with Maclean and part of his entourage (I. Rukavina, J. Šašić, O. Humo), and armed with the latest data from the northwest front, visited General Harold Alexander, commander of the 15th Army Group, at his headquarters by Lake Bolzano. In an unofficial conversation with Marshal Tito, the host said that no Allied landings were planned on Yugoslav territory, and that if Allied troops advanced towards Vienna, they would do so through Yugoslav territory, via Istria, the Slovenian Littoral and western Slovenia — communications and in cooperation with NOP units. According to the conversation notes on this rather sporadic topic in this context, the British officer did not promise everything firmly, but Tito understood it this way and hastened to inform Ranković and Kardelj, knowing that the latter would be especially pleased with this information.

On August 8, Tito visited the landmarks of Rome (St. Peter's Basilica, the Colosseum, etc.), and the next day, in Caserta, he met with the highest political representatives of the United Kingdom and the United States at the Supreme Command of Allied Forces in the Mediterranean. He was also informed of the views of Air Vice-Marshal Sir John Slessor on the training of aircrew members of the 1st and 2nd NOP squadrons in the BAF. In the evening, he received a note from the Vis post, delivered by a "special courier in an airplane," regarding the commander of the Chetnik forces in Stari Ras (the Sandžak), Major Vojislav Lukčević, who, on behalf of several high-ranking Chetnik officers, proposed to the NOP staff a cessation of hostilities and the conclusion of a ceasefire. The proposal was transmitted to the Supreme Command by radio on August 8 and was presented to Marshal Tito the next day, not coincidentally just before the continuation of talks with General Wilson. The essence of the proposal, formulated in a letter sent to three carefully chosen addresses, was as follows: V. Lukčević, along with four prominent Chetnik officers (Petar Baćović, Pavle Novaković, Zaharij Ostojić and Veljko Krivošić), representing the self-proclaimed "Independent National Resistance Command," sent three letters via Brigadier F. Maclean requesting that one be delivered to Marshal Tito, another to General Wilson and the third to King Petar II. The essence of the proposal was that a ceasefire be arranged between NOP units and Chetniks in the areas of Herzegovina, the Sandžak and eastern Bosnia, and that Chetniks from that area, as the "Independent National Resistance Group," join the fight against the occupiers in close cooperation with the Supreme Command of Allied Forces for the Mediterranean. Tito only received a note about these proposals, likely sent from Lukčević and his associates to the 1st Proletarian Corps and the 37th Division headquarters in the Sandžak, and he would receive the letter addressed to him later. Nevertheless, Tito replied to his associates, Ranković and Kardelj, from Caserta, that "the Lukčević issue should be postponed, because, as it seems to me, they

are trying to buy time. When I return, we will resolve this issue definitively."[609] This was a calculated pressure on the main players of the inter-Allied agreements at the top; Lukčević, with his comrades, was trying to salvage what could still be salvaged, and certainly his own skin.[610]

On the same day, the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters joined the Supreme Commander in the official part of the discussions with General Wilson, arriving by airplane from Vis. Nine topics were discussed, most of them formulated based on General Jovanović's presentation on August 6, and conclusions were adopted for each issue. Many important matters were resolved or "touched upon," including those related to material-technical aid for the NOP delivered by air and sea; cooperation with Allied air forces at tactical and operational levels; the training of NOP squadrons with Allied assistance; medical care for a portion of wounded and sick partisans (a report indicated that there were still 3,500 heavy casualties in the country); strengthening the material-technical base of the NOP in Italy; the issue of the "recommand" of the Yugoslav Royal Navy from the Allied Mediterranean Fleet to the NOP Navy; mutual reporting on the stationing, regrouping and movement of German forces, and on the stocks and distribution of Allied supply depots.

From the orderly records of the initial (August 6) and final (August 10) meeting of the delegations, whose original is kept in the National Archive in London, we will highlight only the details that are particularly significant from the perspective of the NOP and its cooperation with the Allies.[611]

When Marshal Tito asked "what are the prospects for increasing the volume of material sent to his forces via air," Air Vice Marshal Sir J. Slessor replied that such deliveries — due to the limitation of one hundred Allied transport aircraft available for this purpose — "cannot be increased beyond the current level." General-Lieutenant J.G.W. Clarke, head of the Administrative Office of the Supreme Command, added that "in July, approximately 2,000 tons of material were delivered to Yugoslavia by air," and that material from Allied aid intended for anti-fascist movements in the Mediterranean basin was being distributed by a "key": two-thirds for NOP and one-third for Greece, Albania and Italian partisans. Marshal Tito replied that, given these circumstances, he was not requesting an increase in the number of aircraft, but that "the type of war his forces are currently engaged in requires that specific materials be

[609] AJ, Fund CC of the CPY, No. 1944/251.

[610] The fate of the signatories of that letter, by coincidence, was almost the same and equally tragic: Lukačević, having separated from General D. Mihailović, came to Bileća for negotiations with the English, who, in December 1944, handed him over to the Headquarters of the 29th Herzegovinian Division, where he was sentenced to death by firing squad by the Higher Military Court in Belgrade in August 1945 as a war criminal. Baćović, at the end of April 1945, separated from D. Mihailović, subordinated the remnants of his units to Lieutenant Colonel P. Đurišić, and was liquidated by the Ustaše in Lijevče field. Ostojić separated from D. Mihailović in March 1945 and tried to break through with the remnants of Chetnik forces from Bosnia to British troops, but in May 1945, with P. Đurišić, he was disarmed by the Ustaše and liquidated in the Jasenovac camp, a fate shared by P. Novaković.

[611] For further details: *Collection Tito-Churchill, Strictly Secret,* pp. 258-260; V. Velebit, *op. cit.*, pp. 271-272.

delivered to the right places and at the right time." For this reason, he requested that his representative be appointed to the 334th Wing Headquarters "to assist with the dispatch of material from the Allied distribution depot in Italy." Generals Jovanović and Žujović, with their presentations, helped to appoint a liaison officer at the 334th Wing, which was confirmed by Brigadier Maclean. General Wilson adopted this as one of the conclusions, which General Jovanović welcomed, emphasizing that "earlier plans of Marshal Tito were significantly hindered because it was unknown what quantities of material could be sent to our forces." He also inquired about "the situation with the existing material stocks," to which General Wilson responded that "there are huge quantities of material in Italy waiting for transport to Yugoslavia."

With Air Marshal Slessor, it was agreed that priority would be given to the training and completion of the first two fighter squadrons of NOP and 150 paratroopers, who would be used "in small groups for sabotage operations."

The discussion about equipping the 1st Tank Brigade with 51 heavy and 132 light tanks was the "toughest." As General Jovanović said, this number of tanks belonged to a British brigade by formation, but, for some invented reason, the NOP brigade was being given far fewer. The debate was concluded by General Wilson: an armoured regiment with 52 tanks, all light, and one division of 20 armoured vehicles — that was the most that could be allocated from the Mediterranean front for the NOP, and anything beyond that was under the authority of London. This issue would be raised later that day in a letter to General Velebit, who was occupied with following Dr. Šubasić around the Mediterranean, with the argument that the planned 52 light tanks were "only a quarter of the number needed for one brigade." Three days later, Tito would raise the same issue in a conversation with Churchill, but he too stuck to Wilson's clearly agreed upon solution.

The longest discussion was about "the care of Yugoslav wounded." General Clarke stated that, at that moment, about 6,500 wounded were being treated in Italy, and by mid-August, the number of beds for Yugoslavs would be 7,500, with one in every five being for convalescents. In response, General Nikoliš, referring to the assessments of General A. Jovanović "about planned large operations," added that "approximately 10,000 more serious casualties would be ready for evacuation in the next five months." Marshal Tito said that up until then, the evacuation of wounded had been carried out only at night, and he proposed that it be done during the day as well, accompanied by fighters. In response, Air Vice Marshal Elliot, the commander of the BAF, said that this could only be organized "at the expense of normal combat fighter operations." His colleague, Air Force representative for the Mediterranean, Major General Sir J. Slessor, in response to General Jovanović's comment that exceptional circumstances should be foreseen for daytime evacuation of the wounded, said "efforts would be made to maintain the current level of evacuation," and that he was ready to "evacuate the wounded during the day, in exceptional circumstances, with fighter protection." This meant that BA would carry out "regular" evacuations at night, and the Mediterranean Air Force would do so during the day "in exceptional circumstances," which was particularly important because autumn was approaching, with meteorological conditions

that, as Air Vice Marshal Elliot emphasized, would "make flying difficult during the day." It was concluded that these would be exceptions, for example, when there were large concentrations of serious casualties after major battles. General Clarke, in the proposed conclusion, stated that 7,000 "was the maximum number of wounded who could be accommodated in Italy at the same time," to which General Nikoliš, based on operational sector analyses, remarked that this number must be increased, referring to earlier promises made to the Chief of Staff — that by the end of August, "11,400 beds would be available for the NOP." General Wilson insisted that the NOP send "the greatest possible number of Yugoslav medical personnel to Italy" and that the relevant Allied services, in agreement with the Yugoslav representative, select places for the permanent accommodation of seriously wounded soldiers and treatment of those suffering from tuberculosis. His Operational Department would "send larger quantities of medical supplies to Yugoslavia in the next six months." At Arso's insistence, it was firmly stated as a conclusion that "at least a tenth of each shipment should be medical supplies."

The issue of the status and fate of tens of thousands of former Italian soldiers and prisoners of war of Yugoslav origin, who persistently expressed their desire to return to Yugoslavia and join the NOB, was also brought up. Some Allied circles had been preventing them. General Jovanović presented the information that there were between 15,000 and 30,000 such people on Sardinia, "doing work for the Allies," to which "Wilson's side" responded that there were only about 5,000 of them, engaged "under American command on a very important task." A similar reaction was given to General Jovanović's claim that there were at least 5,000 of them in Sicily, from where they were, against their will, being transferred to France. These figures were accurate, but the Allies denied them because it suited them to keep these people working on building facilities for their front needs, and likely some political games were involved. After all, several overseas brigades of the NOP were voluntarily recruited from this group of people.

The issue of "incorporating the Royal Navy ships into the operational community with the naval forces of the NOP" was raised, with the proposal that "they all be placed under the operational control of the supreme commander of the Mediterranean," but this, it is true, was a very sensitive and complex issue, and at this meeting, as well as in all subsequent agreements (literally until the end of the war), it was used for political leverage and for the NOP's concessions to the king.

In the discussion about supplying NOP units with artillery, it was mentioned that "84 75mm mountain guns are waiting for delivery to Yugoslavia in the city of Monopoli," and that "the only difficulty in this matter is the transportation issue." Brigadier F. Maclean noted that these were intended for the 1st and 2nd Corps, and that "only the technical maintenance of these artillery pieces, using air transport, would require 30 flights per month."

The agreement in Caserta was conducted in a question-answer, analysis-synthesis, proposal of solution variants-decision format, with the relevant authorities assigned to execute the decisions, and the dominant engagement of staff services. Devoted to

this way of working in high headquarters, Arso would confide to Ranković how he regretted that some of his dear comrades and renowned commanders, but sharp critics of his alleged nitpicking, insistence on precision, and attention to detail in reporting and commanding, were not present at the meeting in the Hunting Lodge — "so they could see how modern headquarters operate."

In the afternoon of that day, Marshal Tito and General Jovanović, accompanied by Brigadier Maclean and his colleagues, visited the Allied target documentation centre on enemy and occupied territories and discussed with the Supreme Commander of Allied Air Forces in the Mediterranean, U.S. General Ira Clarence Eaker, one of the pioneers and legends of aviation, formerly the commander of the 15th Air Force of the U.S. Military. The idea of Brigadier F. Maclean about a joint comprehensive operation between aviation and the NOP in Yugoslavia was discussed in principle, and the next day, General Jovanović and the chief of staff of General Wilson and Eaker worked on it and presented it to the expert teams. Thus, the operation "Ratweek" was established, which would be carried out from September 1 to 7. At Eaker's invitation, the highest military representatives of the Allied Yugoslavia were guests of the Air Force Club, where they were introduced to high-ranking Allied commanders of air and naval forces in the Mediterranean.

In the evening, Marshal Tito and General Jovanović held a conversation with General William Donovan, the director of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the U.S. military intelligence service.[612] The proposal from the American leadership was accepted to establish an Independent U.S. Military Mission at the SH of the NOP and the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia, which, like the British and Soviet missions, would have groups of officers assigned to the operational headquarters of the NOP's military formations. General Donovan also made it clear that the Yugoslav Allied side was "expected to reciprocate in the near future" by sending a military mission of the NOP to Washington.[613]

After the stay in Caserta, Tito headed for talks with Churchill and Dr. Šubašić on August 11, while Arso moved to Bari to visit the NOP Base and some of its units and institutions, as well as several training centres in that part of Italy. He talked with the commander and commissar of the Base, General B. Poljanac and Colonel Velimir Jakić, visited five hospitals full of Yugoslav wounded, and also met a group of future pilots, tankers and artillerymen. As Dr. J. Smodlaka notes, he also visited his sick wife, Ksenija — Senka — who, with their two daughters, was waiting for a Soviet plane to Moscow.[614] He met in Monopoli with his sister Miluša, the commissioner for the treat-

[612] A participant in the First World War in Europe, awarded for bravery; between the two wars, a senior official in the U.S. intelligence services, in which capacity he visited Belgrade before the April War, where even more skilled individuals than him stole a briefcase with confidential material; an ardent anti-communist in both war and peace.

[613] Approval for the work of the Independent Military Mission of the USA was received from the General Staff of the NOP on August 13, and by the very next day, six officers arrived at Vis; the head of the Mission was Colonel Ellery A. Huntington, until then head of the OSS in the 5th American Army in the Mediterranean.

[614] They took off on the night of August 22-23; on the plane were Moša Pijade, the wife of sculptor

ment of wounded partisans in southern Italy, who had been sent there from the 5th Corps hospital. He did everything in great haste, as there were urgent matters at Vis.

The Chief of the NOP Supreme Command did not participate in the Churchill-Tito talks, held on August 12 and 13 in Naples, with Dr. Šubašić attending on the second day. Lasting exactly 75 minutes on both days, these talks were primarily informal and politically charged, but they also addressed specific military issues, as seen from the preserved stenograms and records verified by Tito.[615] The discussions included matters about Istria, military operations in Yugoslavia, British deliveries of war material to NOP units, the evacuation of wounded to Italy, etc. There was also talk about the possible prospect of a meeting between Marshal Tito and King Petar II, the conflict between the Chetniks and the NOP, and the NOP's relations with neighbouring countries: Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania. Tito shared his stance on some of these issues in a letter sent to Churchill immediately after their first meeting, and from Churchill's response (memorandum), delivered by General J. Gammell, he was informed "that should the Allied forces occupy northern Italy, Austria or Hungary, an Allied military administration will be introduced in the area that was under Italian control at the beginning of the war." From this document and the entire record of the discussions, it was clear that Churchill was keen on having Tito meet with King Petar; he pointed out the possibility of reconciliation "with some of the main followers of Mihailović, if Mihailović himself were to leave the country"; observed that "the fact that Mihailović is still fighting against the partisans suggests that, it seems, he possesses certain strength"; expressed concern that the weapons given by the English to the NOP could be used to wage civil war; insisted that the NOP leader publicly declare his intention "not only to not impose communism in the country but also not to use the armed force of his movement to influence the free will of the people regarding the future regime in the country." The very fact that Churchill emphasized in the memorandum to Tito that he "believed that insufficient recognition had been given to the strength and rights of the Serbian people" and that his interlocutor should call on all members of "the other side" to join the unified armed forces under the NOP flag indicates that the main attention was focused on the "Serbian issue."

Churchill was regularly informed about the increasingly frequent contacts between D. Mihailović and M. Nedić and their agreements to fight against the NOP under German patronage. It is difficult to say how it exactly happened, but on the first day of the Churchill-Tito talks in Naples (August 12), a meeting was held between Nedić and Mihailović in the village of Ražana near Kosjerić, and with the knowledge and approval of official representatives of the Third Reich, an agreement was made that

A. Augustinčić, a group of military and political leaders sent to "receive" the 1st Independent Brigade of the NOP in the Soviet Union. In that and other planes that took off that night, there were also 132 listeners headed for training at aviation military centres and seven seriously ill patients and disabled individuals. It was planned that subsequent flights would carry another 324 future aviators, already gathered in Gravin, but this, despite the best efforts of the already promoted General Stefan Sokolov, proved hopeless, and they had to board a ship in the port of Taranto, where 71 more, whom Colonels F. Pirc and B. Lazarević "extracted" from the RAF, joined them in Alexandria.

[615] *Collection Tito-Churchill, Strictly Secret,* p. 274; J. Broz, *Collected Works*, Vol. 22, pp. 43-49.

all of Nedić's armed formations would be placed under the command of General Mihailović. Nedić, in addition to securing money for the salaries of Chetnik officers, was supposed to negotiate with the Commander of the Southeast to supply the Chetniks in Serbia with the necessary weapons, ammunition and other supplies.[616]

Furthermore, on August 26, the head of the American military mission at the Supreme Chetnik Command, colonel of the intelligence service Robert McDowell, would land in Draža's headquarters in Praņane near Čačak, where he would stay until November 1. Among other things, he would attempt to persuade the German command to leave Serbia and hand over power to the Chetnik-Nedić coalition, while the Germans, on the other hand, were "pushing" their plans to expand (Nedić's) Serbia to Montenegro and eastern Bosnia. Thus, each side, in a very complex time before the historical outcome, had its plans to solve the truly layered "Serbian question." Churchill wanted the NOP, as a force of 350,000 soldiers, to be present between the southern wing of the Red Army and the western Allied front, but he also wanted to preserve "royalist Serbia" for his own interests, trying to push as many of the king's generals, former ministers, and political leaders from the other side into the government of Dr. Šubašić and the NOP institutions. In this context, General Đorđe Glišić, former royal military attaché in Paris, appeared as a candidate for the head of the Supreme Command of the Yugoslav Army in the Fatherland, instead of Draža, and General Borisav Ristić, who had joined the NOP in Srem, declaring that he had been "a victim of the Čvetković-Maček regime, which prematurely retired him, and his three sons are fighters of the NOP." He arrived at Vis in early August, already in his sixties. Arso did not find him to be an especially sensible officer, but he heard from Ranković that he had been in German captivity, from which he was released in 1942 due to illness, then quickly chose the NOP, and in 1944, following the example of his sons, joined the NOB, which simply had to be respected.[617]

The Battle for the Wounded under Durmitor

At that time, much of the confusion was unknown at Vis, and even if it had been, the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters did not have the time or authority to resolve it; for him, the most significant and urgent matter was the situation with the units commanded by Generals Peko Dapčević, Koča Popović, Kosta Nađ and Danilo Lekić. Upon returning to Vis, he found a telegram sent from Beli Potok on Kopaonik; Peko requested that the Supreme Command urge Koča to send "as many people as possible" for the reinforcement of units, adding: "Due to our short stay here, we will mobilize very few on our own." This was in response to Koča's telegram: "Peko cannot be reinforced until you get closer, but he can mobilize where he is." Aware of both Peko's needs and Koča's difficulties, the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, by

[616] The agreement was reported to Hitler on August 22, and he approved "only local cooperation in the field." (Note 102 in vol. 22 of *Collected Works* by J. Broz, p. 350).

[617] Later, Minister of Defence in Dr. Šubašić's government (delegated by the NKOJ).

authorization, warned the former: "Koča reports that he cannot send people until you get closer. Carry out mobilization in your sector." At the same time, General Lekić was reminded to move his 12th Corps and 6th Division across the Drina "to a place between Goražde and Foča," while "moving toward Višegrad would be difficult." The units were directed to cross the Drina at the designated place, but their attempt was thwarted by parts of the "Prinz Eugen" Division, which was constantly pursuing and overtaking them. Faced with this situation, General Danilo Lekić and Colonel Đoko Jovanić decided to execute the order by advancing along separate routes, but all their attempts to approach the Drina were blocked by numerically stronger enemy forces. Even the two "light units" (battalions) that the 1st Proletarian Division sent, by order of the Chief of Staff, could not help. There was no doubt that the German command (based on decrypted telegrams) had known in advance when and where each unit was heading and what their operational capabilities were, and had responded with countermeasures. Thus, after several unsuccessful attempts to cross the Drina from the confluence of the Sutjeska to the junction of the Piva and Tara rivers, Lekić decided to orient towards the Vučev plateau.[618]

On August 15, the SH would inform the Main Staff of Serbia that the enemy had launched a new "strong offensive in the Sandžak, Montenegro and eastern Bosnia," involving the German 1st Mountain Division — transferred from Greece for that mission. It took several days of hesitation to arrive at that assessment, due mainly to the (long-standing) weaknesses of the intelligence service. For such an inexcusable delay in evaluating the situation — and thus also in issuing the appropriate directives and tasks, particularly to the 2nd Corps Headquarters — the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters bore the greatest responsibility. Only on that day, when the new and large-scale German offensive operation was already raging across the central front, did he assess and report to the Main Staff of Serbia that this offensive "will further delay our planned operations." From this assessment — which, while fundamentally accurate, still failed to capture the full scope of the German undertaking "Rubezahl" (the Durmitor operation) — came the following message to Koča: "It would be a mistake for you and Peko to become entangled in major battles. That would weaken and disable you for rapid movements and strikes. A flexible tactic must be applied, covering broader operational areas. Peko's brigades need rest and reinforcement. You must do everything to make this happen. Maintain constant communication with him and coordinate your actions jointly.[619] Your decision to send two divisions (the 23rd and 25th) into eastern Serbia is correct. Establish contact with Tempo and the Kosmet region."[620]

In the "Ribecal" offensive operation, the Commander of the Southeast engaged eight battle groups from six German divisions, along with corresponding battalion and regiment-level units of the Wehrmacht, a Bulgarian division and two Chetnik

[618] Thus began a sort of nearly month-long Golgotha for the Vojvodina and Lika men on that, extremely unfavourable, part of the front.

[619] K. Popović and B. Nešković would meet with Peko on August 18 in the village of Mirnica and agree on cooperation; Peko was promised 1,400 fighters for reinforcement.

[620] AVII, file 60/C, folder 1.

corps. This, following the Toplica-Jablanica operation, was the second attempt to halt the advance of the strategic NOP units into Serbia. It began on August 12 with concentric attacks, with the goal of breaking up three NOP corps: the 1st Proletarian in the Sandžak, the 2nd Shock in Montenegro and Herzegovina, and the 3rd in eastern Bosnia, to prevent the shift of the weight of strategic operations, in this case, the main NOP forces, into Serbia. The operation would last eleven days and lead to dramatic situations, particularly regarding the evacuation of over a thousand heavy casualties.

On August 15, three radiograms were sent from Vis to the 2nd Corps Headquarters. The first instructed that its units receive the three divisions of General Lekić, who were arriving in Piva via Vučjevo, provide them with extended rest, food and supplies, and take over about one thousand severely wounded and sick, evacuating them to Italy or keeping them in their own hospitals. The second ordered that the 1st Proletarian Division — despite reports of strong German attacks from all sides — was not to be "drawn into heavy combat," but rather directed across the Lim River toward the 37th Division and instructed to "manoeuvre in the Zlatibor-Golija sector," while the units of General Vukanović would operate in the Sinjajevina-Durmitor-Golija sector. The third message instructed that all wounded from the three corps "be evacuated by air from Njegovuđa."[621]

According to the 2nd Corps Headquarters, no solution could be found for providing food to the 12th Corps units in the starving, offensive-stricken Piva area — nor even for their own units — so food had to be delivered by air. Aircraft remained the only hope in the increasingly dire situation for evacuating the severely wounded from all units affected by Operation Rubezahl. The situation was becoming critical, especially after the loss of the Njegovuđa airfield — all the worse since the enemy had managed to separate the 6th Lika Division from the two Vojvodina divisions and push it onto the desolate Zelengora, which had also lost radio contact with the SH. The wounded from four divisions under the direct command of the SH, as well as from 2nd Corps units, shared an equally uncertain fate. Radiograms from Vis insisted on the care of the severely wounded and the creation of conditions for General Lekić's units to be re-equipped and rested so they would be ready for an imminent and successful breakthrough into Serbia. At the same time, the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters sent Lekić a new cipher via parachute courier, after informing him: "All your orders have been decrypted by the enemy, and they fully know our intentions."[622] This conclusion stemmed from old suspicions and a recent report, confirmed by the fact that the Germans — elements of Prinz Eugen and occasionally the 118th Jager Division — were literally following both the Vojvodina and Lika units step by step, forcing them into constant fighting in semi-encirclement. It was believed that the situation might ease once the Vojvodina troops crossed to the right bank of the Piva River. However, an old hardship returned. In the first radiogram sent to the SH from that territory, Lekić reported that "the day before (15 August), seven fighters had died of

[621] The airport, however, was evacuated on August 17, following the swift and strong German advance from Mojkovac.

[622] AVII, file 28, reg. no. 2-1/11.

hunger, that more would die each coming day, and that the corps would be rendered ineffective if food wasn't provided, since the fighters hadn't eaten anything for three days."[623] The radio intelligence service in Belgrade immediately decrypted this radiogram — containing the most sensitive information about the corps' condition — and the SS troops attacked across the Piva to crush it while it was in such a weakened state, still burdened with around 600 severely wounded and sick. This was further proof that the enemy was decrypting all radiograms from the command network, confirmed by a newly received report from a National Liberation Movement collaborator with the codename "Tiro." Working within the institutions of the 2nd Armoured Army, he reported that the 4th Radio Intercept Command of the Wehrmacht in Belgrade — with a well-developed monitoring service — was successfully decrypting all ciphers used by Partisan headquarters and "reading" their radiograms. The agent's letter reached the SH through the NOP's intelligence service, and since it came from a trusted individual "embedded" in the right place, there was no doubt about the truth of his claims. This was the reason the SH accelerated the adoption of new, much more complex ciphers. On August 17, parachute couriers delivered the new ciphers to the headquarters of the three corps operating under Durmitor. That same day, an attempt was made to deliver the new cipher to the 3rd Corps Headquarters as well, but there was no agreed signal at the designated location, so the courier returned to Bari. He set out again on 22 August, but the aircraft — due to engine failure — crashed into the Adriatic. Two crew members died, while the other two and the parachute courier survived. The Chief of Staff then sent Colonel S. Kereković, Head of the Signals Department, to Bari, instructing him to intervene with General Poljanec to ensure the matter was "resolved once and for all."

Realizing that the 2nd Corps Headquarters — occupied with breaking up Operation Rubezahl — could not be expected to provide food, let alone weapons or ammunition, Lekić requested the following from the SH: 2,500 pairs of uniforms, 1,000 pairs of boots, 400 mines, 100,000 rounds of ammunition, 30 light machine guns, 20 light mortars and weapons lubricant. He was promised an airdrop of food in Donje Crkvice, along with a question asking whether he had received "three food planes" two nights earlier. Encouraged by the promise, he replied that "three planes did arrive that night, but dropped the cargo from such a high altitude that all the food was spilled," and "not even enough could be gathered to feed one battalion."[624] Airdrop supply was no better in Serbia. On August 16, General Terzić reported from Moscow that "Soviet aviators, who are making the utmost effort and using all their strength, flying under the worst conditions, are deeply discouraged when they have to return with cargo — all because of poor or nonexistent organization. There are no of our people at the supply drop points."[625]

On August 17, the 2nd Corps Headquarters was informed that "Lekić has 600 wounded," accompanied by an order to take urgent measures — "either evacuate them by air or place them in your hospitals. Lekić is unable to provide for them. He can bring them to Njegovuđa on the evening of the 18th. We can provide the aircraft. Respond urgently via the next communication."[626]

By the next communication — that day or the following wartime day — nothing more could be done for the wounded at Njegovuđa, nor could any encouraging news be sent to Vis, where it had been known for days that 50 severely wounded from the 1st and 3rd Divisions, 200 ill Italians and 150 nurses destined for patient care in Italy were also waiting for planes on that same landing field. The long-promised aircraft never arrived, while Arso was receiving hourly reports: Njegovuđa was critically endangered and no longer viable as a point for receiving the wounded; the 2nd Corps Headquarters not only couldn't take in Lekić's 600, but already had "on its hands" nearly 600 of its own "wounded for transport," severely ill patients and nurses en route to Italy; the Berane airfield was occupied; the Durmitor airfield had been evacuated; and around 20,000 non-combat civilians were retreating with the units from the occupied areas, fleeing from the crimes of the occupiers. Field hospitals were on the move, without reliable bases to shelter the wounded. Thus, by August 18, there was not a single functional airfield left for the evacuation of the wounded on the remaining free territory of Montenegro and Herzegovina. Following orders from the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, efforts were hurriedly made to prepare an auxiliary airfield near Donji Brezani, by Šavnik. The dramatic struggle to make it fit for the landing of transport planes — carried out entirely under heavy combat — would take far too long, hopelessly so for many of the most seriously wounded and ill. Even the crews of Soviet transport "Douglas" planes, despite the pilots' willingness to fly under the worst weather and terrain conditions, could not help — there was no longer any available airfield, and the wounded died as their comrades defended them with their own bodies.

On August 15, Tito returned to Vis from his first (ten-day) diplomatic mission, after a two-day break in the NOP Base in Bari, where, through personal contacts with the allied commanders, he solidified what had been agreed with Wilson, Alexander and Churchill. In Bari, he also received Colonel Veljko Stojić, before his departure to take up the position of head of the NOP Military Mission at the SH of the People's Army of Albania, giving him "basic instructions for work." Until then, the deputy to General V. Terzić in Moscow, he was provided with a strong Russian radio station to establish communication with Vis. Previously, when Ranković was in Italy, it had been agreed that a number of wounded partisans from Albania would be admitted to NOP hospitals for treatment.

Marshal Tito's successful mission in Italy concluded with a ceremonial welcome at Vis, and now the most important issues needed to be addressed. To begin, the Chief of Staff briefed him in the Operational Room on the latest battlefield situation, with a focus on the dramatic position of the units caught up in the Durmitor operation. From the analysis, the content of the telegram to the 2nd Shock Corps Staff followed, with

[623] Note 153 in Vol. 22 of the J. Broz's *Collected Works*, p. 355.

[624] General Lekić, under his command, had at least 20 battalions, in which death from hunger was a constant occurrence.

[625] Notes 18 and 271 in Vol. 22 of the J. Broz's *Collected Works*.

[626] AVII, file 60/C, folder 1.

an order that the enemy "should be outmanoeuvred by rapid movements and pushed to their rear. You must not leave Montenegro and the Sandžak. Help Lekić with the reception of the wounded. As soon as the opportunity presents itself, he should head towards the 1st Division (which had crossed over Ljubišnja Mountain behind the German-Bulgarian forces engaged in the offensive, moving into the area between Pljevlja and Rudo).[627] Of course, you must take care of his wounded." This was also conveyed to General Lekić, in the Piva area already threatened by the 7th SS Division, with a suggestion that "the most severely wounded should be taken somewhere in Golija," with the commitment: "We will send food; be sure to specify the dropping location every day."[628] Arso's request was respected: in every shipment, at least 10% of the materials were medical supplies.

General Vukanović prioritized the establishment of the airstrip near Donji Brezani, "removing" certain units from their positions, firmly promising that the airfield would be "operational" by August 22, so that planes could arrive in the afternoon, but "only during the day," emphasizing that there were "about 800 wounded" from the operational units.

On August 19, the Supreme Command "reminded" General Lekić that the 6th Lika Division was still under his command and ordered him to report daily on how much food his units needed "and what other materials were required," announcing that the Lika units would receive food at Pišće that night. In response to the request for timely and precise communication on the receiving points for materials, Lekić replied on August 20 that "10 planes of food per day are necessary for the three divisions." In connection with this, three telegrams were sent from Vis to the Base in Bari on August 20 regarding the supply of these divisions: the first indicated that General Branko Poljanac and Colonel Mitar Vujović, Chief of the Logistics Department of the Supreme Command, were "personally responsible for the delivery of food"; the second emphasized that the sending of food was "a top priority"; and the third specified that "10 planes per day are needed for the 12th Corps," listing the quantities of food, clothing, ammunition and medicine. It was also reported that food for the 2nd Corps would be dropped at Krnovo, which would be done by nine Italian planes the next day.

When parts of the units involved in the "Ribecal" operation (the German 1st Mountain Division, "Prinz Eugen" and the Bulgarian 24th Division) threatened the lives of about 800 seriously wounded men gathered in Upper and Lower Brezna, as they waited for the completion of the runway and their evacuation, General Vukanović ordered the 3rd Shock Division to "enter into decisive defence on the Shavnica-Durmitor line," instructing his comrades under the command of Savo Burić: "Not a step back from the main defence line until the last plane with the wounded takes off for Italy!" At the same time, Lekić's divisions, with their utmost effort, stopped the advance of the main force of "Prinz Eugen" after crossing the Piva and Tara rivers, but one column of Germans broke through the left bank of the Tara towards Žabljak, where it joined

[627] *Ibid.,* file 28, reg. no. 2-1/4.

[628] *Ibid.,* file 60/C, folder 1.

the Bulgarian battle group. Upon learning of this extremely unfavourable development, on August 20, the Supreme Command ordered the 2nd Corps Staff: "Throw your light forces behind the enemy and do not give them the chance to supply their units," suggesting that the 1st Division of NOP of Albania, to reduce pressure on Piva, should orient from Đakovica, through Peć, towards Lake Plavsko, where the Germans were conducting mass mobilization of Albanians.[629]

Deeply concerned about the fate of the wounded, General Vukanović shortened the readiness time of the airstrip and requested from the Supreme Command that Allied aircraft land at the Lower Brezna airfield on the afternoon of August 21 for the evacuation of the wounded, emphasizing that it was "necessary and urgent," with an assessment that this barren field could be threatened the next day, as the Germans were advancing from multiple directions. However, the Supreme Command, faced with difficulties in coordinating with the Allies, informed the two Corps staffs, who were under the pressure of the "Ribecal" offensive, on August 21 that "it is not certain that the planes will come this afternoon," but soon emphasized that it would only be possible on August 23.[630] General Vukanović immediately replied that the number of gathered wounded had risen to 900 and that if the planes did not arrive that day, they must come the next day, August 22, adding: "We are not sure that we can secure the airfield on August 23, as the Germans are persistently advancing on it concentrically from three directions."[631] At the same time, the Supreme Command informed General Lekić that his plan to move his units "over Mateševo towards Serbia" after defending the Lower Brezna airfield and evacuating the wounded was not advisable, as it would mean heading towards the heart of the enemy's offensive. Additionally, the journey was long, and the units would not be able to endure it. Instead, they were instructed to manoeuvre in the border area, divided into several columns and cooperating with the 29th Herzegovinian Division under Commander Vlado Šegrt, and to cross over to the Sandžak at an appropriate moment, ensuring they were not surrounded.[632] The 1st Proletarian Division passed through without a fight, and the 6th Division was given "free hands" to follow them. That very day, the commanders of the Proletarian and 37th Sandžak Divisions, Colonel Vaso Jovanović and Lieutenant Colonel Žarko Vidović, met in Banja near Priboj and proposed to the Supreme Command that their units "thoroughly destroy the Visegrad-Užice railway," after which, relieved of their wounded and sick, they would proceed further: the Sandžaks towards the Zlatar-Golija area, and the Proletarians somewhat further north. The Supreme Commander approved this plan on August 22 and ordered: "Report where our Support Battalion is and what is with my horse, because I would like to find it when I arrive."[633]

August 22 dawned, the most dramatic day for about a thousand wounded gathered

[629] *Ibid.,* file 28, reg. no. 2-1/4.

[630] *Ibid.*

[631] Note 261 in Vol. 22 of the J. Broz's *Collected Works*, p. 365.

[632] AVII, file 28, reg. no. 2-1/4.

[633] 274 guardsmen and the horse "Mali" were preserved.

at the edges of the Lower Brezna airfield and for the units that were fiercely defending them. From the morning, the commanders of the two corps received telegrams: General Vukanović was informed that four planes would land that day, and "the next day, planes will come to evacuate all remaining wounded"; General Lekić was told "that today Arso has flown to you."[634]

The previous day, the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters proposed to his (single) superior to allow him, after an intervention with Vice Marshal W. Elliot, to move under Durmitor on August 22, to the improvised airfield near Lower Brezna, and from there personally lead the actions of the two corps' units in defending the airstrip and evacuating the gathered wounded, and then direct the staffs towards manoeuvre operations. He was also allowed on August 21 to move from Vis to Bari for the scheduled meeting with the commander of BAF, to once again impress upon him the seriousness of the position of over a thousand NOP wounded under Durmitor. The General conveyed the assessment of his Supreme Commander to the vice-marshal that the evacuation of these wounded — as Tito would recall almost four decades later — "would have been the most immediate and significant allied assistance to NOP units, and it would also have a significant impact on the manoeuvring ability of almost six divisions engaged in their defence." The Vice-Marshal wholeheartedly supported these requests and ordered that "a sufficient number of planes" be prepared for the evacuation of the wounded from the extremely endangered zone. Encouraged by the good start of the operation, Arso immediately reported to Vis: "120 heavy wounded have arrived by plane. Today, 24 transport planes are coming. I am going with them. Elliot is seriously involved."[635] However, despite the efforts of the British Vice Marshal of the Air Force, who was reminded by the Chief of Staff of NOP about Prime Minister Churchill's firm promise made on August 12 that "we will do everything we can to evacuate them," the planes did not arrive.[636] In a second telegram from Bari, General Jovanović reported: "Thirty transports of wounded from Montenegro have been transferred so far. I did not go there, as I was misled (by the British officials — *I.M.*) about the location and time of departure. Let us know tonight if the Brezna airfield will be secure tomorrow."[637] He was concerned about the airfield's security because, in agreement with Vice Marshal Elliot, after the evacuation of the heavy wounded, 200 sick Italians and 150 nurses were to be transferred to Italy from the same airstrip. In response, General Vukanović replied that the airfield near Brezna "can no longer receive planes, as the enemy has threatened it." Informed of this by his deputy Kveder, Arso the next day — after having seen off two planes full of NOP members headed to Moscow the previous night, and after a firm agreement with Vice Marshal Elliot — issued precise tasks to General Poljanac and Colonel Vujović regarding the aerial supply of NOP corps under Durmitor. He then returned to Vis, carrying with him detailed data on the outcome of the

[634] AVII, file 26, reg. no. 2-1/11, 2-6/12.

[635] Note 301 in Vol. 22 of the J. Broz's *Collected Works*, p. 368.

[636] *Collection Tito-Churchill, Strictly Secret,* p. 275; J. Broz, *Collected Works*, Vol. 22, p. 43.

[637] Note 289 in Vol. 22 of the J. Broz's *Collected Works*, p. 368.

operation on August 22: 36 Allied transport planes, accompanied by formations of 50 fighters, evacuated 1,059 wounded from Brezna, along with 16 allied aviators rescued by the 2nd Corps units and three British officers.[638]

On the afternoon of August 22, General Vukanović informed the Supreme Command that during the night he would "break contact with the enemy for the regrouping of forces, rest and new tasks." At the same time, the 12th Corps units separated from the Germans and, via Golija, reached Avtovac, where they linked up with the Herzegovinians. Meanwhile, the 6th Proletarian Division, after exhausting daily battles to protect the wounded, headed towards the mountain area of Pivo Ravno, where they were promised from Vis that they would receive "at least four planes of food every night, including this one." The Chief of Staff then ordered the Base Staff in Bari, with a reprimand for sending the promised material irregularly to others: to Slovenia, "5,000 rifles, 500 machine guns, ammunition, especially artillery, 5,000 pairs of uniforms, shoes"; to the Main Staff of Macedonia, "250 rifles, 280 submachine guns, 50 machine rifles, 20 'PIATS,' 600 pairs of shoes." The Main Staff of Slovenia, through General Dušan Kveder, asked the Supreme Command to again urge the Allies to evacuate its 430 severely wounded soldiers to Italy. No other areas of the front were neglected, but the focus of the Chief of Staff was firmly placed on the developments in the area where four divisions had to break into Serbia as quickly as possible, with at least two more a little further north. Otherwise, the breakthrough of the Operational Group and the position of General Koča Popović's units would be seriously questioned, which simply could not be allowed. Therefore, operational teams, led by Generals Jovanović and Kveder, monitored the situation in Piva and Herzegovina, the Sandžak and Eastern eosnia, in Kopanik and Toplica, and maintained "constant communication" with the headquarters of Generals P. Dapčević and K. Popović, R. Vukanović and D. Lekić, Colonels V. Jovanović and Đ. Jovanić, and also with Generals V. Terzić in Moscow, B. Poljanac in Bari, V. Velebit from Cairo to London, with Air Force Marshals Elliot and Slessor, Generals Wilson and Alexander, Brigadiers and Commodores, Colonels and their juniors — mostly through agreed but also "private" channels, taking care of their authorities, real influence and power, all the way to personal egos, which was not easy, especially for someone who, as Arso often said, was "objectively placed in a position to ask, although it is essentially about combat cooperation and Allied collaboration."[639]

From under Durmitor and from Kopaonik, from Piva and Toplica, from Zlatibor and Majevica, and from Bari and Moscow — reports were arriving to Vis, day and night, where they were analysed, and in line with conclusions and decisions, measures were taken, all with the aim to "revitalize Koča's divisions" after two successive and heavy German offensives; to ensure that "Peko's group," replenished and materially supported by the Russians, would move towards the Strategic Ridge; and that Lekić's corps and Jovanović's division would "break through as soon as possible on the designated paths into Serbia." All of this was to be done quickly and decisively, according

[638] *The Chronology of the Liberation Struggle of the People of Yugoslavia 1941-1945,* Belgrade 1964, p. 849.

[639] From a conversation with A. Ranković, October 1973, in Belgrade.

to the agreement and responsibility, fully aware of Tito's order from August 26: "Do not let the enemy get ahead of us!"[640] This was wisely and bravely phrased, but it was a real struggle to achieve under conditions where, on just one night, the balance of aid deliveries was catastrophic: for the 12th Corps, out of nine planes, seven failed, and for the 6th Division, out of four planes, none succeeded. In relation to this, Lekić, exposed to a new German operation in Avtovac, was informed: "Your supply is giving us great trouble." And he, put in the position of begging not only for the hungry but also for the barefooted, reported: "The shoes sent are too small. Please, send sizes 8, 9 and 10." Tito informed him on August 24: "I will personally fight to ensure you get what you need."[641]

This might have meant that others had been taking care of this up until then, and they had not lived up to expectations. Therefore, his first order was to send the units of General Lekić and Colonel Jovanović 7,000 kg of food daily. However, despite the Chief of Staff's efforts, the Base Staff in Bari and Russian pilots, this remained mostly a futile wish, as there would still be days when they received "nothing" and Lekić complained about deliveries being "rare and small," warning that this would affect morale: "We tell the soldiers we will receive the promised shipments, but this puts us in a difficult position, as the shipments are insignificant and disappointing." Tito responded in his usual manner: "Do not deceive your soldiers. Move to a place where you can feed the army."[642] But there was no food anywhere, no rest from the fighting and no sign of Tito's promises. A more rational message came on August 26 to General Dapčević: "Do not rely on our ability to deliver ammunition and other supplies on time."[643]

Breakthrough to the Strategic Ridge

The offensive operation "Ribecal" ended in failure, so the situation in the broader Durmitor area was as follows: German forces were retreating into Serbia, and the main force of the 2nd Corps, primarily the 3rd Assault Division, avoided destructive strikes by manoeuvring. Divided into tactical units, it moved behind the enemy's back; the 1st Proletarian and 37th Sandžak Divisions were operating in Zlatibor, while the 6th Proletarian was approaching the Lim; the 12th Corps was preparing to move into western Serbia after a short rest in the Borča region, either via Foča or Šćepan Polje; the Operational Group of Divisions was located in the Kopaonik-Jastrebac sector, waiting for food and equipment promised by the Russians. Its commander was ordered: "Immediately replenish all units and prepare them for movement as quickly as possible. In that sector, you must not get entangled in heavy battles. Your next goal is: Rudnik-Suvobor-Maljen. Leave all the wounded with Koča." It was announced that Colonel Lj. Đurić would bring detailed instructions from Vis — the SH's plan for the final liber-

[640] AVII, file 26, reg. no. 5-1/8.

[641] *Ibid.,* file 28, reg. no. 1-2/11, 2-6/12.

[642] *Ibid.,* file 28, reg. no. 2-2/11.

[643] *Ibid.,* file 28, reg. no. 1-1/1.

ation of Serbia, adopted on Vis on August 19, which emphasized: "The primary goal is to destroy the occupiers and the Nedić-Chetnik government, organized by districts, municipalities and villages," and then "start organizing military formations," with the people "feeling the power of our units."[644] The destruction of the main quisling forces "in the most important sectors in Serbia" was all the more urgent and necessary as talks about cooperation between Nedić and Mihailović had intensified, such as the one in Ražana on August 12. It was necessary to prevent this "general tandem," which, not recognizing the Vis Agreement, was conducting mobilization. They had to be stopped, through "mobile strike groups," to ensure that they would not, with the remaining troops they had and the political elements in Belgrade linked to the Western Allies, create a trap that would complicate the position of the National Liberation Movement at this historically complex political and military moment. This warning was also issued by General Terzić from Moscow, pointing out the urgent need for stronger NOV forces "in connection with the situation in Romania and the rapid advance of the Red Army" to move towards the Danube and Belgrade, and certainly to activate "partisan forces in Banat." The destruction of the quislings, it was emphasized, "should be carried out to the extent that they no longer represent an organized force and a threat to our population. Only then should the entire territory of Serbia be militarily enveloped and organized." This was easier to achieve since Bulgaria was on the brink of capitulation, the Wehrmacht was retreating, and the Red Army was inexorably approaching the Danube. Therefore, the breakthrough of NOV forces to the Sava and Danube was of primary importance. After analysing the situation in specific areas of Serbia, especially in Šumadija, Mačva, Posavina and the Danube region, the order was given for an advance into Vojvodina and Kosovo and Metohija, dividing Serbia into five operational areas: eastern Serbia, where "a corps of two to three divisions should be formed"; the Vlasina region, where a division would operate with the aim of "transforming into a corps"; the area between the Ibar and South Morava, where "a corps of at least three divisions should be formed"; the Kosovo-Metohija region; and the Šumadija and western Serbia region, with the sectors of Šumadija, Belgrade, Posavina, Suvobor, and the area "west of the Ibar, through Zlatibor to Mount Tara." The orientation of the sector boundaries was defined, operational routes analysed, and the disposition of forces in each of them was determined, with a plan for "advancing into these areas" provided: Lekić's Corps (3 divisions) would advance into the Posavina sector, with a foothold on Cer and the Bližanski hills above Valjevo; Peko's, 1st Proletarian Corps (4 divisions)[645] would advance through the West Morava into the Suvobor sector, expanding in the west to Zvornik, leaving one division in the Zlatibor-Tara mountain sector; Nađ's, 3rd Corps was tasked with "clearing Posavina and Semberija," positioning its units so that it could "quickly cross (through Drina into western Serbia — *I.M.*) if the situation requires," but also "in case of a favourable situation near Sarajevo," it could "complete the task there." The decision of the SH to engage all three corps was clear and flexible

[644] *Ibid.,* box 371, reg. no. 6/4.

[645] General Dapčević was appointed commander of the 1st Proletarian Corps on 26 August.

enough for the staff to show initiative in its implementation, which remained one of General A. Jovanović's firm principles in leadership.

The idea behind the General Staff's advance into Serbia was as follows. It was an extensively and excellently executed analysis of the Serbian military, where the "hand" of the general staff could be felt in every one of the 184 lines. Nothing was left to chance, everything was devoid of improvisation, with each given initial and subsequent tasks and ensuring the occupation of the Strategic Ridge. Now, all advantages needed to be given to the realization of that plan.

At the same time, the SH addressed the General Staff of Vojvodina with an order to quickly move the "selected assault units" into the Banat operational zone, with the task of linking up with the partisan forces in Banat and carrying out mobilization, with a warning that Banat, "in connection with the situation in Romania," was becoming "very important" since it needed to become a "stronghold and a source for the mobilization of new forces" for the National Liberation Army.[646] This was linked to Terzić's remark about the importance of a military orientation towards Belgrade and Banat, which, as he said, was his personal opinion, but in response to a repeated question from Vis, he added that "the importance of the Banat-Belgrade-Danube sector had been discussed with Soviet personnel," which gave his "personal opinion" much greater weight. So, commanders Lekić, Kosta, Peko and Koča were hurried towards Sava and the Danube. In a telegram from August 27, it was noted that, as part of the evolving situation in Romania and Bulgaria, "the eastern parts of our country are gaining great importance. On this side, the first link with our allies will be established. In case of necessity, our forces might be able to temporarily use bases in the terrain of Bulgaria and Romania." It was recommended to immediately seek ways to "insert light assault units into the Šumadija and 'Bulgarian' operational zones," as it was very important to "secure positions on the ground. Bleeding and wasting time on some fortified town is unprofitable." And it was ordered: "At all costs, establish secure connections with eastern Serbia."[647]

Bulgaria was on the brink of capitulation, so in this context, on August 27, the Main Staff of Serbia informed Vis that they had ordered all units, among other things, "to establish contact with all Bulgarian garrisons and headquarters, demanding either their participation in the fight against the Germans or the surrender of weapons and supplies," and to seize "the garrisons and communications held by the Bulgarians." Subsequently, they reported that they had consulted with the heads of the allied military missions at the General Staff, General A. P. Gorshkov and Colonel E.A. Huntington, "who agreed with the line."[648] The SH also agreed with this, so the following day, in anticipation of the imminent "establishment of contact with the Russians on

[646] AVII, file 26, reg. no. 4-1/10.

[647] *Ibid.,* file 26, reg. no. 5/1.

[648] General K. Popović, on Victory Day 1985, remembered how Colonel Huntington had pointed out that the Wehrmacht in Serbia "would remain very strong even without the Bulgarians": from Greece and Albania "almost 400,000 soldiers must withdraw to there," and the Russians would — he estimated — "take their time at the Danube."

our eastern borders," they delivered "remarks for further consideration of the situation" to General Dapčević, that is, directives for the grouping of forces, actions in western Serbia, and the advance towards Šumadija, Belgrade and the Sava. It was emphasized that very rapid and radical changes were expected on the Eastern Front, "which requires faster work and troop manoeuvres. Bleeding and wasting time on some fortified town is unprofitable. It is important for us to secure positions on the ground — the broader, the better. Now, it is crucial to take control of the Strategic Ridge from Rudnik-Suvobor-Sokolska Mountain-Cer, for the following reasons: breaking up the main Chetnik-Nedić forces, faster advance towards Šumadija and Belgrade, securing strongholds for our troops, creating conditions for new mobilization, and gaining military and political effects. Perhaps we should already look for ways to insert light assault units into the Šumadija and Belgrade Operational zones, to divert the enemy's attention and create mobilization centres. Grouping and holding strong forces on the Western Morava is dangerous and unprofitable. This chokepoint is important to the enemy, and they will fiercely defend it. Therefore, in the sector from Rudnik-Suvobor-Povlen, at first, we should break through with at least three divisions, then gradually expand east and west, introducing new forces coming from the south." The previously presented idea of the deployment and actions of eight divisions from both (1st and 12th) corps was reiterated, leaving room for flexible implementation of this directive.[649]

In this document, the language of the General Staff officer is also easily recognizable, particularly when discussing the exceptional importance of capturing and holding the Strategic Ridge from Cer to Rudnik, known from military history and geography, as well as the importance of holding the ridges and avoiding the valleys of rivers, which, as Đilas notes in *Revolutionary War*, was Arso's "eternal obsession, most often the harder, but always the safer option."

On the same day, the evacuation of 72 critically wounded soldiers from the 1st Corps at Braneško field near Čajetina was announced, and General Lekić was advised — with the suggestion that during the planned breakthrough from the Čemerno-Izgori sector towards Stari Brod on the Drina, he should "reconnoitre well," because "it would not be good to find yourself on the enemy's movement path again" — some good news from the area ahead of him was also reported: "the enemy in the 1st Corps sector is inactive"; NOVJ units "hold the entire sector around Vardište"; the 6th Lika approaches the units of its corps (it was transferred to the right bank of the Lim on August 30-31); the situation in Posavina and Vojvodina is good, with "many people available for mobilization." The last sentence reads — that the people from Posavina and Vojvodina are waiting for the arrival of the corps that proudly bears the name of Vojvodina on its war banner. The breakthrough of the corps to the Drina was initially announced from Vis for the 4th, but was postponed to the night of September 5-6, when, with the protection of the partisans, they finally crossed this water obstacle and reached the ground of western Serbia.

On August 29, General Tempo, in accordance with the directive from Vis, ordered

[649] AVII, file 26, reg. no. 5-2/8.

all NOV and PO units in Macedonia "to establish contact with all Bulgarian garrisons and headquarters in connection with the situation in Bulgaria, and to demand either their integration into our units or the surrender of weapons." He also ordered them "to seize all cities and communications held by the Bulgarians with bold attacks." On August 25, the Imperial Government announced Bulgaria's neutrality; on August 29, it ordered the withdrawal of the 1st Occupation Corps from Serbia and the 7th Division from Greece, but not the 5th Army from Macedonia; on September 6, it declared war on Germany; and on September 9, it signed an armistice. During all this time of deep upheaval, the commanders of the Bulgarian occupation units steadfastly rejected all proposals and persistent attempts by the staffs of NOV units to win them over for cooperation, or at least to surrender their arms to the liberation army of the Macedonian people.

On the penultimate day of August, Vis asked the Main Staff of Macedonia what kind of and how many military personnel it needed (General Apostolski replied — "that they should be more in the rank of brigade and division commanders") and whether they could secure an airfield to directly land there, instead of "going over Koča."[650] He ordered: "Develop active operations across the entire sector. You must not remain passive in the face of Bulgarian terror. They are now demoralized, so you can take energetic measures against them. Call on them to surrender to us, and if they refuse — disarm them. Energetically raid their garrisons. Conduct intensive mobilization." This sharp and clear stance towards the Bulgarian occupation forces was the SH's response to Tempo's report from the previous day, which, among other things, stated: "There are no signs that the Bulgarians intend to leave Macedonia. We tried to make contact with the Bulgarian army, but the Bulgarians arrested our peasants who brought them letters. The Bulgarians are continuing their blockade of cities and mass arrests. In smaller garrisons, the Bulgarian army hesitates and switches to our side."[651]

On the night of August 28, by plane from Vis via Bari, General Sreten Žujović-Crni arrived at the headquarters of the Main Staff of Serbia. There is no doubt that it was high time for the commander of the Serbian insurgents from 1941 to finally arrive on Serbian soil. Probably authorized to do so, he immediately sent a message to General Tempo from the airport: "If the Bulgarians, who are the occupiers of Macedonia, do not immediately take an active part in the fight against the Germans, disarm them using various methods and taking into account the different specific circumstances." Tempo immediately responded: "The Bulgarians are occupiers in Macedonia and have no intention of leaving Macedonia. On the contrary: they are currently cooperating with the Germans. Our units have gone south to carry out tasks set by Tito. Here, we only have small, mostly unarmed units. Our weapons are not coming and the influx of new fighters is large."[652]

Let us return to a telegram from Tempo that Tito found upon his return from

[650] *Ibid.,* box 26, reg. no. 8-2/12.

[651] *Ibid.,* box 234, reg. no. 2-33/1, radiogram no. 4.

[652] For more on the conduct of Bulgarian forces in Serbia and Macedonia, see notes 64 and 75 in vol. 23 of *Collected Works* by J. Broz.

Italy. He reported that during his stay on Vis, there had been a misunderstanding between some members of the CC of the Communist Party of Macedonia and General M. Apostolski, and a party commission had been formed to investigate it. Tempo expressed his view on the "case" by stating that Apostolski had, on certain issues, truly "overstepped" the Party, and asked for the position of the General Secretary of the CPY. He got it: "Stop the party investigation against General Apostolski. You have acted sectarian. The SH of NOV and POJ and the CC of the CPY trust Apostolski as a good soldier and loyal to the National Liberation Movement. If there are mistakes with Apostolski, they should be pointed out in a friendly manner, without any commissions."[653]

The influx of fighters was also recorded in Serbia, and there were high expectations from the outcome of the "final call to all misled servants of the occupiers," issued on August 30 from Vis, with September 15 as the last deadline for switching from quisling and collaborationist formations to the armed forces of the NOP, or for surrendering all weapons and equipment. The call was one of Tito's commitments made to Churchill in Naples.[654] For the newly arrived personnel and hardened fighters, appropriate weapons and solid equipment were requested from the allies. In a report from August 30, the skilled and active head of the Economic Department of the General Staff, Colonel Mitar Vujić, the "usual culprit," wrote to Arso from Bari that the allied command in Italy, which supplied the NOVJ by air, had promised to transfer around 1,800 tons of weapons, ammunition, explosives, clothing, footwear and food in the upcoming month, September. Instead of the planned 1,232 tons, the allies had agreed to transport an additional 600 tons. Regarding clothing, it was promised: 25,000 sets of uniforms and underwear, 35,000 pairs of shoes, two times that number of socks, and 4,000 blankets, which, according to Mitrović's estimate, could meet the real needs of only two corps. At that time, there were 15 corps, including two Serbian ones in formation and KNOJ,[655] with the prospect of soon forming two more, Macedonian. Everyone was requesting significantly more equipment, especially ahead of the winter and the mass filling of units, because the situation everywhere — except in the 26th Division and the Navy, which were on Vis — was unsatisfactory. So, Colonel Vujić, having collected all the requests and subtracted anything that could be taken away, asked the head of the General Staff "to take the necessary measures with the allies" so that the NOVJ units would "as soon as possible," besides the promised quantities,

[653] AVII, box 60/C, folio 1. When questioned by Ranković (in Tito's absence) about the "Apostolski case," General Jovanović stated that "only the Supreme Command can give an assessment to the Commander of the Main Staff, and that assessment — considering Macedonian conditions and the separation of the front — is positive for General Apostolski." Ranković — he told me in October 1973 — readily agreed when it came to "military expertise and operations," but he also stressed the need to respect the principle that "all Party members are accountable to the Party." Still, they agreed that the issue, given the shortage of military personnel of that profile, should not be escalated. That assessment was conveyed to Tito, and he accepted it.

[654] J. Broz, *Collected Works*, Vol. 22, p. 27.

[655] Formed on August 15, 1944; commander Major General J. Vukotić, commissar Colonel Vlado Janić Capo.

receive: 150,000 overcoats, sets of uniforms, tent covers, blankets and pullovers, twice that number of underwear, 200,000 pairs of shoes and double the amount of socks. Only with these quantities, General Jovanović reminded him, and which he knew well, would "all needs be met, and at the beginning of winter, freezing could be avoided, but that problem wouldn't be entirely solved. In the following months, there would be even greater demand for clothing and footwear, considering the influx of fighters into the NOVJ."[656]

Regardless of the fact that solving these issues, considering the division of responsibilities in the SH, was not under his direct authority, General Jovanović, who was directly responsible for the staff operations related to military actions and accountable for their outcome, considered the supply of food and clothing for the fighters to be of equal importance to caring for the wounded and supplying the units with combat equipment, that is, operational problems of the first order. Therefore, he wholeheartedly engaged in solving them according to the imposed conditions. Here, he took up the pen and, with the general and the colonel, went through "every" item from the quoted report — to personally assure himself of the reasonableness of the requests, and then stand behind them and "push" them through the heads of the allied military missions and the NOVJ missions with the allies, and even directly with certain allied vice-marshals and generals. He knew, at least as well as his colleagues, that one had to ask for the maximum — in order to get the necessary. And much was needed, as large operations were just ahead.

From September 1 to 7, a large-scale day-and-night operation named Ratweek was carried out across the entire Yugoslav front, coordinated by the units of the NOVJ and the allied air force. As already mentioned, the operation was initiated in Caserta on August 6, then accepted in the plenary session on August 10, and in the following two days, at meetings of the chief of staff of both sides, Generals Jovanović and Gammell, and Air Marshal J. Slessor and W. Elliott, the operation was finalized at the level of the involvement of both sides' staff specialists. It was agreed that at least one-third of the NOVJ forces would be engaged in the operation on one side, and on the other, the allied air forces of the BAF and the 15th Army of the United States Army Air Forces (MAA). The operation, titled "Coordinated Operations on Enemy Communications in Yugoslavia," was technically executed by a team of experts led by Brigadier Maclean in Bari, which included experienced experts on the Yugoslav front, Peter Moore and John Clarke. The former would later note how, on August 6, he feared Tito's reaction to the idea of this "combined and strategically significant air and sabotage operation," but he "accepted it enthusiastically," which somewhat surprised even its "parent" Maclean, a former lieutenant in sabotage units.

The SH of the NOVJ planned the actions of all the main staffs and most corps, with operations set to begin on September 1 with a simultaneous, midnight attack on 37 communications: 20 railway lines, 16 roads and the Danube (from Fruška Gora to

[656] M. Vujović, The Economic Service of the Supreme Command of the NOP and POJ 1941-1945, Belgrade 1990, 227. When calling him to report on this "request," Arso — as he recalled in 1985 — greeted him with the words: "Ah, poor thing — even God is heavy on you!"

Belgrade).

The order for the execution of this operation was issued by the SH on August 17 and was promptly transmitted to all operational staffs via allied liaison officers. The operation started with a statement that it was part of the overall allied plan, in which the NOV and PO of Yugoslavia were tasked with "particularly during the period from September 1 to 7, destroying communications across the entire Yugoslav front to cripple the manoeuvrability of the occupying forces." Each operational staff was precisely assigned railway and road communications to be attacked simultaneously, with the units instructed to operate within their own designated areas of responsibility. Next to each communication, numbers from 1 to 4 were indicated, depending on its level of importance, which also indicated the priority for destruction. Thus, 37 railways and roads, classified into all four categories, were specifically designated, with the main staffs allowed "to divide the communications according to the current deployment of individual corps' units." The primary objective was to ensure that the listed communications were destroyed and to target "other important communications so that enemy traffic would be paralysed."

In this operation, the NOVJ units, as highlighted in the order, would be assisted by the allied air force, which would act "during the day, primarily attacking enemy traffic," while the NOVJ units would operate at night, retreating from communications during the day "to avoid suffering losses from allied air strikes," with the need to establish a closer connection with the air force "so its effectiveness could be fully realized." It was recommended to the main staffs to "ensure bases for aircraft takeoffs and regulate the closest tactical cooperation" on their operational space. The staffs were warned that the allied air force "particularly needed to be shown enemy troop concentrations and gathering points due to the disruption of traffic," with a note that the allies "would aim to supply as much combat material as possible for this operation: PIAT launchers, anti-tank and mountain guns, explosives, electric firing machines, ammunition for our infantry and heavy weapons," and through allied liaison officers, they were to "inform in time about the locations for dropping this material."[657]

The order was — as General D. Kveder recalled — drafted and, after verification by Marshal Tito, personally typed by the Chief of Staff, and was promptly delivered to the units as a top-secret document through liaison officers with precise tasks. The operational sector of the General Staff, headed by the Chief, was left to monitor and analyse its progress and outcome, influencing the actions accordingly.

The operation began with a simultaneous attack on all 37 planned communications, involving around 130,000 members of the NOVJ. Units from eight NOVJ corps, i.e., 25 divisions, were engaged, making them very formidable forces. The action of the powerful allied aviation — from General Nat Twining's 15th Air Force and Vice Marshal W. Elliott's BAF — was a significant morale booster for the NOVJ units, both due to the devastating effect on targets and the moral impact on the fighters.

[657] The document was delivered, via British liaison officers, to all operational headquarters of the NOP: for the General Staff of Vojvodina AVII, file 211, reg. no. 54/7; for the Main Staff of Croatia AVII, file 1020, reg. no. 36/6.

A particularly strong moral impression on the fighters was left by the NOVJ squadrons, clearly marked: planes from the 1st Fighter and 2nd Fighter-Bomber Squadrons of the NOVJ, which were part of the 281st "wing," and from the Communications Squadron of the SH of the NOV and PO of Yugoslavia (7 aircraft), which, in addition to the noticeable red five-pointed star, also had the Yugoslav tricolour. Meanwhile, 12 Il-2 aircraft from the Soviet base squadron in Bari bore only the red five-pointed star. This was the fighter aviation whose cooperation in "larger operations" with the NOVJ units was announced by the SH on August 26, requiring the staffs to submit requests in time and designate targets, keeping in mind the capabilities of the fighter planes, which was the responsibility of several aviation (both local and allied) officers in the operational staffs. The staffs were also warned that, whenever possible, opportunities should be seized "to let the units and people at assemblies see the NOVJ planes," and it was required that the locations, dates, and times of gatherings be reported in advance so they could be overflown by "planes with five-pointed stars."[658]

Brigadier Maclean, at his own request and with General Koča Popović's approval, observed the bombing of Leskovac from a very close distance. He was, in fact, continuously on position with the 24th Division's staff for four days, during which its three brigades operated on the Grdelica-Predejane-Đep railway, while the main units of the Main Staff of Serbia were engaged towards the Danube to establish contact with the Red Army, and towards the Operational Group of Divisions. Brigadier Maclean would leave a striking testimony in his memoirs *War on the Balkans*, clearly horrified by the consequences of the bombing, which, to his credit, he had inspired. He did not expect — he told Koča — such a large number of planes and such destruction, which reminded him "as though someone had used a heavy hammer to crush a hazelnut." It was clear that the squadrons of the "flying fortresses" were "determined to carry out their task in 'Ratweek' as it should be." On September 25, the brigadier informed A. Eden that the NOVJ troops "cooperated exceptionally and had much success with us in the recent general attack on German communications in Yugoslavia." He noted that, in the Ratweek operation, among other things, the following parts of the railway were disabled: Niš-Vranje, Kraljevo-K. Mitrovica and Niš-Ćuprija, while the road and railway from Niš to Sofia were now in the hands of the partisans all the way to the Bulgarian border. These operations paralysed the movements of German troops and, especially, reduced the chances for the Germans to successfully withdraw from Greece.[659] From the scene of the events in southern Serbia, American journalist Dr. Stojan Pribićević strongly spoke out with pen and camera, having arrived at this part of the front by plane with S. Žujović and F. Maclean.[660]

Analysing the results of this operation, historian Milovan Dželebdžić writes that the disruption of railway lines occurred at a thousand locations, 97 bridges were destroyed, 77 km of tracks were damaged, nine smaller transportation hubs and 49 stations were captured, 77 km of telegraph lines were destroyed, 12 locomotives and 353 wagons with supplies were set on fire, five armoured cars and 37 bunkers were destroyed, 4,187 enemy soldiers were killed, about 2,000 were wounded and 5,782 enemy soldiers were captured.[661]

[658] AVII, file 26, reg. no. 4-1/13.

[659] *Collection Tito-Churchill, Strictly Secret,* p. 328.

[660] A prominent journalist and publicist, in April 1944, as a correspondent for the United Press Association, he arrived in Drvar and began a series of notable reports on the NOP of his homeland, from which, as a Doctor of Law and with his father Svetozar, he had emigrated to Prague and then to the USA.

For a long time, both in academia and in journalism, it was kept quiet that cities were also affected by the allied bombing in this operation. Only now is it known that 23 cities were bombed, 14 of them in Serbia, including repeated bombings of Kraljevo, Belgrade and Niš. It is recorded that on September 2, 200 "flying fortresses" bombed Niš, and 120 bombed Kraljevo; on September 3, 84 bombed Kosovska Mitrovica and 200 bombed the "Belgrade area," when bridges over the Sava were damaged. It is true that the dense formations of bombers targeted gaps, tunnels, bridges, railway stations, military installations and concentrations of troops, but they often hit suburbs, killing civilians. Documents have been preserved showing that Koča repeatedly insisted on bombing Kuršumlija, Prokuplje, Priština, Kruševac, Raška, Podujevo, Kosovska Mitrovica, Kraljevo and Leskovac. In the proposal to bomb Belgrade, Commander Koča specified "the streets where German apartments were located," as well as the "Albania" palace, the "King Aleksandar" school and sheds in Topčider. While Germans were indeed present in these locations, innocent civilians also suffered massively, usually due to pilot errors. In any case, this remains the largest combined strategic air and sabotage operation of the Second World War. Additionally, it happened that the Main Staff of Slovenia, with its units — not joining the operation to destroy communications and objects due to English Major Goldwin's orders — failed to take part, and Tito intervened sharply at the end of the first day, pointing out the irresponsibility of Commander Franz Rozman and Commissar Boris Kraigher, but also E. Kardelj, who had arrived in Slovenia from Vis in those days. It was only on September 4 that they reported they had begun their actions, adding one "but" — that, "with Kardelj's consent, they abandoned the attack on the Litija Bridge" because "the attack on this object would result in heavy casualties."

During the Ratweek operation (September 6), direct radio communication was established between Vis and the Military Mission of the NOVJ at the SH of the National Liberation Army of Albania. From there, Colonel V. Stojnić sent proposals from the Albanian General Staff for bombing certain communications to Vis in the last two days of the operation. This was particularly urgent since a large part of the German Army Group "E" was stationed in Albania at that time.

September and October were, from the standpoint of operational engagement, the time of the most intense wartime events on all fronts, particularly the Eastern Front,

[661] On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the victory over fascism, a contribution with a summary map of the bombing of cities in Yugoslavia during the 1941-1945 war by the Germans, Italians and Anglo-Americans was prepared for the special issue of the *Military History Herald*. Especially in Serbia, the colour of the Allies prevailed, and the person who decided "in the meritum," frightened by this "multicolour," ordered that the map, along with the accompanying text, not be published — in the name of maintaining good relations with the war allies.

where the focus of operations was finally shifted. This was even more so because, from the island of Vis, the most distant point from the heart of the battlefield, the SH operated largely (from September 18 to October 25) in conditions of separation from the Supreme Commander, who was in Moscow, Craiova and Vršac. This was a period of revolutionary changes in the Southeast: two fronts of the Red Army, under the command of Marshals Rodion Malinovsky and Fyodor Tolbukhin, had driven Romania out of the "Axis circles" and, advancing in one sweep for 500-700 km towards the Danube, had established contact with the NOVJ; Bulgaria had joined the Anti-Fascist Coalition, meaning that for the NOVJ, there was one less enemy on that front; the troops of Army Group "E" of the Wehrmacht (350,000) were hastily retreating from Greece and Albania via the Yugoslav front; in Yugoslavia, there were 19 German divisions and 4 Hungarian divisions, along with quisling units. The Soviets provided Yugoslavia with massive material aid; a group of nine NOVJ divisions was preparing to liberate Belgrade and the central Danube region from the Strategic Ridge, from Rudnik to Sokol Mountain, in conjunction with the Red Army units advancing from the southeast and Banat. This was also the period of forming 3-4 new divisions in Serbia and Macedonia, as well as two new corps. All of this required intensifying earlier operations and establishing new operational connections, pointed to broader needs, revealed new opportunities and multiplied obligations. Cooperation with the NOV of Albania was strengthened, and before that, the military leadership of the NOP in Kosovo and Metohija was reorganized. A new responsibility was the cooperation between NOVJ units and the Bulgarian army in operations from Niš to Kosovo and eastern Macedonia, and later in Srem. Great attention was also paid to the actions of all corps, particularly the 2nd, 3rd, 5th and 6th, engaged in important operational areas, especially since their combat actions, each in its own way, were closely linked to the strategic breakthrough of the 12th and 1st Corps, as well as the group of Serbian divisions — from Mačva and Podrinje, through Šumadija and Pomoravlje, to the Timok region. On the other hand, the British, under the pretext of being angry with Tito for leaving for Moscow unannounced during the night of September 18-19, not only tightened the already narrow valves of material aid and hindered cooperation but also attempted to "reach" the eastern shores of the Adriatic, from the port of Santa Quaranta (in Albania), via Dubrovnik, to Split and Zadar, and even in Istria, stretching to the hinterlands, as far as Knin and the Zalužani airfield. This, if uncontrolled and unchecked, could have led to precedents and dangerous wartime practices. This could have been expected, but it had to be reasonably defended from Vis. At the same time, substantial work was being done: from the formation and equipping of new divisions and corps to preparations for transferring the SH and other NOP institutions to Serbia, which imposed around-the-clock staff work on General Jovanović and his associates. Not by chance, alongside General Arso, high-ranking military officers were present, officers of the Royal Yugoslav Army, now colonels and heads of departments: Intelligence, Vjekoslav Klišanić; Communications, Sava Kereković; Artillery, Karel Levičnik and Branko Obradović; Air Force, Franjo Pirc; Economics, Mitar Vujović. In this institution, former supply captain M. Vujović had been since the fall of 1942, and he would write

in his memoirs, recalling this time, how the SH "was well organized," the division of responsibilities and authorities within it "completely secured," with "plenty of contacts for information and directives." The SH, he writes, "was always mobile, monitored the situation, and was never surprised or caught in a dead-end situation. Every break between offensives was used to master new problems and initiate new actions. It always aimed for broader information about the NOB, formed new and reinforced existing brigades, divisions and corps, summoned commanders and political commissars for consultations, sent delegates and took care of the technical equipment of the army." In this context, Marshal Tito — as is customary in organized armies — made decisions, Arso prepared the decisions and took care of their implementation, while Ranković was "considered the deputy supreme commander."[662]

In the first twenty days of this period, while still on Vis, Tito was primarily focused on solving political issues, while Arso, as before, led the operational matters with the highest authority and full trust, particularly focusing on the occupation of the Strategic Ridge in Serbia as an operational-strategic base for pushing the group of nine divisions towards Belgrade and the Sava River. He also ensured that forces on the secondary route, in the "great bend of the Danube," were strong enough for successful combat cooperation with the Red Army, which he saw as a test of the army's capabilities and its command.

In conversations and some radio communications with commanders, Tito announced his "shift to the side," which was noticed at the General Staff, but he did not inform anyone about it, nor did anyone ask him about it. The Chief of Staff observed this, noticing the urgency to fulfil some obligations undertaken before the Western world, to clarify some of his assessments in correspondence and mutual contacts, and to ensure positive outcomes for his political actions. He believed that he had strengthened relations with the West, resolved all disputed yet important issues and secured that flank. However, some of his closest collaborators, including the Chief of Staff, did not share his opinion, and the course of events, in the first days after his "disappearance" from Vis, proved them right.

Diligently fulfilling the obligations he had undertaken, Tito reviewed the 1st Fighter Squadron of the NOVJ on September 4 at Plisko Polje. He was accompanied by the Chief of Staff and the commander of the BAF. The squadron then had 227 members and 15 Spitfires. Following the Supreme Commander, Arso participated in the review of the 1st Dalmatian Brigade on September 12. At that time, Tito, commenting on the western borders of Yugoslavia, emphasized that "our brothers in Istria, the Slovenian Littoral, and Carinthia must be and will be liberated and will live freely in their homeland with their brothers. This is the wish of all of us, and it is the wish of all of them there. We do not want anyone else's, but we will not give up ours."[663]

At the beginning of September, under Arso's leadership, the General Staff prepared a five-page document titled "Temporary Instruction for the Cipher Services of

[662] M. Vujović, *op. cit.*, p. 264.

[663] AVII, file 15-A, reg. no. 9-2/4.

the NOV and PO of Yugoslavia," with the first sentence phrased as follows: "The management of the army is conducted through the cipher service of the National Liberation Army to preserve state and military secrets."[664]

One of the practical and urgent tasks was the reorganization of the General Staff for Vojvodina and the formulation of its role and tasks in radically changed conditions, especially concerning the advance of the Red Army through the Pannonian Plain. The formation and tasks were outlined by the Chief of Staff, and when proposing the future commander, he first mentioned General Kosta Nađ, the commander of the 3rd Corps, a native of Novi Sad, and for the Chief of Staff, Lieutenant Colonel Antun Kulundžić, which Ranković and Tito accepted. When it came to replacing Nađ, Arso chose Major General Jovan Vukotić, but Tito said that he would soon be more involved as the commander of the KNOJ, so the position would be temporarily held by the current commissar, Vlado Popović, who would first be promoted to the rank of major general. He also agreed that Lieutenant Colonel Pero Kosorić, until then the commander of the 27th Division, would be appointed to the position of Chief of Staff of the corps. On September 4, Kosta Nađ and Vlado Popović were ordered to come to Vis via Bari, and in the meantime, Jovan Vukotić would perform the duties of the commander. It would happen that the two of them, due to disorganized air traffic, would not arrive at the General Staff until September 21, by which time Tito was already in Moscow. They received their tasks and appointments to new positions from the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, and the decrees, including the promotion of Colonel Vlado Popović, were signed.[665]

The Chief of Staff sought to ensure that the units of Vojvodina and Lika, following the harsh "beer epic," quickly recovered, replenished and re-equipped. The Lika partisan division, after 40 days of marching under constant combat from Glamoč to Zlatibor, was reduced to only 2,000 fighters and commanders. The Vojvodina corps, on the other hand, did not have much luck with allied assistance on their first routes through western Serbia, this time from the Soviet Union. There were instances where, due to their own mistakes or the mistakes of others, they did not receive even the most necessary aid, as Soviet pilots returning to Bari left jobs unfinished, and once, they received 254 Italian rifles, to which the General Staff complained, as there had long been no way to procure ammunition or spare parts for that weapon (especially in Serbia). The "case," at Arso's request, was investigated by General B. Poljanac, who reported that "there was no sabotage." The movements of the 11th Krajina and 28th Slavonian Divisions towards the Drina were closely monitored via radio communication with the 5th and 3rd Corps to integrate them into the 12th Corps in western Serbia, in preparation for the operation to liberate Belgrade and Posavina. General Jovanović demanded

[664] *Ibid.,* file 15-A, reg. no. 22-2.

[665] *Ibid.,* file 214, reg. no. 43-4. After 1948, public publications would consistently insist on the formulation that these documents were "signed by the order of the Supreme Commander," which is correct and entirely natural, but incorrect when attributed to Tito. They were included in Volume 23 of his *Collected Works* (pp. 200-202), although it was impossible to avoid the signature of the Chief of the General Staff.

that all changes from their march be plotted on a map so that, at any given moment, it could be seen how far they had advanced. Tasks were assigned to units to accept them accordingly. The routes of the Operational Group of Divisions and the 1st Proletarian Corps were also monitored, which, starting from September 15, were unified into the 1st Army Group, which would include Lekić's divisions, all under the command of General Peko Dapčević.

With no less attention, the situation in the "great bend of the Danube" was also closely monitored, particularly in the sector of Negotin-Brza Palanka. Already by September 6, Arso's deputy, Colonel Lj. Đurić, was urged to orient part of the forces from the two divisions he commanded in that area — to establish contact with the units of Marshal Rodion Malinovsky's front at the Kladovo crossing, which had arrived at Turn Severin and the Danube on September 6. Thus, Đurić was hurried towards Brza Palanka with the 25th Division, and on the night of September 12-13, he led a NOVJ delegation to establish contact with the headquarters of the Red Army in Romania, while communication with the Bulgarian army units was left to General Gorshkov, with Russian instructors immediately arriving in the Yugoslav territory. The urgency stemmed from the fact that the Chetniks also had plans and calculations in that area, and a larger group of allied officers was operating in the broader Danube region. Some data suggested to the SH that the General Staff Lieutenant Colonel Velimir Piletić, Arso's "classmate" from the highest military school, and the commander of the Krajina Chetnik Corps, had crossed the Danube with his entourage, with special powers from D. Mihailović to negotiate with the Russians. It was confirmed that on September 10, with 30 officers, 110 Chetniks and 80 captured Germans, he arrived in Craiova. He handed the Germans over to the Russians and, leading a column of 140 people without any obstacles, he headed to the Red Army command in Bucharest, where he met members of the British and American military missions. He conveyed D. Mihailović's offer — according to Dr. B. Petranović — "to make an agreement with the Red Army and, presenting himself as an ally, take part in the fight against the Germans." Disturbed by this news, Tito demanded from Koča: "Ask General Major Gorshkov, that if it is confirmed that Piletić has surrendered to the Russians, they should hand over Piletić and all of his officers, whom we consider war criminals and traitors, and whom they should punish. The remaining personnel should be disarmed and held as prisoners."[666]

In all of Tito's orders and directives to the commanders on the ground in Serbia, the Chetniks were designated as "enemy number one," whose defeat and liquidation were top priorities. Meanwhile, on September 14, D. Mihailović ordered all subordinate commanders that, without his approval, "fighting may only be conducted against

[666] There is no data on whether General Gorshkov intervened, nor on whether the Chief of the General Staff of the NOP did anything for his school friend or against him. However, it is known that Piletić and his escort — based on a report from the NOP representative — were disarmed by the Russians and, on October 8, "were transferred to Moscow as spies" (B. Petranović, *op. cit.*, p. 639). And when, according to the agreement, he was to be handed over to Belgrade for "trial for war crimes," Piletić disappeared from prison in Moscow in November 1945 "under unclear circumstances" and made his way to Paris.

the partisans."[667] It is indicative that, at that time, Major V. Lukačević spoke out for the second time; through the staff of the 37th Sandžak Division, he sent a letter from the Braneško Field airfield, repeating the offer from the August letter — which he had signed along with four other Chetnik leaders — to make peace with the NOVJ units and for the Chetniks, under British command in the Mediterranean, to join the fight against the occupiers.

The contents of that letter — a copy of which was to be sent to the supreme commanders of the NOVJ and the Mediterranean, as well as to King Petar II — were presented to Marshal Tito by Brigadier Maclean. His stance, as expressed in a letter to the staff of the 37th Division, was: "There can be no talks with the Chetniks unless they immediately switch to our side, under our command and organized as we see fit. The Chetniks, as independent units, cannot exist as such, not even according to the (Vis) agreement. Break them up wherever they collaborate with the occupiers."[668]

By the decree of August 29, at the proposal of Churchill and Dr. Šubašić's government, King Petar II stripped Draža Mihailović of his command and recognized Marshal Tito as the "only leader of the Yugoslav resistance forces" in the country. Soon after, on September 12, a proclamation called on all patriotic forces to rally under Marshal Tito's banner and fight for the liberation of the country from the German occupiers, otherwise, they "will not succeed in freeing themselves from the traitor's stigma, neither before the people nor before history." It was difficult to reconcile these calls, certainly made under pressure from official London, with the fact that: Colonel Robert McDowell, the U.S. Army intelligence officer,[669] was still with Draža; that the Chetniks in Serbia and elsewhere were still receiving material aid from the West; and that, according to a report from the 2nd Corps Staff on September 13, one American military mission had landed at Cavtat and then gone to meet with the Chetniks at Zupci and Bijela Gora, promising them assistance. At that time, Chetnik forces in that part of Herzegovina, heading towards the sea to meet the Allies, were not to be underestimated.

From Vis, according to reports from the main staffs and corps headquarters, the process of response from the quislings and collaborators to the call of August 30 was monitored. The deadline for surrender was September 15, with the senior officers receiving the same ranks they had when leaving their previous units. This caused an avalanche of protests from the partisan personnel, which some, misinformed and hurt,

[667] Exclusivity also existed at the top of the NOP, as shown by just two "cases" from 1943: On January 18, the Deputy Chief of the Supreme Command, Captain V. Terzić, proposed to Tito that "all Chetniks who have fought even once against our units should be mercilessly dealt with — all should be killed" (AVII, file 10, reg. no. 17/1); On September 15, the commander and commissar of the Main Staff of Croatia, I. Gošnjak and V. Bakarić, wrote to subordinate headquarters: "Due to the danger posed by the Chetniks in this phase of the struggle, we do not need their prisoners. All prisoners captured in combat must be immediately liquidated. This should be done in the future as well." (AVII, file 10, reg. no. 3/3).

[668] AVII, box 26, reg. no. 10-10/13.

[669] Professor of Greek and Latin at the University of California and intelligence officer for General Donovan on the Balkans in the Mediterranean.

attributed to the "former officers" in the high command. Additionally, especially in Serbia and Macedonia, mass mobilizations of manpower were carried out, which was the path to filling the divisions that had been severely depleted. In September, three more divisions were formed in Serbia (45th, 46th and 47th) and in Macedonia (48th, 49th and 50th), along with two more corps.

It was expected that with the reorganization of the General Staff of Vojvodina, the issue of mobilizing manpower from Banat and Bačka would be resolved, while Srem had long been fully mobilized. However, Banat proved to be "something else," particularly with its large German population placed in the service of the Third Reich. Thus, the issue of the Germans there, as well as of their compatriots in Romania and Hungary, would be dealt with according to a unified and harsh concept prescribed from Moscow wherever the Red Army had arrived. The General Staff of the Red Army and some Yugoslav circles in Moscow had also planned for the 1st Yugoslav Brigade, formed in the USSR and known as "Mesić's Army" (commanded by Marko Mesić), to move from Craiova through Banat, to be reinforced to the level of a division, and to be included in the liberators of Novi Sad, as a "parallel army to the NOV" (like the Polish and Czech units that had arrived from the Soviet Union). Tito had planned to use this brigade to strengthen Kosta Nađ, but when he saw, in Craiova, and learned from its commissar, Major Đ. Lončarević, who they were dealing with, and upon hearing the Russian plans, Tito ordered that the brigade be incorporated into the 23rd Shock Division (commanded by Colonel Miladin Ivanović, and commissar Vojin Popović), with the directive to "make sure that in the first battle, somewhere deep in Serbia, they face a situation where they will 'blood their pants,'" which indeed happened in the November battles near Čačak, when the brigade was pulled back from the front after losing half its strength.[670]

The German divisions from the south were hurriedly retreating, attempting to take advantage of a pause in the Red Army's operations in Romania and Bulgaria, with their forward units (from September 6) on the Danube and (from September 15) near Caribrod (Dimitrovgrad). General Alexander Lohr, commander of the Southeast, was aware that for the Red Army, the occupation of Pomoravlje and Belgrade had become an immediate priority, which would sever the most favourable route for withdrawing forces from the south. He was in a hurry because losing these communications would force him to retreat through the Kačanik Gorge, and from there, through Kosovo and the Ibar Gorge and the Sandžak, heading towards the Drina, and then towards Sarajevo and the Sava. These were far more difficult paths, fraught with many risks. In light of this development, Vis, through the leadership of the NOV of Albania and via Colonel V. Stojnić, requested the paralysis of the "harmful actions of the Albanian mercenary troops that the Germans were pushing towards the upper Vardar, Skopje, Kumanovo and Bujanovac, to paralyse the success of the NOVJ and assist in the liber-

[670] Lieutenant Colonel M. Mesić was dismissed and assigned to an administrative position; the reorganized brigade was incorporated into the 5th Krajina Division, only to meet misfortune again in Srem. Đ. Lončarević was promoted to the rank of colonel and appointed political commissar of the 14th Corps.

ation of communications for the German withdrawal from the south." On September 11, all staffs directly subordinate to the SH were ordered to "maximize the initiative and offensive order, intensifying the destruction of communications, capturing important nodes, cities and other strongholds." They were instructed to "not allow the Germans to retreat in an organized manner and take their weapons out of our country."[671] Their commander, Lohr, directed the main units along the roads (since the railways were destroyed) through the Vardar-Morava valley, with some passing through Skadar and Montenegro towards Trebinje. He had little choice, and after losing the route through the Morava and Zeta valleys, he would have even fewer options. Against such a force, regardless of which paths they chose for their retreat, the only units that could oppose them were the numerous, well-organized and well-armed units of the NOVJ, which by then numbered around 450,000 fighters. In this context, on September 13, the SH ordered that the fighters from the massive influx first be used to replenish the old divisions, growing them to 6,000 to 8,000 fighters, and that new special units be formed, including artillery, communications, engineering, as well as tank, motorized and cavalry units.[672]

Despite the intense professional work, there were brighter moments on Vis. For example, by a decree from the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on September 5, the Supreme Commander was awarded the Order of Suvorov, 1st class; Generals A. Jovanović, A. Ranković, S. Žujović, M. Đilas, I. Milutinović and Tempo received the Order of Kutuzov, 1st class; six generals were awarded the Order of Suvorov, 2nd class, and 14 received the Order of Kutuzov, 2nd class; 14 received the Order of the Red Banner, and five prominent officers were awarded the Patriotic War Order, 1st class.[673] This was cause for sincere rejoicing and congratulations, which flooded in both in writing and verbally, literally overwhelming radio communication.

In return, the Presidency of the AVNOJ awarded medals to several senior officers of the Red Army, with Generals Korneyev and Gorshkov receiving the Partisan Star, 1st class.

The first "contingent" of 12,430 "1941 Commemorative Medals" arrived from the Moscow mints, and the first decorations for achievements in the NOB were also awarded, with Arso receiving the Partisan Star, 1st class, which was then ranked just below the Order of People's Hero.[674]

A dedicated infantryman and lover of the "queen of war," Arso, on September 15, enthusiastically conducted a review of the 1st Heavy Motorized Division of the SH, composed "of personnel and material" from a Howitzer regiment (12 100mm guns) and a battery of long-range guns (two 105mm pieces). He had been heavily involved in the formation of this powerful unit, directly tied to the General Staff, for a long time,

[671] AVII, box 372, reg. no. 33-128/1. This referred to four army corps and four independent commands with eight divisions, seven independent fortress brigades and 12 battalions.

[672] AVII, file 394, reg. no. 21-50/2.

[673] *Collection of Relations Between Yugoslavia and Russia (USSR) 1941-1945,* pp. 495-497.

[674] The Decorations Commission, as an organ of the NKOJ linked to Tito, dealt with this: D. Kveder (president), S. Orović, R. Čolaković and M. Bakić.

385.

УКАЗ ПРЕЗИДИЈУМА ВРХОВНОГ СОВЈЕТА СССР О ДОДЕЛИ ОРДЕНА СССР ГЕНЕРАЛИМА И ОФИЦИРИМА НОВЈ

5. септембар 1944.

За изузетну борбену активност и за испољену храброст и одважност у борби против заједничког непријатеља СССР и Југославије - хитлеровске Немачке додељује се:

ОРДЕН КУТУЗОВА I СТЕПЕНА

1. Генерал-мајор Вукмановић Светозар
2. Генерал-лајтнант Ђилас Милован
3. Генерал-лајтнант Жујовић Сретен
4. Генерал-лајтнант Јовановић Арсо
5. Генерал-лајтнант Милутиновић Иван
6. Генерал-лајтнант Ранковић Александар

ОРДЕН СУВОРОВА II СТЕПЕНА

1. Генерал-мајор Апостолски Михаило
2. Генерал-лајтнант Гошњак Иван
3. Генерал-лајтнант Дапчевић Пеко

First Russian decorations.

along with veteran artillery officers, Colonel Branko Obradović and Karel Levičnik, and the effort paid off. The first to recall this moment was how, during the ceremony, the Chief of Staff suddenly exclaimed: "Here, Brankiša, we have mighty artillery. With this, we can even go to Berlin!"

One of Arso's more cheerful moments was reading the report from Major Oskar Danon about the success of the NOVJ teams in the recently concluded allied sporting competitions on water, in which his participation had been a major accomplishment.[675] The matter was raised in discussions in Italy (August 6-12), the supreme commanders generally accepted it and the operatives thoroughly discussed it. It concerned organizing sports competitions, particularly swimming contests, for the Allied forces in the Mediterranean, a possibility Arso eagerly embraced. An invitation to Vis arrived soon

[675] AVII, file 15-A, reg. no. 31/402.



On behalf of the Supreme Headquarters, Arso greets the people of Dalmatia from the Vis airfield on the occasion of the third anniversary of the uprising.

after, via Bari, noting that the competition would begin at the end of August. When asked for permission, the Supreme Commander responded to the Chief of Staff, in the presence of Đilas, Kardelj and Kveder, that there were "great reserves," before proceeding with the plan.

The competition between teams from the USA, the UK, France and Yugoslavia came and went, and on September 2, Major Danon reported to General Jovanović, beginning with the assessment that "the preparations and departure of our swimming team to the Allied forces' competition in Rome were not well organized," meaning that everything was "arranged in a rush," which resulted in "the team's performance not being representative." Additionally, "the team had no training; it seems that the decision to participate in the swimming competition was based on the idea that for us, success was just participating, and the result didn't matter. If we view the whole situation from this perspective, then the performance of our swimming team was more than successful. All our swimmers were very disciplined at every stage, both on the journey and in the competition. There were no misunderstandings or incidents. The Allied athletes greeted us with great sympathy, and during our meetings with them, they greeted us with 'Long live Tito.' However, if we view our participation from another perspective, i.e., that our team must act as a serious and important force in sports, just as in today's struggle, then our participation in the Allied forces' swimming competition missed the mark. The performance of an untrained team, combined with the situation of relying on the Allied athletes' transport to get to the stadiums, begging for balls, shorts, swimming caps and the like, could not leave a more serious or desired

impression. While the French, British and Americans had everything organized, we had to fight for everything — we arrived in Rome completely partisan-like. No one knew us, not even our own representatives, who couldn't prepare food for us. We had to organize everything ourselves."

Danon reported that they had won one first place, one third place and second place in water polo. The leader of the team was evidently dissatisfied that, as he had predicted and hoped, the team was not the overall winner, showing that he was one of the many victims of the obsession that partisans must always be winners — "in the fight, and in sports." Major Danon also shared several observations from the trip, such as the neglect at "our reception station in Naples," and that there were reasons to discuss this, especially the negligence in Rome regarding the NOVJ team. However, during the operation Ratweek, there was no opportunity or time for a conversation about sports. In fact, at this time, Arso, surrounded by a team of expert operatives, was working day and night over operational maps, radio communication schemes and reports on combat performance — this was the real work he had longed for and knew well, so sports had to wait. Although a famous swimmer from Morača, he would occasionally, in the company of leisure-seekers, including the Slovenian ballet and Croatian theatre groups, "dive" into the sea and immediately return to his work. Due to his duties, he rarely played in the half-line of the General Staff football team, but whenever possible, as a passionate supporter, he cheered for the excellent NOVJ "Hajduk" team at their matches against Allied teams in the Mediterranean region. On the night of August 23, while accompanying a group of senior officers from Bari, he told talented footballer Major Đuro Lončarević not to miss the opportunity to watch a match of the famous CSKA team in Moscow with a group of fellow soldiers. They watched the game, and Đuro would later tell him in liberated Belgrade, at the end of November, when he was already a colonel and commissar of the 14th Corps, how he had faced great difficulties "with some of our people in Moscow" because he loudly said (the truth) — that our "Hajduk" plays better football than what he saw in the otherwise good match between CSKA and Dynamo. "It can't be," he was told by "one of ours," older in rank and more influential than him — "that anyone in the world, even if he's chasing his father's shadow, plays better football than the Red Army men; our 'Hajduk' is good, but the Russians are an unbelievable miracle. And that's it!" Almost no period — Đuro was nearly punished, which Arso found amusing.[676]

Wishing to resolve one more issue on his own front before heading to Moscow to strengthen his position, Tito requested from the Chief of Staff data on "what NOVJ forces are operating near Zagreb, which could quickly intervene or attack the city if needed." On September 16, this request was sent via radio to the Main Staff of Croatia,

[676] Later, at the very beginning of the peace era, General Lončarević saved the editor of *Front,* Captain Niko Kadić, who, in the first radio broadcast of a foreign sporting event in Moscow, said that "Partizan" had outplayed the famous CDKA, which was true, but the "politically awake" cell of the CPY "People's Army," at the insistence of General Otmar Krečić — "firmly standing on the line of internationalism" and unquestioning obedience to the "older brother" — pushed hard for Kadić to be "expelled from the Party and removed from office."

where, under Arso's leadership, Colonel Vjekoslav Klišanić was working on the task. The reason for examining this possibility was an attempt by a group of associates, with the help of a Western intelligence service, to stage a coup against Poglavnik Pavelić.[677] Viewed from a military perspective, the response arrived the following day: "Two divisions of the 10th Assault Corps are near Zagreb, and the main force of the 4th Assault Corps could arrive in three to four days." All of this was immediately presented by Arso, with a graphic representation, showing the locations of the German-Ustaša forces defending the city and its approaches. When asked what he thought about the possibility of taking Zagreb, he responded that the city, along with its approaches, was defended by strong forces, and the likelihood of receiving help within 12 hours was high. If the city were taken, the Germans would quickly retake it because that would be the retreat route for their main forces from the Balkans. Tito remained silent, and then, just before his flight to Craiova, he authorized Arso to respond via radio: "You must not attack Zagreb without our approval. However, always have forces ready to take advantage of a favourable situation. The city should be attacked when we are sure it can be captured and firmly held under our control. Otherwise, we would lose politically and militarily. The German forces are still strong with us. As they retreat, they will hold our northwestern parts longer."[678] Otherwise, Arso would spare Zagreb, multiple times until May 9, 1945, by Tito's order, from human casualties and destruction, but the people of Zagreb — according to the memory of M. Šušović — would never forget at least two wartime moments: that on April 10, 1941, they massed and welcomed the Wehrmacht tanks with flowers, and on February 2, 1943, like Berlin, they raised black flags in mourning for the defeat of General Paulus' army and, in its ranks, the Croatian Legion at Stalingrad.

On the evening of September 18, just before his "flight to the East," Tito hosted a dinner where, besides General Korneyev, Milutinović, Ranković, Arso and Bakić were present. Since Tito had given each person an individual task, there was no talk at the table about parting, shared obligations, the long journey or a quick reunion. Unexpectedly, the host, as Ranković recalled, initiated a conversation "about a certain relaxation of our people on Vis," mentioning the appearance of "order-mania." Speaking about the enthusiasm of those who had received the first Soviet military decorations and the disappointment of those who were left "empty-handed," he also mentioned the name

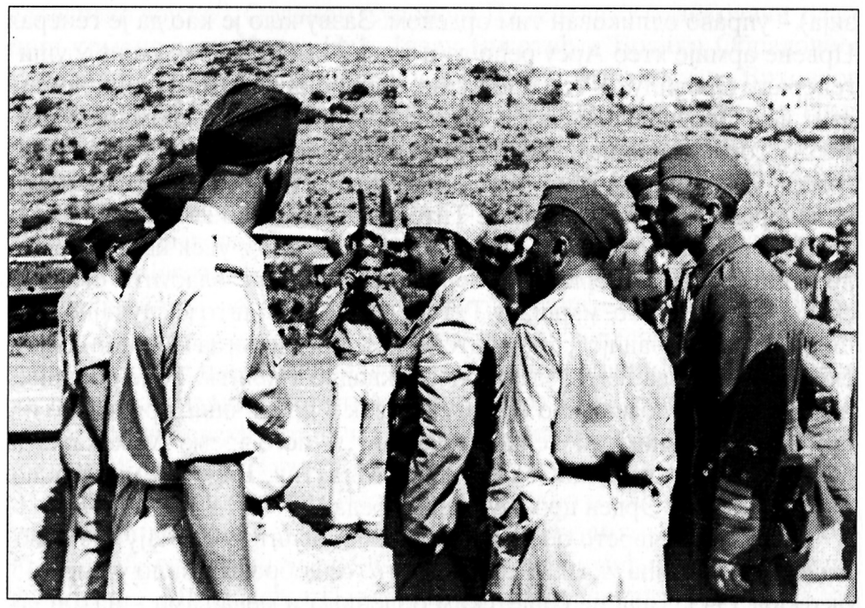
[677] Academician Milorad Ekmečić, at the International Scientific Conference "the Second World War, 50 Years Later," Podgorica, September 20-22, 1995, organized by CANU and SANU, stated that in 1942-43, the Vatican sought to arrange a separate peace between the Axis powers and the Western Allies on the international (behind-the-scenes) stage. Instead of a fascist regime, a milder form of rule would be introduced in these countries, including the NDH, with somewhat softer leadership (like Salazar in Portugal or Petain in France), which would be better suited to handling the approaching Red Army in these areas. In addition, the key witness and actor in the war events in Yugoslavia, Dr. V. Bakarić, in one of his final speeches in *Vjesnik,* stated that "until May 8, 1945 (the day the troops of the 1st and 2nd Yugoslav Army entered Zagreb), the HSS and its leadership were offered the opportunity to form a Croatian republican government in the new Yugoslav federation under communist leadership." (Further details in the proceedings of this conference, Podgorica 1997, Vol. II, p. 566).

[678] AVII, file 26, reg. no. 7-4/6.



A chess match with Tito, filmed by John Phillips, from which the author captioned the photo: "Who will checkmate whom?"

of the old General Savo Orović, who, from his sickbed (injured in a car accident), sighed deeply and even told Milutin that he was disappointed for not receiving "not only the promised Order of Suvorov or Kutuzov, but not even a medal." Tito then added, as a comment, that he believed "even a medal for courage or war merits is a high decoration, especially when it comes from Comrade Stalin." General Korneyev, on the other hand, was curious about who had promised General Orović the highest military decoration of the Red Army, a man whose patriotism, pro-Russian sentiments and bravery he highly valued. The host explained that it was something "he had promised more as a joke," but "tomorrow, Arso would go to see him and calm him down." Probably to emphasize the exceptional value of the Order of Suvorov, with which Tito was decorated, Korneyev mentioned that this decoration was reserved only for the highest commanders. As an example, he cited Marshal Semyon K. Timoshenko, the legendary commander from the Battle of Stalingrad and the commander of the Red Army front group, who in ten days of fighting at the end of August had literally wiped out the German-Romanian "Southern Ukraine" Army Group (18 German divisions). Timoshenko had just been awarded that order. It sounded as if the Red Army general wanted Arso to tell General Orović about Timoshenko's "achievement." Arso remained silent, somewhat angry that the Supreme Commander had mentioned Orović's name, a respected general and an honourable man, in the context of "order-mania," misusing some of his words from a conversation in the hospital with Milutin, and not understanding the feelings of the orthodox Montenegrin pro-Russian. To calm his first and now well-established general, Tito tasked Arso, as always when it was necessary to correct his own deliberate or accidental mistakes, to calm Orović. Tito said that he deeply



At the airfield of the 1st Squadron of the NOVJ on Vis.

regretted "that by mistake, due to administrative error," it had been overlooked to nominate him for the highest Soviet order, but that this would certainly be done later. The injured man, known as a harmless and kind person, accepted this explanation, and in his war diary, he noted: "At the same time, Arso says that we from the Supreme Headquarters (I, Arso, Milutin, Đido, etc.) will get the Order of the Red Banner, 1st class, in the next batch."[679]

The opportunity for a firmly promised "re-examination" in the case of (not just) General Orović would only arise once peace had firmly set in — on October 15, 1945. Then, with Soviet orders and medals — following the awarding of the Order of Victory to Marshal Tito — 240 military and political figures of Yugoslavia would be decorated.[680] The three top figures in the decree, Generals Arso Jovanović, Koča Popović and Aleksandar Ranković, were awarded the Order of Suvorov, 1st class, in recognition "for exceptional wartime readiness and, at the same time, the courage and daring shown in the fight against the common enemy of the USSR and Yugoslavia — nazi Germany." The war in Europe had ended five months earlier and General Jovanović was no longer the Chief of the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army, but it was still a time when wartime merits were remembered and valued, so he and General Aleksandar Ranković became the only Yugoslavs to receive the highest classes of the Orders of Suvorov and Kutuzov, which would long "prick the eyes" of some powerful

[679] S. Orović, *op. cit.*, p. 536.

[680] *Collection of Relations Between Yugoslavia and Russia (USSR) 1941-1945,* pp. 166-172.

individuals. The poetically celebrated Peko Dapčević received the Order of Kutuzov, 1st class, while the same decoration — in recognition "for outstanding contributions to organizing the armed forces of Yugoslavia and for skill in commanding wartime actions of the Yugoslav Army in the fight against the common enemy, nazi Germany" — was awarded, evidently according to the "republican key," to Andrija Hebrang, Dr. Vladimir Bakarić, Blagoje Nešković, Boris Kidrič, Rodoljub Čolaković and Đuro Pučar, as well as Blažo Jovanović. In contrast, these seven civilians, who were mostly marginally and unnoticed involved in "organizing the armed forces" and "leading the wartime actions of the Yugoslav Army," were awarded the Order of Suvorov, 2nd class. Successful commanders Kosta Nađ, Jovan Vukotić and Branko Obradović received this decoration. General-Lieutenant Savo Orović, a member of the first wartime composition of the SH (May 1942), along with Major Generals Ljubodrag Đurić, Ivan Maček and Franjo Pirc, leading a group of five colonels, received the Order of Kutuzov, 2nd class. This meant that Tito's word, given to the old general on Vis, was once again broken. And General-Major Dr. Gojko Nikoliš, a hero of the Spanish and Yugoslav anti-fascist armies, a renowned partisan doctor, and a recognized organizer of wartime medical services at the strategic level, seemed to have more reasons for dissatisfaction. He was, as the only general, awarded the Order of the Patriotic War, 1st class, leading a group of 17 senior officers — from Colonel Vojo Kovačević, the political commissar of the Main Staff of Serbia, to Major and one of the SKOJ tribunes, Slavko Komar — and finally, at number 18, Tito's secretary, Davorjanka Paunović, was listed — with no rank or position. The same order as Davorjanka, posthumously and symbolically, "in recognition of all the heroes who died in the fight for freedom," was awarded to Ivan Milutinović, Pero Ćetković, the two Ratkos — Mitrović and Pavlović, Sava Kovačević and Ivo Lola Ribar. They, at least, couldn't express their dissatisfaction...

Ispit-Šumadija Division *(September 27-October 6, 1944)*

Tito and Ranković agreed that Ranković would replace him in military matters on Vis, relying on Arso for expertise, while the political matters would be handled by E. Kardelj, who was called to "return as soon as possible" from Slovenia. From there, ten days earlier, he had requested from the Chief of Staff "a proposal of military issues for discussion with the headquarters of the 11th Croatian and 9th Slovenian Corps regarding joint operations." Arso pointed out the feasibility of joint military actions in Istria, which was operationally "covered" by the units of the 11th Corps, and the possibility of an attack on the Ljubljana-Trst railway, for which the British were especially interested and would "supply them with explosives and provide air support." Kardelj would align these issues with the corps headquarters and the British military missions at their headquarters and in the Main Staff of Slovenia.

At that time, only A. Ranković and I. Milutinović were on Vis from the members of the Political Bureau. They were, along with Arso, given some tasks, likely temporarily, while the General Staff, with all the institutions of the NOP, would be relocated to Serbia. While Ranković was left in the role of Tito's deputy, Milutinović was ordered

to travel to Bari with Colonel M. Bakić and part of the Cavalry Squadron, where they would wait for Tito's call.

Two "Dakotas" took off "at midnight" on September 19, without lights, and were joined by ten fighter planes, also lifted secretly. The operation of Tito's secret transfer to Craiova, and then to Moscow, was commanded by General V.I. Sokolov, and it was all carried out under the organization of the Soviet intelligence service.[681]

On the plane to Craiova, Tito and his son Žarko, along with General Korneyev, were accompanied by Colonel Branko Obradović from the General Staff, engineer Nikola Petrović from the AVNOJ Presidency, head of the cipher service Major Branka Savić, translator Olga Humo, two radio telegraphists and officers from Tito's closest guard, and his personal doctor Dr. Stjepan Štajner.[682]

Colonel Branko Obradović, as he notes in the collection *Tito in Vršac 1944,* unexpectedly found himself on the plane, and it was there that he learned that Tito was heading to the Soviet Union. When they landed on the morning of September 19, convinced they had arrived in Russian territory, Obradović knelt to kiss "the holy land," to which Tito "kicked him" and said it was Romania.[683]

Two days later, on September 21, when Tito, accompanied by fighters, left for Moscow, all his (arranged) associates remained in Craiova, along with "Radio Station Number 2" (the one on Vis was Number 1).[684]

Due to Tito's "phantom disappearance" from Vis, Churchill was angry, feeling deceived, especially regarding Tito's failure to fulfil obligations under the Vis Agreement. Dr. Šubašić was also upset, fearing that "the Balkans would be liberated in the next two or three weeks by Stalin's and Tito's divisions, but the agreed unified government was not formed."[685] The General Staffs of England and the USA were also displeased, seeing Tito's departure to Moscow as a possibility of arranging a deal that would, among other things, accelerate the transformation of the NOVJ into a regular army. They had previously favoured the partisan, more specifically, the guerrilla movement in Yugoslavia, providing assistance in heavier weaponry, but now they feared Stalin would provide tanks and aircraft. Perhaps the most outraged was General H. Wilson, who, with good reason, considered himself the commander of the Mediterranean,

[681] General A.P. Gorshkov in the collection *Tito in Vršac 1944.*

[682] Some writers state that General I. Rukavina travelled with Tito to Craiova, and that some even "saw" him in Moscow, but the source documents show that he was only invited after the decision "on the special status of Banat" was made at Marshal Tolbukhin's Headquarters, and on October 17, he was appointed as the commander of the "established" Military Administration covering Bačka and Baranja in Vršac.

[683] Colonel Obradović stayed in Craiova for almost a month, simultaneously working on establishing a technical base for supplying the NOP and, with Russian instructors, developing the concept for the development of the Yugoslav Army's artillery, before soon being promoted to general and becoming its commander.

[684] There are claims that I. Milutinović and M. Bakić travelled with Tito to Craiova, and even to Moscow, which is not true; the two of them, with part of the Cavalry Squadron, would arrive in Craiova 18 days later, expecting an "air link" in Bari.

[685] Further details in the *Collection Tito-Churchill, Strictly Secret,* pp. 304-308.

meaning all the troops and movements operating in his broader region, which implied the obligation of every subordinate to inform him of any intended step — in Tito's case, his departure for Moscow. He had the support of the Foreign Office, which, in a telegram from September 20, stated that it was "very impolite of Marshal Tito to have gone in an unknown direction without first informing General Wilson."[686]

The highly informed General V. Velebit argues that there was no reason for Tito's "so mysterious disappearance," as he had the right to travel "wherever he wished," noting in his *Memoirs* that "Tito's secrecy regarding his departure by Soviet plane without prior notification to the Allied military representatives on Vis acted like a bomb in the Allied command of the Mediterranean and in the British government in London." To all of them, the statement from Vis that Tito was in Serbia seemed highly unconvincing; they all anticipated that he had gone to Moscow, where he would receive assistance to transform the NOVJ into a modern army that would have no competition in Yugoslavia and would become a strong support for the state authorities. The situation and balance of forces would allegedly have been very different if the Red Army had found the royal government and the partisan army, which could only fight in a guerrilla manner, in Serbia.[687]

As he was leaving for Moscow, Tito ordered that "Radio Station 2" remain in receiving mode during his absence, and that it would only be "fed" with the most important news, so that when he returned from Moscow, he would be "up to date with operations." There is no doubt that he thought he would "stay very briefly outside Yugoslavia," as seen from his first telegram to Ranković (September 19), where he mentions that he would stay for a "short time," and instructs him and Arso to "slowly prepare for the transfer," while Milutinović was ordered to "immediately be ready to travel" to him, as he was "urgently needed."[688]

On his way to Moscow, Tito was accompanied by his son Žarko and General N. Korneyev, the only Yugoslav and the only Russian. The Russian had returned ten days earlier after spending two months away from Vis, having settled nearly all the issues regarding which Tito had travelled to Moscow, as seen in documents from September 7 to 12. There is no written source regarding who from the officials received Tito between September 21 and 28, what was discussed and what was decided. Even General Terzić and Moša Pijade left no written record on this; only Tito shared some of this with his official biographer V. Dedijer, but after his conflict with Stalin in 1948. He recounted, in fact, some of his memories, but in a rather tendentious and somewhat mocking manner, possibly out of spite toward the "cunning Asiatic" for not personally, as leader to leader and marshal to marshal, presenting him with the Order of Suvorov, 1st class, in the Kremlin, but instead having authorized his representative, General-Lieutenant Korneyev, to do so in the Romanian village of Craiova. Dedijer also

[686] V. Velebit, *op. cit.*, p. 305.

[687] In such circumstances, the Chetniks would have had a chance, after the Germans' withdrawal, to "get into" Belgrade and "present themselves to the world as liberators and conquerors." (V. Velebit, *op. cit.*, 311).

[688] AVII, file 26, reg. no. 12-1/13.

wrote that Marshal Tito had met Stalin two or three times in the Kremlin and at his dacha, where, according to the "Sun of the East," he allegedly noticed "a certain coldness" and unfamiliarity with Yugoslav conditions, along with insistence on a unified, pro-royalist government of Dr. Šubašić, which irritated the partisan leader.

It is also known that, even after five and a half decades, any documents concerning two fundamental issues in the domain of wartime Yugoslav-Soviet relations remain unavailable to the public: the correspondence of Korneyev from Drvar and from Vis with official Moscow, and Tito's conversations with Stalin. Regarding Tito's eight-day stay in Moscow, here are two documents: the first, a telegram to the president of the Bulgarian OF government (September 24), in which Tito emphasizes how he "gladly accepts the cooperation of the Bulgarian people in the joint fight to expel the German occupier from the Balkans"; the second, a *TASS* statement from September 28 about the agreement "on the participation of the Red Army in operations on the territory of Yugoslavia."

In conversations with representatives of the Soviet government and the Supreme Command, there was undoubtedly talk of implementing decisions already made at the highest state level, primarily: the formation of the (2nd) Tank Brigade of the NOVJ, the allocation of two air divisions (491 combat aircraft) and the completion of armament for 12 (out of the planned 24) divisions of the NOVJ "at full wartime strength" (10,000 fighters).[689] Much of this would be delivered immediately after the Belgrade Operation and would serve to rearm the divisions of the 1st Proletarian and 12th Assault Corps, which was a prerequisite for them to be developed into the 1st and 3rd Armies of the NOVJ on January 1. Moscow also allocated 50,000 tons of wheat, which was a great wealth in conditions of famine for both the people and the army.[690]

On the day of Tito's departure from Moscow to Craiova, the official Soviet agency *TASS* released a communiqué, the beginning of which read: "A few days ago, the Soviet command — keeping in mind the interests of developing combat operations against German and Hungarian troops in Hungary — approached the National Liberation Committee of Yugoslavia and the SH of the NOV and PO of Yugoslavia with a request to give consent for the temporary entry of Soviet troops into Yugoslav territory bordering Hungary. The Soviet command stated at that time that the Soviet troops, after completing their operational tasks, would withdraw from Yugoslavia. The National Committee and the SH of Yugoslavia agreed to satisfy the Soviet command's request. The Soviet command accepted the condition, set by the Yugoslav side, that civil administration of the National Liberation Committee of Yugoslavia would operate in the areas of Yugoslavia where Red Army units would be located..."[691]

[689] This included the delivery of: 96,515 rifles, 68,423 light and heavy machine guns, 3,797 submachine guns, 3,797 PT rifles, 712 PA machine guns, 3,364 mortars, 1,065 artillery pieces, 1,319 radio stations, seven evacuation and four surgical hospitals.

[690] By mistake, Tito added an extra zero, as was announced in Moscow and on Vis, and the data, under pressure from the Russians, was denied from both centres because it had political implications; after all, at that time, 500,000 tons of wheat could not have been collected from the entire Danube region.

[691] *Collection of Relations Between Yugoslavia and Russia (USSR) 1941-1945,* p. 527.

In fact, the communiqué represents a real recognition from the leadership of the Soviet Union — that is, unilaterally — not only of the National Committee as the de facto government of Yugoslavia but also of the SH as the military leadership of the allied state. This is especially significant since the communiqué further states that "the two armies, which, fighting far from each other, have contributed proportionally the greatest sacrifices for the freedom of mankind, have found themselves on Yugoslav territory and are now standing shoulder to shoulder for the final destruction of the fascist monstrosity." This was something the West persistently refused to acknowledge about the NOV, wanting to keep it at the level of a guerrilla movement, questioning its legitimacy and providing it with "piecemeal" assistance, accompanied by political blackmail. Thus, the Western allies were faced with a fait accompli and were "forced to reason" — that from now on, they too were obligated to respect the integrity of Yugoslavia and, for any potential temporary presence on its territory, to consult with the wartime government and the Supreme Command. In that document, spanning two typed pages, legal experts would, of course, find a few absurdities and contradictions, and politicians would see illogicalities and forced reasoning, but the agreement was in place, and behind it (according to F. Roosevelt) was the "Red Tsar from Moscow," the then most powerful and famous figure in the "earth's orbit," on the eve of his life's triumph — victory over Hitler. Moreover, in the coming days from the East — through newspapers and the waves of the powerful Radio Moscow, the "first pen of wartime propaganda," Ilya Ehrenburg, would thunder that "Yugoslavia, when the war is over, will come to the Peace Conference not as a beggar, but as a scout. It has not only liberated a whole series of regions of its territory, but it has also won a new honourable place in post-war Europe..."[692]

In the first telegram after returning to Craiova, Tito ordered Ranković to "urgently start moving parts of the staff and staff materials here." The SH, the CC of the CPY, the National Committee and AVNOJ, according to the Russian and his plan, were to be transferred to Pirot, with the instruction that "Arso with the rest of the staff should be the last to arrive in the liberated territory near the border, as he will be accompanied by the Allied missions."[693] According to this plan, the Anti-Fascist Assembly of Serbia was also supposed to take place in Pirot in those days. Koča was also supposed to transfer the General Staff there, for which Arso "needed" four Soviet planes. This plan was abandoned due to the strength of the German units defending the wider Niš area and the eastern advance from Bulgaria, with around 20,000 Wehrmacht soldiers, so the leadership of the NOP would remain on Vis for another twenty days.

There is no doubt that Tito's decision to be as far away as possible from the Western Allies at this stage of the NOV was very pragmatic. He knew that staying on Vis and being exposed to the daily and various demands and pressures from Churchill, Dr. Šubašić and their emissaries would waste precious time, and the presence of their missions in Serbia before the liberation of Belgrade, when everything was flowing

[692] Article in *Druzhba*, written on the occasion of the meeting between Red Army and NOVJ troops.

[693] AVII, file 15, reg. no. 21-1/1.

according to the Russians' decisions, would complicate operations. Therefore, in his view, it was best for the Chief of Staff to keep them "under control" on Vis, while he had full freedom of action in Serbia, bringing them face to face with the reality. On the evening of September 28, after the *TASS* announcement, he received a radiogram from Vis stating that "Allied circles were affected by the agreement regarding the entry of the Red Army into Yugoslavia. They say that the Russians cleverly crafted the agreement at the Tehran Conference about non-interference in our issues. The Allies found it difficult to raise similar questions with the NKOJ at the time, as they feared he would refuse, given that he had many arguments for this, and that it would somewhat mean his recognition."[694]

To calm the anger of the heads of the British and American military missions, Tito ordered the SH: "Publish through *Tanjug* that I have completed the inspection of the troops in western Serbia and some other areas."[695] It was published, but the "circumvention of the truth" no longer "worked." For the "Westerners," the announcement from *Slobodna Jugoslavija* on September 29 about the cancellation of the UNRRA assistance was a sign that Tito had been encouraged by Stalin not to allow hundreds of members of this international institution to distribute aid across Yugoslavia and control its ports and airports. He was so materially supported by the Russians that he could afford to reject such (very significant) Western assistance. In fact, Tito would inform Kardelj on October 3 that he made this move "in agreement with our brothers."[696]

Upon his return from Moscow, Tito received a recently arrived report about the rather unfavourable outcome of the (second) Banja Luka operation, carried out with his approval, but also during his absence from the country, from September 18 to 28. Around 11,000 fighters from the 5th Corps were engaged against German and collaborationist forces of 10,000 soldiers, across a wide area from Banja Luka to Bosanska Gradiška. In the operational staff of the Supreme Command, no one disputed the exceptional significance of Banja Luka for the enemy, who, relying on it, secured communications along the Vrbas valley and prevented the NOVJ forces from advancing into the Sava valley. The Germans had also heavily fortified the city, turning it into an important supply base for their divisions in Dalmatia, prepared for the crushing (and further) expected Anglo-American invasion. From this, the significance of the city on the Vrbas river for the NOVJ arose — as a military facility, an economic centre and a mobilization base. However, the possibility of liberating the city under the given operational conditions was questioned in the SH, primarily by its Chief. Therefore, when in early September, directives for long-term operations were to be given, he advocated for the 5th Corps — undoubtedly a large and agile unit — to focus in the coming weeks on stronger actions towards the Bosna valley and the wider Sarajevo region, even demonstrating attacks on the city of Sarajevo itself on the Miljacka river, with the primary goal of disrupting communications in the Bosna valley and relieving the 3rd

[694] Note 458 in Vol. 23 of the J. Broz's *Collected Works*, p. 293.

[695] AVII, file 15, reg. no. 54-1/1.

[696] *Ibid.,* file 26, reg. no. 12-2/13.

Corps units in eastern Bosnia. General Slavko Rodić, with a personal intervention to Tito and the assessment that "everything was ripe for the liberation of Banja Luka," received approval for his bold and ambitious plan: to connect the vast liberated territory in the Bosanska Krajina and central Bosnia, and then advance into the Bosna valley, threatening the local communications — before carrying out the operation to capture Banja Luka, Bosanska Gradiška and a series of strongholds up to Kotor Varoš, along with breaking the Chetnik foothold on Manjača. Arso emphasized that it was unrealistic to attack such strongholds with a 1:1 strength ratio, and that the enemy, due to the importance of this area in their defensive system, would quickly intervene with stronger forces. He added that Banja Luka, with its fortress Kaštel and its internal defence system, was defended by at least 5,000 soldiers, making it a hard nut to crack, and it was important to consider the negative experience from the first attack.[697] However, the corps' staff[698] defended their idea, and Tito yielded to General S. Rodić's arguments, an undoubtedly talented and popular commander of the People's Army. The Supreme Commander, no doubt, believed that the Krajina forces would liberate Banja Luka, which would be very good news during his stay in the Kremlin. Thus, it was left to Arso to once again remind Rodić of the lessons from the first Banja Luka operation and wish him, as well as the three divisions (4th, 39th and 53rd) of the 5th Corps, good fortune in battle.

The grouping of divisions was completed by the 10th, the order was given on the 16th, and combat actions began on September 18 at 10:00 p.m. The superhuman struggles of the attackers lasted a full ten days, and the outcome was: the unclaimed fortress Kaštel, the untaken Bosanska Gradiška, the undestroyed bridge on the Sava preventing the entry of German reinforcements from the north and the unsuccessful attempt to prevent the intervention of forces from Derventa, who would unblock the city centre and drive the attackers out of the city. Some 7,500 fighters attacked Banja Luka, armed with 40 artillery pieces. The attack was supported by aviation, and there were connections with the Domobran units in the defensive positions, with combat groups of the NOV operating in the city. Despite all this, it was insufficient to capture Kaštel. According to the attackers' data, the defenders had 2,100 killed, 1,400 wounded, and more than 3,336 officers and soldiers were captured. This was a significant success for the 5th Corps, especially considering that General-Major Karl von Dewitz was captured (on Kardelj's suggestion, exchanged for the arrested Slovenian poet Oton Župančič). Kaštel was defended by 300 Germans and Ustaše, and it was shelled by artillery and aviation, even with incendiary mixtures, but remained unconquered until reinforcements arrived.

The first analyses of the operation, conducted at the Corps Headquarters and then at the Supreme Command, revealed that many winter mistakes were simply repeated,

[697] The operation took place from December 30, 1943 to January 2, 1944, when the defence of Bosanska Gradiška was not eliminated, nor was the bridge across the Sava River destroyed, so reinforcements arrived and the city on the Vrbas River remained unconquered.

[698] Commander General S. Rodić, his deputy Colonel Nikola Karanović, Commissar Colonel Ilija Došen and Chief of Staff Lieutenant Colonel Velimir Knežević.

or more precisely, "reproduced," which was the result of deviating from some basic principles of military skill that Arso often insisted upon, albeit unsuccessfully at times. These principles included ensuring a favourable force ratio, especially when attacking a fortified city, maintaining secrecy in preparations and troop movements, establishing cooperation and protecting against surprise.

Six months earlier, on March 25, 1944, Koča Popović had recorded in Prekaja (p. 270) that Arso, "impulsive, temperamental and undoubtedly a talented soldier," had been "decisively against the attack on Banja Luka at the beginning of the year," which he classified as "a lack of courage — not personal." He was also against the second attempt, made nine months later, and their ultimately unfavourable outcomes proved him right. He argued that such a radical goal, like capturing such a large and fortified city, could not be achieved without superior forces and ensuring the attackers' backs. This was not a sign of indecision or disbelief in one's forces, but rather rational thinking based on theory and long experience in warfare.

The Supreme Commander, on "Radio Station Number 2," left "on reception," received more radio reports from Vis: the "situation in the Kosmaj sector is excellent"; there was a "huge influx of fighters from Posavina, Pomoravlje, Podunavlje and Belgrade"; the Supreme Command had sent 130 people — tankers, listeners of the course for corps, division and brigade headquarters, and intelligence and counterintelligence officers — to the Soviet Union; the Croatian Main Staff was sternly reprimanded for the 11th Corps Headquarters' unilateral request to withdraw from the task of the British fighting groups in Istria, whose activities had been previously approved at the highest military level, which led to a strong protest from Brigadier Maclean; the Supreme Commander, as per his orders, developed the idea that, through operations from Mačva and Srem, the enemy's combat order could be cut off along the line Sremska Mitrovica-Danube, thus "cutting off" the Germans in Zemun and Belgrade; Arso approved the execution of the "well-thought-out" operation by the 6th and 10th Corps (around 16,000 fighters) in Podravina and issued a directive for operations by the 4th and 11th Corps in Lika and Gorski Kotar. And something quite unusual: General Dapčević reported that Draža Mihailović's son had joined the NOV and was "ready to make a statement about Draža being a traitor and his cooperation with the Germans," so the Supreme Command approved that such a statement be taken from Draža's son and daughter, Branko and Gordana, members of the SKOJ from 1941 and partisans in occupied Belgrade, but also ordered that they be treated well, with caution, as "they could be attacked by someone and this could be set up against us."[699]

In a radio message from September 29, Tito informed Ranković that, along with "two divisions of aviation — one of assault planes and one of fighters," he received "complete artillery and other armaments for 12 full-strength divisions." He told Arso that he would reduce the number of divisions from 46 to 24, as divisions must have at least 10,000 men.[700] This referred to the suggestion from the Soviet military experts, which Stalin "cut off," that the NOVJ should consist of 24 rifle divisions, meaning that 26 of the previous 50 would be disbanded. In this regard, General Dapčević received an order on September 30 to "mobilize and fill his divisions," each with 8,000 to 10,000 fighters, and prepare artillerymen who would receive "80 to 90 guns of various calibers" for each division, as well as mortars, for which horses needed to be mobilized, and prepare "an airfield for landing planes."[701]

The Western Allies complicated the situation with their stance towards the new Yugoslavia, particularly towards its NOVJ, as Tito was informed from Vis: official London pushed reports about British troop actions on the Dalmatian islands; Major Reid, from the Independent American Military Mission, expressed a desire to turn the airport in Zalužani near Banja Luka, taken by the 5th Shock Corps on September 20, into an American base; Kardelj reported from Bari that the British were not sending weapons to the Supreme Command of Slovenia, which needed 10,000 rifles and 1,000 machine guns for 20,000 mobilized men. Clearly disturbed, Tito from Craiova ordered countermeasures, announcing substantial supplies from the Craiova base and creating conditions in Serbia "for receiving wounded from other regions." Meanwhile, in Moscow, there were talks about opening hospitals in Craiova for the NOVJ with a capacity of 5,000 beds; some organizational measures were taken, but the plan was abandoned due to the favourable developments in the Danube region. Large hospitals with the help of the Soviet Army's medical services would be opened in Belgrade, Sremska Mitrovica and Novi Sad.

Two events, or rather processes, alerted the Supreme Command and its units, particularly the 2nd and 8th Corps, to the need for vigilance: the first — the landing of parts of the British 4th Special Service Division (800 commandos) on September 24-25 at Santa Quaranta without the approval of the political-military leadership of the new Albania; the second — the gathering of Chetniks for an advance towards Dubrovnik and the Montenegrin coast, where they expected an allied landing. Along with this, there were reports about Major Randolph Churchill's cooperation with some influential pro-Ustaša "elements." It was known that the Americans had interests and plans for landings at several locations on the eastern Adriatic coast, in collaboration with the Chetniks and Ustaše, and they spread rumours about this as a form of military and political pressure. The Supreme Command's concern about this was all the greater because, through the Santa Quaranta port, groups of Albanian reactionaries had managed to escape to Italy while the port was held by General Tom Churchill's forces. In response to such developments on the Adriatic coast, Arso, on September 27, without waiting for instructions from the Supreme Commander (which would arrive on October 2), ordered the Croatian Main Staff and the headquarters of the 2nd and 8th Corps to take all precautionary measures to prevent any unexpected actions. They were instructed to organize intelligence and reconnaissance services, secure all

[699] Branko was a second lieutenant and commander of a battery in the Artillery Brigade of the 21st Division by the end of the war, while Gordana was a member of the SKOJ Committee of the 5th Serbian Brigade. As students, they were demobilized in 1946; both, as students, suffered because of the Resolution of the Cominform, and later, as a lawyer and a doctor, lived under the burden of their father's sins.

[700] AVII, file 26, reg. no. 12-1/13.

[701] *Ibid.,* file 26, reg. no. 10-21/13. The choice of airport was made at Divci near Valjevo.

strategic points and prevent any Allied forces from entering Yugoslav territory without the Supreme Command's approval. Simultaneously, through Colonel V. Stojnić, he advised the Albanians on how to resolve the problems caused by the landing of commandos, particularly in the area where Mussolini had begun the aggression against Albania on April 7, 1939. At that time, the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia in Albania not only had a strong military and political mission but also numerous groups of instructors in partisan units from the "Land of Eagles," all experienced senior officers. The NOV of Albania at the time had about 40,000 fighters, and with the help of experts sent from Vis for organization and formation, they had organized the first of their two corps.

The formation of new large units of the NOV was in full swing, particularly within the organizations of the main headquarters of Serbia, Macedonia and Vojvodina, which was significantly influenced by the Supreme Command. On October 3, the Supreme Commander firmly formulated a previously announced stance: "Let Arso halt any further formation of new divisions, and let the old ones be filled up to at least 10,000. We need to see which divisions will be dissolved and merged into others. Urgently gather artillerymen in all corps since we have received around 1,000 cannons, which will be distributed to 12 to 15 divisions. It is necessary to urgently organize short artillery courses at the corps and gather enough people. This primarily applies to Serbia, Croatia, Vojvodina, Bosnia and Montenegro."[702] These were the new and very delicate tasks for the Chief of Staff: how to stop the intensifying process of forming new divisions from the mass influx of personnel, which had become a symbol of national prestige; how, even more difficult, to dissolve 26 already formed divisions, most of which had been hardened in combat, and how to communicate this to the main headquarters and explain it in a way that they, along with the party leaderships, would understand and accept it; how to organize the urgent transfer of artillerymen, aviators and paratroopers to Craiova when airplanes from Bari had not been taking off towards it for days or weeks, and no other transportation was functioning; how, in the midst of round-the-clock combat operations, to organize artillery courses when the expert officers had been scattered across the battlefield, and there was nothing material-wise to begin with. And all of this — by order of Marshal Tito and the plans of General S.S. Biruzov from distant Craiova — had to be done urgently, yet professionally and of high quality, as Russian artillery was about to arrive!

Perhaps the most difficult task was to halt all activities concerning the formation of the Šumadija Division, which had been spearheaded by generals from Vis — Ranković and Jovanović, in their roles as deputy supreme commander and Chief of Staff; from Serbia — Blagoje Nešković and generals Koča Popović, Sreten Žujović-Crni and Peko Dapčević. Brigades (21st Šumadija, 22nd and 31st Serbian) had already been planned, and weapons had been gathered from other divisions (68 machine rifles alone). Nešković and five prominent generals, who had been intensively working — albeit from two ends of the front — on the formation of the Šumadija Division, were

[702] AVII, file 15, reg. no. 31-1/1.

well-versed in the history and tradition of the Serbian people from the liberation struggles of the last hundred years, particularly from the Serbian-Bulgarian wars to the Salonika Front, where the Šumadija Division played such a role that neither Serbia nor Šumadija could be imagined without units of that name and the legacy of that tradition and collective memory. Tito likely did not know or understand this, and certainly did not accept it — while he was issuing orders from Craiova.

The decision to form the Šumadija Division was adopted by the SH on September 27, based on the report from the commander of the 1st Army Group, which had continuous radio communication with Vis. The report stated that two brigades, with about 1,800 fighters, were located in the region of Aranđelovac and Kosmaj. Until a final decision was made, these brigades were placed under the command of Colonel Milutin Morača, the commander of the 5th Krajina Division. In response, Ranković and Arso sent a dispatch: "For political and military reasons, it is very important to form a Serbian Šumadija Division from the forces in Kosmaj. You must select good command personnel for this division. Therefore, it is crucial for us to form the Šumadija Division."[703] On September 30, General Dapčević responded: "In 10 days, I will form the Šumadija Division; two brigades have already been formed."[704] The personal staff of the Šumadija Division Headquarters was proposed from Šumadija and approved from Vis — with Colonel Momčilo Đurić as the commander and Milivoje Radovanović Farbin as the commissar. The brigades were completed, auxiliary units formed, weapons gathered from other units and actions planned. However, on October 3, upon Tito's orders sent to General Jovanović at Vis and Dapčević in Šumadija from Craiova, this process had to be halted and the units disbanded. A question arose, particularly at Vis: how to explain this to the fighters and the people of Šumadija? Confronted with this, Generals Ranković and Jovanović attempted on October 5 to "squeeze the Šumadija Division through the eye of a needle," explaining to the Supreme Commander: "Before your order, we only commanded the formation of the Šumadija Division, we will prepare a proposal to merge the divisions."[705] Instead of listening to his two closest collaborators, or at least conditionally acknowledging their initiative, the Supreme Commander again issued a more categorical order: "Do not form the Šumadija Division. Create Šumadija battalions and integrate them into your divisions, especially those that are the weakest. We need to create full divisions of 8,000 to 10,000. Otherwise, our divisions will not be able to accept the weapons that will arrive in the coming days."[706] Convinced that the Russian weapons for the mentioned 12 divisions had just arrived and angered that Ranković and Jovanović were "pushing" the Šumadija Division, he angrily, or rather threateningly, warned them on October 6: "I am giving orders for Serbia! Stop giving your own orders. I said not to form the Šumadija Division, but to

[703] *Ibid.,* file 28, reg. no. 1-6/1.

[704] Note 527 in Vol. 23 of the J. Broz's *Collected Works*, p. 299.

[705] *Ibid.,* Note 467.

[706] AVII, file 26, reg. no. 10-21/13.

integrate the existing brigades into other divisions."[707] A similar order, perhaps slightly calmer, was sent to the Headquarters of the 1st Army Group: "Do not form the division, but include the entire Šumadija brigades in your 6th Lika, 5th Krajina and the Vojvodina units. Follow my orders, not those from Vis."[708]

One can only speculate how the idea of forming the Šumadija Division must have felt for those who were behind it — Generals Ranković and Jovanović, as well as the leading figures of the NOP in Serbia, who were personally involved in its implementation alongside the military and party leadership. With Tito's order, the SH's previously positive assessment of the idea, which was given on September 27 for Koča Popović's proposal to form a new corps, was erased. The reasoning behind this decision was: "The number of your divisions and the intake of new personnel require it. Strive to carry it out as soon as possible."[709] However, the Supreme Commander's orders had to be followed, and a radio message was sent from the SH to the Main Staff of Serbia: "Proceed with the Šumadija Division as Marshal has ordered."[710] While the elite military leadership was fighting for the formation of this division, Tito, in Craiova, did not have any of his old and trusted collaborators from the top of politics and the military with him, and he made decisions based on proposals, or more precisely, already prepared solutions from General Colonel S.S. Biruzov, a joint chief of staff of both his and Tolbukhin's command, whom he met for the first time at that time. Biruzov was an exemplary staff officer, a fiery Russian patriot, a Pan-Slavist and a hero, later rightfully proclaimed a national hero of Yugoslavia and Marshal of the Soviet Union, but it can be assumed that he knew very little not only about Šumadija and its military history and tradition but also about Yugoslavia.

With General Biruzov, Tito planned the Belgrade Operation, i.e., joint actions from Niš to Belgrade and about fifty kilometres further through Srem, which he could hardly have qualified for alone, without the assistance of one of the generals from the military leadership of the NOVJ. There were also several General Staff officers who knew the people, their history, the military and its characteristics, values and advantages of the people's army. One of them, primarily Arso from Vis, or Rudolf Primorac from Serbia, or Mihailo Apostolski from Macedonia, could have been easily transferred by a Russian airplane to Craiova to influence the planning of the joint operations. On October 3, Tito informed Vis under the heading "For Arso": "In agreement with the Supreme Command of the Red Army, our operations in eastern and western Serbia must align with the operations of the Red Army in that sector. Therefore, all

[707] *Ibid.,* file 26, reg. no. 12-3/13.

[708] *Ibid.,* file 26, reg. no. 10-27/13. The author of the monograph on the 22nd Serbian (Kosmaj) Brigade, which was prevented by this order from joining the Šumadija Division, publicist Milorad Gončin, analysing this Tito stance, reasons (p. 83): "It is indeed unusual that the Supreme Commander warned the Army Headquarters not to follow orders from Vis, or from Aleksandar Ranković who was replacing him, but rather his orders from abroad."

[709] Everything was carried out except for the formation of the Šumadija Division.

[710] Thus, anti-fascist Serbia did not record in its history of the NOP the division that, in all previous wars for liberation: 1876, 1912, 1913, 1914-18, was a symbol of combat readiness, patriotism and loyalty to tradition.

orders to Koča and Peko will be given directly by me from here."[711] And he would continue with this until October 25, when he arrived in liberated Belgrade, which is why we "exclude" Arso from all matters related to the planning and implementation of operations (Niš, Belgrade, Kosovo, etc.) for the liberation of Serbia, depriving him of all possible merit, but also relieving him of any responsibility for potential mistakes.

For the massive army of the Soviet empire, the Belgrade Operation — or "campaign" — according to the standards of the Soviet military school, grounded in the teachings of the brilliant military theorist Marshal M.N. Tukhachevsky (whose doctrine was successfully adopted by former Tsarist officers like F. Tolbukhin and S. Biruzov), began on October 8 somewhere on the distant approaches to Niš and ended two weeks later not only with the liberation of Belgrade but also part of the Syrmian Plain, up to the line of Stara Pazova, securing a protective buffer zone for the capital. Those standards, however, were not accepted by the national military school of the host — a small country with a modest army — which Arso R. Jovanović had mastered excellently. This divergence led to disputes, even during the writing of a joint Soviet-Yugoslav monograph on the Belgrade Operation.[712] In the local strategic doctrine, these were in fact two separate operations — the Niš and the Belgrade Operations — each with distinct characteristics. Tito, with his limited military education, may not have known that, but he had a Chief of the Supreme Headquarters who certainly did. In Yugoslav historiography, the Belgrade Operation is considered to have begun on October 11 and ended on October 22. It involved eight divisions of the 1st Army Group of the Partisan Army (around 60,000 fighters), as well as the 75th Rifle Corps and the 4th Guards Motorized Corps of the 3rd Ukrainian Front, supported by a mixed air corps and the Danube Flotilla of the Red Army — over 40,000 Red Army troops — against roughly 60,000 German soldiers. The Niš operation, meanwhile, lasted from October 8 to 14. It included the 13th Corps (commanded by Colonel Ljubo Vučković, with Commissar Lieutenant Colonel Vaso Smajević), part of the 14th Corps (commanded by Colonel Radivoje Jovanović Bradonja, with Commissar Raja Nedeljković), the 1st Guards Fortified Region of the 3rd Ukrainian Front and — at Tito's suggestion to Tolbukhin — six divisions of the 2nd Bulgarian Army. It concluded with the complete defeat of the 7th SS Prinz Eugen Division. Let us put aside the technical criteria of military art — the most important fact is that both operations, by military science standards, were successfully executed, resulting in the liberation of both Niš and Belgrade, as well as the entire, deeply strategic corridor between them. This severed the only favourable withdrawal route for Army Group "E" from the south, forcing its units onto much more difficult paths of retreat — through the Kačanik Gorge, across Kosovo and the Sandžak, down the Ibar and West Morava valleys, Morača and Lim, the Drina and

[711] And he would give them until October 16, and then, in the next ten days, from Vršac, all from the headquarters of Marshal F.I. Tolbukhin's Staff — until arriving in Belgrade on October 25, 1944, where his transfer and accommodation were arranged by General NKVD Shadrin.

[712] The first edition, organized by the military top brass of the JNA and SA, was published in 1964 in Belgrade and Moscow, edited by the heads of general staffs, and the second, revised and significantly expanded, was published two and a half decades later (1989), also in the two capitals.

Bosna — all while exposed to attacks from Partisan units.

From Vis, General Jovanović — stripped of command authority over troops on Serbian soil — contributed to the fullest extent he could by focusing on logistical efforts and the integration of the 28th Division into "Lekić's Group," thereby helping to complete the 1st Army Group, composed of eight divisions. This would cooperate with elements of the 3rd Ukrainian Front in the liberation of Belgrade. On September 15, 1948, following Arso's death, General Dapčević would publicly state that he, as a "weak military leader," had been "excluded from the most important strategic operations" and that "during the Belgrade Operation he was left in Aranđelovac, with strict orders not to come to Belgrade or get involved in that operation."[713] However, this statement — particularly the claim about the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters' supposed military incompetence — as far as is known, has no basis in any original document, memoir or oral account by any other key figure involved in the events. The core of Arso's "exclusion" lay in the fact that the Red Army General Staff conditioned its support for the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia in the liberation of Serbia — and especially Belgrade — on the frontline commanders having a free hand in planning and conducting operations. This "suited" Tito, as he did not allow the Serbian leadership even the slightest insight into two spheres of strategic importance: high-level military command and foreign affairs.

On October 5, after discussions with the "equal partners" in Moscow, Tito unconditionally accepted Sofia's request for the participation of the "new" Bulgarian army in the liberation of the remaining parts of Yugoslavia. He did this without consulting the central political and military bodies of the NOP or their legitimate representatives, including the national leaderships of Serbia and Macedonia. This decision was likely made under Stalin's pressure and Dimitrov's assurances. Although Tito had, at least seemingly, gone to Vis aware that this step would not only be unproductive but also harmful — something he clearly expressed in his letter to Tempo on September 17[714] — he, 20 days later, away from the forums he led and was accountable to, decided on his own, even proclaiming it a great achievement, possibly to repay the debts to proletarian internationalism and confident that this was the first step towards the creation of the Balkan Federation, which had been announced a year earlier from Moscow. Because of this autocratic move in Craiova, Tito would regret his decision several times during the remaining eight months of the war, due to the lack of combat engagement and the rude behaviour of the Bulgarian units in the Niš and Kosovo operations, in battles in eastern Macedonia, in Srem and in Podravina. This "brotherly agreement" was especially unacceptable since troops from a foreign country fought to liberate Yugoslavia under the command of the army of a third country, the Soviet Union. Four years before his death, on December 21, 1976, when he was proclaimed the first doctor of military sciences, Tito would admit, in his inaugural speech, that there were no "operational reasons" for the participation of the Bulgarian Fatherland

[713] The cover of *People's Army* on September 18, 1948.

[714] AVII, box 26, reg. no. 10-16/13.

Front army in operations on Yugoslav territory, and that it had a minimal role, even being "more of a hindrance than a help,"[715] although he remained silent about the fact that generals Jovanović, Ranković, Žujović and Đilas had warned him in time. Tito, since his time in Jajce and especially in Drvar, had believed in the imminent, quick and profound anti-fascist changes in Bulgaria and its army, with his arguments being that the Bulgarian people had been misled, that its Communist Party was strong and that the state was not at war with the Soviet Union, allegedly supported by the anti-fascist mood within the occupying German divisions in Serbia and Macedonia. His collaborators from the Supreme Command opposed these views, more based on experience and feeling than evidence, arguing that such expectations of quick and profound changes were unfounded and premature, pointing to Serbia's difficult historical experience with Bulgaria. Some of them, particularly Žujović and Ranković, as well as Đilas, would tell him this, without wanting to upset him. Arso, aware of his professional and moral duties, warned him that there had never been a war in modern Balkan history where Bulgaria had not participated, but never — at least until it was clear who would be the victor — on Serbia's side. He would say this to his friends, not particularly choosing the time, place or words, but speaking truthfully about what he knew and how he felt, asserting in Jajce and Drvar that the Bulgarians would "fight stubbornly for months on the Drina, the Ibar and throughout Serbia," with a force of about 30,000 well-armed soldiers, "imported" with the 5th Army in Macedonia, "drugged" with poisonous propaganda, until "the water reaches the top" in Sofia. Marshal Tito, as A. Ranković recalled in October 1973, was angry about this, calling such an assessment "excessive, non-Marxist, even sectarian." On December 12, 1943, Tito wrote to Milutin Morača that they should "contact the Bulgarian units and invite them to join our side," expressing confidence that they would do so en masse.[716] Yet, for another nine months — long and hard months, as only wartime can be — those units would remain a tough nut for the NOVJ units engaged in battles and operations for the liberation of Serbia, with no soldier voluntarily approaching them.

The generals Ranković and Jovanović from Vis, with Tito's authorization and directives, resolved many ongoing issues across the front, except for Serbia. This would not have been allowed had a stronger radio station been available to Tito.[717] After establishing on September 29 that the 28th Division had broken through to Devetak, Arso ordered General Vladimir Popović to ensure communication and facilitate the advance over the Drina into Serbia. On the last day of the month, he warned the Headquarters of the 2nd Shock Corps that the Germans intended to withdraw from the coastal strip, protected by the Chetniks, to whom they would leave their weapons, and that General Mihailović had moved to eastern Bosnia[718] and would probably move "towards Jahorina and even further south." From this, tasks for the units of this group-

[715] J. Broz, *Military Works*, vol. V, Belgrade, 1977, p. 301.

[716] AVII, box 14, reg. no. 43/6.

[717] He requested 100 watts, to which General Terzić replied from Moscow that "he did not have such a radio station," and then he asked for a range of 2,000 km, which he also did not receive.

[718] On September 24, he settled in Dvorovi in Semberija with Colonel R. McDowell.

ing, especially the Adriatic Operational Group (3 brigades) and the 29th Herzegovinian Division (5 brigades and 9 detachments), were derived. This period saw some peculiar events in Herzegovina and Montenegro. It had started about ten days earlier, when the Chetnik High Command, encouraged by the landing of British commandos in Albania, estimated that "an Allied landing from Ulcinj to Šibenik was very likely." Before this, the "Independent National Resistance Group of the Yugoslav Army in the Fatherland" decided to initiate "offensive operations against the occupiers and all those in their service." The appeal was signed by Lieutenant Colonels Zaharije Ostojić, Petar Baćović, and Pavle Novaković, Major Vojslav Lukačević and the publicist Captain Velimir Krivošić. This was an attempt to pressure the British to "take a stand for joint actions against the Germans," but the leadership of the NOP was not willing to accept this "late appeal." General Vlado Šegrt and Lieutenant Colonel Vojo Kovačević, commander and commissar of the 29th Herzegovinian Division, rejected Lukačević's request from September 11 to halt the attacks on the Chetniks and reach an agreement for joint actions against the Germans. Soon, Lukačević's Chetniks, against both Draža's will, attacked the Germans in Trebinje and found themselves caught between the Germans and the 29th Division, which attacked them in Bileća and, in one night, destroyed the Bileća Brigade (32 killed and 27 wounded). As the Allies did not land, the Chetniks, after Trebinje and Bileća, lost all of southern Herzegovina, and Lukačević sought permission from Draža to retreat towards Greece, which he considered "a great military adventure." The adventure also involved Lukačević's connection with part of Brigadier Sir Henry Floyd's detachment, which, with the Supreme Command's approval, was based in Dubrovnik, and its batteries, protected by commandos, operated in Herzegovina and Montenegro. He openly offered them cooperation, which was considered, but General Šegrt intervened and demanded his handover, arresting a group of Englishmen as hostages near Stoc.[719]

At the same time, in Herzegovina, Lieutenant Colonel Pavle Đurišić in Montenegro announced a general mobilization of people aged 17 to 55. On September 23, he informed the Chief of the High Command's prominent division, Lieutenant Colonel Ostojić, that the Germans in Montenegro should be disarmed, but that he could not do it alone because partisans would immediately attack him, otherwise he "would have worked wonders with the Germans." He suggested that Major Lukačević send 2-3 members of the Anglo-American military mission from Herzegovina to protect him from partisans while he struck the Germans, and that P. Baćović send forces to Grahovo, from where they could head to the coast. Aware that, like Lukačević in Herzegovina, his own forces would soon be attacked by the NOVJ, he struggled, reporting that he had 4,500 soldiers gathered in the Podgorica area, with another 2,000 in a broader area, and if he attacked the Germans, he could raise another such force. Major Lukačević, also struggling with clashes with units commanded by General Šegrt, asked Đurišić to remove the Germans from the Montenegrin garrisons and then push

[719] The Chetnik commander of Stari Ras, honorary aide-de-camp to His Royal Highness and holder of the Karađorđe Star, would pay for his misdeeds and the crimes of his units, but also for some of his own significant delusions.

through Lovćen and Boka Kotorska to him. Đurišić did not accept this proposal, and it soon became impossible to achieve in the conditions of an offensive by General R. Vukanović's forces, which were encircling and breaking up the German 21st Corps, and especially numerous Chetnik forces in the Skadar Basin.

In the telegrams from Craiova, Tito frequently reminded Arso of the obligation to maintain continuous and direct communication with Brigadier F. Maclean and Colonel E. Huntington. Only after the relocation of the National Committee, the CC of the CPY, AVNOJ and the SH, would Tito personally, with the last convoy, lead them into liberated Serbia. Both leaders repeatedly insisted on being there as soon as possible. In one of these conversations, Colonel E. Huntington told Arso that his old acquaintance, Linn Ferrish, a colonel in the U.S. Army and the official representative of his government to the Greek resistance movement (ELAS), had been killed in action on September 11. He expressed genuine regret over this loss, aware that Ferrish's reports to the SH in the fall of 1943 had significantly influenced the three major powers to take a favourable stance towards the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia at the Tehran Conference. However, he would never have the opportunity to read Ferrish's report from June 28, 1944, detailing what he had witnessed in Serbia, where he had observed civil war raging and hundreds of Serbs dying from wounds possibly inflicted by American bombers, and yet "the two major powers from the West had done nothing to stop it."[720] Who knows what Arso would have changed his mind about — the man and soldier Linn Ferrish, or the harsh Serbian reality, where almost all the efforts of the National Liberation Army were directed against the Chetniks.

Upon learning of Brigadier Maclean's request to go to the front in Vojvodina, Tito, on October 7, determinedly decided not to allow it and demanded from Arso an explanation of how this was "connected with the permission of the Soviet military command, whose troops were operating in that sector." He did not see "the need for the head of the British military mission to go to Vojvodina; he should instead stay with our Headquarters or in Serbia. Tell Maclean that the SH is relocating to western Serbia, and I will be there."[721] It was easy for Tito to issue this order, but it was difficult for Arso to explain it to the Scotsman, who had his reasons to be in Banat, where the Military Administration was active, and where Kosta Nađ was expected to be closer to the Supreme Commander for coordinating joint actions with the Soviet army headquarters. For this wartime need, Arso requested three planes. While waiting for the planes at the Šuljam airport, Colonel Ellery Huntington requested permission to take eight officers to Serbia, and for Lieutenant Colonel MacFarlane to remain in the SH of Slovenia with a group of officers, which was granted. Shortly after, he asked for a modification of that approval so that, instead of MacFarlane, he would operate with two majors and another sixteen officers and experts at the SH in Belgrade, which was also approved. Arso, while Maclean and Huntington impatiently awaited their transfer to Serbia, reassured them until dusk on October 8: "What's the rush? The Chief of

[720] David Martin, *op. cit.*, chapter "Ferrish's Reports," pp. 256-261.

[721] AVII, file 26, reg. no. 12-3/13.

the Supreme Headquarters is still here with you!" He then allowed them to transfer to General Dapčević's Staff, and both, with their entourage, arrived in Aranđelovac on October 9, the headquarters of the 1st Army Group, where the next day, a telegram arrived in the name of Peko and Crni: "Order in my name to Maclean and Huntington the following: my departure from Vis was dictated by military and state needs. Given previous experiences with various German attempts, my journey had to be kept in utmost secrecy. Therefore, there has been no change in relations between us and our allies." He promised that, "as soon as possible," they would be received, and now, he greeted them.[722]

From Vis, Arso, mostly through radio messages, directed the actions of operational units: The Main Staff of Macedonia was warned not to allow the creation of bases for Allied fighter planes, "paratrooper drops, saboteurs and various missions" without the knowledge and approval of the SH. The Main Staff of Croatia ordered to switch to the "system of communication destruction" and the seizure of "important traffic hubs" along the German retreat route, emphasizing the Brod-Zagreb route and from the Una valley, via Sisak, towards Zagreb, as well as the roads in the upper Vardar area and through the Kačanik Gorge. The General Staff of Vojvodina warned to abandon the formation of the 51st division in line with the Supreme Commander's stance. The staffs of the 2nd, 3rd and 8th Corps were instructed to "firmly" destroy all communications from the Adriatic leading to the west in their operational areas. The 2nd Corps staff was specifically tasked with contributing as much as possible to the SH's efforts to cut off the retreat routes of large German forces from Kosovo and Albania in the Sandžak and Montenegro areas, even at the cost of decisive defence. The only remaining escape routes, as perceived from Vis, were the paths "from Sjenica and Peć to the Sandžak, as well as the Montenegrin coast." The destruction of bridges in Prijepolje, Goražde and Čajniče was ordered, along with "systematic destruction" of all communications from Višegrad to Sarajevo, with the primary task of preventing German advances towards the city on the Miljacka, and repelling "reinforcements heading east from Sarajevo." The 5th Corps staff was instructed to "vigorously work towards disabling the communication network of Mostar-Sarajevo-Doboj-Brod." The 29th division was directed towards Dubrovnik and Metković, while the Coastal Operational Group, along with parts of the 26th division from southern Dalmatia, was tasked with the liberation of the city under Srđ, which happened on October 18. The next day, the 29th Division staff reported that half of the 1st Tank Brigade would join them for operations in the Neretva Valley and towards Mostar, and that "all material and trucks" for the supply of the 2nd Corps would arrive in the Gruž port. They were also warned: "In Dubrovnik, they (the English) cannot establish bases without our approval. Be careful that they do not infiltrate any agents using that material. You need to protect the coastline from the Allies to prevent them from accepting any Chetniks, Ustaše or other elements." They were instructed to carry out "swift operations" in the Neretva Valley and Mostar with two brigades from the 26th division and "suppress any potential German advance

[722] *Ibid.,* file 26, reg. no. 10-38/13.

from the Bay of Kotor or from Neretva." The city of Dubrovnik had to be fortified and the sector from Dubrovnik to Trebinje firmly defended. The reserves against the Allies were all the more justified considering these events took place immediately after the "incident" of the British landing in the Santa Quaranta (Albania) and Patras (Greece) ports, to encourage the quislings and save the monarchy. The 2nd Corps staff, in addition to half of the Tank Brigade, was also informed that 200 Allied trucks would be sent to transport materials, which had to be quickly evacuated to Nikšić, the Sandžak and Gacko, conducting operations in two directions — one towards Neretva and Mostar, and the other towards the Montenegrin coast, with the goal of "securing the channel from Dubrovnik to the interior." Collaboration with the 8th Corps units was emphasized, and actions of the 5th Corps on the Mostar-Sarajevo-Brod communication were communicated.

In the midst of these operations, the Chief of Staff was informed by General B. Poljanac that the Italian Undersecretary of War, Mario Palermo, had arrived in Bari, expecting approval to visit the 2nd Corps and inspect the Italian "Garibaldi" partisan divisions. Palermo, after a request from Italian diplomacy, had been delayed twice. The Chief of Staff considered it necessary to approve the visit, and after consulting with Ranković, granted the visit, instructing General Vukanović to arrange a review of the Garibaldi units, which was done at the Berane airport. Other completely unforeseen incidents occurred. For example, drivers of the trucks announced for Dubrovnik, who were members of the NOPJ, had gathered in Bari to receive the vehicles. Suddenly, the English, through General Poljanac, informed Vis that they would provide 120 trucks under the condition that the drivers first transport materials for the Poles and Greeks for 15 days. Before making a decision, the Supreme Commander was consulted (on October 14), and the response was that this "arrangement" would be approved, as long as it "was not directed against us or our allies."[723]

The games around Dubrovnik had begun. A proposal from the British arrived at Vis to transfer three of their batteries, along with appropriate personnel from the 211th Heavy Artillery Division, to liberated Dubrovnik, along with forces for the defence of the city and the protection of the artillerymen, all under the command of Brigadier General Sir Henry Floyd. Arso reported this to Tito, with the opinion that it should be approved, as the city, having been liberated and turned into an important base for the NOV, was located on a potential German breakthrough route, including by sea from the Bay of Kotor, and the artillery would be useful for supporting actions further inland. This, along with the transfer of two squadrons to the airport in Konavli, was approved on October 21. Thus, on October 23, Arso, already in Aranđelovac, informed the staff of the 2nd Corps and the 29th Division that it had been approved for the aforementioned British batteries, with protective personnel, to be transferred to Dubrovnik "to strengthen its defence and prevent the German breakthrough in that direction," citing information from the Navy Staff that "the Germans are preparing an attack from the Bay of Kotor through Konavli." The transfer of two NOVJ

[723] Clearly refers to the Soviet Union.

squadrons from the RAF and "part of the Soviet air force" to Konavli airport was also announced, and it was noted that British Colonel McNair had been allowed to, along with a group of officers, scout the Gruž port and the airport, and establish contact with the 2nd Corps Staff. The Herzegovinians were instructed: "Establish proper relations with them and coordinate operations. On the other hand, prevent any connections between Chetnik and Ustaša elements and the English."[724] Soon, General Poljanac conveyed Arso a request from Vice Marshal W. Elliot to disembark "a command of 500 infantrymen to protect the artillery in Dubrovnik," making it clear that no material would be sent to that port until the request was fulfilled. In material distress, this was approved on October 24, but General V. Velebit also demanded that "attention be drawn to the British, as it is problematic that they are linking the delivery of material to the disembarkation of artillery. These are two separate matters." However, the British took advantage of the SH's approval and, on the same day, a group of 15 officers arrived in Dubrovnik "to carry out the transfer of artillery with several hundred soldiers." The approval was one thing, but the practice was another; soon, this "Floyd's unit" was reinforced, and its strength would triple the allowed number, and its activities deviated significantly from the agreement, which led to serious difficulties in relations and intervention by the SH. Eventually, this unit was withdrawn to Italy at the end of January 1945. As for the approval to use the airport in Konavli, Elliot, for purely operational reasons, did not utilize it, and the NOVJ squadrons operated from Kane and Vis until January 6, 1945. On that date, the SH signed an agreement with the Allies to use three airports near Zadar, with the central one, Zemunik, being used in parts from February 10 to early April, to participate in the final operations for the country's liberation. In every one of Arso's communications regarding the approval of Allied activities on Yugoslav soil, there was a clear warning — the British could engage in "only tactical work," and only in cooperation with the NOVJ staff.

[724] AVII, file 2125, reg. no. 1-111/10.

Part Ten

FROM LIBERATED BELGRADE

- *At the head of the expert group with 332 senior officers*
- *Sleeping on a military bed, eating from a cauldron*
- *Defence of Bijelo Polje against bombers and two marshals*
- *Zagreb spared destruction, Podgorica bombed 78 times*
- *Results of the conversation with Stalin on January 9, 1945: 222 instructors, weapons for 32 divisions*
- *Marshal Tito offers Field Marshal Alexander 200,000 fighters for operations outside Yugoslavia*
- *With General Ira Eaker, an aviation legend*
- *Department of the General Staff in the 4th Army Headquarters*
- *Lightning advance to Trieste, then to Carinthia*
- *The unfortunate fate of the 97th Army Corps of the Wehrmacht*

Intensification of the Fronts

After nearly a month abroad, Tito returned from Craiova to Vršac on October 16, where he would stay with Russian generals for the next ten days, calling to him one by one generals S. Žujović, K. Popović, A. Ranković, and P. Dapčević. The first two had been there, primarily to assist him in collaboration with General-Lieutenant of the NKVD G.A. Shadrin and his ten officers, ensuring his transfer to Belgrade. The plan was to carry this out on October 23, but due to the death of I. Milutinović on the Danube and because there was no electricity or water in Belgrade, it was postponed for three days. General Shadrin, with his visible and invisible "organs," took care of the security of Tito's travel by car and armoured monitors across the Danube, previously selecting, along with commanders Dapčević and Đurić, a villa in Rumanjska 15 (today Užička) for Tito's stay in Belgrade. The organization of his arrival in Belgrade was also arranged by the commander of the city, General Ljubodrag Đurić, with the 2nd Serbian Proletarian Division. On the Danube quay, on October 25, Tito was greeted by the highest military and party officials, including Generals Ranković and Jovanović. About this meeting, M. Đilas would later write in *Revolutionary War* three decades later: "He hardly even greeted us but immediately started to rant: nothing was done in Belgrade — the people are suffering; the 'fifth column' is active; Milutinović was not found; the front in Srem is disorganized... I noticed even then that he was imitating the 'Russian,' probably Stalin. But Tito did not hold on to that for long: by the afternoon, in the villa, when we, the members of the CC, gathered around him, he returned to his style of quick, almost hasty decision-making, with personal openness and care..." Around Tito, in Rumanjska 15, the boys from General Shadrin's team and soldiers of

the Escort Battalion gathered, and five days later, Tito ordered the formation of the Guards Brigade.

Generals Ranković and Jovanović arrived that morning from Aranđelovac. Their route to the heart of Šumadija, however, was somewhat longer and more circuitous: Ranković, along with members of the CC of the CPY, the National Committee and AVNOJ, along with part of the SH, were transferred from Bari to the Divce airport by Soviet pilots on the night of October 15-16. From there, they were taken to Aranđelovac.[725] From the headquarters of General Dapčević's staff, Ranković had, two or three times, tried to respond to Tito's calls and somehow make his way to Vršac to report to him, but it wasn't possible, the last time because of the "dense situation" caused by fighting with the Stetner group on the approaches to Belgrade. Arso arrived in Aranđelovac, with a number of operatives and telegraphers, as well as part of the Escort Battalion, three days later. From there, for the next five days, as well as in several previous days from Vis, he ensured continuity in command. From the "invincible fortress in the Adriatic," in the last days, he, among other things, sent 190 specialists for the reinforcement of the 2nd Tank Brigade, which was being formed in Russia, coordinated battles and engagements for the liberation of Dubrovnik (October 18), monitored inter-allied negotiations about the return of the Yugoslav Navy's warships to the NOV, oversaw the exchange of the captured poet Oton Župančić for German Major-General Karl von Dewitz, who was captured during the battles for the liberation of Banja Luka, hastened the shipment of arms and ammunition from Bari to Slovenia, where "the situation was very critical," directed the actions of the 2nd Shock Corps divisions, especially the 37th Sandžak Division, to block all routes and prevent "any breakthroughs" (by the enemy) toward Užice, insisted on sending war reports for broadcasts of *Slobodna Jugoslavija*, ordered the selection of dozens of senior officers from the Krajina units for commanders of local, district and county military commands for Banat, Bačka and Baranja...

Below Bukulja, until the evening of October 24, and with the authorization received from Vršac, he commanded the NOVJ units on the coastal, the Sandžak, Vardar and other operational fronts and areas. The last tasks, signed in Aranđelovac, were given to the headquarters of the 2nd and 8th Corps, the 29th Division and the Base in Bari. The topic was mainly relations with the allies, with the request that they be "extremely correct" in Gruška harbour, at the Konavle (or Grab) airport, in Dubrovnik and elsewhere, with the condition that the English "deal only with tactical work," cooperate with NOVJ headquarters, and respect local authorities.

All operational tasks on October 26 and 27 were subordinated to the preparation of the review and parade of around 10,000 participants of the battle for the liberation of Belgrade at Banjica. In preserved photographs and films, you can see how Tito approaches the formation, accompanied by A. Jovanović on his right and P. Dapčević on his left, followed by generals S. Žujović and K. Popović. In the presence of Soviet commanders and heads of allied military missions, Tito gave a speech. The event was

[725] Due to the flooded runway, the plane from Vis could not take off for six days, so they were transferred by ship to Bari, where, due to poor weather conditions, they had to wait for another three days.

widely covered in the press, on the radio and in film journals, enhanced with congratulatory messages to the victor.[726]



Banjica, October 27, 1944: Tito, with Generals Arso, Peko, Crni and Koča, reviews the liberators of Belgrade.

In the evening, Tito received Brigadier Maclean, who, like Dr. Šubašić (earlier in Vršac), brought messages from Churchill. Anticipating that the brigadier would complain about certain actions taken by individual headquarters and even members of the SH during his absence from Vis, the host invited Generals Ranković and Jovanović to the meeting. After reading Churchill's personal message, in which Churchill congratulated him on the liberation of Belgrade, Tito visibly relaxed. The high-ranking guest, as Churchill reported, also pointed out "the uncompromising and, in many ways, uncivilized actions of the partisans during the last two months." The host and his two close associates, who had been the most responsible after his "disappearance from Vis," explained each "case" individually to the brigadier, and Tito somewhat apologized "for various inappropriate actions," emphasizing that they, no matter how severe, "do not signify any change in policy," adding that from now on he would be "in constant contact" with the guest.[727] From that conversation, especially regarding the prospect of cooperation with Dr. Šubašić, the brigadier got the impression, which he shared with his Prime Minister: "It is clear that the consequences of your visit to Moscow are already being felt here" — referring to the "Tolstoy" conference (October

[726] He said that the dearest to Tito were those from "Comrade Erkolija" (Palmiro Togliatti) and the "brotherly Bulgarian CC."

[727] In a report to W. Churchill on October 28, F. Maclean states that Tito "apologized for various impolite actions I had mentioned and said that these were serious mistakes on the part of his staff." (*Collection Tito-Churchill, Strictly Secret,* p. 360).

9-18), during which Churchill and Stalin agreed on the division of spheres of influence in the Balkans, with Yugoslavia being split "fifty-fifty," which was the expression of the policy of "balanced equilibrium." The brigadier also raised the issue of his unapproved proposal to "heavily bomb" Skopje, Priština, Kosovska Mitrovica and Kraljevo, to which the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, with Tito's authorization, responded on October 19 – that "bombing" of these cities was "no longer desirable," among other reasons because they would "soon be in our hands."[728] The brigadier, as proof of inconsistency in this stance, mentioned that just a few days before — on October 24 — Ruma had been bombed at Marshal Tolbukhin's request. Tito passed this "hot potato" to the most knowledgeable, the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters: his response on October 19 did not signify a halt in bombing in the service of victory in specific operations, and as for Ruma, the SH had requested from Marshal Tolbukhin on October 23 that the city be bombed, as there were about 4,000 Germans and 110 tanks in it.[729]

Immediately after arriving in Belgrade, Arso, with a group of operatives — not claiming any of the glory of the liberators, but looking at the situation rationally — made an analysis showing that there was a very real danger that the capital, with all the institutions of the NOV and allied missions, could be threatened by the breakthrough of German armoured units from Srem or by air bombardment. These were the conditions when the Red Army's tank units were too far, and the NOVJ units were even further, when there was no substantial own anti-landing (AL) or anti-aircraft defence, and the promised "Vitruck Group" was occupied with other war tasks across the Danube. Upon being informed of the conclusions from this analysis, Tito initially became angry at the objective situation and even more so because for help, he inevitably had to ask the otherwise irritated Stalin (due to disagreements over the division of trophies in the Belgrade Operation and Đilas' sharp criticism of the improper behaviour of some Red Army soldiers). Aware of the worst: that the vulnerability of the insufficiently secured Belgrade from land and air, especially its capture, would represent an international compromise of everything achieved, Tito immediately, and later after being reminded about the "order of moves" through Tolbukhin and Kornilov, appealed to Moscow for help.[730] Stalin reacted as only a powerful leader would: on October 31, evidently angry, he wrote to Tito that his troops must "reorient from the vicinity of Belgrade and further south" so "that the German-Hungarian block can be crushed and Hungary can be removed from the field," but that Kornilov and Tolbukhin had just convinced him "that, in the interest of Belgrade's safety, some of our troops must remain in the Belgrade area." Now comes the sentence that hit Tito hardest: "This is unexpected for me because I was convinced that the Yugoslav troops would be able to deal with the Germans on their own and secure Belgrade."[731] Something was, however, obtained, but it left a bitter taste and a lesson that one should not anger the one they

[728] AVII, file 26, reg. no. 13-2/13.

[729] On October 24, the squadrons of the "Vitruck Group" bombed Ruma, and the stubbornly defended town would only be liberated on October 27 by the 16th Vojvodina NOP Division.

[730] Tito-*Collection of Relations Between Yugoslavia and Russia (USSR) 1941-1945,* pp. 592-594.

[731] *Ibid.,* pp. 600-601.

must ask for help.

Arso "settled" into the old General Staff building. The command connections were established, and the basic prerequisites for the organic units to function harmoniously were created, with the goal of achieving victory in operations on the territories of Macedonia, Kosovo and Metohija, Montenegro, Dalmatia, the Sandžak, the Neretva and Bosna valleys, the Ibar and Western Morava, and in eastern Bosnia and Srem. Fronts and headquarters were visited, data was collected and analysed, and decisions were proposed. Arso, at times, travelled to certain headquarters (the 2nd, 3rd, 5th and 8th Corps) by Russian planes for just one day. This is stated in the radiograms signed by Tito, through which the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters was announced — to ensure his landing and transportation to the headquarters. At first, it was not easy for him to get to the Russian planes, as the Zemunski airport was not yet fully operational, and the connection squadron of the SH (eight planes with 15 aviators) would remain in Vis until November 8. It was difficult to rely on Anglo-American planes, even for transporting the wounded. On November 27, the Slovenians would cry out: "The situation with our wounded is desperate. Six hundred severely wounded are waiting for transport. We ask that direct air connection with Belgrade be established as soon as possible."[732] For such a large number of wounded and under these conditions, as General Pirc reported to Arso, 60 air sorties would have been needed, which was not possible except in empty wishes. The Slovenians, like all the subordinate headquarters to the west of the Drina, were ordered to transport the wounded to Serbia and Vojvodina,[733] but this was not yet happening. Earlier, agreements made in Moscow had foreseen that hospitals with a capacity of 5,000 beds for the needs of the NOVJ would be opened in Krajiova, but this was abandoned as Tolbukhin had allocated "for use" three field hospitals and one evacuation hospital for the front, which, by the end of the year, were located in Ruma, Šabac and Valjevo. Large capacities were secured at the Main Military Hospital in Belgrade, and in hospitals in Novi Sad and Sremska Mitrovica.[734] The care of the wounded remained the foremost professional obligation and human concern of the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, so he visited hospitals, particularly the Main Hospital and the School of Medical Sisters in Belgrade, where his sister Miluša, the famous Igmanka, was the commissioner. Together with General Nikolić, he did everything to expand hospital capacities, secure doctors, improve treatment conditions and speed up the rehabilitation process.

From the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters to the couriers — everything slept on military beds in offices and was fed "from the pot," while families, most often divided, were still far away. One day, Arso received a key to a villa near the Railway Hospital from the National Property Administration by order of General Đurić. It was a beautiful "two-storey and fenced" building, but he expressed to Ranković his wish not to move into someone else's house when he already had his own, half-paid home on

[732] Note 282 in vol. 25 of *Collected Works* by J. Broz, p. 278.

[733] AVII, box 26, reg. no. 4-7/4.

[734] In hospital centres in Belgrade, Srem and Bačka on October 30, there were 10,212 wounded; in corps hospitals, 15,220; while in southern Italy, 3,116 were being treated.

Stiška Street before the war. He probably relayed this to someone, as the next day he was called and told that this "might sound demagogical" and "would serve as a lesson to those who accepted similar solutions"; after all, according to protocol, the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters "is entitled to a villa, with guard protection."[735]

In another way, Arso — as Ranković would recall four decades later — would remain strange to the establishment of the victors: as soon as he arrived in Belgrade, through General Đurić, he attempted to secure the property of institutions of national importance: theatres, museums, libraries, galleries, then libraries and art collections of well-known families, etc. Personally, at the beginning of November, he supervised the work of the Property Inventory Commission in the White Palace, which, as it is known, was not within the purview of the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, but he was determined to stop the pillaging of things whose value he knew well. The report was received on November 23, signed by only the third member of the commission, Major Dragić Tomić. Silver and gold utensils, paintings, carpets and furniture were listed. Everything found was packed into boxes and sealed or "moved to safe places."[736]

For the next two to three months, he gathered trusted operatives and experienced soldiers, who would later become generals. The heads of departments arrived: Rade Hamović — Operations, Mihajlo Apostolski — Training, Bogdan Oreščanin — Organizational, Srećko Manola — Naval. General R. Primorac was chosen as his assistant, and after his promotion to the rank of general, he invited Mile Pavičić. On December 3, General V. Terzić would arrive, who would replace him. From before, there were generals V. Klišanović, B. Obradović, M. Vujović, F. Makhin, G. Nikoliš and V. Smirnov, of whom the first four were "former officers."

By the order of October 29, the Air Force Headquarters of the NOVJ was formed, where the leading positions were taken by pre-war pilot officers: Major General Franjo Pirc and Colonels Božo Lazarević, Miodrag Lozić, Zdenko Ulepić, Jevrem Bjelić and others. For selecting candidates, the Chief of the General Staff was consulted, who personally knew them, almost without exception.[737] Soon, a request would be made to bring Royal Air Force pilots from the Slovak Resistance through Moscow, including Major Arsenije Boljević and Captain Savo Poljanec, as well as from the Military Mission in Paris — after the appointment of its leaders, General I. Rukavina and Ljuba Ilić — Colonel Pilot Gavro Škrivanec.[738] The proposals were accepted, and these individuals would take high positions in the NOVJ Air Force.

[735] From conversations with A. Ranković and K. Popović; the latter would, for a time, live as a lodger with Arso — "even though before the war he owned an entire block on Karađorđeva Street."

[736] AVII, file 15-A, reg. no. 5/50.

[737] The commander of the Air Force of France — Franjo Pirc, a Slovenian "with some German blood" from Kočevje, Tito's personal choice — was the commander of the 2nd Fighter Regiment in the April War, with particularly poor performance, and by October 1943, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force of the NDH, linked to the NOP, and later the Chief of the Air Force Department of the General Staff of the NOP. He soon proved to be a poor personnel decision and was sent to the position of ambassador of the FPRJ in Argentina, where, as General B. Lazarević writes, he "connected with Ustaše gangs," and was later recalled and retired.

[738] In January 1944, they escaped from a German prison camp in Štrulj and joined the Slovak partisans, and from there, via Moscow, they returned to the homeland; Bojović was appointed deputy commander of the 11th Fighter Division, and Poljanec as the commander of its 412th Regiment.

Operations in all the unliberated parts of the battlefield were directed from the Supreme Command. Thus, on October 9, from Vis, Arso ordered the 5th Corps to "solidly destroy" communications in its area of responsibility, and priority, out of the four designated directions, was given to the one from Mostar via Konjic to Sarajevo and then to Brod. The 8th Corps headquarters had already launched an offensive to liberate Dalmatia, so Arso's main concern was to "push" its reinforcement with tank and artillery units. The Main Staff of Macedonia, in cooperation with two (somewhat inactive) Bulgarian armies, was conducting an operation for the final liberation of Macedonia, which was completed with the capture of Skopje on November 14.

The German 21st Army Corps was advancing from Bijelo Polje and Prijepolje, and the German 91st Army Corps from Novi Pazar and Sjenica, in a hurry to escape across Višegrad under the protection of acceptance units. Therefore, the General Staff planned an option to form the Southern Operational Group (5 divisions) from two Serbian corps (13th and 14th), which would be engaged on the Zvornik-Tuzla-Doboj axis with the goal of preventing the German retreat through Brčko. As a result, these divisions were gradually withdrawn from combat in the Ibar, Western Morava and Lim valleys and moved north, to be included in operations in northeastern Bosnia on December 3. General Koča Popović was appointed the commander of the Group and Colonel Blažo Lompar as the commissar. Time was of the essence, as the Group Army "E" units were successfully retreating across the Drina into Bosnia thanks to their persistence and resourcefulness. The insufficient forces of the NOVJ were unable to prevent this retreat or achieve — in the Western Morava valley, in cooperation with the 68th Rifle Corps of the Red Army — any major operational success. The Germans were delayed, their extended columns suffered certain losses, but they persistently and systematically advanced.

Solutions were sought and found for the efficient anti-aircraft defence of Belgrade, preventing any potential breakthrough of German armoured units from Srem toward Belgrade, supplying food and clothing to the semi-militarized army on the front, and the care of thousands of new wounded, among other things. These were concerns of the Chief of the General Staff, which he could not solve alone, but as the most responsible, he could not share them with others either.

Even the closest comrades from the inner circle of the SH were no longer gathered in one place as before — they were now scattered across Belgrade on other assignments, connected only by phones and "papers." At the same time, from 15 Rumska Street, Tito was once again primarily focused on political matters, occasionally taking interest in military issues — typically when problems arose in relations with Churchill and Roosevelt and their commanders in the Mediterranean, or when things with Stalin and his marshals were not proceeding as agreed in Moscow or Craiova. In general, military affairs were handled by the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, who maintained "direct contact" with 13 organizational units. From the perspective of

modern military organization, this was far too many. Still, as a man of great knowledge and experience, he worked on establishing new institutions, including institutes for gathering historical materials, military geography and more.

The most prominent commanders of NOVJ units, much like during the NOB, did not meet — not even in pairs — to discuss the situation, anticipate possible developments and coordinate their own actions based on that. The Chief of the Supreme Headquarters proposed ending such a practice, especially before decisions were made regarding the final offensive. This was particularly necessary because every commander had his own (critical) opinion of the SH's orders and often felt entitled to raise these issues directly with Tito. Notably, "our Spaniards" held deep reservations about the NOVJ SH, led by a group of about ten wartime generals who had been pre-war officers. The "Spaniards" referred to them as "former" — unable, however, to admit that they themselves lacked both the aptitude and knowledge for command-level staff work. Peko and Koča were especially vocal in this regard. Koča wrote that "very few professional, especially senior officers, proved capable of being operational commanders. Gradually, they found roles as instructors at officer schools or as chiefs and staff officers at higher command levels. So, more 'theoreticians' and administrators — that is both characteristic and instructive. What most of them lack is dialectics!"[739]

On behalf of the SH, General Jovanović greeted 885 delegates at the long-delayed founding session of the Great Anti-Fascist Assembly for the National Liberation of Serbia (ASNOS). The session lasted five days, and Arso — enthusiastically welcomed at the opening on November 9 — spoke after Tito and Dr. Ribar. Speaking for less than five minutes, his remarks were concise and persuasive, fitting the euphoric atmosphere in the ceremonial hall of Kolarac. Among other things, he said, "The day is not far when our entire homeland will be liberated — along with Carinthia, Istria, the Slovenian Littoral and Trieste. Zadar is already free, and our Navy sails the Adriatic with a banner of freedom embroidered in blood." On the growth of the Partisan Army, he stated that "this army holds the inexhaustible strength of our peoples, strength that has been suppressed for centuries. That is the greatest guarantee that our decisions will be carried out. But our army demands of you, the representatives of our people, to mobilize all forces for the swift and imminent liberation of all our nations." Feeling as though he was reporting to the representatives of the Serbian people on behalf of the highest military institution he led, General Jovanović — frequently interrupted by cheers and applause — concluded: "Our army, comrades, on the left wing of the glorious and victorious Red Army, in coordination with the armies of our great Western democratic allies, is tightening the noose around fascist Germany — until it chokes in its own den, in Berlin!"[740]

In the newly liberated Belgrade, the deaths of two talented and respected commanders of the NOVJ were mourned — the commander of the 8th Corps, Major General Vlado Ćetković, and the Chief of Staff of Slovenia, Lieutenant General Franc

[739] K. Popović, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

[740] Stenographic notes from the meeting, edition of the Institute for the Workers' Movement of Serbia.



At the session of ASNOS.

Rozman.[741] Deeply saddened by the loss of these two high-ranking commanders, who had been crucial to the upcoming strategic offensive, Arso ordered a thorough investigation, which also included the Allied missions. A few days later, on Arso's suggestion, General Dušan Kveder was appointed as the new commander of the Slovenian Main Staff, while Lieutenant Colonel Milo Kilibarda, a member of the "southern group" that had been led to Slovenia by the Chief of Staff in late 1942, was appointed as the acting head of the General Staff. Meanwhile, Pero Popivoda and Rajko Tanasković, both "former officers," who had risen to the rank of corps commanders during the NOB in Slovenia, were returned to Yugoslavia due to Kardelj's request[742] and unfavourable evaluations. With Arso's support and Ranković's understanding, as they were highly valued, they were appointed: the first as the commander of the 22nd Division and the second as the Chief of Staff of the 23rd Shock Division.

Although overwhelmed with duties, Arso took it upon himself to write an article about a special German formation, the troops. This was prompted by a report received on October 29 from the 8th Corps headquarters about the mysterious landing of a small unit of Western Allies near Vodice, close to Šibenik, allegedly to link up with the Chetniks, who were indeed present in that part of Dalmatia at the time. The headquarters, however, left open the possibility that this could also have been a German

[741] AVII, file 26, reg. no. 7-2/4.

[742] Tito ordered the Chief of the General Staff from Craiova to call P. Popivoda to Vis and "conduct a judicial investigation" against him, which was done, but as no elements for prosecution were found, Ranković and Arso sent him to Serbia — first as the chief, and soon after, with Tito's order, as the commander of the 22nd Strike Division — along with commissar and veteran communist Živko Živković.



At the ceremonial academy marking the 27th anniversary of the October Revolution.

unit composed of soldiers dressed in British uniforms, which, upon verification in the field and in Belgrade, was confirmed. The soldiers were thrown into the sea, and the "incident" became the reason for the Chief of Staff to order General Vjekoslav Klišanić to write the first draft of a report on German troops, based on information provided by the Intelligence Department. General Fyodor Makhin contributed to the manuscript as the "second hand," after which Arso made the final edit and ordered it to be published in the General Staff's publications, as well as to be reproduced and sent by air mail to the headquarters of all operational units. The article was particularly instructive and relevant because the Chetniks, especially when crossing the Drina into western Serbia, were also preparing similar surprises for the commands and organizations of the NOV. Therefore, the operational units' headquarters were tasked with multiplying the "lesson" and sending it to tactical units and military territorial organs. It described the composition, armament, and tactics of troops as specially trained and equipped units, usually around thirty soldiers, prepared to carry out sabotage and terrorist actions on liberated territory. The members of these units were mostly Germans, but also Ustaše and Domobrani, and in Dalmatia, Chetniks. They were trained in special centres, one of the first and more well-known of which was in the Trappist Monastery near Banja Luka. They were taught special skills, dressed in partisan and Allied uniforms, and supplied with their weapons and equipment. They would appear suddenly, act extremely boldly, behave brutally and quickly disappear from the scene of the crime.

In November and December, with the expert and material assistance of the Red Army, the Supreme Command established several of its own organizational units, prepared to form armies, and initiated military education, with the Military Academy (later renamed a school in June 1945, following the Russian model) being the central institution.

In Craiova, Colonel Branko Obradović, with the help of the Soviets, planned the development of a strong artillery force, with its material foundation being about a thousand guns and at least twice as many heavy mortars received from the Red Army, along with rich war spoils from its own operations. This would be realized in Belgrade, already under the rank of general, under the leadership of the Chief of Staff, with the expert assistance of 93 Soviet instructors.[743] Additionally, one of the important tasks of the high headquarters of the operational units of the 3rd Ukrainian Front was to assist the headquarters of the armies and corps of the NOVJ, starting from March 1, 1945, in planning operations and, especially, in the use of artillery. Stalin considered that this solved not only the issue of the professional training of staff from divisions to the Supreme Command but also the planning of battles and operations. On November 22, he asked E. Kardelj in the Kremlin why Tito had not come to Moscow with Dr. Šubašić, as previously agreed, but he himself did. Kardelj, puzzled, responded that Tito was "too busy with conducting military operations." Stalin's reaction, according to the recollection of the person questioned, was: "What does it matter when he has my generals? Let him take care of politics."[744]

The complete equipment received from the Soviets made it possible to form signal and anti-aircraft defence regiments, which, with the support of the Red Army systems, were integrated into the functions of the Supreme Command. In December, for example, three mixed anti-aircraft brigades were formed "to defend the area of Belgrade-Zemun-Pančevo," integrated into the 6th Anti-Aircraft Corps of the Red Army. A Railway Brigade was also formed, with its first task being to repair the railways leading directly to the fronts in the Danube, Srem and Podravina regions, as well as for the transport of grain from Soviet aid, including a good portion sent to Belgrade — 14,000 tons, with a plan to ensure 400 grams per person per day for the next four months.[745]

The 51st Vojvodina Division was formed, and the Supreme Commander announced on January 5, 1945 the creation of a new division in Croatia, with approximately 5 overseas brigades as the backbone (2,000 fighters). A month later, he signed an order to form the 52nd Division in Kosovo, while the 53rd Division operated in central Bosnia. However, the formation of the Šumadija Division was not pursued due to unclear reasons, as there was neither time nor place for it (?).

The Supreme Command established the River Flotilla Command, with the task of ensuring river navigation and organizing mine-clearing. Naval bases were established in Novi Sad and Šabac, with very important tasks in supplying the fronts in the Danube and Posavina regions.

[743] In Moscow and Craiova, Tito was promised "close to 300 military instructors," which would be confirmed on January 9, 1945 in a conversation between General A. Jovanović and Marshal J.V. Stalin.

[744] Tito-*Collection of Relations Between Yugoslavia and Russia (USSR) 1941-1945,* p. 626.

[745] *Ibid.,* p. 569.

A Headquarters for the Air Division Group of the NOVJ was also organized,[746] and its commander from March 15, 1945 would be Major General Božo Lazarević.

In Macedonia, after the liberation, the Main Staff was reorganized, and simultaneously, the 16th and the Bregalnica-Strumica Corps were disbanded, while the 15th was transformed into a "mobile assault corps" (commanded by Major General Aleksa Demijevski-Bauman, with Commissar Colonel Vujadin Popović). With two divisions assigned, it was initially planned by the Main Staff to be deployed toward Sarajevo, but by an order dated December 29, it was redirected to eastern Srem for rearmament and training, as a broader protection for the capital and preparation for participating in a breakthrough operation.

The reorganized Main Staff of Macedonia, with the remaining units, carried out



At the ceremony at the Military Academy: to the right of Arso are Dr. Ivan Ribar and Mitar Bakić, and to the right of Tito is General Orović.

a previous order from the Main Staff — to completely occupy the state border with Greece, where, in the civil war that began on December 3, the English openly intervened, deploying around 50,000 soldiers, or the Expeditionary Corps under General Ronald Scobie's command, thereby siding with the royalist forces in order to protect their and the monarchy's interests. The British had announced this move in early October, specifically intervening with commandos near Patras and Athens. However, it was not anticipated that Churchill, with such recklessness and despite the opposition

[746] Formed on December 29, 1944 with its headquarters in Novi Sad.

of the democratic world, would defend "his" 90 per cent of interests in Greece, recently agreed upon with Stalin. This was also opposed by his primary wartime ally, the United States, whose official circles claimed that the British intervention in Greece had "distorted the interests for which they entered the war." This was also a warning to the National Committee and the Supreme Command of the NOVJ, especially since the "allied help" on the Yugoslav battlefield (Dubrovnik, Split, Šibenik, Zadar, etc.) had turned into something vague and contradictory to the agreement. The supreme institutions of the NOP reacted strongly and in time, although the British persisted in explaining how Yugoslavia was "entirely different from Greece."

After lengthy preparations, the Supreme Command issued an order on November 21, 1944, to establish the Military Academy. Alongside the energetic chief of staff, General S. Orović, General Arso Jovanović was directly involved in the task. Barracks in Topčider were adapted, teaching and command staff were gathered, training plans and programs were created and classrooms were equipped. The future 2,000 cadets from all parts of the country were called. It was planned for the Academy to start on January 1, 1945, but due to the very difficult gathering of 2,168 young men in Belgrade, the schooling began only on February 23, 1945, with an oath before the Supreme Commander, the President of the AVNOJ and the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters — to remain loyal to the homeland.

In Belgrade, Kragujevac, Ćuprija, Petrovaradin (Zrenjanin) and Novi Sad, officer and non-commissioned officer schools were formed, and in artillery bases, courses were conducted where, as the most urgent need, artillery personnel were trained in preparation for receiving help from the Red Army, which, in October and November, had formed as many as nine artillery brigades. With 800 trucks received from the Red Army and rich war spoils from the defeated German "Stetner" group under Avala, automotive units were formed, including the Auto-Command linked to the SH. The Engineering Brigade of the SH was also very actively engaged, and its commissar, Vlado Strugar, recalls General Arso Jovanović from those days as a leader with rational plans, clear in command, dignified in behaviour, elegant in clothing and approachable in his relationships with junior officers.

At the SH, several new departments were formed out of urgent necessity: the Personnel Department, the Organization Department (headed by B. Oreščanin), the Training Department (M. Apostolski) and the Propaganda Department (Stefan Mitrović). These operated alongside previously established and heavily burdened departments: Artillery (B. Obradović), Operations (R. Hamović), Naval (S. Manola), Intelligence (V. Klišanović) and Engineering-Technical (V. Smirnov). The task of organizing the future Military History Institute was entrusted to Lieutenant General Fyodor Makhin, and after his death in 1945, it was continued by Major General Milan Zelenika, who had returned from captivity. A core team of experts was also assembled for the future Military Geographic Institute. General Makhin also worked on advancing publishing activities. Every two weeks and weekly, he wrote military-political summaries of global wartime developments, offering commentary of his own choosing. At the same time, Major General V. Klišanović edited the *Daily Situation Briefs*

covering the domestic front. The Judicial Department had its hands full, while the Propaganda Department — with Arso's direct involvement — handled the opening of the Officers' Club and the launch of "a military journal that would cover our military experiences — operational, organizational and otherwise." Initially, it would be a publication duplicated in a field printing house, with preparations also underway for a more illustrated military periodical. Thus, the newspaper *Front* would appear while fighting was still ongoing on the Srem Front, while the weekly *Narodna armija* would begin publication in peacetime, on October 2, 1945.

For the first issue of the military publication, the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters wrote an introductory article in late December, covering the situation on the Yugoslav front in the context of Allied strategic theatres and their intersection. The article's content — presented more broadly and generally — can also be found in his publications *The Belgrade Operation* (1945) and *Overview of the National Liberation War* (1946). According to him, the Red Army had decided the outcome of the battle for the Balkans "by destroying the powerful German defences in Romania," with the completion of that victory being the Belgrade Operation, in which "the main Salonika-Belgrade-Budapest corridor was cut at its most sensitive point — the throat of the Balkans — in Belgrade. This completely dismantled the remaining German defensive system in the Balkans," since all German forces had been "pushed into the difficult mountainous terrain of Montenegro, the Sandžak and Bosnia, where they were met and finished off in the mountain gorges by our Partisan Army." This — he wrote — dashed the German command's hope of extracting "more than 150,000 men" from those large forces to form "a capable group to strike at the southern flank of the 3rd Ukrainian Front." Supported by the "brotherly Red Army" and receiving substantial material aid from it, the Yugoslav Partisan Army quickly liberated "all areas east of the Drava-Drina-Neretva line. In this way, we established a strategic front and, for the first time in our warfare, secured a stable strategic base that allowed us to draw from all sources for continuing the war effort." As a military analyst, he predicted that this "stable front with a stable rear," as an inevitable and necessary development, would "bring new challenges in warfare," since "committing our large forces, equipped with modern Soviet technology, will require the use of communication lines, the organization of the rear and the securing of territory."[747] Just before departing for Moscow on January 4, he asked Colonel Stefan Mitrović for a contribution and added a paragraph on the significance of forming the armies (on January 1), which he saw as "the completion of the reorganization process and the full modernization of our Partisan Army."[748]

The radically changed living and operational conditions for the troops required new solutions. Under Arso's leadership and final editorial oversight, orders and instructions were issued regarding: the accommodation of units in populated areas; methods of supplying them from local sources; mobilization; relations and conduct of military personnel in public places; prevention of the increasingly frequent occurrence

[747] A. Jovanović, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

[748] *Ibid.,* p. 65.

of self-inflicted wounds; and the introduction and functioning (as of November 11) of "full military censorship on the liberated territory as a temporary measure to protect military secrets and the country's war effort."

At that time, the services (departments, administrations, commands, sections, divisions, etc.) of the SH and the Department of National Defence of the National Committee were still operating in parallel, without clearly defined responsibilities. As a result, the Organization Department often served as the coordinating body for harmonizing the work of the organizational units of both institutions, particularly when it came to projects and directives, regulations and orders, rules and protocols, and so on. Because of the pressing need to delineate the responsibilities and functions of these two institutions, Arso — both authorized and qualified — organized discussions in Belgrade, often including Soviet experts. During his stay in Moscow (January 4-February 14, 1945), he also held discussions in the Red Army General Staff and the USSR State Defence Committee. At least formally, it was undisputed that the SH functioned as the direct expert body of the Department of National Defence and was responsible for commanding all three branches of the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia. However, in practice, that relationship remained complicated by the fact that Tito — besides being the General Secretary of the CC of the CPY and head of the government — also acted as Supreme Commander and Minister of National Defence, and held the rank of Marshal. In an underdeveloped system of collective work and decision-making, his word on all matters — including military ones — was both the first and the last. At the same time, he was heavily preoccupied with internal political matters, as well as with the question of creating a Balkan Federation. He was especially burdened by the issue of forming a unified government with Dr. Šubašić — something both Stalin and Churchill were insisting upon.[749]

The increasingly complex and specialized work of the SH (renamed the General Staff as of March 1, 1945) required personnel of all profiles — yet in the "army of workers, peasants and honest intellectuals," such individuals were few. Moreover, the qualified personnel that did exist were still scattered across the Yugoslav front. For this reason, the "recruitment" process for staffing the SH remained permanently open, with each department chief having the right to select and bring in collaborators — a request that all subordinate headquarters were, in principle, expected to accommodate. Preserved documents clearly show how specialists of various kinds were being sought from within the units — right down to technical draftsmen and typists. Confronted with the challenge of staffing, the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters issued the "Directive on the Selection of Leaders for the Supreme Headquarters of the National Liberation Army and Partisan Detachments of Yugoslavia" on November 20, instructing subordinate headquarters to send "capable, carefully chosen and reliable military leaders" who "must be vetted, absolutely loyal to our cause," and who would

[749] For this reason, when he returned to Craiova — according to the memory of engineer N. Petrović — he exclaimed, uninvited and "with consternation" listened to: "After all, I don't have to be the president of that government!" This question occupied him so much, recalls Branko Savić, that General Korneyev had to calm him down and remind him of his military duties.

"remain permanently in the army, be able to quickly understand assigned tasks and grow through them." He emphasized that this should not be understood as a call solely for professional soldiers. "The key criteria are reliability, loyalty, strength of character and capacity for development. Keep in mind that these individuals will be entrusted with the most delicate and confidential duties. If there are such people outside the army who meet these criteria, then propose them to us. It is desirable that they be senior officers, but rank is not decisive. For each candidate, provide a detailed profile and indicate the type of work they are best suited for. Send all selected personnel to Belgrade as soon as possible."[750]

In one of the "staff appointments" at the General Staff, Major Omer M. Gluhić arrived, sent by the 3rd Corps Headquarters. It's hard to say why the (in)competent authorities, especially the OZNA (People's Defence Ministry) service of the National Committee, demanded that he be appointed as the head of the General Staff's Cabinet. He was a pre-war teacher of democratic orientation, and in the first two years of the war, "on Party orders," he worked in the "legion" (the term for the Ustaše militia in eastern Bosnia) in Tuzla. After the liberation of the city, he became the commander of a small Tuzla partisan unit, which, during the "seventh enemy offensive," was completely scattered in the battles against parts of the 13th SS "Handžar" division in the Majevica region. However, a group of intelligence officers remained around the commander of the unit on the occupied territory and reported on the events to the 3rd Corps Headquarters via radio. He was articulate, quite skilled as an administrator, with elaborate handwriting and an attractive signature, devoted to his countrymen, and without a doubt, close to the "iron fist of the revolution." Those who knew the details of his biography acknowledged his patriotism, anti-fascist orientation and certain merits for the NOP, but also wondered how he ended up in such a crucial and sensitive position in the military high command. Arso's relationship with him was always formal, with a bit of suspicion. At the end of the war, on Arso's insistence through Ranković, he was "reassigned" to the service of the Federal Assembly, where he did not stay long. It remains a subject of thought as to why a teacher without systematic military knowledge or staff experience was appointed to such an important position in the General Staff, when there were so many exemplary officers, veterans of the NOB, with completed high military schools. These men, many of whom were Arso's acquaintances and collaborators from the toughest war situations, were people in whom he had complete trust and shared a common language. Only such a person could be among the 330 senior officers in the General Staff.

By mid-November, Radio Belgrade began broadcasting, and the *Borba* newspaper started publishing as a daily in the capital. The editorial teams requested war reports from the General Staff, and its Chief provided them. On the other hand, General Orović asked him to write at least some introductory lessons for the cadets, which he also understood as part of his duty as the head of the Supreme Command, especially due to the severe scarcity of literature for military schools. Additionally, he was involved in "fighting" for obtaining, translating and printing instructions from the Red Army for combat use of units.

[750] AVII, file 26, reg. no. 9-4/12. The corps headquarters and main staffs were obliged to send three senior officers selected according to criteria provided by the SH.

In early November, for about ten days, he intermittently worked on drafting the document "Draft Agreement on Political, Military and Economic Cooperation and Fraternal Unity between the Peoples of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria," and within that, on the "Addendum I," which discussed the creation of a "unified command of all the armed forces of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria." The draft was coordinated by the CC of the CPY and was part of efforts to create a Yugoslav-Bulgarian federation. The draft, or the proposed text, stated — "for the most successful conduct of operations and faster completion of the war against the common enemy, nazi Germany" — that:

"1. A unified command of all the armed forces of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria is established, which will be conducted through a joint General Staff.

"2. For the Supreme Commander of all the armed forces of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, both contracting parties appoint the Supreme Commander of the NOV and POJ, Marshal of Yugoslavia Josip Broz Tito.

"3. The unified command over all the armed forces of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria includes the unified use of all material resources of both countries and the armament and supply of the armed forces."[751]

The draft, like the proposal for creating the Federation, remained only a proposal, primarily because the Bulgarians created their own, quite different one, still lacking a "military component." The failure to reach an agreement stemmed from two main reasons: first, the Bulgarians "delayed" because they wanted equality with Yugoslavia in the Federation — unlike the Yugoslav proposal, which intended for them to be the seventh federal unit; second, the British, fearing for their strategic interests in the Balkans, were decisively against it, and Stalin accepted this at the "Big Three" meeting in Yalta, where it was concluded that Bulgaria was still "under the truce regime," so it could not be allowed to conclude a treaty with another state.[752] For professional soldier Arso Jovanović, the only option left was to distance himself from these political games and focus on the war — to finish it as quickly and painlessly as possible.

Formation of Armies

To maintain a unified front and carry out the final offensive for the liberation of the country at the junction of the Allied strategic wings, three initial armies of the NOVJ were formed on January 1, 1945. This was the result, among other things, of the operational diligence of the Supreme Command, which led efforts to effectively prepare the NOVJ for the spring, final offensive. This involved its reorganization, filling it with personnel, armament and supplying it with appropriate military equipment. Regarding the armies, each one, positioned on the front from eastern Bosnia to Podravina, was to be supported with five to seven divisions, technical service units, auxiliary

[751] The revival of the Federation was planned to be announced on January 1, 1945.

[752] The meeting was held from February 4-11, 1945.

units and, finally, a command staff capable of leading military formations of 50,000 to 70,000 soldiers or more, directly before and during the final operations on the Yugoslav battlefield. The first army commanders were "our Spaniards," Major Generals Peko Dapčević, Koča Popović and Kosta Nađ, and the leader of the 4th Army (formed on March 1) was Petar Drapšin. The commissars were Colonels Mijalko Todorović, Blažo Lompar, Branko "Kađa" Petričević, and Boško Šiljegović, while the chief of staff were Major General Pavle Jakšić and Colonels Savo Drljević, Ljubo Vučković and Vukašin Subotić.

As the core of the three initial armies, the following units were used: for the 1st Army — the 1st Proletarian Corps; for the 2nd — the Southern Group of Divisions; for the 3rd — the 12th Shock Corps; for the 4th — the 8th Shock Corps. The 3rd Corps was placed under the operational command of the 2nd Army,[753] and the 6th and 10th Corps under the 3rd Army. Several corps, including the 2nd and 5th, remained directly under the Supreme Command. Thus, the number of direct command links between the Chief of Staff and the units was reduced, but his responsibilities increased, and the complexity of leading the war grew.

The fronts were held by: in Podravina, on the left wing of the Red Army troops advancing toward Budapest and the Muddy Lake — the 3rd Army; in Srem, along the "green line," the 1st Army; in eastern Bosnia — the 2nd Army; towards Sarajevo, the 2nd and 5th Corps; in southern Lika — units of the Main Staff of Croatia (Commander Major General Ivan Gošnjak, and Commissar Colonel Rade Žigić), and in Dalmatia, the 8th Corps. The fronts of the first three armies were intensively supported by the Air Force Group of the NOVJ, while the 8th and partially the 2nd and 5th Corps were supported by two NOVJ squadrons and other parts of the BAF from airports in Kani (Italy) and Vis, and from mid-January 1945, from Zemunik near Zadar.

During the liberation of most of Serbia by mid-November 1944, the "first wave" of mobilizing manpower took place. It is estimated that around 60,000 fighters — young men from Serbia — were enlisted. Then, based on directives and orders from the Supreme Command, systematic mobilization was carried out, so that by the end of 1944, 135,000 young men were mobilized in Serbia, something that Arso would report to Stalin on January 9, 1945.[754]

Those who were mobilized while the units were liberating territory were sent directly to the front, where they learned the art of warfare in the harshest possible way — unfamiliar with weapons, operating in completely unknown terrain, mostly in the lowlands. All later "batches" of mobilized men, aged 17 to 30, were first grouped into battalions (up to 2,000 fighters) and brigades (6,000 fighters), stationed in reinforcement centres, and remained there for a mandatory two-month period of combat training, carried out according to a unified plan developed at the SH. Only after

[753] Colonel Pero Kosorić was appointed as the new commander of the corps, replacing General V. Popović, who was sent at the end of November to head the Military Mission in Sofia.

[754] At the Founding Congress of the Communist Party of Serbia (May 8-12, 1945), B. Nešković, in his political report, stated that around 250,000 fighters were mobilized in Serbia, with 25,000 not responding and about 7,000 deserting.

that were they sent to the front, which became the sole method for replenishing the units. Combat training was conducted under the most difficult tactical, weather and terrain conditions, guided by the slogan Arso frequently repeated while visiting and inspecting these centres: "The more sweat in training — the less blood in battle." In Serbia, there were four such reinforcement centres in November; by December, that number had doubled (in Kragujevac, Valjevo, Šabac, Novi Sad, Vršac and elsewhere). By mid-December, 10,000 "Serbian recruits" had been sent just to the 3rd Corps from these centres.

For those already at the front — many of whom lacked sufficient combat experience and were exposed to losses — training was carried out behind the lines, between engagements and during rotations. This consisted of one month of combat instruction, strictly monitored by higher commands. The results were a required element in reports on each unit's combat readiness. According to Arso's explicit orders, officers underwent drills and were assigned tactical tasks developed by the SH.

In the second half of November and throughout December, after the final liberation of Macedonia, Kosovo and Metohija, and the valleys of the West Morava and Đetinja Rivers, numerous operations took place in Podravina, Srem, eastern Bosnia, Montenegro and Dalmatia.

His hometown of Podgorica was liberated on the eve of St. Nicholas Day (December 19), and in honour of the occasion, Arso retrieved from his "untouchable reserves" a litre of grape brandy — barely preserved — to share with his closest associates. His mood was quickly dampened by a radiogram from General R. Vukanović: "Podgorica destroyed, Vizier's Bridge demolished." Later, from the captured war diary of German Major Bohm, he would read: "The town of Podgorica, which once had 10,000 inhabitants, is completely destroyed — not a single house remains intact." His uncle Mirko would tell him that "not a sound or sign of human life could be seen anywhere in the town." Ratko Parežanin would write that almost "nothing was left of Podgorica. There was talk that the town had been used as a training target for undertrained aviators." If that were true, the pilots of the Western Allies — without a doubt — had time and opportunity to hone their skills: the town was bombed more than 70 times, as documented in a first-hand account by Professor Dr. Branislav Kovačević. Arso would not return to the city of his youth until March 1945, after returning from Moscow and holding talks with Field Marshal Alexander and initial meetings with army commanders. The city was, quite literally, flattened — with barely cleared passageways. Among the ruins, he saw a clearly marked sign reading "Njegoševa," which reminded him that this had once been the street he had walked thousands of times as a student at Podgorica's Gymnasium. In addition to his family home, he visited the homes of fallen generals from Piperi — Ivan Milutinović and Vlado Ćetković — and, in Potkraj near Danilovgrad, the house of Milovan Šaranović.[755] A native of Podgorica, Milan Vukotić — a driver "for the Government of Montenegro" — drove him to the elementary school where he had learned his first letters and where he met barefoot children

[755] They died on three fronts: Milutinović on the Danube; Ćetković on Velebit; Šaranović in Bela Krajina.

in mourning. From that moment, this honourable worker forever remembered the tear in the general's eye — as they told him — the Chief of the General Staff. When this "driver veteran" heard in August 1948 "from the elders" that General Jovanović had "been killed at the state border while trying to flee the country," he went to his birthplace in the village of Zavala, which he had seen engulfed in flames in the autumn of 1941, set alight by an Italian incendiary shell fired from Trijepč. From the doorstep, following an old folk tradition, he let out a loud wail "for Montenegro's greatest sword," and then told the gathered villagers, "General Arso was a man of great soul — beneath that military blouse beat a heart as big as Lovćen." Of course, those who had been "keeping watch" over Arso's house in those days would carry out their duty — and that "wailer" would end up in serious trouble too.[756]

Mostar was still in German hands until mid-February, as was Sarajevo, to ensure a retreat from the south. On December 9, Knin was liberated, and in several liberated ports (Dubrovnik, Split, Šibenik, Zadar, etc.), as well as at several airfields in the rear, combat cooperation with the English was organized. After 24 years under Italy, Zadar finally joined Yugoslavia, and the front moved north to Pag, where it would remain through the winter.

Unlike the good cooperation with the Russians, relations with the Western Allies were characterized by "mixed results," marked by the dark tones of their own disappointing experiences and reasonable suspicion. Floyd's detachment, originally consisting of 500 commandos in Dubrovnik in mid-November, had grown to 2,500 soldiers scattered throughout the interior of Herzegovina and Montenegro, where they participated in battles against the Germans but also cooperated with the Chetniks, making propaganda out of their undoubtedly valuable contributions to the battle. At the beginning of November, Admiral J. Morgan, commander of the Allied naval forces in the Adriatic and Ionian seas, arrived in Split with a strong escort, supposedly to inspect the port. Behind him, on November 10, the cruiser *Delhi* arrived, followed by the cruiser *Colombo* in Šibenik and then in Zadar. They arrived not only without permission but also without prior notice, behaving arrogantly and rudely. This led to misunderstandings and incidents. This was the reason for protests from the Supreme Command and the Navy Command (Commander Major General Josip Černi, Commissar Colonel Dragiša Ivanović), which ended in a compromise with the signing of precise agreements allowing Allied ships to use Yugoslav ports exclusively for actions against the Germans in the Adriatic. An agreement was also signed regarding the use of the port of Zadar and three airfields in its nearby area (mainly Zemunik and auxiliary Prkos and Nanos), with Tito's proposal that the documents be signed by him and General Wilson rejected. Wilson transferred his prerogatives to Brigadier F. Maclean, avoiding giving the Yugoslav side equal recognition as an allied partner.

This was a time when General Wilson had two ideas regarding the eastern Adriatic coast: the first was to land strong forces at Rijeka and Trieste, with bases in Split,

[756] As a pensioner, in the mid-1980s, he told me on the terrace of the "Ribnica" Hotel that "with that wailing, he deprived himself of a thick loaf of bread," but that he never regretted it because "his heart guided him."

Šibenik and particularly Zadar providing support and supplies; the second was to land six divisions of ground troops at Zadar, for actions to the north and northwest towards Trieste and Friuli, to interrupt the Germans' retreat from Yugoslavia to the west, with air support from the airfields near Zadar. Both ideas remained only concepts in London's highest-level analysis, mainly because preparations would require at least ten weeks, but General Wilson didn't abandon Zadar, seeking the port and airfield for "tactical bombing" to support operations on the unliberated parts of Yugoslavia, with 20,000 of his troops handling the logistics. Discussions were lengthy and heated, taking place in the Supreme Command and the headquarters of General Wilson in Zadar. Arso, in regard to these matters, flew to the Allied headquarters twice with a team of experts, a third time to Zadar, and the Mediterranean command staff arrived in Belgrade, while Brigadier Maclean and his colleagues, Colonel E. Maxwell and Major Clissold, were caught in the middle of two heated sides. Finally, on December 7, Vice-Marshal of Aviation W. Elliot, commander of the BAF, arrived in Belgrade. Though strongly supported by the staff of the "37th military mission," with Brigadier F. Maclean at the head, he did not achieve his goal: the number of 20,000 men, proposed in the draft agreement from the British side, was delayed for a conversation between Tito and Alexander (at the end of February 1945), and here it was first reduced to one armoured and one combat regiment, then down to around thirty officers from all three branches who would scout the terrain, with the final arrangement being that no more than 2,000 people would be stationed at the naval and airfield bases, with logistical duties handled by an additional 2,000 personnel. Their security would be provided by the 8th Corps, with one of its divisions stationed in Zadar.

Vice-Marshal Elliot arrived in Belgrade for a one-day visit, accompanied by a small escort, including, alongside Maclean's mission, his liaison officer to the Supreme Command, Aviation Colonel J.B. Selby. On the other side of the table, alongside Marshal Tito, were Generals A. Jovanović, Dr. V. Velebit, F. Pirc and Colonel M. Bakić. The conversation began in an atmosphere of tension, particularly because Vice-Marshal Elliot presented the operation plan "Firefax," which involved landing 20,000 English troops in Zadar and its hinterland. The meticulous Major Heyman precisely recorded everything that was said and, especially, what was concluded in a five-page report preserved in the British Public Archive. The Yugoslav side was unanimous, and the most persistent among them was the Chief of Staff, who, by virtue of his responsibility, emphasized that not permanent but forward and auxiliary airfields, and not permanent bases but temporary ports and anchorages, were needed — and this only for as long as operations were taking place in the northern Adriatic, all under the protection of the NOVJ units and the authority of the NOP. The discussion, to say the least, was very heated. In the end, after detailed alignment, contracts were drafted in the Supreme Command, and were signed on January 6 for aviation and January 9 for the navy. The aviation agreement specified that the entire force at the Allied base in Zadar — six fighter or fighter-bomber squadrons, one defence and one night-fighter unit — would consist of "3,700 officers and soldiers," while the port of Zadar could host an addition-

al 3,000 "military personnel."[757]

In the conversation with Field Marshal Elliot, the "Bijelo Polje case" inevitably came up. On the evening of November 19, Arso received a radio message from General R. Vukanović, reporting that Allied planes "accidentally bombed the liberated Bijelo Polje, causing enormous material damage and a large loss of life." He mentioned that seven fighters from the 7th "Budo Tomović" Montenegrin Youth Brigade were killed, and 35 were wounded, while the exact number of civilian casualties was unknown, with about a thousand locals left homeless.[758] Arso, already angry about the unauthorized and unannounced bombing of Podgorica and its surroundings on November 5 and the following days, which had killed dozens of the encircled 21st Army Corps (about 27,000 soldiers) and Pavle Đurišić's units (about 10,000), as well as many innocent civilians, was further agitated. After having previously "interrogated" Colonel J.B. Selby, the liaison officer of the BAF at the Supreme Command, over the phone, he demanded that Colonel M. Bakić immediately connect him with the Supreme Commander. This proved impossible, as the Marshal was resting before a concert by the songs and dances ensemble of the 3rd Ukrainian Front, which was being held at the National Theatre, an event which, according to protocol, the Chief of Staff was also supposed to attend. He and Mitar, based on general authorization and earned trust, sent a strong note to General Wilson, protesting the bombing of Bijelo Polje and demanding that a commission be formed immediately to assess responsibility in this and similar cases and to determine compensation. The note, signed by M. Bakić in his capacity as Chief of the Cabinet and "by the authority of the Supreme Commander," marked an unusual tone in communications with the Supreme Commander of the Mediterranean, and was inappropriate given the relationships between the "small" and the "great" allies, which greatly angered the vain Wilson and prompted him to reply with a sharp protest to Tito, insisting on formal matters — who, why and how, bypassing Brigadier Maclean, wrote and signed the note, but not answering the essence — why a liberated town was bombed, why fighters and civilians were killed, why homes that had survived all offensives were destroyed, who was responsible and what consequences would be faced. Both Arso and Mitar, remembering the invaluable contribution of Bijelo Polje in the struggle for victory, knowing how much it had suffered alongside the Lim river, eternally a target of the occupiers and, in particular, the Muslim militia, were fully on the side of the people of Bijelo Polje. Furthermore, only twenty days earlier (October 31), the liberated Zadar had been bombed "by mistake" by six planes, which led to deaths and destruction. In that case, the response had been as sincere and patriotic as possible, albeit with a bit of undiplomatic sharpness.

When Vice-Marshal Elliot — during the discussion under point three regarding this incident — stated that "events of this kind are painful" and that "special care is taken when selecting targets and giving instructions to flying personnel," he was upset

[757] *Collection Tito-Churchill, Strictly Secret,* pp. 387-388.

[758] For more details: The collection *Seventh Montenegrin Youth Brigade Budo Tomović, Tito-Grad 1980*, contributions by Stana Đukić-Deljević, Veljko Petrović, Drago Vuković, Marka-Mata Raičević, Miša Miličković, and Milorad Raičević, pp. 437-448.

that the note had been sent without his knowledge. He persistently tried to find at least some explanation, as he could not justify the bombing of Bijelo Polje. Brigadier Maclean, after pointing out the unacceptability of Colonel Bakić's actions, said that "the officers of his mission will do everything they can to ensure that the liaison service operates." Arso and Mitar — as much as they could speak — explained how the people of Bijelo Polje were a poor but proud and combat-ready people, very deserving in the anti-fascist war. They said that the Allied bombing had left a very heavy impression, and that, as a reminder and a message, the responsibility of all parties involved must be increased, especially the liaison officers, "so that similar cases do not repeat." As usual in similar conversations with Allied representatives about misunderstandings, Tito, according to the record, was conciliatory, saying that "no further actions should be taken regarding this note," but he asked that the maintenance of liaison be improved, and that, as confirmation of this, a special shipment of supplies be delivered by air to the Bijelo Polje area when operations allowed. The Allied Air Force commander agreed with this proposal and was ready to accept it as a conclusion, but the Chief of Staff insisted that "the appropriate level of Allied command," perhaps through Brigadier Maclean, should apologize to the 2nd Corps Staff and the people of Bijelo Polje for killing their people and destroying their homes. The Chief of Staff also suggested waiting before sending the "special shipment of supplies" to see whether the proud hosts would accept it via General Vukanović. Arso did not ask for heads or revenge, but firmly sided with the losers. Nevertheless, Tito "glared" at the Chief of Staff, and the others remained silent. Only Maclean — usually correct — muttered that the Montenegrins always "push their own agenda," adding that General Vukanović "refused to accept his men." In response, Arso, as calmly as he could, reminded the brigadier that — as a Scot by birth — he knew well how a proud people would sacrifice everything for honour, and that honour could not be bought for all the gold in the world. He said he would, through General Vukanović, do everything possible to "calm this dignified and wounded people, accept the apology from the Allied command and, as a sign of attention, not mercy, accept the offered help." The record noted that regarding the sending of the "special shipment of supplies," "the Supreme Command of the NOV and POJ will designate the most suitable time."[759]

3. Neočekivano bacanje bombi na Jugoslaviju

Brigadir Maklin **se pozvao na notu u vezi s ovim događajem koju je pukovnik Bakić uputio vrhovnom komandantu savezničkih snaga. On je bio u zabludi, jer je pretpostavljao da je tu notu potpisao pre pukovnik Bakić nego sam maršal Tito.**

Conversation with Elliot: the fallen from Bijelo Polje last on the agenda.

Arso was likely even more affected by this situation because, at that time, Tito had a strict ban on the Allied bombing of Zagreb. On November 26, he ordered the Head-

[759] *Collection Tito-Churchill, Strictly Secret,* pp. 389-390.

quarters of Croatia to, in agreement with Colonel Ellery Huntington, the head of the Independent Military Mission of the USA at the Supreme Command, who was then in Croatia, to send "someone to Zagreb to establish contact with the main German command" to "examine the conditions for their troops' surrender from this part of the front with all their weapons," thereby guaranteeing their lives and return to Germany, while sparing Zagreb from destruction both from the ground and air.[760] On December 26, in a telegram to the same Headquarters, he emphasized that the Allied air force was forbidden from bombing the enemy "in the immediate vicinity of Zagreb," but rather focusing on nearby communications with stronger enemy concentrations. It was only then that he realized how "several of our cities, with no particular military purpose, were ruined by Allied aviation,"[761] as if this was happening to someone else, with someone else's approval. On January 3, 1945, in response to a question about the desire of the English to bomb "some objects near the Sava River in the immediate vicinity of Zagreb," he answered: "The English can only bomb objects near Velika Gorica and the bridges near Zagreb. The city itself must not be bombed."[762] In any case, such mercy was not shown by the Supreme Commander for Podgorica, Bijelo Polje, Prijepolje, Užice, and, earlier, for Niš, Leskovac, Belgrade and other Serbian cities.

The end of 1944 was met with significant results from major domestic, Allied-supported military efforts across the entire Yugoslav front. However, there was no time for celebration or self-satisfaction, because the results achieved opened up new questions and pointed to wider possibilities. With more optimism, 1945 could be expected to be the final year of the war. Much of this was the result of two months of operations carried out by the Supreme Command from Belgrade, which had been strengthened in terms of personnel, organization and material, and was now capable of efficiently and successfully directing the numerous operations that had just been completed or were forthcoming, with overlapping objectives, terrain and timing.

On New Year's Eve, from the Operational Room of the General Staff, the departure of three newly-formed armies was tracked on detailed maps and radio messages — heading to Srem, northeastern Bosnia and Podravina; the operations of the groups of Vojvodina and Slavonian divisions of the NOVJ and a regiment of the Red Army on the approaches to Virovitica; the battles of the 5th Corps units for the capture of Varješ, around Kreševo and Banja Luka; the breakthrough of the German 963rd Fortress Brigade from Sarajevo, through Vlasenica and Zvornik, towards Bijeljina, sent to assist the 34th Corps in creating conditions for the withdrawal of German units from the south; the movements of the Chetniks through Ozren, who had evaded after 20 days of fierce fighting to break their 8,000-strong group led from Romanija to Tuzla; clashes of the 3rd Shock Division with the German 22nd and 181st Divisions around Mojkovac; actions around Gospić, on the line of Žužemberk, and the outcomes of actions aimed at the liquidation of Ballist groups in Kosovo and Chetniks in western

[760] AVII, file 119-4, reg. no. 3-11/1.

[761] *Ibid.,* file 119-4, reg. no. 3-24/1.

[762] *Ibid.,* file 31, reg. no. 1-1/1.

Serbia, transferred across the Drina...

Sixty of Tito's guests were celebrating at the White Palace. According to protocol, Arso was among those seated at the head of the table. He spoke with the Supreme Commander, diplomats, representatives of the Red Army at the Supreme Command and the Ministry of National Defence, Minister Smodlak and other politicians, General Orović and a group of senior commanders. He waited for the midnight congratulations, then excused himself due to the urgency of his work and returned to the General Staff building. The last image he carried from the reception at the White Palace and later shared with V. Terzić was of Marshal Tito dancing the waltz in the middle of the hall with Cana Babović; the newly promoted General Veljko Kovačević, sliding "on the lower part of his back" on the heated floor, trying to stop himself, flailing his arms in the air as his boots, made by some German soldier and tightly fitted with spurs, failed him; a group of ten men from Lika and Krajina, all in uniforms and with belts, following Đoka Jovanić in the *Žikino kolo,* as a group of Serbs gathered around Sreten Žujović-Crni watched.

In the Operational Room, the head of the duty team was Lieutenant General Rudolf Primorac, and his deputy, Major General Vjekoslav Klišanić, both officers of the General Staff Corps of the Yugoslav Army. Almost all of the department heads were gathered in front of maps and reports from the front. Generals Terzić and Hamović analysed the operational situation in Srem; General Obradović excitedly spoke about the role of artillery in the Knin operation and the great achievements of Colonel Karel Levichnik, the artillery commander of the 11th Corps; Generals Smirnov and Mahin, speaking in Russian, discussed the position of the troops of the two Red Army fronts in Hungary.[763]

In such a strictly organized institution and in such serious discussions, there was neither time nor place for noisy celebrations, let alone for drinking toasts. Only General Obradović, a man never caught without a drink, found a bottle of vodka. They toasted, with the best wishes for a successful ongoing war night and the successful months ahead in the war.[764]

Conversations with Stalin *(January 7-February 14, 1945)*

The military and state delegation for negotiations with Moscow left Belgrade on January 4, 1945. It was led by Political Bureau member and commissioner for industry and trade of the National Committee, Andrija Hebrang, and the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, Lieutenant General Arso Jovanović. The delegation also included Mitra Mitrović-Đilas, Major Generals Rade Hamović, Gojko Nikoliš, Branko Obradović and Srećko Manola, Air Force Colonel Zdenko Ulepič, Navy Lieutenant Colonel Juraj Bonači, as well as two high-ranking economic leaders, Maksim Goranović (agriculture) and engineer Leković (chemical industry). Žarko Broz travelled with the delega-

[763] General Terzić forever remembered that New Year's picture.

[764] From a conversation with General B. Obradović in August 1983 in Meljine.

tion for medical treatment.

The delegation departed from Zemun by "Douglas" aircraft and arrived in Kiev, where they were delayed due to a heavy blizzard. In the evening, they attended a ballet performance and, due to the weather, continued their journey by train. On Christmas Day, they arrived in Moscow, covered in snow and encased in ice.

They stayed at the Central House of the Red Army (CDKA); each member had their own room with all its amenities. The dining hall was full, and the program of Moscow's cultural scenes was rich, with everything from ballets to circuses every night, according to choice.

The members of the delegation knew that their leaders had been received by Stalin and Molotov immediately upon arriving in Moscow, but they were "strictly selectively" informed about it: each person was only told what was directly related to the task for which they had been sent. It was only on January 12 that the members of the military delegation joined the discussions at the General Staff, according to their respective fields. Where the issues were really being resolved, the new head of the Soviet military mission in Belgrade, Major General A.F. Kiselev, was also present. The discussions focused on the reorganization and rearmament of divisions, the organization of the future General Staff and Ministry of National Defence, the restructuring of the cumbersome rear and the resolution of issues regarding health care, artillery, aviation and the navy. The guests felt that the issues on the list formulated in Belgrade were being "removed" slowly. For example, General Nikoliš had a list of ten essential questions for discussion with his colleague Dr. Smirnov, who, however, had little time for him. As noted by the renowned partisan doctor, "he was quite reserved, probably because many people were asking him for a lot."

There was also time for a visit to the headquarters of the All-Slavic Committee, a visit to a collective farm and a stay at military academies. Arso and B. Obradović, both classmates from 1907 and former colleagues in the royal army, now "red generals," would, when they were not part of the official program, walk through Red Square at night, circling the timeless lighthouse and bastion of freedom, the Kremlin. Sometimes, General Kiselev would join them. Arso would poetically reminisce about the frequent and obligatory prayers of his father Radivoje "for the health and progress of Tsar Moscow"; the generations of his fellow countrymen, especially the communist Piperians, who had crooked necks from constantly looking to the East; the deep faith of the July rebels in the Red Army; the long and fruitless waiting for Russian airplanes beneath Durmitor; the ecstasy over the victory at Stalingrad and the breaking of the blockade of Leningrad; the warm welcome in Drvar from Generals Korneyev and Gorshkov; talks with Marshal Tolbukhin and General Biruzov about the joint operation of the two allied armies. On Epiphany (January 19), in the evening, he stopped in front of the magnificent building of St. Basil's Cathedral and said how, if it were possible, he would light a candle in that church in honour of all the fallen heroes from Skadar (1913) and Mojkovac (1916). He most fondly remembered the long and sincere wartime stories with General of the NOVJ Fyodor Makhin (whom he affectionately called Ataman), born in 1882 in Nikolayevsk on the Amur, a man of high culture,

wide general and military education, strong patriotic feelings and a delicate Russian soul, with whom their friendship was a true godsend. It seemed as though he knew everything about him: a descendant of the famous Cossack family from the Urals, later settled in Siberia, a General Staff officer in the Tsar's army, a knowledgeable speaker of several world languages, a participant in the First World War as a member of one of the 64 Cossack regiments, and then a fighter in the Serbian Volunteer Division in Dobruja and on the Salonika Front. After the war, he settled in Yugoslavia in 1923, considering it his second homeland. He was always and everywhere a good Russian and a writer of several books and articles in support of Soviet power, a member of the CPY since 1939 and a fighter in the NOB from the days of the uprising. He worked in the Supreme Command on propaganda duties, cooperating in newspapers and magazines, preparing materials for *Slobodna Jugoslavija* and was the author of several intelligence-related publications and military-political assessments. He was deservedly promoted to the rank of Major General. Carrying "Mother Russia" in his heart, Arso said to him just before entering the plane that he would greet "Mother Moscow" and tell her in the middle of the Red Square that he would visit her soon, and later obtain Montenegrin citizenship. Arso fulfilled the promise, but Ataman would only fulfil the first part, as he did not live to fulfil the second part: he returned from Moscow to Belgrade and applied for Montenegrin citizenship, which generals Orović, Đilas and Jovanović had promised him during the war, but death was quicker; he died on June 3, 1945, while serving as the Head of the Historical Department of the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army.

While in Moscow, Arso recalled an article by the bard of Russian journalism and "king of wartime propaganda" Ilya Ehrenburg, titled *Together*. It had been written to mark the meeting of the Red Army and the Yugoslav Partisan Army and was widely published in the Soviet press and broadcast on radio programs transmitted from Moscow. Knowing the article by heart, Arso would often quote the part where that "golden pen," reflecting on the wartime alliance of the two armies, wrote that "friendship is not tested at a banquet but in hardship," and that "Yugoslavia will come to the Peace Conference not as a baggage handler but as a scout, having earned for itself an honourable place in Europe." He expressed a desire to meet Ehrenburg in Moscow, which he mentioned to Kiselev. The next day he was told that Ehrenburg was "somewhere at the front," but his wish would be relayed — and indeed it was. Later, when the famous writer arrived in Belgrade, he was a guest at the Jovanović family home. Inspired by the epic storytelling of Arso's mother Zorka, and by the sight of her hands, he wrote a notable story titled *Hands* — about hands that "fed a blinded warrior husband, raised a son who would become a general, shielded grandchildren from the knives of murderers, welcomed guests and threatened evildoers."[765]

One wish remained unfulfilled — to visit the communist shrine, the Mausoleum of V.I. Lenin, leader of the Great October Revolution, which was, and remains, a profound aspiration for many of Arso's comrades and countrymen. The reason was entire-

[765] The text of *Hands* was — according to the memories of Branka and Pavle Savić — read in one of Radio Belgrade's broadcasts.

ly objective: the sarcophagus, evacuated in the winter of 1941 ahead of the onslaught of Hitler's divisions, was still secretly hidden in the Urals, awaiting the return of peace and its reinstallation in Red Square.

On January 21, the delegation paid a much-anticipated visit to the "M.V. Frunze" Military Academy. The Partisan generals were deeply impressed — by the classrooms, the order, cleanliness, comfort, and especially by a model lecture on an army offensive operation.

The impression was even more powerful that evening, when they attended a brilliant performance of *Prince Igor* at the Bolshoi Theatre.

After another concert at the magnificent Tchaikovsky Hall and a fine dinner, Nikoliš would write in his diary: "Nervousness is growing in our delegation. We've been in Moscow for over two weeks now: being fattened at the overly lavish CDKA table, countless toasts, ballet performances — Lepeshinskaya, Ulanova, Tarasova — old Kachalov (all distinguished artists), circuses, concerts, we sit in the front rows or in luxurious boxes at the Bolshoi — it's all wonderful, but nothing has yet come of our actual work. A few meetings and informative talks with high-ranking officers of the Red Army, but no conclusions, not even promises. How long will this go on?"[766] As it would turn out, however, the doctor was simply uninformed and impatient — discussions and decisions were taking place at the top, beyond his view, under the principle: why should everyone know everything?

Finally, on the night of January 25, the "main event" happened — an invitation to the Kremlin — to meet with Him. According to Mitra and Gojko's notes, word reached them around 10:00 p.m., during a performance of *The Last Days of Pushkin* at the Moscow Art Theatre. On stage at that very moment was the brilliant Tarasova, and they were watching from the front row, seated side by side — all present and accounted for, as always — impeccably dressed in uniform and adorned with decorations, with their leaders at the head. Arso wore a new uniform, with gleaming general's insignia and his highest military orders. Suddenly, in the dim light and silence, a colonel approached and whispered something to Hebrang. He immediately sprang from his seat, followed by the others — as if by command. One after another, they quietly slipped out of the theatre, while the audience looked on in bewilderment, unaware of who they were or where they were heading in the middle of the performance. The cars raced down the reserved lanes of the wide boulevards...

The leader and teacher Vissarionovich was met by everyone, except Arso and Hebrang, for the first time. He kissed each one. First impressions: simple, relaxed, cordial. Arso watched him intently, aware that during the three-hour meeting on January 9, due to being overwhelmed by such an important task, there had been little time to form more complete impressions. Five hours at the same table would provide an opportunity for that. Later, he would jokingly say that he had imagined that nature had endowed him with a taller stature, a deeper voice, a more handsome face and broader shoulders, in short, with more of the male beauty so highly appreciated in his native

[766] G. Nikoliš, *Roots, Tree and Withering*, Zagreb 1980, p. 623.

Montenegro.

They sat at the famous "Stalin's table." As was customary, Stalin sat at the head, next to him Vyacheslav Molotov, Nikolai Bulganin and General A. Kiselev, with Hebrang, Mitra, Arso and the others seated as per protocol. They ate and drank, and from the start, only the host toasted, while the guests, as much as they could, drank. The guests did not show much in this regard — all of them, in true "partisan" fashion, drank little, except for the well-known jovial drinker and spender Branko Obradović, who, together with Stalin, was drinking *pertsovka*. Stalin toasted to the Yugoslav and his army, to the Yugoslavs present, mentioning their names and functions, to the blood and gun brotherhood of the people of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, then to partisans, pilots, gunners and tankers. For a long time, no one responded, they just stood up and "accepted" the toasts; everyone, as agreed and per protocol, was waiting for their leader's word, Andrija Hebrang, who, sitting "beside Stalin," remained silent as if glued to his seat.

When even the strictest teetotalers, constantly sipping at each toast, had "adorned themselves with wine," they began to sing partisan songs, although not as harmoniously as loudly, so Stalin, probably so that they would hear his next toast or remember his thought, calmed them down by shouting, "Shut up, shut up!" They listened to him.

There was conversation, with Stalin mostly speaking, occasionally asking something, at the beginning seemingly for no reason, praising Bulgaria and criticizing Hungary, constantly questioning Molotov whether what he was saying was correct, to which Molotov confirmed. At one point, without warning or preamble, Stalin turned to the guests and accused Đilas of slandering the Red Army. Surprised by the harshness of his words, everyone knew what it was about: a member of the Political Bureau and the Supreme Command had sharply criticized the improper behaviour of certain Red Army soldiers, officers and fighters toward the Yugoslav people, especially young women and girls. While expressing the highest respect for Stalin, but determined to defend their comrade, they explained, each jumping in to speak, how Đilas, like all the partisan army and the entire patriotic and combative people of the country they represent, loved the Soviet land, the Red Army, and its "genial leader and teacher" so much that they rushed into battle and died with their names on their lips. To be more convincing, they all stood up except for the solemn Hebrang, gathered around Stalin, and loudly explained that what Đilas said was certainly not slander. Stalin seemed to listen attentively, and then, convinced that this issue had been "removed from the agenda," they returned to their seats. But he went on in his own way: "Đilas slandered the Red Army and me personally!" They flew back to him, explaining, waving their hands. They were not "convincing" — the host repeated his judgement.

Again, food and drink, toasts, and then Stalin, somewhere "in the small hours" and without any particular reason: "The Bulgarian army is better than the Yugoslav one!" The assessment hit all the members of the Yugoslav delegation except Hebrang, who sat with a gloomy face. They expressed this loudly. At that moment, the Chief of the Supreme Command of the Army, which had fared much worse in this assessment than the Bulgarians, stood up and tried to convince Stalin otherwise: The Bulgarian

army, until four months ago, had been "Hitler's military reserve," it had an occupation army in Macedonia and a corps in Serbia; its units committed atrocities, carried out massacres, caused great trouble for a group of divisions of the NOVJ during the Battle of Sutjeska, and acted the same way during all three attempts of the NOVJ to break through into Serbia in 1944. Stalin interrupted him by repeating the same assessment. From military history, Arso knew that Russian imperial policy, when choosing between Serbia and Bulgaria, had always leaned more towards Bulgaria for its own strategic interests, a stance that Stalin had inherited. Therefore, in October 1944, to save Bulgaria from the deserved punishment by the Allies, Stalin pushed Tito into an embrace with it. In doing so, both ignored the historical fact that, in both world wars, the Bulgarians were occupiers of Serbia, determined to realize their long-standing territorial claims through fire and sword. Believing that Stalin was well aware of this, Arso, defending the honour of the army he represented here and not underestimating the Bulgarian Fatherland Front army — whose troops, due to political circumstances, and most of all under Russian pressure, carried out operations on the Yugoslav front on the side of the Anti-Fascist Coalition — tried to explain how the Bulgarian soldier was tough and combative, but the Serbian and Montenegrin fighters had demonstrated their superiority in frequent wars on the Balkans. The Bulgarian army was, probably, more organized and certainly better equipped technically than the NOVJ, its 300 soldiers having already died in battles against the Germans on the junction of the Yugoslav and Soviet armies on the northern flank of the Srem Front, which was highly valued and respected in Yugoslavia. However, one could not ignore the joint assessment of Marshal Tito and Tolbukhin that the units of the 1st Bulgarian Army (around 100,000 soldiers), unlike the brilliant 68th Corps of the Red Army, "did not fight persistently."

Disregarding these reasons, or deliberately inflaming the discussion, Stalin, cunningly smiling, stuck to his point: the Bulgarian army was, after all, better than the Yugoslav one! Once again, the guests stood up, gathered around him, and tried to prove that he was wrong. So — according to what witnesses recorded and remembered — five times. Then Arso, evidently burdened by Stalin's insults, stood up again and, not hiding his tears, astonished — just as Dr. Nikoliš recorded — said: "Comrade Stalin, do you understand, how can you say such a thing, comrade, comrade...?"

Only then did the leader of the Yugoslav state delegation "wake up," or at least stir from his mysterious silence, but not to support the struggle and fighters for the defence of the honour of the Yugoslav, partisan and anti-fascist army, which was, by all assessments, a brave force, but to sternly, commanding and reprimanding stop and silence the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters: "Arso, I order you to stop!"

General Jovanović, a man of honour and order, still a guest, trained to "let the howitzers thunder while the guns remain silent" — sat down as per the order of a Political Bureau member, to hear, like the others, another of Stalin's "snubs": how the Red Army was gifting the Yugoslav army with artillery, while they, just the day before, in Srem, had "abandoned and surrendered to the Germans." Unlike the "Bulgarian case," the Yugoslav generals, especially the Chief of Staff, knew exactly what was meant —

the unfortunate 3rd and even more unfortunate 17th of January. The day before their departure to Moscow, the Germans had launched a breakthrough and counter-offensive in Srem near Otoka, forcing the 21st Assault Division to retreat after heavy losses, during which they lost a division of artillery pieces obtained for rearming from Red Army aid. Considering himself the most qualified to explain this loss (officially 15, but there were rumours of up to 36 guns), Arso said that the front had been established, the division reorganized, and its commander and commissar were replaced.[767] Two weeks later, the Germans — according to reports from Belgrade — broke through the positions of the 1st Army along the Sotin-Tovarnik line at dawn, following a heavy artillery preparation, with four divisions, aiming to establish a front on the Nibelungen Line. The resistance of the NOVJ units was decisive — only the 1st Proletarian Division had 243 killed, 643 wounded and 1,638 missing in the first two days of fighting, but reinforcements quickly intervened, halting the German advance, with indirect cooperation from Marshal Tolbukhin's troops. Other generals also tried to explain how such losses of military equipment, particularly artillery, occurred, especially since the army was deployed, particularly at unfortified positions. All in vain: Stalin reprimanded them for the "surrendered" Russian guns, putting five generals of the Allied armies in a very uncomfortable position. It was even harder for Arso since, on January 9, he had personally heard Stalin, in response to General Kiselev's complaint that the "21st Yugoslav Division, under little enemy pressure, had given way and lost part of (Russian) artillery," say: "Such things happen everywhere: with the Germans, and with us too." He believed that with this, January 3, an otherwise quite uncomfortable day, was in the best possible way — realistically, broadly and nobly, as only the great Stalin deserved — taken off the agenda. But now, here, in front of such a broad and diverse group, Stalin raised it again, adding January 17 to it, striking at the honour of the army that did not deserve it. He also believed that he, as the Chief of Staff of the respected Allied army and one of the six Yugoslavs first awarded the Order of Kutuzov, First Class, which he proudly wore on his chest — did not deserve such treatment, as it was believed that Stalin was infallible, and certainly omnipotent.

In these dark times, at the stroke of the first morning hours, Hebrang finally stood up. He spoke "somewhat confusedly and without enthusiasm," as Gojko and Mitra recorded the next day. He mumbled that "here, this night, some serious reprimands from Stalin were heard, but we have no right to be angry, because Comrade Stalin is always right," adding: "We, the Yugoslav communists, must admit that we made mistakes both in foreign and internal policy, and I will still report this to the Political Bureau."

Marshal Stalin, the grandmaster of hot-and-cold politics, continued with his toasts: in honour of the new Yugoslavia; for the final victory over fascism; for the progress of all branches and arms of the Yugoslav army, which had their representatives at this table; for the good health of everyone present — approaching the "called ones" and kissing them. They understood it as part of his self-criticism, as he had "fatherly" scolded them as representatives of the state and army, but also insulted them.

[767] He was informed about it, as per Tito's order, by General V. Terzić.

As soon as they returned to their quarters, Hebrang, in the Ceremonial Hall and in front of everyone, said: "If I, General Jovanović, were to have a say in it — you would no longer be a regular soldier, let alone the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters!"

The state delegation returned to Belgrade on February 14, 1945. What they did in Moscow in the twenty days after the dinner with Stalin was not documented anywhere publicly until 1996, if at all.

What Hebrang wrote in his report to the Political Bureau, threatening it, about that evening and, especially, about General Jovanović's "outburst," remains unknown, especially since both men relatively quickly (in 1948) disappeared from the political and public stage. A propaganda war with Stalin began, and the period of demonization of everything related to the names of all three came, so it was best to erase all of this from the archives and, by extension, from history and even from personal memory. Written records of this, surprisingly, do not exist even in the 1995 published collection of the minutes from the Political Bureau sessions of 1945-48. However, one fact remains: the Chief of Staff of the NOVJ, for his defiance of Stalin — albeit with some tears, which were stirred by emotions and alcohol that he couldn't handle — was never reprimanded, probably because the powerful, in private, acknowledged him for what they did not have the courage to do themselves. It is likely that even the Generalissimo from Moscow (promoted on June 24, 1945) did not take this "misdeed" as an offence, or considered it unimportant in relation to his "exceptional wartime preparedness and the bravery and courage shown in the fight against the common enemy of the USSR and Yugoslavia — nazi Germany," as this formulation would appear alongside Arso's name as a recipient of the Order of Suvorov, 1st class. Stalin "personally decorated" him by signing a list of three individuals in the Decree of the Supreme Soviet from October 15, 1945, making Arso the only Yugoslav military leader to be awarded the two highest and most prestigious Soviet military decorations — the Orders of Suvorov and Kutuzov, both 1st class.[768]

Two witnesses, Mitra and Gojko, showed each other their notes about that strange Kremlin evening and agreed on all the key points, only to return to Hebrang's words before Stalin after Hebrang's fall in 1948, along with a few "companions" from Moscow, primarily that "he is always right." And as Arso also disappeared from the public stage in August of that year, the "communist orthodox" interpreted his tears not as the final tool in defending the honour of the army he had led, but as a sign of surrender to Stalin. Thus, Nikoliš — in a footnote on page 638 of his memoirs *Roots, Tree and Withering*, when handing the manuscript to the publisher in 1979 — wrote: "Fate cruelly played a joke on Arso Jovanović. That man, already in his mature years, suffering a nervous breakdown under the blows of Stalin's insults that night, in 1948, did not know how to choose any other path but into Stalin's embrace! On that path, he lost his life. Psychological explanation: perhaps he was in a state of hypnosis shock, or an inability to prove the truth before Stalin's *vsyo-taki* (in Russian: well, nevertheless

[768] These two highest decorations from the Yugoslavs were awarded only to A. Ranković who, as he himself said, did not deal with "purely military issues," so it seems that they were more about political merits for the common victory over fascism.

— *I.M.*)? Perhaps he was afraid of his own courage, the one he showed on January 25, 1945? Because, that night, Arso acted truly courageously. Weakly and unwisely, but courageously."[769]

With those words, a prominent fighter in two anti-fascist wars concluded his account of the wartime excursion to Moscow, a text 12 pages long. More than that, regarding the rather ephemeral content of that document, the shorter text by Mitra Mitrović, and a few protocolary telegrams — written traces of the mission of a highly influential military and state delegation and its exceptionally significant contribution to the victory of the new Yugoslavia — remained undocumented until the end of October 1996. As those five decades of persistent silence neared their end, the researcher almost concluded that the truth would never be uncovered, convinced that such forces in both politics and historical science were satisfied with this, especially since the dead mouths of Arso Jovanović and Andrija Hebrang, condemned for "betraying the country," could never speak. However, suddenly, in the autumn of 1996 — through the kindness of some archivists in Moscow and the publication of a collection of wartime Russo-Yugoslav documents in Belgrade — I received about ten original documents, mostly well-preserved in Russian archives. These allowed me to more fully reconstruct the events related to the 39-day stay and the extraordinarily significant performance of that delegation, and thus the indispensable and very important role of General Jovanović.

Thus, it happened, in the words of Nobel laureate Andrić: "When human memory and speech cease with death, documents remain in the archive, which remember and speak the place of the person. What goes from mouth to mouth is easily forgotten, and even distorted, but what is written in documents is not forgotten and is not distorted."[770] Had these documents not been preserved, and, well, now published, everything would have been — as described in a diary, recalled in fragments, retold and suppressed — saying that it was a failed mission, a strange wartime excursion of a group of partisan generals to the capital of red Russia, perhaps even a kind of farce. However, the record of the meeting of the delegation with the all-powerful Stalin could have served as a libretto for an operetta, where the Supreme Commander of the Soviet and Chief of the Yugoslav anti-fascist army would play the main roles, although neither of them was in the mood for such trivialities: the first was, in those days, in the Crimea, shaping the fate of the world in discussions with Roosevelt and Churchill; the second, meanwhile, was reorganizing the army and preparing for a decisive strategic offensive to finally liberate the country. And the issues they discussed in Moscow were extremely serious military matters.

Surprisingly, even Đilas — a member of the Political Bureau and the Supreme Command, and a man of Tito's highest trust — remained uninformed, or chose to remain silent about the true, the material and factual, outcome of that "wartime excursion to Moscow," for which he could not have an excuse four decades later when, in

[769] G. Nikoliš, *op. cit.*, pp. 626-638.

[770] I. Andrić, *Signs by the Road*, "Prosveta," Belgrade 1997.

his memoir *Revolutionary War*, he recorded that the delegation in which — he emphasizes — his wife Mitra was included, was sent to Moscow "to seek economic, military and other aid, but it was subjected, both collectively and individually, to criticisms about the situation in Yugoslavia and certain leaders. These criticisms were mostly half-truths. They were mainly focused on Tito — that he was more concerned with the restoration of royal palaces than with the front, that he understood little about military matters and even less about economic ones, and that too much attention was given to his personality." The writer, however, stuck to the humorous side of the delegation's stay in Moscow, describing the "banquet in the Kremlin." In mentioning how Stalin attacked him over the criticism of the behaviour of some Red Army soldiers, he added how "he kept toasting, joking, teasing and crying," and recorded: "Arso Jovanović defended our army and cried, while Hebrang reprimanded him for contradicting Stalin. And Mitra cried too: 'How could you not cry?' — she told me upon arriving in Belgrade, 'when you see Stalin in tears?'

"Mitra's story shocked and stunned me. But not so much that I couldn't see the efforts to weaken, if not replace, Tito and his leadership in all of this. Mitra quickly recovered from her depression, and the dramatic evening with Stalin was known to other leading comrades as well..."[771]

Having reached some key documents from Moscow's archives and the publication (in October 1996) of a comprehensive (975 pages) collection of "documents and materials" titled *Relations Between Yugoslavia and Russia (USSR) 1941-1945*, published by the foreign ministries of the two countries and the Military History Institute in Belgrade — only now are we able to fully comprehend the truth about that long-suppressed and deliberately downplayed wartime mission of the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters of the NOVJ, viewing it in the context of the relations between these allied countries and their armies. Had documents from Arso's side not been preserved, he could have remained a major loser when it came to domestic written sources about his participation in negotiations with General Wilson in Caserta (August 1944), with Field Marshal H. Alexander (February 1945), with General V.J. Morgan (March and May 1945) in Belgrade and with the Allied military leadership (May-June 1945) in Trieste, where his notable, and in some cases decisive, role as a military expert and patriot was marginalized for decades, with the achievements attributed to others. Fortunately, there are also allied (from Moscow to Washington) and enemy (from Rome to Bonn) archives, and documents preserved within them, and there are still a few crucial witnesses alive...

The dispatch of the military delegation to Moscow was announced by Tito on December 14, 1944, in a telegram to Stalin:

"1. I have received your telegram with the proposal that we agree on all matters concerning rearmament, the reorganization of the armed forces and supplies.

"I fully agree with this proposal and am very grateful to you for your attention.

"I believe that it is most expedient to send our delegation to Moscow. We will

[771] M. Đilas, *op. cit.*, p. 415.

select the members of the delegation and prepare the materials.

"2. In a few days, I will inform you who will be part of the delegation and when it will travel."[772]

There are no written traces of the promised announcement, but it is known that as the "delegation of the Supreme Command of the NOVJ," it joined the state delegation on January 3 and arrived in Moscow four days later. Until now, little was known about its 39-day stay in Moscow, other than from diary entries about that evening with Stalin and two or three radio messages that were almost of no value. Dr. Nikola B. Popović also pointed out the lack of documents about the work of the delegation,[773] which "stayed unusually long in Moscow," emphasizing that "no minutes, reports or any other documents concerning the negotiations and their results are available to us. Some information was provided by Mr. Nikoliš in his memoir. Nevertheless, considering how relations with the Soviet Union developed until the end of the war, it can be concluded that the results of the NKOJ delegation's visit were more than positive. This is clearly seen from the character and extent of the Soviet material aid that followed after February 1945." He mentions that the Yugoslav Army's Military Mission in Moscow (headed by Lieutenant General Rudolf Primorac from mid-April) delivered to Belgrade on September 3 "a comprehensive Soviet document" showing that from February 10 to August 10, that is, over six months, Yugoslavia received military aid classified into more than 700 "items": 56,273 7.62 mm rifles with nearly 22 million rounds of ammunition, as much ammunition for rifles of the same calibre, 1,262 82 mm mortars with 173,230 shells, 84 105 mm howitzers (German), over 18 million rounds for pistols, 38,455 mines for 50 mm and 13,662 for 120 mm, 282,189 hand grenades, 65 tanks (T-34), 385 planes, 93 trucks and cars, materials for communication, engineering, medical supplies, etc. The list also included 2,806 tons of kerosene, 6,493 tons of gasoline for automobiles, 3,849 tons of diesel fuel, as well as 45,000 soldier uniforms and 7,300 officer uniforms, and various other materials for all branches and types of the army.

Of the quantities agreed upon on February 10, the majority was delivered during the wartime months, up to Victory Day (May 9), as confirmed by several written sources — though the pace of deliveries after that remains unknown. However, it is recorded that around the middle of the "agreed period" (May 13), Tito hinted to Stalin (via the radio channel of Soviet ambassador I.V. Sadchikov) that "due to the worsening military-political situation (on the southern and western borders), rearmament and strengthening of the Yugoslav Army are necessary," and he requested that "the delivery of weapons and other military-technical equipment be accelerated."[774]

Deeply aware of the responsibility that came with being appointed head of the NOVJ military delegation for negotiations in Moscow, the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters carried out thorough preparations with the members of the delegation.

[772] *Collection of Relations Between Yugoslavia and Russia (USSR) 1941-1945,* p. 642.

[773] N.B. Popović, *Yugoslav-Soviet Relations in the Second World War* (1941-1945), Belgrade 1988.

[774] AVII, file 17-A, reg. no. 4/4.

He anticipated meetings with the People's Commissars for Foreign Affairs and Defence — V. Molotov and N. Bulganin — with the Chief of the General Staff of the Red Army, A.I. Antonov, and possibly even with Marshal Stalin himself.[775] For that reason, he prepared answers to every possible question they might be asked and instructed his colleagues to be ready — if prompted — to supplement his presentations with details from the sectors they led in the SH. He knew well that anyone requesting something from another must, after showing respect, thoroughly explain their need using arguments and carefully crafted language. It was true that some of the key issues that had prompted the trip to Moscow had already been paved through inter-army cooperation. But as the war progressed, new problems continually emerged, opportunities for broader cooperation arose, better solutions were sought and the correspondence between the two marshals — the one from the Kremlin and the one from Dedinje — sometimes included sharp words. Thus, whoever came to Stalin for assistance had to not only know everything but also formulate their words with precision and deliver them with caution. This applied equally to Arso, Chief of the Supreme Headquarters of the NOVJ — an army that was a reliable ally of the Red Army — regardless of the fact that he did not come to Moscow with personal appeals or to resolve internal problems or "beg" for something. He arrived on behalf of a state that was, under extremely complex domestic and international conditions, just in the process of constituting its highest institutions, and on behalf of its army, which, operating along a front from the Drava to Zadar, was reliably linking the wings of the Allied fronts in Central Europe and Italy. That army was about to enter several months of combat under exceptionally difficult operational, economic, geographical and climatic conditions, constantly positioned at the junction of the Allied fronts. Ahead lay final operations for the complete liberation of the country and the pursuit of territorial claims against Italy and Austria. That is why the assistance — as abundant as possible — which he was seeking in Moscow, was essential and urgent. Nothing could be left to improvisation, interpretation of sympathies or the expression of animosities. Accordingly, the Supreme Commander had determined the platform that had to be strictly followed, adding that he would be "in daily contact with Moscow" — a statement that served both as encouragement and as a warning.

The very thought of standing before figures whose names, in the pre-war years, had been used by royalist generals to frighten him — and who, during the war, had been elevated by the communists to superhuman status — drove Arso to prepare thoroughly. The senior officers of all 16 of his "direct connections" within the SH were kept fully occupied, with everything ultimately coordinated under his leadership by the Cabinet headed by Major O. Gluhić.

In the officer's briefcase, which he never parted with, according to the official note he left in the Cabinet, he had neatly outlined the positions of all three armies (each with 5 divisions) on the Drava and Srem fronts, as well as in eastern Bosnia, the 2nd and 8th corps engaged on separate fronts, and seven divisions of the KNOJ, etc. He

[775] J.V. Stalin received the title of Generalissimo on June 24, 1945.



Before the flight to Moscow: New Year's visit to the units in Topčider.

carried a plan for the reorganization and rearming (with Soviet weapons and equipment) of the first 12, and then the remaining 28 (as proposed from Belgrade) infantry divisions, as well as a graphic representation of the concept for carrying out a strategic offensive for the final liberation of the country, with carefully mapped territories of Italy and Austria that Yugoslavia claimed. He also carried a proposal for the formation of a future ground army division, which would largely follow the Soviet model,

but also include several solutions that would express Yugoslav specificities — limited battlefields, a modest communication network, the material possibilities of the state, historical experiences, traditions and the mentality of the people.

He had notes on the mobilization carried out in Serbia to that point — 136,809 fighters; received Allied military aid — Soviet and Anglo-American; the number of wounded treated by both sides, the work of Soviet surgical teams, new medical needs, especially regarding field hospitals, the education of doctors and the specialization of surgeons, and the equipping of medical battalions for the divisions. He had a (strongly positive) assessment of the performance of the 68th Corps of the Red Army and a (rather unfavourable) assessment of the 1st Bulgarian Army on the Srem Front, the very important role of Soviet instructors and advisers in the high commands of the NOVJ, particularly in rearming and training the handling of new weapons in the units, and a conclusion on the successful cooperation of the Supreme Command with the 37th Anglo-American military mission led by Brigadier F. Maclean. He was prepared, if necessary, to outline the conditions under which the Zemunik airfield near Zadar would be temporarily made available to Western allies for operational use, and to grant them the right to dock their warships at the ports (Split, Zadar and Šibenik) and anchorage points "while operations against the common enemy in the broader Adriatic region continue." He also had a note on discussions with Vice Marshal of Aviation W. Elliot in Belgrade (December 7, 1944) regarding further cooperation with the RAF forces, as well as a concise argument for the request to finally hand over to the NOVJ the war and merchant ships of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia scattered across Allied convoys and ports in the Mediterranean. He carried a note about the engagement of two divisions of the People's Army of Albania on Yugoslav soil and information about the military aid provided to the army of that neighbouring country.

Confident that he would be asked about this at the first steps in Moscow, he paid special attention — based on the first 24 hours of observation and analysis in the Supreme Command in Belgrade — to the breakthrough of two German divisions, reinforced with tank units and self-propelled artillery, executed on January 3. He pointed out the possible objectives of the enemy, the depth of the breakthrough along the Otoka-Komletinci-Njemci axis, the heavy losses of the 21st Assault Division in personnel (182 killed, 308 wounded and 315 missing) and equipment (including, among other things, 15 guns received from Soviet aid). He also recorded the measures taken to halt the German breakthrough and restore the situation on that part of the front: urgently, from Belgrade, after a break and rearming, the 6th Lika Proletarian Division (commanded by Major General Đoko Jovanić, and Commissar Lieutenant Colonel Nikola Pejinović) was sent there, while the 2nd Proletarian Division (commanded by Colonel Sredoje Urošević, and Commissar Lieutenant Colonel Milija Stanišić) was moved to the Supreme Command reserve instead. The heavily compromised 21st Assault Division was pulled back from the front, and it was proposed that its commander and commissar (Major General Miloje Milojević and Lieutenant Colonel Mladen Marin) be replaced, and that measures be taken to reorganize and replenish it, as well as appoint new commanders and commissars (Colonel Vlado Bajić and Lieutenant

Colonel Mirko Jovanović). He was prepared to explain all this, but not to justify this indisputable failure and loss.

Everything prepared for the negotiations in Moscow was verified by the collegium of the chiefs of staff and approved by the Supreme Commander. Tito gave him a special task — to consult with the military leadership of the Red Army on organizing the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army and the Ministry of Defence, with an emphasis on the relations between the professional military organization at the strategic level and the highest state and political defence institutions, which was an important topic in Belgrade at the time. He announced that Stalin would most likely meet him, and certainly Bulganin and Molotov, and (with a great delay) informed him of some of the military views of the "leader and teacher" expressed in conversations with Dr. Šubašić and Kardelj (November 22, 1944), emphasizing that it was now critical and urgent to build a strong armed force as "the fist of the people and the Party," since we must live in a world where, as Stalin says, "only strength is respected."[776]

Finally, the Supreme Commander told him not to worry about the fact that "that damned Andrija," nominally, would be his boss in Moscow, because such is the order "in state affairs." The note struck him as, at the very least, strange. He was still distanced from politics, especially party politics, where the Political Bureau and its leader overshadowed everyone, but he knew, from accounts within the highest leadership, about the "bringing in" of A. Hebrang to Drvar and Vis for a "talking to" because of "nationalist deviations," and also that, due to the repetition of political mistakes, he had been removed from his position as secretary of the CC of the CP of Croatia on October 14, 1944,[777] and brought to Belgrade, where he was appointed commissioner for trade and industry in the National Committee, and immediately thereafter as the president of the Economic Council, while remaining a member of the Political Bureau. This did not bother General Jovanović, the head of the "Military Delegation of the NOVJ" within the delegation of the National Committee, and, in fact, no one had asked him about this during the preparations for Moscow; what bothered him was that this man was always grim-faced, obviously dissatisfied and nervous, extremely uncommunicative and uncooperative, and often reserved, especially toward generals from the Supreme Command, not to mention "former royal officers" and Montenegrins, which he did not hide. However, the Chief of Staff had been given a precise task he was well-suited for, with broad authority and colleagues whose professional abilities and moral integrity he highly valued, and he was going to the capital of the first socialist country with seasoned friends, allies and comrades. Thus, he would arrive in Moscow eager and with the best of intentions.

He was fortunate — so to speak, at the very first step in Moscow, he met and spoke for a full three hours with Stalin, as seen in the key document of 11 typed pages, published 52 years later. This is the "Official Note on the Conversation Between the Chairman of the Soviet People's Commissars Council J.V. Stalin and the Head of the

[776] For more details: *Collection of Relations Between Yugoslavia and Russia (USSR) 1941-1945,* p. 626.

[777] In place of the late I. Milutinović.

NKOJ Delegation," held on January 9, 1945. Along with Stalin, the Soviet side was represented by V.M. Molotov, General A.F. Kiselev, the new head of the Soviet Military Mission in Belgrade, and V.M. Sakharov from the General Staff. From the Yugoslav side, A. Hebrang and General A. Jovanović were present.[778] The two of them had previously spoken with Alekseyev (Molotov's nickname) — likely about the rationale for presenting their case to the "common master" (in Russian *gazda — I.M.*).

According to the official note written by General Sakharov, the meeting — after the conventional part — began with Stalin asking what "questions the delegation has to raise." They pointed out "three groups of issues: first, economic assistance to Yugoslavia; second, Yugoslav foreign trade demands; third, the issue of rearming and reorganizing the Yugoslav Army." Regarding the first and second issues, for this occasion, the most urgent requests were: food, "raw materials for several factories, equipment for schools and universities, materials for securing propaganda (paper for newspapers and books, paints, and others)." In response to Stalin's question "whether Yugoslavia is receiving anything from UNRRA," the host received a negative answer, with a note that "principled political reasons" were behind it, to which Stalin "noted the necessity of receiving" this aid as well.[779] Stalin warned that not much was expected, at least not quickly, from the reparations of the occupiers, particularly Hungary and Germany, to which it was stated that the Yugoslavs, in order to make reparations for war damages, "intend to participate in the occupation of certain German territories."

Highlighting the severe shortages in the Soviet Union, the host mentioned that economic aid to Yugoslavia, which was continuously requested from Belgrade, would be "provided according to possibilities," but that "until the end of the war, it should not be expected to be large." When asked whether the Yugoslavs had already received the promised 50,000 tons of grain, Hebrang replied that "regarding the grain from Russia," which was the promised aid, it included "supplies from Romania and from the northern part of Yugoslavia," adding — quite unwisely — that "this is not Russian grain," but rather from the Yugoslav and Romanian parts of the Banat. This careless remark about the origin of the donated grain provoked a sharp response from Stalin, which also addressed some current military questions, previously raised from Belgrade. He — according to the document we are quoting almost in its entirety — "clarified that part of the grain, quite naturally, could have been from trophies the Red Army had acquired. Then Comrade Stalin added that the Yugoslavs did not fully understand the issue of trophies. The Yugoslav leaders, including Tito, believed that the Red Army should leave to the Yugoslavs everything it had acquired in Yugoslavia, but this was not correct. Trophies belong to the army that acquires them. If an army knows that it must return what it has seized, it will not have the motivation to acquire trophies. The army wants to stand out not only by destroying the enemy's forces in battle but also by seizing property, trophies, from the enemy. Demanding that the Red Army return all the trophies is not correct.

[778] *Collection of Relations Between Yugoslavia and Russia (USSR) 1941-1945,* pp. 652-659.

[779] These words of Stalin were immediately conveyed to Tito, and the agreement with the "International Organization for Aid and Reconstruction" was signed by January 19.

"Hebrang noted that many Yugoslavs misunderstand the export of food acquired in Yugoslavia to Hungary and that this leaves a bad impression on the population.

"Comrade Stalin responded that food was being exported for the Red Army and that it didn't matter where it was located. The food is being exported to Hungary for the Red Army, which cannot fight without systematic food supplies. The army fights, spills blood and thinking that it has stolen something is offensive to the Red Army. Comrade Stalin remarked on Đilas' statement when he said that the moral-political character of Soviet officers was lower than that of English officers. Comrade Stalin emphasized that this was completely incorrect and offensive. An army cannot be judged based on individual cases; because of one degenerate, the entire Red Army should not be insulted. One must understand the soul of the fighter who fought 3,000 kilometres from Stalingrad to Budapest. The fighter thinks: he is a hero, he can do anything, today he is alive, tomorrow he is dead, and everything will be forgiven. The fighters are tired, exhausted from long and hard fighting. It is not correct to adopt the "biased" viewpoint. English officers showed their moral character best in Greece. There were individual cases that disgraced our fighters. We shoot them for that. But one must keep in mind that the people were tired and had lost their nerves; they think they are heroes to whom everything is allowed...

"Moving on to military matters, Hebrang said that the Yugoslavs, in this regard, expect dual assistance from the Soviet Union: in weapons and men (instructors-advisers), and they expect help in creating a modern organized army.

"Jovanović, in supplementing what Hebrang had already said, emphasized that the backbone, the foundation of such an army in Yugoslavia, already exists. It is necessary to organize a central leadership of the army, a general staff, army headquarters and other large staffs.

"Comrade Stalin asked how many divisions the Yugoslav Army currently has.

"To this, Jovanović responded that it has 50 divisions with 518,000 men. With the liberation of the entire territory of Yugoslavia, an additional 300,000 men will be mobilized. Among these divisions, there are also smaller partisan divisions that need to be reorganized, and thus the number of divisions will be reduced to 40. There is consideration for the formation of three army groups, in addition to 12 corps. The army groups will have five divisions each, and the corps will have 2-3 divisions.

"Comrade Stalin was interested in how much artillery a Yugoslav division has, to which General Kiselev replied that today, each division has 72 pieces of artillery, including mortars, and the Yugoslavs want to increase the number of pieces to 84, with a division consisting of 12,500 men.

"Comrade Stalin pointed out that such a large number of heavy divisions is unrealistic, as there are not enough officer cadres needed for them. He cited the example of Poland, where soldiers were mobilized for 20 divisions, but there weren't enough officers, and the number of divisions had to be reduced to 10, five of which are now at the front, while the other five should soon be sent to the front as well. However, he said, those would be good divisions. The standard composition of a division is 8,000-9,000 men. If Yugoslavia had 20 divisions, but good divisions, that would be

very good. It's not about the number. There can be many divisions, but they may not be worth much. Officers need to be trained, that's the most important thing. Even 20 divisions are quite a lot, and one shouldn't overdo it. Given the fact that there are not enough officer cadres in Yugoslavia, Comrade Stalin expressed the thought that several partisan divisions should be kept in the rear, as they could be armed with lighter artillery. The composition of a division should be fewer than 13,000. Twenty good divisions, Comrade Stalin said, would be enough for Yugoslavia, even very good. Each division could then be converted into a corps, creating three divisions from one. A lot of divisions are very difficult to feed, and in battle, they will not be stable. Comrade Stalin paid attention to this difficulty and said that a goal should be set, but that it's not achievable now — divisions will only exist on paper.

"Comrade Stalin asked how the Yugoslav Army would be organized: would it have a joint command, or would the Serbian, Croatian and other armies exist separately?

"Jovanović answered that the command would be joint.

"Comrade Stalin then asked what would happen with the language. Which language would be adopted?

"Jovanović responded that the language would be Serbo-Croatian, and only in Slovenia and Macedonia would Slovenian and Macedonian be used, as those languages differ from Serbo-Croatian.

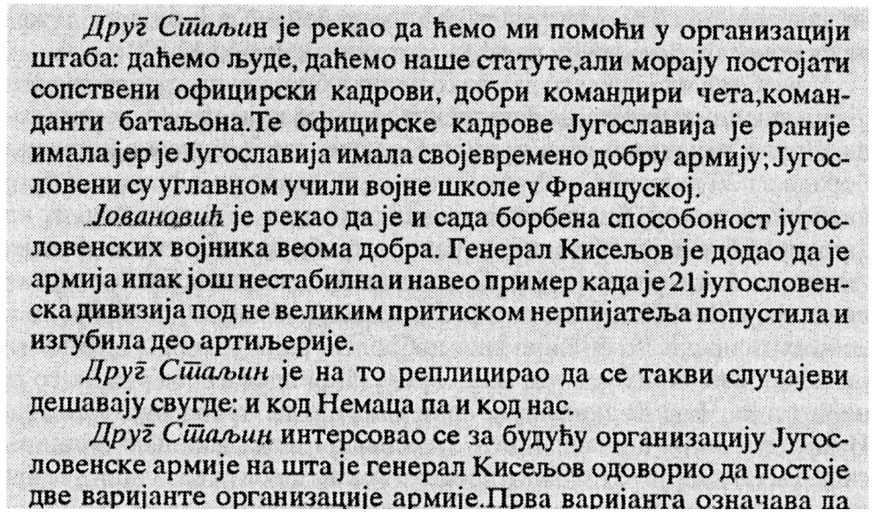
"Comrade Stalin said that they would help with the organization of the staff: they would provide people, provide their statutes, but there must be their own officer cadres, good company commanders and battalion commanders. Yugoslavia had these officer cadres in the past because Yugoslavia once had a good army; Yugoslavs, in general, had attended military schools in France.

"Jovanović said that the combat readiness of Yugoslav soldiers was still very good. General Kiselev added that the army was still unstable, citing the example of when the 21st Yugoslav Division, under minor pressure from the enemy, gave way and lost part of its artillery (he didn't specifically mention "the artillery received from Soviet aid," but it was obvious that this was what he meant, and everyone present knew what he was referring to — *I.M.*).

"Comrade Stalin responded that such cases happen everywhere: with the Germans, and with us too.

"Comrade Stalin then asked about the future organization of the Yugoslav Army, to which General Kiselev replied that there are two variations for the army's organization. The first variation means that each division would be a full-fledged division of normal composition, while the second would involve divisions with a reduced composition. A staffing plan for these divisions had been developed.

"Comrade Stalin said that the brigadier system could be accepted and mentioned the Red Army's experience from 1942, when 100-120 brigades, with a composition of 4,500 to 5,000 men, were included. These brigades fought well and were later turned into divisions. Such brigades are easier to manage, and when the commanders gain experience, they can command normal divisions. It might be good for Yugoslavia to have 7-10 divisions of 10,000 men, and the rest should be converted into brigades, where



Друг Сталин је рекао да ћемо ми помоћи у организацији штаба: даћемо људе, даћемо наше статуте,али морају постојати сопствени официрски кадрови, добри командири чета,команданти батаљона.Те официрске кадрове Југославија је раније имала јер је Југославија имала својевремено добру армију; Југословени су углавном учили војне школе у Француској.

Јовановић је рекао да је и сада борбена способоност југословенских војника веома добра. Генерал Кисељов је додао да је армија ипак још нестабилна и навео пример када је 21 југословенска дивизија под не великим притиском нерпијатеља попустила и изгубила део артиљерије.

Друг Сталин је на то реплицирао да се такви случајеви дешавају свугде: и код Немаца па и код нас.

Друг Сталин интерсовао се за будућу организацију Југословенске армије на шта је генерал Кисељов одоворио да постоје две варијанте организације армије.Прва варијанта означава па

Moscow, January 9, 1945: from the stenographic transcript of the conversation with Stalin.

younger officers could learn to manage and command. These brigades could even be called divisions. Later, they should be turned into proper, modern divisions, but for now, the focus should be on properly training the officer cadres...

"Jovanović said that Yugoslavia has enough cadres for 40 divisions, to which Comrade Stalin noted that those divisions would need someone to command them...

"Returning to the issue of the future composition of Yugoslav divisions, Comrade Stalin expressed the idea that perhaps divisions should be formed with 7,000-8,000 men. Comrade Stalin said that partisans should be taken under control and adapted to meet the needs of a modern army. They often don't want to, but they need to be trained for a modern army..."

After receiving an answer to the question of which parts of Yugoslavia have been liberated, Stalin returned again to the issue of organizing the Yugoslav Army, particularly the formation of divisions, saying that it is normal for a division to have 12,000-13,000 men, emphasizing how "especially difficult the issue of command cadres is — commanders who need to be trained for many years."

When Stalin was told that the Red Army had provided enough weapons "for almost 10 divisions," General Jovanović "requested that at least enough weapons for 20 more divisions be provided," to which the host replied that it still needed to be determined what the division itself would look like, which would, along with other issues, be "discussed with comrades Bulganin and Antonov.

"Jovanović requested that instructors be assigned to the Yugoslav Army and mentioned that certain rights and obligations would be granted to them. They would have the rights of deputy commanders of specific units and would have the ability to communicate their suggestions to higher authorities. Additionally, Yugoslav uniforms were planned for the Soviet instructors.

"Comrade Stalin responded that an instructor, in order to wear a uniform, must know the language; otherwise, the uniform would have no meaning. An instructor should only be an instructor, an adviser. He does not have the right to make decisions or impose them on the commander. Comrade Stalin noted that we would temporarily assign instructors. In Comrade Stalin's opinion, the weakness of the Yugoslavs lies in their reliance on advisers, and if the Yugoslavs knew that the advisers would leave, then they would learn on their own..."

A conversation began about artillery in a modern division, where Stalin felt authoritative, discussing the Yugoslav need for captured weapons and ammunition, as well as the necessity of forming "army apparatuses with supply organs and rear organs," which led General Jovanović to particularly emphasize "the urgent need for transport means, because without them, the entire army apparatus and rear services cannot function properly. The roads and transport means that were available earlier have been destroyed, and there are very few horses left in the country.

"Comrade Stalin noted that the issue of motor transport is difficult, not only because a certain number of vehicles must be provided, but primarily because a large amount of gasoline will be needed, which is much harder to secure. However, a certain amount of transport means for heavier artillery will be allocated. For all light artillery, however, horse-drawn transport must be ensured.

"Comrade Stalin was interested in what specific tank and engineering units needed to be formed.

"Jovanović replied that the plan was to form 4 tank brigades, 9 engineering battalions and 2 anti-tank regiments. Additionally, over the next three years, it was expected that the Yugoslav personnel would be trained and that technology (about 1,000 planes) for 8-10 air divisions would be received from the Soviet Union.

"Comrade Stalin asked how the preparations were going for the cadres of the two air divisions that were to be handed over to the Yugoslavs.

"Jovanović responded that the preparation was hindered by the lack of sufficient training aircraft.

"Comrade Stalin asked how officer cadres for the army were being prepared and whether there was a military academy.

"Jovanović replied that there were special officer schools preparing artillerymen, machine gunners and signalmen. Training for artillery officers was going best. There were no academies in Yugoslavia, but plans were being made to establish a unified officer school that would prepare younger officers, mid-level officers and groups for the advanced training of higher command personnel.

"Comrade Stalin pointed out the need to prepare, besides the officer cadres for specific branches of the army — machine gunners, tankers, artillerymen — also general troop commanders. Comrade Stalin emphasized the necessity of developing a tradition of training and educating military specialists in the country.

"Comrade Stalin asked if the delegation had any further military-related questions.

"Jovanović replied that all questions had been exhausted, but they had one request

— for military-topographic equipment for the Military Topographic Institute..."

After quoting the majority of the official note, especially the section dealing with military matters, some parts of it should be commented on or clarified for a broader understanding.

Stalin, once again, returned to the issue of war trophies, a topic Tito had raised multiple times with Marshal F.I. Tolbukhin and his Supreme Commander, particularly for the first time in relation to the participation of Bulgarian troops in the Niš Operation from October 8-14, 1944. In response to several dispatches from the Main Staff of Serbia, which spoke of "the seizure and looting of trophies obtained by our units and the disloyal conduct of the Bulgarians," Tito requested "from the Soviet command that Bulgarian troops immediately halt their movement towards Kosovo and vacate the territory of Serbia," adding that "all military trophies and warehouses must remain at our disposal." He further stated: "If the Bulgarians resist, we will consider it an act of hostility."[780] Commander Koča also complained that even Red Army units were extracting material from the warehouses in Niš, to which the Supreme Commander requested concrete evidence, noting: "Inform the Soviet commanders that I have an agreement with the General Staff of the Red Army, under which all material, enemy weapons and other items belong to us. If certain commanders refuse to respect this, record their names and let me know so that I can inform the General Staff for further action. Set up strong guards at the warehouses and at the city entrances and prevent the extraction of materials."[781]

Upon being informed about Tito's request for Bulgarian units to withdraw from Serbian territory and protests regarding the looting of war trophies from NOVJ units, V.M. Molotov responded that "the Bulgarian army is operating in Serbia according to a general plan agreed upon with you," adding that it was now "impossible to remove them, especially since the Red Army units, occupied with fulfilling other tasks, will not advance further into Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav units will have difficulty eliminating the German grouping." In a special note, he emphasized: "Regarding trophies, the law of war is such that the trophies go to the one who captures them. In joint operations by equal armies, trophies are distributed among the armies in proportion to the forces participating in the operations."[782]

The agreement on the fate of the war spoils from the Belgrade Operation, as Tito informed General Dapčević on October 15, was that "all trophies and all warehouses in Belgrade are at our disposal."[783] However, according to Dapčević's reports, this was not respected when it came to the massive heavy weaponry and hundreds of trucks seized from the "Stetner Group" units (about 30,000 soldiers), which were jointly defeated from Boletič, through Zuce and Rušnja, to the Sava. He reported that the commands of the Red Army units had retained "almost all the heavy equipment," which

[780] AVII, file 26, reg. no. 8-2/8.

[781] *Ibid.*

[782] *Collection of Relations Between Yugoslavia and Russia (USSR) 1941-1945,* p. 581.

[783] AVII, file 372, reg. no. 3-41/2.

led Tito to personally address Stalin on October 29, stating that senior Red Army officers "did not adhere to your orders that all the spoils captured in Belgrade should be handed over to our National Liberation Army. Of over 500 trucks and other motor vehicles, which were jointly captured by the Red Army and the National Liberation Army units, as reported by the commander of the 1st Corps, General Peko Dapčević, he managed to retain only 6 trucks, while the rest were taken by your units. As for the rest of the spoils, guns, etc., everything was handed over to our army. Furthermore, our units captured around 60 tanks and armoured vehicles, all of which were taken by your units."

Tito also wrote about the numerous unpleasant actions "by certain soldiers and officers of the Red Army, which is hard for our army and our people to bear, especially considering that our people and army adore the Red Army and idealize it."[784] This would strike at Stalin's vanity, but for a moment, let us stay focused on the issue of war trophies. Stalin's response was awaited for only two days: "No order for the transfer of Red Army trophies to the Yugoslavs exists. You have been misled. Such an order cannot exist because, according to general rules, trophies belong to the state whose army captured them."

Regarding what hurt him the most from Tito's letter — the criticism of the behaviour of some Red Army members — Stalin wrote that it must be understood "that the Soviet government, despite the colossal sacrifices and losses, is doing everything possible and even impossible to help you. But I am surprised by the fact that certain incidents and mistakes made by individual officers and soldiers of the Red Army are being presented by you as the norm and attributed to the entire Red Army. It is not right to insult the army that helps you expel the Germans and spills blood fighting against the German conquerors.

"It is not difficult to understand that in every grain of wheat, there is some chaff, but it would be strange to throw out the wheat because of one piece of chaff. If the Red Army soldiers find out that Đilas and those of mine who did not oppose him consider English officers morally superior to Soviet officers, they would weep from such an undeserved insult." Since Stalin also insisted in his conversation with Arso on Đilas' alleged "outburst against the Red Army," this also deserves a few remarks. First of all, he expressed his personal opinion — diplomatically speaking, surely not completely "refined," but certainly well-meaning. He did so in the presence of Political Bureau members, including Generals Koča Popović and Peko Dapčević, whose units had cooperated with Red Army troops, and the head of the Soviet military mission, General N.V. Korneyev. He had a good intention in mind, not wanting "very severe cases of immoral behaviour and illegal actions by individual Soviet military personnel" to be repeated.[785]

[784] *Collection of Relations Between Yugoslavia and Russia (USSR) 1941-1945,* pp. 597-599.

[785] According to domestic sources, there were "over 5,000 incidents of violence, mostly rapes (according to Soviet records, '1,219 women raped') from offenders among the 200,000 Red Army soldiers," of which allegedly 111 "cases" ended in murder or suicide; the funerals of these violence victims were turned into protest rallies (with up to 5,000 demonstrators).

Realizing that the all-powerful Stalin would not forget this well-intentioned and justified act, Đilas — seeing that everything had been "taken over by the devil" due to arbitrary interpretations of his words — wrote a letter in Russian which, though never sent, has been preserved and published as a testament to that period. In it, he clarified exactly what he had said: "At first glance, the behaviour of British officers towards our officers in Italy and Yugoslavia seems better than the behaviour of Soviet officers here. Of course, the British have devious intentions. And the enemy will exploit all of this if Soviet commanders do not treat us as friends and allies."

He added that any other interpretation of his words, he wrote, "could only come from a scoundrel or a traitor," and urged Stalin to trust "the Yugoslav communists, who are ready to give their lives for your great cause and who have already proven it. Please forgive me for troubling you, but for me — and for the others — this has been very difficult: it appears as if we are ungrateful to you and to the Red Army."[786]

Let us now return to the delegation's stay in Moscow. Two days after the meeting with Stalin, A. Hebrang informed Tito that the Comrade (as he referred to J.V. Stalin) "shared the following views on military matters":

"1. The issue of assistance in weapons presents a difficulty, and the problem is not simply about weapons.

"2. It is very important now, at the beginning of the transition to a regular modern army, to form solid, strong divisions.

"3. Based on the experience of the Red Army in the early phase of the war and the Polish army, the Comrade expressed doubt that, in the short term, we could find 40 officers capable of commanding modern divisions.

"4. He raised the question — wouldn't it be better now to create only as many fully formed divisions as we have officers capable of commanding them, with both combat experience and solid theoretical and military training? Clearly, there would not be many such divisions.

"5. At the same time, form standard divisions of 5,000 to 6,000 troops, manage them more simply, allow commanders to gain experience, and later reorganize these divisions into standard formations — that is, with around 10,000 troops.

"6. He placed great emphasis on personnel, stating that systematic training should now be organized.

"7. He promised to provide instructors and advisers in due time, and that we would be informed in advance of when those instructors would depart. Today, we will begin negotiations with responsible military leaders on all specific matters."[787]

The following day (January 12), General Kiselev also reported to Tito. He stated that Hebrang and General Jovanović, after meeting with Alekseyev (Molotov), had

[786] *Collection of Relations Between Yugoslavia and Russia (USSR) 1941-1945,* 905-906. Attempting to explain this "case" to Stalin, Đilas, in April 1945, would "go to his feet" and deeply bow to the "Sun of the East," but this arrogant and powerful Asian would not only not forget it but would "shove it in his face" during the Cominform Resolution, as the most vocal in condemning the figure and actions of the "moustached man from Georgia."

[787] *Collection of Relations Between Yugoslavia and Russia (USSR) 1941-1945,* pp. 663-664.

visited "Comrade Drushkov (referring to J.V. Stalin — *I.M.*), where the conversation lasted more than three hours. All issues were discussed in detail. It was established that all assistance and support would be provided to the extent possible — considering both the Soviet Union's and Yugoslavia's capabilities — and the allocation of approved material resources was confirmed. Furthermore, the overall political and international situation was being taken into account.

"Work is now underway with our senior commanders to resolve all issues in accordance with the instructions and advice of Comrade Drushkov."

There is no archival record of how the Marshal in Belgrade reacted to this summary of the meeting with the Comrade — that is, with Drushkov — in the Kremlin. However, it is known that when Tito received a radiogram from Hebrang stating that "negotiations with appropriate military commanders on all specific matters" were beginning, he told General Terzić that from that moment on "the entire burden falls on Arso." In fact, during those negotiations with figures from the USSR's State Defence Committee and the Red Army General Staff, Hebrang did not participate at all — he lacked both the knowledge and the interest. M. Pijade, who had just arrived in Moscow, became preoccupied with the idea of a Balkan Federation, whose creation Stalin had, in the meantime, begun to question. General Jovanović, however, had full authority and everything proceeded according to plan: he either went personally or dispatched his aides to various institutions and high-ranking Soviet military officials. Tito, meanwhile, due to the deteriorating situation on the front, sent a personal radiogram to Stalin the next day (January 12):

"We are in urgent need of a tank brigade. If you are able, I ask that you urgently send that brigade so we can use it at Međurečje. The Germans are concentrating large forces here that have arrived from Greece and Albania."[788]

By highlighting this pressing operational need, Tito — somewhat indirectly — reminded Stalin of the unforgivable delay in dispatching the tank brigade from the Soviet Union. The decision to assign the brigade to NOV troops had been made as early as September 7, 1944. At General Terzić's urging, personnel from Yugoslavia had been sent to fill out and train the unit. Members of the military mission in Moscow frequently visited the tank crews in Tula, as well as airmen in Krasnodar and Grozny. On November 20, General Terzić informed the SH that he had visited "our tank brigade," which had "fully completed its combat training and was ready for the front," but was still "awaiting receipt of tanks." Those tanks would not arrive until two months after Tito's intervention with the "Supreme Commander." Specifically, it was only on March 6, 1945 — six months after the government's decision to assign a tank brigade to NOVJ forces — that Army General A.I. Antonov ordered that "the 1st Independent Yugoslav Tank Brigade be sent by rail to report to the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army." The loading was scheduled for March 9 at the Tesnitskaya station, with unloading in Belgrade. The brigade included 872 officers and soldiers, 65 of the renowned

[788] *Ibid.,* p. 662.

T-34 medium tanks and 129 vehicles.[789]

The deployment of Soviet instructors, or military advisers, to Yugoslavia, ranging from junior officers to generals, as one of the prerequisites for the success of the (re) organization and construction of the NOVJ, was mentioned in Tito's correspondence and discussions with Stalin. This was one of the indications that the Yugoslavs, due to ideological convictions but also pure necessity, had opted for the Soviet model of organization and formation, supply systems, education, and the relationships between junior and senior officers, etc. Fearing the "former Yugoslav army" (praised by Stalin) as much as the devil fears the cross, the communist leaders, unable to know and especially implement something new on their own, did not want to rely on anyone other than the Russians. The idea was raised in August on Vis, adopted in September in Moscow, and the Soviets began to develop it in principle in Craiova and Vršac. In liberated Belgrade, as far as operational tasks allowed, generals such as V. Terzić, R. Hamović, M. Apostolski, B. Oreščanin, S. Manola, B. Obradović, V. Klišanić and other prominent military figures were involved with Arso. Six of the eight listed here were, not coincidentally, officers of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia's army, and they, despite all the pressures, tried to preserve at least some Yugoslav specificities in the organization and formation of the new army. General Jovanović, as the development of this strategically significant and long-lasting issue progressed, regularly informed the Supreme Commander, and on November 17, he sent a detailed letter to Marshal Stalin regarding one of the prerequisites for its realization — the arrival of instructors from the Red Army. The essence of the letter was a request for the sending of 220 generals and senior officers to serve as instructors and advisers. However, it is highly indicative of Tito's critical evaluation of his own officer cadre, which is probably one of the reasons it was never published in his pre-death *Collected Works* and remained concealed in his personal archive for 52 years. Due to this, and because the letter was of a distinctly military nature, we are providing a broader excerpt. In the introductory part, Tito outlines, in general terms, the upcoming tasks "of an organizational nature in all spheres of state life," with "the main task being the creation of fully modern armed forces with all the consequences that arise from that," continuing that this task must be solved "under the difficult conditions of ongoing battles, the harsh economic and political situation." The following text follows:

"For the creation of the armed forces, we have favourable conditions, primarily the numerous cadres of exceptional fighters tested in battles, who have vast experience in partisan warfare. But this also means that our military cadres have long become accustomed to partisan warfare; they lack the experience of modern armies, and their habits of partisan organization and forms of warfare have turned into a great strength that must be overcome and redirected in the desired direction.

"In solving this task, we urgently need assistance from your side, the help of the Red Army, which has gained immense combat and organizational experience during the years of peacetime construction and throughout the Great Patriotic War against

[789] *Ibid.,* p. 695. As the 2nd Tank Brigade of the Yugoslav Army, it arrived at the Srem Front just as the 1st Army (on April 12) was making its breakthrough.

fascism.

"We intend to begin the reorganization of our armed forces, starting with the formation of the General Staff, the entire central military apparatus with a precise management system and necessary schools.

"In general terms, the plan we have is approximately as follows: a central military apparatus, three main staffs (which will later become front staffs), 10 corps staffs and 30 divisions."

"It is extremely important for us to have your people at all these levels, especially in the central apparatus, which will determine the state of affairs in the entire army in every aspect.

"1. For this reason, in the central staff, it is desirable to have people from all major branches and services, a total of around 36 people, including: one major general for operational and army building issues, one major general for aviation, the rest should be colonels, and some of them can be lieutenant colonels or majors for each specialty, one person per branch (the list includes about thirty specialties or branches in all types, branches and services — from organizational-mobilization issues to preparing ski troops).

"2. For the main staffs, one general-major of general military expertise and three colonels or lieutenant colonels each for artillery, staff service, intelligence, communication, engineering duties and the rear. In total, for the three staffs, 21 people are needed, i.e., 7 people per staff.

"3. For the ten corps staffs, 70 people, i.e., 7 people for each staff — of the same branches as for the main staff, except for the general-major, where a colonel is needed instead.

"4. For the 30 divisions, 90 people — colonels or lieutenant colonels, of whom 30 are general military, 30 artillery officers, and 30 for staff services."

Along with "5 people for establishing garrison services in major cities," this brings the total to "222 people, and technical services and communication means need to be provided along with them." The requester understands that "every person is especially valuable to Stalin now, but I ask you to fulfil our request and let us know how many of the listed specialists you can allocate at least."

"The Red Army is the closest to us of all the armies in the world in spirit and historical tasks, it is the most advanced and the most powerful in its organizational and military experience." He also announces further requests for expert help in organizing the rear and building "naval and river military fleets." He asks that the people assigned to work in the "central military apparatus" be "capable of helping us take into account all our military-economic resources, properly consider the capabilities of our economy from the perspective of war, and utilize all material aid you provide to us in the difficult wartime conditions with the greatest efficiency."[790]

In November and December, instructors and advisers arrived in groups, but the final solution, with a legal foundation for their status, was delayed until negotiations in

[790] *Collection of Relations Between Yugoslavia and Russia (USSR) 1941-1945,* pp. 617-619.

Moscow. Stalin expressed his position not only at that meeting but also in a conversation with E. Kardelj on November 22, 1944, when he said: "Your people do not listen to our instructors." The guest from Belgrade "ignored" the remark and continued: "We need military officers as specialists, particularly for artillery. An organized army will help us to quickly recover in kind on enemy territory."[791]

Based on "instructions and advice" from "Comrade Drushkov," suggestions from Belgrade, and conversations at the General Staff of the Red Army, General Jovanović, with his closest collaborators in Moscow, "in mid-January 1945" formulated the "Appeal of the NKOJ to the Chairman of the SNK of the USSR, J.V. Stalin." This document, preserved in the archive of J.B. Tito and published 51 years later, is presented in excerpts due to its length.

In the introductory section of the (unsigned) "Appeal," it is emphasized that the NOVJ, as "a recognized ally of the anti-Hitler coalition" and battle-hardened in the four-year long liberation war, "is ready to continue the fight, side by side with the Allied armies, until the complete destruction of Hitler's Germany," but due to the conditions in which it "developed and fought," it is "weak and insufficiently armed and equipped." Therefore, "for equal participation in the joint struggle against nazi Germany and for the defence of the borders, modern weapons and organization must be provided." In this regard, Stalin is asked "to provide assistance in the following for the current (1945) year:

"I. General military joint units:

"a) Supplementary armament for 10 divisions, each with 9,000 soldiers. Immediate delivery of weapons is required.

"b) Complete armament for 20 divisions, each with 6,000 soldiers. Delivery of weapons for the first 10 divisions — by April 1, for the next 10 divisions by August 1.

"II. Reinforcement units for the main command (general staff):

"a) Three mixed artillery brigades. Delivery of weapons for the first — by May 1, for the second — by August 1, and for the third — by November 1.

"b) Complete armament for 2 tank brigades. Delivery of weapons for the first — by February 4, for the second — by June 15."

For special units, the following is requested: equipment for three engineering battalions and one pontoon battalion – with delivery by May 15; for four signal regiments (for army headquarters), with delivery deadlines: two regiments by March, two remaining regiments by June; for six separate signal battalions and 11 telegraph companies for various purposes, all with precise delivery schedules.

There is also a request for equipment for three "separate automobile battalions," with deliveries ranging from March 15 to November 1, 1945. The request includes the handover of the 68th automobile and 82nd anti-aircraft regiments, "since our personnel is already prepared to take them over."

For the "military air forces," a request is made for the delivery of flying and technical material to form one mixed division (one fighter and one ground attack aviation

[791] *Ibid.,* p. 626.

regiment, plus bombers) and one transport division (20 twin-engine and 31 single-engine planes), with delivery by July 1. The request includes: supplementary materials for all units, totalling 15 units, and up to 50% of engines, as well as transport material, workshops for aircraft engine repairs, technical materials, fuel and oil; meteorological instruments for organizing the meteorological service; equipment and clothing for pilots; materials for forming 10 independent companies for three divisions, for two regional air bases, for five airfield battalions, and for a communications section at the base headquarters; fabrics, threads and rubber for finishing 17 planes currently in production; assistance in the form of official instructions, regulations and specialized literature for the Air Force.

For the "needs of the medical division," material is requested for two medical companies in the Supreme Command and three medical battalions, as well as some additional urgent needs, including an anatomical-pathological laboratory, medicines and instruments.

Detailed needs are also expressed for military schools and training centres (all with immediate delivery deadlines): ten complete sets of weapons for ten training centres to train 1,000 infantry officers; five batteries with two artillery pieces each for five infantry reserve brigades; ten complete sets of artillery weapons for ten artillery training centres (training officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers); six heavy weapons for training, and ten tanks for a training centre for 100 students.

For airmen education (as soon as possible), there is a request to establish an "aviation school with the delivery of everything necessary" (flying and technical material and instructors) to train 360 pilots, 60 observers and 120 air gunners, as well as training 820 mechanics and 1,800 young specialists.

There is also a "request" for one complete set of equipment for an engineering school (middle, advanced or higher) for 100 students, and for a communications school (middle, advanced or higher) for 1,200 students.

In point XII (all emphasized), it is requested that "in the future, material deliveries for armament and equipment be provided for replenishment and replacement according to the norms established in the Red Army, with some increase considering the still limited experience of our army."

For "necessary transport means," a request is made for 20,000 tons of gasoline, 2,000 tons of motor oil and 150 tons of gear oil. There is also a need for spare parts for the 68th automobile regiment and for trophy vehicles. As a five-month need for the "existing river fleet," 200 tons of gasoline, 6,000 tons of oil, 10,000 tons of fuel oil and 1,000 tons of motor oil are requested.

This long list of urgent needs of the NOVJ concludes with point XV: "It is necessary to send various military literature, military journals and other materials."[792]

There is no doubt that these "items" were generally established with Stalin, and that he, having been presented this way and precisely formulated by the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters of the NOVJ, verified them. Moreover, he was certainly at least informed about them by the Supreme Commander, Marshal Tito. Everyone in Belgrade who was involved in this request — how V. Terzić would later recall — "expected that everything would be delivered literally and exactly within the specified deadlines, as if no one else had made similar requests from Stalin and as if he himself had an abundance of resources."

The optimism from Belgrade was fuelled by Moscow. At the very end of the formulation of the "Appeal," Hebrang informed Tito that "in principle, the issue of armament and army construction has already been resolved," while General A.F. Kiselev, in a report to Tito from January 18, was even more optimistic, though a bit more detailed:

"1. The negotiations are proceeding successfully and are nearing completion.

"Regarding military issues, the following has been decided: the previously existing divisions are being re-armed to 9,000 soldiers, and all equipment, except for logistics, is being provided. Additionally, this year, in various terms, complete armament and other equipment for 20 divisions with 6,000 soldiers will be approved. This composition was accepted in order to give commanders in such divisions an opportunity to gain experience, after which the divisions will be reorganized into full-size divisions.

"2. Armament for three artillery brigades of the RGK and two tank brigades has been approved. The first brigade will receive tanks in February, since there are currently none available due to the ongoing offensive on the front. Additional material has been approved for one mixed and one transport aviation division, as well as four signal regiments, 11 signal companies (these units do not belong to divisions) and other special units.

"Approximately 3,000 vehicles are planned for the composition of all units.

"In all negotiations, the number of officers and their military-theoretical preparedness are limiting factors.

"The request for admission to our schools (about 2,000) has been approved, and the necessary instructors will also be sent."[793]

From the Kremlin's and Dedinje's perspective, the Moscow negotiations on military issues were proceeding as well as could be expected, and it was probably, given the wartime and political circumstances, true, but no one knew better than Arso how much, among certain officers and in the appropriate services in the General Staff and the State Defence Committee, despite all their responsibilities and fear of the "master," the "details" about each "item" were being "dragged out," not in the sense of giving or not giving, but rather why it was being given, when it would be delivered and who would handle it, always emphasizing their own scarcity and great needs. This was the case, for example, with medium tanks and airplanes (so the tank units would arrive just before the start of the final strategic offensive, and the squadrons of fighter and assault aircraft, despite all the requests and pressure, only after Victory Day in 1945, under the command of Majors Petar Radević and Mirko Šćepanović). Their own significant needs and limited resources, as well as the sacrifices made for "nourishing" the

[792] *Ibid.,* pp. 665-669.

[793] *Ibid.,* p. 671.

manpower and material resources of several fronts of the Red Army advancing across the width of Europe toward the heart of nazism, limited the capacity to provide aid. In those conditions, it was necessary to gather hundreds of expert officers, thousands of suitable weapons, tens of thousands of tons of food, millions of litres of fuel. And it was given, seemingly — both in small and large amounts. No one thought about the conditions and interests, or at least no one spoke openly about them. It was based on Stalin's view that "only power is respected" and that "no one has sentimentality for the weaker."

Perhaps the negotiations, discussions and agreements in Moscow — from the perspective of Belgrade, which was requesting and eagerly awaiting help — were too slow. However, the stakes were high, and the list of demands was long, so each one needed a rational explanation before it could be "approved." Tito, once again — the only one responsible for this — constantly urged and, indeed, grew increasingly dissatisfied with the inefficiency of the powerful ally, grumbling about "bureaucratic oversight and the incompetence of former officers" (Generals Jovanović, Obradović, Hamović and Colonel Ulepić) "in realizing his truly easily and quickly achieved basic agreement with Stalin from September 1944." The truth was that no one more than General Jovanović wanted everything promised and subsequently requested to be realized quickly, but he knew better than anyone in the delegation and in Belgrade how many strong arguments and convincing explanations were needed to defend every number, how much tact and patience it took to ask and plead, which was very difficult for him — as a person with high moral standards, great life experience and dignity in performing the highest military duties. It was so difficult that, upon returning to Belgrade, he would tell General Terzić that in "hospitable Moscow, among the Russian brothers, he felt very embarrassed"; in the capital of the Russian empire, the eternal stronghold of the Slavic nations and the living desire of every Montenegrin, he arrived "with a deep empty bag," just as once "the emperors of heroes" from Cetinje would arrive at the Emperor's Court in Petrograd, begging for all kinds of military assistance, aware that whatever they brought in their bags would never be enough for those they returned to, and despite all their love and interest in which they "loosened the purse strings," the donors would think they had given a lot. He remembered the saying from his hometown, "Poor thing, you're heavy even for God!" but also the lesson that "this dreadful human suffering cannot be hidden."

In the capitals of empires, as homes of great nations, one stays a long time as a guest. Thus, Arso, with his collaborators, returned after 39 days — on February 14 — noticeably tired but ready to work even harder for the benefit of the homeland and the victory of its army, for which the just-concluded agreement in Moscow opened up a full perspective. He returned satisfied that he had successfully completed an exceptionally important state task, conversed and reached agreements with the highest commanders of the glorious Red Army, was among true allies and sincere friends, fulfilled the living desire of generations of his countrymen and the dream of thousands of partisan comrades — he had visited the capital of the Russian empire and walked across the Red Square, and, twice, for several hours, personally conversed with Stalin!

And Đilas would, in his headquarters in "Madeira," admit that in Moscow, he often remembered Stalin's iconic reply from May 1944, when, in response to a statement from Tito's comrade that Yugoslavia was ready to pay the Soviets for the weapons they were requesting for the NOVJ, Stalin responded: "I am not a merchant, we are not merchants. You are fighting for the same cause as we are — we are obligated to share everything we have with you!" And they shared — generously — Arso was convinced.

After returning from Moscow, General Jovanović was faced with new tasks: the realization of the plan for the reorganization of the NOVJ into a modern regular military force; the planning of the Srem Front breakthrough and the execution of the strategic offensive for the final liberation of Yugoslavia (about which he and General Rade Hamović had discussed with leading operational staff of the General Staff of the Red Army in Moscow); personal involvement in the formation of the 4th Army (March 1); participation in negotiations in Belgrade with the highest military representatives of the Western Allies; reference at meetings of commanders of arms and armies in Dedinje. Working day and night, even sleeping, according to General Hamović's recollection, on an iron bed in his office — he had no time, not only for family life, the string of receptions with cocktails, festive dinners and lunches, but even for fulfilling some personal obligations he considered part of his honour and professional courtesy as a man of order and prestige. Thus, on April 4, he finally found the time — after momentarily postponing operational tasks related to the fronts in the central theatre of war and inter-army cooperation with Eastern and Western allies — to draft a letter and send it to Moscow. A copy of the letter is kept in the Archive of the Military Historical Institute,[794] and it is addressed to General Colonel N.E. Chibisov, the head of the "Frunze" Military Academy. He warmly greets him and thanks him for the attention given to him and his collaborators during the visit to the esteemed institution and for the generous help in military literature provided for the education and training of their officers. On behalf of the generals and officers of the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army, he sends "fraternal greetings with firm conviction that we will follow the example of the Red Army — our liberator and teacher — in military education and training, just as we do on the battlefield."

In the meantime, huge shipments of weapons and military equipment (referred to as "military property" in Soviet sources) agreed upon in the negotiations in Moscow began to arrive. This allowed for the reorganization and rearming of units, in accordance with Stalin's suggestion of "one division at a time" — 12 divisions during the war and 20 in the first months of peace. This was a massive task, starting with the 21st Serbian and the 51st Vojvodina divisions, and continuing, according to a set timeline, during the six months following the agreement in Moscow. During this time, "all weapons and other equipment" arrived "in various terms" from February 10 to August 10, 1945, in accordance with the provisions of the document "Decree of the USSR State Defence Committee from February 10, 1945," adopted based on the "Appeal" from General Jovanović in mid-January. This document has not been published until

[794] AVII, Fund of the NOP, General Staff Documents from 1945, no box and registration number.

now, and due to the label "state secret — strictly confidential — permanent," it cannot be quoted. However, the content of the Decree can be indirectly reconstructed, at least in basic terms, by comparing the documents "based on it" and especially the reports on the delivery of the agreed-upon quantities of "military property," using the figures in the columns for delivery and required quantities. From the listed numbers, such as 156,331 gas masks and 147,755 protective blankets for chemical warfare, provided for every soldier and officer, one can deduce the size of the JA, as determined in that key document — at least for the first post-war year.

By analysing the reports from the General Staff of the Red Army and the State Defence Committee (SDC) of the USSR regarding the delivery of "military property" in the spring and summer of 1945, especially in the "delivered" and "required" sections, it can be reliably concluded that the following quantities of weapons and equipment were listed in the Decree of the SDC from February 10: 89,165 rifles, 24,836 revolvers and pistols, 4,092 flare pistols, 38,800 submachine guns ("Shpagin"), 1,102 machine rifles ("Degtyaryov"), 181 anti-tank rifles, 2,428 heavy machine guns ("Maxim"), 181 large-caliber machine guns, 60 120mm mortars, 932 artillery pieces — from 45mm cannons to 122mm howitzers, 63 fighters, 61 assault planes, 62 bombers, 85 transport planes and 28 training planes, 130 tanks, 6 armoured vehicles, 8,444 binoculars, 47,200 compasses, 144 radio stations, 417 telephone switchboards, and 4,012 phones, 5,000 km of telephone cables, 60 mine-firing machines, 20,167 kg of TNT with accessories, 4,503 wooden mines and 135 boats.

There are no complete data regarding the timeline of these deliveries of "military property" to Yugoslavia, but Soviet publications, such as *The Liberation Mission of the Soviet Armed Forces in Europe* (Moscow, 1985) and the *Collection of Documents and Materials on the Relations between Yugoslavia and Russia (USSR) 1941-1945* (Belgrade, 1996), have published several reports from the Soviet side that allow tracking of the deliveries. Anyone interested in those details will find them easily there, but here we only provide a few, noting that the arrival of each shipment required new professional efforts to rearm soldiers and officers with entirely unfamiliar weapons, which involved withdrawing units from the front and organizing their specialized training in handling the new equipment and learning its tactical application in the most complex wartime conditions. For commanding officers at all levels, and especially for the General Staff and its chief, this was an enormous professional task, carried out with the engagement of a large number of Soviet instructors — this work was crucial and urgent since even Stalin — the generous donor but, certainly, a strict commander — demanded to be periodically informed about the progress in implementing the Decree. By his personal order — "as the Supreme Commander" — the first day of peace saw the beginning of "the handover of the material-technical means for the fighter and assault divisions and their bases" on November 15, 1944. The handover report was signed by General Božo Lazarević on May 15, exactly six months after it had been scheduled by the agreement. Its previous commander, Guard Major-General of Aviation A.N. Vitryk, was awarded the Order of the People's Hero for his wartime merits "in the skies over Yugoslavia," and 12 of his officers were "temporarily" assigned to duty as instructors.

On the second day of peace on the Yugoslav front (May 17), Colonel Trofimov, a high-ranking officer in the General Staff of the Red Army, wrote a report on the quantities of "military property that was delivered to Yugoslavia by May 16, in accordance with the Decree of the USSR State Defence Committee from February 10, 1945," i.e., in 95 war days: rifles and carbines 29,987 (required 89,165), revolvers and pistols 5,311 (24,839), signal pistols 901 (4,092), submachine guns "Shpagin" 24,563 (38,800), machine rifles "Degtyaryov" 1,430 (1,430), heavy machine guns "Maxim" 313 (1,102), anti-tank rifles 2,206 (2,428), 120mm mortars 16 (160), cannons and howitzers of 45 to 122mm caliber 210 (932), and other weapons; aviation property delivered according to the Decree: 63 fighters and 61 assault planes, 62 bombers, 28 training planes, and 85 transport planes; a small percentage of the contracted "chemical equipment" was delivered, and the largest amount of engineering equipment was TNT — 20,167 kg; the delivery of communication equipment was expected to intensify, and 65 tanks (of 130) and all 6 contracted armoured vehicles were delivered.[795]

This was only part of the "weapons and other military property" delivered to the units of the NOVJ by May 1, 1945 (from April 1, the NOVJ became the JA), as evidenced by the report of the General Staff's Operational Support Department of the Red Army from June 25, 1945, signed by Colonel Belyatsky. Here are some of those figures, compared where possible with quantities obtained from the Western Allies: rifles and carbines 125,446 (from Anglo-American aid 137,092), submachine guns 38,210, light and heavy machine guns 4,296, anti-tank rifles 1,641 (our data 3,797, according to Anglo-American sources 1,256), mortars of all calibers 1,065 (our data 3,364, according to Anglo-American sources 2,684), artillery of various calibers 895 (388), tanks and self-propelled guns 65 (10), airplanes 491 (61), radio stations 256.[796]

In addition to the report from General R. Primorac from September 3, 1945, a document signed by General Bednyakov, the head of the department in the State Defence Committee, contains precise data on the tasks carried out by the Red Army's aviation from its bases in Kalinovka (the Ukraine), Bari (Italy), and Craiova (Romania) for the JA up to November 15, 1944; it carried out 1,799 air sorties, completed all combat tasks (except for individual cases), transported 3,933 people and dropped 27,609 loads of cargo weighing 1,275,860 kg.[797]

Other data on Soviet military aid to Yugoslavia are also preserved in archives and occasionally published.[798] No well-intentioned person interprets this as boasting or even as a form of blackmail; simply, an organized army of a great country at all times maintained proper documentation, written decisions on everything and preserved traces, thus ensuring clear accountability with itself and others, before history.

The provision and use of Soviet (not at all concealed) military aid caused some dismay, even reaction, from the Western allies. For example, the government of Great

[795] *Collection of Relations Between Yugoslavia and Russia (USSR) 1941-1945,* 761.

[796] In *Yugoslav War History 1941-1945* (third edition, Belgrade 1975), historian Vlado Strugar records the figure of 1,329 radio stations.

[797] *Collection of Relations Between Yugoslavia and Russia (USSR) 1941-1945,* p. 625.

[798] *Military Historical Journal*, 5/1978, pp. 67-72.

Britain considered that providing military assistance to Yugoslavia, already according to the agreement on the division of interests 50:50, should be a joint concern of the Russians and the English in both wartime and peacetime. The Soviets, considering that "the request for and receipt of military aid from another country is the concern and sovereign right of the Yugoslav government," reassured their Western partners. In this regard, it is interesting to note a letter from V.M. Molotov on March 13, handed to the British Ambassador in Moscow, A.K. Kerr, in which, among other things, he states: "Considering that it is premature to discuss plans for military aid to Yugoslavia in the post-war period, the Soviet government places priority on providing aid to Yugoslavia today, as the Yugoslav people still face a difficult struggle to completely expel the German occupiers from their territory. On this basis, the Soviet government is providing Yugoslavia with as much help as is possible in armaments and other military materials, and it intends to continue doing so. It would also welcome any actions by the British government aimed at increasing military aid in weapons to the Yugoslav forces."[799]

There are no written traces of whether Hebrang briefed the Political Bureau or General Jovanović briefed the Supreme Commander about the results of the forty-day stay in Moscow and the outcome of the talks with Stalin and his associates. It is simply impossible that there were no such briefings, but the data has been buried, most likely to ensure that there was no trace left about how these two, who were eliminated three years after the end of the war, were key figures in such an important war mission and achieved, especially in the field of military cooperation, a highly valuable success. However, those who thought that silence would lead to oblivion were mistaken: preserved (mostly Soviet) records from which emerges the figure of the Chief of the General Staff, based on high professionalism, moral strength, patience and wisdom. There were, and occasionally abused, internal and public reports (especially from the "army staff") about the "former officer," and at that time the highest-ranking general of the JA, who was constantly followed, monitored, bugged and accused in Moscow. He was well aware of their "mischief," but he despised them as much as he despised those who had sent them on such "missions," and, when necessary, he made use of their reports. He had his own mind and followed his own thoughts, remaining true and honest with the allies. After all, Red Army General Biruzov at one point (in Craiova, Bela Crkva and Vršac) planned operations for the JA, including jointly executed ones; Russian General G.A. Shadrin, truthfully from the NKVD, organized security around Tito in liberated Belgrade, and his "agents" were legally in the OZNA as instructors in army and corps commands; Soviet instructors and advisors (at least 260 of them) were present in all the headquarters, including divisions, in military schools; under the command of the Red Army officers, not only were there no secrets, but under their leadership and according to their instructions, all the more important plans were being made and implemented. General Jovanović did not establish or develop such relations, but as a soldier, he accepted them, agreeing to carry out political orders. However, as a

[799] *Collection of Relations Between Yugoslavia and Russia (USSR) 1941-1945,* p. 700.

man and a professional soldier, he could not accept a sudden and harsh reversal of politics against such relationships in 1948, against an ally that had shared everything with the Yugoslav people and their army during the war and in the early post-war years. This disagreement would cost him his life.

Discussions with Field Marshal Alexander *(February 21-28, 1945)*

Accompanied by his deputy, V. Terzić, he headed to his workplace, eager to hear and read the latest news from the fronts after 41 days of absence from the country. In the Supreme Command, he found General M. Apostolski, and the next day, he met with General Josip Škorpik, an experienced officer (born in 1892), who had been persistently sought by the Main Staff of Croatia. He hoped that Škorpik's experience from three armies would be beneficial in the new structure of the Supreme Command. Upon arriving to greet him, General V. Klišanić showed him a recently received German brochure, "Instructions for Fighting the Partisans," issued by the Southeast Command. Respecting the suggestion of a diligent collaborator, he ordered that the publication be duplicated and sent to the operational units' headquarters, with instructions for careful analysis as part of the training.

From General Terzić, he learned about the state of the Supreme Command's strategic reserve, which he had been constantly advocating to strengthen. It included the 2nd Proletarian Division and the 22nd Shock Division, reinforced with two brigades and two heavy artillery battalions, for interventions in complex situations on the Drina front, and the 15th Macedonian Corps (15,000 fighters) on training in eastern Srem, conveniently located near both Belgrade and the front.

He was briefed on the situation on the fronts. In the Drava area, the situation was calming down after the German five-day operation "Werewolf," in which the Virovitica bridgehead had been liquidated. He had just received a gift from General Kosta Nađ in honour of the liberation of Budapest (March 13) – a bottle of Hungarian apricot brandy.

In Srem, the situation had stabilized after the German offensive "Winter Storm" launched on January 17, and the strong counter-offensive by the 1st Army, with five of General Dapčević's divisions ahead of the "Nibelung Line."

On the Drina front, General K. Popović, at the request of the Supreme Command, had just dictated an ultimatum to the commander of the German 22nd Division (16,000 soldiers) to surrender their completely encircled and split units, or they would be destroyed in the area of Zvornik-Kozluk, with the support of the 22nd Shock Division of the JA from the right bank of the Drina (commanded by Colonel Pero Popivoda, and commissar Lieutenant Colonel Živko Živković). He assessed that it was good that the commander of the 2nd Army had formed an Operational Group with four divisions for this task and appointed General Ljuba Vučković as its commander, but expressed concern that the force ratio of 25,000:16,000 would not be sufficient to

secure victory when dealing with such an elite unit of the Wehrmacht.[800] Therefore, he immediately ordered that the commander of the Air Group "Vitruck" be tasked with stronger air support for General Vučković, and instructed General Dapčević to activate the southern wing of his army's deployment towards Semberija to reduce the pressure from the Germans advancing from Brčko towards Bijeljina, and then along the Drina, to meet the 22nd Division. However, everything turned out to be insufficient and delayed — the Wehrmacht division, with help from the north, managed to reach Semberija. This led to an upset Commander Koča, who, in a detailed and somewhat self-critical report on the reasons for such an outcome, unfairly judged the combat worth of his divisions, shifting some of the blame for the failure onto his superiors. General V. Terzić was angry at this, but after a brief silence, Arso told him that the essence of the matter was that Koča had openly pointed out the responsibility of the Supreme Command and both of them — specifically for faster and better staffing, more organized supplies and more realistic task selections.

Towards Sarajevo, divisions from the 2nd, 3rd and 5th Corps, constantly engaged in combat, were closing the ring around the city.

The Mostar Operation was successfully concluded on the same day by the 8th Corps, the 29th Division and the 1st Tank Brigade, after ten days of fierce battles. Forty thousand soldiers of the JA defeated 20,000 Germans, Ustaše and Chetniks. He ordered the divisions of the 8th Corps to be sent on new tasks — one towards Metković and Zadar, and the main force towards the Knin area, while the 29th Herzegovinian was directed towards Sarajevo.

Two divisions had been engaged in battles in the central Serbia region, specifically "in the areas of the Kopaonik, Gledić Mountains and Dragačevo," to break up the remaining Chetnik forces.

In Kosovo and Metohija, the Operational Headquarters and Military Administration, led by Colonel Savo Drljević (formed on February 8), with the 52nd Kosovo and 46th Serbian Divisions and the Montenegrin Operational Group (2 brigades), totalling around 30,000 fighters, successfully began the operation to energetically eliminate the Ballist resistance bands in Drenica and other strongholds (about 11,000 insurgents). At the same time, the mobilization of 14,000 young Albanians was prepared, and they were to be sent for training in auxiliary centres, while the 5th and 6th Divisions of the NOV of Albania, until then part of the 2nd Corps, were directed through Bosnia and returned to Kosovo to participate in suppressing the Ballist rebellion.

On the Adriatic, he was informed that two new institutions had started working: the Adriatic Commission in Split for receiving and distributing Allied aid for the population and units, according to the programs of "Military Liaison" and UNRRA; and the Main Staff of Slovenia's base in Biograd na Moru, led by Colonel Stane Potočar, who had been the commander of the 9th Slovenian Corps until then. Having been briefed on the work program of both institutions, he ordered that the duties of JA units be clearly defined and insisted on their fulfillment.

[800] Formed in 1934, it participated in the invasion of the Netherlands, the Wehrmacht operations in the Crimea and Crete, and in Macedonia and Montenegro, receiving the honourary title "airborne."

The most important tasks the General Staff would focus on in the coming days were preparations for two exceptionally significant events: talks with Field Marshal H. Alexander and the first consultation of army commanders and the military high command. This required highly specialized work on selecting essential issues and finding answers to them. The Chief of the General Staff coordinated the work of several teams while simultaneously addressing some ongoing issues. Amid these tasks, he was called for a meeting with A. Ranković, where the situation arising from the discovery of a plan to infiltrate Chetnik groups over the Drina River into Serbia, divided into nine zones, was analysed. These groups would form the base for a "new army," with 70 saboteurs already infiltrated into the Belgrade area under the command of Draža Mihailović. They had also infiltrated from Semberija, the Ozren and Višegrad regions, where they were decisively met by forces on the Drina's side, but no larger surprises were allowed. There were assignments for the OZNA, KNOJ and the operational military forces. In connection with this, Colonel P. Popivoda was tasked with closing off the Drina from Ljubovija to Bajina Bašta and preventing the Chetniks from crossing into Serbia.

The next task was to transfer the Italian partisan division "Garibaldi" from the Yugoslav front to Italy. For this, the Chief of the General Staff assigned General R. Vukanović, commander of the 2nd Corps, which had fought for 14 months. He ordered him to gather the division in Dubrovnik between March 1 and 6, from where it would be transported by ship to Italy. He pointed out the need to ensure that the division left behind "heavy weaponry, artillery and mortars" in an appropriate manner. The order was carried out, except for the artillery and mortars, as the division took all its heavy weapons with it. The division's headquarters firmly believed it would be deployed on the Allied front in the Po Valley against the German occupier, but this would not happen. The division, with all its equipment and weapons, was carefully gathered in Dubrovnik, transferred to Bari, and then to Sicily as a garrison unit.[801]

The Chief of Staff brought him a list along with "mail," at the top of which, written by General V. Terzić, was a note: "By order of Marshal Tito, inform the Chief of the General Staff." It was a dispatch signed by the commander of the Main Staff of Slovenia, D. Kveder, reporting: "Maribor has been bombed several times recently. A third of the city has been destroyed. Many military buildings have burned down, but so have many civilian homes." Unsure if this was authorized from Belgrade, he asked who had requested the bombing of Maribor and, in general, what had been approved for bombing in Slovenia.[802] The dispatch was accompanied by a response signed by Tito: "No city in Slovenia has been approved for bombing, only communications."[803] From a conversation with General Terzić, he learned that three days earlier, bombing was only allowed on Novo Mesto, at the request of the Slovenes. Soon after, General J.

[801] While engaged in the battle for Trieste, by his order, he would also return the second Italian partisan division of the NOP, "Garibaldi-Natisone" (which fought under the command of the Main Staff of Slovenia), dignifiedly seeing them off.

[802] Note 272 in Vol. 26 of the J. Broz's *Collected Works*, p. 167.

[803] AVII, file 30, reg. no. 1-2.

Avšič came to him and, instead of a welcome, began complaining that more places in Slovenia had been bombed in his absence, including Celje, hastily claiming that this caused "more damage to civilian than military objects." Arso could have reasoned: Allied pilots had bombed my Podgorica dozens of times in a year and levelled it to the ground, so let it be the turn of the Slovenians to "spill a little blood" and feel how those deep wounds burn. However, he, feeling as the chief of the highest command of all forces and convinced that, at least in the final phase of the war, cities should be spared from destruction as much as possible, reassured the Slovenians and immediately called the heads of the Western military missions, Brigadier F. Maclean and Lieutenant Colonel C. Teyer, to him. This was an agreement but also a call to intensify the assumed responsibility.

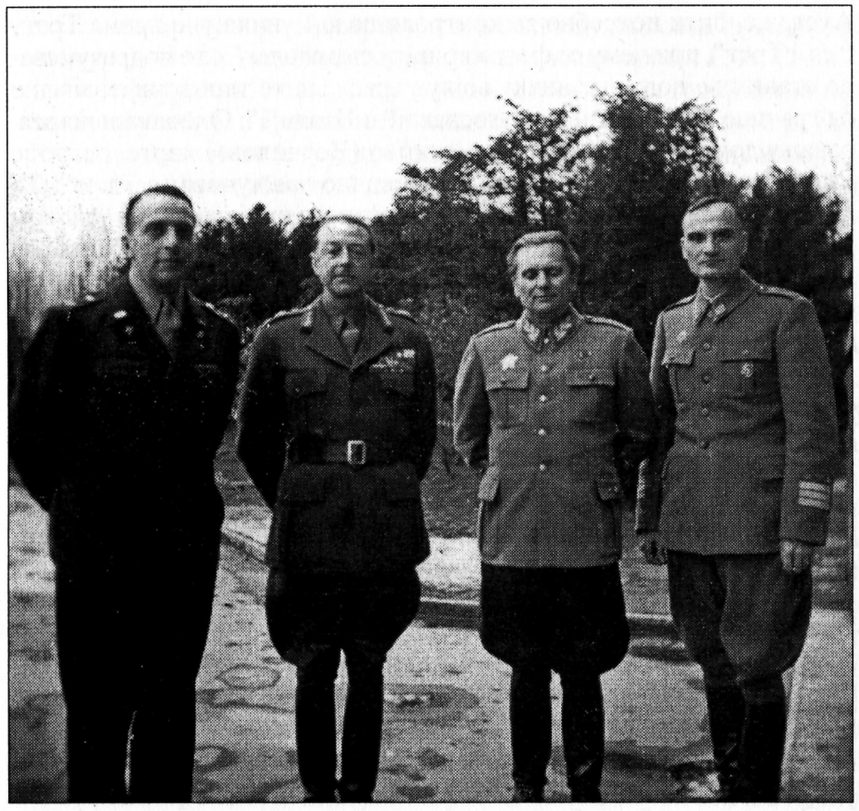
He finally completed the revision of the text of the "Order on the Conduct of Military Personnel," and on February 23, along with Marshal Tito and Dr. Ivan Ribar, conducted the ceremonial inspection of the Military Academy in Topčider, commanded by Lieutenant General Savo Orović, and then attended the swearing-in ceremony of 2,168 future officers, pledging loyalty to the homeland. He verified the final version of the new division formation named 1U-A, worked on by his assistant M. Apostolski, which, according to the previous plan, was expected to be operational by mid-March.

Field Marshal Alexander stayed in Belgrade from February 21 to 28, with official talks held from February 21 to 24, while army commanders remained in Belgrade from February 25 to March 2. General P. Drapšin attended a meeting of the Allied staff teams on February 23. The four were introduced to the Field Marshal on the afternoon of February 25, and in the following days, the conclusions of the talks with the Allied supreme commander and, in more detail, the upcoming joint operations were presented. No original documents have been preserved for either the first or second meeting and agreement, at least concerning the JA, so they can only be judged based on the memories of the participants and key witnesses.

Field Marshal H. Alexander, accompanied by a strong staff team, landed at the Zemun Airport on the afternoon of February 21, where he was greeted by Generals Jovanović, Orović and Velebit on behalf of the hosts and escorted to the White Palace. General Orović noted that he greeted the distinguished guest at the airport in a partisan manner: "Comrade Field Marshal, greetings,"[804] to which he replied "very clearly and distinctly, with a smile," "Greetings!" Marshal Tito immediately received him, and later that same day, he laid a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier on Avala. The first official conversation between the two marshals took place that evening. According to the minutes kept by F. Maclean, only the guest and host and the heads of their military missions were present. They discussed issues that had been postponed for this level of decision-making but also those raised by the upcoming and, it was believed, final joint offensive.

At the beginning of the conversation, the guest emphasized that "his intention is

[804] S. Orović, *op. cit.*, p. 565.



In front of the White Palace: from the right, Arso, Tito, Field Marshal Alexander and General Lemnitzer.

not to carry out any large-scale operations on Yugoslav territory," and that small-scale operations, except possibly for capturing the island of Lošinj, "would not be worth it."[805] Tito agreed with this, suggesting that the operations to clear the coastal area towards Lošinj be carried out by the JA divisions within three weeks, for which "Allied air and naval support, food, guns and ammunition" would be necessary. The Field Marshal proposed to "explore the possibility of establishing additional air bases in the northwestern part of Yugoslavia, once the Germans retreat to the north." Tito also easily agreed with this, which could not be said for Alexander's assessment that, "after the capture of Austria, it would be necessary to control the communications towards Trieste and the city itself," at which point the Field Marshal slipped up, implying that this would mean placing "the entire territory west of the 1939 border between Yugoslavia and Italy" under Allied military administration. Realizing from the host's reaction that he had prematurely revealed (Churchill's) cards, he said, "This would not

[805] Minutes published in the *Tito-Churchill* collection, Strictly Confidential, pp. 470-480.

prejudge the final peace settlement." Tito, however, stated that this idea would only be acceptable to him under the condition that his already established civilian authority remained on that territory, otherwise, "chaos would ensue." He added that the Allies should not occupy Istria for the sake of protecting the communications between Trieste and Austria; they could use the routes passing through Ljubljana, but he did not see this as necessary, as "they are quite within the borders of Yugoslavia." To calm his interlocutor, the Field Marshal said that his explanations were "purely investigative," as the final decision on this matter would rest with London.

The issues selected for discussion at the staff level over the next two days included: the restoration and use of the Zadar-Ancona telegraph line, with the condition that "as long as fighting continues, it will be under Allied operational command"; the exchange of intelligence data about the enemy collected during operations; the further development of the Yugoslav Navy, especially regarding the material assistance the Allies could provide; the procurement of armoured combat vehicles, primarily for the replenishment of the 1st Tank Brigade "with Stuart tanks." Point 13 of Maclean's minutes reads:

"Marshal Tito explained that he hoped to make 200,000 fighters available for battles outside the borders of Yugoslavia. He believes that this would be very useful in the mountains of Austria, where he expects the Germans to offer strong resistance. He also suggested that they be allowed to occupy part of Austria after the defeat of Germany. He then explained that for the equipment of these forces, he would need 100,000 sets of clothing and 10,000 trucks. He requested that the Americans supply him with this under the terms of the lend-lease arrangement. However, the Americans responded that they must first inform the Supreme Commander of the Allied forces in the Mediterranean. Field Marshal Alexander replied that there was a possibility of providing certain quantities of food, fuel and clothing, but there was little hope for trucks, as his own forces were already lacking in them. Therefore, he would instruct his staff to examine Marshal's request. In response to a question from Field Marshal Alexander, Marshal Tito stated that the Russians had so far supplied the JA with food, ammunition, artillery and 800 trucks."

The Field Marshal informed Tito that he had decided that — once a unified government was formed in Belgrade — he would dissolve Maclean's "37th Military Mission," and its political responsibilities would be transferred to the future British Embassy in Belgrade, while military and air force functions would be taken over by a mission to be headed by Air Vice-Marshal G.A.S. Lee.

As for what the expert teams, led by Generals Arso Jovanović and Lyman Lemnitzer, discussed over the next two days, this can only be judged from British sources, which have not been published in Yugoslavia because they supposedly "concern technical matters related to the upcoming offensive of the JA units."[806] However, these records have been preserved in the British Public Archive, and they are presented here in more detail — precisely because of Arso's role.

The first meeting of the Allied staff teams was held the next day at 3:00 p.m. in

[806] Note 426 in Vol. 26 of the J. Broz's *Collected Works*, p. 186.

the War Hall of the General Staff, led by Generals A. Jovanović and L. Lemnitzer, the deputy chief of staff of the Supreme Commander in the Mediterranean. The Yugoslav side was represented by Generals R. Hamović, S. Manola, V. Klišanić, Dr. G. Nikoliš and Colonel A. Kulundžić (presented as "chief of the operational sections"). With L. Lemnitzer were the new commander of the BAF, General-Vice Marshal G. Miles, Brigadier Maclean with his staff (including Lieutenant Colonel J. Clarke, who would frequently trouble Arso in the coming months) and Lieutenant Colonel C. Teyer, head of the Independent U.S. Military Mission. After being given the floor by Arso, as a guest, General Lemnitzer, after the usual formalities, placed on the agenda Tito's request from the previous evening "to provide maximum naval and air support from the Allies for his upcoming operations against the island of Mali Lošinj." General Jovanović spoke not only about the request but also about the pressing need to begin those operations "as soon as possible, but this specific operation is part of the overall plan for a ground offensive that will include the use of an army. An attack is also planned towards the north of Bihać, as well as operations in the coastal area. He stated that these forces, with the main headquarters in Knin, will be commanded by General Drašin. Soon, he will be reinforced with troops as part of the 8th Corps, which he currently commands." He then asked, "What specific assistance are the Allies willing to provide the JA for these operations?" Lemnitzer replied that the naval and air support would be coordinated, as before, by the BAF's main headquarters, and that the scope would depend on the other obligations the Allies had in the Mediterranean region. He asked if a specialist would be delegated to work with local JA commanders to coordinate with representatives of the three Allied branches of the military. General Jovanović confirmed that this would be arranged, and then inquired, "Is it possible to get an estimate of the scope of future Allied assistance to help with planning?" He was told, "The naval support will be very limited due to the danger of waters near Mali Lošinj and enemy coastal batteries." General Manola responded, "This is understood, so naval support will not be counted on in the planning of operations."

General Miles stated, "The entire Balkan air force" would be engaged in "supporting the operation along the coast and on the islands," while General Lemnitzer added that for this purpose, "officers for liaison will be assigned to General Drašin's headquarters."

The minutes state: "General Jovanović asked what additional assistance in the form of tanks and artillery could be ensured. The 'Stuart' type tanks, which are already in use, have proven very useful. He emphasized that the JA would fill these tanks with its own personnel." In response, General Lemnitzer stated, "The Supreme Command has already been instructed to check the availability of tanks, and it will now be instructed to do the same for artillery." He supported Brigadier Maclean's suggestion that priority should be given to supplying 75mm heavy howitzers, which the JA already uses. However, he highlighted the significant shortage of all types of artillery ammunition. In this regard, a serious problem always arose with shipment. The situation was even more critical because the operation had to take place within three weeks. Since both tanks and artillery needed to be checked, collected and shipped, it was unlikely that any-

thing would be sent in time for the operation." Brigadier Maclean added, "Given this, the JA should plan the operation assuming that, in its early stages, it will not receive Allied supplies." After noting these reservations, General Jovanović asked, "Can we expect an increase in supply during the operation?" General Lemnitzer replied that "personally, he believes this would be possible," but that the final decision would depend on reports from lower commands. He was not more specific in his response to Arso's "request for additional food supplies for the army," simply stating, "A large quantity of equipment and materials, including food, has already been shipped to Yugoslavia, but after further examination, it might be possible to increase the food tonnage."

Dissatisfied with both the course and the outcome of the talks with Lemnitzer's team, Arso attended the ceremonial academy in the National Theatre in the evening, organized on the occasion of the 27th anniversary of the Red Army. The host was Tito, and alongside him in the front row were Field Marshal Alexander and Generals Kiselev and Jovanović.

The next day, on February 23 at 10:00 a.m., the talks took place in the General Staff hall. On the Yugoslav side, Generals R. Hamović ("deputy chief of staff"), S. Manola, P. Drašin, Dr. G. Nikoliš and Colonel A. Kulundžić participated. On General Lemnitzer's team were experts from various sectors of the Supreme Command, as well as Brigadier Maclean and Lieutenant Colonel Charles Teyer. The discussions focused on the mechanism for exchanging intelligence data at the levels from corps headquarters to the Supreme Command; the need to "lend" Yugoslav war prisoners to Allied headquarters for interrogations about the enemy, particularly technical specialists; the "infiltration of agents" by the Allies, with the help of the SH of the NOV, into the territory of southern Austria and western Hungary; the possibilities of "establishing mutually beneficial and secure communication, especially with the airbase in Zemunik" via the submarine cable from Zadar to Ancona; the request for the return of Yugoslav war and merchant ships and tugs, which were transporting for the Western Allies in the Mediterranean; and the insistence of the hosts on "guarantees from the Allies that they will increase the amount of fuel to 1,000 tons per month for the next operation, as well as quantities of food, clothing, ammunition and material-technical resources." General P. Drašin said that, as the commander of the operation on the coastal flank, he would be happy "to discuss Allied aid in detail." He said that he would involve about 50,000 men in the operation and that his "primary requirements are food and clothing," followed by "artillery and transport," all of which would be delivered "via the port of Zadar and Šibenik."

The final official meeting took place on February 24 at the White Palace, where the NOVJ, alongside Tito, were represented by the Chief of Staff and the Head of the Military Mission in London, while the Allies, alongside Field Marshal Alexander and General Lemnitzer, were represented by the heads of the British and American military missions in Belgrade. A summary of the three-day discussions was made and, from a top-level perspective, mutual obligations were established. The Field Marshal, clearly in good spirits, immediately stated "that his headquarters and Marshal Tito's headquarters, in his opinion, had adequately covered all the points for discussion." The



Celebration of Red Army Day: from the left, Arso, Lemnitzer, I. Ribar, Alexander and Tito.

head of the NOVJ delegation stated "that the only limiting factor for the success of future operations on the Dalmatian coast is the supply factor." He said he was "unable to supply his forces on the Dalmatian coast and would need to turn to the Allies for help. The most important points are food and artillery ammunition." He added that the operations would be scheduled to start in three weeks and that, for this reason, temporary storage facilities in the area of operations should be established as soon as possible. Ports in Split, Zadar and Šibenik would be used for this. The Field Marshal, a measured man without full authority, did not indicate a firm "yes," but he took on the responsibility to quickly "examine the availability of equipment that would meet Marshal Tito's requirements and hoped to respond to him in a short time." To this, General A. Jovanović, known for his insistence on clarification and precision, responded, stating "that the feeding of 50,000 soldiers participating in this operation should not be linked with the problem of helping the civilian population." Field Marshal Alexander, as recorded by Lieutenant Colonel J. Clarke, "agreed with General Jovanović and stated that this was an entirely different issue and that his headquarters in Italy was handling it." General Jovanović added "that most of the equipment currently being used by the NOVJ forces was captured from the Germans, and due to its wear, there was now a serious shortage of spare parts for it across the entire army. He believes that a certain number of warehouses containing such equipment are now in Italy and requests that a commission be sent to examine the possibility of obtaining such equipment and spare parts for the needs of the NOVJ." The Field Marshal "stated that he considered this a very reasonable request and hoped that the NOVJ would send such a commission to

Italy as soon as possible."

After the Field Marshal concluded that the Allied Navy would "assist Marshal Tito in the upcoming operation within its limited resources," and that support from the BAF would be provided, particularly from the base established in Zadar, General Jovanović raised the issue of further supplies for the NOVJ. Having been informed "that the Allies would no longer supply the NOVJ after June 1, 1945," he asked "whether this situation could be reconsidered." Brigadier Maclean's explanation was not very precise, so the Field Marshal added "that the situation would be reviewed after his arrival in Italy and that he hoped the Allies would be able to continue sending aid to the NOVJ as long as they continued to fight against the Germans." In response to the Field Marshal's question about whether "there are any additional specific requests for any types of heavy weaponry," Tito replied that "significant amounts of heavy weaponry were needed and that tomorrow his Chief of Staff (Supreme Headquarters) would provide a detailed list of needs." The Field Marshal welcomed this "as an incentive to re-examine the situation in supply" to help the NOVJ "within the available resources." Toward the end of the discussion, General Jovanović — who had raised the issue after the Cassino meeting in August 1944 — "brought up the possibility of the Allies freeing Yugoslav ships for the needs of the NOVJ," to which this time he did not receive a firmer answer. It was only concluded that General Majors J. Černi and S. Manola, the commander and chief of the Naval Staff, would travel to Cassino for further discussions.

The final version of the joint statement was adopted, which would be published simultaneously by both sides on Monday, February 26, at 11:00 a.m. The formulation of the statement was carried out by Generals Jovanović and Velebit on the Yugoslav side. The issues discussed were outlined as follows:

"1. Coordinating future Allied operations with the actions of the NOVJ.

"2. Providing further material assistance from the Allies to the NOVJ in the fight against the common enemy.

"3. Administrative arrangements between the armed forces of Marshal Tito and Field Marshal Alexander for the final joint operations.

"These discussions, which were purely military in nature, were conducted in an atmosphere of great cordiality and agreement on all matters."[807]

The formulations of the adopted statement appeared to Arso as vague, indefinite and full of optimism, carefully crafted to leave a positive impression on the public, and he would later tell Velebit, "especially to the enemy." However, he was left with a sense of ambiguity, reservation and even duplicity, which was inappropriate for a soldier. As a professional soldier with a straightforward and open character, Arso, although not entirely informed on many current political tactics, understood that the issue of establishing Allied military control and setting up garrisons along the long routes from Trieste to Vienna and beyond was primarily political in nature. He recognized it as something imposed by Churchill, with only limited space for tactical manoeuvring.

[807] *Tanjug* broadcast from February 27, 1945.

He understood how this "simple and cheerful man, an experienced soldier," although a Field Marshal, was not adept at playing the game and did not feel "at home" during negotiations, unlike his experience in his divisions at El Alamein, Sicily or on the Gothic Line. Arso hoped that the participants in the discussions, as soldiers and people, would reach an understanding more easily, but everything remained only at a general, tentative and certainly unfinished level, leaving each side the possibility to interpret it in their own way. Tito, evidently aware of the complexity of his guest's position, made some concessions or at least hinted at his consent to solutions that would respect the established local authority. He was confident that after the formation of a unified government,[808] the matter of securing the communication lines from Trieste to the Allied occupation forces in Austria would be easier and more successful. He argued that no one in the world could execute this task better than the divisions of the NOVJ, which knew the local conditions, were familiar with the territory and relied on local authorities. However, Field Marshal Alexander, somewhat coldly interpreting the political demands from London, sought full control not only over the Trieste port but also over the entire railway and road network leading north from Trieste. In this context, no one understood the strategic importance of the "Ljubljana Gates" better than Arso, especially since he had "played out" their defence or conquest in five or six variations, both on maps and during command trips in the field, as well as in war games at the General Staff. This was something Field Marshal Alexander and his "chief of staff" General Lemnitzer could also foresee from their demands. In personal conversations, Dr. Velebit, probably the best expert on the field marshal, mentioned that the demands for complete security of the "designated" communication lines had, in essence, a political background, and would later write in his *Memoirs* that "the NOVJ, in cooperation with the national liberation committees, was incomparably more secure and suitable for ensuring the communication lines than foreign armies. Due to the lack of modern weaponry, the NOVJ could not match the perfectly equipped Allied divisions in frontal battles, but for securing communication lines, the NOVJ was on par, and I would even say, a more suitable force than the British or American armies. The insistence on taking over the responsibility for securing transportation was, therefore, politically motivated, and did not stem from real, objective needs. Tito understood the true reason behind the Allied demands, but he thought that in the interest of good Allied relations, he would make a concession that could not undermine the gains of the liberation struggle. Principally, he agreed to Alexander's demand, albeit in a very general form. After all, many issues during the meeting between the two military leaders were not fully resolved and were left unclarified, which later led to various interpretations and disputes."[809]

The different interpretations of the agreement would indeed lead to open military disputes in the Julian March region, and later in Austria, which would involve the Chief of the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army in very dramatic circumstances dur-

[808] The Unified Provisional Government of the Democratic Federal Yugoslavia was formed on March 7, 1945.

[809] V. Velebit, *op. cit.*, p. 358.

ing the first months of the "post-war war."

Immediately after the meeting with the Field Marshal, Arso ordered his closest associates, together with General P. Drapšin, to compile a list of the most urgent needs for heavy weaponry on the left strategic wing (artillery, tanks, trucks, landing crafts, etc.), which he revised the next day, Sunday. After agreeing with the supreme commanders, he handed it over to General L. Lemnitzer.

In the evening, on February 24, Brigadier F. Maclean hosted a reception at the Officers' Club "on the occasion of Field Marshal Alexander's return visit to Marshal Tito and his departure from Belgrade." The toasts were given by Brigadier Maclean, Field Marshal Alexander and Marshal Tito. The first, with carefully chosen words and noticeably emotional, bid farewell to the NOVJ after 17 months of war in the Yugoslav theatre; the second expressed admiration for the Yugoslav peoples' struggle against fascism "when the war situation was very bleak for us" and paid tribute to the NOVJ "for tying up 15 to 20 enemy divisions that could have been used against the Allies on any front."[810] Arso personally regretted Maclean's departure just before the end of the war, partly because, in the final shortage of time, it was important to "win over" Field Marshal S. Lee, who was quite reserved and somewhat enigmatic.

After the official talks and meeting with the commanders of the NOVJ armies, the Field Marshal spent the evening of Sunday, February 25, and the following day as a guest of General P. Dapčević at his headquarters in Erdevik. They were accompanied by Generals R. Primorac and Dr. V. Velebit. After visiting the honour guard, the guest said: "Soldiers! I hadn't intended to speak, but I can't resist telling you what I feel. This is a joyful evening for me because I am with soldiers from the front, and I am a soldier from the front myself... Three years ago, you rose up to fight when the situation was very dark and difficult for all of us. It was only when I landed in Italy with my victorious army that I could realize how much your army contributed to the common Allied cause... Hard days are behind us. Great days lie ahead. Soon we will meet to the north of the Adriatic, and together, as true war comrades, we will triumphantly finish this fight..."

He would report from Caserta on February 28 under "strictest secrecy," stating that "this was a properly organized front with trenches, artillery, machine guns, anti-tank weapons, etc. Several rather tough battles were fought on this sector, and the partisans had success in subsequent raids on German positions and in capturing artillery. In my opinion, the Yugoslavs deserve our help, and they are fighting to expel the Germans from their country with the limited resources they have."[811]

At around 10:00 p.m., an artistic program was arranged for him at his headquarters, and the next day he visited the fighters at their positions in the plain. He spent hours conversing with them, about which there were remains on the film reel and photographs.

Dignified in his reception and farewell, the Allied Supreme Commander in the

[810] *Collection Tito-Churchill, Strictly Secret,* p. 483.

[811] *Ibid.,* p. 488.

Mediterranean, a soldier of great reputation and career, on the afternoon of February 26, crossed the Danube with Maclean, went to the airport and, unplanned, flew to visit Marshal Tolbukhin, as per his desire and Moscow's approval. The Russians — as his superiors would report as soon as he landed in Caserta on February 28 — "received him very well — they couldn't have shown more friendship. There, I established useful contacts, which might prove valuable in the future when our armies shake hands in Austria."

On the afternoon of February 28, the Field Marshal was seen off at Zemun Airport by the Supreme Commander, the Chief of Staff, army commanders, generals, foreign military representatives and the political leadership of the country. A photograph was also taken just before entering the plane: in front of the aircraft doors were Marshals Tito and Alexander, Generals Jovanović and Kiselev, Brigadier Maclean and Lieutenant Colonel Teyer.

In a report dated March 6, marked as "top secret," diplomat H. Mack — originally informed by Field Marshal Alexander during lunch — writes that Marshal Tito in Belgrade said "he would like to participate in the occupation of Austria and is willing to put 200,000 soldiers at the disposal of the Field Marshal and under his command. Marshal Tito added that he had no aspirations in Austria but demands a command of territory in the south (which, of course, refers to the area of Celovec) as it would be fair for it to belong to Yugoslavia. Field Marshal Alexander did not comment on these remarks in front of Tito." He adds that the Field Marshal told him during lunch that "Tito is a determined man, with whom a deal can be made, but it was very clear that his master is Moscow, and that he seeks leadership from Moscow."[812]

Agreements of Army Commanders in the General Staff

The first consultation of the army commanders at the General Headquarters of the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia (from March 1, General Staff of the Yugoslav Army) preserved only two original, highly formal documents in content: the first — an invitation, sent five days in advance, for the commanders to come to Belgrade by 12:00 p.m. on February 25, bringing "all necessary information about the situation and the condition of the units"; and the second — a notification to the staffs regarding when their commanders would return (due to bad weather, they would return by March 4). Not only is the document about what the army commanders did in those five days in Belgrade not preserved, nor what they discussed or concluded with whom, but there are also no broader testimonies in the memoir literature on this matter. Only some key witnesses — commanders of the 1st and 3rd Armies, P. Dapčević and K. Nađ, and especially members of the wartime composition of the Supreme Command, Generals R. Hamović and S. Vukmanović — spoke about it at scientific gatherings on the "The Army in the Strategic Concept of the NOB and Revolution"[813] and "The Final Oper-

[812] *Ibid.,* p. 489.

[813] The gathering was held on May 15, 1985, and the collection of papers was published in 1986.



War Room of the General Staff: briefing by the commanders before the start of the strategic offensive.

ations for the Liberation of Yugoslavia,"[814] held in Belgrade five decades later. From the allied documents and those memories, it is clear that the commander of the 8th Corps, General P. Dapšin, arrived in Belgrade by plane from Zemun on February 22 and the next day attended a meeting with the operational teams of the two supreme commanders. The army commanders were introduced to Field Marshal Alexander on February 25, and General Dapčević spent the afternoon of that day and the next with the field marshal at the Srem Front. Without other sources of information about this important meeting in Belgrade, we present here what was recorded in the 26th volume of Tito's *Collected Works,* based on the analysis of the content of "previous and subsequent orders and directives of the Supreme Commander and the Supreme Command." Editor M. Dželebžić wrote in 1988 that "at this consultation, the unit commanders reported on the situation and condition of the units; Tito announced his decision to rename the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia to the Yugoslav Army, the Navy of the National Liberation Army to the Yugoslav Navy, and the Supreme Command to the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army, and to form the 4th Army of the Yugoslav Army; the army commanders were informed about measures for rearming the units and transitioning to a three-tier structure in March; the general plan for the final liberation of the country was globally elaborated, while the plan for the Littoral-Primorska and Rijeka-Trieste operations with the commander of the 4th Army was elaborated in more detail; Tito personally introduced his army commanders to Field Marshal Alexander, the Allied Supreme Commander in the Mediterranean, who was in Belgrade

[814] The gathering was held on April 23-24, 1985, and the collection of papers was published in 1986.

from February 21 to March 1, 1945, where he held discussions about further joint actions of the allied armies and measures to be taken for cooperation with these two allied armies."

However, it is likely that the plans for the offensive of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Armies in April 1945 were not thoroughly elaborated at this meeting but were likely discussed at the consultation held from March 25 to 27, 1945. No written orders for this second consultation have been found either, but from the telegram books of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Armies, it is clear that all three commanders of the mentioned armies were absent from their headquarters at that time. This consultation was held just before Tito's departure for the Soviet Union, where he stayed from April 5 to 20, 1945, so it is likely that during this time he detailed the plan for the general and final offensive for the liberation of the country, in which these three armies also participated.[815]

Much of the consultation took place in the War Room of the General Staff, where maps of the frontlines and diagrams showing the routes of attacks, manoeuvres and cooperation were prominently displayed on the walls. Key witnesses, V. Terzić and S. Vukmanović-Tempo, recall that when it came to operational and strategic issues on the agenda, "the opening and closing statements were delivered by Arso, the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters," in written form.[816] It is strange that, at least regarding discussions in the General Staff, no notes were taken or preserved, even though this was a practice learned from the Russians. What is even more unusual is that such responsible officers as Generals Jovanović, Terzić, Primorac, Apostolski, Hamović and Škorpik did not leave any written trace. These senior officers were known for diligently writing in their official notebooks and carefully keeping them, which, as R. Hamović recalls, they did at that time as well, but everything disappeared without a trace, most likely due to the unprofessional and irresponsible "organization" of the General Staff's and Ministry of National Defence's archives.[817]

March was the month of the most intense and extensive preparations for carrying out the final strategic offensive for the complete liberation of the country. These preparations were conducted concurrently with ongoing battles, engagements and operations that, with unabated fierceness and intensity, were taking place on all fronts: on the Drava, where the Bolman Operation, known as the "Spring Awakening," erupted, in which the 12th Corps of the 3rd Army participated; on the Srem front, where, along with necessary rearming and professional training, the heavy "trench warfare" battles unfolded; on the Sarajevo front, where the 2nd, 3rd and 5th Corps fought introductory battles for the city's liberation on the Miljacka; on the Lika-Primorje route, where the 4th Army's divisions, beginning their offensive on March 20, by the end of the month, after the liberation of Bihać, reached the outskirts of Gospić; and on deep enemy lines, with the engagement of three Croatian and two Slovenian corps. Within the framework of these intensive preparations for the strategic offensive, several

[815] Note 381 in Vol. 26 of the *J. Broz's Collected Works*, p. 180.

[816] Presentations were not preserved or are in private archives.

[817] The same fate would befall the sources about the second meeting of the leading figures of the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army and the commanders of the armies, held from March 25-27, 1945.



At the exhibition on the development of the Red Army.

issues were of fundamental importance: the reorganization of the Supreme Command of the NOVJ into the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army (JA), which had essential significance; the formation of the 4th Army; the comprehensive reform of the Yugoslav Navy; the organization of operational-level units, primarily infantry divisions, according to the new "1U-A" formation prescribed on March 14;[818] the rearming of units with Soviet weapons, which, after a certain delay in the previous two winter months, began to arrive in large quantities; the construction and realization of the radical mobilization system of manpower and resources, which Arso entrusted to General J. Škorpik; accelerated professional training of officers, mostly handled by General M. Apostolski; and the care of wounded and sick members of the Yugoslav Army, which, on March 20, numbered more than 48,000. In these tasks, the General Staff had strong support from the Ministry of National Defence of the Provisional Government of Democratic Federal Yugoslavia, which, in its inaugural declaration (March 9), stated that the final liberation of the country was "the first and most important goal to which it would devote all its forces."[819]

The military missions from the anti-Hitler coalition in Belgrade included: the USSR (Major General A.P. Kiselev); the USA (Lieutenant Colonel C. Teyer); Great Britain (Air Vice Marshal A. Lee); and France (General Philippe de Piepone); and from other countries: Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and Poland. Due to the increase in the number of missions and their representatives in the staff of armies and corps, as

[818] The division's composition: three infantry and artillery brigades, a total of 7,000 soldiers, which made it "more mobile, better armed, and trained for rapid manoeuvres and effective strikes."

[819] *Borba* newspaper, March 10, 1945.

well as in the commands of arms, the General Staff established the Department for Relations with Foreign Military Missions, headed by the lawyer Colonel Mirko Krđić. At the same time, Yugoslav military missions were in Moscow (from mid-April, Lieutenant General Rudolf Primorac); London (Major General Dr. Vladimir Velebit); Paris (Major General Ivan Rukavina); Tirana (Colonel Velimir Stojnić); and Sofia (Major General Vladimir Popović).

Discussion with General Ira Eaker *(March 11-12, 1945)*

Arso Jovanović, the Chief of Staff of the Yugoslav Army, held discussions with Lieutenant General Ira Eaker, the supreme commander of Allied air forces in the Mediterranean, on March 11 and 12. Eaker was one of the pioneers of American military aviation, a legend among aviators from the first transcontinental flights in the mid-1930s, and the former commander of the 8th Bomber Command and the 15th American Air Force, which successfully struck the Third Reich and its Wehrmacht across all of Europe — in Yugoslavia from October 9, 1943 to May 6, 1945. There are no preserved original domestic or allied documents regarding the program of his stay or his achievements in Belgrade. Officially, this was reported in *Borba* on March 15.[820] In it, among other things, General Eaker expressed his "sincere gratitude for the help Yugoslavia provided to American aviators who were forced to land due to mechanical failures. This assistance saved thousands of aviators."

Lieutenant General Eaker promised air support in the fight against the Germans in Yugoslavia as soon as the weather improved.

It was also emphasized that Marshal Tito warmly thanked General Eaker "for the help Mediterranean aviation provided to the Yugoslav Army, both in bombing selected targets and in the evacuation of wounded Yugoslav soldiers and the dropping of supplies to military units at their positions." It was noted that both sides hoped that this cooperation would become even closer and more cordial in the future.

On March 14, at a press conference organized at the Independent American Military Mission headquarters, General Eaker stated that he had come to Belgrade "to thank for all the help the Yugoslav peoples provided in rescuing American aviators who had crashed in Yugoslav territory. Thanks to this help, it was possible to rescue several thousand American aviators who had crashed in Yugoslavia and return them to duty (approximately 3,600 had been confirmed). All these American aviators, upon their return, stated that the Yugoslav National Liberation authorities and the partisans had taken great care of them and treated them excellently in every case."[821] Tito warmly thanked General Eaker for the cooperation, respectfully heard his promises that Allied aviation "would continue to strongly support the actions of the Yugoslav Army," and awarded the guest the Partisan Star of the 1st Class.

[820] At that time, it was said that only what this "official organ of the CPY" recorded actually occurred.

[821] Note 363 in Vol. 27 of the J. Broz's *Collected Works*, p. 193.

Tito was certainly right from a strategic standpoint because Eaker's pilots had been fulfilling all his bombing requests for 17 long months, bombing 83 cities in Yugoslavia and hundreds of objects on railroads and roads. However, when it came to tactical considerations, both the General and the Marshal could turn to the citizens of Podgorica, Niš, Leskovac and Belgrade — those who were fortunate enough to survive the devastating bombings.

Apart from the communiqué and this statement, no other documents regarding this visit to Belgrade have been preserved. However, it is remembered that Eaker visited the General Staff twice, where he was hosted by Arso, and in the War Room, Arso, with his colleagues, thoroughly informed him about the plans for the upcoming operations for the final liberation of the country, particularly on the coastal flank, where the 4th Army was set to occupy a military area with a depth of about 350 km, all the way to Sochi. This was accompanied by an emphasized need for air support and cooperation with the Yugoslav Navy.[822]

The Eve of the Strategic Offensive *(March 15-April 12, 1945)*

On the Allied fronts in March, conditions varied depending on the region. To the north, across the Drava River, two Ukrainian fronts of the Red Army endured immense pressure from March 6 to 16. After long winter preparations for the "Spring Awakening" operation, the German command of Army Group "South" launched a counter-offensive on March 6 with 31 divisions (including 11 armoured) and several other units, totalling 431,000 men. The goal was to break and destroy the Soviet units in Hungary, reclaim the lost part of the Pannonian Basin, and secure economic resources in this Danube state and Austria. These forces aimed to launch a counter-attack on multiple fronts to "cut through the combat formations of the Red Army" and destroy them. One of the attack directions (the 91st Corps), in an operation called "Forest Devil," moved from the area of Upper Miholjac and Valpovo to the north towards Mohacs. Very intense fighting, which ended by March 16 with a complete failure for the Germans, led the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts of the Red Army to go on the counter-offensive across the front, pushing eastward towards Graz and Vienna by April 13, thereby liberating almost all of Hungary. The 3rd Yugoslav Army participated in the destruction of the German counter-offensive and the liquidation of the established Bolman bridgehead, with Bulgarian 1st Army on its right flank.

To the left, the 5th American and 15th British Armies, or the 15th Army Group, were still in their winter pause, preparing to begin their offensive through northern Italy on April 9, unless the secret negotiations for the unconditional surrender of Army Group "C," ongoing throughout the winter, succeeded. The Germans used this long operational pause to establish a new defensive line along the Po and Adige rivers, called the "Genghis Khan" line.

The decisions to rename the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia (NOVJ) to

[822] Around 14,000 soldiers, 250 vessels and nine battalions of naval infantry.

the Yugoslav Army (JA) and to reorganize the NOVJ General Staff into the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army, "as the immediate professional body of the Ministry (since March 27) of National Defence for all armed forces," marked the final step in the reorganization of the Army and its Supreme Command. The Chief of the General Staff, General-Lieutenant Arso R. Jovanović, now at the head of a very strong staff team with 12 prominent generals in key positions within sectors, departments and services of the Supreme Command, along with 320 officers, considered these decisions not only the final act of the transformation of the NOP's armed forces into a modern army but also a personal satisfaction for the enormous efforts he had invested in this highest staff position as a professional soldier. Through the reorganization, the number of direct operational links between the Chief of the General Staff was reduced to 12 — with the headquarters of four armies, four main commands, and commanders of the 2nd and 3rd Corps, as well as with the commands of two branches. With the formation of the rear, artillery, engineering and communications commands as the Ministry of Defence organs, the number of organizations and units directly linked to the General Staff was also reduced. As a result, the highest military institution became a modern, well-organized professional body, with 332 generals and mostly senior officers.

The 2nd Army, forced to engage in intensive combat operations day and night, was, in March 1945, subjected to strong German pressure from all sides, especially since the 3rd Corps of the NOVJ was removed from its operational command due to actions towards Sarajevo. From this part of the front, we quote just three (in a way original) documents: the first, General K. Popović's notes on the army's condition and the relationship of his superiors towards him and the army; the second, the post-war assessment of the battles in the zone of responsibility of this strategic formation, stretched over a 130 km front; and the third, the insistence of the Chief of the General Staff on an investigation into how the 25th Division suffered a heavy defeat in the battles in the "Posavina Triangle." The battles and skirmishes not only did not stop but became more intense, which was natural because the Germans, in the "embrace" of the 2nd Army, were fighting for their own survival, defending the lines protecting their "camaraderie" by holding Sarajevo, the Bosna valley and Srem. In this context, the 2nd Army faced every possible hardship, and its commander — always honest and often hostile — wrote on March 31 in Tuzla:

"Three months I haven't written anything down.

"The Red Army is 35 km from Berlin. Tolbukhin has broken out from Budapest toward the Austrian border. The Allies have broken through the German defence on the Rhine. Germany is on the verge of collapse.

"...In eastern Bosnia, where the units of the '2nd Army' are located — the Germans are launching an offensive! The offensive is clear, with specific, local objectives. In the context of the general situation, it makes no sense. The overall situation is such that no German plan can have any logic left, as it's happening, taking place in this contradictory situation: 'Since the war is finally lost, what should be done to win?' Every adventure is permissible and appropriate under these circumstances. The German soldier has become the cheapest soldier in the world. The task of the 2nd Army,

since crossing the Drina, has proven to be thankless. I'm not sure if they see all these elements above. The army is young, almost without experience, the personnel too, the supply bases are far, the evacuation of the wounded is also difficult, the territory is devastated, surrounded by traitorous groups, the front is long, advanced compared to others, constant fighting, no days of rest for organizing and strengthening the units — a heavy burden in one word, few instructors, irregular supplies and the rearming not completed.

"Under these conditions, it seems to me that we have accomplished the task to the fullest. Recently, I have a feeling, which may not be accurate, that somehow, we've been abandoned, and it's hard for me, because we did everything we could, under the most unfavourable conditions and prerequisites."[823]

In the official review of the NOVJ, in the two-volume work *The Liberation War of the People of Yugoslavia 1941-1945,* it is written that the units of the 2nd Army oper-



Commander of the Main Staff of Serbia with associates: from the left, Ljubo Vučković, Koča Popović, Rudolf Primorac, Moma Marković and Živojin Nikolić Brka.

ated "under extraordinarily difficult conditions during this period. The enemy had strong forces in all the peripheral strongholds of Semberija and Posavina, and in the lower course of the Bosna River, reacting quickly to every activity. Moreover, the harsh winter, lack of means for rapid troop movement, significant difficulties with supply,

[823] K. Popović, *op. cit.*, p. 312.

inadequate artillery and air support, poor training and insufficient combat experience of new fighters — all these factors negatively affected the operations of the 2nd Army and led to many diverse difficulties in commanding the troops. Nevertheless, the 2nd Army Staff managed to lead these difficult operations thoughtfully and rationally. The units of the 2nd Army did everything they could. Nothing more could be done."[824] However, it is evident that some units did not fully carry out their responsibilities — at least according to assessments from both Belgrade and Tuzla at the time. One example of this is the "case" of the 25th Division in the battles in the so-called "Posavina Triangle," in the wider area of Gradačac, where the clearing of the area was particularly insisted upon by the Chief of the General Staff. The 25th and 45th Divisions had broken through and threatened the vital Sarajevo-Slavonski Brod communication route. The breakthrough was deep, bold and highly risky, and although the army commander was promptly warned, he, "an eternal offensive-minded commander," continued with the fight toward the Bosna River. This forced the commander of the Army Group "E" to undertake the "May Storm" operation with two divisions. In this operation, the 25th Division suffered particularly heavy losses — 526 were put out of action, including 125 killed. Additionally, the 18th Serbian Brigade was completely destroyed, and the Germans captured a hospital, storeroom and archives. Aware of his own responsibility, General Koča immediately (on March 19) informed the General Staff about the defeat, adding his assessment that "the 25th Division was completely incapable of opposing even small German forces."[825] The General Staff assessed that the "failure of the 25th Division was the result of extreme negligence" and ordered an immediate investigation into the case, which was completed and the materials sent to Belgrade for evaluation and action. The order was carried out, several leaders in the division were punished and many were removed from command positions.[826]

Intensive battles and skirmishes on the approach to the city of Miljacka were preparing for the Sarajevo operation, which the Operational Staff of the Army Group (2nd, 3rd and main body of the 5th) with seven divisions, totalling around 60,000 men, was to begin on March 28 against the German 21st Mountain Army Corps and quislings, totalling about 40,000 soldiers. Formed on March 17, the Operational Staff, by the General Staff's choice, was made up of the commander and his deputy, General Majors R. Vukanović and S. Rodić, and a member, Colonel P. Kosorić. The newly formed Staff was tasked to "immediately begin preparations for the Sarajevo operation, to prepare a plan for the liquidation of Sarajevo, and to send the plan to us via telegram for agreement and approval." It was ordered that the troops' preparations be thoroughly carried out, as the success of the operation depended on this. It was added: "Before the beginning of the decisive operation, troops should rest as much as possible, securing the starting positions."[827] The plan to liberate the city, dear to his

[824] Second, revised and expanded edition, Belgrade 1965, Vol. II, p. 512.

[825] Notes 77 and 78 in Vol. 27 of the J. Broz's *Collected Works*, pp. 164-165.

[826] Instead of Major Uroš Kuko, Colonel Rajko Tanasković was appointed as the commander, previously the Chief of Staff of the 17th Eastern Bosnia Division.

[827] AVII, file 51, reg. no. 2-5/3.

youth, was approved by Arso, and he emphasized that they should wait for the most favourable moment to execute it, maximizing the preservation of lives and minimizing destruction. In connection with the preparations for the Sarajevo operation, the Chief of the General Staff suggested to the 2nd Army Staff which tasks, with a part of the 5th Corps, could be carried out in the Bosna valley. To ensure freedom of choice and stimulate initiative, he requested their opinion:

"1. Which sector in the Bosna valley is most suitable for your attack?

"2. Can your two divisions from Bijeljina, Brčko and Šamac secure you, or could they possibly clear Bijeljina?

"3. Would it be better for Rodić to cooperate with your forces in the same sector, or should he be assembled and sent to Zenica?

"4. What material do you need to prepare these operations?

"5. Any other suggestions?"[828]

Two days later, General Jovanović warned the Operational Headquarters that "in the current balance of forces, success is not guaranteed in the attack on Sarajevo," and concludes: "The German forces are still strong in Sarajevo, and it is necessary to wait until at least some of their strength weakens, and only then launch a decisive attack on the city. Until then, we need to tighten the ring around Sarajevo, eliminate its prominent strongholds towards Trnovo and Podromanija, and gather and organize all forces for decisive operations. Monitor all movements in Sarajevo, especially towards Brod, and report any changes urgently."[829] The imminent execution of the Sarajevo operation is announced to the 2nd Army Headquarters, and once again, cooperation with the 5th Corps units in the Bosnia valley is suggested. At the end of March, they are informed that on April 5, "on the left bank of the Drina, in the sector of Janja, there will be the 2nd and 5th Divisions," which, together with his 17th Division, will form the Southern Operational Group under the command of P. Dapčević. The task is "to eliminate Bijeljina and continue the advance towards Brčko and Šamac," and they are to send their division and reinforce it with two artillery battalions. Furthermore, they are to "close the enemy's advance towards Tuzla and the Spreča Valley." The commander of the 22nd Division is ordered to replace the 2nd Proletarian Division and secure control of the Drina "from the mouth to the height of Janja, preventing the enemy from crossing into Serbia."[830]

Sarajevo was liberated on April 6, and the breakthrough from the south to Zenica was completed in the following six days. The Chief of the General Staff would sternly reprimand General R. Vukanović for giving in to pressure to ensure that the Krajina troops participate in the liberation of the Bosnian capital — for political prestige — rather than the main body of the 5th Corps, which had been agreed to focus on the Bosnia valley, where their impact would have been much more noticeable.[831]

[828] *Ibid.,* file 42, reg. no. 1-8/1.

[829] *Ibid.,* file 49, reg. no. 2-16/1.

[830] *Ibid.,* file 1052, reg. no. 4-15/2.

[831] From a conversation with R. Vukanović, May 1985, in Belgrade.

The 4th Army was the first to begin the final offensive. Its Headquarters, under the leadership of Chief of Staff General P. Jakšić, created an initial operational plan, aligned with General P. Drašin's agreement with leading officers in the headquarters of Field Marshal Alexander, and with the conclusions of army commanders' consultations in Belgrade, which was then accepted by the General Staff. After extensive reorganization and unit preparation, the army launched the Lika-Primorje operation on March 20 (with 9 divisions and 67,000 soldiers) against the German 15th Mountain Army Corps, with a strength of around 40,000 soldiers. This operation was carried out until April 15, for the liberation of Lika, Bihać, the Croatian Littoral and Gorski Kotar. In executing this operation, which aimed to break through towards Rijeka and continue the advance towards Trieste, the General Staff was particularly engaged, reinforcing it with four branch brigades, coordinating the actions of two divisions of the 4th Corps, naval forces of the northern Adriatic and support from two squadrons of the Air Force. The scale of this operation is indicated by the fact that it took place over an area 80 km wide and 100 km deep and lasted 27 days. Two days after the operation began, due to what seemed like a very favourable situation on the battlefield, the Army Headquarters raised the question: should Bihać, a stronghold in the Una valley, be liberated? It was potentially a great threat to the right flank of the army, and especially to its rear. Opinions were divided, as recalled by Ante Biočić, Chief of the Operational Department of the Army Headquarters. The possibility of a German breakthrough from Karlovac towards Bihać, in the army's flank, was quite real and substantial. On the other hand, it was believed that an action to capture it would lose at least four days, which was not planned in the initial operational plan, and the strategic goal of reaching Trieste by May 15 was at risk. The Chief of the General Staff supported the liberation of the city on the Una River to secure the right flank, but carefully listened to all opinions, and finally, in the nature of his command responsibility, General Drašin decided to prioritize the liberation of Bihać. The battles for its liberation, conducted in motion, lasted six days, and both sides were uncertain whether its capture had gained or lost more. The victory was significant, but it was paid for by the loss of six war days, which for the units tasked with reaching the strategic military and political objective — Trieste and Friuli — was considerable, and could potentially result in irreplaceable, even disastrous consequences.[832]

After the liberation of Bihać, the army's troops were regrouped and directed towards Gospić, so that after its liberation, they could advance to Karlobag and the island of Pag, then turn towards Rijeka, although there was no unified opinion within the Army Headquarters on this strategy. At a consultation in the 4th Army Headquarters, held immediately after the liberation of Bihać, the Commissioner of the Croatian Main Staff, Colonel Rade Žigić, suggested that after Bihać, they should not return to Gospić but instead turn directly towards Rijeka. However, others, equally influential, were in favour of heading towards Karlovac and Zagreb, where the enemy was expected to be, though both viewpoints remained in the minority. Due to the threat of

[832] *Collection of Final Operations for the Liberation of Yugoslavia*, contributions by General Boško Šiljegović and Ante Biočić, pp. 333-360.

compromising the right flank (particularly from the 104th Division "pulled" from the Drava front), the 29th Herzegovinian Division was sent from the Kiseljak region near Sarajevo, on the initiative of the Chief of the General Staff, to participate in the subsequent Rijeka-Trieste operation of the 4th Army. By mid-April, this operational-strategic unit, having liberated Lika, the Croatian Littoral, Gorski Kotar, and the islands of Pag and Rab, had made a 150 km advance and, after breaking the 15th Mountain Corps, had reached the Sushak and Rijeka area, creating conditions to continue its advance into Istria and towards Trieste without an operational pause, aiming for an offensive towards the Soča river.

At the end of the month (March 25-27), a second consultation of army and corps commanders was held in Belgrade with the senior officers of the General Staff, where — at the Supreme Commander's residence in the White Palace and in the War Hall — the "questions regarding the final decision on the specific concept and plan for the concluding operations of our war" were outlined (according to R. Hamović). In other words, a plan was defined for the execution of the final operations for the liberation of the country, including the determined lines of advance for the 1st, 2nd and 3rd armies, proposed manoeuvres, and mutual cooperation with the Allies on both strategic flanks. It was assessed that the Yugoslav Army was capable of conducting frontal actions and offensive operations, typical of the Second World War, with even one-quarter of the total forces in the final offensive carrying out operations and battles in the enemy's rear. At the same time, seven divisions of the NOVJ and about ten from the operational structure of the Yugoslav Army operated in the rear.

In mid-March, the Operational Headquarters of the Airborne Division Group was formed, which had significant tasks in supporting the first three armies during their march towards Carinthia in the final operations.

The General Staff kept two divisions — 2nd Proletarian and 22nd Assault — on the eastern Bosnian front as its reserve, while in the depth of the liberated territory, the 24th and 47th Divisions were stationed. Preparations for the execution of the strategic offensive were a special concern for the Chief of the General Staff. However, under the pressure of events, he addressed many issues that, by the nature of the position he held, were not within his jurisdiction. For example, based on the model of the Red Army, penal units were formed — one battalion in each army. To preserve the health of the units and prevent possible sabotage, orders were issued prohibiting the consumption of "any kind of sweets except those from the unit kitchens." In response to a request from the Minister of Finance, General Žujović, orders were issued to headquarters to preserve the records of tax offices, financial directors, banks, mints and institutions of industrial enterprises during the liberation of cities. It was also required that "in high headquarters, especially the General Staff, all 'paper' documents should be registered in the registry, with copies kept, especially those with confidential content and lasting value, for the purpose of writing history, with a reminder that what is not recorded might as well not have happened."[833]

[833] Memory of General R. Hamović, May 1985, in Belgrade.

Field Marshal Alexander kept his word from the meeting in Belgrade: he immediately reported from Caserta what he could provide, while seeking approval from London for the rest, with a recommendation "that the Yugoslavs should certainly be supported." Holding to his commitments, he gave as much as he could from his reserves to the 4th Army, aware of the importance of its operations on the coastal flank. In April, he congratulated the Supreme Commander of the Yugoslav Army on the victories in the Sarajevo and Lika-Primorje operations, and Arso believed in the military word and officer's honour of this victor in the operations of the British Crown's army, from India, through the Middle East and North Africa, to the Apennines. He would continue to believe in him until the "post-war" period, when they clashed over Trieste and the Field Marshal failed the military and human test, which, according to Arso, a professional soldier, especially an allied supreme commander, should not have endured. Only then would he realize that the great Field Marshal was just a servant of politics, given that much of what was "agreed in February regarding Istria, the Slovenian Littoral, Trieste and beyond the Soča" had, by May, turned out completely differently than what had been determined in Belgrade. He spoke publicly that such a renowned soldier should not have allowed this, judging by the change in the British stance based on the Field Marshal's actions, without knowing about the orders he received from politics before and immediately after the brilliant impression he left in Belgrade, in seemingly very sincere conversations. For example, Prime Minister Churchill wrote to his Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, on March 11, under the note "private — strictly confidential":

"1. I believe that from now on we must be inclined to support Italy against Tito. We can leave Tito to stew in his mountains in the bitter Balkan sauce. But the fact that we have been at all inclined to support Italy's demands regarding the top of the Adriatic will give us the opportunity to influence Italian domestic policy against the communists and savages who could help the collapse of the Italian state. My inclination towards Yugoslavia, which as a state must rely on the Tito-Šubašić agreement, etc., has faded. On the other hand, I hope we can still save Italy from the Bolshevik plague."[834]

The old political fox thus recklessly exposed himself before history: he called Stalin a "great friend" and Tito a "friend" as long as their struggle served the interests of Great Britain, but when victory was within reach, he showed that he had always regarded both as part of the "Bolshevik plague," from which, as V. Velebit writes, "Europe — and even the former fascist enemy, Italy — had to be saved. How much truth was contained in the Allied proclamations of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states, when Churchill expected that, in return for the effort to have Trieste belong to Italy, he would gain influence over Italian domestic politics against the communists?"[835] To make matters worse, Churchill and his successor at 10 Downing Street, Clement Attlee, would succeed in persuading the new U.S. President, Harry Truman, to support such a policy.

The day after Churchill's letter, A. Eden presented four possible solutions for the

[834] *Collection Tito-Churchill, Strictly Secret,* p. 492.

[835] V. Velebit, *op. cit.*, p. 361.

fate of the area from the Rječina to the Soča River to the War Cabinet, with special plans, expressing his own preference for imposing an Anglo-American military administration over the entire area. That the Allied Supreme Commander in the Mediterranean, Field Marshal Alexander, shared this stance is evident from his letter, written just two days after returning from his mission in Belgrade, to the Combined Staff. Based on certain reports, he stated that "there is considerable evidence showing that the Slovenians intend to expand their control as much as possible into northern Italy to create a sufficient reason for annexing the maximum territory in northeastern Italy to the federal Yugoslavia." He emphasized that the influence of the NOV east of the Soča River was "preponderant," and that "great efforts are being made to expand this influence westward, at least to the Tagliamento River." He suggested that "to act well out of necessity," the provisional Yugoslav government should be invited, once formed, "to participate as an ally in the Allied military administration of the Julian March," meaning that he already had a plan in place for establishing such an administration and had visited and left Belgrade, though he did not reveal this. Minister H. Macmillan the next day "interpreted" Field Marshal Alexander's statement to the Foreign Office, saying that he feared the Field Marshal's statement "was not entirely clear," and as his first impression from a conversation with him, he noted that "Marshal Tito is trying to secure Pula and Rijeka at all costs, and possibly Trieste, when the final settlement is reached. But he might be satisfied with the border across the Soča, although he is seeking territories west of it." On March 23, a senior official from the British War Cabinet, O. Sargent, reminded the Foreign Office that "Tito has informed Field Marshal Alexander that he hopes to make 200,000 soldiers available to the Allies to fight on the external sides of Yugoslavia's borders. He suggested that this force be used: 1) to fight against the Germans in the mountains of Austria and 2) after the defeat of Germany, to occupy part of Austria. To equip this army, Tito would need 200,000 uniforms and 10,000 trucks." In relation to this, the named official also reminded how Minister A. Eden, at the Crimean Conference, had handed over to his colleagues E. Stettinius and V. Molotov "a document drawing attention to the danger of Yugoslav incursions into Austria and suggesting that the three powers agree to 'freeze the pre-war borders between Austria and Yugoslavia and jointly demand that Tito's forces respect them.'"[836] This is only part of Churchill's games regarding Istria, the Julian March and Carinthia from March 1945,[837] and I mention them because, as part of the overall policy, they would confuse soldier Arso Jovanović and hinder his sincere and decisive, professional and human efforts to return every inch of Yugoslav territory, roughly torn away under the secret London Agreement (1915) and handed over to Italy in Rapallo (1920) as the price for its switch to the Allied camp, back to Yugoslavia.

This was a matter of "high politics" playing out in offices and at conferences in global centres of power, while Arso — even in March 1945 — was dealing with its echoes and consequences, tackling problems that rolled through the heart of the Balkans, withholding what had been promised and further complicating an already difficult life. Hence, his contacts with the heads of Allied military missions — including numerous unpleasant conversations — became increasingly frequent. Requests, proposals, letters of thanks and complaints poured in from unit headquarters and institutions of the National Liberation Movement. As the war drew to a close, complaints grew more frequent. For example, on March 7, the Adriatic Commission in Split reported that a shipment of five wagons of gasoline was missing 4,500 litres and — as usual — the fuel was found to contain a considerable amount of water. That same day, a radiogram from Gorski Kotar reported that the Allies had heavily bombed the railway station at Srpske Moravice, which had been under the control of the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia since Italy's capitulation. From Šibenik came a complaint that the long-promised hospital with 600 beds had still not arrived. One can only imagine how unpleasant the conversation must have been between the Chief of the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army and the head of the British Military Mission, RAF Vice-Marshal A. Leigh.

The final wartime April on the Yugoslav front was marked by the intensive preparations of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Armies for a strategic offensive on the Srem-Slavonia and Posavina axis, aimed at the final liberation of the country. In its offensive plans, the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army anticipated facing an enemy force of seven German army corps (about 450,000 soldiers), supported by more than 230,000 collaborators — a total of over 700,000 troops.

According to the final operational plan for the complete liberation of the country, the Yugoslav Army had two main objectives: first — to encircle, force the capitulation of, and destroy the bulk of the occupier's forces and their collaborators still present on the Yugoslav front; second — to liberate all parts of Yugoslavia, including those unjustly taken from it after the end of the First World War, especially Trieste, the Slovene Littoral and Carinthia.

The General Staff's primary operational-strategic concept was to deliver the main strike along the Belgrade-Zagreb-Ljubljana-Villach axis. Through bold manoeuvres and rapid advances by the flanking armies, combined with frontal pressure, the goal was to reach the Soča Valley and Carinthia, thereby forcing the bulk of enemy forces into a hopeless position. The 4th Army was assigned the role of the left flank, while the 1st and 3rd Armies formed the right, with the 2nd Army — to be reinforced during the march — advancing frontally.[838]

The essence — on the left wing, to strike towards the Soča River and the upper course of the Drava, and on the right towards Carinthia, then firmly close the encirclement around the enemy in the Julian Alps and the Karavanke Mountains and force their capitulation, tightening the "clamps" somewhere near Klagenfurt — was timely "translated" by the General Staff into two main documents: the Directive for the Final

[836] In terms of timing, this coincides with the approval from the Kremlin for Yugoslavia's request to participate in the occupation of part of Austria.

[837] Original documents on this in the *Collection Tito-Churchill, Strictly Secret,* 488-500.

[838] For more detail: *Collection of Final Operations for the Liberation of Yugoslavia*, with contributions by Admiral Branko Mamula and General R. Hamović.

Destruction of the Enemy[839] and the Order for the Breakthrough of the Srem Front.[840] Both documents were completed on April 9 and, via "couriers by plane," delivered to the army commanders by 8:00 p.m., with the absence of the Supreme Commander being addressed by his representative, Lieutenant General A. Ranković.[841] The Directive began with the assessment that the enemy intended "to gather as many of his forces as possible in the area of the Croatian Littoral, Istria and Slovenia, and establish a new, narrower and stronger front, with support from his forces in Austria." Tasks were assigned to each army, operational directions determined, coordination with neighbouring forces on land objectives and targets established, and supply methods outlined. Essentially, the 3rd Army would advance towards Varaždin, the 1st towards Zagreb, the 2nd towards Banja Luka and the 4th towards Rijeka. The core idea was to first outmanoeuvre and destroy the enemy forces in Srem, which was "the most prominent and audacious bastion of fascism," and this was connected to the primary and initial tasks of the 3rd and 2nd Armies — to cooperate with the 1st Army (around 111,000 soldiers) if necessary, and certainly protect its flanks during the breakthrough. The Directive arrived when some units were already deep into the offensive: the 4th Army towards Rijeka, two operational groups of the 1st Army engaged with the Sava and Bosut areas, and the 2nd Army (58,000) and the Assault Corps Group (70,000) in the Bosnia Valley, which would soon unite under General K. Popović's command and continue the advance through Posavina towards Brod, simultaneously assuming the role of the mobile strategic reserve for the Supreme Command. The 3rd Army (50,000) began its offensive on April 11 at 11:00 p.m. by crossing the Drava, and, if needed, would assist the 1st Army by advancing on its right flank. This way, it would participate in encircling and breaking the enemy forces in the Vinkovci area, but if this was not necessary, it would continue advancing through Podravina, cooperating with the Bulgarian army units on the left side of the Drava. Tasks were assigned to all units, particularly those operating behind enemy lines, which were initially commanded by the main staff: the Croatian 4th and 10th Corps, the Slovenian 7th and 9th Corps, and the 4th Operational Zone (Styria). Behind enemy lines, 36 partisan units were engaged. In Serbia, six Yugoslav Army divisions were stationed — three under the command of the Main Staff of Serbia and the Operational Staff for Kosovo and Metohija, with two divisions of the Albanian National Liberation Army cooperating with them in destroying the Ballist forces.

All these forces were commanded by the Supreme Commander through the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army, which, under the leadership of General Jovanović, planned, directed and consolidated operations from the Adriatic to the Drava in a timely, professional, modern and responsible manner, according to general acknowledgment.

This is the time when the Spring Strategic Offensive — the entire month after the two fronts of the Red Army in Hungary — began for the 15th Army Group of the Western Allies in Italy. The Russian "steamroller" in Hungary began its offensive on March 16, without informing the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army, as part of an armed force consisting of nine fronts, or 6 million soldiers, pushing westward, and on April 13, after a violent breakthrough at the Austrian border, liberated Vienna. The Allied forces in Italy (1.5 million soldiers, commanded by General Mark Clarke) began their offensive on April 9, after months of hesitation in front of the "Gothic Line," also failing to provide the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army with any data on their offensive or the strength of the enemy, as per the agreement with Field Marshal Alexander in Belgrade. They particularly hid the fact that, for months, they had been negotiating with the headquarters of Army Group "C" (around 600,000 soldiers, commanded by Field Marshal Albert Kesselring) on the unconditional surrender of the German forces in front of them, which would be signed on April 29, with the agreement taking effect on May 2. By that time, the Soviet Union, the United States and Great Britain had 28 million soldiers under arms, along with an additional ten million members of national liberation armies and resistance movements. The Yugoslav Army, officially around 800,000 fighters, was the fourth armed force in the Anti-Fascist Coalition, the only one holding a crucial strategic front on which the western Allies' flanks on the opposite side of the Adriatic and the Soviet troops in Hungary could reliably depend. The Germans and Japanese, on the other hand, had 13 million soldiers, or three times fewer than the Anti-Fascist Coalition, but Hitler still hoped for a deep and imminent rift between the Western Allies and the Soviets, on which he built not only great hope but also the belief that the Germans could avoid total defeat at the last moment by signing a separate peace.

Historically, April 12, 1945

The Supreme Commander of the Yugoslav Army was in Moscow when the strategic offensive began, having arrived on April 5. From there, in an extraordinary report for April 6, he informed the Yugoslav public that Sarajevo had been liberated and praised the units that had accomplished the task, which he would repeat on April 14, announcing that the Yugoslav Army troops, "after three days of fierce fighting," had broken through the Srem front and crossed the Drava, liberated Vinkovci, Osijek, Vukovar and Županja, and were "continuing to pursue the defeated enemy" along a wide front through the Sava and Drava valleys towards the west.[842] The General Staff maintained "constant radio communication" with him, and he was continuously "in the situation" while in Moscow. This was made even more complex because the Western Allies were once again encroaching on the integrity of the country and complicating the work of several headquarters, particularly the 4th Army, where the head of the British military

[839] AVII, file 21, reg. no. 27-1/1.

[840] *Ibid.,* file 21, reg. no. 48-1/1.

[841] Tito, leading a large delegation that included the new head of the Military Mission in Moscow, General R. Primorac, travelled on an official visit to the USSR (April 5-20), where he would sign the Agreement on Friendship, Mutual Assistance, and Post-War Cooperation between the USSR and the DFY.

[842] J. Broz, *Collected Works*, Vol. 27, p. 51.

mission (16 officers), Lieutenant Colonel J. Clarke, had arrived. Clarke was well-versed in Churchill's concept regarding the fate of Istria, the Slovenian Littoral and Trieste, and was actively working towards its realization. As part of this, Field Marshal Alexander announced a radical restriction on the supply of the 4th Army, which General A. Ranković informed Tito about in Moscow on April 10, starting with the good news — that the 4th Army "had reached the sea northwest of Senj," the 2nd Army was at the railway line near Doboj, and the 1st Army had liberated Orašje and crossed the Sava near Brčko; an "overall decisive attack to liquidate the Srem front" was ordered. Everything would have been fine if not for one hard "but" — the English had withheld the promised amounts of food. In this regard, Ranković reported:

"a) Starting from April 1 of this year, the English have reduced the supply to the 4th Army by 1,500 tons per month, which they had previously been sending in accordance with your agreement with Marshal Alexander.

"b) For the months of April, May and June of this year, they will send 1,960 tons of food per month for our entire army and navy.

"c) As immediate assistance, Marshal Alexander will send 500 tons of food to our 4th Army, and this is only for April. This is the definitive decision from the English, and it was officially communicated to General Terzić today by the British military mission.

"From now on, the monthly amount of 1,960 tons of food that we will receive from the English for the entire army can barely cover the monthly needs of the 4th Army, while we will have to supply all other units in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Dalmatia, as well as the Navy, from our own sources, which are very scarce, and it is difficult to transport food due to the lack of transport means.

"3. We believe that the situation regarding the supply of food for our army in the northern Adriatic could be significantly improved if we could receive a shipment of 10,000 tons of food from the Soviet government, which should be delivered by sea to our ports in the Croatian Littoral."[843]

The document, rather untidily typed, was lightly edited by Arso with his green ink, and with several corrections, he likely handed it over to the radio-telegraph operators due to urgency and without Ranković's signature.

Four days later, Ranković reported again to Tito, starting with good news about deep advances on all fronts, but also mentioning that the troops on the Srem-Slavonian axis had run out of ammunition. He reported that they had requested ammunition from Tolbukhin, whose forces had already liberated Vienna, but he had not responded, so the only hope remained with Comrade Stalin — to send at least three combat loads of ammunition.

On April 18, Prime Minister W. Churchill questioned the supply to the entire Yugoslav Army. He informed his ambassador in Washington, Lord Halifax, that he completely agreed with the statement "to stop any assistance to Tito under the best excuse that could be found," and the essence was "to tear apart Tito's demands in

[843] *Collection of NOP Documents*, Vol. II, Book 15.

Italy and, as much as possible, prevent Russian penetration into central and western Europe."[844] Since the breakout on the "Ingrid" line, when the strategic goal of the 4th Army was clear — seizing Trieste — there had also been a complete halt in air support, which had previously been very helpful. Two squadrons of the Yugoslav Air Force from the 281st wing of the RAF, without their fault, ceased supporting their comrades ten days before the end of the war, despite having started their operations in August 1944 and completed 1,444 combat flights since then.

Regarding the final offensive for the liberation of the country, the General Staff



At the reception for Marshal Tito upon his return from the USSR.

of the Yugoslav Army tried to coordinate air support with the Allies. Through Air Vice Marshal A. Lee, Arso established contact with General A. Eaker, who assigned the task to his Air Force staff in the Mediterranean. Thus, Major G.H. Hayes, in a detailed memorandum dated April 11, delivered to General Jovanović, suggested that heavy and medium bombers, operating from airfields in Italy, be used to bomb transportation infrastructure in the non-liberated territories, primarily in Slovenia and Istria. Following the instructions from the Chief of the General Staff, General Terzić responded the next day: such bombing at this stage could only be effective if it targeted the most sensitive transportation facilities with the highest possible precision. Otherwise, the proposed bombing of railway junctions and other facilities "due to the disrupted land network will not yield decisive results nor disrupt enemy transportation on this part of the front." Under point 3, it was written: "We must be extremely cautious about protecting our population and cities, which are usually the victims of strategic bombing. At least, that has been the case so far." It was then allowed that

[844] *Collection Tito-Churchill, Strictly Secret,* p. 502.

"only medium bombers, from low altitudes, attack the most sensitive targets: Radovljica — railway bridge on the Ljubljana-Trbovlje line; Dravograd — railway bridge on the Drava; Borovnica — viaduct on the Trieste-Ljubljana line; Zaprešić — railway bridge on the Zagreb-Ljubljana line." It was reiterated: "Bombing of other locations and objects you mentioned in your proposal of April 11 cannot be allowed under any circumstances."[845]

This was the time when Soviet, British and independent American military missions traditionally had a developed network of missions in army and corps headquarters. At that time, there were more than one hundred Americans in the commands and headquarters of the Yugoslav Army, as many as there were Brits, and the Soviets, excluding about 270 instructors, numbered around 80 in the headquarters from division to General Staff — except for the 4th Army Staff, where the first Soviet officer arrived on April 28 and remained the only one until the end of the war. He was Colonel P.V. Rak, who had previously been the head of the Soviet military mission at the General Staff of the Croatian Army.

To Trieste and Freedom *(April 12-May 9, 1945)*

At the end of April, the armies were positioned as follows: the 3rd Army was located at the Drava-Bilogora positions; the 1st Army was at Ilova; the 2nd Army was at the approaches to Karlovac; and the 4th Army was stationed in front of the "Ingrid" line between Snežnik and Rijeka — isolated on a special coastal route, forward and quite isolated, and deprived of Allied supply and cooperation from the sea and the air. The army headquarters received orders and directives from the General Staff, signed by the deputy supreme commander, A. Ranković, but Arso believed that no matter how good the directives were, they could not replace the direct presence of delegates from the institution he led. For this reason, he sent his closest collaborators to the front. In this regard, he agreed with Ranković that he would frequently visit the 4th Army Headquarters, which had the most important strategic task — liberating Trieste, while General Rade Hamović would more directly influence the work of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Army Headquarters, coordinating their actions. He visited General Drašin's Headquarters twice, for one or two days, until April 27, and from the next day onwards, he became continuously engaged with it. Meanwhile, his first assistant, V. Terzić, replaced him at the General Staff.

Even after about twenty days of the general offensive, the Chief of the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army still believed that the armies had received realistic and clearly formulated tasks, especially those of a longer-term nature. However, he firmly exercised his undisputed right to assign additional tasks to operational-strategic units during the offensive. At the same time, he respected the right of their headquarters to submit their proposals to the General Staff, without hesitation about potentially stepping into his own jurisdiction, and demanded that his collaborators not respond with

[845] AVII, file 17-A, reg. no. 6-1/8.

vanity, selfishness or reprimands in such cases. For example, with "Directive No. 8" of April 8, signed by Ranković, the 4th Army Headquarters was tasked with — within the coordination of the entire Yugoslav Army's actions — "leaving smaller forces on the main axis towards Rijeka and Trieste, while the main forces, in cooperation with the 4th Corps, should clear the area up to the Bosanski Novi-Karlovac line." The Chief of Operations of the 4th Army, Ante Biočić, recalls how, under the leadership of General P. Jakšić, they analysed the situation all night, and the next morning, on April 9, Commander Drašin reminded the General Staff of the army's task from the initial operational plan — to "advance towards Trieste, without worrying about the flanks," so that the army would reach the port city before the Allies. In connection with this, he suggested how to engage part of the 5th Corps and the entire 4th Corps so that the 4th Army could continue its advance with the least risk. He also mentioned information just received from his Intelligence Department, led by Colonel Petar Tomac — "that the Germans were advancing towards the Po River, and that in Istria, five to six thousand collaborators had gathered, mostly fugitives from Serbia, who, it seems, had made contact with 40 British officers dropped by parachute in that area," and there were also remnants of Ljotić's military formations under the command of General Kosta Mušićki.

General Drašin undoubtedly "delved deeply" into the General Staff's decision-making domain, but Arso acknowledged that the commander was pointing out new developments and proposing new solutions, so his task remained unchanged, while the problem of liberating the Una Valley and Karlovac — and thus securing the sensitive right flank of the 4th Army — would be solved by forming the Una and Karlovac Operational Groups, each consisting of four divisions from the 2nd Army, commanded by Generals Lj. Vučković and R. Vukanović. General Drašin was already ordered on April 10 to "immediately continue the vigorous advance on the Rijeka-Trieste axis."[846]

In the meantime, the Chief of the General Staff had visited the 4th Army Headquarters twice to personally assess the situation alongside General Drašin and his collaborators. During the final days of the offensive, he remained with them continuously, keeping them from himself, his powers and authority, respecting their initiative and autonomy in decision-making. From there, he frequently pointed out possible developments and outcomes on the front and the flanks, organized cooperation with the main headquarters of Croatia and Slovenia, inviting their leading figures to discuss matters at the Army Headquarters. Personally, using his authority, he gradually strengthened the army with two divisions from the 4th Corps and the 29th Herzegovinian Division. These divisions, operating in parallel with the army, would secure its right flank as it advanced along the coastal strip, which was set as a top-priority task for the 7th Corps. The 9th Corps was tasked with reinforcing operations deep in the enemy's rear, gradually directing them towards Trieste and the Soča.

Before the final push to the front of the 4th Army, on April 27, Arso, together

[846] *Collection of Final Operations for the Liberation of Yugoslavia*, p. 358.

with his assistant M. Apostolski, analysed the draft for the post-war organization of the Yugoslav Army, which was being developed by the Operations and Education Departments. They established the foundations: to envisage 30 divisions of 8,000 men each, with 20 mountain divisions and 10 field divisions, to engage 42,000 officers of all specialties and ranks, including 11,000 political leaders. The entire country would be "covered" by six armies and six military districts with 28 area commands.

He held a meeting with the General Staff Commission for the development of the Law on the National Defence of Yugoslavia, which worked with: Major Generals Srećko Manola and Bogdan Oreščanin, and General Staff Colonel Vekoslav Kolb.[847] They agreed on the approach and dynamics for the project.

Arso also wrote to Ranković and submitted a telegram requesting the Main Staff of Croatia to provide two selected commanders and commissars "for the leadership of military districts in the occupied territory of Austria," as well as four more commanders and commissars for senior positions in the military areas. The list of selected candidates was expected to arrive in Belgrade on April 29, with the people soon to follow, having been pre-emptively included in special training for service in the occupied territory, which the Yugoslav Army had no experience in — this was organized by Soviet instructors.

On the evening of April 27, a telegram from the General Staff was sent to the Main Staff of Croatia and the Zemunik Airport command, announcing that General Jovanović would arrive by plane at 9:00 a.m. on April 28, and a vehicle would be waiting to transfer him to Gospić. The next day, around noon, the General Staff received a telegram confirming that the Chief had arrived on schedule, and he reported in the evening from the 4th Army Headquarters in Crikvenica, respecting his own request that the General Staff should always know where his representatives were.

In the directive of the General Staff, which he brought to the 4th Army Headquarters in Crikvenica on his way from Belgrade, it was noted, among other things, that the northern group should immediately be formed with three divisions, "and advance relentlessly along the Lož-Trieste route"; the southern group, also consisting of three divisions, should directly and energetically attack Rijeka, and if resistance was "too strong and the fighting became tense," then they should advance energetically along the general route towards Trieste, leaving one division behind to block the port city. It was also ordered that three divisions, under the command of the 9th Corps Headquarters, should "immediately begin preliminary operations for Trieste."[848] It happened that the front at Klana, at the beginning of the main breakthrough towards Trieste, could not be broken, despite all efforts. The Chiefs of the Operations and Intelligence Departments[849] reported that "at least 10,000 soldiers" were defending there. Arso

[847] He arrived from the German camp, where he had held himself courageously and patriotically, refusing to return to Slovenia on the condition of loyalty to the occupying regime; he remained in solidarity with Serbian officers in "Oflag" in Osnabruck.

[848] AVII, file 316, reg. no. 5-20/2.

[849] General Staff Colonel Petar Tomac, military attaché in Turkey; during the April War, Chief of Staff of the Vardar Division, in the NDH as part of the Domobrani and collaborator with the NOP, in

could not accept this during the discussion about the situation in front of the army's front, reasoning aloud — "if there were that many, they wouldn't have stopped until reaching Gospić." At that moment, he was deprived of the information that, by firm agreement with Field Marshal Alexander, the Allies owed him, and that the 9th Corps Headquarters, as part of the official duty, had information about the capitulation agreement between the German forces in Italy and the significant reinforcement of their flank along the 4th Army's breakthrough route, which had the task of decisively defending Rijeka and its hinterland, especially the communication lines to Trieste and Ljubljana, so the Allies could be the first to break into the northwestern area of the Yugoslav front and Group Army "E" would surrender, much like Group "C." He did not, especially, have the information that, ahead of the army's front, the entire 97th Corps, previously in the strategic reserve of Group Army "C" (Italy), had been moved to the Rijeka route from the broader Soča area. When this was discovered, Arso, "on the move," modified the plan for the rapid breakthrough of the armies towards Trieste. The decision was communicated to Commander Drašin from the headquarters at the "forward observation post" in front of the "bloody Klana."

Not by chance, the 4th Army Headquarters had prepared and ready units, so General Drašin, upon receiving the directive from the Chief of the General Staff, ordered that the 20th Division be reinforced with one brigade, two tank battalions (35 tanks), two artillery battalions, two engineer companies, etc. This formed a "complete and strong operational unit" of around 18,000 fighters, completely self-sufficient in terms of all combat needs, "on wheels," equipped with 50 radio stations, and thus prepared for rapid penetration and bold manoeuvre. The commander of this operational group, Lieutenant Colonel Bogdan Pecotić, was given the task on April 28 at 11:00 p.m. and, at dawn, was sent towards Trieste.[850] Upon returning from the position to the Headquarters in Crikvenica, he deeply sighed in front of Arso: "May God help it!" He was thinking of the 20th Division, for whose fate and success they shared responsibility.

In connection with this bold initiative by the Chief of the General Staff, as the second echelon of the Northern Group, the 29th Herzegovinian Division (commanded by Vlado Šegrt) was sent to the 20th Dalmatian Division, while to the south, through the central part of Istria, the 9th Division (7,500 fighters, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Ljubo Truta) was sent, with the 43rd Istrian and 30th Slovenian Divisions (around 1,000 fighters) positioned ahead. All were tasked with initiating decisive battles for Trieste as soon as they reached their objectives, and at the latest on the night of April 29, when the 9th Slovenian Corps units, previously engaged in preliminary battles, would orient themselves towards Tržič, Gorizia and the Soča.

In maintaining radio communication with these units, strict restrictions were imposed to preserve the secrecy of the task, and these were even stricter as the combat group (the main force of the 20th Division) had more than 50 radio stations. The fear

the NOP from the Italian surrender; during the "Trieste Crisis," Chief of the Intelligence Department of the 4th Army.

[850] *Collection of Final Operations for the Liberation of Yugoslavia*, contribution by Admiral B. Pecotić, p. 413.

that the Germans might decode the telegrams proved correct: all telegrams from the "Alpine Fortress" (Austria) were decoded, but with a 24-hour delay, which, in the fast-changing situation, did not significantly affect command operations. Since, as a measure of mandatory secrecy protection, officers for liaison were sent, they could not assist in this situation either. Thus, the communication with the divisions rushing towards Trieste on April 29 was extremely poor, and no further help could be provided, especially since the Allies had cut off air support. The report from these divisions in Trieste was eagerly awaited. Here lies the explanation for General Pavle Jakšić's observation of Arso's "certain nervousness," as he felt personal responsibility for the lives of thousands of people, for the outcome of the battles for Trieste, which had to be urgently captured and the Allies brought to a fait accompli. He knew, as did Commander Drašin: if the army's units entered Trieste before the Allies and reached the Soča, everything they had done would be highly praised; if not, everyone would have the right to criticism. Arso also remarked that what others had captured would not be given, but what was captured should not be surrendered.

The reinforced 20th Division, tasked with reaching Trieste, located about 30 kilometres away, advanced under conditions where the port city was defended by about 15,000 German soldiers, while the front-line Western Allies were located on the Adige River, 200-250 km away, advancing with motorized forces, without any resistance from the Germans, and with the help of at least 80,000 partisans from that part of northern Italy. This deep breakthrough surprised both the Germans and — what was particularly significant here — the 20 Allied officers under the command of Lieutenant Colonel John Clarke, so both the Germans and the Allies, completely caught off guard, had no response to this bold challenge. The commander of the division, B. Pecotić, was also surprised, having suddenly broken through over the Mašuna Mountain, finding himself behind the Klana defence, ready to participate in its liquidation. As he recalled five decades later, he received the task to "immediately redirect his and the attached units towards Trieste and liberate it as soon as possible." The task seemed pointless to him and all the officers "at that moment, because we believed that we could quickly deal with the enemy in the Rijeka area and then continue across Istria, towards Trieste and the Soča. Fortunately, it turned out we were wrong. Here, we would have certainly wasted time, which the Anglo-Americans needed to capture Trieste and a larger part of Istria and the Slovenian Littoral before us."[851] The divisions' headquarters, like the 4th Army Headquarters, had been working with elements from the initial operational plan until April 28 — expecting to reach Trieste by May 15 (some divisional commanders even mentioned May 30), as the pace of the Allies' advance through northern Italy was used as a reference.[852] Now the situation — after the complete cessation of fighting in that area — had changed fundamentally, and political reasons dictated the decision of the Chief of the General Staff and the order from the 4th Army commander, constantly urged by Kardelj and Dr. Ribar from Crikvenica, as well as by Arso from Belgrade,

[851] *Ibid.,* p. 414.

[852] *Ibid.,* contribution by General Ilija Radaković, p. 361.

where a new radiogram arrived while the 20th and 9th Divisions were rushing towards Trieste: "The English are already in Padua, tomorrow they will likely be in Venice, and in two to three days, they can be in Trieste. Mostly advancing without resistance. Therefore, you can assess the speed that is being imposed on the 4th Army. The main task is to begin the fight for Trieste immediately. The 9th Corps units and the 43rd Division should immediately march into Trieste and begin street fighting."[853] Before issuing further orders, Arso assessed that Group Army "C," with its 600,000 Germans, had laid down their arms, so the Allies, with their strong motorized forces, could advance "through northern Italy as if through butter," but with their usual marching speed and, especially, uninformed about the bold manoeuvre of the 4th Army with the 20th and 9th Divisions, they would not be able to reach Trieste before its liberation. He also considered the estimate that the Germans in the city, supported by pro-fascist and nationalist forces, would put up strong resistance.

By the night of April 29, both combat columns of the 4th Army had already reached Trieste, and on April 30, they launched an attack on the city's defence, which was spread across 30 resistance points and completely surprised. The toughest positions were in the suburbs of Opčina and Bazovica, with the first being liberated after three days of fierce fighting, in which the 10th Herzegovinian Brigade, more numerous than two Slovenian divisions combined, also participated.

The heaviest fighting for the liberation of Trieste occurred on the last day of April, with strong resistance fighters from the heart of the city aiding the attackers — around 15,000 fighters, or 15 battalions, under unified command. The battles continued in the following days and nights, and here is the first official report from Trieste, arriving in Belgrade at the dawn of May 1:

"On April 30, the assault group of the 4th Army continued intense street fighting in the city of Trieste, cutting off all enemy routes and advancing 20 km west of Trieste. During the battles in Trieste, around 100 guns and a vast amount of war material were captured. The enemy suffered heavy losses in combat strength, and a large number of officers and soldiers were taken prisoner. Fighting continues for the destruction of the enemy group in the Rijeka sector. In Istria, the city of Buzet was liberated. Battles for Pula and Rovinj are ongoing. Arso." The report was read from the ceremonial podium before the May Day parade in Terazije and "caused a storm of enthusiasm among the assembled troops and the jubilant citizens."[854]

Such a telegram, as a report from the front near Trieste, was rightly written and signed by Arso, especially since it praised the very agile units of the 4th Army and its headquarters, led by General Drašin and Colonel Šiljegović, never for a moment claiming any of the success or credit for himself. However, he had his own merits in the successful outcome of the "March on Trieste," even if the ideas and practices, as usual, were entirely attributed to Tito. The truth is that in wartime, all victories are attributed to the commander, but here there was no reason to ignore several important moments,

[853] AVII, file 316, reg. no. 5-21/2.

[854] *Borba* newspaper, May 2, 1945.



May Day celebration in Treiste.

two of which are highlighted. First, on April 14, when Tito was in Moscow, General Jovanović wrote, and A. Ranković signed an order to the main headquarters of Croatia and Slovenia to secure the right flank of the 4th Army, whose task was "to immediately continue westward towards Istria and Trieste," and General Drašin was warned in the directive that "it is of utmost importance and significance that we appear in Trieste as soon as possible, so when advancing on the given route, do not get bogged down too much with the enemy's side strongholds and smaller garrisons, which should be isolated with smaller forces, and with the main force, boldly and energetically hurry towards Trieste."[855] The second moment, on the morning of April 20, when Tito was in Kiev, the Chief of the General Staff informed the 4th Army Headquarters that the 29th Herzegovinian Division was placed under their command. He ordered the 9th Corps Headquarters to "orient itself southward to Trieste and direct its mobile units to the Trieste area so that they could attack the city as soon as possible," which was also instructed to General Drašin, so they "could enter the city at any moment."

Here is the first image from Trieste, as remembered by Commander Bogdan Pecotić: "May 1 in Trieste was marked in the most unusual way. Amid fierce gunfire in all directions and grim wartime scenes, enthusiastic crowds were seen singing, shouting slogans, dancing or groups of civilians from the City Command with red stars on their

[855] AVII, file 46, reg. no. 3-5/1.

caps, escorting prisoners they had captured themselves. It was sweltering in Trieste that day, like a cauldron. Various banners and flags could be seen: red with the sickle and hammer, Yugoslav, with and without the red star, Slovenian, with and without the red star, Italian, Triestine, and even British, American and Soviet.

"By the end of the day, it was mostly resolved. By evening, the enemy's resistance had diminished, except for a few isolated strongholds."[856]

The morning report on May 2 read: "Trieste captured; the 9th Corps units liberated Gorizia and Tržič and reached the Soča; the German 97th Corps is holding its last hours in Rijeka, before retreating into a deadlock..."

In the early afternoon of that day, the Allies crossed the Soča, rushing towards Trieste "with not-so-clear Allied intentions." It was the 2nd New Zealand Division, whose intelligence chief, Major Cox, would write in 1947: "The Yugoslav 4th Army arrived at the outskirts of Trieste on the night of April 29-30, the same night we reached the Piave River towards Venice." The New Zealanders crossed the swollen Soča much more easily and quickly because the 9th Corps commander — how E. Kardelj testified in 1951, before a group of historians — had refused to destroy the bridges across the river, reasoning: "Why destroy them today when we'll be building them tomorrow?" He had been sent to the Soča to slow, even stop, the potential breakthrough of British forces. Thus, the New Zealanders, acting as the vanguard of the Allied group, broke into the liberated Trieste on May 2, without making the encounter particularly amicable. Just a few days later, the complete British 13th Corps appeared in the Trieste-Tržič-Gorizia area: with its headquarters in the Tržič region, surrounded by two divisions, one American and one New Zealand division in Trieste, while the 2nd Polish Corps under General Wladyslaw Anders' command was deployed west of the Soča — serving as a reserve for actions towards Trieste or Postojna. In this area, Allied forces provoked incidents that, in this extremely tense situation, could have led to armed actions against the Yugoslav Army, whose 4th Army had also occupied the Trieste-Gorizia-Tržič area, with Trieste held by two divisions and the Soča-Gorizia border by one division.

Miserable and long negotiations began about the future of this part of the country, which the National Democratic Federation of Yugoslavia (DFY) would conduct, led by the Chief of the General Staff, persistently and wisely, with General Drašin and his collaborators maintaining control of the 16 divisions. These "over 110,000 fighters" — angry because, by the unilateral decision of the British, they had been left without air support even before Rijeka, and already from April 20, deprived of the firmly promised material aid, especially food — kept their finger on the trigger, facing their former Allies. As for the air support, there had been none during the entire final offensive of the 4th Army, even though both squadrons of the Yugoslav Air Force in the RAF had been ready, and the Allies at airfields south of the Po River had over 5,000 aircraft, with only 60 German aircraft, which posed no significant threat.[857] The food supply issue was solved when the Chief of the General Staff, with the Supreme Commander and

[856] *Collection of Final Operations for the Liberation of Yugoslavia*, p. 418.

[857] *Ibid.*, pp. 347-348.

Rear Command, arranged for 20 wagons of food to be flown every day from Zemun to Zemunik, which became the responsibility of the Main Staff of Croatia — to be distributed to the army and divisional bases.[858] Thus, the 4th Army's crisis was avoided, as it had been left with only a three-day food reserve, "while having 60,000 German prisoners on hand."

The balance of power with the former Allies in the liberated city of Trieste, where General Arso Jovanović had immediately arrived, became dangerously complicated. The Allies attempted, in the most brutal manner, to capitalize on the accomplishments of the Yugoslav Army units — not only to claim trophies and seize the 12,000 German prisoners, but also to push the Yugoslav forces out of Trieste, which the commanders firmly rejected, sometimes even drawing pistols. The surrender of 3,011 German soldiers and 300 wounded in the Opčina stronghold on the evening of May 3 was followed by the Chief of the General Staff, who realized that the Slovenian units, through their positions on the Soča, had missed the main force of the Chetniks, who, along with their leaders and most of the Italian fascist army, had surrendered to the Allies. From Opčina, the 10th Herzegovinian Brigade, by Arso's selection, was urgently sent to Ilirska Bistrica to participate in the operation to dismantle the 97th Corps, while the main force of the 29th Herzegovinian Division, along with the 7th Corps, was directed towards Ljubljana, to liberate it on Victory Day, May 9.

On the third day in Bazovica, the Chief of the General Staff gave the 4th Army Headquarters an additional task — to form a Motorized Detachment, consisting of around 5,000 selected and first-class equipped officers and fighters, which would immediately head up the Soča Valley, over Vršič, towards Klagenfurt in Carinthia. With the Detachment — a composition of a brigade, a motorized division, a tank company and an engineering battalion — was also the 4th Army Commissar, Colonel Boško Šiljegović, a composed and wise man, a prudent and brave soldier. Alongside the unit were known heroes and experienced officers, including Simo Dubajić, Geća Bogdanović and Ivan Guvo. This move by Arso, as Dedijer carefully listened to the thoughts of the top leadership in Belgrade, was called an "heroic deed"[859] by General Pavle Jakšić, who, on the spot, acknowledged that it had "played an important role." He, however, believed that the new circumstances on the battlefield required new and bold decisions from the Supreme Command, decisions that involved personal risk and responsibility for potential failure, primarily for the fate of the people. Racing with the Allied columns on the narrow roads along the Soča, constantly exposed to the risk of being pushed off communication routes, the Detachment, fully supplied for five days of combat, rushed to reach Carinthia before the Allies to coordinate with the 14th Division and the other forces of the 4th Operational Zone in Styria. Arso, as remembered by Commissar B. Šiljegović, stated that the unit was too small to execute the strategic task, but that a larger unit would have been slower and less mobile, and here, speed of breakthrough and reaching a specific area were of paramount political and military

[858] *Ibid.,* contribution by Colonel Nikola Anić, p. 409.

[859] V. Dedijer in the foreword to General P. Jakšić's book, *Above the Memories*.

significance. The Allies were also rushing to — at Churchill's request and relying on collaborators — quickly break into Austria and "prevent the Red Army from penetrating Central Europe more than necessary." However, this was already too late — the Red Army had already liberated Vienna on April 13.

The German 97th Corps (88,000 soldiers), designated for special purposes in the Soča area, was tasked with decisively defending the positions at Rijeka-Snežnik, thus safeguarding the rear of Army Groups "C" and "E," while simultaneously preventing the Yugoslav Army's forces from penetrating into Istria and further. Faced with frontal pressure from three divisions, the 97th Corps, when it realized its dramatic situation, could no longer counter the manoeuvres of the three divisions advancing from the flanks towards Trieste. During the street battles for Trieste, it resisted the attacks along the Rijeka-Rječina line, trying to withdraw northward, where, according to his subordinate General A. Lohr, the commander promised him salvation from the 7th SS "Prinz Eugen" Division. However, he encountered a group of Yugoslav Army divisions, making it clear that he had lost the battle. The Yugoslav Army liberated Rijeka on May 3, and four days later, the 97th Corps was completely surrounded and forced into unconditional surrender in the wider area of Ilirska Bistrica. The commander of the Corps, L. Kubler, two generals, 40 senior officers and around 16,000 soldiers were captured.[860]

With the surrender of the remnants of the 97th Corps (May 7), combat operations on the 4th Army front came to an end. Over 49 days, it had conducted an offensive in the area from Lika to the Soča, covering a distance of around 360 km, destroying the 15th Mountain and 97th Army Corps, achieving an impressive pace of 6 km per day. The offensive began with nine divisions and 67,000 fighters, and ended with 16 divisions and 110,000 fighters, as well as 63,000 German prisoners, including the commander of the 97th Corps, while at the other end of the battlefield, his superior, General A. Lohr, was also captured.[861] These two prisoners would later provide statements in the investigative prison, which Arso reviewed in February 1946, seeing from them that the 4th Army had, by the end of April, faced over 90,000 soldiers, and that by "securing the Ingrid line," the 97th Corps, with its main forces at the Rječina and in Rijeka, had created a gap in the German lines, some 30 km deep, through which the strengthened 20th Division boldly broke through, and on April 30, entered the battle for Trieste. Meanwhile, the vanguard of the British units, the 2nd New Zealand Division, was at the Adige River. This allowed Arso to easily add another page to his publication, *Overview of the National Liberation War*.

Regarding the collapse of the 97th Corps, there was a misunderstanding and even a conflict between the Chief of the General Staff and the commander of the 26th Dalmatian Division, General-Army General Arso Jovanović and Major General Božo Božović. The issue arose when General Kubler, attempting to break through energetically over Ilirska Bistrica towards Ljubljana, ran into a decisive defence by the 26th

[860] *Collection of Final Operations for the Liberation of Yugoslavia*, contribution by General M. Šumonja, p. 378.

[861] He was sentenced to death for war crimes in Yugoslavia; executed in 1947.

Division. The units literally became entangled, with the Dalmatian soldiers, under the pressure of the battle for their survival, being forced to retreat. Generals Jovanović and Drašin, as P. Jakšić would later write in his memoirs, "misjudged that no more than 20,000 German soldiers were encircled, which later surrendered according to the list, and considered it a 'small group,' and that the 26th Division, with its 9,000 men — otherwise an extremely experienced and battle-tested force — was showing weakness, and its commander 'cowardice.'" This caused a fiery reaction from Božo Božović, and he pulled out his pistol on the Chief of the General Staff and the Army Commander.[862] When I asked him to comment on this account, published in 1990, in the presence of General Savo Drljević, General Božo Božović, known for his reticence, especially about his wartime actions, and already in poor health, murmured that the misunderstanding — "neither the first nor the last in the war" — had occurred; Pavle was a witness and had the right to write, although he said it would have been better if that moment had been skipped. However, since it hadn't been, he felt the need to clarify certain details for the reader, especially as Generals Jovanović and Drašin could no longer provide their version. The division, which had been in continuous fighting since the initial battles for Mostar at the beginning of February, had not had any respite from combat and had been worn down in the ten-day, day-and-night battles during the blockade of the 97th Corps, further weakened to reinforce other units. No one knew better than its commander how strong the division was in battle and how significant the enemy forces in front of it were, especially considering how deep its wounds were sustained in the last five days of April and the first days of May: 246 dead, 868 wounded, 118 missing. The units had been reduced to 20 fighters per platoon, and the front of only the 12th Brigade was 8 km long; the land was broken up, the 3rd Overseas Division halved, the 1st Division held at Klana, and the 11th in Trieste. Upon realizing, with the Headquarters, that the ordered decisive defence under the unrelenting pressure of General Kubler's forces was entirely unfeasible, Božović, faced with the mass death of his fighters, and informed that the "Prinz Eugen" Division was rushing from Ljubljana, proposed to the Chief of the General Staff and the Army Commander that whatever was left of his units should be positioned alongside the German "mobile hedgehog" and be picked apart as much as possible, and whatever broke through should be allowed to advance, knowing others would stop and destroy them. The two superior officers had very different thoughts. Word by word, the dispute escalated. Suddenly, the Chief of the General Staff, sticking to his decision that Kubler's forces should be halted and fought, threatened the commander of the 26th Division that if he remained stubborn, he could be removed from his post, and General Drašin added: "or even stripped of rank." Enraged, Božović responded that neither rank nor position were given to him by them, so they couldn't take them away, and then, walking away without permission, "showed them his elbow" and cursed at them. He did not give in to his honour or the honour of his comrades in the division; he admitted he had overstepped, but the two generals, in his view, using their authority

[862] P. Jakšić, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 579.

over men, had been unreasonable, and all three, under the dramatic situation and the burden of their responsibility, were "under high tension." Yet, there was neither time nor place for drama. Quickly, known for their strong personalities, they "came to their senses," each sacrificing something of their own pride, and extended a hand. On the evening of May 5-6, a replacement was sent to his division's positions, and they were pulled into the army reserve, with the task to immediately head to Tržič and "occupy the area all the way to the Soča." There, Božović and Arso would meet several times in the exceptionally difficult "post-war war," discussing new, very complex tasks. The two of them, as fellow tribesmen and comrades from the July uprising, had always respected each other, and Božović, along with Commissar Dušan Korać, commander of the 26th Division since March 1944, always acknowledged that Arso, being senior in rank, position and age, deserved respect; from the approaches to Rijeka, he highly valued the Chief of the General Staff's decisiveness, particularly when he sent the 20th Division from Klana to Trieste, and then, from Bazovica, the Motorized Detachment to Carinthia, albeit "picking apart" his own 26th Division.[863]

In the seven days of warfare, from the entry into Trieste to the dismantling of the 97th Corps, there was also a psychological-political battle taking place at this, the farthest northwest end of the country. This time and topic belong to this chapter of Arso Jovanović's biography, especially as he was at its very centre throughout.[864] During these days, messages, suggestions, and directives from Tito — bearing his signature — arrived daily, and reports and proposals with Jovanović's signature were sent to the capital. Almost all of the first group of these reports can finally be found in volumes 27 and 28 of Tito's *Collected Works*, while others, particularly those from Arso, are very difficult to access, except in the British Public Archive in London. We only point out a few of these, with the necessary quotes.

On May 1, upset over the previous night's assertion that the forward elements of the Anglo-American forces were "fighting on the approaches to Trieste" when they could have been 100 km away, Arso sharply reprimanded the head of the British mission, John Clarke, personally "timely informing him about the battles of the Yugoslav Army units in Trieste and between the Soča and Trieste." He sent the following written position to Belgrade:

"1. Without the approval of the Supreme Commander, I will not allow the presence of Allied troops in our operational area.

"2. Our forces are advancing towards the lower Soča, Gorizia, Tolmin, and further to the north and northwest.

"3. To designate a representative to coordinate operations in the further advance to the north." The Englishman added that it was necessary to establish a demarcation line.

[863] Two distinguished generals of the Yugoslav Army would, in the early years of peace, and especially during their training at the "Voroshilov" Academy in Moscow, often remember that "chaos" and make jokes at their own expense.

[864] His comrades remember him for his nightly visits to positions and troops in a SL-type "*blinda*" (armoured car) equipped with a powerful radio station, hurrying to negotiations.

"4. Considering that our units are located on the Trieste-Tržič road and railway, it could be concluded that the report of the head of the British mission is inaccurate."[865]

After receiving a directive with Tito's signature a few hours later, Arso repeated what he had already told the British and, when the units met with the Allies at 1:30 p.m., four kilometres west of Tržič, he demanded from the Allied command:

"1. That they do not enter the area liberated by our units.

"2. That the demarcation line be at the lower Soča (Gorizia-Tržič section).

"3. That the demarcation line be placed north of Gorizia, where our forces meet the Allies, as we are advancing from Gorizia towards the west and northwest.

"4. That the Allied forces withdraw from the Gorizia-Tržič section to the right bank of the Soča River, should they have crossed the river."[866]

On May 2, Arso received a message from Belgrade to quickly attack and capture Pula, to deny the Allies another strategic advantage, while simultaneously preparing "for the orientation of stronger forces to the north and further," in order to "cut off the enemy's retreat in the upper Sava region," placing "at least three selected divisions" in Trieste, Gorizia and Tržič.[867] The task was executed by liberating Rijeka the following day and continuing the battle for Pula. The 7th Corps and the main force of the 29th Herzegovinian Division were directed towards Ljubljana, with the main assault aimed at Kranj, Radovljica and the Ljubelj pass. After the destruction of the 97th Corps (May 7), the Army Headquarters, by decision of the Chief of the General Staff, positioned the 9th and 20th Dalmatian Divisions in Trieste, while the 26th Division occupied Tržič.

On the same day (May 2), Arso received a message that the Germans had "surrendered in Italy, Tyrol and Carinthia. They are surrendering to the American forces. The situation demands that you immediately send two good divisions along the Tolmin-Tržič-Beljac route to break into Carinthia and capture Beljac and Klagenfurt."[868] Due to deteriorating relations with the Allies and the lack of two reserve divisions to send to Carinthia, the Chief of the General Staff, in agreement with General P. Drašin, directed the 29th Division to operate "from the sunny side" of the Karavanke Mountains, alongside the previously dispatched 14th Division and units of the 4th Operational Zone of the Main Staff of Slovenia, reinforced with the Motorized (Fast) Detachment.

Reacting in accordance with Tito's order to capture Pula, Arso immediately, on May 2, summoned Lieutenant Colonel J. Clarke and formally informed him that "there was no question of the Allies taking the ports of Pula and Trieste, and the communication line Pula-Trieste extending north into Austria," that "we will immediately establish military and civil authority in the territory we are liberating, and Allied troops do not need to go there," and that "there will be no subordination in command."[869] His position was confirmed by the content of the three radio messages that were sent to Arso from Belgrade on May 3. The first instructed him not to send regular Yugoslav Army units west of the Soča but only partisan detachments, as they would fall under the command of Field Marshal Alexander. It also ordered him to "hold the Soča line firmly in his hands," establishing "the strictest control and vigilance across the entire area east of the Soča" and to organize city and town commands, "establishing military-territorial authority over the entire area up to the Soča."[870] The second order instructed him to immediately send "regular selected troops" to Gorizia, where English tanks were protecting fascist demonstrations against Yugoslavia, to "suppress any attempt against us and our army and ensure that this place remains under our control." It also instructed that "the most energetic measures be taken across the entire area up to the Soča against all enemy elements."[871] The third order demanded that the Allied forces withdraw across the Soča, along with the directive: "Take all strategic positions in the cities: Trieste, Gorizia and Monfalcone (Tržič). Do not allow them any interference in the work of our military rear and civil authority. Gather and concentrate all available forces in these places. Keep these areas in our hands at all costs. Be cautious of provocations, but remain unwavering. If they launch military aggression against you, resist immediately. Wait for further orders."[872]

Following these instructions, on May 4, Arso demanded from Lieutenant Colonel John Clarke (around whom at least 16 British officers had gathered in Trieste) "that the Allied forces immediately withdraw to the previously agreed line, that is, to the Soča River," and that this protest be immediately delivered to Major General J. Harding, commander of the 13th Army Corps of the British 8th Army, whose units were located east of the Soča.[873] The following day, during a lengthy conversation with Harding in Trieste, as instructed by the Chief of the General Staff, General P. Drašin demanded the same. At the same time, Arso — at the insistence of E. Kardelj and due to the practical incompatibility for cooperation — raised the issue of recalling Lieutenant Colonel J. Clarke and, as part of urgent measures to resolve the situation in the city, proposed that Major General Dušan Kveder, the commander of the Main Staff of Slovenia, be appointed as the commander of the city of Trieste, which was immediately approved. The port was taken by two divisions, and the cities of Gorizia and Tržič by one division each. The left bank of the Soča was secured, and coastal batteries in front of Trieste were activated.

From Belgrade, Arso was flooded with demands. On May 6, he was instructed to ensure that "three of our selected divisions be deployed in Trieste and its surroundings"; to "protest to the head of the British military delegation that Allied aviation has not bombed or strafed the enemy from Ilirska Bistrica to Klagenfurt for days," and

[865] AVII, file 316, reg. no. 5-23/2.

[866] *Ibid.,* file 316, reg. no. 5-2.

[867] *Ibid.,* file 316, reg. no. 5-25/2.

[868] *Ibid.,* file 316, reg. no. 5-27/2.

[869] *Ibid.,* file 316, reg. no. 5-2.

[870] *Ibid.,* file 316, reg. no. 4-17/2.

[871] *Ibid.,* file 316, reg. no. 5-27/2.

[872] *Ibid.*

[873] Note 26 in Vol. 28 of the J. Broz's *Collected Works*, pp. 159.



Belgrade on Victory Day.

that, by mistake, two officers of the 29th Herzegovinian Division had been killed while flying over their column. Recognizing this as a serious provocation and a demonstration of military power intended to exert psychological pressure on the 4th Army Headquarters, Arso informed Clarke that no further requests would be made for Allied air support with his units.[874]

On the same day, Arso reported to Belgrade in two messages that in Trieste, "there are 111 English tanks, 105 trucks and 16 armoured vehicles. Reinforcements are arriving today. According to unverified reports, a motorized division is coming." He further reported that "the cities of Trieste, Tržič and Gorizia, as well as the communications between them, have been occupied by about 30,000 soldiers and 150 tanks."[875]

This was the situation of the 4th Army on the day the war ended, when five divisions finally defeated the German 97th Corps in the Ilirska Bistrica area. And on that very day, as a sign of at least a fleeting peace, a radiogram signed by General Svetozar Vukmanović-Tempo arrived. It pointed out the need to establish a publication for the Ministry of National Defence and called for members of the editorial board "who can develop military-political issues of our army," something to be "taken very seriously, as it concerns the body of our army." Arso was present in the headquarters at the time. Some, in the absence of Commissar Šiljegović, thought that raising this issue in the given circumstances was unimportant and premature, to which Arso, in the Operations Department, replied that the new national army needed "a central publication good enough so that, based on its annual volumes, its history could be written." He influenced the selection of a group of fighters from the 4th Army, who had distinguished

[874] That marked the final and sombre end of 19 war months of close and intense cooperation between the NOVJ and Allied aviation at both the strategic and tactical levels.

[875] AVII, box 316, reg. no. 5-2.

themselves as correspondents and editors of the 8th Corps' and its divisions' publications, including Živko Milić Štrkalj, Vladimir Kolarić and Andro Gabelić, personalities who would later become prominent figures in Yugoslav journalism during peacetime. This was six months before the launch of the *Narodna armija* (People's Army) newspaper on October 2. Incidentally, in his commentary for one of its first issues — drawing from his harsh experience in Trieste and freed from the duties of the Chief of the General Staff — Arso wrote that events on both the southern and northwestern borders of the country demonstrated how, due to the imperialist politics of Great Britain in particular, long-standing political disputes and conflicts remained, which would continue to exacerbate military relations, meaning that "Yugoslavia remains surrounded by *BRIGAMA*." The director and chief editor of the newspaper, Lieutenant Colonel Savo Vukčević, who had "commissioned" the article on the military-political situation in the Balkans, asked Arso how to "translate" and explain this formulation *BRIGAMA* (in Serbo-Croatian *brige, brigama* in dative case, means worries or troubles — *S.P.*) to the readers, indirectly asking what both the editor and the proofreader were wondering: whether it was, by any chance, a typing error, mistakenly capitalized. There was no mistake, Arso replied — the term was a coinage made from the first letters of Yugoslavia's neighbouring countries: Bulgaria, Romania, Italy, Greece, Albania, Hungary (Mađarska in Serbo-Croatian — *S.P.*) and Austria; from these neighbours, there had always been troubles — either real or invented — especially involving at least two of them at the same time. And, he said, while fighting, he honestly hoped: "If we can't completely free ourselves from those troubles, at least they won't be so serious." He added that those "troubles expressed on paper" were not his "invention" but a term he had read in 1938 in the humorous column of the magazine *Peace on the Borders*, and it had stuck with him as the truth about their fate, so much so that he had remembered it forever and, in this harsh time, used it as a metaphor for evil.

Part Eleven

THE YEARS OF DECEPTIVE PEACE

• The decisive battle for every inch of the Julian March
• At the head of the five-member general commission in Devin
• Churchill's generals were not men of their word or servants of peace
• Tito toasts the "main military advisor" in Moscow
• Visit to Mamayev Kurgan and Borodino
• Over 5,000 Yugoslav Army officers trained in the Soviet Union
• From the 16 "Voroshilovists" Arso was killed, and Branko Poljanac, Momo Đurić and Slobodan Radulović were on Goli Otok
• Dr. B. Petranović: "Is Arso Jovanović the only one so condemned that he should be forever silenced?"
• Pero Đukanović: "Only Zhukov was equal to Arso"
• Arso's daughter, Dr. Zoja: "My father's bones should not lie in the grass, and today we should fear those who do not fear sin"

Fifty Days of "War After War" *(May 9-June 28)*

Moving in his "*blindie*" (armoured vehicle — *S.P.*) with a cipher, mostly from headquarters to headquarters for negotiations and agreements, he deeply experienced the expressions of the people's trust in the liberating army, seeing it as an even greater obligation to, with his military skill and patriotic zeal, fight for every inch of the homeland. He did not visit the coastal battery crews or the squads securing the fortifications, leaving that to the commanders; he did not deliver fiery speeches at rallies, believing that was the responsibility of the commissars. Instead, he focused on planning and coordinating actions and diplomatic tasks with senior staff from the 4th Army's headquarters. He believed that this was the best way to serve the interests of the homeland and its armed forces in the given circumstances. Through the General Staff, a collective of 360 high-ranking military experts, he ensured the creation of strong reserves in the strategic depth of the country, capable of intervening at the front in case the Yugoslav Army was forced to go to war with its former allies. That a military conflict was a real possibility is evidenced by a piece of information — possibly intentionally leaked to the Chief of the Army's Intelligence Service, Colonel Petar Tomac — that the Allied supreme command, on May 13 in Caserta, discussed "bombing cities and other targets in Yugoslavia" as part of the measures "for a potential conflict over Trieste."[876]

To "smooth over misunderstandings," Tito, in correspondence with Field Marshal Alexander, arranged a meeting between the chiefs of staff, General A. Jovanović and

[876] *Collection Tito-Churchill, Strictly Secret,* pp. 544-545.

W. Morgan, in Bari to "resolve the arising issues." However, the Field Marshal changed his mind and sent his chief of staff to Belgrade to "conclude a military agreement regarding the problems caused by the Julian March," sending a draft of the ultimatum contract to Tito for his signature.[877] General Morgan arrived in Belgrade by plane on the evening of May 7, where he was welcomed by the host, General Jovanović, who had just arrived by plane from the airport near Gorizia. Not knowing what the guest was bringing but well-informed about the situation on the ground, Arso did not share the optimism of his Supreme Commander that he would "easily reach an agreement with General Morgan on smoothing over the disagreements." However, he was ready, in the spirit of mutual respect and understanding the arguments of professional soldiers in top staff positions, to seek solutions, confident that any solution was better than continuing the war. He knew from the history of wars, from the collective memory and painful experiences of the Balkan peoples, that former allies often clashed over war spoils, and he was ready to find a solution that would prevent the bloodshed he foresaw in the encounters with evil. Again, as a devoted patriot, he sang with everyone: "Trieste, Gorizia and Rijeka will be ours forever."

After escorting the guest, the Chief of the General Staff hurried to the White Palace for a scheduled meeting with the Supreme Commander. As soon as he returned to the Cabinet, he wrote and signed an ultimatum, which, as a radiogram, was immediately sent to the "German-Ustaša troops in the Zagreb area," with whom the institutions of the National Liberation Movement maintained contact and had all the information regarding their defence (4,000–5,000 people). He called on them, literally at the last moment, "to lay down their weapons immediately in order to prevent the senseless destruction of the city of Zagreb, which, in the event of your resistance, will be subjected to bombing by air and artillery fire.

"To prevent the destruction of the city, I also call on the citizens of the city of Zagreb to assist in any way they can to prevent irresponsible elements from destroying the city.

"You must surrender all military and civilian facilities intact, and if any are damaged, you will bear full responsibility."[878]

He gave them a deadline of 24 hours. They met it: on May 8, the city was mostly abandoned before the entry of the troops of generals Peko Dapčević and Koča Popović — the first had broken through from the east after seven days of fighting along the "Zvonimirova Line," and the second from Karlovac. The 10th Zagreb Corps was also nearby, though it had largely refrained from fighting for the city.[879]

Two more details about the wartime fate of Zagreb — one related to the name of General A. Lohr and the other to Marshal Tito. The former, after an agreement with A. Pavelić, issued an order on April 29 for decisive battles to be fought on the fronts be-

[877] *Ibid.,* p. 538.

[878] AVII, file 258-A, reg. no. 9-17/10.

[879] The corps — as R. Jovanović Bradoja writes (1998) in the *Introduction to the Critical Analysis of the Strategy of the NOP 1941-1945* — waited for "two days before entering the liberated Croatian capital, to parade through it."

fore Rijeka and Zagreb "for the defence of the southern bastion of the Reich" and that "there will be no retreat from this line"; the latter, within military talks held in April 1945 in Moscow, according to the well-informed Dr. D. Šepić,[880] "was determining the strategy to be used in capturing Zagreb, which, if carried out by the partisans, could cause very large losses."[881] However, the most important thing is that such a large city was taken without bloodshed and destruction, in which the ultimatum from Arso, sent literally at "the last minute," played an indisputable role in its defence.

On the evening of May 8, Arso wrote a report, which the press, bearing his signature, would publish on Victory Day: "After the liberation of Zagreb, Ljubljana and Varaždin, our troops are rapidly advancing towards Austria, pursuing and destroying the enemy, who still resists in isolated, disconnected units.

"Our forces have captured an enormous war booty and a large number of enemy officers and soldiers."[882]

The first of three meetings with General W. Morgan began on May 8 at 5:00 p.m. and lasted 90 minutes. According to the minutes from the Allied side, representing the Yugoslav Army were the Chief of the General Staff and the Commander of the Rear Command, Lieutenant Generals Arso Jovanović and Jaka Avšić, as well as Major Generals Srećko Manola and Ljubodrag Đurić. The Allied side, represented by General W. Morgan, included Brigadier A. Hamblen, Chief of the 37th Military Mission, Vice-Marshal S.G.A. Lee, and Colonel Frank Lindsay, head of the Independent American Military Mission in Belgrade.[883] Both sides openly presented their positions at the negotiating table. However, General Morgan did not have the authority to make changes to the "draft" of the agreement brought by Field Marshal Alexander, and the Yugoslav side was unwilling to accept it without substantive changes, so the meeting ended unsuccessfully. The Field Marshal, in agreement with the governments of the United Kingdom and the United States, requested the port of Trieste and railway tracks and roads from that city to Austria, via Gorica and Tržič, "to maintain his forces in northeastern Italy and Austria," with the stipulation that "the port of Pula and anchorage on the western coast of Istria, up to Trieste, be opened for the unrestricted use of Allied naval forces." On the topographic map attached to the agreement, a visible line was drawn at Caserta, dividing the Julian March according to British (and Italian) interests, so that the entire western part and a 10 km-wide strip east of that line would be under the command of Field Marshal Alexander, with regular units of the Yugoslav Army to be withdrawn from that area by May 11, and all partisan forces "with their weapons handed over to the Allied military authorities or withdrawn from the

[880] He was, in his capacity as Chief of the Cabinet of the Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr. I. Šubašić, part of Tito's entourage during the visit to the USSR.

[881] This fear of retaliation could be the reason for the delayed decisive strike of the 1st Army to break through the "Zvonimirova Line" and crush the weakened and completely deciphered defence of Zagreb — a copy of its plan, obtained from the NOP's intelligence, was in Colonel Timofeyev's hands, the chief instructor of the NKVD at the OZNA headquarters in Belgrade for several days.

[882] *Borba* newspaper, May 9, 1945.

[883] *Collection Tito-Churchill, Strictly Secret,* pp. 536-541.

area." It was foreseen that the Field Marshal would govern this area "using the Allied military administration" and the Yugoslav civilian administration "already established and functioning satisfactorily." General Jovanović tried to soften the other side's stance with arguments based on geography and military history, but soon realized he was dealing with a stubborn and quite arrogant British officer, who was authorized only to convey the views of his superiors and, possibly, clarify them.

Considering that the results of the negotiations were "completely unsatisfactory," General Morgan said that Field Marshal Alexander "would be disappointed, as he had expected things to develop differently, since the Allies had reduced their demands to a minimum," and then withdrew from the room to report to his superior about the host's demands so that the governments of the United Kingdom and the United States could consult on the matter. In the first paragraph of the report, he mentioned that Tito believed that his country should be allowed to take the disputed territory, "as well as other territories to the west of it," as a "reward for all its efforts for the Allied cause and for the losses in men and material."[884] Meanwhile, the Yugoslav side was willing to make certain concessions, such as allowing "the Allies to use the port of Trieste and the roads and railways they request, which could satisfy their (military) needs," and to establish a joint military command in the disputed area, while the Allies insisted on their own military administration. General Morgan left the meeting with the impression that Tito "was in such a position that, even if he wanted to, he was unable to accept the terms we proposed without prejudicing his own position."[885]

Even after two meetings held on May 9 (at 11:00 a.m. and 11:00 p.m.), there were no significant changes, and the issue — which had initially been posed as a strictly military matter — had gained "primarily political significance," thus becoming the competence of the governments of the involved parties.[886] Despite the pressure, Tito remained firm in his stance that his troops — according to Morgan's report — "liberated the territory that is Slovenian and have the right to take it as an Allied army because of their sacrifices and contribution to the Allied cause." Furthermore, Tito noted that at the Peace Conference, he would demand the territories to the west of the Soča. Remaining steadfast in this position, the Yugoslav side offered their version of the agreement, formulated in nine points according to the British minutes — ranging from granting unlimited use of the port of Trieste, believing "it would meet all reasonable military requirements," to agreeing to the Italian lira as the circulating currency. This was insufficient for the other side, which demanded everything. One of General W. Morgan's conclusions — agreed upon by Field Marshal Alexander — was: "Military talks will not take us any further. If the Allied governments intend to reject Marshal Tito's proposal, they should certainly be prepared to use force with all the consequences."[887]

[884] *Ibid.,* p. 533.

[885] *Ibid.,* p. 534.

[886] *Ibid.,* pp. 539-543 (minutes and report from General W. Morgan).

[887] *Ibid.,* p. 542.

The problem of Trieste, Istria and part of the Julian March was referred through diplomatic channels to the governments of the United States and the United Kingdom, on one side, and the Democratic Federal Yugoslavia on the other. For the new U.S. President Harry Truman,[888] Trieste was to be an open international port, and American troops — he had said — would not enter into an armed conflict over this "piece of Europe." Prime Minister Winston Churchill, on the other hand, was angry, dissatisfied and upset, remaining firm in the position he expressed in his dispatch to Field Marshal Alexander — that "it is important for us and the Americans to gain control over Rijeka, Trieste, Pula and the Istrian Peninsula, and that your communications with Austria should be protected."

Reluctantly, Tito finally realized that the saying "what is gained by the sword in war — no one can take in peace" applied only to the great powers. He became aware that it was in vain that just yesterday (May 7), according to Colonel Randolph Churchill, he had written to his father Winston, expressing hope that he would understand the justification of "Yugoslavia's demand for the regions of Istria and the Slovenian Littoral with Trieste, which in the last war were unjustly annexed to Italy, to be annexed to Yugoslavia," and that all misunderstandings with the Allies "would be definitively resolved in talks with Morgan." On the contrary, the differences deepened, misunderstandings multiplied, and threats of war became sharper; however, no one was bluffing, and both sides had divisions literally with their fingers on the trigger. Among other things, on May 6, all Allied military missions were withdrawn from the commands and headquarters of the Yugoslav Navy and the 4th Army,[889] and then from the other armies, while Prime Minister Churchill demanded that consideration be given to withdrawing the diplomatic staff and "subjects of the Crown" from Belgrade, as the Yugoslav Army activated coastal batteries from Boka to Zadar, and by May 15 would also have them along the entire western coast of Istria. Meanwhile, on May 13 in Caserta, the bombing of cities and other targets in Yugoslavia was discussed. The Field Marshal reported that "the situation is undoubtedly tricky, but I believe there will be no shooting if we do not fire the first shot."[890]

Although faced with harsh reality, Tito did not lose hope of achieving his plans regarding Trieste. Thus, on the last day of the Founding Congress of the Communist Party of Serbia (May 8-12), speaking in front of 459 delegates at the "*Kolara*" (Kolarac People's University — *S.P.*) he said: "Not only are we denied the right to annex Istria, Trieste and the Slovenian Littoral, which we liberated with our arms, but they deny us the right to occupy them, because, from an international legal standpoint, they belong to the Italian empire and we have occupied those regions, while from our internal standpoint, we have liberated them. They wanted us to withdraw. However, we have

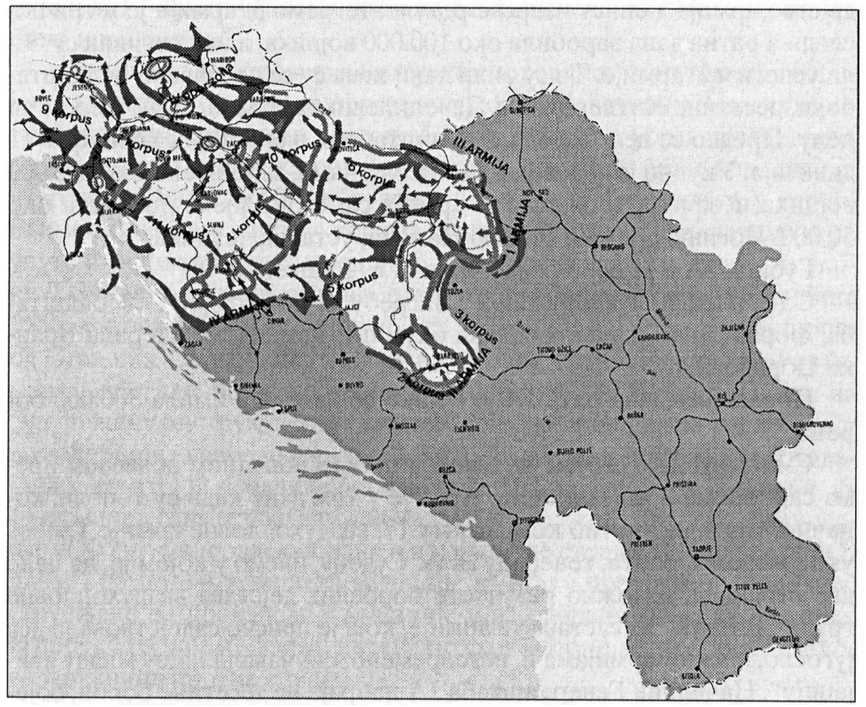
[888] U.S. President F.D. Roosevelt died on April 13, 1945, and was succeeded by then-Vice President Harry Truman.

[889] From Trieste alone, 16 officers, and from the "rest of Yugoslavia," another 97, equipped with 32 radio stations.

[890] *Collection Tito-Churchill, Strictly Secret,* p. 532.

come to the Soča, and we will stay at the Soča!"[891]

This was a principled stance, but harsh politics took its toll: on that very day, the British Ambassador in Belgrade, R. Stevenson, delivered a note from his government, in which Yugoslavia — referring to the Moscow Declaration of November 1, 1943, which established that the borders of Austria would not change until the Peace Conference and that the occupation of Austria would be carried out only by British, American, Soviet and French troops — was requested to withdraw its units from the Alpine country. This stance, confirmed by their foreign ministers, was agreed upon by the "big three" at the Yalta Conference in February 1945 as a decision that "the borders of Austria should not change," thus making Yugoslavia's territorial claims to occupy part of Austria moot, although official Moscow had repeatedly recognized this right since November 1944, encouraging it to verify it with the Western Allies, and even training Yugoslav Army officers for command duties in the occupied territory.[892]



To Trieste and Victory Day: development of the Yugoslav Army's strategic offensive.

The Chief of the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army was deeply disappointed by the outcome of the talks with his colleague Morgan, mainly because, with a professional soldier and a high representative of a former ally, he could not find any common ground, despite knowing well what awaited him in the Julian March, in front of his comrades and Allied commanders, where even E. Kardelj, as a representative of the political leadership, was constantly on his heels. When he encountered him, he recalled their wartime meetings from Užice, through the Dolomites, to Vis; he always gave new tasks to the armed forces, often in the realm of resolving "specific Slovenian problems." And their resolution here also implied attacks and sacrifices.

From the far northwest of the battlefield, the Chief of the General Staff sent a report to Belgrade on May 15: "Organized resistance from the enemy has ceased before our troops. The disarmament and destruction of smaller scattered enemy groups is finishing. Arso."[893]

A good initial operational plan and timely coordination between the armies produced excellent results: just the 3rd Army alone captured about 100,000 soldiers in the last three days of the war, and the successes of the 1st Army were equally impressive. These were the days when entire staffs surrendered, dozens of Hitler's and Pavelić's generals, with A. Lohr at the head. The entire Lohr staff and the staffs of his three corps and 11 divisions surrendered. In total, about 300,000 soldiers and officers were captured in the final operations, including about 50,000 from Rijeka to Trieste alone by the 4th Army. Approximately 100,000 Germans, Ustaše and Chetniks were killed.

The losses of the Yugoslav Army were 18,838 killed and 61,671 wounded.[894]

From the captured weaponry in Zagreb, the General Staff formed the Main Trophy Base, under the command of General Branko Obradović.

On the last day of the war, the Yugoslav Army — according to reports — had 800,000 fighters.[895]

Considering it his personal and professional obligation to his comrades and allies, Arso, on the day when the guns finally fell silent, sent a letter to the commander of the 17th Air Army of the 3rd Ukrainian Front, General V.A. Sudets, in which he detailed, over two full pages, the results of combat actions of the "Vitruck" air group within that army, which closely cooperated "with the Yugoslav armies while simultaneously training our young aviation." The Chief of the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army listed dozens of battles, engagements and operations conducted from the eastern to the western borders of Yugoslavia, in which the "Vitruck Group" formations played a significant role, "as commanders of the ground armies constantly pointed out, giving high praise for the combat effectiveness of the air group on the battlefield."[896]

For the 4th Army, the war did not stop on May 15; on the contrary, it continued even more intensively, though fortunately — without bloodshed. Meanwhile, in con-

[891] *Collection of the Founding Congress of the Communist Party of Serbia*, Belgrade 1972, pp. 209-215.

[892] Promised to E. Kardelj and Dr. Šubašić in November 1944 in Moscow; later two memoranda on this, see documents 579 and 583 in *Collection of Relations Between Yugoslavia and Russia (USSR) 1941-1945,*

[893] *Borba* newspaper, May 16, 1945.

[894] *Collection of Final Operations for the Liberation of Yugoslavia*, contribution by Nikola Anić, p. 118.

[895] AVII, file 25-A, reg. no. 37-1/2. According to N. Anić (p. 115), the total number of four armies that made up most of the Yugoslav Army was 355,603 soldiers.

[896] *Collection of Relations Between Yugoslavia and Russia (USSR) 1941-1945,* p. 757. The group, from October 1944 to May 1945, completed 31,690 flights with a total of 13,689 flying hours, trained 269 pilots and 330 gunners, and built 24 and repaired 14 airports.

nection with the worsening situation over Trieste, Istria and part of the Julian March, to prevent the Yugoslav Army units from receiving ammunition, fuel, food and other wartime supplies, the Allies completely ceased supplying them, notifying the Yugoslav Army Base Headquarters in Bari about this. As a result, the available food was rationed, and British weapons and equipment, especially artillery and tanks — of which there were the most in the composition of these units (all tanks and communications equipment, 50% of artillery, etc.) — were replaced with German weapons from war spoils, for which ammunition was plentiful.[897]

Faced with the intensifying situation and the real possibility of an armed conflict between former allies, Arso suggested to the Supreme Commander that he request Moscow to expedite the delivery of weapons and military equipment, and to do so more extensively and quickly than initially agreed in Moscow on February 10 — especially in armament, surgical teams, instructors for new heavy artillery, as well as to send experts and engineering units for railway repairs, T-34 tanks, aircraft and anti-aircraft guns, as well as the heaviest artillery (155 mm howitzers and 122 mm long-range guns). Tito personally requested this from Stalin on May 13, writing to him in Russian, emphasizing as the first argument "the current military-political situation."[898] Insisting on "sending instructors and advisors, providing educational materials and assisting in organizing schools," Tito requested that the 170 previously allocated instructors be kept, 111 more be sent, and an additional 97 instructors be added, making a total of 427, including 49 medical officers. He requested "supplementary armament for the Corps of National Defence and border guard, totalling for 50,000 men," as well as 3-4 sets of ammunition for each rearmed division, specialists for ammunition production, and for the defence of maritime borders, the delivery of fuel and lubricants, supply materials, light vehicles and vaccines against epidemics.[899]

These were the days when the British, at the highest military levels, with the blessing of the new U.S. president, considering the real possibility of war with the Yugoslav Army, anticipated simultaneous operations "bombing Yugoslav cities and attacks by combined Anglo-American forces." On May 15, the British government, as part of the pressure on Yugoslavia, demanded that the government of the DFY agree that "the Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in the Mediterranean take command of the area, which must include Trieste, Gorica, Tržič and Pula, and the lines of communication through Gorica and Tržič leading to Austria," and that it urgently notify London of its readiness to "immediately accept the above." Supporting Churchill, President H. Truman, seeking Moscow's support, wrote to Stalin on May 21, stating that the territorial issues in the Julian March were not "simply a border dispute between Yugoslavia and Italy, but a principled issue concerning the peaceful resolution of territorial disputes and the foundations of lasting peace in Europe," and that these problems should

[897] From Gospić to Trieste, the following was seized: 19 tanks, 390 guns, 180 mortars and about 2,000 machine guns.

[898] AVII, file 17-A, reg. no. 4/4.

[899] Directive to General R. Primorac from May 14, with a list of military needs from the USSR; AVII, file 57-2, reg. no. 16-2/7.

be resolved "in the spirit of agreements reached at Yalta."[900] Stalin replied the next day, offering full support to the government of the DFY in its legitimate demand regarding Trieste, Istria and the Slovenian Littoral, emphasizing: "It goes without saying that the future of that territory, where the majority is Yugoslav, should be regulated by a peace treaty. However, this is currently a temporary occupation of the territory. In this regard, in my opinion, it is necessary to take into account the fact that Yugoslav troops expelled the German invaders from the territories of Istria and Trieste, thus greatly contributing to the Allied cause. Because of this circumstance, it would be unjust and an undeserved insult to the Yugoslav Army and the Yugoslav people to deny Yugoslavia the right to occupy territory it has liberated from the enemy after so many sacrifices made by the Yugoslav people in the fight for the national rights of Yugoslavia and for the common cause of the United Nations."[901] To support Yugoslavia in a situation where the British were demanding the immediate withdrawal of the 4th Army's motorized detachment from their occupied territory in western Carinthia, Marshal Tolbukhin ordered the deployment of "several Yugoslav Army divisions" in the Soviet-occupied territory in eastern Carinthia, placing them under his command.[902] This task was assigned to General Kosta Nađ on May 15, who, on May 18, with three of his divisions, crossed into Carinthia, while the rest remained at the border. At the same time, the General Staff developed a plan for the occupation of that Austrian region, planning to deploy five divisions (about 50,000 people), with the main headquarters of the occupying army located in Graz (or alternatively in Klagenfurt).[903] However, soon the 4th Army units and the main headquarters of Slovenia — under pressure from the British for "unconditional evacuation" — withdrew, though with all the war spoils, from the part of Carinthia they had occupied, with centres in Klagenfurt and Velikovec, as well as from the area west of the Soča. These fates, despite Stalin's undisguised support, would also apply to the three divisions of the 3rd Army stationed in the Soviet-occupied zone in Carinthia — these also withdrew on June 28.[904]

Within the first peacetime "reorganization" of the Yugoslav Army, accelerated by the unfavourable attitude of the Western Allies toward the issue of Trieste, in mid-May, by the order of the General Staff, the 5th and 6th Infantry Armies and the 1st Tank Army were formed, with commanders General Slavko Rodić, Radovan Vukanović and Petar Dapšin, and their headquarters located in Skopje, Sarajevo and Ljubljana. As part of the reorganization, Peko Dapčević, the former commander of the 1st Army, was appointed on May 19 as the commander of the 4th Army "and all other forces in the Slovenian Littoral and Istria." His headquarters was located in Postojna, where, initially, the 29th Herzegovinian Division was deployed, and the 1st Proletarian Division in the Bazovica-Trieste sector. While he was still the commander of the 1st Army,

[900] Note 147 in Vol. 28 of the J. Broz's *Collected Works*, p. 175.

[901] *Borba* newspaper, May 20, 1945.

[902] From a conversation with General B. Šiljegović, May 1985, in Belgrade.

[903] Note 166 in Vol. 28 of the J. Broz's *Collected Works*, p. 178.

[904] Note 189 in Vol. 28 of the J. Broz's *Collected Works*, p. 180.

on May 13, 8,000 Albanians were sent to him after completing training at supplementary centres, with orders to "join your army. Act on orders and do not make any proposals in advance." Many Albanians, during the offensive, were also incorporated into various divisions of the 4th Army. One of the reinforcements of this army, 2,381 conscripts, gathered in Prizren and, via Kukeš and Skadar, was sent to Dubrovnik, and upon arriving in Bar, after many serious incidents against their escorts, revolted, in which, according to reports from the field, Bosko Đuričković, the commissar of the Coastal Operational Group, reported to the General Staff that "about 400 people were killed, and several hundred were wounded."[905] This took place at the beginning of April, and Arso was still in Belgrade. As soon as he was informed about the rebellion, he ordered the commander of the 2nd Corps to conduct an urgent investigation.



At the White Palace: agreement before the start of operations for the final liberation of the country.

The task was given to the Headquarters of the Coastal Operational Group, with Commissar B. Đuričković (Commander Radomir Babić had just been reassigned as the commander of the 5th Krajina Division in Srem). The commissar, who was inspecting troops in the interior of Montenegro, rushed to the task, angry that this had occurred in the zone of responsibility of his units. Conscientiously, with a group of collaborators — talking to fighters and officers from the 10th Montenegrin Brigade and the 26th Dalmatian Division, which had been mobilized, following the surviving rebels he found housed in the tobacco station building (Monopol), and with the citizens of Bar, who were involved in that drama — he inquired about what had happened during the march from Prizren to Bar. He then drafted a report which General A. Jovanović received within less than 24 hours. The report included details about throwing escorts into the Drim River near Ljuma Kula and into the Bojana River near Skadar, the cowardly knife murder of a guard and an escort, the attack with sticks on an officer and the attempt to disarm, and especially about the course of the rebellion in Bar. Listing the facts as he had heard them and, by "cross-checking," verified them, Đuričković concluded his report with a summary that, 45 years later, he would publish in his book *Remembrances, Reflections, Reactions*: "Our soldiers were provoked in the most brutal and inhumane way, which is why this tragedy occurred. It was difficult to ask seasoned warriors, armed in war, to be killed, while silently bearing it. This is one of the examples showing how madness and the ruthlessness of fanatic nationalists can lead to all kinds of consequences."[906]

[905] B. Đuričković, *op. cit.*, p. 326.

The departure to the 4th Army's front toward Trieste interrupted Arso's intention to thoroughly and completely investigate the "case" — after this very responsibly carried out, yet preliminary, investigation — so he left the matter as a duty to General Terzić, and both, as neighbours of the Albanian areas, knew well whom they were dealing with. And Peko knew too, which is why that note from Belgrade: "Act according to the order and do not make any proposals in advance." Arso would request the conclusion of the investigation as soon as he returned from the "war after the war" at the end of June. After carefully reading the report, he demanded further investigation, and only then — according to Đuričković, who was serving in Belgrade at the time — "measures of punishment were undertaken and determined."

As part of measures to strengthen forces on the northwestern front, two divisions of the 2nd Army, stationed in the Novo Mesto-Karlovac area, were designated as reserves for the 4th Army. All units were kept on strict standby and in complete combat readiness, with strict order and discipline, particularly in terms of caution to prevent individuals and units from being provoked by the arrogant behaviour, outbursts and challenges of the "Westerners," on which the Chief of the General Staff insisted and vigilantly monitored day and night.

There followed broader personnel changes, within which General-Lieutenant Ivan Gošnjak and Colonel Rade Žigić were appointed commander and commissar of the 2nd Army, while General Koča Popović initially worked in "Arso's Commission for Border Demarcation" in Trieste, and from June 15, he was "seen" on a mission in Moscow with a group of Yugoslav Army generals and his colleague Rudolf Primorac. There, he arrived at the head of a representative delegation that included Generals Mihajlo Apostolski, Radovan Vukanović, Franjo Pirc and Mate Jerković, in order to attend, on behalf of the Yugoslav Army, the large military parade held on June 24 to mark the end of the Second World War. Undoubtedly, the delegation also had the task of accelerating and securing much-needed material and personnel aid for the Yugoslav Army. Tito reminded General Popović of this obligation as early as June 13,[907] and again (twice)

[906] *Ibid.,* 327. Similar data appear in the report by Veljko Mićunović, head of OZNA for Montenegro.

[907] AVII, file 57-4, reg. no. 6-33/1; Note 41 in Vol. 29 of the J. Broz's *Collected Works*, p. 252.

on July 17, and once more on July 27, which could indicate extensive tasks and dissatisfaction in Belgrade with the performance of this mission, which "stayed with the Russians" for almost two months, though the generosity of Moscow, for which there are no written records, remains unclear.

As part of further personnel changes, alongside the commander of the 1st Tank Army, Petar Drapšin, Colonel Dušan Korać was appointed as commissar, and they were tasked with organizing two tank divisions and motorized brigades, authorized to select tanks and armoured vehicles, trucks and automobiles from the entire stock of war trophies, with the 1st and 2nd Tank Brigades serving as the basis. In Ljubljana, the main workshop for the most complex repairs of combat vehicles was established, where, at Arso's suggestion, the knowledge and experience of captured German experts were utilized.

To strengthen the defence of the Adriatic coast, one division was sent to Metković and one to Zadar, and coastal artillery along the entire coastline were put on alert. It was ordered that the fighter regiment and the assault regiment of the Yugoslav Army, which were undergoing training in Krasnodar and Grozny, be immediately transferred back to the country.[908] War tasks were prepared and "drilled" in the General Staff for all units of the Yugoslav Army at all levels, with General Jovanović, who was most responsible for preparing the armed forces to defend the endangered country, insisting that tactical tasks with operation scenarios, live combat and battles be incorporated into the training of unit commanders, up to the brigade level, which encouraged the offensive spirit of the young army. He became known for this even during the NOB, as evidenced by his "Instructions for Solving Tactical Tasks," which were sent to the staff from Drvar, where, in the introduction, he emphasized that these tasks "are solved in order to teach military leaders to command. To learn to command means to learn the proper preparation of individual tactical actions for leading units in those actions, with the aim of achieving success on our side in the shortest time and with the least casualties, while, on the contrary, inflicting the greatest losses on the enemy in both manpower and material in that time."[909]

It was ordered that, on June 2, the Second Officer Infantry School of the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army be opened in Zadar for accelerated professional training of command personnel, and the armies were provided with "quotas" for the listeners. An agreement was made with the Soviets for the Yugoslav Army to receive 1,000 tons of gasoline monthly, and Moscow allowed the use of roads and railways across Hungary for supplying Yugoslav Army units on the northwestern front, as the Belgrade-Zagreb highway was completely destroyed, the vehicle fleet was extremely limited and fuel reserves for most units had been reduced to a one-day supply. Work began, with the help of special units from the 3rd Ukrainian Front, to restore the main railway lines, primarily Ljubljana-Zidani Most, Ljubljana-Trieste and Zagreb-Slavonski Brod, as well as roads to Sisak for transporting oil from Gojlo.

[908] Note 152 in Vol. 28 of the *J. Broz's Collected Works*, p. 177. The 554th Fighter Regiment and the 254th Assault Regiment of the DFY flew from June 21 to June 23.

[909] AVII, file 23, reg. no. 6-14.

When tensions between the former allies reached a critical point, Field Marshal Alexander made a statement to *Reuters* correspondent Hubert Harrison, which was immediately published in the British press and through the BBC, and which was deeply insulting to Yugoslavia.[910] In response, Tito, on May 19, expressed "surprise and indignation at the impossible comparison of the presence of Yugoslav troops in Istria and the Slovenian Littoral to Hitler's, Mussolini's and Japan's imperial methods. Such an accusation can only be thrown in the face of the enemy, not a long-suffering and bloodied ally, which has been recognized by all freedom-loving peoples as an example of heroism and sacrifice in this great liberation war." He emphasized that the Yugoslav Army "drove the occupiers to the Soča River and beyond with the strength of its weapons, and its presence in that territory cannot be characterized as imperial. I decisively reject such an accusation." He concluded the statement by noting, "Yugoslavia is ready for cooperation and agreement on a basis that will not be offensive or humiliating to Yugoslavia as an ally."[911]

In a conversation with Colonel Boško Šiljegović in Postojna, Arso — convinced that Marshal Tito's statement would contribute to calming the situation — said that Field Marshal Alexander, a man who seemed honourable and dignified, could be forgiven for being unjust toward Yugoslavia as a loyal ally, for turning his back on reliable comrades, and for being determined to defend the political interests of his own and Italy's state, even at the cost of entering an armed conflict. However, what he could not forgive was that, as a professional soldier and a famous commander from Dunkirk, Tunisia, Italy and the Supreme Allied Commander in the Mediterranean, he "resorted to base, profane, indecent and dirty language, without military dignity or arguments, equating a leader from the Anti-Fascist Coalition with the leaders of the Third Reich," thereby deepening distrust, adding fuel to the fire and escalating the dispute. "He was thinking," Šiljegović recalled four decades later, "that, as a soldier to a soldier, he would write Field Marshal Alexander a private letter and tell him where he belonged. I had the impression that he wanted to hear what I, as the army commissar, thought about it, and I answered him that, personally, I would send the Field Marshal — 'as a native Bosnian' — 'not to just one, but three mothers' but, considering the sensitivity of the issue and his duty, I recommended that he discuss it with Comrade Tito. He did discuss it, but I don't know what they agreed upon or how he ultimately acted. He wanted to defend the honour of his Supreme Commander, our army and his own — why not?"[912]

The insulting statement by the Field Marshal also irritated Soviet leader Stalin who, in a letter to U.S. President H. Truman on May 21, stated that he could not "agree with Field Marshal Alexander's public statement where he allowed himself to compare Marshal Tito with Hitler and Mussolini. Such a comparison is unjust and

[910] Note 166 in Vol. 28 of the J. Broz's *Collected Works*, p. 178.

[911] *Borba* newspaper, May 20, 1945.

[912] From a conversation with General B. Šiljegović, May 1985, in Belgrade.

offensive to Yugoslavia."[913] In his assessment, the leader of a country severely wounded in the recently concluded war, with a devastated economy and an exhausted multi-million army scattered from Sakhalin to Berlin, could not have done more for Yugoslavia than this verbal support in that situation. And certainly not enter into war with the West for "a piece of land in the northern Adriatic," even if it involved such a loyal and, in this deceptive peace era, such a significant ally as Yugoslavia. Indeed, for the vast Soviet Union, which occupied a tenth of "Earth's sphere," the Julian March and Istria might have seemed like a "trifle" (in Russian: *buva*, meaning a small thing), while for Yugoslavia, small in both area and population, it was enormous — not only in terms of size and not only as a corrective to the injustices caused by the game of the great powers, but also as a matter of national honour.

To maintain the Soča River as the western border until a final political solution, on May 24, Arso, in accordance with his authority and based on his own assessment, issued the following orders to the 4th Army Headquarters — possibly as cover for any possible tragic consequences:

"1. You must not allow the English to cross the eastern border of the disputed zone, and if they attempt to do so, oppose them.

"2. Your divisions within the disputed zone must stay in their positions and be very vigilant and decisive.

"3. Concentrate strong forces on the eastern borders of the disputed zone and place them in the most favourable directions. Arso."

In Zagreb, just before the celebration of Tito's 53rd birthday, he received information from the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army about a message that had arrived from Postojna, stating that some British units, protected by armoured vehicles, had entered the village of Komino in the Gorica area at night. The army commander, in agreement with the Chief of the General Staff, ordered that the village be surrounded and the British driven out.[914] Immediately — according to E. Kardelj, who urgently travelled to Postojna — a response was sent stating "that the Allies must not be allowed to go any further. You are to demand firmly that they wait until the dispute is resolved based on the last note from the British government. Reinforce the threatened areas with sufficient forces. I am sending two more divisions from the 2nd Army as deep reserves."[915] The next day, General Jovanović reported that, in order to resolve the emerging problem and calm the exceptional tension, he had met with General J. Harding, the commander of the British 13th Corps, who "refused to have his units leave the area."[916] At the same time, official Belgrade, in a note to the British government, expressed its deep regret that it had been informed by the Chief of the General Staff that "that day, Allied forces entered the entire area of that sector of the Slovenian Littoral, the status of which is now under negotiation between the governments of the

[913] Note 166 in Vol. 28 of the J. Broz's *Collected Works*, p. 178.

[914] Note 189 in Vol. 28 of the J. Broz's *Collected Works*, p. 180.

[915] AVII, file 317, reg. no. 1-10/2.

[916] Note 189 in Vol. 28 of the J. Broz's *Collected Works*, p. 180.

United Kingdom, the U.S. and the DFY." Such an action by the Allies surprised the government of the DFY even more, as two days earlier, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had expressed its willingness to continue talks on the "principally acceptable" proposal of General Morgan.

It came to what everyone had feared: on June 8, Belgrade announced to the 4th Army Headquarters an agreement with the Anglo-Americans "on the withdrawal from the disputed territory with all personnel and material, within three days starting from June 9." The following day, a dispatch signed by Tito arrived at the same address regarding the just-signed agreement, which stated that the "time countdown" for the withdrawal of all personnel with "all captured material" would begin on June 9 at 9:00 a.m., with the goal of avoiding any incidents or provocations. The "A zone," which would fall under the control of the Allies, would retain a Yugoslav Army unit "of 2,000 elite fighters from all branches of the military," "the best selected with strong weapons and a high percentage of officers and commissars." The arrival of a commission from Belgrade was also announced to "later agree on the final deployment" of Yugoslav forces in the "disputed zone" — Trieste and part of the Julian March, and in Istria, only in Pula, with a "quota" formulated in Belgrade: 300 Istrians in Pula, and the rest — 1,000 in Trieste, 500 in Gorica and 200 in Tržič.[917] Called to Belgrade "for the formal signing of the agreement," Arso — disappointed with the outcome of the Trieste operation — tried to "excuse himself" with (genuinely) urgent and important tasks and the (rather strained) insecurity of the airport in Gorica. The invitation was repeated — to "receive instructions for the negotiations on implementing the agreement as head of the delegation." The document would be signed on behalf of the government of the Democratic Federal Yugoslavia (DFY) by its Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Ivan Šubašić, and on behalf of the governments of the United Kingdom and the United States, by their ambassadors in Belgrade, R. Stevenson and R. Patterson Jr. In this regard, the *Tanjug* agency reported that on June 9, "an agreement was reached on the temporary administration of Istria, Trieste and the Slovenian Littoral. Military details will be worked out by representatives of Marshal Tito and Field Marshal Alexander."[918]

The announced military commission would consist of five members at the general level: Chief Arso Jovanović, and members Koča Popović, Jaka Avšič, Srećko Manola and Dr. Vladimir Velebit.[919] The commission would work from June 13 to 20, continuously negotiating with the team of the Supreme Allied Command in the Mediterranean, led by General W. Morgan. The negotiations were primarily held in Devin, near Trieste, the headquarters of the 13th Army Corps of the 8th British Army, with General Harding at the head, and where E. Kardelj was present. The military delegations discussed the composition and deployment of the Yugoslav detachment for Istria, Trieste and the Slovenian Littoral; the composition, purpose and scope of the Yugoslav military mission at the headquarters of the British 8th Army; the activities of

[917] AVII, file 47, reg. no. 1-13/1.

[918] J. Broz, *Collected Works*, Vol. 28, p. 150.

[919] *Ibid.,* Note 217, p. 184.

the civil administration under Allied military rule; the fate of the Yugoslav Army's war spoils; the movement of populations between the "A" and "B" occupation zones; joint use of communications, and other matters. During these talks, there were disruptions in the work of the delegations, primarily because the Western Allies did not adhere to already reached agreements, such as those regarding the functioning of the civil administration. However, Field Marshal Alexander would not even respect the signed agreement; almost immediately after the signing of the agreement establishing the "A" and "B" zones, in order number 1, which followed his months of promises that the laws of Yugoslavia would apply in the disputed zone, he informed the population of the "A" zone that the "legislation in effect until September 8, 1943" (the date of fascist Italy's capitulation) would be introduced in the area. For Arso, this was further proof that official Rome had merely formally renounced its imperial ambitions proclaimed at the beginning of 1945 in the "Green Book" and that it still had the support of the West in this.[920]

As the situation in the negotiations worsened, some ambitions in Belgrade grew, and on June 15, Tito, in a dispatch "for Kardelj or Arso Jovanović," in addition to the guarantee for respecting existing national committees and civil administration, demanded that the 2,000-strong Yugoslav Army garrison, placed under Field Marshal Alexander's command, "not be stationed in one village, where it would practically be interned," but instead that its number be increased "to 6,000" and stationed "in the most important centres: Trieste, Pula, Tržič and Gorica, and some smaller places west of the Soča." Additionally, he, thoroughly informed by General Jovanović and deeply dissatisfied with the views of the other negotiating side, turned to Moscow — through Ambassador I.V. Sadchikov — seeking the help and support of the Soviet government, as well as a final stance from the Soviets on the Western Allies. Moscow, however, persistently remained silent, delaying its response, and so on June 18, Tito, realizing that the negotiations could no longer be postponed, demanded that they resume immediately, with the condition to "abandon the request for increasing the detachment and agree to the demarcation line," insisting that the West "officially recognize the civil authority."[921] Arso delayed the negotiations until June 20, waiting for the Russian stance, but careful not to provoke the other side into breaking off the talks. However, Stalin remained silent, and on that day, General Jovanović signed the so-called Devin Agreement, alongside General W. Morgan.

Finally, an agreement was reached on the demarcation line, named after General W. Morgan. The entire area west of the "Morgan Line," which divided the "A" and "B" zones, was placed under the command and control of the Allied Military Administration. This area "includes Trieste, the railways and roads leading from there to Austria via Gorica, Kobarid, Tržič, and equally Pula and ports on the western coast of Istria." The forces of all three branches of the Yugoslav Army remaining west of that

[920] In that document, the Italian government emphasized "its historical right to the Dodecanese Islands, Istria, the Slovenian Littoral, Tyrol and Mont Senn," but on May 5, under strong condemnation from the democratic public, it was forced to formally renounce it.

[921] AVII, file 317, reg. no. 1-31/2.

line, in the "A" zone, could not exceed 2,000 soldiers and officers and would be placed under the command of the Allied Supreme Command; they would occupy "one district selected by the Allied Supreme Commander west of the dividing line, and they would not be allowed access to the rest of the area." The last point of the agreement established that it did not prejudge the political resolution of the fate of that area, which would be determined by the Peace Conference.[922]

Yugoslavia, at least verbally, had Stalin's support in Austria, but it too had to retreat from there — under relentless British pressure to prevent "any presence of Yugoslav Army units on Austrian territory" in the name of the decisions of the Yalta Conference. On June 18, Tito ordered the 3rd Army Headquarters to immediately prevent "the creation of our civil authorities in our occupation zone in Austria,"[923] and ten days later, all Yugoslav Army units withdrew from there.[924] The new situation in Austria, in the "A" zone, and the state of the borders concerning them, along with the measures to be taken to defend the integrity of the country in that part, were discussed with Tito on June 23, based on an oral report from the Chief of the General Staff.[925]

Exactly 50 years later, K. Nađ, during a break at the scientific conference "Final Operations for the Liberation of Yugoslavia,"[926] remembered, in front of a group of comrades, how Arso Jovanović, at that conference with Tito, "started an unprincipled conversation" about the alleged thousands of executed prisoners of war, speaking "as if he were talking about an enemy, not his own army." He claims that these statements were "completely untrue, because if people had been killed in my army, I would have had to know about it and forbid it." His fellow comrades and victors, all generals from the front lines, easily agreed with him, and it is possible that even after five decades, "they did not know" about the thousands of prisoners who were executed, as they refused to acknowledge it, even to themselves. It is possible that Arso did not choose the right moment, or perhaps he exaggerated in front of the commanders crowned with glory, opening a topic that was equally sensitive for both the defeated and the victor, and still very fresh. The truth about why he brought up this topic at that moment, and in front of that particular group, died with him. Tito, it seems, showed more sensitivity to the matter than his commanders, and it is likely that Arso wanted to ensure that such atrocities committed by the victors were condemned and would not be repeated, to ease the ever-present tide of sectarian "proletarian justice." Marshal Tito commented on the words of the Chief of Staff by saying that "such examples exist, admittedly individual ones," but that, by his order to the commanders of the armies and main staffs,

[922] J. Broz, *Collected Works*, Vol. 28, p. 151.

[923] AVII, file 44, reg. no. 3-5/2.

[924] The General Staff of the Yugoslav Army ordered on June 28 that the 3rd Army Headquarters withdraw all three of its occupation divisions from Austria by July 3, 1945, in accordance with an agreement with the Soviet government.

[925] The commanders of the 1st Tank Division and the 3rd and 4th Armies, Generals P. Drapšin, K. Nađ and P. Dapčević, were also invited to Belgrade for talks, and E. Kardelj arrived by plane from Gorica with Arso.

[926] Held on April 23 and 24, 1985, in Belgrade.

he "demanded that the killing of prisoners of war and detainees by units, individual organs, and individuals be prevented at all costs," and as he trusted his commanders, he removed the matter from the agenda. Arso, however, knew from the history of wars and his own people's traditions that some warriors had a natural instinct for vengeance against the defeated. He feared this, especially at the end of the war, particularly in Austrian territory, and so he warned his deputy in Belgrade, Terzić, that through the General Staff delegates to the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Armies, Generals Rade Hamović, and with the signature of the Supreme Commander, "army and main staff commanders in Croatia and Slovenia should be warned to take vigorous measures so that the captured quisling forces would not be executed but sent to prisoner-of-war camps for selection, from where only war criminals would go to trial and, if they deserve it, to the gallows." In fact, such an order was sent on May 14, with Tito's signature, in a "circular dispatch" to the commanders of the armies and main staffs of Croatia and Slovenia,[927] but the chain of those who killed, or at least gave approval for it, led down to non-commissioned officers. The events, particularly in the area of Bleiburg and earlier in the Kočevski Rog region, got out of control of the command, leading to mass executions of prisoners. Horrific stories about this were conveyed to Arso by members of the Yugoslav Army units who were on the ground,[928] and the mass killings continued in the collection camps of the main staffs of Croatia and Slovenia during the transport of prisoners, and so on. To make matters worse for the losing side, on May 18, the main staffs were disbanded and new "authorities" arrived, during which time the transfer of prisoners and the record-keeping system suffered, and with it, so did the prisoners. A soldier or a non-commissioned officer, with the approval of the commander, guards or even acting independently, would separate a group of "their own," sometimes as many as a hundred, take them "aside" and line them "against the wall."

There is no data in the preserved documents regarding the scale of this bloodshed, at least not in domestic archives or in the memoir literature written by the victors, but there are sources in some American, English and even Russian works, with the most extensive records kept in the British Public Archive in London. There are also accounts in books published by political emigres in the West, as well as stories from the executioners, though of course, these must be taken with a grain of salt, as exaggerations are a natural feature of people with such psychological makeup, and especially those who managed to escape under the blade and later found themselves in positions where they were writing about it. Professor Branko Petranović, in his testamentary book *Historians of the Contemporary Era,* notes that "the most data about the fate of captured quisling and Chetnik forces in Slovenia and Austria" were found by the author Borivoje Karapanđić, who "partially used English and American sources about the massacre of captured quislings after their surrender, by the British, to Marshal Tito's army. What led the English to carry out this surrender of men who were already sentenced to death? The agreement between the Yugoslavs and the British, Churchill's policy to

[927] A copy for the Main Staff of Slovenia in Ljubljana, State Archive, file 41, folder III.

[928] Especially from the "Rapid Detachment" of the Yugoslav Army inserted into Austria.



The fate of prisoners of war — the ultimate test of the victor's morality.

quickly rid themselves of former allies now considered unnecessary, the fear of a possible war between the Western powers and Yugoslavia, and the desire of British officers to have a 'clean deck' if dramatic events that could be foreseen came to pass..."[929] The esteemed professor, perhaps near the end of his life, left it as a legacy to his colleagues to investigate this taboo topic, with which one can easily agree, and let this invitation and reminder be included in these few excerpts in the book about the Chief of the Supreme Command of the victorious army. And to add the note from Commissar B. Šiljegović that Arso was horrified by the stories arriving in Postojna from Carinthia, Kočevski Rog and Kras — about pits, caves, holes, ravines, and canyons, forests and fields covered with the bodies of the executed; he was ashamed of these actions, which lacked the chivalry of the victors. This sentiment was shared in discussions "from the sunny slopes of the Alps," where they did everything possible to end the massacres and preserve the honour of the victorious army.

It was no longer a time for chivalrous treatment of prisoners, especially not the kind described in the book on nobility and heroism by Marko Miljanov, or the practices of "the emperor of heroes" Nikola Petrović, where a captured Turk was ensured a piece of bread even if the victor himself went hungry. Arso knew this, but he believed that a prisoner should be given a proper status — one that was legally documented — of an investigator and a judge. A document about this has been preserved: on April 24,

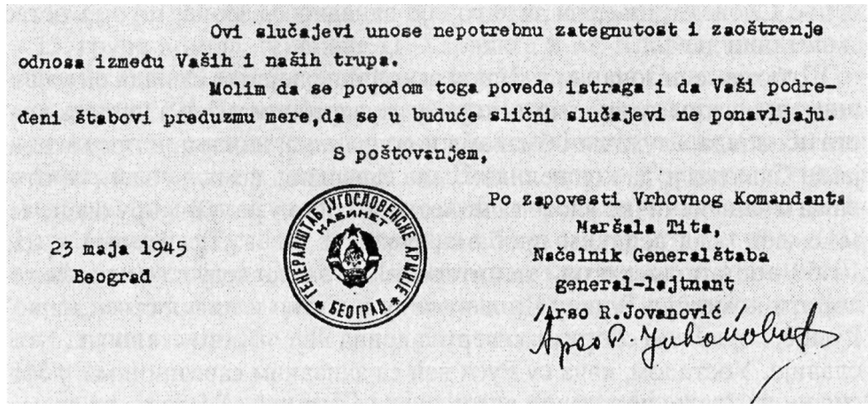
[929] B. Petranović, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

he received a report, signed by Colonel Tasić, stating that a column of prisoners had been escorted through Belgrade, seven of whom had the letter "U" clearly marked on their foreheads, and one of them had a sign around his neck that read "captain," with a large brass bell hanging from it, which would ring with every step he took. Outraged, Arso — through General Lj. Đurić — demanded an immediate investigation. The Report Section of the Belgrade City Command confirmed the accuracy of the report, explaining that these prisoners had arrived from the Mobilization Centre in Novi Sad, and that the guards, on their way to Banjica, had not removed their "symbols" because they were concerned for their safety — trying to protect them from a lynch by the angry mob. It was discovered in Novi Sad that this group of Ustaše had been captured in the battles near Darda, and that the one with the bell, "the butcher," Marko Felinac from Tovarnik, had "confessed before Major Božović that he had slaughtered 174 people, including twenty children." This was reported by the guards, who beat him, and his companions suffered the same fate. It was in the Mobilization Centre that Rade Katić, a 12-year-old fighter, had clearly marked them. As he testified during interrogation, the Ustaše had "slaughtered everyone alive." He had infiltrated their movement toward Belgrade, ordered them to kneel and marked each of their foreheads with a red pencil, so large that it could be seen from a distance. It was never determined who in Novi Sad, in Čortanovci or at any other station en route to Belgrade had hung the "bell" around Marko's neck. It was difficult to determine who, among the guards and escorts, did not beat these criminals, and in the streets of Belgrade, they were attacked by an enraged crowd. To those who reported the investigation to him, the Chief of Staff said that "for that Captain Marko, if he killed even one person, and not 174, the rope would be a light punishment," but that it needed to be verified in an investigation and in court. However, in any case, prisoners should not be subjected to such public humiliation — first and foremost because of the honourable name of the partisans. Those most responsible for this "performance" in the streets of Belgrade were punished, and the "case" was presented to the General Staff as a warning, explained by General M. Apostolski.[930]

General Velimir Terzić will remember Arso's "final submission" in Belgrade with some regret; the Chief of Staff, as his first assistant and a loyal comrade in the toughest circumstances, had punished him with a military reprimand, which remained his only punishment in his officer career. The issue was that Generals Terzić and Hamović, in the absence of their superior occupied on the northwestern part of the Yugoslav front, had urgently provided "the authorized organs of the Provisional Government" with data about the victims of Yugoslavia in the NOB, and specifically about the victims of the National Liberation Army, which was done hastily, resulting in an improvised, unclear and unprofessional outcome. When he heard about and saw the data, Arso flared up and asked who had ordered it, who had approved it and who had used it. He did not accept any answers, insisting that "this is a very serious matter, these are the data by which the world will understand and accept us, judge our fight, our victims and our

[930] Document, archivally unmarked, in AVII, compartment for 1945.

contribution to the victory." Immediately, through the Supreme Commander's Cabinet, he insisted on the prohibition of using this data, and he first reprimanded Terzić privately, then appointed him head of a commission with five department heads from the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army. He gathered them, set the task, determined the methodology and parameters, and set a deadline. This would result in the data on 305,672 killed, died from wounds and missing, and 399,880 wounded members of the NOV and PO. These figures formed the basis of the brochure *The Wartime Efforts of Yugoslavia 1941-1945,* the data from which is still used today, and by which the world acknowledges and values the contribution of the NOVJ.[931]



Ovi slučajevi unose nepotrebnu zategnutost i zaoštrenje odnosa između Vaših i naših trupa.

Molim da se povodom toga povede istraga i da Vaši podređeni štabovi preduzmu mere,da se u buduće slični slučajevi ne ponavljaju.

S poštovanjem,

23 maja 1945
Beograd

ГЕНЕРАЛШТАБ ЈУГОСЛОВЕНСКЕ АРМИЈЕ КАБИНЕТ БЕОГРАД

Po zapovesti Vrhovnog Komandanta
Maršala Tita,
Načelnik Generalštaba
general-lejtnant
/Arso R.Jovanović/

Protest to Marshal Alexander.

When the "military section" of the brochure, full of data, was approved by the top of the government, it gathered all the generals from the General Staff and the Ministry of National Defence to congratulate the "Terzić Commission" on successfully completing the task. It was then added that anyone who could not understand how what is created in the General Staff — correct analyses, written orders and directives, defined regulations and laws, and the like — goes directly into the archives and becomes part of history, should immediately change their profession, move into politics, enter the world of artists or somewhere else where revisions, extensions, reductions, rewritings and improvements are possible. For people prone to compromising with mediocrity, there is no place in the General Staff, which must be an esteemed institution, and it will be even more so if its institutions and its leading figures, the generals, are respected. "He was for all of us collaborators, for the public, an institution in his own right, and he had the right to demand this from us, his assistants," said General Terzić, adding that "he gathered intellectuals, and he did not tolerate small-minded men in narrow vests at the military top, which is why, surely, he had opponents. He followed

[931] AVII, file 21-A, reg. no. 2/19. The validity of the insistence of the Chief of the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army is also confirmed by data on the USSR's casualties in the Second World War, as noted by academician Zoran Lakić: Stalin spoke of seven, Khrushchev of 20, Gorbachev of "more than 27," and later studies would determine "more than 30 million dead."

his own thoughts, was reluctant to adapt and even less to cater to mediocre minds, considering it harmful for the art of war."

The Chief of the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army hurried to catch a plane after the June 23 meeting, staying in the heated area for the next four days, doing everything to ensure that what was agreed upon would take effect. From June 24, he worked on "introducing the Yugoslav Army's Military Administration into the 'B' zone," which covered the Julian March, Istria with Rijeka and the Slovenian Littoral, up to the demarcation line agreed with the Allied commission in Trieste, while for the territory west of the "Morgan Line," in the "A" zone, the Allied Military Administration was established. This was introduced as a temporary institution — until the issue of Trieste and the Slovenian Littoral was permanently resolved through a peace treaty with Italy.[932]

While in Belgrade, Arso, "by the Supreme Commander's order," sent a protest to Field Marshal Alexander, with his signature and the stamp of the General Staff's Cabinet:

"In recent times, several incidents have occurred in Trieste due to the fault of your drivers. These incidents are too significant to be completely believed as coincidences. There have been more than five cases where large Allied trucks rammed into the passenger cars carrying our military leaders.

"One such case involved the commander of the city of Trieste, General Kveder, whose car was hit by an Allied truck, and by sheer luck, Kveder passed unharmed, although his car was completely wrecked. Another case involved Colonel (Vlado) Vodopivec, whose car was also hit by an Allied truck, but fortunately, without major consequences. The third case involved Commissar of the Main Staff of Slovenia, Colonel Boris Krajger. The fourth case involved Lidija Šentjurc, who was in the city until the liberation of Trieste and led the resistance. She was severely injured on the head. The fifth case involved our officer Derenda, who was shot at for no reason by an Allied jeep on the Trieste-Gorica road. Other cases are still unverified.

"These cases create unnecessary tension and aggravate relations between your and our troops. We kindly request that an investigation be conducted and that your subordinate headquarters take measures to prevent similar cases from happening in the future."[933]

Arso returned to Belgrade on June 28 — when the capital loudly celebrated Stalin's proclamation as the Generalissimo of the Soviet Union. The celebration was also held in Moscow, where, on June 24, a grand victory parade took place, with the Yugoslav Army represented by a delegation headed by Koča Popović. The ceremony also included Stalin's promotion, undeniably the most deserving leader for the defeat of fascism — the most important one.

After the long "post-war war," the Chief of the General Staff returned, convinced that, by receiving orders from politics, he and his comrades had done everything they

[932] The Osimo Agreement between the SFRY and Italy would not be signed until October 11, 1975.

[933] AVII, file 30, reg. no. 2-1/2.

could for the homeland and its army. For the second time during the anti-fascist war, he found himself on Slovenian soil, in a very delicate mission with unlimited authority, at a time when Slovenia was facing its hardest period. Both times, as a soldier and a man, he did as much as he could to preserve its integrity and position within the common state. In 1947, he lived to see Yugoslavia, through the Peace Treaty with Italy, regain part of the Slovenian Littoral, Istria with Rijeka, Zadar, as well as Cres, Lošinj and other islands, including the distant Palagruža. Six years after his death, Yugoslavia, after long negotiations and agreements with the great powers, would expand its civilian administration to the "B" zone. All of this, surely, would have been different for Yugoslavia, certainly less favourable, had it not been for that "furious breakthrough into Trieste" and the advance to the Soča, the dramatic battle for every inch of "disputed territory," and the firm stand in the face of power. That gain in 1947 was a vindication for Arso for the two hardest months of his life, when, at the head of the "general commission," he fought for every inch of Slovenian land, considering it a patriotic duty and an exalted obligation of the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters. Indeed, from Trieste and its approaches, he carried the bitterness of the deepened realization that, as a small country, Yugoslavia had lost the battle with the Western great powers for that European port, which it was inevitably doomed to lose. However, he believed that the fight must continue and that the response should be measured, calmly preparing the arguments for the Peace Conference. He felt that with the indulgent political approach, he had been personally cornered, in some ways betrayed, especially since E. Kardelj, from Vis — through the mediation of the old J. Smodlaka — had been preparing him for the conquest of Trieste and the introduction of "municipal autonomy and bilingual administration" there, the annexation of Slovenia and part of the territory west of the Soča, which remained "Venetian debt."

He was deeply disappointed by the professional soldiers of the West in the highest staff positions, who, in order to achieve the objectives of their own governments, used deception, trickery, lies and provocations. He realized that with the great powers, there was no love, respect or protective role for the small countries, no matter how loyal the country had been in war and peace. In the great trials, such as the "Trieste Crisis of 1945," only naked interests remained. In this regard, as he would tell Commissar Boško Šiljegović, he was also angry at the leadership of "Mother" Russia, which did not firmly stand behind Yugoslavia in the dispute over the northern Adriatic. After all, when the Soviets had already signed an agreement with the Western Allies in Moscow and at Yalta stating that the border of Austria, as it was before the "Anschluss" (March 1938), could not be changed and that the occupation of the Alpine state would only be carried out by the troops of the U.S., Great Britain, the USSR and France — why then did they fuel Yugoslavia's hope that it would receive Carinthia? Why did they insist that Yugoslav Army divisions participate in the occupation of its eastern part, only to soon and easily allow the Western Allies to literally expel them from there after only a month and a half? He never knew, either then or until his death, the position of the Bolshevik Party leadership from those days: that the USSR — completely exhausted from the six-year war and in the given military-political situation on the international

stage — could not enter into a war with the Western Allies over Trieste, except in the sphere of propaganda.

From the forever lost Trieste, he also carried with him a deep human dilemma about which — according to generals M. Morača and Đ. Jovanić — there would often be debates, even during their schooling in Moscow: whether the Allies were willing, for the sake of Trieste and the interests of the Italians, to go to war with the Yugoslav Army, pushing it to the brink, like "cannon fodder," with the aggressive Polish army of General Wladyslaw Anders. And it was in Moscow, while studying at the "Voroshilov" General Staff Academy, that he heard news about severe military provocations on Yugoslavia's western borders, which became a reason for him to reassess what had been done. In reality, this was the starting phase of the long and ultimately disastrous "Cold War," where the national airspace was often threatened, culminating in the downing of Allied aircraft. A personally brave man and determined soldier, in Trieste he found himself on a great test — looking eye to eye with high Allied commanders and chief staff officers or passing in his armoured vehicles with escorts through positions bristling with artillery, facing the threatening gazes of the British, Americans, New Zealanders, South Africans and Poles. Along with Field Marshal H. Alexander, among the professional soldiers with whom it was impossible to reach any understanding on any issue, seeking at least an explanation, if not a justification, for the dramatic misunderstandings and incidents, he counted: Lieutenant General W. Morgan and the commanders of the 13th Corps and the 15th Army Group, Generals J. Harding and M. Clarke, heroes of the Allied battles in North Africa and Italy from Sicily to the "Gothic Line."[934] After frequent, profoundly bitter conversations with these Allied generals, he often returned with the deep impression that they, officers hardened in wars from Burma, through the Middle East and Africa, to southern Europe, would have, without hesitation, ordered fire to be opened on the Yugoslavs. Field Marshal Alexander, judging by his increasingly belligerent orders, was no exception. Let's start with what Field Marshal and his superiors and closest associates had written down in the 42 days of "war after the war" — from Victory Day to Devin.

On the morning of May 10, General W. Morgan, after being seen off by his host, the Chief of the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army, flew from Zemun to Caserta, where he submitted a report that H. Macmillan, in a report to the Foreign Office, interpreted in such a way that the Allied governments, "if they intend to reject Marshal Tito's proposal," should certainly "be prepared to use force and all that is associated with it."[935] The following day, Prime Minister W. Churchill sent a message to Tito: "I sincerely and from the heart hope that you will not take any action that would bring your units into armed conflict with ours. We have ordered Field Marshal Alexander to make a strong concentration of all forces on the British front opposite your forces in the Julian March. I am convinced that you will make a great mistake if you attack him. In such circumstances, he already has full authority to respond." Thus, the Prime

[934] General Harding would be the first head of the Allied Military Administration in the Julian March, and General Clarke the first commander of occupation troops in Austria.

[935] *Collection Tito-Churchill, Strictly Secret,* p. 542.

Minister had ordered a "strong concentration of all forces," knowing that his units and individuals were provoking the other side and making increasingly coarse incidents, but he pre-emptively blamed the Yugoslavs for any potential conflict. His supreme commander in the Mediterranean, in a "military assessment" delivered to the Imperial General Staff on May 12, stated that, in case they decided to use force against Yugoslavia, he would need a total of 11 divisions.[936]

On May 14, Foreign Minister A. Iden wrote to Churchill from Washington (where he was attending a UNO meeting) that "the Americans have not yet definitively decided what the next step should be if Tito does not meet the Anglo-American request. I get the impression that they have reconciled themselves with the fact that, in the worst-case scenario, they will have to use force. They were alarmed by Alexander's mention of the general impression that an action against Yugoslavia would leave on British and American soldiers." This was, in fact, a part of Field Marshal's assessment of the situation in the Julian March, prepared for the Imperial General Staff where, in the chapter on combat morale, he assessed that his soldiers held "deep admiration and great sympathy for Tito's partisans' fight for freedom. Therefore, we must be very careful before asking them to turn from fighting a common enemy to fighting against an ally."[937] Churchill was angered by such an evaluation, calling it "immoderate and even cowardly," especially since it had resonated in America, and he asked the Field Marshal to "find ways to guarantee that the army under his command would execute orders and demonstrate its usual sense of duty and discipline." To calm his Prime Minister, he somewhat backed down, stating that "I am confident that our soldiers will execute the orders, but I doubt that they will once again start fighting, this time against the Yugoslavs, with the same enthusiasm with which they fought the hated Germans." Churchill quoted this last sentence in a letter to Minister A. Iden (still in Washington) on May 16, admitting that "from war-weary units, one should never expect them to embark on a new task with enthusiasm, but experience from Athens (referring to the start of the Expeditionary Corps' battle against the ELAS liberation movement — *I.M.*) teaches us that once the shooting starts, they quickly warm up, assuming that after consideration, it can be proven to them that they are fighting for a just cause."[938]

Around June 10, when the situation around Trieste intensified, the British had plans for the "return home" not only of officers from the military missions of the Yugoslav Army and "members of the diplomatic mission in Belgrade," but also for the headquarters' assessments: with how many divisions and from which direction to strike Yugoslavia from Greece, Italy and Austria, which cities to attack from the air, and which ports to bomb from the sea.

Indeed, the details from the strictly confidential documents cited here, especially the assessments of the strength kept as the greatest state and military secret, were not known to Arso at that time. However, based on the actions of the former allies,

[936] *Ibid.,* p. 545.

[937] *Ibid.,* p. 548.

[938] *Ibid.,* p. 549.

particularly their command, he could — and with great certainty, from the highest vantage point and place of the events — judge the political views and plans of the great powers, England and the U.S., at the approaches to Trieste. He believed that this, along with the stance of the USSR and Italy's behaviour, should remain a permanent lesson and a serious warning — so that there would be no need for constant retesting in front of the "teacher of life" and a life lived in constant worry. There was no doubt about it: the units of the Yugoslav Army, with the Chief of the General Staff at the head, were doing everything they could to prevent armed conflict with the Anglo-American forces and bloodshed despite all provocations from the opposing side. However, they were undoubtedly determined that if war was imposed on them, they would defend the national interests in that part of the country, accepting the battle regardless of the cost. It is worth noting that two-thirds of the 4th Army, as well as other armies, were made up of Serbs — the flower of the Serbian youth. The Serbs — just as their descendants would be in 1947, 1953 and in some subsequent years of the "Trieste crisis" — were prepared to bleed for the Julian March, convinced that this was a true national interest and a strategic military task, and certainly a duty to the homeland, singing sincerely that they would "fly like birds — over Trieste and Gorica." And they did — reliably, just as the Chief of the General Staff did. Life would, for them and their sons and grandsons, show in the early '70s and especially the '90s of the 20th century, that Croatia and Slovenia did not deserve such readiness to sacrifice. General Arso R. Jovanović, however, would not live to see this.[939]

Return to the Book *(June 26, 1945-March 15, 1946)*

Returning from war to peacetime duties in the General Staff, its Chief immediately continued his own battles: it was urgent and essential to reorganize the wartime

[939] He could only have lived to 84 years old — in the revolutionary year of 1991, both of these republics forcefully seceded from Yugoslavia, which, if one had carefully read and listened to what their leaders wrote and said, could have at least been expected. For example, according to academician M. Ekmečić, in the final edition of his study on the Slovenian national issue, in the last sentence he wrote that "the historical goal of the Slovenian people is to create an independent state," i.e., to secede from Yugoslavia, but that achieving this goal would only be postponed "until the fascists and nazis are at the borders," "because of which the Slovenians must remain together with the Serbs in a common state until the danger passes" (this sentence would be omitted in two post-war editions for tactical reasons). Two Slovenian ministers in Dr. Slobodan Jovanović's London government, Miha Kreka and France Snoj, were open about holding the "Serbian side" throughout the war and strongly advocated for the restoration of Yugoslavia, because they were aware that only in such a strong military and economically prestigious state could Slovenia expand to its ethnic borders. This was also hinted at by the policy of the Liberation Front and from the writings and positions of E. Kardelj up until the fall of 1943 — whose victim was also the head of the General Staff of the NOP Yugoslavia, but there was neither the time nor the sense to review this, and in the first post-war years, the victorious side dismissed it, showing (eight years after Arso's liquidation) no interest in the true meaning of the words from the party leader and constitution-maker E. Kardelj, sent to writer Dobrica Ćosić, in a debate about the Program of the new SKJ (instead of the CPY) — about the "transitional role of Yugoslavia" which, "in the new power relations, faces reorganization." This continued until June 26, 1991, when "*dežela*" ("land" in Slovenian — *S.P.*) raised arms against the army of the joint state. And so did Croatia, just a month later.

army and "shift it onto a peacetime track," which entailed stabilizing and modernizing it in all areas of life, particularly by elevating the officer corps so that it would be capable and ready to protect the hard-won, yet seriously endangered, freedom. Perhaps most vividly, this is captured by the sentence with which he concluded his publication *Overview of the National Liberation War* — that "the Yugoslav Army, after achieving victory, has a role in protecting the gains of this fight earned with blood and in ensuring the peaceful development and construction of our country based on the principles born in the NOB." Probably no one in the Yugoslav Army better understood than him how only a strong, modernly organized, and well-equipped military force, with officers morally and professionally suited to these tasks, could achieve this. And it can be said with certainty that no one better than him knew how to create and build such a "deterrent force against the aggressor." The fact that some long remembered how the Chief of the General Staff sometimes overstepped in his demands in this regard speaks mostly about them — unprepared to, truthfully, after the exhaustion of war, face new challenges, shoulder heavy burdens, and enter battles that required sacrifice...

Alongside the building of the Army, railways and roads had to be repaired, bridges rebuilt, the economy started, the vehicle fleet made operational, roofs raised, schools and hospitals repaired, towns connected and so on. This was not only the army's duty to the people but also a condition for its own progress. This heaviest burden fell on its shoulders because it occupied the most vital part of the diminished, exhausted and impoverished population, with hundreds of thousands of its fighters making up a significant portion of the liberated country's population. The Army, among other things, had an urgent and emotionally significant obligation — to deliver to mothers the bodies of their sons and daughters killed across the battlefields. These victims, including fighters and officers, numbered more than 300,000, with additional losses from terror. Moreover, it had to solve its own problems urgently: relocate to old and improvised barracks, establish basic infrastructure in new garrisons, build shooting ranges and training grounds, compile and review wartime plans for units, and secure food and basic medical conditions...

More than 83 per cent of officers had no full secondary education, while one in four had incomplete primary schooling. With these people, and with the help of Soviet instructors, it was necessary to organize specialized training for the fighters. The small number of intellectuals and specialists from various fields was required by the economy, education and culture, and they had to be accommodated, as per the government's decision. The younger generations, mostly students and women, were prioritized in the first two, "selective," demobilization phases.

Work continued on regulating the relationship between the General Staff and the Ministry of National Defence and developing legal regulations. Under Arso's leadership, the *Military Obligation Law* was drafted and adopted, and he also worked on the *Service in the Yugoslav Army Law*, which would be applied in the following years. The drafting of the *National Defence Law* was also underway, but it was soon understood that it was a long-term task. He participated in the formulation of key provisions related to defence in the draft Constitution (adopted on January 31, 1946).

In accordance with the military-political situation, intense work was being done on preparing and "rehearsing" potential combat operations, especially for the units in the southern and central theatres, namely the 5th and 6th Armies. Those in Macedonia, due to the imminent threat of aggression on the country from Greece, were placed in the first echelon, while those from Bosnia were on high alert to be rapidly deployed wherever needed. The weaponry and war equipment were still almost exclusively of Soviet and German origin — about half and half. Despite all the demobilizations and the outflow of personnel to the economy, the number of officers was slowly decreasing, maintaining a figure of around 100,000, with the number of inadequately educated and unqualified individuals not dropping below 80,000. In wartime, even with such (un)educated but highly motivated personnel, the army could reliably engage in both offence and defence, with a high chance of success. However, in peacetime, in reorganizing and modernizing the army, progress was slow. Yet, the work had to continue, driven by the situation and urgent tasks, and the persistent pressure from the Russian instructors, who were in all the headquarters, schools and teams for major projects. According to some sources, in September 1945, there were 472 of them, and this number would remain fairly consistent over the next two years. There are no written records about their assessment, the significance of their assistance to the officers of the Yugoslav Army, or their relationships with Soviet advisers in Belgrade, and in Moscow, this information is (still) inaccessible. Even in the 32 meetings of the Political Bureau of the CC of the CPY, held from June 11, 1945 to March 1, 1948, from which some records have been preserved, there was no mention of them, although the topic of military building, especially in the context of related issues, was discussed at least in every third meeting, according to the remaining legacy. Three traces remain, however: the first — an order from the Chairman of the Council of Ministers on July 10, 1945; the second — an observation by Peko Dapčević; the third — some indications from the minutes of the Political Bureau meeting regarding the position of Yugoslav instructors in the Albanian Army and their relations with Soviet advisers.

The preamble of the Order states that "irregularities" continue to occur with Soviet instructors, which damage the "organization and modern warfare" of the Yugoslav Army, and may harm "the fraternal relations between our army and the Red Army." It is emphasized that they are here "at our request," "tirelessly and selflessly transferring to our young army the valuable knowledge and experience of the most modern and powerful army in the world," "working selflessly under the difficult conditions caused by the development of our young army, not knowing our circumstances and language," and therefore "they should feel our respect and gratitude at every step and in every situation." Pointing out that all staffs and young leaders must receive the advice, suggestions and demands of Soviet military advisers and instructors with respect and understanding, always aware that "in terms of military knowledge and war experience, we are far behind them," Marshal Tito ordered:

"1. Army staffs, namely the highest responsible staffs and commands, will strive to use the advisers and instructors in the most proper and beneficial way and to fully achieve the goal for which they are here.

"2. The relations of our staffs and members of our army with Soviet military advisers and instructors must be fully fraternal and friendly, with due respect and genuine regard."[940]

In Peko Dapčević's memoir *How We Waged the War* (1956), it is stated that "most of them, brought in as help for training the troops, were not up to the task and could not contribute much in solving such large issues. They did not particularly try to understand our situation and problems, as besides helping with troop training, they had other 'obligations' to their country." He mentions that "some of them demanded that everything be subjected to Russian standards, often regardless of the sacrifices in human life and the difficulties we faced in managing these resources." In 1985, I asked the military leader and author, in front of his comrades — generals Koča, Kosta and Morača — to point to any examples of these "other obligations," but he did not wish to add anything, which was his prerogative. However, all four of them agreed that Soviet instructors or advisers had access to all meetings and all data, participated in drafting documents, and had copies of them. Therefore, there were no secrets or reservations before them, and perhaps the only thing they could provide were their assessments of the morale of the units, the mood of the people, the readiness of the troops to defend the southern or western borders and the political conditions in the country.

The disagreements and disputes between the instructors of the Yugoslav Army and the Red Army in Albania stemmed from the efforts of the latter to "overpower" the Yugoslavs, despite having arrived there about a year later. Their goal was to have the final say and dominate. Lieutenant Colonel Đuro Medenica, supported by Ambassador Josip Đerđa, proposed from Tirana that Soviet experts — around 180 of them — be placed under the joint command of the "nearly 500 in Yugoslavia" and put under the authority of the "Belgrade general." There is no information on the stance of the Political Bureau regarding this proposal on June 11, 1945, but it is known that, based on Medenica's report and the proposal from the Minister for Montenegro, Milovan Đilas, it was decided that "the Albanian divisions under the command of the 5th Army[941] would be armed and that they should be helped to arm their remaining divisions."

In the construction of the Yugoslav Army, the efforts of those in political leadership who claimed the right to deal with military matters decisively rejected the values and experiences of the Royal Yugoslav Army in areas like organization, formation, training, military administration and internal relations, while undervaluing the experience from the creation of the NOP. In contrast, Soviet military experiences, particularly the wartime skills of the victorious Red Army, were accepted uncritically. Soviet military instructors and advisers in the Yugoslav Army headquarters, who worked selflessly, tried to standardize everything: organization, formation, equipment, armament, combat training, education and internal relations. This led to disputes in some division and army headquarters, to which Tito's order responded. Arso, in the discussions in the General Staff and in commands, advocated for more respect for the

[940] AVII, file 21, reg. no. 14-1/1.

[941] The 5th and 6th Divisions of the Albanian Army, deployed towards Debar, served as the strategic reserve for "eliminating the common war threat from the south."

specifics of the Yugoslav Army and the value of its war experience — not just from the NOB but especially from the liberation wars of the early 20th century, such as the battles at Kumanovo, Mojkovac, Cer, Kolubara, Albania and Salonika. In his conversations with General Terzić, he emphasized that it was "unhealthy" to completely rely on Russian global strategy and its offensive spirit when formulating Yugoslavia's own war doctrine. He also argued that the Yugoslav Army of 1941 had been treated unjustly; it was abandoned by politics, torn apart on March 27, and like all other European armies (including the Red Army), it could not hold its ground against the Wehrmacht's blows. The term "former officer," used in political discourse, was deeply insulting to him. This category of NOP officers was much larger than it was thought — around 700 officers were caught in Italy's surrender, and this number increased sharply with the arrival of officers from camps and, particularly, with amnesty calls. On October 16, 1945, a group of 500 officers returning from German prisoner-of-war camps would be welcomed by Marshal Tito himself, accompanied by Generals Arso, Koča, Kosta, F. Pirc and Lj. Đurić. At the gathering in the Agricultural Faculty hall in Zemun, Tito gave them, in his reserved and solemn manner, recognition for having remained "faithful sons of the people of their country, which fought to the death against the enemy in whose claws you were." He praised those colleagues who had joined the NOB for "truly being faithful to their people and enduring all the suffering and hardships." He emphasized that in the Yugoslav Army, "there should be no division between those who were on the front and those who were in captivity. You were also on the front in captivity. You performed your duty there, only you were prevented from doing it with a weapon in hand. But you remained faithful to this democratic, federal Yugoslavia." He concluded: "There are no first-class or second-class; everyone must have equal duties and rights."[942]

By the end of 1945, through the selection of arrivals, 733 officers, or one in every ten, had their pre-war rank recognized, and the following year, this number increased by 1,213. In 1945, ten "former generals" were "taken in," and the following year, only one more was added, so by the end of 1946, the JA had a total of 82 generals, up from 74 the previous year.[943] Generally, officers and generals from the NOB and captivity were equal in status, but in practice, the former were in a much better position. The latter — assigned to staff, school, operational and other duties — were everywhere labelled as "former officers," particularly those who "had never smelled gunpowder." Moreover, the new head of personnel, Lieutenant General Ivan Gošnjak, insisted that officer positions "should be filled by workers and peasants" and that the "staff issue should be approached from a class perspective." On December 12, 1945, Tempo stated that the Army "should not be led by uncertain elements, but by reliable workers and

[942] *Borba* newspaper, November 17, 1945. By the end of 1945, 7,130 officers and 3,647 non-commissioned officers returned from German captivity, and in 1946, another 15 officers and 364 non-commissioned officers (Note 242 in Vol. 29 of the *J. Broz's Collected Works*, p. 289).

[943] General Dr. Drago Nikolić, ed. *Development of the Armed Forces of the SFRY 1945-1985*, Volume on Personnel Policy, Belgrade 1986 (internal edition SSNO). According to M. Stanišić (*Ruling Personnel of the NOB in Montenegro 1941-1945,* Podgorica 1995, p. 623), out of 28 war generals from Montenegro, 15 were officers of the Yugoslav Army.

peasants who will rise through the ranks." At that time, the officer corps was made up of 42% peasants, 30% workers, 20% intellectuals and 8% "others," including "former officers," meaning "elements" with little chance in competition with 93% communists, especially when 58% of the officers in the JA were under 25 years old.[944] This was the time when the evaluation of officers' success in leadership focused primarily on "political correctness, loyalty to socialism, engagement in studying Marxism-Leninism and dialectical materialism (Diamat)," and only afterward on their military expertise. Arso, a dedicated military professional, could increasingly influence this process less, though he was more aware than anyone else of the role of over 4,000 "former officers" — now leaders of the JA in building armed forces that would later become a regional military power during his lifetime.

He more frequently visited army commands and oversaw their preparations for war tasks. The 5th Army was on constant alert, directed southward, where an aggression from the British and monarcho-fascists was certain. The 6th Army, stationed in Bosnia, was ready to intervene on threatened strategic routes. The two armies of the ground forces and the Tank Army were stationed at the northwest military front, echeloned in depth, with headquarters in Zagreb, always kept under tension from the West, overflown by planes, and provoked by land and sea. However, the General Staff's assessment expected less aggression from the northwest, so half of the Tank Army's forces were moved south, with the corps command located in Niš.

The Chief of the General Staff insisted on strengthening the staff services, which, in his view were the weakest, and, together with General Pavle Ilić, the head of the 5th Army Staff, he appointed more assistants. The first and second assistants were "former officers," Colonel Velimir Knežević and Jefto Jovanović. He insisted on professional training under conditions as close as possible to wartime, requesting commanders, particularly battalion and brigade leaders, to lead by example in training. For instance, a female officer serving in the Rodić Army Staff recalled how, hidden behind an office window, she watched how the commander of a Tank Brigade, in front of the Chief of the General Staff and his officers, demonstrated how to crawl under low barbed wire and, with a protective mask, insert bombs into a bunker. If the commander had chosen this role, following the example set by Russian instructors who had practised and required this type of training, the Chief of the General Staff should not have allowed such a "demonstration." The witness believed that it was too harsh and certainly unpleasant to watch. However, Arso believed that such self-sacrificial demonstrations by example were appropriate for the times. He considered issuing good directives and rational orders, successfully leading military exercises in the General Staff, visiting units in border sectors, at exercises and shooting ranges, sleeping on hard military beds, and eating with the troops "from the pot" as part of his own obligation and readiness to set an example for his subordinates. He did not consider his own inconsistency or relaxation acceptable as a right, even though others, equal to or above him, were not ready to share the burdens of creating something new with him. He agreed to study in

[944] D. Nikolić, *op. cit.*

Moscow, even though he was fully prepared in both theoretical and practical aspects of the General Staff, having been trained in a school modelled on the most prestigious French military institutions. He genuinely believed in the importance of continuous learning, criticizing senior generals who, despite their education, would not even attend a lecture on strategy or operations, while persistently convincing subordinates of the need for systematic military education.

In addition to purely military matters, from time to time, he dealt with issues that, formally speaking, were not within the jurisdiction of the Chief of the General Staff. For example, in May 1945, Army General Dušan Simović returned to the country. Marshal Tito authorized Arso to resolve his basic life issues with the relevant services. Appreciating that he was a general of personal authority, who had done what he did in 1941, and in June 1944 spoke on Radio London about how the NOP "must coordinate the activities of all patriots in the country and abroad with one main goal — defeat the enemy!" — Arso made sure he was provided with accommodation, assigned a pension and given the conditions to write memoirs.[945] Later, he would ensure that he received a "R-card" as a "military writer," with a few extra "dots" for food, clothing and fuel.

As soon as he arrived in Belgrade from Vis, through the organs of General Ljubodrag Đurić, the commander of the city, he found the divisional general of artillery and chemical engineering, Miloš G. Obradović, "the father of Serbian gunpowder," the inventor of the explosive "*Kamniktit*" and the author of the esteemed book *Ballistics.* Having heard that throughout the war, he had maintained an anti-fascist and patriotic stance in his hometown of Gledić near Kraljevo, and in Belgrade, Arso planned, with the consent of Chief of Staff General Savo Orović and Commissar Lieutenant Colonel Mirko Kalezić, to offer him the position of Head of the Teaching Department and, simultaneously, the leading officer of the Military Academy's Shooting Department of the DFY. The elderly general (born in 1881) readily accepted the responsibility, and from Victory Day 1945, upon Arso's suggestion, he became the head of a group of inspectors who assessed the state of the pre-war military industry plants. On this task, Obradović, in the rank of Lieutenant General and stationed in Kamnik, visited the Chief of the General Staff of the JA in Postojna.

For some generals who returned from captivity and found themselves without basic means of livelihood, and had not yet regulated their pensions, Arso helped them find work as researchers, consultants, translators and archivists at the Military History Institute, thus enabling them to earn a living. One such case was Brigadier General Svetomir Svetom Popović, an officer who had graduated from the War School in Paris.[946] Born in Smederevo, he had spent the war in captivity and, for some reason, could not be reappointed to active duty. With the approval of General M. Zelenika and A. Ranković, Arso secured him a position at the aforementioned Institute, where, being an excellent speaker of French and German, he was welcomed.

The Chief of the General Staff's office was visited by Iko Mirković, a member of

[945] Manuscript in AVII, available to researchers.

[946] In the April War of 1941, commander of the Skadar Detachment.

the CC of SKOJ. He requested military assistance for the accommodation of the delegation of the 1st Congress of the Anti-Fascist Youth of the Balkans (July 8-15, 1945). At the moment of his arrival, no one was in front of the Chief of the General Staff's office, so the well-known communist from Podgorica and a veteran of the NOB had to wait. He did so, encouraged by the fact that Arso was "a very strict general," and he had been sent here to resolve the situation as smoothly as possible in that difficult time, "with his fellow Podgorican." Seeing him through the open door, Arso called him over, shook his hand, offered him a chair, and then, already familiar with the details of this important event, with a discreet smile, asked for the list of requirements. As he read it, he added at least half of the requested amount, saying that military needs were great, but supplies were scarce, but "as hosts, we cannot disgrace ourselves in front of the youth of the Balkans." A satisfied Mirković could only thank him for getting more than he had requested, including food, vehicles, bedding and space, acknowledging that Slavko Komar and Rato Dugonjić had prepared him for the fact that the Chief of the General Staff, "pressured by the army's poverty, might give nothing," but here everything turned out "quickly, easily and satisfactorily." This was the first time Mirković had seen Arso, and he knew little about him, as he was not one of those people who gave "fiery speeches" and was not celebrated in songs. He thought he might tell Arso immediately that he was from Podgorica, hoping it might give him an advantage, but would only confirm it at the end, once everything was settled. To which Arso replied: "I was told you're from Podgorica, I know your parents, but you wouldn't have received anything if this wasn't a state interest."[947]

At the end of December 1944, using connections with two comrades, "our Spaniards," Colonel Veljko Kovačević arrived at Arso's office, coming from the front in Slavonia, from the 46th Division. He had previously been announced by General Vlado Popović and "brought" by General Peko Dapčević. He protested that, despite being part of "Lekić's group," with 15 high-ranking officers, including Ante Banina and Milan Kuprešanin, he had not been sent to study at the "Voroshilov" General Staff Academy and demanded that this be "corrected immediately." Arso replied that he bore no responsibility for the delay in sending him to Moscow, as it was General Kosta Nađ's task, and that with such delays, only Marshal Tito could send him. He added that this was the first time he had heard Kovačević's name on the list, and General Terzić had said the same when Kovačević and Dapčević had met him in the hallway, heading toward the White Palace. Marshal Tito had been informed of the "bureaucratic delay" by the two generals "former officers." To calm them down, the Supreme Commander gave Kovačević a general's rank, instead of a passport for Moscow, and entrusted him with the command of the 6th Corps in Slavonia. From that moment, General Kovačević became an adversary of the Chief of the General Staff, and he would not greet him even when, in early 1948, he visited Moscow to check on the "Croatian personnel" in Soviet military academies. He would later pay his debt to Arso in the 1960s and 1970s when signing Tito's (unpublished) war memoirs.

[947] From a conversation with I. Mirković, September 1995, in Belgrade.

In the development of wartime and peacetime formations of infantry divisions — as models for other branches and units — Arso made a concerted effort, perhaps overly so, to ensure that, in addition to modern army solutions, particularly those of the Red Army, Yugoslav experiences were taken into account. He wanted to ensure that, given the scarce motorization and even scarcer fuel supplies, animal-drawn carts were at least partially considered as part of the initial solution, which was suitable for the existing transportation network and the mountainous terrain. Some Yugoslav generals smiled at this, while the Soviets considered it unnecessary, as they viewed the defence of Yugoslavia's integrity as their responsibility. There were no basic rules or regulations for unit training, so practically everything available from Soviet technical literature, military journals and publications was translated, multiplied and processed. Thus, in the publications of army and corps headquarters, alongside contributions by Marshal Tito and General Jovanović on the development of the NOB, there were articles by Soviet authors on trench warfare, traffic routes, reconnaissance patrols, the handling of compasses and the importance of courier services. As for the professional literature of the Yugoslav Army, it was simply not accepted for study or application, and even Arso's notable work *Tactics of the Infantry Battalion* was disregarded.

The military education system was a particular concern for him. He initially envisioned a solution where all officers would complete elementary school through extracurricular learning, and later, through work and military schooling, would earn diplomas equivalent to a "junior high school graduation." This was a difficult process: in some places, service was performed further from basic schooling, and for many, studying was harder than standing in front of a bunker. The number of illiterate individuals decreased, and military education, for those in charge at the time, began to function. Over 2,000 cadets began to be educated by the Military Academy, and courses, seminars and training sessions were organized for the existing officers, leading to the introduction of one-year schooling. Specifically, by the order of July 31, 1945, schools for the branches of the army were established: Infantry (POŠ) in Sarajevo, Artillery in Zagreb, Engineering in Šabac, Air Force in Pančevo and Communications in Petrograd (now Zrenjanin). For future officers, schools modelled after those in the Red Army were organized: Infantry in Kragujevac, Artillery in Zagreb, Air Force in Zadar and Communications in Šent Vid.

At least once a week, the Chief of the General Staff would give lectures at the Military Academy, focusing on military history, geography, and especially military tactics, which he would later refine into lessons and sometimes write about separately. He imposed this as an obligation on the department heads and sections in the General Staff. One of his personal responsibilities was to give lectures on the enemy's offensive and defensive operations from 1941 to 1945 across all fronts, particularly against the Main Operational Group of the divisions of the Supreme Command, which he would later shape into a special publication *Overview of the National Liberation War,* which became the permanent basis for studying the history of NOB and its military tactics.

When he handed over his duties, Arso left a plan for Koča to follow, outlining that within the next five years, military schools, academies and institutes should "graduate"

52,286 officers and military personnel, which, combined with the 28,030 officers who had completed one of the 36 schools or 233 courses during NOB, was an impressive number. This plan would, as much as possible, be adhered to, but official data from 1951 showed that 10.9% of officers were still "insufficiently military educated," and 10,793 were "completely uneducated."[948] Among those poorly educated in the military, certainly, were two individuals without the necessary qualifications but placed in the highest military positions — a carpenter by profession, former KUNMZ member and Deputy Minister of National Defence Ivan Gošnjak, and a graduate philosopher, Chief of the General Staff Koča Popović. The first persistently refused to attend school, and the second argued that, alongside an uneducated minister, he, the philosopher, and "some commander from Guadalajara and Sutjeska" could perform the highest staff duties. Arso would reproach them for the rest of their lives for not showing the willingness to attend "at least one lecture on strategy and operations."

According to the agreement with the Soviets, in the 1945-46 academic year, a group of 16 generals and colonels from the Yugoslav Army was supposed to be sent to Moscow for regular two-year studies at the "Voroshilov" Higher Military Academy. This was the highest higher education institution of the Red Army (later the Soviet Army), with a long and distinguished tradition and great achievements in educating the most prominent military personnel, awarded the Order of Suvorov, 1st class.[949] The choice fell on General-Lieutenant Arso R. Jovanović, Chief of the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army. How and why this happened remained a subject of speculation for a long time, especially since, on the day of the April War's outbreak, he was nearing the end of his schooling as a General Staff officer in the Yugoslav Army. He accepted the offer without hesitation. He received an order from the Minister of National Defence[950] with the obligation to "hand over his duties" to the new Chief of the General Staff, General-Lieutenant Konstantin Koča A. Popović, by September 15. Koča had first proposed and then insisted that the position be taken "simply by swapping chairs," but Arso, responsible and methodical, trained in military discipline, as recalled by Arso Tomić, an officer serving in the Cabinet, insisted that this be done according to the rules, with a protocol, and concluded with a report to his superior. The latter was "somewhat resistant" but was eventually received by Marshal Tito on the evening of September 15 and, according to Đilas, was promised that, "after Moscow, he would return to head the General Staff."

By the end of 1945, due to the delay in departure to Moscow, the remaining candidates, ranked from army commanders to divisional commanders, were relieved of duty until October 30. Originally, it was planned for them to arrive in Moscow by October 1 to start their studies, but the "Soviet side" delayed it, not only for the "Voroshilovists" but also for students from other academies, citing "some objective circumstances." As a result, they would only depart on a Soviet plane on March 15, 1946.

[948] All figures from the publication by General Dr. D. Nikolić.

[949] The Academy also trained top Red Army personnel during the Second World War, under the command of Marshal B.M. Shaposhnikov.

[950] Order No. 401/45 from September 11, 1945.

Gathered in Belgrade, the chosen officers, eagerly awaiting their arrival in Moscow, studied the Russian language and the basics of military theory and practice. Additionally, Arso, as the most prominent general in rank, carried out certain tasks as a representative of the Supreme Commander and worked on writing military lessons, brochures about the NOB and newspaper articles for *Narodna armija* and *Borba*. More extensive and significant works would later be preserved from oblivion in bibliographies of published works during the anti-fascist war (17 titles) and about him (14). Some contributions, such as *The Sixth Enemy Offensive, The Seventh Enemy Offensive, The Military Collapse of Yugoslavia, Our Military Schools,* etc., can be found in collections of works published in Yugoslav and foreign languages in anti-fascist presses from Moscow to New York, with contributions from other prominent NOP leaders. These were first published in the journal *Nova Jugoslavija,* mostly in 1944, and later transferred as the truth about the Yugoslav battlefield. This publication, as a "journal for political and social issues," in its selected article collection from issues 1 to 14 from 1944, published three of Arso's war articles — about the two offensives and the collapse of Yugoslavia.

In early 1946, *Narodna armija* published his brochure *The Belgrade Operation: The Battle of Pljevlja* of 36 pages, developed from articles published in *Borba* and *Narodna armija* to commemorate the anniversaries of those events. Early in the same year, *Borba* published his brochure *The Battle for the Liberation of Belgrade,* and *Mladi borac* published a 157-page publication titled *How Belgrade Was Liberated,* a military analysis of the joint, complex and victorious operation of the NOV of Yugoslavia and the Red Army.

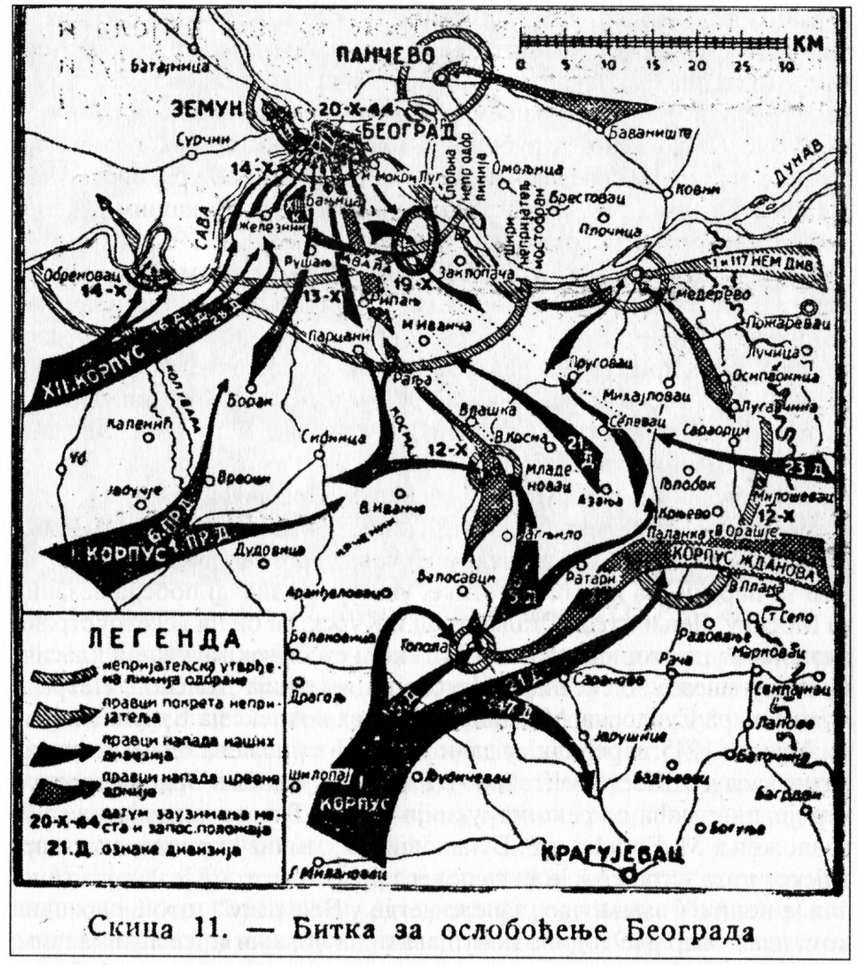
In February 1946, the People's University, just before his departure to Moscow, published his brochure *Overview of the National Liberation War* on 68 pages, where — through text and 11 original sketches — he comprehensively, analytically and persuasively described the events on the Yugoslav battlefield, especially in areas where the Supreme Command and the Main Operational Group of divisions were active. It was received with great interest by the public, who gave it several notable reviews. In one of the reviews published in the "New Books" section of the army's newspaper, it was stated at the end of the 55-line note that "this brochure, written under the fresh impressions of the just-passed events, will serve as a guide for our commanders and fighters in studying the NOB."[951]

On February 9, 1945, *Narodna armija* published a testament-like text under the title "Support Military Knowledge," with the message: "Military science is not one-dimensional; it is connected to all branches of life. Therefore, an officer must know and understand social sciences, history, geography, literature and art. This will not only enrich his cultural-political ascent but also his understanding of all contemporary events."

In the February 23 edition, dedicated to the Red Army, the entire third page featured its historical victories, illustrating the text with an image of the Red Square with troops lined up for a parade. With some pathos, the text highlighted the significance

[951] *Narodna armija* newspaper, June 1, 1946, p. 4.

of victories tied to Moscow, Leningrad, Stalingrad and Kursk, and on the tenth page, portraits of six famous Russians who forever influenced classical military thought were presented: Alexander Nevsky, Dmitry Donskoy, Peter I, Alexander Suvorov, Mikhail Kutuzov and Alexei Brusilov.



Скица 11. — Битка за ослобођење Београда

The last of the 11 sketches from the book "Overview of the National Liberation War" (1946).

In the fall of 1945, days filled with the awarding of decorations for wartime merits followed. On October 6, A. Ranković received the Order of the People's Hero, and judging by the reconstruction of the routes initiated by Tito, with the explanations of M. Bakić and R. Vukanović and the "approval" of the Montenegrin party leadership, Arso was also supposed to receive it, which was announced to him, but something in the last moment "got stuck somewhere in Belgrade." This issue would remain un-

resolved for at least two years, despite Tito's efforts to smooth things over by publicly praising his "first military associate." These two comrades from the anti-fascist war — Generals Ranković and Jovanović — would be equal in one aspect: by decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on October 15, 1945, they were awarded the Order of Suvorov, First Class, and thus became the only Yugoslavs to receive the two highest decorations for "frontline merits" — the Suvorov and Kutuzov Orders of the highest rank. This order was also awarded to the new Chief of the General Staff, K. Popović, and P. Dapčević, who received the Order of Kutuzov, First Class, in addition to the Order of the People's Hero (which was awarded to Arso a year earlier). Arso received the Order of Suvorov on October 27 at the Officers' House, handed to him by the Soviet ambassador I.V. Sadchikov.



Receiving the Order of Suvorov, 1st Class, from the hands of Soviet Ambassador I. Sadchikov.

On October 16, in *Narodna armija*, on the first and second pages, General Jovanović wrote about the Belgrade Operation, praising the two great commanders in this "joint effort": Tolbukhin and Zhdanov, and Koča and Peko, ending the text with: "The great Russian people have always been our hope and support. This time was no different. Faith in their strength and ultimate victory was a decisive factor in our long and difficult struggle."

In the next issue, the newspaper on the first page reported that a group of the highest military leaders, "on the proposal of the President of the Council of Ministers and the Minister of National Defence," had been awarded the Order of Merit for the People, First Class; Arso was, as expected, first on the list.

There are photos and film recordings: Arso, accompanied by Tito, at the ceremonial opening of the Varadin Bridge; at the construction site of the Pančevo Bridge led by a Russian expert team with General Golovko at the head, where, at their request, he dined with divers and bridge designer Colonel N.M. Kolakolov; at exhibitions and ceremonial academies at the Officers' House...

On the third anniversary of the "Nikola Tesla" 6th Lika Proletarian Division, then part of the 2nd Army in Zagreb, Arso, on November 25, 1945, arrived "as the personal envoy of the Supreme Commander." At the ceremony, he handed over the Proletarian flag and the Order of Brotherhood and Unity. He also inspected the troops, accompanied by the army commander, Major General Milan Kuprešanin, and representatives from the Red Army, Colonel P.V. Rak. Then, from the adorned tribune, he addressed the proletarians. Among other things, he said, "Military knowledge must be continuously perfected. There cannot and must not be any slackness between war and peace." He emphasized that "military science is so vast that it requires constant study, and there is no soldier who could claim to know everything and not need further improvement." He said it must be kept in mind that "the end of one war does not mean that military science stays at the attained level, but it constantly progresses, with new tactical and technical developments. Methods that are valid today can be outdated by tomorrow."



The Lika proletarians, at the beginning of the 1960s, in their commemorative anthology about their division, which proudly bore the name of the famous Nikola Tesla, do not mention that, undoubtedly significant, event. It is clear that they wanted to avoid mentioning the name of General Jovanović who, on behalf of the Supreme Commander, had presented the proletarian flag to them and, certainly deservedly, a

high decoration for wartime merits. The name of General Jovanović is not mentioned after 1948, not even in the records of the Congress of the Doctors of the Yugoslav Army held on December 16, 1945, where, in his capacity as an envoy of Marshal Tito, he addressed these unique heroes of the NOB.

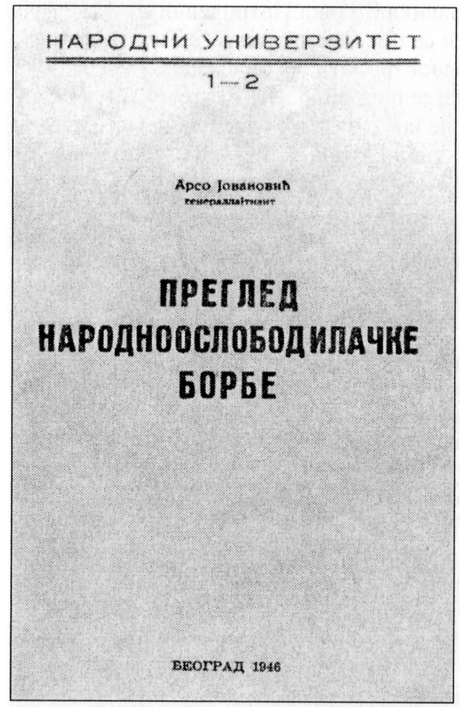
In contrast to not only the Lika and military doctors, the people of Slavonia, in the second edition of the monograph *The Twelfth Proletarian,* published in 1972, on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the brigade known as "Mother of Slavonia," literally reprinted what had been written and published back in 1945, in this case from the ceremonial inspection of this famous unit held on October 9 in Vinkovci, where General Arso Jovanović, also an envoy of Marshal Tito, presented the proletarian flag and the Order of Brotherhood and Unity, First Class, on the third anniversary. During this occasion, among other things, he stated that this brigade was "the pioneer of the liberation struggle in Slavonia," adding: "You were the first to create a strong partisan base in the mountainous massif of the Požege mountains, against which all fascist offensives broke. From those mountains, symbols of the heroic struggle of the people of Slavonia, the avenging rifle fired throughout our liberation war. Not only on these hills but also in the plains of Posavina and Podravina, your battles around Virovitica, Našice and Đakovo are famous. You destroyed the theories of 'military experts' that guerrilla warfare cannot be fought in the plains..." He spoke — remembers then-major, now university professor Mihajlo Vučinić, who also introduced me to this publication — calmly and with dignity, "from the heart" and in a clear language that was close to both the soldier and officer. Along with the text, a photo was published showing General Jovanović presenting the wartime flag to the brigade's commissar, Major Antun



At the Founding Congress of the People's Front.

Malić, in the presence of the 3rd Army's commissar, Colonel Branko Petričević.

In August 1945, he appeared publicly as one of the initiators, with Tito at the forefront, for the creation of the People's Front. The following month, he was elected to the Federal Committee, which was repeated at the 2nd Congress when he was in Moscow. While studying in Moscow, at the end of August 1947, he appeared on the list of initiators for the creation of the SUBNOR organization, calling on fighters to "tighten their ranks," and at the founding Congress the following month, he was elected to its highest leadership, with Tito at the head. On the occasion of Victory Day in 1947 — according to *Narodna armija* from May 7 — he was awarded the Order of Brotherhood and Unity, First Class.



To Moscow with one more book of his own.

In the *Narodna armija* of December 22, 1945, the entire third page was dedicated to the wartime Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, who published an article titled "On the Fourth Anniversary of the First Proletarian Brigade." Selected by the most influential members of the Political Bureau — Ranković and Đilas — probably also because, as the highest-ranking general, he had something to say and knew how to write, and certainly for his personal satisfaction, he wrote extensively and boldly in many aspects. At the very end of 1945, he publicly proposed that the holiday of the Yugoslav Army be celebrated on December 22, knowing full well, along with Pavle Jakšić, then a major general in charge of the Rear Command, the significance of the first victory of the 1st Proletarian Brigade, achieved on December 22 in Gaocići. The proposal would be accepted.[952]

Two years later, on December 16, 1947, *Narodna armija* published the Decree of the Presidium of the People's Assembly of the FNRJ about Arso's promotion to the rank of Colonel-General. In fact, he was first on the list, followed by the names of Ranković, Đilas, Žujović, Popović, Gošnjak, Dapčević and Nađ. On the front page of the central army newspaper, a large photograph was published with the caption: "Marshal Tito with a group of high military leaders." There were ten of them, with Arso standing next to Tito. In the following issue (December 24), portraits of all eight first colonel-generals of the Yugoslav Army were published; Arso, being the oldest by

[952] Tito signed the order to declare December 22 as the Day of the Yugoslav Army on October 20, and it was published in *Narodna armija* on November 15, 1947.

rank, was listed first.

"Voroshilovist" *(March 15, 1946-May 31, 1948)*

Before his trip to Poland and Czechoslovakia, and their departure for schooling in Moscow, a group of 15 "Voroshilovists" was received by Marshal Tito. Generals Koča Popović and Ivan Gošnjak were also present. General Đoko Jovanović recalled how Tito, at the beginning, "spoiled the mood of the would-be 'Voroshilovist' Gošnjak," reprimanding him for asking Ranković to "remove him from the list for schooling," as, being a carpenter, he would not be able to cope with the curriculum of the General Staff Academy, the most prestigious in the world. The Marshal, indeed, accepted this request, sending in his place another representative from Croatia, General Mato Jerković, but also firmly stated that his general, "whether he was a carpenter or a locksmith," must be ready for any task, even to teach astronomy after proper preparation, as he, in the late 1930s in Moscow, "successfully did at KUNMZ." During dinner, he spoke to them about the "capital of the Soviet country," warning them not to be discouraged by the consequences of war: ruins, hunger and begging. He also told them to study well "so that you can pass on this knowledge to our cadres."

The evening before Arso's departure for Moscow, Ranković invited him to dinner. Three decades later, he remembered how they welcomed midnight in an intimate conversation, "jumping from topic to topic" — from current events to the host's military service in 1935. In addition to the war events, they "brushed off" the decisions of the "three greats" in Potsdam, especially concerning the fate of Germany, and discussed the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki under the American atomic bombs, as well as the historical significance of the events of September 2, 1945, aboard the warship *Missouri*, where the Japanese signed their unconditional surrender, finally ending the six-year-long Second World War. They talked about the fate of the world and Yugoslavia's role in it, and the dangers looming from the disrupted relations of former allies. As he stated, Arso was not surprised by the content or tone of Winston Churchill's bellicose speech in Fulton (March 5), in which he "set up the iron curtain" between East and West. Meanwhile, two next issues of *Borba* were brought to the host from the printing house, which announced Stalin's sharp response to Churchill's "Fulton challenge" for March 15. Before their parting, the host entrusted his guest with the (still) closely guarded secret — that General Draža Mihailović had been captured two days earlier, a message that was relayed to Tito in Poland. The guest merely shrugged, then, with a touch of sadness, remembered how, in February 1943, in the Dolomites bunker, he had listened to stories on the BBC about the "Balkan De Gaulle" and the "Robin Hood of the free Serbian forests."

They parted "with hope for a brighter human dawn," with the host forever carrying the impression that his wartime comrade was a little apprehensive about the long trip ahead, the extended stay in Moscow...

On March 15, 1946, in a Soviet transport plane, along with the "Voroshilovists," were listeners of military academies named after Dzerzhinsky, Lenin, Stalin and Kuybyshev. The "Voroshilovists" included Generals Arso Jovanović, Peko Dapčević, Radovan Vukanović, Slavko Rodić, Milutin Morača, Ljubo Vučković, Dušan Kveder, Mate Jerković, Đoko Jovanović and Božo Božović, along with Colonels Sredoje Urošević, Momčilo Momo Đurić, Vojo Todorović Lerer, Pero Kosorić and Slobodan Radulović. They were divided into two groups according to rank: army and corps commanders, as they would later be grouped in the Academy. Most of them were intellectuals, predominantly lawyers, and of the "former officers," only General Staff officers Arso and Colonel Radulović — a former captain in the People's Army, a war prisoner in Germany, from where he escaped and joined the NOP and later served as an operational officer in the Main Staff of Slovenia and then Croatia, and after Victory Day worked in the Training Department of the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army. According to some records from the General Staff's archives, they left for Moscow on March 15, while Đoko Jovanović, in a serialized article by Milan Šarac published in October 2000 in *NIN*, states that it was March 28, noting that the lessons began on April 8, 1946.



A strong wartime friendship (photograph from 1943).

They were heading for a two-year schooling at a time when 3,740 officers of the Yugoslav Army were already studying in military academies and schools in the Soviet Union.[953] By chance, the plane with the "Voroshilovists," somewhere over the Car-

[953] D. Nikolić, *op. cit.*

pathians, lost one of its two engines, so they made an emergency landing in Bessarabia, where they waited for parts from Moscow. The engine was repaired, and the journey continued — with a loud song in praise of Stalin and Tito.

In Moscow, the "Voroshilovists" were accommodated in an old building on Krapotkin Lane, not far from the city centre. For their first post-war year, the accommodation and learning conditions were good. There were four people per room. The rooms were small, and the classrooms had large tables for comfortable work with spread-out maps and diagrams. They were also given a "good salary in rubles," as well as "booklets with coupons" (points) for purchases in special stores (like in Yugoslavia) meant for ministers, generals and diplomats. The food, for Moscow's standards at the time, was quite good but, admittedly, monotonous — usually, for two meals a day, chicken meat, often cow butter, and plenty of bread. Organized into a party cell tied to the representative of the CC of the CPY in Moscow, they held several consecutive meetings at the start of their schooling, mainly about their studies and conduct in Moscow. However, soon the "meetings and idle chatter" — as remembered by P. Dapčević — became less frequent. They focused on their studies, knowing that they had entered the highest educational institution of the Soviet Army.

They lived without major frictions, with great obligations regarding the mastery of their educational program. At the beginning, their "class supervisor," a major-general by rank, drew attention to the fact that Moscow was full of pickpockets, beggars and all kinds of losers, who had flooded the capital among the two million war refugees. This should not confuse, let alone disappoint, the generals and colonels from the allied country. As Marshal Tito had similarly told them at the time of their departure, they understood the seriousness of the situation.

Along with the group of Yugoslavs were three colonels from the Albanian Army, who had equal difficulties with both the Russian and Serbian languages. Mehmet Shehu, formerly a successful Paris student and now a rather arrogant figure, often visited them for "lectures," and Arso became a regular conversation partner with him in French.

The program — as still alive "Voroshilovists" M. Morača and S. Urošević recall — was "overwhelming to the point of horror," although they do not hide the fact that it "came after years of fighting and unlearning," all in Russian, mostly dealing with tasks on maps, but also in the field, in any weather. Every day they evaluated the situation, made decisions in the role of commanders or staff officers from corps to the front, as well as for individual branches.

They immersed themselves in the books; General Morača remembers even "the first guests on the windowsills — the singing nightingales." Little time was left for theatres, sports or exhibitions. The Muscovites recognized them at every step and greeted them as friends, as brothers. Officially, they did not endure any pressures, offers or blackmail from the NKVD authorities — something some "remembered" after 1948 — and whether anyone secretly "stirred things up" is difficult to say. There is, however, one place in Đilas' book *Power and Rebellion* where he mentions that after a meeting with the "Voroshilovists and representatives of other academies" in early January 1948,

he "left with a dark impression of the presence of secret services among our people studying in the Soviet Union." This very heavy assessment, almost fifty years later, he could not (or did not want to) comment on or justify, and as for Arso, he recalled, "he was only influenced by the views of the Russian military doctrine, and irreparably so, which is why I bitterly regretted voting for him to go for schooling in Moscow."

In the aforementioned serialized article, General Jovanović also recalls how, perhaps for quicker adaptation to the new environment and obligations, they were taken to Leningrad, and from there to the Russo-Finnish front of 1940 at the Karelian Isthmus; they toured the entire complex of underground trenches and shelters, some of which could fit an entire battalion. They also participated in the May Day Parade of 1946; dressed in civilian clothes and mingling with Soviet citizens, they marched in front of Lenin's Mausoleum, cheering and waving at Generalissimo Stalin, who "discreetly waved back."

The first class in the classroom was held by a major general, a corps commander during the war, and the head of the group. He gave them the task "Infantry Division in Attack": drawn maps and a half-page text, with the obligation to make a decision and formulate it in Russian within an hour. After reviewing their work, he told them that what they had written was "nonsense," that they poorly understood the language, and assigned them a professor, a woman in her age, completely bald from the effects of typhus, diligent and determined to help them. They accepted her as well as the technical staff who were always on duty — bringing them maps, books and diagrams, all strictly confidential. They burned themselves in studying and answered literally every day, which was made possible by small groups of listeners. The tasks were from the fields of strategy and operations, based on maps, for various areas of Europe. Among the lecturers were aviators and sailors. Tasks concerning the terrain of Yugoslavia were not given, probably due to Allied considerations. Once, however, they had to solve a task on the southEastern Front of Austria, along the Drava, where an army was attacking. They had to assess the situation and make a decision. General Kveder, in analysing the situation, claimed that "on the given sector and at this time of year, the Drava is fordable," which the Soviet general, reading the map, did not accept and Arso interrupted: "Kveder knows best, because he grew up near it and fought on it."

The focus was on solving tasks in the domain of the use of operational and strategic formations, mostly in offensive operations, but alongside that, extensive programs on Marxism-Leninism, military history, geography and theories of warfare were studied. The instructors, ranging from major-general to lieutenant-colonel, were very skilled officers and correct people.

They were free to go out in the city, and in addition to the courteous caretaker of the building, they were also visited freely and sat in armchairs in the spacious lobby. Arso, Peko, Radovan and Milutin repeatedly visited their wartime friend and companion, Lieutenant Colonel Volođa Ješurin, a film cameraman at the headquarters of the 2nd Corps and later the 1st Army, where he had filmed invaluable footage at Njegovuđa under Durmitor and at the Srem front. They would look at that perfectly organized material together and reminisce about the war and soldiers.

Several times, Arso, with some of his comrades, would go towards the exit from Moscow, to a place visibly marked by a cross — where the Germans had reached during their offensive on the red capital in the autumn of 1941. They stopped there. Forever. He would stand there, deep in thought, for a long time. Similarly, in Borodino, the site where, in one day in 1812, 94,000 soldiers from the French and Russian armies died, the site of the bloodiest battle of the 19th century, which tactically remained unresolved, though both Field Marshal Kutuzov and Napoleon considered it their victory. He was allowed to visit the Mamayev Kurgan near Stalingrad, where the bloodiest battles of the Stalingrad epic took place, but his unfulfilled wish was to visit the front on Lake Ladoga from 1941-43, although the brilliant Ješurin had filmed that as well.

Near the end of his stay in Moscow, he managed to fulfil an old wish — he visited Lenin's Mausoleum on Red Square. In front of the entrance, on a cold January afternoon — just like any other day of the year — there was an unusually long line of people of all ages, disciplined and waiting in some reverent silence to "meet Ilyich," but the group of "Voroshilovists" was let in without waiting, through the "doors for state guests." They walked in icy silence, looking breathlessly and somewhat mysteriously at the guides. From there, as he confided to General Radovan Vukanović, he "left a bit disappointed," probably expecting more, with the impression of the small stature of "the leader and teacher of the world proletariat," forever trapped in a glass sarcophagus, "the taken" hand, the wax-coloured skin and the voice from a tape recorder. That impression was not notably improved even by the unforgettable performance of the evening show *Eugene Onegin*.

It happened to Arso — as some "Voroshilovists" recall — that on Sundays, he would put down his book and, for hours, together with his friends from Moscow, visit the Novodevichy Cemetery, discovering the memorials of "Russian giants" in poetry, painting, military leadership, Pan-Slavism...

Soon after arriving in Moscow, he unofficially visited his old and dear acquaintances, confirmed friends of the Yugoslav Army, Generals Alexei Antonov, Nikolai Korneyev and Nikandr Chibisov, with the knowledge of Ambassadors Vladimir Popović and Military Attaché General Niko Jović. He gifted each of them, in a gesture of attention and in good Slavic tradition linked to the joy of giving, a bottle of Serbian rakija.

Some of the students established emotional connections with "the girls," which the secretary of the CPY cell, General P. Dapčević, harshly criticized during a party meeting, causing the "immorality" to be discussed even in Belgrade.[954]

They came home to visit their families by airplane, staying for about twenty days.[955] All other days in Moscow were filled with intensive studying and, mostly, genuine camaraderie. No one stood out; it seemed that everyone found studying and being separated from their families and comrades at home equally difficult. And when

[954] At one of the meetings of the party leadership, Ljubinka Milosavljević asked if it was true that "there are Voroshilovists with two wives."

[955] Most of the "relatively high salaries" were sent back to families in Yugoslavia, where life was marked by great scarcity.

M. Morača received a telegram from his wife Mira that they had a son, Arso gladly accepted the role of godfather and named the youngest Morača after his own father, Radivoje, with the "Bosnian variant" of Radivoj being recorded.

The days passed slowly, quite monotonously: studying before and after noon, over assignments and lectures, often answering and giving reports. They often went to lectures at the other end of Moscow, where the main headquarters of the "Voroshilov" Academy was located. Arso did not particularly stand out for his knowledge, nor did schooling, at least as could be seen, come any easier to him than to the others. He was not, as was later maliciously suggested, a favourite of the Russian generals' instructors or a demonstrator at military exercises.[956]

Meetings with Ambassador Vladimir Popović, representatives of the CC of the CPY to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Boris Ziherl, then Ilija Došen and Puša Pervić, as well as generals Niko Jovićevic and Branko Poljanac, and other official representatives of Yugoslavia in Moscow, were very rare, mainly for two reasons: first — due to lack of time because of intensive studying; second — because of the official stance of the management of all academies and schools, which made contact with official representatives of the FNRJ an exception, in order to focus on the task for which they had come so far. In this regard, a characteristic presentation by B. Ziherl at the Political Bureau meeting of the CC of the CPY held on December 26, 1945, just before the departure of the "Voroshilovists," was noted. The agenda was "Comrade Ziherl's report." He reported in detail, and in the minutes, written quite untidily by K. Popivoda, it was noted: "In the schools, there were weak elements... A mixed composition — some had served in enemy armies... Partisan Salonika — negative... Old partisans without education — and others who were well-prepared, as they studied, but politically weak. They came with illusions to the Soviet Union. Demoralized. Letters where they ask to return because they don't want to suffer." Ziherl himself would later write to Kardelj on April 20, 1946, from Moscow, where the "Voroshilovists" were already present, that he was "blocked in his work," reduced to an administrative role performing "mostly technical tasks." If he had gained anything from his stay in Moscow, he said, it was "the acquisition of a sense of reality," adding: "Russia is a great school of political realism that bursts from every person and official." Because of this, he eagerly awaited his replacement, Colonel I. Došen, the war commissioner of the 5th Corps, probably chosen to "restore order" in the schooling of the increasingly numerous military personnel.

In an earlier letter to Đilas, Ziherl asked for "politically strong people" to be sent as his collaborators, "who will not be demoralized as soon as they face the first difficulties in life here but will understand what the Soviet Union sacrificed in this war, and will not ask for too much." And something that could have been a message for the "Voroshilovists": "Please explain to the comrades who are coming here that the comrades here do not like too much familiarity between the students of the academies and official representatives of Yugoslavia. Until now, every senior officer of our army thought

[956] From time to time, it was heard from the head of the Academy, General Zakharov, that General B. Božović, along with D. Kveder, was the most successful.

they should have the Mission's or Embassy's car at their disposal. The Russians even noticed this and took one car from the Mission."[957]

From the encounters of the "Voroshilovists" with delegations from the homeland, which frequently visited Moscow,[958] we are providing only two — from early June 1946 and January 1948. We make this selection because they had such strong connections with Arso. The first delegation was led by Marshal Tito and accompanying him was a whole entourage — Blažo Nešković, Boris Kidrič, General Aleksandar Ranković, Koča Popović, Jovan Vukotić, Srećko Manola and Mijalko Todorović, down to the last official, writer and agitprop specialist Radovan Zogić. They arrived in Moscow on May 27 and stayed as guests, as is customary for great friends, until June 10. The essence of the visit was to sign long-term economic agreements. On the two days of the program, June 1 and 2, Tito, in agreement with the hosts, set aside some time to visit several military schools in Moscow where JA officers were studying, likely to check on the improvements in the conditions that B. Ziherl had reported to the Political Bureau six months earlier with much less optimism. On the first day, he visited some academies in Moscow, met with their administrations, attended lessons with Yugoslav listeners and, as he later said, came away with a favourable impression. On what happened the next day, June 2, at the FNRJ Embassy in Moscow, several present witnesses testified, as there, according to Tito and military attaché Niko Jovićević's agreement, along with all the "Voroshilovists," the secretaries of CPY cells from other Moscow academies gathered. One of the participants in that meeting, a veteran of the 1st Proletarian and 1st Tank Brigades, then a major and secretary of the CPY cell in the "Stalin" Tank Academy, Radomir Ljaka Vujović, provided a part of his record from the scene for this book, under the condition that it not be shortened, changed, or commented upon, which I have respected:

"The next day, June 2, 1946, Tito met in our embassy with all the members of the 'Voroshilov' Higher Military Academy, and with two or three of our officers from the Frunze Academy, 'Stalin' Tank Academy, as well as from the Artillery, Engineering, Aviation and Intelligence Academies. At the 'Voroshilov' Academy, our general elite was studying: Arso Jovanović, Peko Dapčević, Dušan Kveder, Radovan Vukanović, Đoko Jovanović, Milutin Morača, Božo Božović, Mate Jerković, Slavko Rodić, Colonels Sredoje Urošević, Momo Đurić...

"Tito, along with Aleksandar Ranković and Koča Popović, heard from us that we were studying hard and that, unfortunately, we only received about ten copies of *Borba* or *Politika* once a month. Peko Dapčević noticed that there were officers who were ruining our reputation in the eyes of the Muscovites, and Tito insisted on him being specific. Peko hesitated, and when Tito insisted again that he clearly state what misconduct was involved, he said: 'Well, I saw one of our officers taking a penknife out of his pocket in a restaurant, and instead of using the knife on the table, he was cutting the meat with the penknife.'

[957] At that time, the acting head of the Military Mission was Major Teodosius Parezanović.

[958] It was said in Belgrade: "The city above all cities is Moscow, above it is the Kremlin, and in it Stalin, above them the Sun (and God — would be added by anyone who still secretly believed in him)."

"'Oh! That's good manners!' Tito laughed. 'I thought our people were doing some foolish things. They will easily learn good manners, Peko.'

"Peko did not like Tito's reaction and began sweating.

"Tito spoke about the conditions in the country, most of all about relations with the West. He thoroughly informed us about the exchange of notes with the Americans regarding the downing of their airplane. When the Americans, dissatisfied with our answers, sent a protest note for the third time, Tito's head of cabinet, Mitar Bakić, appeared with the question: 'Comrade Tito, what should we answer them?' '"Answer them," I said,' Tito told us, '"that they can go to hell!"'

"As soon as we sat down at the table to have lunch, Tito raised a toast to his, as he said, 'main military collaborator, General Arso Jovanović.' According to Tito's words, Arso was the 'initiator of major operations' or 'their planner.' He listed the strongest epithets, which his modest vocabulary could muster, alongside the name of the Chief of Staff. The Chief's ears turned red, flowing down his neck, covering his cheeks. A vein swelled on his forehead, and Tito did not relent in giving praise. He showered him with eulogies while he sat with his elbows on the table, head bent, possibly thinking of a response. As soon as Tito finished the toast and sat down, Arso immediately straightened up, sharply pressed his heel to heel, where the spurs that he never removed from his boots gleamed, carefully maintaining their nickel-plated shine. He turned his entire body toward Tito, in 'at ease' posture, holding the knife of the glass with his right hand, in which vodka shimmered. He held the glass at face level, as if he were holding the scabbard of a raised sword in salute. 'Comrade Marshal!' Arso spoke loudly and firmly, 'I was just an ordinary soldier who followed your orders!' With this resolute self-diminishment to the lowest rank in the military hierarchy, he elevated Tito to an unattainable height. Without hesitation, Tito stood up and said, 'And I was just an ordinary soldier who followed the orders of Comrade Stalin. And tomorrow, if needed, our armies will be the vanguard of the Red Army on the way to the English Channel!'

"A round of applause erupted. We all stood up. Those closest to Tito lifted him into their arms and began throwing him to the ceiling, and as he fell onto the raised arms and was tossed back up to the ceiling, he cheerfully shouted, 'I'm heavy, I'll break my bones if I fall.' The hands certainly caught him as he returned, and no one was worried about his safety, not even Ranković. 'We thought: will this march to the English Channel happen soon?'"

Many witnesses remember Tito's high praises for the Chief of Staff of the Supreme Command, and then the "Voroshilovist," but even more fervent and resounding praises, emphasizing the claim that he not only initiated and planned the biggest operations but also successfully executed them. They recall these words, without ever questioning whether he deserved them, but even today, when asked about the occasion and the real reasons for such statements at that time, during that meeting, and in that place. It was still Tito's first toast at that lunch, and it came at an unusual moment, at the very beginning of the meal, without any specific reason. In any case, the words sounded like the highest recognition that the Supreme Commander could express to his Chief of Staff, and only a pragmatic leader, as Professor B. Petranović would call him, a

"master of applied dialectics," while still a guest in Moscow, could understand its true meaning.[959] What makes it even more interesting is what was published in volume 30 of Tito's *Collected Works* (the edition in Macedonian, pages 138-140). The official version differs significantly from what those present recorded: the date was moved from June 2 to the June 9; Arso shared Tito's high praise "equally" with Koča Popović; there is no mention of the English Channel; everything was sanitized, but not clean — as the truth was. Why it was subsequently rewritten and archived in the CC of the CPY archive (Reg. No. XIII, File 30/1) is known only to those who did it and probably to Tito himself.

On January 8, 1948, a very strong military and state delegation arrived in Moscow at Stalin's invitation: Political Bureau member Milovan Đilas and generals Koča Popović, Mijalko Todorović, S. Vukmanović-Tempo and Ivan Rukavina, with teams of experts in military industry and armaments, and they found Bogdan Crnobrnja from the Ministry of Foreign Trade there. They were staying incognito — nothing was published in the Moscow or Belgrade press about their visit, the people they met or the results of their conversations, which was highly unusual for the relations between the two parties, two states and two armies. It was no wonder: they were sent by the extremely agitated and impatient Political Bureau to ascertain what Moscow was really ready to offer, and when, about the frequently promised military armament for the Yugoslav Army and, particularly, the development of the military industry, specifically shipbuilding — the reconstruction of shipyards in Rijeka and Kraljevica and the construction of another large new shipyard at the mouth of the Neretva River, all for military purposes. It was assumed that an investment of 60 billion dinars would produce an additional 200,000 tons of shipping, which would elevate Yugoslavia to a regional naval power.

After a two-day stay in Moscow and a three-hour conversation between M. Đilas and Stalin, the military attaché, General N. Jovićević, hosted a dinner for the delegation. He also invited all the "Voroshilovists," as well as generals and party cell secretaries from other academies and institutions, following the usual practice. While waiting for dinner, they sat in a spacious and fairly luxuriously furnished lobby. Đilas, as usual, was talking and sitting in an armchair, long answering the curiosity of A. Jovanović about the repertoire of Moscow's theatres, ballet, opera and publishing activities. He asked him specifically about Belgrade poets, painters, actors, singers and musicians with whom he was personally friends and spent time with occasionally at home, which at first caused misunderstandings with Đilas and Tempo, and Radovan Zogović didn't think much better of it, which he didn't hide. Arso was also reproached for the fact that before the war, he used to sing *Oči čornije* in a duet with Olga Jančevecka in the famous "Kazbek" tavern, "a gathering and refuge of White Guards and sworn enemies of communism," "making the tavern stand on its feet." Đilas replied to him about what

[959] Some of the still-living witnesses of this "incident in the middle of Moscow" remember how the most zealous participants in that celebration of Tito were "colonels from the Orient" who were at school in the Russian capital at the time, Momo Đurić (a former Yugoslav champion in shot put) and Pero Popivoda, only to part ways with both of them in 1948, as well as with Arso, forever.

was "brewing in the Belgrade artistic kitchen," and he, as it seemed, knew this "menu" very well. He joked that the bass-baritone Cvjetić sings arias in the opera and talks about how lucky he was that Arso Jovanović went to the generals, otherwise, he would have been left without bread.

Sitting across from Đilas, on what seemed an unstable chair, Arso suddenly, without any particular reason, asked General Koča: how could a division formation be made in the General Staff based on such units from large, modernly organized, and, particularly, well-equipped armies, "saturated" with armoured equipment and motor vehicles, while neglecting the experience and tradition of the Serbian army, in which horses and oxen carried a heavy load in the last four liberation wars. He thus opened a series of questions: why insist on the foreign term "infantry" when the traditional term "infantry division" exists; why are there two mechanized corps in the JA formation; why are strategic units called "fronts" when there is neither tradition nor realistic prospects for this... The conditions, he said, had changed significantly compared to the wars fought, and the focus should be on the future, but the domestic experience, when creating peacetime and wartime formations, should not be neglected, and much less should the modern armies be copied when there will be no conditions for such equipment and armament for a long time.

Fidgeting on the small chair, Koča remained silent, and Arso, in a rather uncomfortable and tense atmosphere, again asked: who is doing this in the General Staff, where formations are frequently changed, and why has this been signed, why is there stagnation in modernizing the army in all areas, especially the officer corps, where almost the entire wartime cadre is still maintained... Koča muttered something, mentioning new times, modern needs, research results, and then, rather sharply, added that perhaps the current Chief of the General Staff and his 374 associates, whom Arso had largely selected, knew what the defence interests of the country were and how they (the interests) and the formation, as a document of the highest importance, are articulated and materialized under the guidance of the Political Bureau and the Supreme Commander himself. Red in the face and with a noticeably swollen neck vein, Arso said that for the JA, and in the significantly altered conditions of warfare, mountain artillery and horse-drawn transport would remain a significant need for a long time; here, any megalomania and imitation of others, wealthier ones, could cause irreparable damage, so one must not succumb to such influence. Koča muttered something again, clearly very nervous, but Đilas interrupted further argument. Those present were left with the impression that the Supreme Commander's Chief of Staff — already aware that after five months, when he returns from schooling in Moscow, he would not return to his previous position — wanted to publicly question the professional qualifications of the now significantly altered General Staff and some of its fundamental powers, including the authority of its current Chief, who, in the conditions of the "dominant role of the Party," had "fallen" to the third Deputy Minister of National Defence — behind Gošnjak and Tempo.

To lift the mood, Đilas shared some good news with the gathering: in a few days, Albania, he said, would "officially join the union of the Yugoslav state," and he empow-

ered the secretaries of the party organizations to relay this to the listeners. This statement, certainly a reflection of official policy, does not appear in party documents, but it is found in Đilas' book *Conversations with Stalin* (pp. 92-95) and in the neatly kept, almost miraculously preserved notebook of the party secretary, which is also a type of document. After a longer conversation than the one the previous evening, in which Stalin authorized Yugoslavia "to absorb Albania," or to "unite all Albanians into one republic as a member of the Federation," Đilas was tasked with sending a telegram to Tito on behalf of official Moscow, stating that "the Soviet government and Yugoslavia are fully in agreement on the matter of Albania." Đilas noted that he wrote such a telegram but, after considering some newly arisen circumstances, he did not send it. In the meantime, he shared the information with the Yugoslav "military colony in Moscow," and it was recorded in the notes of the party secretaries.

While seated at a rich table, Đilas began with anecdotes about people from the highest state circles, occasionally recalling incidents related to Moša Pijade's name. He spoke, it seemed, with sympathy, but almost without exception, everything turned out to be "at Moša's expense." As usual, "Comrade Đido" dragged on, and Tempo, growing increasingly uncomfortable, finally, loudly enough for everyone at the table to hear, said, "Enough with the jokes about Uncle Janko." At that, Đilas told two or three jokes, with Tempo in the main role, and then "teased" Arso, who, as the most senior in rank, was sitting across from him at dinner, looking sturdy in his new uniform. He recalled, he said, August 1941. They were proposing him for party membership, and as a final test of his political views, he asked him what he thought would happen with Montenegro when freedom was won and the Karađorđević dynasty was overthrown. Arso, he said, answered: "Only with Serbia, in one united state, just as in 1918, based on the decision of the Great Podgorica Assembly. I was 12 years old then, and I remember how enthusiastically and hopefully my Piperi accepted it." Đilas made a joke out of that answer in January 1948, in the middle of Moscow, saying how a "non-Marxist person" couldn't even imagine that Montenegro could be one of the federal units of Yugoslavia, equal in every way to Serbia. Embarrassed, Arso admitted that this was the very beginning of his "political youth."

In the following days, Đilas, during his "one-month and futile stay in Moscow," found time to speak more widely with a group of generals from the "Voroshilovists." In Belgrade, he had heard, and after his conversation with Ambassador V. Popović, he "seriously understood their discord, their ideological and action-based disunity." The discussions were open and vigorous. He wrote in *Power and Rebellion* that he was "surprised by how little they knew about the current situation, realizing that they were ill-informed, and that the CC had made a mistake by not visiting them earlier and holding short briefings." From this meeting, he took away the already emphasized "dark impression, not only about the influence of Soviet doctrine and resistance to our CC's intentions (he refers to the possibility of defending the country — *I.M.*) but also about the presence of secret services within the ranks of our people who were studying in the Soviet Union." He did not provide any confirmation of this heavy accusation, nor did anyone "incidents" come up in the conversation held almost five decades later,

remembering that there was talk "about the character of the future war and the influence of the atomic factor on its conduct and outcome." Arso, he said, believed that in the future war, the atomic bomb would play a decisive role, as its mass production in the Soviet Union was a matter of days, so both leading military powers would have it. In the event of their "inevitable collision," a small nation would, inevitably, have to fall under one of those two "umbrellas." That is how he understood it, and that was what he "had to report as a member of the Political Bureau." He does not exclude the possibility that this may have influenced Tito not to appoint him to the promised position of Chief of the General Staff but to the also prestigious but slightly lower rank of commander of the Higher Military Academy in the making. Perhaps, he believes, "that was the straw that broke the camel's back, prompting Arso's conviction that he had been degraded."

From another of the terse and badly organized minutes from the Political Bureau meeting held on February 19, 1948, we see the agenda item "Đilas' report from Moscow." The report was given orally, and the recorder, Krsto Popivoda, noted almost none of its contents in full, and there was not a single word about the "dark impression" from the conversation with the "Voroshilovists." It is clear that the delegation was in Moscow in January, where on February 8, Kardelj and Bakarić arrived for talks with the Soviet leadership about the "complications that had arisen" — this was at Stalin's invitation. In fact, Stalin personally invited Tito, but due to his own safety, Tito did not respond, instead sending close collaborators, citing "not feeling well," which was understood as "a sign of mutual distrust." Đilas reports: "They stayed for a month and nothing. Rukavina stayed to clear up some promises." From Đilas' account of the requested but not received billions for military industry, and from his remarks, it is evident that the main reason for the high-level military and state delegation's trip to Moscow, with him at the head, was to seek economic aid. Meanwhile, "Kardelj's group" was trying to "clear up mutual misunderstandings and problems that had been accumulating," which culminated in Tito's decision to send two Yugoslav divisions to Albania. This was discussed with considerable bitterness during the second conversation with an extremely angry Stalin, held on February 10. The first of the two divisions promised to Enver Hoxha, the 2nd Proletarian Division, with headquarters in Bitola, was ready to move south, and the second was being prepared in Manjača, scheduled to be ready for deployment to Albania by February 15. According to the plans of Belgrade and Tirana, and without Moscow's knowledge, and even without their instructors in "the land of eagles," these divisions were to occupy the eastern, and the domestic forces the western part of the border of Albania with Greece, which was bleeding from a civil war. Stalin sharply criticized Tito for even sending divisions to Albania, and especially for not consulting him on the matter. Tito took responsibility for this at that Political Bureau meeting, noting that "it was enough to inform, not ask," adding that he had intended to do so, but concluded that "there were no serious disagreements," and, in any case, "the division had not been sent." At the end of the discussion on the item "Economic Relations with the USSR and the Armament of Our Army," Tito made two conclusions: first — "do not send people for schooling in the USSR. Soviet

comrades make wrong conclusions about many things"; second — "Leskošek in the Political Bureau should take over the responsibility for military industry," which, due to complete reliance on the USSR, was not included in the Five-Year Plan (1947). At the end of the minutes: "Tito: The Idea of the 5th Congress."

In connection with another conclusion, the Political Bureau already held a meeting on March 1, at which, under item 3, there was the topic "Army and Military Industry." The Chief of Staff also attended. The minutes do not contain evaluations, nor conclusions. The disputes between Stalin and Tito had already escalated, and there was a remark that relations "had recently reached an impasse." Tito said that the Russians "did not want to meet us halfway on the issue of arming the army," but instead said: "Why do you need a strong army, we are here." On the other hand, although they knew that the military needs of the FNRJ amounted to 25 billion dinars, they gave Bulgaria 300 tanks and modern airplanes. Angry at Tito for allegedly agreeing, at the request of the Albanian government, to send two divisions to southern Albania without his knowledge (which the JA already had an air regiment in, though this was omitted in Moscow), Stalin said: "If Albania is attacked, let the Albanian government turn to us for assistance," adding that he believed "sending JA divisions to Albania would provide grounds for American attacks." Tito responded by saying that, in the midst of the escalating "Cold War" and at the alleged request of the Albanian government, he agreed to send two JA divisions "because of Greek claims over northern Epirus," and that we wanted Korča, connected to Ohrid, "as our base. They (the monarcho-fascists of Greece) are not ready for war, but they are ready for provocations. We started preparing one battalion division" to send for "the elimination of the external threat to Albania, and through it to Yugoslavia." The Political Bureau adopted this as a platform for responding to Stalin's and Zhdanov's anger and sent Ambassador A.I. Lavrentiev to Tito to investigate the matter and express his government's protest. In response to Molotov's second dispatch — instead of the invited Tito, Kardelj and Bakarić went to Moscow. They did so incognito. The explanation about the divisions was not accepted. Đilas — as he remembered five decades later — told Arso at Ambassador V. Popović's about the dispute, adding that Yugoslavia wished, through rapid development of all three branches of the JA, to "quickly grow into a respectable regional military power on the southwestern borders of the people's democratic family of nations." He also mentioned that, despite its own poverty, Yugoslavia had given Albania 1.2 billion dinars to build its army, and had planned exports of Yugoslav goods and services to that country worth three billion dinars for 1948, with the introduction of a customs union. The Russians, Đilas says, "had their military inspectors there, the beginnings of military bases and an enterprise for oil exploitation," which Tito soon accused of seizing the "black gold" produced by the Yugoslav-Albanian company. General Jovanović's comment was: "These are, therefore, significant military-economic interests, which neighbouring Yugoslavia must take into account in a rational foreign policy." According to Đilas, this all "sounded like a reproach."

There is no doubt that the members of the Political Bureau, at the meeting of February 19, had before them another document about the "Voroshilovists," written

by the representative of the CC of the CPY in Moscow, Puniša Perović. It was the minutes of a meeting of their party cell, held at the behest of M. Đilas. Perović had planned such a meeting because, from his predecessors in Moscow, B. Ziherl and I. Došen, he had heard that, here, among the "Voroshilovists," as in the schools, there was occasionally "nervousness, envy, intolerance, boasting and gossip." According to the general assessment, recorded in the official document, General P. Dapčević, who was the secretary of the CPY cell, stood out as the main instigator, and there was often "sparking" between him and almost all of the other "Voroshilovists," especially A. Jovanović, which was also recounted in "high circles in Belgrade." Perović wanted to discuss this with them, and in the meantime, he had been tasked by Đilas to "clear up the situation" by early January, which he attempted, writing a detailed report to Belgrade "on the state of the party group of the Voroshilov Academy generals," particularly regarding the case of Peko Dapčević.

The meeting was held in the premises of the Military Mission. Secretary Peko initially insisted "that we speak while standing, because that is the order in the Bolshevik Party and we should follow it," but this was opposed by the majority of votes.

All the "Voroshilovists," including the head of the Military Mission, General Branko Poljanac, who joined them in the second year of their studies, openly spoke out and equally sharply condemned the behaviour of General Dapčević, especially his "incorrect, intolerant, and dismissive, and most of all arrogant attitude" toward Arso, which had roots in the NOB when he "considered the Chief of Staff incompetent and bypassed him in communications," and here, according to S. Urošević, "painted him in the worst possible light, as if he wanted to humiliate him, to frame him." Peko admitted "that he does not think well of Arso, that he believes he cannot provide much benefit to our army, that he cannot stand him, considers him sly and stubborn, and that he can never be a good comrade or friend with him." Peko's mistakes were often discussed over almost two years, but with considerable caution and restraint, and even some fear, especially as the end of the schooling approached, because he wrote the characteristics and evaluations on which, as he said, the future positions in the Army would depend. Criticisms of him, however, he called "old wives' tales." When they were leaving Belgrade for Moscow, it was agreed (at Koča's request) that Arso, as the highest-ranking and oldest by age, would be the "commander of the unit," the liaison with the JA General Staff and the Academy's administration, but Peko Dapčević "took it all away," even writing, at Gošnjak's request, proposals for awards and promotions, building a "monolithic group," which he later admitted was a mistake and considered a lesson that the former commander should not be a party secretary.

The representative of the CC of the CPY in Moscow, Puniša Perović, emphasized in his report that "the comrades have a good opinion of Arso, as do the people in the Academy's administration," and that there was "a deep mutual hostility between Peko and Arso, at the core of which stands Dapčević's stance." This stance was, first and foremost, "toward the comrades who were officers in the former Yugoslav Army. I confirmed in a conversation with him that he holds a similar opinion of Arso as he does of Terzić and Apostolski. Comrade Dapčević claims that this attitude is only toward

these three, that he cannot stand them, but it seems to me that there is something more to it."

Due to the mentioned and other mistakes, which he self-critically admitted, General Dapčević was removed from his position as party secretary by P. Perović, based on his authority and, at the suggestion of Ambassador V. Popović, Radovan Vukanović was appointed to his position, pending a decision from the CC of the CPY, which Belgrade would confirm.[960]

The final exams were held by the "Voroshilovists" — "fighting" with maps across central and western Europe — at the end of May, and all of them received a document on May 28, 1948, recorded under the same number, 200, stating that they had completed the "K.E. Voroshilov Higher Military Academy, decorated with the Order of Suvorov, First Class," within the regular time frame "with the grade 'good'" (successfully), which was confirmed by the signature of its president, General-Lieutenant Razuvaev, on behalf of the State Examination Commission, and equally with him, the Academy's Chief of Staff, General of the Army M. Zaharov (later Chief of the General Staff of the Soviet Army).

The completion of the schooling was marked by a formal reception at the residence of Ambassador V. Popović. As with previous similar occasions, the generals were supposed to be personally received by Generalissimo J.V. Stalin but, probably due to the worsening relations with Marshal Tito, he broke that rule and sent his envoy to the "Voroshilovists." The ceremony was attended by all the graduates, mostly JA generals (the majority of whom had been promoted by one rank during their schooling, though this did not apply to colonels) and a large number of guests. The mood was — seemingly — like in the best of times: they drank and toasted Stalin and Tito, victory and freedom, the homeland and communism, alliance and brotherhood in arms, and later the people at the table. Although most people knew that Arso was not fond of alcohol, he had to "respond" to the many guests.

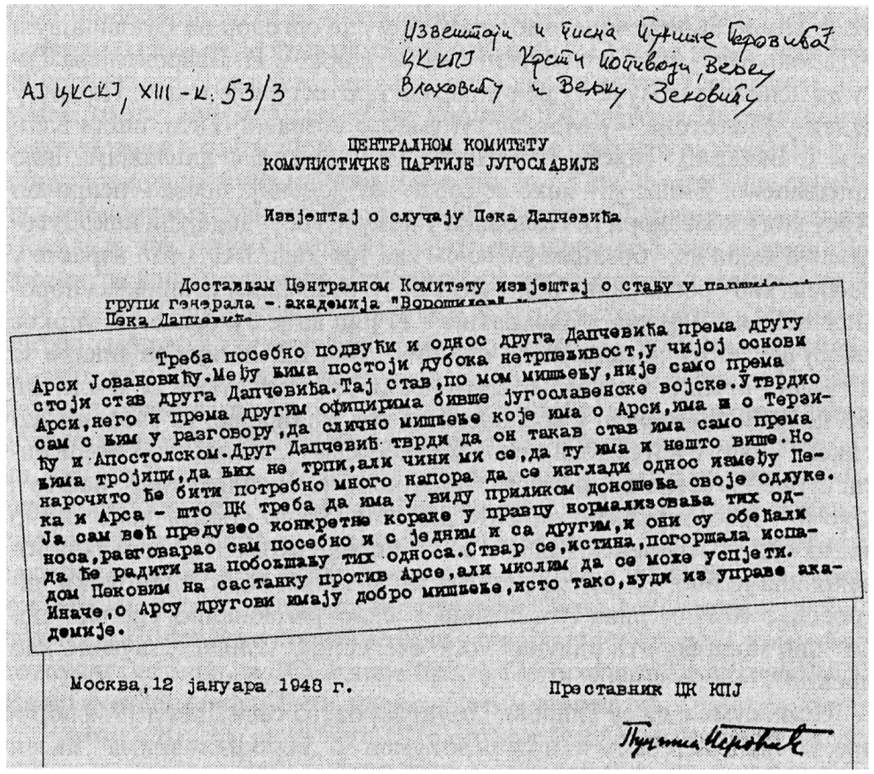
Facing Death *(June 1-August 12, 1948)*

The "Voroshilovists" returned to the country in the first days of June 1948 by sleeper train. They were seen off by the hosts, none of whom were urged to stay in the Soviet Union. None of them — at least publicly — expressed such a desire, and, truth be told, they didn't know enough about the true nature scope, and sharpness of the disputes between the central committees of the CPY and the CPSU(B), or between Tito and Stalin. In fact, by then — after the recall of 427 Soviet military advisors and instructors based on Bulganin's letter from March 18, 1948, explaining that they were "surrounded by distrust and unfriendliness" — two sharp letters had been exchanged (from Moscow on March 27 and May 4, with responses from Belgrade on April 13 and May 9), and the decision by the CC of the CPY on May 20 to reject participation

[960] The minutes of the meeting, 14 densely typed pages, were delivered by P. Perović in January 1948 "for the CC of the CPY" (it is handwritten on the top of the document that it was "received by hand" by Krsto Popivoda, Veljko Vlahović and Veljko Zeković). AJ, Fund CC of the CPY, XIII, file 53/3.

in the Cominform session in Bucharest, scheduled for mid-May and later postponed to the end of June.

The representative of the CC of the CPY in Moscow, Puniša Perović, selectively informed the "Voroshilovists" about what was happening in these relations, though he himself, far from the decision-making centre in Belgrade, didn't know much. During their twenty days of rest in groups, in Miločer, Crikvenica and at Lake Bled, where they were accompanied by representatives from the Main Political Directorate,[961] they were kept informed within party activities and through *Borba* and *Narodna armija*, and by June 23, when they were gathered in Belgrade awaiting assignments, they began following the development of events more closely. With particular interest, they followed the content of the "Resolution of the Cominform" and the response from the CC of the CPY to it on June 28, where the first document ended with a call for "healthy forces" in the country to remove the leadership with Tito at the head and "appoint a new internationalist leadership of the CPY."



Извештаји чланова Политбироа ЦК КПЈ Крсте Поповића, Вељка Влаховића и Вељка Зековића

АЈ ЦКСКЈ, XIII - к. 53/3

ЦЕНТРАЛНОМ КОМИТЕТУ
КОМУНИСТИЧКЕ ПАРТИЈЕ ЈУГОСЛАВИЈЕ

Извјештај о случају Пека Дапчевића

Достављам Централном Комитету извјештај о ставу у партијској групи генерала - академија "Ворошиловград" Пека Дапчевића

Треба посебно подвући и однос друга Дапчевића према другу Арси Јовановићу. Међу њима постоји дубока нетрпељивост, у чијој основи стоји став друга Дапчевића. Тај став, по мом мишљењу, није само према Арси, него и према другим официрима бивше југословенске војске. Утврдио сам с њим у разговору, да слично мишљење које има о Арси, има и о Терзићу и Апостолском. Друг Дапчевић тврди да он такав став има само према њима тројици, да их не трпи, али чини ми се, да ту има и нешто више. Но нарочито ће бити потребно много напора да се изгласи однос између Пека и Арса - што ЦК треба да има у виду приликом доношења своје одлуке. Ја сам већ предузео конкретне кораке у правцу нормализовања тих односа, разговарао сам посебно и с једним и са другим, и они су обећали да ће радити на побољшању тих односа. Ствар се, истина, погоршала испадом Пековим на састанку против Арсе, али мислим да се може успјети. Иначе, о Арсу другови имају добро мишљење, исто тако, људи из управе академије.

Москва, 12 јануара 1948 г.

Представник ЦК КПЈ

Letter from Moscow: defence of Arso and principles.

The "Voroshilovists" from the group that stayed in Miločer reported that during

[961] In Miločer, where the group was most numerous, it was accompanied by Lieutenant Colonel Dušan Dozet.

their twenty days of rest on the southern Adriatic, they felt "like prisoners" or at least like prominent military leaders isolated "to be cleansed," freed from any pro-Soviet views or even sympathies. In any case, they were excluded from the highly intense life of the Party and the military, which, according to a report from the Personnel Directorate at the time, had 128 generals and about 100,000 officers and non-commissioned officers (whose economic standard, according to the Political Bureau's assessment on January 29, 1948, "was low") with 700 planes and 600 cannons in terms of armament.[962] Additionally, tens of billions of dinars were spent and requested as loans for military needs, particularly for the development of their own military industry and, within that, shipbuilding. With such a radically emphasized defence policy, they could — it was heard in Miločer — anger their neighbours, primarily Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria, leading them to strengthen their limited contingents of military and police forces through unilateral decisions, and provoke imperialist circles to attack Yugoslavia from Greece and Italy, or at least provoke it grossly, which the USA would support by sea and air. As high military officers and confirmed patriots, they were worried about relations with the West and the outcome of the evident deep disagreements with the East, and, as people taught by the Party to speak freely and as they think, and knowing that truth is the ultimate criterion of practice, they spoke about what troubled them. For example, someone would say in a conversation with a wartime and school comrade that they should go to the Cominform meeting and defend the truth, which was on the side of the CPY; that Soviet military aid to the NOP was invaluable, even decisive, for victory; that the "case" of sending JA divisions to Albania was unacceptable; that the costs for developing the military industry were too high and the army was too cumbersome, and that the plan to build 4,000 cooperative homes and the decision to build a "new building for the CC of the CPY across the Sava" could wait in conditions when, simultaneously, decisions were being made at Political Bureau[963] sessions about "reducing the bread ration for the population" and "the number of pairs of rubber boots," about the mandatory purchase of agricultural surpluses, and about forced collectivization of villages...

An overt discussion was imposed on them, as a kind of test, about the content and messages of the Soviet film *In the Mountains of Yugoslavia,*[964] which, according to the Agitprop assessment, presented "a simplified, quite inaccurate and certainly incorrect portrayal of the NOP" because "it depicted a numerically small, poorly dressed and poorly armed partisan army, for which Soviet aid was not only welcome but also life-saving." It turned out that some "Voroshilovists" were not so harsh in their judgement of the film, especially not seeing any malice from the Russian filmmakers, remembering, after all, how some elite proletarian divisions — during their advance into Serbia before meeting with the Red Army — had counted fewer than 2,000 fighters,

[962] *Collection of Political Bureau Sessions of the CC of the CPY 1945-1948*, Belgrade 1995, edited by Prof. Dr. B. Petranović.

[963] In the party and state leadership, it was referred to as the "General Staff of the Revolution," "the brain of the Party," "the nerve centre of the state" and "the most powerful lever of power."

[964] Director Mihailo Rom; a film of modest artistic value.

and the new ones were almost exclusively armed with light infantry weapons with only a few rounds of ammunition, all without cannons and mortars, let alone aircraft, which the Russians, by the end of September 1944, had provided without counting. This was now, at Party leadership meetings, referred to as the "so-called fraternal assistance," with claims that everything had been "well compensated" — though no evidence was offered. Regarding this, as witnesses R. Vukanović and B. Božović would recall in the late '80s, General Jovanović's words were heard, with remarks that, in that "lead" time, could still be opposed to the firm assessments of Agitprop, and increasingly, of the Party leadership. According to reports, this was almost equally true for the majority of "Voroshilovists." On the other hand, almost all of them unequivocally accepted the key stance of the CC of the CPY, expressed in the letter sent to Stalin on April 13 — that "no matter how much one of us may love the land of socialism, the USSR, one must never love their own country any less, which is also building socialism."

In Miločer, two close relatives and sincere friends, General Arso Jovanović and Colonel of the Legal Service Vujadin Ćetković, met and spoke at length. The evil that was happening and the greater one that loomed over their conversation, but they did not suspect that it would be their last meeting.[965]

At that time, Colonel Živojin Nikolić Brka, who was stationed in Sarajevo and on leave in Miločer, would remember for the rest of his life the image: Arso, in the twilight, sitting on a rock, isolated and deep in thought, now looking at an open book, now at the vast sea, "silently communicating with the text, with himself, with life."

After returning to Belgrade, they were all first spoken to by Tempo, then with Generals A. Ranković, and finally, with the three "toughest" — among whom, according to P. Dapčević and V. Dedijer, was Arso — Tito himself, at Brdo near Kranj, "immediately after the 5th Congress of the CPY," as they remembered, "around August 5, certainly in the afternoon."

Then, Colonel Sredoje Urošević, now a retired general and one of the only two surviving "Voroshilovists" (along with M. Morača), recalls how the first of these meetings, unexpectedly scheduled, was held in the office of the Chief of the General Staff of the JA, Koča Popović, but without the host present. Arriving from Crikvenica, he thought it was something urgent and important, even dramatic. All the "Voroshilovists" were gathered. Tempo, quite dramatically, said that it was about "their declaration during their rest," and invited Lieutenant Colonel Dušan Dozet as a witness. When the attendees heard what was being reported "from the field" (Miločer), they demanded that Tempo immediately remove him from the meeting, calling it "a serious provocation and slander." They continued their discussion, in which it became clear that the majority were torn by concerns, uncertainties and questions not about the fate of individuals or their families, but about the country, which was exposed to possible economic and

[965] Arso was physically liquidated within two months, and Vujadin, president of the military court in Sarajevo, was arrested and sentenced to 12 years in strict prison for refusing to execute the order of the army's commissioner, General Milinko Đurović, to condemn officers, allegedly pro-Cominform, for "crimes against the state and people" — he would serve his sentence in Gradiška, Sv. Grgur, Ugljan and Bileća.

military pressures, international isolation and even military aggression. According to the memory of D. Dozet, "the only correct stance on the main disputed issues was held by Generals Peko Dapčević, Slavko Rodić and Radivoje Jovanović Bradonja."[966]

During their strategy lessons in Moscow, they studied the new circumstances arising from the introduction (in early 1947) of the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan, which, in reality, was the backbone of the "strategic containment of the USSR," with its southern flank made up of Greece and Turkey. If it happened that the "people's democratic countries" — Albania, Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary — turned against Yugoslavia, in the context of the extremely strained relations with the West, especially on the southern and northwestern border fronts, then the country, with a population of 16,000,000 versus 280,000,000, would face a great danger, at the very least complete and disastrous isolation, at a time when it had diplomatic relations with only 26 countries. Thus, the concern was a shared burden for almost all the "Voroshilovists."[967]

The documents, the Resolution of the Cominform and the response from the CC of the CPY,[968] both lengthy and sharp in content and assessments, only somewhat eased the "Voroshilovists" in navigating the political whirlwind. For some, things became clearer, others withdrew into themselves, and some considered it a patriotic act to endure the truth. It could be said that everything ended well — with one conversation with A. Ranković, which he would later call "an open meeting of war comrades" in 1973; with one telegram of support from all the "Voroshilovists" sent to the CC of the CPY, in which they emphasized that they were convinced "the Resolution of the Cominform represents a severe insult, a heavy historical injustice," and expressed hope that its authors would realize that it was "the result of falling for false information and ignorance of the situation in the CPY," promising "that we will continue to, as we have always done, love and respect the great Soviet Union in the days of the toughest battles against our common enemy."[969]

At the time of the adoption of the Cominform Resolution, 1,424 JA officers were studying in the Soviet Union, with 1,082 returning to the country and 342 remaining in the USSR.[970] Earlier, from April 1945 to the end of 1947, 5,135 cadets and listeners had been trained there. Perhaps one-third of these "Russian students" would be labelled "Cominformists" over the next five to six years, carrying with them the corresponding legal or disciplinary consequences, while the majority — almost across the board, deemed "insufficiently reliable" — carried out their duties professionally and patriotically in the JA, with the rank of lieutenant colonel or colonel, staying for up to

[966] From a conversation with General Dušan Dozet in June 1995, in Belgrade. Unlike Dozet, General Bradoja told me (June 1998) that he never considered any of those present as Stalinists, but rather as sincere people, professionals and patriots "questioning where this heated dispute might lead us."

[967] General Tempo later disclosed that he had spoken day and night with around 200 generals and colonels in the 5th Congress Hall in Topčider and, every hour, informed Tito of how each one voted, repeatedly telling those present: "If we even doubt for a moment — there is no salvation for the country!"

[968] Published in 600,000 copies of *Borba* on June 29, 1948.

[969] Published on July 8, 1948, on the front page of *Narodna armija*.

[970] D. Nikolić, *op. cit.*

two decades, and eventually retiring.[971]

The academy students returned to the country around the time of the 5th Congress of the CPY (July 21-28). The *Narodna armija* newspaper, in its July 24 issue, published a telegram of support for this "historical gathering" from 200 officers who had been studying in academies in the Soviet Union and were then "on their way through Romania to Yugoslavia." They wrote how they were convinced that "the 5th Congress will unanimously condemn all slanders directed at our Party and its leadership, prove their groundlessness, preserve and further strengthen the unity of our Party, and elevate its authority both at home and abroad."

Meanwhile, the "Voroshilovists" were assigned: Arso as the commander of the Higher Military Academy (VVA), Milutin Morača and Dušan Kveder as his assistants, and Sredoje Urošević as the head (leading) of the Tactical Department; Peko Dapčević as the chief inspector of the JA, Radovan Vukanović as the commander of the 3rd Army, Mate Jerković as the deputy commander of the 2nd Military District, Slavko Rodić and Đoko Jovanović as the heads of the 1st and 2nd departments of the General Staff, Momo Đurić as the deputy commander of KNOJ...[972]

The training of the first class of the VVA, for which 82 students were selected, including 12 generals and 19 colonels from the upper ranks of the JA, was supposed to begin on October 1. Given the circumstances, with nothing prepared except for "smuggled" notes from training in Moscow and donated professional literature, this was a very short deadline. Work was done in teams: to establish goals, content and the duration of the training; to ensure the basic conditions for work; and to select instructors for the 12 departments, which proceeded quite slowly. An optimal model for organizing the classes was reached, with eight groups of students, the first of which included generals Kosta Nađ, Savo Burić, Pavle Jakšić, Miladin Ivanović, Blažo Janković, Nikola Karanović, Božo Lazarević, Nikola Ljubičić, Branko Obradović and others. Already from the composition of the students, it was clear how significant the establishment of the VVA and the selection of its commander was, as he would be an authority for such a "class." Due to the urgent need for systematic training of the most distinguished personnel, he was practically the second most important figure in the military hierarchy. There are no official sources suggesting that Arso did not accept this position or that he felt underestimated and sidelined — for not being reinstated as Chief of the General Staff, which, according to those closest to him, "marked the beginning of the decline of his military career." There is a trace in the memoirs of Pavle Jakšić where it is said that Arso, presenting "his views on the organization of the Supreme Command, shortly before his death," expressed an unfulfilled ambition: "Arso — then, after returning from training in the USSR, somewhat flustered, unexpectedly

[971] Out of thousands of students trained in the USSR, only three received the rank of general in the Yugoslav Army. Even worse were those "classmates" who, under pressure or by their own choice, stayed in military service in the Soviet Union; with the signing of the Belgrade (June 1955) and Moscow (June 1956) declarations, in the years immediately after Stalin's death (March 5, 1953), they became the biggest losers.

[972] Order No. 764 from July 1, 1948.

entered our general meeting in the War Hall of the General Staff building, where organizational matters were discussed, including the organization of the Supreme Command; he took the floor and said: 'There should be one authoritative general with Tito, a strong personality' (obviously thinking of himself!), and after that, he disappeared into the void."[973]

It is noted in Đilas' memoirs that Arso, "because he was not returned to the promised position as Chief of the General Staff, felt degraded."

General Sredoje Urošević recalls that after the news spread, before his return from Moscow, that Arso would be appointed as the commander of the Higher Military Academy, he was "nervous, silent and noticeably angry" for several days.[974]

In the early 1980s, V. Dedijer would write in *Nova prilozi* that Arso Jovanović "was a victim of his own unhealthy ambitions," which, lacking any argumentation, speaks more of the "chronicler of the revolution" being too hasty with both his speech and his pen.

It is difficult to say how Arso personally experienced it, especially since there are no original documents or key witnesses. However, in 1986, Colonel Milutin Šušović, undoubtedly a close friend of his, pointed me to one clue. He recalls an incident from the time of handing over the duties to Koča Popović and preparing for the general staff training (which he successfully completed five years earlier, in the most esteemed way, "à la France"). At that time, Arso, with a certain philosophical calm, spoke to his "classmate" from all 16 years of schooling, saying that at least three things were clear to him: first — that when the war is over and its achievements start to be exploited, even successes are not forgiven, or rather, "the most difficult to forgive are sincerity and successes"; second — that politicians are known for being unwilling to tolerate the superiority and leadership of soldiers, and they "can't wait to see them on the downhill slope and serve them up"; third — that the fate of the military leadership of the mighty Wehrmacht, although from the losing side, is characteristic of the tragic fate of soldiers: out of 17 German field marshals, ten were removed from their positions during the war, three were liquidated, one was in prison and only one managed to hold a position until the tragic end of the war; of 36 prominent generals, 26 were removed from their positions, three were executed, and only three survived until the end of the war. The moral of the story: for him, it could have been worse, and if he felt that wound in the fall of 1945, he bore it until the summer of 1948.

In any case, if he had been that dissatisfied with his new position, he wouldn't have, in July, despite all his other obligations, worked on three significant "papers": the inaugural speech for the first-class students of the VVA, which he, known as a conscientious and ambitious man with completed general staff academies from two armies, prepared with special responsibility, calculating that it would last exactly one class period; a lesson on the offensive operation of a corps in hilly and mountainous terrain; and a proposal for supporting the army with aviation and the navy on the

[973] P. Jakšić, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 56.

[974] From a conversation with General S. Urošević, October 1999, in Belgrade.

coastal strategic wing. General Terzić recalled that Arso finished all three works in their first versions and gave them to him, "like a student of the old school," for consultation, as well as to his assistants, "Voroshilovists" Milutin Morača and Dušan Kveder, "but not so they would praise him, but to help him with criticism and suggestions." "My overall impression," says Terzić, "was that this keyholder and prisoner of Serbian military tradition did a solid job, admittedly with some influence from the modern military doctrines of the great powers, and it is a shame that this, as testimony to a certain time, was not preserved."

With Arso's liquidation in August 1948, these works, along with the rest of his writings, were seized — from the family house and his office. The first commander of the VVA would be General V. Terzić on October 1,[975] while all the other "Voroshilovists" remained in their assigned positions. Of the 17, only General-Lieutenant Branko Poljanac and Colonels Momo Đurić and Slobodan Radulović would perish in the subsequent Cominform purges.[976] The others managed to hold on, having learned from Arso's tragic experience. It was precisely on him that Tito, under the pressure of aggressive Soviet propaganda, realized that in the increasingly complex relations with Moscow, it was not advisable to lay hands on the generals who were "Russian students." This was all the more true because, within the Soviet and its affiliated propaganda machinery — according to Dr. Radojica Luburić's research — debates soon escalated in 35 languages on 24 very sensitive issues related to Tito's name, five or six of which involved General A. Jovanović; the fifth issue read: "Who is responsible for the December 1 catastrophe at Pljevlja?" and the ninth — "What was the dispute between Arso Jovanović, Chief of Staff, and Tito after Sutjeska, how Tito broke through the encirclement, how Sava Kovačević died, and what the fighters didn't know, but Tito and the Political Bureau concealed from the public." As much as this heated propaganda was full of lies and insinuations, with mostly half-truths, it significantly complicated Tito's position, gradually "revealing the path and manner of his rise to the throne of the victor."

Both of the surviving "Voroshilovists" today (2001) firmly believe, citing evidence for it, that they were "certainly covered" — under surveillance, wiretapped and followed, so they were controlled and blocked. General M. Morača, for example, recalls how "a security officer, a decent man, godfathered him and advised him not to talk about politics in the car, because the driver must report everything" — even though he was the commander of the army. The number of "Voroshilovists" in the highest military positions also quickly dwindled: S. Rodić suddenly died in April 1949, officially

[975] He was also considered a "Russian student" by the political leadership, as he spent 20 war months as the head of the Yugoslav Army Military Mission in Moscow and, with the label of "unfit," was retired at the age of 50 with the rank of General-Lieutenant of the Yugoslav Army.

[976] Lieutenant Colonel M. Đurić, commander of the Supporting Battalion, Šumadija Division and Belgrade Division of the KNOJ in the NOP. General B. Poljanec broke down under torture on Goli Otok, and Colonel Đurić — having been cruelly tortured along with 23 others of equal rank (including two of P. Dapčević's brothers — Vlado and Milutin), three lieutenant colonels and six majors in the notorious "Petrova Rupa" — went from 110 kg to 46 kg of body weight and barely survived (M. Stojanović, *Goli Otok Trilogy*).

stated as having died from acute and then supposedly incurable meningitis (while General Đoko Jovanović, in an article in *NIN* issue 2596, claims that the KOS authorities "executed him on the spot"); in the early 1950s, P. Dapčević, D. Lekić and D. Kveder were sent to diplomacy, R. Vukanović was prematurely retired, and S. Urošević, at 40 years old, was transferred to the reserve, while Milutin Morača was "pulled" into the position of federal minister, etc. Arso, on the other hand, was the first of the "Voroshilovists" to disappear, unfortunately also physically, having been indebted to many powerful figures during the war: to Tito, saying to him — during the Kupres operation, after Sutjeska, during the breakthrough into Serbia, in the "campaign" of final operations for the country's complete liberation — what he thought of Tito's autocratic decisions and the actions of his favourites; to Kardelj, especially for his first mission in Slovenia; and to "our Spaniards," of whom 29 became generals by the end of the war.

From the reports and the entire work of the 5th Congress of the CPY, which, as he confided to the revolutionary Petar Komnenić, then president of the People's Assembly of Montenegro, "passed under the sign of militant monolithism,"[977] from the arrogant responses of the security services, whose members were increasingly "tracking" him, from the predominant role of the Party in personnel politics within the Army, from the amateurish work on establishing war doctrine, and especially from the atmosphere of titles, honours, idolatry, dogmatism and sectarianism — he realized that things would not end well. He remembered Tito's marked tendency towards autocracy and omnipotence from the days in Bihać, the refusal to accept collective decision-making. In reality, for months, during that tumultuous, even revolutionary, period of the first half of 1948, the government did not meet nor make collective decisions, so it was of little consequence that its president, Tito, expressed his alleged willingness at a Political Bureau session to resign from that position and remain only as the party leader and Supreme Commander, which, as Đilas would later write, was a sort of test to see how leading political figures would react. He heard about the issues on which Andrija Hebrang and Sreten Žujović were politically liquidated in a brutal manner; he knew about the negotiations with the Germans in March 1943, which were now vehemently denied; he knew the real truth about the destruction of the bridges over the Neretva, which was now celebrated as "a genius example of Tito's decision-making and operational deception"; he was aware that even Stalin, in November 1943, was opposed to proclaiming the Marshal of Yugoslavia and consolidating the highest party, state and military duties in his own personality, which was now celebrated as "an expression of the unity of the people's will"; he experienced Tito, E. Kardelj and their group's actions in the Drvar cave, while Žujović, Ranković and he, leading the units for their immedi-

[977] Frenzied applause, "hot slogans," chanting of the leader's name and the like were inventions of fascism and the Comintern's version of communism, which disrupted the proceedings and annoyed many people; for example, at the 2nd Congress of the USAOJ in May 1944 in Drvar, which Arso greeted on behalf of the General Staff, delegations of three anti-fascist youth "factions" from Italy arrived. Already in the first break, the leaders of the delegations declared to the Congress Presidency that they were "tired of twenty years of chanting in their country and could no longer tolerate it anywhere else." Since nothing changed in the behaviour of the Congress delegates, two out of three delegations left the four-day meeting the next day. (R. Zogović, *op. cit.*, p. 245).

ate defence, risked their lives in mortal danger, while Tito now attributed all the credit to himself. He did not share the assessments of those who, from the congress podium, at rallies and in the press, proclaimed that Josip Broz Tito was a brilliant military leader who should be credited with all the victories, even though he, throughout the entire war path, especially from Drenova to Jajce, had made significant contributions, speaking and writing about "a gifted strategist" and "a great military thinker," singing like others: "Comrade Tito, sharp sabre — victor of all battles."

He was one of those who believed that the NOB, with combined combat actions of operational units and partisan detachments, was unique and highly successful, but that the partisan method of warfare, as Stalin and Molotov wrote to Tito because he claimed it as his "invention," had truly existed on the battlefield for over 140 years, referring to Spain in 1809, Russia in 1812, the October Revolution of 1917-21, Spain in 1936-39, and the ongoing Chinese liberation war. He did not accept the crude denial of the extent and significance of Soviet military aid to Yugoslavia, especially in terms of armament and the execution of operations to liberate Belgrade, Banat, Bačka, Baranja and Podravina in the final phase of the war, but, on the other hand, he was deeply hurt by Stalin's insults towards his comrades — comparing them to the Bulgarians. He could not accept the gross distortion of the truth about the values and advantages of Soviet military doctrine, which was increasingly being spoken of with disdain, as a "set of dogmas and templates," which, a reasonable man, a successful "Russian student" and a good expert in military tactics, General Dušan Kveder, would soon attempt to correct, doing so so cleverly and courageously that, certainly — had he not been a Slovenian with Kardelj behind him, and particularly had the publication of such an article (for reasons only known to him) not been ordered by Tito himself through Koča Popović's mediation — he would have ended up on Goli Otok, where several JA generals already found themselves: Đoko Mirašević, Branko Poljanac, Branko Petričević, Rade Žigić and Mirko Krdžić. Kveder, among other things, unequivocally pointed out what the "Voroshilovists" had understood and learned: that "it is characteristic of Soviet doctrine to apply its principles flexibly, according to their fundamental conditions. Therefore, it is essential to properly understand this feature of Soviet doctrine and accept its non-template element to use it creatively in our own conditions."[978] This, and only this — a year and a half earlier, in Moscow and Belgrade — General Arso Jovanović had said, but it was recorded against him as proof of serving Stalin and betraying his own country and its army.

He was afraid that "the dirty water would take the child with it" — that in the condemnations and current conflicts, in which both opposing sides were overstepping, people would forget the gratitude for the immense military aid from the Soviets to the NOP and, especially, that the deep and rich spiritual ties between Serbs and Russians would be severed, and that the "Russophobes" would become empowered. He loved Russian history and tradition, literature and painting, song and music, he loved the "wide Russian soul," and he never allowed anyone to challenge that. He highly respect-

[978] General theoretical military journal *Vojno Delo* — organ of the MNO, edited in the VVA Directorate, No. 1/1950.

ed Stalin as a military leader, but he did not — as M. Šušović assessed — love him, because "he was not a soulful Russian but a cunning, sly, cruel Asian." He understood the adulation of the Generalissimo at the 5th Congress as securing time for new moves against him, with guarantees from Washington and London that they would support him in preventing Stalin from launching a military attack on Tito, assuring that "Tito must not sink," for which only the spring of 1948 remained a good chance.[979]

The reasons why, as one of 2,344 delegates, he did not attend the Congress on the first day after noon and the following morning are only speculative, but it is believed — according to the most knowledgeable — that it was a distaste for the high praise with which every word from the leader of the CPY was greeted. And since he was sitting in the front row, his absence was more conspicuous. This was discussed with him by Ranković, and he claimed it was due to a migraine — which could have, but did not necessarily, have been true. During the Congress, which lasted seven days, he was bothered by the aggressive emphasis on the Party's unity with the people and loyalty to the leader, which, as he confided to Petar Komnenić, he saw as a type of desperate need from smaller nations and their institutions, an attempt at self-affirmation, particularly when, in his own assessment, the sovereignty of the country was in question. Yet, in Topčider, as the more composed people assessed, every measure was exceeded. And certainly, for Arso's ear and eye, for his reasoning and understanding — it was the complete opposite of everything he had learned, heard, seen and done in the Royal Yugoslav Army, even in meetings with His Majesty the King. Additionally, he was bothered by the fact that he always had at least two "brothers-in-law" on his tail, with careful attention paid to whether someone clapped and for how long when Tito's name was mentioned.

At the same time, no one, at least publicly, no matter how much they slandered him — ever said that from his return from Moscow until his removal from the scene, he held informal meetings, contacted any representative of the Soviet Union or other "brotherly countries" embassies in Belgrade, in conversations placed Stalin above Tito or Russia above Yugoslavia.[980]

Those who met him during those days and talked with him say that he remained a reliable patriot, an upright and respected soldier, and that he was elected as a delegate at Tito's insistence, perhaps to see if the Party still valued him, or perhaps to check his loyalty. However, he knew Tito's nature and his inclination toward autocracy all too well, but he had no reason to step aside or to bow down to him. He was, as they say in his homeland, "clean before God and the people": as a professional soldier and patriot, he overlooked the oath he had taken to the sovereign when he left the country

[979] The nature and content of Tito's contacts with the West, particularly the White House, is also evidenced by the fact that his correspondence with President H. Truman has not been made available to the public even 52 years later.

[980] Dozens of "Cominform members" claim that at the CPY cell meetings, where they were taken to prisons, the question "Tito or Stalin, Yugoslavia or the USSR" was never asked, as they would have undoubtedly voted for the first. However, it was remembered how Tito, on May 12, 1945, in the packed Kolara hall, thundered: "The love of the Soviet Union towards us is boundless — from the great leader Stalin to the last man."

and its people; he joined the uprising and, as the chosen one of the people's army, was appointed as the Chief of the Supreme Command of the Anti-Fascist Army; he became a Party member because it was a condition for surviving in that Liberation Army in the highest military position, but he was never a communist in the Comintern, sectarian and conspiratorial sense, always somewhat "artificially attached" to a small group of 5-6 people who were at the top of the political, Party and military hierarchy. He was the Chief of Staff alongside the Supreme Commander, a former Comintern student and resident, a believer and prisoner, he was in solidary with him, loyal to him as a subordinate, but never a like-minded person in carrying out the revolutionary course, especially in the extreme politicization of the army, in the fight for power, in the escalation of civil war and in the violence against the bourgeois class...

He never understood the deep discord and disunity among the top communists, the tendency to gossip and belittle each other, quarrel, and even — in national and international frameworks — exterminate one another. Therefore, much of the fierce, satirical quarrel between the leadership of the Yugoslav and Soviet parties, especially between Tito and Stalin, was incomprehensible to him; he did not understand why Tito refused to go to Bucharest and why he feared "the long arm with the drawn sabre" of the autocrat from Moscow, not knowing at the time that Stalin had "shortened heads," including his most talented military leaders, even the Tsarist officer, and later Soviet Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky, whose original works on military science and bold manoeuvres involving mass airborne drops and deep armoured "wedges" he carefully studied, both in school and independently, and regarded as intellectual innovations, as daring breakthroughs into the world of military art, which would soon be strongly confirmed by practice on the world's battlefields. He read that "every revolution imposes bloody, terrible reckonings," and understood that it was in the tradition of Bolshevism to allow everything in peace — from assassinations and sabotage to guerrilla warfare. He had difficulty understanding such contradictions in the leader's mind: during the NOP years, Tito had demanded that soldiers be killed at the bunkers with shouts of loyalty to Stalin; in 1946, he called for the advance of Stalin's troops towards the English Channel; and in 1948, he turned against Stalin — all for the ruthless preservation of his own position, accusing those who did not share such views of "criminal acts of treason against the state and the people," saying initially that "opposition should be struck on the hands, even on the head, but their hands should not be torn off, nor their heads cut off," something which, in the escalating reckoning, could not be kept under control, and it couldn't ensure that "the revolution does not eat its children," and only the "Goli Otok" association for Montenegro would gather data on "about 220 killed."

The two strong individuals on the same, seemingly fateful issues for the country, obviously had different beliefs, and both could not survive in the military leadership, with it already being known in advance that the more informed, clever and unscrupulous one would prevail, thus being the stronger.

It is known, from the memories of his mother Zorka and sister Miluša, who swore by the memory of Arso, and this is the most solemn vow of a Montenegrin mother who

lost her only child and a sister without a brother — that one day, "sometime in early August, certainly after the Congress," he was taken from the house to which he never returned. A terrain vehicle entered the yard, and two "operatives from the flying penal detachment of the revolution" appeared at the door. They were looking for "Comrade General." It was told to them that he was ill, with a high fever, and "a headache that was splitting his forehead," which was the truth, but they were persistent, pushy and angry, saying they were there "on the orders of Comrade Stari." Pleas were of no help. Arso came out into the hallway, heard that the Supreme Commander was looking for him, and was told to leave immediately. He tried to explain to the newcomers that he was sick, that he would come to the Supreme Commander in the morning, dressed in uniform, but the other side was unyielding. Before leaving, he told his mother that he was going to Avala and would return, and that his relative Mirko Jovanović, who was supposed to arrive soon from Titograd, should wait for him. Less than an hour after his departure "with the brothers-in-law," his nephew, Captain of the First Class from the communication units, Božidar Pavićević, arrived from Zrenjanin, who recalled that it was "August 4 or 5" and that the phone lines to his uncle's house had already been cut off, with the family now pressed by uncertainty and fear. Thus, the wait for Arso's return lasted until General Koča Popović arrived on August 12 with the sad news, which would be officially confirmed six days later, in a statement from the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the FNRJ — that he had "been killed while attempting to escape across the Yugoslav-Romanian border."

There are only three details that are reliably known from what happened in the meantime — because they were recorded by survivors. The first is that, certainly before being taken from his house at the host's request, he had lunch at M. Đilas' house, which Đilas would note in *Power and Rebellion*. Đilas writes that this was "immediately after the 5th Congress," and that they mostly talked about "the Soviet leadership's attack on us," with the host indirectly expressing his thoughts on the matter. "Arso either remained silent, confused or made vague statements, saying: 'I don't know what the Russians want'... I conveyed my impressions of Arso's indecisiveness to Ranković." It is hard to imagine that these two members of the highest CPY leadership would have kept this "indecisiveness" of Arso's from the General Secretary and the Political Bureau, which surely only worsened his position.

The second detail is that, the day before or after that "meeting" at Đilas' house, he was, "on a friendly invitation," at dinner with General V. Velebit, a man of Tito's highest trust, whom official Moscow listed as an "English spy in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs"; according to the host's recollection, the guest (Arso) at dinner, among other things, objected to the decision to displace two JA divisions to Albania without proper military justification, and without even informing the Kremlin, which had important strategic interests there on the very edge of the "community of people's democratic countries," which could have been one of the serious reasons for the disagreement between the two Party, and state, leaderships. He expressed his "personal view" that they should have gone to Bucharest and defended the truth there; finally, he spoke about the danger of a sudden rupture of the deep spiritual ties between Serbs and Russians. It

is generally assumed that all of this could not have remained "just between four eyes" until dawn, nor Arso's warning: "Those who overstep will not be saved!"

The third detail, certainly the most interesting for this story, is that Tito, most likely after Arso's "detention," had several heated discussions with his first major general while walking around the Brdo complex near Kranj, gesturing with his hands, stopping, and then leaving angrily for coffee, leaving his interlocutor on the path. At least three of Tito's guards, officers by rank, remembered this scene, one of whom was his nephew, Captain Branko Broz, while Major Boško Čolić recalled a similar scene from the White Palace. No one knows what they were discussing, but the scene was strange, especially when the host went for his mandatory coffee, leaving the guest alone on the path.

The ever-present V. Dedijer would write in 1982, in *New Contributions*, that Tito, during a break in the extended Political Bureau session at Brdo near Kranj, spoke with three "Voroshilovists," of whom only Arso's demeanour seemed suspicious to him. In fact — as the host told Peko, who then relayed it to Dedijer — he behaved "like a drenched hen," which did not necessarily indicate support for Stalin's side, but could have stemmed from concern about the course of events, dissatisfaction with being appointed to a new position rather than being made head of the General Staff or even a personal matter. In any case, "the red light was flashing."

Soon after, Arso disappeared, and then, on August 18, a statement from the Ministry of Internal Affairs appeared in *Borba*. It stated that during the night of August 11-12, Generals Arso Jovanović and Branko Petričević and Colonel Vlado Dapčević attempted to cross the state border illegally and armed, trying to defect to Romania, during which Arso was killed. At the very least, this is strange: the border is guarded by the army, and its top general dies there, yet the statement is issued by the Ministry of Internal Affairs instead of the General Staff — with the news being delivered to the family the next day by the head of the General Staff. Meanwhile, the leading figure in that Ministry, Aleksandar Ranković, some twenty years later in conversations with Arso's nephew Božidar Pavićević and the author of this book on Arso, claimed he had nothing to do with the statement — even saying he was not in Belgrade at the time. In October 1973, he would also tell me that Arso was "a top-class professional, an extremely responsible man and a proven patriot," but when asked how such high praise aligned with the alleged border-defection attempt, he demurred: "Let history judge that!" Regarding his own "case," in which Tito in 1966, during a struggle for (or over) power, burdened him with unfounded accusations and politically eliminated him, Ranković wrote: "The truth has never remained buried. It may have been suppressed, but never defeated." I am certain that he knew the full and real truth about the "Arso case," but I do not believe he did enough during his lifetime to ensure it would not remain forever buried and defeated — especially since he outlived Tito by three years and could have at least revealed the location of Arso's grave. Yet, as I increasingly believe that the truth will neither remain buried nor defeated, I am recording every detail — literally at the last moment — in the hope that, sooner or later, it will serve some researcher in establishing the facts, encouraged by the knowledge that modern

science is capable of revealing the secrets of death, even those of Egyptian pharaohs.

The then KOS officer for the section of the border where Arso had allegedly perished — Vlajko Bajić — stated that his superior had sent him there four or five days after the incident reported in the statement. He encountered a tearful police officer, Vladimir Kovačević, who was frightened of being punished for "killing the head of the General Staff," while seeing no other evidence of the event. Before him, Colonel Ilija Kostić, deputy head of the KOS Directorate under General Jevto Šašić, had spent several days there. Notably, early reports claimed General Jovanović was killed by a soldier on the border line, later saying he was shot by a police officer in the border zone. Bajić would inspect the border sector again some twenty days later and found Officer Kovačević healthy and cheerful, having been told he had "carried out a patriotic act." At the trial of Petričević and Dapčević — held only two years later — the verdict stated that "experts carried out the necessary forensic analysis," but there is no written record of them appearing in court, nor were their findings, if any existed at all, included with the verdict. There was no mandatory forensic investigation, ballistic analysis or findings from a border commission — all of which were required in such cases even at that time. In the Book of the Dead of the Vršac municipality, the name of the allegedly killed leader of the attempted defection, Svetolik Arabljac, is recorded, but Arso's is not. Even after fifty years, the location of Arso's grave is unknown, as is the official act by which he was — even in death — condemned to such isolation, something criminologists consider highly indicative from the standpoint of credibility.

For some, however, everything was clear: blindly trusting the official statement from the state authorities, institutions and individuals immediately turned against Arso. The first to react was the Main Political Directorate, led by General Tempo, who sent a letter to the party committees and unit commanders, presenting Arso in the worst possible light, demanding that, after reading and processing the statement, all officers individually and publicly express their stance on this "act of treason against the state and the people" and submit detailed reports within five days, with particular emphasis on "possible deviations from the Party line." There is no information from these reports, except for phrases about loyalty to Tito and the Party, but those present at these meetings remember the total confusion, even the "entanglement" in this "case" and the involvement of Western intelligence agencies, with Tempo's recollection adding that the Political Bureau assessed that "at that time, 75 to 85 per cent of the JA's composition would not turn their weapons against the Red Army." Every hesitation, delay in answering on the spot, reservation or disagreement with the claims in the statement, which was declared the "line" — was carefully recorded by diligent KOS agents, and those individuals immediately became victims of repression. This is how his sister Miluša, known by her partisan nickname Igmanka, his brother-in-law Major Luka Stojanović, neighbour Colonel Dukljan Vukotić, close relative Colonel Vujadin Ćetković and hundreds of comrades, relatives, friends, fellow tribesmen, admirers and acquaintances suffered — often simply because they publicly questioned whether this was possible or, in some cases, because they refused to publicly spit on his name. The family was evicted from their house and placed in a cramped apartment, their tele-

phone lines were cut, his wife Senka was fired from her job and they tried to persuade her to "renounce her traitor husband" so they could secure her livelihood...

The press and radio, clearly prepared for days, unleashed a full barrage against him, accusing him of his "class affiliation before the war," listing alleged mistakes from the NOP period, and especially criticizing his "cowardly stance in front of Stalin" in January 1945 and his "work for the NKVD." General Pavle Jakšić wrote in his memoirs that on August 12, "he was returning from a spy spot on Ada Ciganlija — at that time a favourite beach for political and military leaders. On Čukarica, I was nervously and unusually stopped by the military security services, at the start of my future long years of playing first violin in the armed forces — and they didn't show the usual respect toward generals, not even after identifying my identity." He soon learned the reason for this disturbance — that "General Arso Jovanović, the wartime Chief of Staff of the Supreme Command of the NOP, had been killed while attempting to cross the Romanian border."[981] One might wonder: if his body was found near the border, what was the military security doing among the general elite on Čukarica, where the response also points to clumsy direction.

General Tempo, then head of the Main Political Directorate and leader of the CPY organization in the army, wrote in his memoirs from the early 1970s that after the 5th Congress, exhausted, he had gone to the Montenegrin coast, where, after ten days, he was urgently called back to Belgrade. On the way back, while on the plane, he heard that Arso, Petričević and Dapčević had tried to cross the Romanian border, that Arso had been killed at the border, Petričević was captured and Dapčević was in flight. He concluded: "As for Arso Jovanović, his actions didn't surprise me: he was an officer of the old army, and after the war, he was sent to the Soviet 'Voroshilov' military academy, where he could have been recruited," but he was surprised by the actions of the other two.[982]

In the 1950s, the Ambassador of the SFRY to the USSR, Veljko Mićunović — at the time the Deputy Head of the UDBA and assistant to Minister A. Ranković — recalled in his memoirs titled *Moscow Years* how, in a heated conversation with Soviet leader N.S. Khrushchev during the Soviet Army's intervention in Hungary (1956), he heard the host's comment: "You constantly boast about Yugoslav democracy, but you arrested tens of thousands of communists who disagreed with you in 1948." The former powerful general sharply retorted, as Mićunović wrote: "It is true that we arrested Cominformists. They were not communists to us; they were enemies of socialism and foreign agents. I don't know if they were sentenced to execution, but there were those killed, like General Arso Jovanović, who attempted to flee across the state border to Romania. He had come from the USSR, where he had studied at military schools."[983]

Alongside Tempo's assumption that Arso might have been "recruited" in Moscow and Mićunović's suggestion that he had been recruited by the NKVD, there is also a

[981] P. Jakšić, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, 40.

[982] S.V. Tempo, *Revolution in Motion*, Vol. II.

[983] V. Mićunović, *op. cit.*

claim published by Dedijer — allegedly from "one of Tito's most trusted commanders (who had studied with Arso in the Soviet Union)" — stating that two colonels from that service sharply rebuked Arso for his "impolite behaviour toward Stalin" during the Kremlin dinner on January 25, 1945 and, in front of A. Hebrang, forced him to work for them. Even in the pages of *New Contributions*, this sounds extremely implausible — even if it came from Peko Dapčević and the pen of Vladimir Dedijer!

From Vrnjačka Banja, a letter arrived on September 4 addressed to *Narodna armija*, sent by the "non-commissioned officers, officers, generals and military personnel of the Military Sanatorium Vrnjačka Banja" from a protest rally. It was addressed to Comrade Tito and expressed their outrage that "traitors of our people such as Arso Jovanović are being glorified in Hungary and Romania, even though it is well known that Arso Jovanović betrayed his people and his homeland, broke his oath, and was killed at the border by a soldier who guarded it more conscientiously and loyally than the general-colonel himself."

Montenegrin leader Blažo Jovanović, while visiting his native Piperi on the Feast of the Transfiguration (August 19) at Brajalovica spring, was asked by his hosts, "What happened, Blažo, with our Arso?" He replied, "He died like a common horse thief, and no one even mentions his name anymore." Three decades later, I reminded him of those words in Igalo, and he told me — from his sickbed — that he had said so "to protect his clansmen from the UDBA."

General Peko Dapčević also spoke out at a "meeting of the Party cell of the Ministry of National Defence" held on September 15, 1948 in the Central House of the Yugoslav Army. His speech, devoid of subtitles or section breaks, took up the entire front page of *Narodna armija*.[984] It is also noted that he said this "among other things." The "subjects" were Generals Arso Jovanović, Branko Petričević and Pero Popivoda, and Colonel Vlado Dapčević — his own brother. The first was likely dead, Petričević and Dapčević were in prison, and Popivoda had fled to Romania by plane from Pančevo Airport. The article stated that General Dapčević said these four were "men alien to our army, men who turned to treason because they were never truly part of our army. They were and remain foreign and corrupt elements — men who never cared about the interests of their homeland or our obligations within the anti-imperialist camp. They are individuals who, for personal and base reasons, tried to tarnish the honour of our officer corps and bring shame upon our army and all of us." He called them "petty-bourgeois, ambitious types," "despicable deserters," people who "never had anyone behind them in the army or the Party who would be willing to sacrifice anything for their dirty ambitions." He condemned the way the Cominform's Party press glorified Arso Jovanović with false information, claiming "as if he was supposedly the organizer of our army, supposedly recognized as the leader of all the major operations during the liberation struggle, the soul and brain of all strategic and tactical operations against the occupiers," adding that Moscow's *Pravda* called him "a great organizer and military talent, a passionate friend of the USSR." In response, he said

[984] Issue of September 18, 1948.

this was about an officer "who lost a whole series of battles (e.g., Pljevlja, Bosansko Grahovo, Bugojno, etc.), was removed from the most important strategic operations, and during the Belgrade Operation, was left in Aranđelovac with explicit orders not to come to Belgrade or get involved in that operation. He was relieved of his position as Chief of the General Staff, among other reasons, due to incompetence and poor interpersonal relations." He argued that it was absurd to claim that Arso Jovanović was a friend of the Soviet Union when, in 1941 in Belgrade, "after Mitar Bakić approached him to recruit him into the Party, Arso kicked him out of the house, telling him that the Red Army was a giant on glass legs, that he opposed all forms of dictatorship — both fascist and communist — and that he would report Bakić to the police if he ever came back with such matters." Believing that such articles "throw mud even on those who write such untruths," General Dapčević emphasized that "those four renegades believed the Party was a tool for fulfilling their personal ambitions, and that's why they are filthy individualists, putschists and deserters.

"These are the kinds of people who are now being promoted in the people's democracies as those who should 'save' the banner of Marxism in Yugoslavia! Let everyone know that we have always held the banner of Marxism–Leninism firmly in our hands, and we have defended it more than once from attacks by opportunists and factionalists — and today we will defend it even more easily, thanks to the unity of the working class, our peoples and our army, who, under the leadership of our Party and our Comrade Tito, are building socialism..."

On October 8, 1948, the *Pobjeda* newspaper published a document from the Founding Congress of the Communist Party of Montenegro, which "deemed it unworthy and condemned the attempt to fracture the unity of our glorious Party, the attempt to create factions within it, whereby deserters and cowards (Arso Jovanović, R. Golubović and others) were proclaimed heroes."

It would take almost two years for the chief military prosecutor, General Ilija Kostić at the time, to prepare the trial for the two alleged companions of Arso in his flight — General Branko Petričević and Colonel Vlado Dapčević. This did not happen until early June (1-4), 1950. In the meantime, he had replaced General Veljko Žižić, who, along with the President of the Supreme Military Court, General Mirko Krđić, and the military legal officers Major Miliija Laković, Vlado Lakić and Vujadin Ćetković, had refused to prosecute and judge based on the police report, "without legal grounds for criminal prosecution," as most of the individuals involved had only said something or spoken out, but had not committed a crime or caused any harm to the interests of the country or the people. All these "disobedient and unsuitable legal officers" received sentences from military courts of 10 to 12 years in strict prison, with Žižić dying during the investigation.

In addition to the removal and sentencing to long prison terms of the most prominent figures from the military judiciary, before the trial of the participants in the "Arso Jovanović case," special security measures were taken within the country and political propaganda against the "diplomatic staff of the Cominform countries in Belgrade" was intensified, especially their military measures at Yugoslavia's borders,

which at the time, in fact, was encircled from all sides, which, as Arso would say, by *BRIGAMA*, and according to Tempo, "there were seven motorized Soviet divisions on the northern border."

Dr. Darko Bekić writes extensively about the foreign policy conditions in which this happened in his study *Yugoslavia in the Cold War* (Zagreb, 1988), emphasizing that it was about "the trial of Generals B. Petričević and V. Dapčević, participants in the well-known attempt to escape to Romania, in the summer of 1948, during which their leader, the Chief of Staff of the JA, General Arso Jovanović, was killed." He adds that the emphasis was "on the intelligence activities of the Soviet embassy in Belgrade. For example, it was published that the Soviet military attaché, General Sidorovich, through the accused, tried to recruit Ivan Gošnjak and Koča Popović, but of course, nothing came of it. Western observers assessed that, politically speaking, the trial was intended to expose the unlawful activity of the Soviet embassy, or to warn domestic dissenters not to contact Soviet diplomats, as such activities were being closely monitored and harshly punished." The writer's comment is undoubtedly accurate, but there are three factual inaccuracies in this brief account, relying on the escape attempt statement: V. Dapčević was never a general; A. Jovanović had not been the Chief of Staff for nearly three years before his death; the JA officially existed only from December 22, 1951. These remarks may seem formal, but they indicate an inadmissible lack of understanding of this very sensitive "case," which still persists to this day.

The trial was public: it was broadcast over loudspeakers in halls, schools, squares and villages, and extensively reported in the press. The court transcript was published in the *White Book* in 1951 for the international public. The accused admitted that before the escape attempt, they had maintained contact with representatives of the Soviet embassy, military attaché General G.S. Sidorovich, and his colleague Major I.V. Kolobanov, from whom they had received orders and submitted reports, although they did not mention Arso Jovanović's involvement. According to the court transcript, there was no mention of how these two men, under cover of night, determined that Arso was dead and then fled; nor, we repeat, was there a commission investigation or forensic report if they even existed. It was not legally established that Arso was dead or where his grave was, which would have been the legal basis for his family to assert basic rights, or at least gain moral satisfaction. In the "records for internal use on personnel policy and practices in the JA," General D. Nikolić mentions that Arso Jovanović, "by the decision of the competent authority," was stripped of his rank as general and his awards, along with "the loss of all civil and honourary rights," but there are no records of this decision, or any written trace, not only in the Military Archive but also in the records. Unlike some other Cominform members, his name in Tito's *Collected Works* does not carry this mention. According to those who should know, his "case" file was not preserved, although it existed in the most strictly guarded part of the Federal SUP archive in the mid-1980s and could, according to the minister's words, be extracted from the vault and reviewed with the approval of the three most responsible people at the head of the Party, the army and the police. When, in 1995, permission was requested from the highest ranks of Serbia — since that archive had, in the meantime,

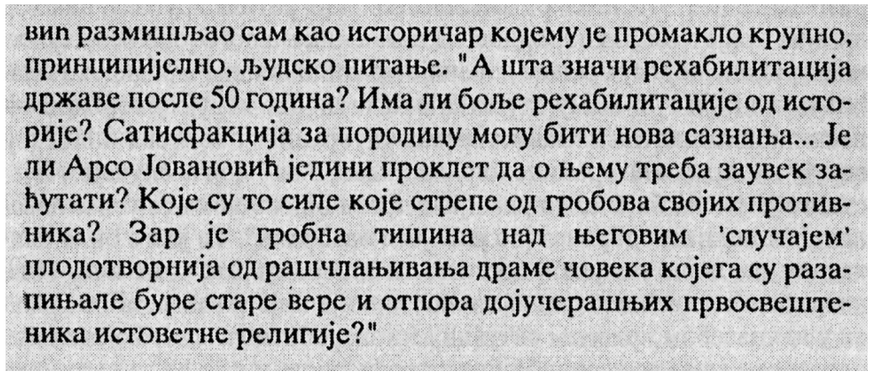
moved under the jurisdiction of its police — to inspect this file (even if it had been selectively edited), the first response, after insisting on who and why was requesting it, was that "to obtain a statement" one must return the following day. It was then said that the file did not exist, and later that it might be in the KOS archive, and on further insistence, they pointed out "the neglected possibility that it might be in some bunkers at the edge of a city in Srem," and finally, that (with that material in the book, and in the book overall) "we should not stir things up now." Then, in 1999, the excuse for rejecting the request was that the archive had been destroyed (burned) in the NATO bombing, and in 2001, that, possibly, the disclosure of General Arso R. Jovanović's file would fall under the competence of the Yugoslav Army, for which the laws regarding the opening of archives do not apply...

From the Military History Institute, following the established procedure, I requested access to at least one document from Arso Jovanović's file up until 1941, to which I was first told I would receive it in eight days, and then that there was no trace of it. Over the course of several months, mostly poring over thousands of pages of the *Official Military Gazette,* I gathered the basic information about that part of his otherwise rich biography. From his "case" file, at least indications about the basis of the accusations that have followed his name for 50 years could be obtained: that he was recruited by the NKVD, that he attempted to escape across the border and so on, and perhaps some insights from those who, according to their intelligence and morals, interpreted what he said. I tried to get access to such a file in Moscow, but without success, which is also the case with Tito's file until 1941, which, as historian Đorđe Stanković notes, was "locked with nine locks" in specially guarded Russian archives. This is how it happened what Professor Dr. Branko Petranović told me in February 1993, when I asked whether to write a book about General Arso Jovanović's life: "Write, of course! He was the most prominent soldier of the NOP, 'the first man of the General Staff,' as old Smodlaka used to say." He added: "Remember well — if it had been possible to write that, you wouldn't, among us historians, be waiting for this challenging topic, which can't be given a final answer until the archives of KOS and UDBA are opened on one side, and the NKVD on the other, and you won't, my son, live to see that!" This is what the scholar, who published a brilliant essay titled "Epistolary Exchange of Thoughts" with the daughter of General Arso R. Jovanović, Dr. Zoja, regarding his "case" in his testamentary work *The Historian and the Modern Era,* told me. And he concluded it with three questions which — unfortunately, with his premature death (1994) — he left for his colleagues to seek and provide answers on behalf of the profession: "Is Arso Jovanović the only one cursed that his name should forever remain silent? What are the forces that tremble at the graves of their opponents? Is the silence of his 'case' more fruitful than analysing the drama of a man whom the storms of old beliefs and resistance to the past high priests of the same religion crucified?"[985]

It took me six years, carefully searching for the truth, to understand how the historian Petranović — along with all the dozens of people who claimed they would

[985] B. Petranović, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

certainly help me uncover the truth about the life-ending fate of General Jovanović — was, ultimately, right. In my search for relevant materials, first in the Military History Institute in Belgrade, then in documents from archives ranging from Moscow to Washington and from Rome to London, I read sources and met people who offered, or at least hinted at, assistance in shedding light on the "case" of this significant figure. Thus, I came across 29 versions of his final days, and upon realizing that none of them were grounded in facts that could be unconditionally believed without confirmation from a document, I formed an unmistakable impression: that, undoubtedly, under the orders of Josip Broz Tito, he was liquidated through an organization led by his most trusted confidant. This was, after all, neither the first nor the last victim of Tito's hunger for absolute power, and in the political liquidations of real or imagined opponents, we, thank God, have long become skilled in these areas, where both Russian and Yugoslav communists could raise their banners, cleverly using the experiences of the Okhrana and Special Police, the Cheka and OZNA...



вић размишљао сам као историчар којему је промакло крупно, принципијелно, људско питање. "А шта значи рехабилитација државе после 50 година? Има ли боље рехабилитације од историје? Сатисфакција за породицу могу бити нова сазнања... Је ли Арсо Јовановић једини проклет да о њему треба заувек заћутати? Које су то силе које стрепе од гробова својих противника? Зар је гробна тишина над његовим 'случајем' плодотворнија од рашчлањивања драме човека којега су разапињале буре старе вере и отпора дојучерашњих првосвештеника истоветне религије?"

Professor B. Petranović: history owes answers.

What is indisputable in the entire story is that the name Arso R. Jovanović lives in the minds of all generations, especially those who lived through the war and its aftermath, but also among younger generations, which I confirmed in a survey conducted by a group of journalism students at the Faculty of Political Science in Belgrade. From a sample of 30 young men and women, 26 had heard of Arso's name, 22 had read something about him, 18 knew basic details about his role in the NOP, particularly about his death, and no one believed the official version of his life's end.[986] Furthermore, none of the six "Voroshilovists" I spoke with since 1973, none of his close wartime comrades, family members, relatives, friends or citizens who followed the news and radio five decades ago — especially the younger people who had heard or read about him — believe the credibility of the official statement from the Ministry of the Interior of the FPRY. They believe that Arso never even saw the border, and if he did by chance, it could have only been part of the direction orchestrated by the leaders of

[986] The survey was enabled by the Dean of FPN, Prof. Dr. Momo Stojković.

those who sang in unison: "Militia and defence — this is the chosen army." Yes, it was the elite, but more and more in the service of the political and military top, which no longer needed strong but obedient individuals, who did not understand that the country would, in times of crises, need distinguished military leaders, responsible only to the homeland and their profession; otherwise, the party army would disintegrate along with the party that created it, which is what happened — though four decades later.

When it comes to the staging in the border area, here are two details: first — let the relevant state bodies present the original documents and Arso's grave, so that the truth can be determined by an independent expert and all speculation be dismissed; second — for now, it remains indicative that academician Milan Milutinović, a longtime head of the Department of Criminology at the Faculty of Law in Belgrade and a scholar respected in European circles, when asked to analyse the statement and verdict from a criminological standpoint, said that they "don't hold any weight." It was not determined that Arso died; key witnesses, V. Dapčević and V. Kovačević, disagree — the former talks about a burst of gunfire that hit Arso in the head, while the latter says he fired from a rifle with single shots and fired four bullets, with the fifth one failing. The documents do not "follow" the findings of the forensic commission, the ballistic expert's report or the report from the military accident commission on the border, which in such cases is mandatory. The name of his alleged guide is recorded in the Death Registry, and there is a known grave, while Arso's name is absent from this mandatory document, and there is no trace of his grave, "which is probably the biggest flaw of this otherwise poorly orchestrated drama."[987] This also applies to the testimonies at the trial organized even two years later — where his killer appeared as a key witness, and the two alleged companions were charged with "crimes against the people and the state." These three men cannot confirm, and based on the verdict, no one insisted that Arso was mortally wounded. All three testify that it was "complete darkness," so why couldn't it have been: as a skilled soldier, the moment the shooting started, he ducked, and then, like both of his companions, made it to Belgrade, where he sought refuge at his sister Miluša's, only to be arrested again, and perhaps dragged to the border, alive or dead.

Moreover, Miluša, retelling a conversation with Đilas in secret "Madera," said she told him that Arso "was dragged in his pajamas," and distinguished NOP fighter and university professor Milo Marković drew my attention to another variation he had heard — that Arso had been wounded earlier, taken to Belgrade, and then dragged to the border and liquidated. A quote from Dr. Svetislav Božović's book *Gulag Genocide,* published in 1992, recorded in Igalo from the story of "a colonel from Tito's entourage," claims that Tito "struck the table forcefully when he read the telegram from Belgrade in Kranj, which said that 'General Arso Jovanović, during his escape across the border, was killed'" — can be, like much of this chapter, interpreted as an indication, in the absence of official data, that everything was staged.

When it comes to the version that General Arso Jovanović's liquidation was carried

[987] From a conversation with M. Milutinović, March 1996, in Belgrade.

out (rather clumsily) by the Party's top leadership and its brutal repressive system, here is a citation from the publication by Živorad Mihajlović Šilje, *Serbian War Circle*. This first sergeant of the 1st Proletarian Division and wartime logistics officer of the People's Defence Corps, and later, in post-war years, a high-ranking officer in the UDBA in the capital, writes how Arso met with Branko Petričević and Vlado Dapčević, where they discussed fleeing to Romania, but at the last moment, he changed his mind and repented. Citing "some patriotic reasons," he abandoned the plan, which, according to Dapčević, codename "Cossack," was then reported to the "Russian connection in Belgrade," a certain Bandarjenko. Meanwhile, Arso, aware that he was meeting with Petričević and Dapčević, already "marked Russian men," was warned by A. Ranković to be cautious because "Šašić's agents were after him." Arso reportedly replied that there was nothing to regret or be ashamed of, adding that "there was nothing for Jefto to grab onto." However, for the repentant man, abandoning the plan to leave the country was not "strong enough cover." According to the scenario and in the presence of General Šašić, and under the arrest of Colonel David Laušević, Arso was killed by a KOS officer, also a colonel by rank, "in the official apartment" of the KOS agents in Revolution Boulevard, number 28. The author confirmed these details in an oral conversation on November 17, 2000, citing the name of the executioner (which, for moral reasons, I am recording only with the initials Đ.M.).

This all occurred before Petričević and Dapčević attempted to escape, and there, at the state border with Romania, they discovered that Arso's body had been transported to the border, where, for the sake of convincing the story, the local agricultural estate manager was also killed. When they learned of this, they scattered in different directions, and "Cossack," upon reaching Belgrade, wrote a letter to the "Russian connection" in Belgrade (which fell into the hands of the UDBA), stating that Arso was "killed here, in Belgrade, and then transported down to the border," adding that they had composed "that awkward, false statement." Everything, he writes, was done according to the scenario set by General Jefto Šašić, where Arso's body, before being transported to the border, was "dressed in a white summer blouse," which, he tells the Russian, was the reason for his great surprise: "How could this General, Chief of the General Staff, a top officer, cross the border at night in a white blouse?" The Soviet embassy connection helped V. Dapčević to reach northern Bačka, but his escape failed. At his interrogation with Petričević, he agreed to accept the staged version, which claimed that, together with Arso and the unfortunate manager, they "ran into an ambush at night," resulting in Arso and the guide being killed. Based on this, in June 1950, the judicial panel headed by newly promoted Colonel Miloje Stijović sentenced them to 20 years of imprisonment each.

Mihajlović published this in 1992 — while V. Dapčević, General J. Šašić and the alleged executioner were still alive, but none of them, nor any other publicly named actors or possible witnesses, ever denied these allegations. Not publicly, at least. I, however, have taken from the book — in a manner consistent with the sensitivity of the topic — those sections that relate to the "case of Arso Jovanović," leaving them for the reader and any future researcher, with the note that even then, and later, in the

actions of the sprawling repressive system, there was a certain — I can't help but get the impression, even encouraged from the top — rivalry between the state and military security, which emerges from every page of this publication.

For months, the "Eastern propaganda" would assert that General Arso Jovanović's death was an "organized brutal murder" and that "such methods of settlement were used by the nazis," which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the FPRY (Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia) denied in protest notes that were published in the press. Furthermore, Moscow, through its neighbouring and involved Bucharest, insisted that a joint commission — considering the importance of the person and the gravity of the incident — verify and confirm or deny the claims from the statement, which, from the outset, had not been believed in the East. Belgrade refused, although the "case" certainly affected inter-state relations. Namely, the Yugoslav Ambassador to Romania, Radonja Golubović — a pre-war lawyer, old communist, first fighter of the NOB, AVNOJ delegate and head of the Presidency of the National Liberation Committee of Yugoslavia in Vis, then a republican minister — resigned on July 29, 1948, and remained in Bucharest. This was noted by *Pravda* on August 2, and earlier, Air Force General Pero Popivoda had defected and joined the Yugoslav emigration, which began to gather around them. For this reason, official Romania was interested in determining the truth. Moscow claimed that the "greatest strategist of the NOB and a great friend of the Soviet Union" was forcibly brought to the Romanian border, where "his escape was staged, and the liquidation carried out." Thus, in the "Statement of the People's Assembly of the FPRY" from September 30, it condemns *Pravda*'s assertion that "the responsibility for Arso Jovanović's death lies with the current leaders of the CPY and that wide-scale repressions, arrests and murders of communists and non-communists are taking place in our country." Although it is "well known that Soviet representatives know in detail that Arso Jovanović was killed by a police officer guarding the border because he opened fire on him. Despite this being well-known to them, *Pravda* continues to praise the traitor and makes insinuations as if his death was deliberately organized."

Moscow's assessment of Arso's qualities as an allied military leader was also expressed by the entire armed force of the Slavic empire — around six million soldiers grouped from Eastern Asia to Western Europe. Upon hearing of his death, by Stalin's personal order, they held a minute of silence in his honour. This was told to me by academician Branko Pavićević, who spent a long time researching Moscow's archives, emphasizing the reason that no honours are bestowed on a spy, informant or traitor of one's homeland, especially by a great power. Moreover, to reiterate for clarity: Arso was the only Allied military leader to receive two of the most prestigious Russian military decorations for his contribution to the victory over fascism — the Order of Kutuzov and the Order of Suvorov, First Class. Therefore, that power had an army capable of paying tribute to him.

Now, some details about a few of the 29 versions of Arso's death.

Several officers of the UDBA, with quite a few "elevated lookout points" in the then system of informers and deliverers, claim to know even who killed him in the

basement of a certain house in Banjica but are unwilling to testify in writing.

An account from academician Miomir Dašić: One day, a retired senior officer of KOS entered his office, the director of a gymnasium in Berane, and reprimanded him for allowing this and that captain, a former student of this reputable school, to enter his office — "a rust of a man, a piece of filth without equal," a Kosovo man who "with a pistol, in the office of the General Staff, killed Arso Jovanović." The academician told me this in front of ten witnesses, allowing me to include it in the book. However, being cautious and wise, he could not give the names of the two Kosovo men, as both, he says, had since passed away, and "they have numerous descendants who should be spared from their vile actions."

One other academic, the renowned writer and Goli Otok martyr Dragoslav Mihajlović, in 1998, told me that a man from the *Književnih novina* editorial office mentioned that General Arso Jovanović was liquidated in Belgrade. He even knew the location of the crime and the name of the executioner, but he kept the details to himself.

Spending his pension years, General Radovan Vukanović, in conversations with those he trusted — better than anyone else among his wartime comrades and colleagues who knew Arso — would assert that, with his understanding of morality, patriotism and profession, Arso could not have stepped toward the border to escape abroad, even if he had ideologically and action-wise completely parted ways with Tito and felt danger for his personal safety and life. When it came to the story of his escape by plane with Ana Pauker, he would dismiss it with a wave of his hand, rejecting it as pure fabrication. However, he did mention the threat from 1st Proletarian fighter and then lieutenant colonel, and OZNA representative Sava Mićković to his superior in Belgrade, general by rank, that if his demand was not met, he would reveal "how you killed Arso here and dragged his body to the border." Colonel Radomir Petković and I were told in 1985, at his home, about Arso's end: "He was probably liquidated in Belgrade, and all other stories are smoke screens to cover up the crime and the criminals." This was also said, on another occasion, at a table in the "Metropol" hotel, to a group of generals and his wartime comrades and friends, which included Savo Drljević, Božo Božović and Petar Radević. Pre-war sergeant pilot Mirko Šćepanović, battalion commander of "Beli Pavle" in the battle of Pljevlja in 1941, and later a shock infantry battalion commander in 1944, and in the first year of the Cominform period, commander of the air division in Niš, told the KOS (military security) officer: "We know how you destroy the best cadres, how General Arso Jovanović was liquidated in Belgrade. Be careful, because we also have weapons!" Shortly thereafter, the Air Force Command was informed that Lieutenant Colonel Šćepanović "died while attempting to escape to Albania."

Several former KOS officers would later hint that Arso's body was tied in a sack and thrown into the Danube or Sava; others would say he was liquidated and secretly buried within the grounds of the former military hospital below Avala; a third group mentioned that his bones lay somewhere beneath the paths of the White Palace or in ravines south of it; and a fourth group referred to the area of Brdo near Kranj...

In the 1970s, the national hero and retired pilot colonel Petar Radević[988] was taken by General Blažo Janković to Novi Sad to meet his nephew Milo Vukmirović. The party leader of Vršac from 1948 recounted the "case" as he interpreted it during the trial of Petričević and Dapčević, and, in short, his account was: the group helped get a guide to the border, where Arso fell; however, this time, he did not exclude the possibility that Arso might have survived that "midnight shooting in the complete darkness" and returned to Belgrade, where "later, things could have happened that suited the regime." Vlado Dapčević does not entertain such a possibility — in his statement given to the Military Court in June 1950, and again in February 1999, he remains adamant, "not giving up even a single letter." When I asked him, in the presence of publicist Jovo Popović, to explain some gross inconsistencies in his statement, he initially, reluctantly, accepted but then avoided it the following day in a completely improper manner. The official version is also accepted by Nikola Koča Jončić, then head of a department at the top of the UDBA, which was led by Slobodan Krčun Penazić; his unit was in charge of that part of the border area, preventing especially intensive livestock smuggling; he heard the original account from Arso's killer, police officer V. Kovačević, but says he did not see the body, and knows nothing about his grave. The same story is recounted by reserve General Boško Todorović, then an officer of KOS on the border.

During the investigation into the final moments of Arso Jovanović's life, I reached out to several high-ranking officials of the then Ministry of Internal Affairs, whom I believed, by the nature of their duties, must (at least more than others) know about this "case," especially since their "ordinary regular," officially, killed the leading general of the Yugoslav Army. I wrote to them — both in writing and orally, personally and through influential people — asking for a conversation on the subject, promising that I would publish their authorized statements without commentary. However, most of them did not respond, mostly visibly offended by the very fact that someone could even dare to doubt the truth of the official statement from their ministry, led by A. Ranković, with the Political Bureau and Josip Broz Tito personally behind it. One of them was Nikola Kmezić, at the time the UDBA commissioner for Vojvodina, the region where, according to the official statement, this "case" occurred. I particularly wanted this conversation because at the time, his colleague in a high position, Jončić, had recommended Kmezić to me as someone to talk to about this topic, and even more so because Zarija Guberinić, a first partisan from Vasojavići and retired Colonel of the JNA, had drawn my attention to a note from his notebook recorded on July 17, 1988, in the "Bera" hotel. There, Gojko R. Đukić — born in 1922 in Polica, a high school student in 1941, participant in the Battle of Pljevlja and fighter in the first row of the 1st Proletarian Brigade, and in August 1948, major of the JA and head of the political department of the division — testified that "Nikola Kmezić, a high-ranking officer of OZNA from Vojvodina, knows the truth about Arso Jovanović's death," and even listed "the location where his grave is hidden." He added that "everything was organized and carried out in agreement with Ćeća (Ranković's deputy Svetislav Stefanović)

[988] Promoted to the rank of general in the reserves on November 29, 1999.

and Jefto" (General Jeftimije Šašić, head of KOS). This prominent activist (treasurer) of the current citizens' association, which sets "the defence of the truth about the anti-fascist struggle of the people of Yugoslavia" as its main goal, did not respond to the conversation, which is his civil right. The worst thing for both the truth and for him is if he — like some of his comrades in defending the full and true truth about the anti-fascist struggle of our front — considers Arso's fate "just an episode." They (verbally) responded to my suggestion to place this "case" on the agenda and hold a public debate, offering to make all the gathered material available to them without any preconditions. According to them, this topic, reduced to an "episode," does not deserve to be searched for truth, which, after all, is not something new, since such reasoning has been dominant for more than half a century. However, as time passes and the archive grows: "the case" by "case," "episode" by "episode," data by data about individuals and groups liquidated at the borders, and from "Glavnjača" to "Petrova rupa," then about the thousands convicted "for betraying the country, people and state," and detained and tortured in Gradiška, Goli Otok, St. Grgur, Bileća, and the tens of thousands "deprived of bread" in disciplinary procedures, all participants of the glorious anti-fascist war. Thus, the material for revealing that very dark side of our history grows, before which the truth can no longer remain blind and deaf, let alone absent. At the same time, the prevailing "ethical view" that perpetrators of crimes should not be "named" in the name of the peace of their descendants (falls) before the truth, that from the roots of General Jovanović and many other "cases" and "episodes" grow grandchildren who are very much interested in knowing the full and true truth about their, more than half a century ostracized, ancestors. This is the least history can, not only do but must, do for them (both ancestors and descendants). In the name of truth and civilizational considerations.

A retired ensign, originally from Lika, very resourceful and agile eighty-year-old, occupied with real estate transactions, sometimes slips and mentions knowing the truth about Arso Jovanović's final moments. He even remembers the number of the field vehicle "that took him to his death," and it seems that he also assigns himself some role in this "case," maybe even as the driver. However, more than that, he refuses to say, defending himself with an oath he allegedly signed, even though he has long since neither the army nor the service to which he swore.

When it comes to the drivers, one of the three who took Arso to the vehicle in question met, sometime in 1950, his nephew Major Božidar Pavićević and told him, "What is being said about Arso's escape is a sheer lie! I said it, and now I feel better in my soul. Don't ask me anything else..." In the court records, a certain "Bruno Bensan, from Karlovac" is listed as a witness, who would describe events from the trip to Banat in great detail to UDBA officer and writer Đurica Labović. However, this witness does not appear on the list of drivers at the General Staff at that time, nor does anyone from his contemporaries recall such a distinctive name.

Retired General Koča Popović, at his home in Dubrovnik, told Božidar Pavićević: "I deeply regret that your uncle suffered such an end. Stupidity, madness." In his home on Lačkovićeva Street in Dedinje, he told me in May 1985: "General Jovanović didn't

deserve to be forgotten in encyclopedias, lexicons or the majority of historical works. He did make mistakes in the NOR, even grave ones, like all of us, but that doesn't give anyone the right to marginalize, silence, or, even worse, hide his grave for four decades — if he's even buried." Koča would later propose in the Federal Assembly, as vice president of the SFRY, perhaps recalling how he had been a frequent guest in Arso's house and had even lived there for a while, that a "state or investigative commission" be formed to examine Arso's "case," review all documents and deliver a verdict of truth. However, the idea was not accepted in the parliamentary committees. When I reminded him that he had been the first to bring the news of Arso's death to the family on August 12, 1948, he reluctantly remembered that unpleasant role, adding that it was "the police's job" because Arso hadn't been killed by a soldier, but "that's what Broz ordered, and I passed it on to Senka."

The Secretary of the Federal Assembly Mitar Bakić was found by Professor Dr. B. Pavićević in 1959, in his hospital bed. The dialogue was brief:

"I know everything is being listened to; they are bugging us, but I don't care. Arso's death is the heaviest wound for me. My conscience gnaws at me..."

"Couldn't you help?"

"I was prevented and unable to... That's all I can tell you."

Regarding helping Arso, only Tito could do everything, and everyone else too little. If Tito had not seen in him, from the closest circle, a person who could, in those troubled times, oppose him, he could have treated him the way he did with the political leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro: sternly reprimanding him for not understanding the true danger coming from the Kremlin, then, aware of how much worse it could have been for him, returning him to work, or, as a capable, esteemed and deserving military leader, condemning him to a life of isolation, perhaps even assigning him to some invented and insignificant military post in the country, or to exile in some barren land in Bačka, in sub-mountain ravines, or his native village, and perhaps especially in Slovenia; as for foreign countries, there was no possibility of exile or assignment to a fictitious mission: he couldn't go to the West because of his ties to Stalin and the complete break in relations, and to the East, he could no longer dare. However, Tito, from his days in Moscow and the years after, knew best that only a dead enemy is harmless; feeling personally threatened and insecure in Belgrade, he would retreat to Brdo near Kranj and Split, while Arso, not having any reason to fear anyone or give up anything, did not guard against the people who were threatened, not knowing their "need to protect themselves and defend themselves, and for that reason often unexpectedly and treacherously attack" — as Nobel laureate I. Andrić wrote. He was an honest man, and honesty is the greatest courage — before others and, especially, before oneself. A witness who knows much, and who, in some estimates, could also be a dangerous opponent — is most easily and quickly disposed of through liquidation. Everything else is technique.[989] What Tito, even after three decades, at

[989] The old revolutionary and prolific writer R. Čolaković, a man known for his rejection of exclusivity, fanaticism and hatred, called Tito in his *Diary* an "imaginary autocrat," and on March 22, 1983, just a few days before his death, he wrote, when "only the truth is spoken and written": "He was a democrat as

least before his death, did not order — that Arso's descendants be shown his grave — can be interpreted as personal uneasy conscience, or perhaps reasoning: let the graves of the Chief of Staff of the two opposing Serbian war sides, Generals Arso and Draža, remain forever unknown; in this way, balance would be maintained more easily in the Serbian national corpus on both sides of the Drina. This reasoning, despite all the hypocrisy and cunning, carries a significant "but" — he was, after all, the first before the victorious anti-fascist army. Had he revealed Arso's grave, perhaps he would have transferred to the realms of memory with fewer troubles, and certainly, with a much lighter conscience, entered into the collective memory of the Serbs. And with that, Arso's descendants would have finally been freed from the heavy, five-decade-long burden: by burying his earthly remains in the grave of his father, Radivoje, a hero and victim of the Battle of Mojkovac, they would have fulfilled the basic civilizational duty to the deceased ancestor, and certainly would no longer have to endure the advice of state authorities to "declare the death" of their glorious ancestor through "court declarations of missing persons," which would have been a humiliating procedure for the Jovanović family and undignified for the state, as this was not a beggar or wanderer whose "every trace and voice was erased during their lifetime," but the Chief of Staff of the Supreme Command in the anti-fascist war, a military leader who would have made any liberation army proud.

Golotočanin, former lieutenant of the JNA, and flight instructor Mišo Burić, introduced me in the fall of 1995 in Pančevo to "the man who saw the corpse of Arso Jovanović," the armourer Pera Kumarski. He spoke to me at length and vividly about the difficult conditions along that section of the state border with Romania, but the essence of the story is that while inspecting the border guards' weapons, he spent the night in the sentry post of Corporal Stevanović, and just before dawn, he heard some gunshots and, in the morning, learned "that one general and one civilian had been killed." Soon after, Major Kurc, a Slovenian and the commander of the Vršac border battalion, informed him that General Arso Jovanović had been killed, that "the field guards had shot him, armed and authorized to shoot anyone within a 15 km zone from the border — if they weren't reported by the UDBA." This, he claimed, was confirmed by the KOS and UDBA commission. Kumarski also mentioned that, near some jeep and black cars, he saw a corpse carefully covered with a blanket. I asked him how he knew it was the corpse of General Arso Jovanović, and whether he personally knew him or had seen him in a photograph. He responded negatively. After all, the victim's face was completely covered with a blanket, with only a hat near the head and mud-covered boots exposed.

Here is a conversation from 1998 between the Podgorica lawyer and the president of the "Goli Otok" Association for Montenegro, Milinko B. Stojanović, and the history professor and Arso's close relative, Jagos Jovanović, who lived in Belgrade:

"There is talk, Jago, that you know where Arso was killed and where his grave is?"

"I know, Milinko, I really do!"

long as you agreed with him, but just a little opposition — and you would be destroyed without mercy." Why couldn't General Arso R. Jovanović have been one of those destroyed?

"Will you tell me, because we've been searching for these two pieces of information for a long time?"

"No, Milinko, I will really not!"

"When will you reveal it, Jago?"

"I won't until the day I die, Milinko!"

"Well, that's in time, my soul..."

Before this "interview" and in the presence of lawyer Petar M. Marković, I had discussed Arso's "case" with this ninety-year-old man, and I left with the clear impression that he knew little more about it, both in general and in detail, than the common knowledge available.[990]

In September 1990, Slavko Đurić, a farmer from Izbište, aged 85, wrote in *Borba*. In August 1948, as a "fiacre driver for the district budget," he witnessed a scene when a group of "coat-wearers" in a covered truck brought a civilian man to the area near the village of Sočice; they untied his hands and shouted for him to run toward the border, then shot him in the back. In confidence, the district president Branko Jeremić told him that it was General Arso Jovanović, with the warning: "What you've seen, you haven't seen, otherwise, you'll end up like him." He carried this secret, as he told journalist Drago Božić, for more than four decades, and, sensing death approaching, he publicly revealed it to ease his conscience. Since neither Đurić nor any of the eyewitnesses whose names he mentions are alive, only his firm word remains, with the caveat that he may have been deceived to ensure that the truth was concealed.

Milan Vućak from Knin also spoke out (September 17, 1994) in *Politika,* revealing that "the grave of Arso Jovanović is near Vršac, by the Romanian border." He claimed to have seen it with his own eyes in 1952, when, as a cadet of the School of Reserve Cavalry Officers, he visited the area as part of the school's squadron. He said that it was their commander, Nikola Pavlović, who had told them in confidence that the remains of General Jovanović were buried there. Due to the upheaval in the ensuing civil war, it was impossible to trace Vućak and his commander Pavlović, and the Vršac Border Section Command responded that they were "unaware of such a grave."

In June 1995, a retired non-commissioned officer from Pirot, who claimed to have been the commander of a cavalry section in the border area where Sočice belonged, contacted me. He reported seeing the corpse of General Jovanović in a crouching position in the August dawn. "He was killed while relieving himself, and his trousers were left undone." Severely wounded and deprived of medical aid for two and a half hours, he bled out. When I met him in Niš and asked how he knew it was General Jovanović's body, he replied: "I was told from above."

In this border sector, smuggling of horses and cattle flourished, and from mid-May, especially from the end of June, desertions became more frequent, so the movement control in the 15 km deep border zone was rigorous. In this regard, the authority of the security organs, the field guards and various (armed) UDBA collaborators was unlimited. In this, reliably the busiest, border zone, murders became increasingly fre-

[990] He died soon after, taking that secret (if it existed) with him to the grave.



● Измишљена убијања

ПРИЧА о таквом страдању четника, као ју је многих балканчка „четворка", не стоји, на простор разлога што је пријератерску војну подружје имало најстрељену команду у НОБ. Чињеница да је постојао који сва говоси из њега нису могли.

УДРУЖЕЊЕ „ГОЛИ ОТОК" ДОПУЊАВА СПИСАК УМРЛИХ И УБИЈЕНИХ ИБЕОВАЦА

АРСОВ ГРОБ ЈОШ ТАЈНА

● Ни после најновијих трагања не зна се где је сахрањен Арсо Јовановић ● Парламентарна комисија Црне Горе позвала на разговор управнике логора и затвора и важније истражитеље да би се утврдило где су сахрањене жртве Голог Отока и других казамата

ИЗ УДРУЖЕЊА „ГОЛИ ОТОК" У ЦРНОЈ ГОРИ

Голооточани траже гроб Арса Јовановића

Забележио: Славко ЂУРУВИЈА

Како је погинуо Арсо Јовановић

An unpaid fundamental civilizational debt.

quent, almost a regular occurrence.

After a series of articles about the life path and, especially, the tragic end of A. Jovanović, published in September 1995 in *Politika*, the author of the serialized article, journalist Radovan Kovačević, was contacted by retired engineer Milan Egarić, with the information that Arso, on the eve of his alleged death at the border, had been in Vršac and even, with the director of the aeronautical sports centre and pilot ace Pavle Crnjanski, had toured the Vršac area. After touring the facilities within the airport grounds and conversing with the cadets and instructors about the conditions for training sports pilots, the guest readily accepted the offer from pilot Crnjanski to make two or three rounds in Russian training aircraft. Everyone was satisfied, especially Arso. However, in the morning, the commissioner of the centre "fired tirades directly against General Arso Jovanović: he attempted to desert but was prevented at the border!" As a reaction, comments, especially among the 150 young men, mostly future intellectuals, were heard in the ventre that, despite the dangerous risks, could not be suppressed: "How could a man intending to flee across the border not have taken advantage of the opportunity that was offered to him yesterday in the plane? Surely he had a pistol, with which he could have forced the pilot. And the Romanian border was only a few kilometres away. In short, at least for the people from the centre, it was immediately clear that the official version of Arso's death was seriously lacking in credibility. That is, it was a fabrication just to justify Arso's liquidation"![991]

When it comes to the possibility of fleeing the country by plane, three details are worth noting: the first is the statement attributed to Tito recorded by Dedijer, where it was revealed that there was a conspiracy that Arso would escape to Romania on Ana

[991] I could not obtain the flight log from 1948, which might have confirmed these claims.

Paukera's plane, which was clearly a complete fabrication and impossibility, partly because, if such a mysterious plan was indeed known, it could have been easily thwarted: the plane was well-guarded at the Zemun airport, and Arso was followed for days. The second is that the husband of his biological sister Draga, Major Luka Stojanović, a pre-war pilot sergeant, was the commander of a fighter regiment in Velika Gorica and could have quickly and very safely smuggled him across the border. The third is directly related to the previous one: the commander of the air division in Belgrade, Colonel Petar Radević, was summoned by the commissioner of the Air Force, General Milija Stanišić. After a brief conversation about the situation in the units, he asked him if he would, at his request, have provided a plane for General Arso Jovanović to cross into foreign territory. The pre-war second lieutenant pilot and commander of the 1st Fighter Regiment of the JA, formed in 1945 in Krasnodar, replied: "Not only would I have given him the plane, but to ensure the safest flight, I would have personally piloted it!" At that point, the general informed him of what Petar would soon read — an official statement about Arso's death "during an attempt to cross the border and escape to Romania."

At the trial of Branko Petričević and Vlado Dapčević in June 1950, a tank was mentioned as a possible means of escaping across the border. Specifically, it was said (and has been repeated to this day) that the two of them, arriving around 5 p.m. in Arso's car in Bela Crkva, "looked for his close relative, Dukljan Vukotić, some kind of commander of an armoured unit, who would give them a tank to escape across the border, but they didn't find him, so they continued toward Vršac." There are at least three falsehoods in this sentence: the first — Dukljan Vukotić was not related to Arso by blood, but was simply a neighbour from their hometown, a pre-war sergeant in the tank units of the Guard, a partisan and a leader in the NOVJ, who ended the war as the head of the 52nd Kosovo Division Staff; the second — he was not "some commander" in Bela Crkva, but the head of the Tank School in Vršac; the third — not only was he not at work on August 11, but he had already spent three days in Montenegro, specifically in Budva, at his own wedding and vacation before starting his studies in the first class of the VVA, which Arso knew well, as Dukljan had stayed with him while waiting for transport to the then Titograd, even asking him to be his wedding godfather. In any case, what kind of a general would not know that all border crossings had been mined, or at least would not have checked by phone, before embarking on such an adventure as an illegal border crossing, whether the tank was secured and whether a connection awaited him? Such gross errors should not have been allowed in heated political propaganda, let alone in court,[992] two years after the event. However, even greater ones were allowed. These three high-ranking military leaders were followed by KOS agents for weeks, especially from the eve of the Congress and then day and night, during which Dapčević and Petričević, by their own admission in court, had frequent contact with Soviet military representatives in Belgrade, which, if true, was closely monitored and known. General Tempo, while leaving for vacation

[992] Chairman of the judicial panel Lieutenant Colonel Miloš Stijović, military prosecutor Colonel Radoš Raičević, both pre-war lawyers and first combatants of the NOP.

after the Congress, says to his associates: "Be cautious with Arso, he seems to be on the line of the Cominform." At the same time, the Supreme Commander "has information" that he is preparing to flee on Ana Pauker's plane, and according to Dedijer, he says that in a conversation with him "Arso behaved like a drowned chicken," meaning, at the very least, highly suspicious.

The question arises: how do these three high-ranking military officers easily leave their posts and Belgrade, when, under conditions where the militia and military, UDBA and KOS, with thousands of their collaborators, control all passages and approaches, especially toward Romania, where no vehicle could move without orders and escort — unnoticed during the day they ride through Banat to Bela Crkva and Vršac? And in the evening, through rain, they rush and get stuck in the mud in the most strictly controlled border zone, helped by the secretary of the District Committee CPY and the manager of the state agricultural estate in Sočica, both of whom, without any doubt, were people trusted by the UDBA, knowing that the three, still dressed in their ceremonial white uniforms, had not set off on a supposed "wild boar hunt," but on an escape across the border. Today, it is incomprehensible how all this, and much more, could have happened, and how anyone could believe in this entire contrived story, full of illogicalities and nonsense, especially in front of a court panel.

I have spoken with six "Voroshilovists" since October 1973 about the tragic end of their colleague's life; none of them believes that he betrayed his country and attempted to illegally cross the state border, certainly not for treacherous reasons or a lack of personal courage. In their view, he was perhaps the greatest loser among the 1,673 holders of the 1941 Commemorative Medal and another 21,880 participants in the NOP who were labelled "Cominformists." Many communists, participants in repressive measures, in the name of the purity of the Party, stained their hands along with hardened criminals, tarnishing their own honor. It should be mentioned here that later, Edvard Kardelj said that Andrija Hebrang and Sreten Žujović, after the April Plenum in 1948, were arrested and given "for further investigation by the organs of public security" and isolated in Fruška Gora not because they disagreed with the Political Bureau (read — Tito), but to prevent them from defecting to Romania and appearing as "legitimate representatives of the healthy forces in the CPY" at the Cominform consultations. If that's the case, why wouldn't Tito, for the same, and even more serious, reasons, be afraid of the potential of Arso leaving for Romania, where, around the former ambassador R. Golubović, a group of exiles or emigrants had already begun to form, from whom, objectively, a Yugoslav government-in-exile could be assembled, with Generals Jovanović and Popivoda as the core of a future army? All of the mentioned individuals could have appeared in the country, under certain circumstances, as the core of the "healthy forces," whom Tito feared as much as Stalin's long arm, and soon, they would be replaced by Serbian politicians.

It was indisputable that Tito could not allow Arso to become independent, to feel that he was the master of his own thoughts and actions, to show himself as a soldier of strong will and determination, and he needed to — like with every own mistake in military assessments and actions during the NOB — find a "scapegoat." In this, he

had secured the firm support of the "young lions": Đilas, Ranković, Bakarić, Kidrič and Tempo, while three-quarters of the "old guard," mostly his former comrades, were raised in blind loyalty to Stalin, for whom Russia was a second home — as Tito said in 1951 to American Congressman John Kennedy — having perished in the war or disappeared in the first wave of resistance to the "brigands from Georgia," making it easier for him to hunt and break dissenters, exclaiming — according to Đilas' *Power* at Political Bureau meetings: "Arrest them! To the camp! What else, if they want to serve others against their own party..."

There is no doubt that Tito had the greatest support for the liquidation of General Arso Jovanović — not just from the public, but from the life stage — from Kardelj, who had old, unresolved issues with the leading general of the National Liberation Army, particularly from the war. One of the most memorable incidents, from a meeting in the War Room of the General Staff, was recounted by A. Ranković-Marko to UDBA officer and writer Živorad Mihajlović Šilja, which he later recorded and published in his 1992 book *The Serbian Circle in War (File 2)*. The story goes that after 40 days of being out of the country, Arso, at the head of the Military Delegation in Moscow (January 4-February 14, 1945), headed straight from the airport to the Srem Front, where dramatic events had occurred in January, with the NOPJ units suffering thousands of dead, wounded and missing. He spoke with the commander of the 1st Army, General Peko Dapčević, listened to reports from two division commanders, visited the fighters in the trenches and toured the wounded. He then rushed to the scheduled meeting to brief the leading state (and party) figures. Here is a quote (pp. 137-139), with Arso's introductory evaluation:

"If you remember, immediately after the establishment of the Srem Front, I requested that with the existing forces, the line we had established be maintained. That no offensive be undertaken, and that the method of mobilization in Serbia — which was exclusively carried out in Serbia — was anti-Serb!

"I will explain this, comrades!

"Our units systematically liquidated the Chetnik forces, which consisted mostly of mobilized peasants.

"A terrible number of people were killed.

"Then we started mobilizing their children, their sons. Two generations. We even mobilized boys as young as 16. We sent them to the Srem Front, untrained, unprepared and without proper equipment.

"Our January offensive, led by Peko, was disastrous!

"I emphasize: a real catastrophe.

"The Supreme Commander had to be made aware of what it means to undertake such an offensive with untrained young men, without adequate equipment.

"It was a slaughterhouse.

"I directly hold Peko responsible for not reporting to the Supreme Commander, when he required it, that our units were not ready for such an operation, for such an offensive action.

"Another generation from Serbia was lost on the Srem Front...

"Kardelj interrupted him:

"'For God's sake, Arsenije (that's how Arso is referred to in the book — *I.M.*), I think you are a chauvinist! The revolution demands sacrifices. It doesn't choose them!'

"'In this case, Comrade Kardelj, it chose them. Yes, it was chosen by the will of one man, and the incompetence of another. I think that if the Supreme Commander had been made aware of the consequences at the time, he would have withdrawn his order for the offensive!'

"'This is getting serious! I think you can't stay in this position! We're not playing war here, we're not a choir of church singers!' Kardelj jumped up.

"Then Marko intervened:

"'I think we shouldn't fall into the fire! This is a conversation among experts, military experts, and I respect it...'

"'This is a political conversation! We are a political army, Marko.'

"'We are an army that fights and dies and kills!' Arsenije interjected and added:

"'I would like to finish my presentation. I am in a position where I bear responsibility for the failure of that January offensive. And that is exactly why I am pointing out the way the units were led, which, as ordered by Peko, led to this slaughter. Yes, slaughter! Peko thinks — push forward as much as possible, with "hurrah," and victory will follow! He did not develop the order at all. The order is simple, with a few sentences: "I order our forces to break through on the Srem Front and clear the land of the enemy"! Please, this means that the Supreme Commander, writing this order, did not consult with experts, with us people who make war our craft. Peko received this order, forwarded it to his commanders and the death march began!

"'Now I can be called this or that, but one day, military historians will analyse all our battles, including this one on the Srem Front! Unfortunately, that will be too late! We've lost the flower of our youth...'

"'You mean the flower of the Serbian youth, Arsenije!'

"'Yes, Comrade Kardelj! The flower of the Serbian youth, not Slovenian or any other! It was the flower of the Serbian youth!'

"The special phone on his desk began to ring and brought him back to the present. He picked up the receiver. His secretary was on the line. He had scheduled a meeting for five...

"He put the receiver down and began to rub his cheek.

"'The Slovenian people', Kardelj replied then, 'by their nature are pacifist people! They are not a warrior nation! They are far ahead in a civilizational sense. You cannot ask them to suddenly become a warrior nation!'

"'I am a soldier, Comrade Kardelj, but if we're talking about the culture of a people, then the Serbian people are far ahead of your pacifist one...'

"Kardelj jumped up:

"'We can no longer discuss this. Comrade Arsenije's case is for the party commission. I even think it's for the court...'

"Marko recalls how Blagoje Nešković stood up in defence of Arsenije at that time.

"Tito had no choice.

"Nothing was done against Arsenije..."

Unlike mid-February 1945, when, due to the upcoming offensive military operations, he was not only necessary but indispensable, as he had been throughout the war, by August 1948, anything could be done with Arso.

However, even then, since Arso held no political position in the Party, it wasn't easy to politically strike at him, meaning it required careful thought on how to ensure the political guillotine would fall on the neck of the dedicated military scientist and the defiant soldier. As the most prominent military figure, he could not be publicly liquidated, at least for two reasons: the first — he feared that Arso had long been "strong with Stalin"; the second — he was also wary of a possible reaction from the "group of Montenegrin generals," of whom there were 28 on Victory Day in 1945, 15 of whom were Arso's pre-war colleagues, officers of the Royal Yugoslav Army.

He could not even bring him to trial, because the process could not yet be reliably directed and controlled; the military judiciary and prosecution, mostly composed of Montenegrin lawyers, were still politically inexperienced and unreliable, and Arso, as the most influential general, knew too much, and who knows what he might have revealed. The victor was unwilling to tolerate a discussion about how he rose to power, so witnesses had to choose between a sentence of persistent silence or a brutal liquidation. The most acceptable option was to liquidate him, without trial, in the places where horse thieves roamed day and night, with the hand of the police, so that his army "could remain with clean hands and a bright reputation." Tito ordered his close associates A. Ranković and especially J. Šašić to "keep an eye on the Montenegrins after Arso's liquidation, because they are prone to uprisings and conspiracies and react tribally — wherever the leader goes, everyone else follows, in an atavistic manner." They, along with their subordinates, would interpret this as permission — and even an obligation — to send Montenegrins en masse to camps, and they would be the most numerous there, proportionally. And when revolutionary Andro Mugoša told Tito, in 1951, during the centenary of Njegoš's death, "as a class comrade and leader," that the treatment of arrested comrades was very harsh, Tito replied: "Listen, Comrade Mugoša, you should know that dry wood burns just as well as wet. So it's better to convict 100 innocent people than to let one guilty person remain free." This stance already contradicts the basic principles of justice since Roman times. After all, these were mostly political trials, and politics and justice usually walk at odds. The then-state prosecutor Josip Hrčević wrote in his *Testimonies* that the UDBA "did not allow anyone, not even the public prosecutor, to interfere in these matters. All that was left for us was, in some cases, mostly at the request of the family, to intervene with the UDBA." He wrote that he intervened until he discovered that he himself was being checked, at which point he withdrew into himself. In the military prosecution and judiciary, those who refused to play according to the tune the all-powerful KOS agents "played" were sent to Gradiška, then to Goli Otok.[993] There are many examples of this,

[993] The idea of a remote and deserted island to isolate political opponents of the regime was not Tito's invention, as is often claimed; as early as October 19, 1939, the General Staff proposed to the government to establish a concentration camp for communists on Žirje, Mulat, Capri or any other

like the lawyers General Kržić and Žižić, and Colonel Laković, Lakić and Ćetković, who refused to judge their comrades "for betraying the country and the people" in cases where there were no criminal elements. According to official data, 2,345 officers were sentenced with this legal qualification.[994] The "Goli Otok" Association cites the number 3,319, providing ranks, while M. Đilas in *Power* writes about the number being "around 7,000." My own research suggests that, in addition to those sentenced, around 16,500 others, mostly in disciplinary procedures for "actions on the Cominform line," lost their rank and livelihoods, meaning that one in every five military or political leaders from the NOP lost their position.

As an illustration of what the people from the countryside, with "a little longer life," thought about the liquidation of General Jovanović, here are excerpts from just three publications. Podgorians, knowing that Arso's end "was not as written," and not knowing which of the many versions was true, in the *Collection: Revolutionary Movement of the Titograd Municipality 1919-1945* published in 1975, list his name in the list of the July 13th fighters, stating "died after the war." In the book by General and publicist Milija Stanišić *Leading Cadres of the NOP in Montenegro* (1995), for the first time in publications of this kind in our country, there is no obligatory qualification about "the Cominform member and traitor to the country who died while attempting to escape across the border." Finally, the memoirs of the old warrior and freedom fighter Pero Đukanović (1892-1986), originally from Bratunac and one of the more known, respected and influential figures in the NOP of eastern Bosnia. He was a leader from the Drina valley who, at the beginning of spring 1942, sought a life-saving connection with General Staff officer Arso Jovanović, and then met with him as a member of ZAVNOBiH in Mrkonjić Grad and AVNOJ in Jajce, evaluating him as "a very well-organized man, in the true sense of a General Staff officer, strategist and democrat." He remembered him in his 92nd year of life, describing in his memoirs what befell him and his family in the revolutionary year of 1948, when, with his two sons — also participants in the NOP — he became a victim of UDBA's arbitrariness and spent several years in prison. Giving the reader, in the chapter of his writings titled "Oh, life, how hard you are — oh, freedom, how costly you are," his "honourable elderly word" to speak only the truth, he, based on his own harsh experience, states how those who came to power after the war acted according to the people's "deceive and judge" mentality. According to him, "a battle for supremacy and for a seat began, not for any other slogan." These, he writes, "spat on the Russian help and the arrival of Russian troops into our country"; they "complain about Stalin for having taken many lives of his opponents, but do not complain about the fact that they killed Arso Jovanović, one of the

deserted island. Historians B. Petranović and M. Zečević attribute this idea to A. Korošec and Dr. M. Stojadinović. Goli Otok, in terms of living conditions in isolation, was neither better nor worse than the aforementioned islands, except that, as a former white marble quarry of an Italian company, it had some infrastructure. In any case, the deserted island as a location for a concentration camp and a place for the persecution of political dissenters was an invention of the fascists, and communists only took it over and — one must admit — developed and perfected it.

[994] D. Nikolić, *op. cit.*

best strategists in our country, a military commander and Chief of Staff throughout the war. Today, our politicians, and unfortunately many writers, record and present to the public that Tito was the mastermind behind the main strategy throughout the Second World War. Tito gave much of himself to the Party, but he was not a military strategist, because he has no higher military knowledge than a corporal, a sergeant, or a petty officer. By military strategy, Tito could not have been anything more than a second-rate officer compared to Jovanović. Arso Jovanović gained General Staff abilities from one of the best strategists and supreme commanders, General Brusilov in the First World War. He was equal to Zhukov in the Second World War...

"When Arso Jovanović was killed, it was reported that he had been killed somewhere on the Romanian border. Surely, an army general wouldn't be that naive. Immediately, rumours spread that Arso Jovanović had been killed in Belgrade and that

четири чоека. Кукају на Стаљина да је укино млоге животе неки свој противника, а не кукају што убише Арсу Јовановића, једнога од најбољи стратега у нашој земљи, војсковођу и начелника Врховне команде за све вријеме рата. Данас наши политичари, а на жалост и млоги писци, биљеже и дају у јавност да је Тито изводио ту главну стратегију за све вријеме другог свјетског рата. Тито је даво млого од себе за Партију, али није војни стратег, јер он нема вишег војног знања од каплара, десетара или водника. Тито по војној стратегији не би мого Јовановићу бити ни обојак. Арсо Јовановић је стеко генералштабну способност код једнога од најспособнији стратега и главнокомандујућег војсковође генерала Брусилова у првом свјетском рату. Њему је само био раван Жуков у другом свјетском рату. Па зар рачунате да је Тито извео ону операцију на Неретви, Сутјесци, Јахорини и на другим мјестима, а не главни стратег Јовановић, пред киме су вавијек стајале на столу отворене географске карте наше земље.

Кад је убијен Арсо Јовановић, јављено је да је убијен неђе на румунској граници. Ваљда није био толико наиван један генерал армије. Одма су пронешене вијести да је Арсо Јовановић убијен у Београду и да му се не зна за гроб. Да му се подигне бар споменик пред којим би масе давале поштовање једноме најспособнијем војном стратегу наше земље. Кад убише Арсу, онда није ни чудо овамо за нас мале. Ово је радио један ужи круг на врху, који је био припремио групу око себе разбојника и добри плаћеника који за своја злодјела никоме не одговарају.

From the memoirs of Pero Đukanović.

his grave was unknown. It was suggested that a monument should be erected for him, where the masses would pay their respects to one of the most capable military strategists of our country. When they killed Arso, it was no wonder what happened to us small ones. This was done by a narrow circle at the top, who had prepared a group of bandits and well-paid mercenaries around them, who were not held accountable for their misdeeds."[995]

The pragmatist Tito understood that this was, at least initially, political, even more so intra-party friction, and expressing one's stance about whether to go or not to

[995] P. Đukanović, *Uprising on the Drina*, Belgrade, 1994, edited by Dr Z. Antonić, p. 298.

Bucharest, whether to send or not to send JA divisions to Albania — freely expressed political beliefs in which there were no elements of a criminal act, something that leading military lawyers pointed out from the beginning, which would soon cost them their rank, and some even their lives. Therefore, stories were fabricated about Arso's supposed escape attempt via Ana Pauker's[996] plane; his relative, the commander in Bela Crkva; a wild boar hunt in the border zone; and his escape not from Tito (because, for God's sake, who wasn't happy to be at his knees?!), but an emigration to a safe embrace. All of this — when the years of tyranny had passed, and with some reservations, the truth of the announcements, even from the omnipotent Political Bureau, began to be assessed — showed cracks at every seam, becoming a political farce.

Not by chance, there is no written trace of Arso's liquidation in the discussions at the plenums of the CC or its executive body, and the government of the FPRY, in the orthodox party state, did not convene; instead, only in its name, made up of leading Party figures, "printed" official statements and protest notes. It was the same with the others: reject them and remain silent, while even people from the party and military top pretended to be ignorant and, later, for decades, would claim they knew nothing about the fate of these individuals, which is also possible — because they didn't have the courage to ask where their collaborators were disappearing, and the tears of their children didn't touch them. It didn't concern them either that Arso's name was not mentioned even in the first composition of the administration of the Higher Military Academy, in archival sources, publications or albums of wartime and post-war photographs. The books he wrote were banned, and almost all copies were destroyed. Regarding the development of the stance on this, only two or three written traces remain.

In September 1950, Colonel Stanoje Brajović was transferred to the Military History Institute as head of the Department for Publishing the *Collection of Documents on the NOR.* During the establishment of the project's starting points, several problems emerged that neither he nor his collaborators, nor their superiors, could solve, primarily two: the first — what to do with wartime documents where the names of Arso Jovanović, Sreten Žujović and Andrija Hebrang are mentioned in the signature or text, "who were killed or branded as supporters of the Cominform; should we provide some explanations in the footnotes or within the text itself?" The second — what to do with documents of German and Ustaša origin in which, in the first two years of the war, Chetniks and partisans from eastern Bosnia are referred to as "rebels" or "outlaws"? Perplexed, the wartime commissar of the 21st Assault Division turned to Moša Pijade, who was deeply involved in the Institute's affairs, very interested in what had been recorded, what would be processed archivally, and especially what would be published, having a significant influence on that. The newcomer presented the questions he stumbled upon at the first step, and Moša, for a start, asked him what he thought about it. In an apparently relaxed atmosphere, which Čiča Janko knew how to create, the colonel replied that the document remains a document only if it is published in its original form, with any possible notes about the conditions under which it was created.

[996] Political Bureau member and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of Romania, from July 28 to August 18, 1948, in Belgrade, at the Danube Conference.

The host, raising his glasses to his forehead, probed further, then concluded that these were too delicate matters for the two of them to decide, and they would consult with Kardelj and Ranković and quickly inform him. That consultation probably happened immediately, but Brajović didn't need the stance the next day: in the morning, he was arrested in his office, in front of his colleagues, then sentenced to several years of "isolation" on Goli Otok, on Sv. Grgur, in Bileća.

The result of the agreement at the very top of the state-party leadership was the introduction of the infamous "three points," which replaced parts of texts or names of individuals whose publication would "disturb the public." Additionally, certain documents could be selectively withheld from publication or even hidden from the eyes of researchers. The result of this agreement is evident from the first edition of the *Military Encyclopedia*, where in the entry about the Supreme Command of the NOPJ, Arso's name is not mentioned, nor is the function of Chief of Staff of this highest military institution of the National Liberation Army; instead, his associates and he are referred to as "technical staff." The name of the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters is absent even in General Vojo Todorović's 1954 monograph *Podgorica Region in the Thirteenth July Uprising*; nor in the two-volume *Liberation War of the Peoples of Yugoslavia 1941-1945* (1965); nor in *Chronology of the Liberation Struggle of the Peoples of Yugoslavia* (1964) — a book of 1,265 pages with 18,322 chronological entries, where the Supreme Command is mentioned in at least every fifth entry, along with over 2,000 names. There are no photos by *Life* reporter John Phillips, taken on Vis and published in a photo album in the West, where Tito and Arso are eating from the same plate or playing chess; the author's caption for the latter was "Who will checkmate whom?" but later, only the Supreme Commander was published, as if pondering over the pieces and playing alone.

Dedijer complained that the publisher of the second edition of his *Diary* had removed the names and photographs of A. Jovanović, A. Hebrang, S. Žujović, "and some others who were labelled as Cominformists," and that, because of this, he "came into conflict with the powerful policeman S. Stevanović." Tito, reportedly, would rule that they be returned.[997] A similar complaint came from Lj. Đurić[998] — he claimed that in 1966, the Military Publishing House removed Arso's name from the original *War Diary* (along with Žujović, Nešković, Đilas, Penezić and Ranković); he personally complained to Tito, and "only a little was returned." There is no doubt that this was in line with Tito's order from the mid-1960s to General Milinko Đurović — that the names of A. Jovanović, M. Đilas and Petko Miletić should not be published in the editions of the Military Publishing House "except in a negative context." This coincided with the release of D. Plenča's book *International Relations of Yugoslavia During the Second World War,* in which Tito is mentioned 126 times, while Arso's name is absent, despite his involvement in wartime missions in Caserta, Moscow and Trieste.

However, it seemed that with the appearance of Miša Leković's books, there was a certain shift in the military institutions' stance on ignoring Arso Jovanović's name

[997] M. Gligorijević, *War and Peace of Vladimir Dedijer*, Belgrade 1985, p. 17.

[998] He too, in 1952, fell into great and permanent disfavour with Tito.

and wartime merits. In the monographs *The Offensive of the Proletarian Brigades in the Summer of 1942* (1965) and *The Bihać Operation* (1972), the name of the first wartime major general is mentioned at least a hundred times (138 times in the first), but with an inevitable concession: a "negative label" was attached in footnotes. In the meantime (May 1977), Tito made a decision that nothing would change in the documents for his *Collected Works*, which was understood to apply to all other publications as well. However, not all powerful figures respected this; General Velimir Terzić was even placed before a harsh decision in 1984 by one of the co-publishers, under the instructions of political powerbrokers: either he would remove Arso Jovanović's name from the group of officers who, in April 1941, bravely opposed the Germans and Ustašas with their units — or he couldn't publish the two-volume work *The Collapse of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia 1941.* In the *Military Lexicon* (1981), as a "general military encyclopedic manual," a volume of 1,129 pages with around 20,000 terms and 6,000 published personalities, neither Arso Jovanović's nor Milovan Đilas' names appear (not even in the footnotes that would discredit them) among the first wartime generals and personalities from the highest leadership of the NOP armed forces, with the additional decision made by the JNA leadership during the development of the concept of this edition that the photograph of General Rado Hamović, a wartime member of the Supreme Headquarters and the 1960s Chief of the General Staff, would not appear among the 3,000 illustrations.[999]

Regarding Tito's *Collected Works,* Arso is mentioned 213 times, but in the indexes of each of the 22 wartime volumes (published between 1982-1990), his name is accompanied by the same note, formulated by the omnipotent "first party man" Stane Dolanc: "Accepted the Cominform Resolution, became an enemy of socialist Yugoslavia; died at the border while attempting to escape the country in August 1948." As one of the illustrations, there is the distorted photograph by Phillips: Tito alone, playing chess with himself! True, unlike some others, Arso's name here does not carry the mention that he was stripped of his rank, civil rights and decorations, such as the Orders of Suvorov and Kutuzov, which could only be taken from him by the one who granted them — official Moscow. However, with the dead, in the wave of violence and injustice, anything could be done — they were one of the three generals who, along with 11 colonels, 10 lieutenant colonels, 22 majors, 24 captains and 33 lieutenants, were liquidated or arrested by the end of 1948. These numbers increased throughout the years of the Cominform period, reaching eight generals, 43 colonels, 119 lieutenant colonels, and 322 majors. Along with the aforementioned Branko Petričević, Mirko Kržić, Veljko Žižić and Rado Žigić — Goli Otok, Sv. Grgur and Bileća would also host Generals Branko Poljanac and Đoko Mirašević, both officers of the Royal Yugoslav Army, who were subjected to the harshest humiliations and torture. Arso's luck in misfortune was that he did not have to endure that fate.

Jovanović Arso (1907—1948), oficir vojske Kraljevine Jugoslavije. U NOR-u od 1941: član Glavnog štaba NOPO za Crnu Goru, komandant Crnogorskog NOPO za operacije u Sandžaku, od decembra 1941. do kraja rata načelnik Vrhovnog štaba odnosno Generalštaba JA. Od 1946. do 1948. u SSSR-u završio vojnu akademiju »K.J. Vorošilov«; po povratku u zemlju (1948) načelnik Više vojne akademije; general-pukovnik JNA. Prihvatio Rezoluciju IB, postao neprijatelj socijalističke Jugoslavije; poginuo na granici pri pokušaju bjekstva iz zemlje, avgusta 1948 — 229, 289

The same note in each of the 22 wartime volumes of J. Broz's "Collected Works."

[999] Tito removed him from the military leadership in August 1969.

He is fortunate that people remember him for good, inquire about his grave and have their own versions of his life's end, while the men beneath the shining insignia of his executioners are unknown and unacknowledged. Thus, Arso 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.

For the first time, Arso R. Jovanović was publicly and more extensively discussed at scientific conferences in 1995, marking the 50th anniversary of the victory over fascism, in Belgrade and Podgorica. The Organizational Committee in Belgrade received the submission with some reluctance, agreeing on the condition that Arso's name not be mentioned in the title. However, the editor of the first book of the conference proceedings, Dr. Dušan Živković, correctly included my discussion, while I publicly and permanently withdrew my paper due to the stance of the conference leadership regarding my topic. When General Tempo was asked for his word after me, he said: "Yes, yes, a book about Arso, built from the truth, but also about members of the Supreme Command — Đido, Marko, Crni." I cannot omit that he was not ready to help me with even a single word in articulating that truth.

The conference in Podgorica, titled *The Second World War — 50 Years Later,* held under the auspices of the Academies of Sciences and Arts of Montenegro and Serbia, warmly accepted my presentation on A. Jovanović, and the Editorial Board, with Academician Vlado Strugar at the head, correctly published it in the second volume of the proceedings, as well as a separate 12-page print, with a summary in English, under the title *The Life Path of the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters of the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia.*

This was, at least in Yugoslavia, the first comprehensive presentation of this prominent figure of the anti-fascist war to the public. The paragraph with which I concluded the presentation reads: "The question (of the life's end and grave of A.R.J.) has remained open for 47 years. The grave silence over the 'case' of Arso R. Jovanović still reigns. The dead lips of the victim cannot speak, and the executioners remain silent."

At the scientific conference *The Yugoslav-Soviet Conflict 1948,* held on October 15, 1998, at the Institute for Contemporary History in Belgrade, I presented the paper *In the Footsteps of Arso Jovanović's Fate,* which was fully published in the proceedings in 1999.

The journal *Military Historical Bulletin,* in its third issue for 1998, published my contribution of three authorial sheets on the 50th anniversary of the death of this military leader, titled *Arso R. Jovanović, Chief of the Supreme Headquarters of the NOPJ.*

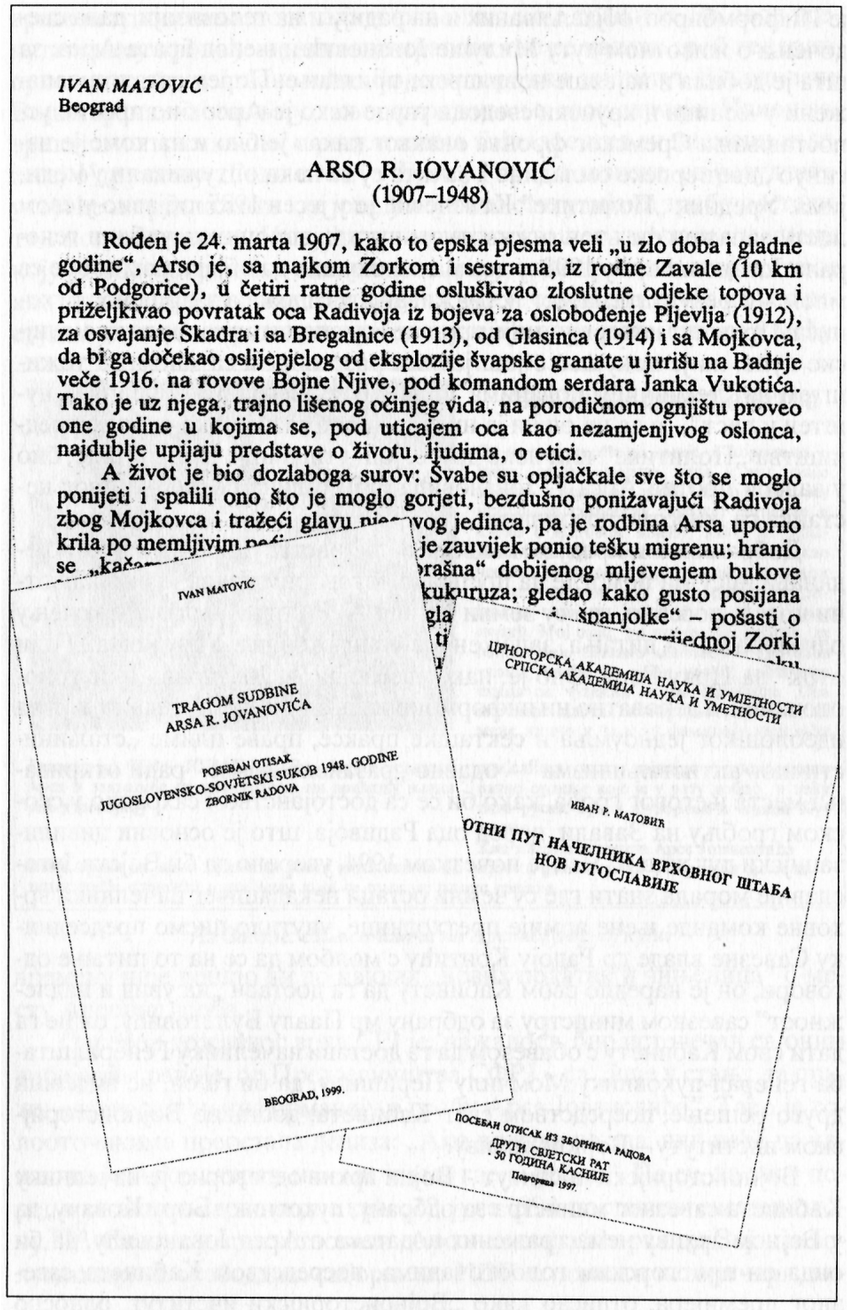
The reviewer, Dr. Zdravko Antonić, recommended the manuscript for publication, which the Editorial Board accepted.

Finally, in March 2000, the top of the Yugoslav Army organized an exhibition of the Chiefs of Staff from 1876 to 2000. Thirty-seven individuals were presented side by side, each with a photograph and about fifteen lines of text, including basic biographical details. Viewing this as an expression of patriotism and integrity, courage and loyalty to the profession at the very top of the Yugoslav Army, as a gesture of paying off a generational debt, I provided the catalogue authors with basic details about General A. Jovanović. However, someone in the final editing of the text somewhat devalued this brilliant idea — details about his higher military education, including his General Staff training, and his war decorations, including the highest orders of Suvorov and Kutuzov, were omitted from his biography. This was corrected in the public publication of the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army, identically titled and published three months later.[1000]

A significant contribution to the research of the work and, especially, the final years of General Arso R. Jovanović's life came from two distinguished Belgrade journalists — Milka Pušara, now the editor at Radio-Television Italy (RAI) in Rome, and Radovan Kovačević, the editor of *Politika*. Notably, as editor of RTS, Milka Pušara, in the early 1990s, as part of a series of broadcasts about the tragic fate of victims of the Cominform Resolution, aired testimonies about the life paths of Miluša Jovanović and her brother Arso, for which she received the highest journalistic recognition. Among other things, prominent participants and key witnesses claimed that Arso opposed the establishment of the Srem Front as it was, and where "the flower of the Serbian youth" was killed, which some accused him of in the media. In the fall of 1985, *Politika* editor Kovačević published a notable serialized article on the life path and, especially, the fate of General Jovanović, and in 1998, he twice attempted to publish interviews with me about the results of my research and the content of the completed manuscript. The first interview "did not pass" the judgement of the political leadership of the media house, so he tried again with a discussion focused on "technical details," but even that manuscript was "not allowed in the paper" — and neither he nor I ever learned who in the editorial board of *Politika* or another, more influential institution, conspired against Arso R. Jovanović, even 50 years after his disappearance from the public stage.

The good will and initiative of several institutions and many individuals did not help me precisely answer what Arso R. Jovanović's final days were like, and, especially, where his earthly remains were. In the search for answers to these questions, the engagement of the "Goli Otok" Association for Montenegro was also notable. Although aware that Jovanović was neither a Goli Otok inmate nor likely a Cominformist, but was, reliably, a victim of ideological monism and sectarian practices, a true tide of "Stalinist anti-Stalinism" — the association had long "pulled the strings" in the quest to uncover the location of his grave, so that he could be buried with dignity in the village cemetery in Zavala, beside his father Radivoje, as a fundamental civil duty of

[1000] V. Ivetić, *Chiefs of the General Staff 1876–2000*, Belgrade, 2000.



IVAN MATOVIĆ
Beograd

ARSO R. JOVANOVIĆ
(1907–1948)

Rođen je 24. marta 1907, kako to epska pjesma veli „u zlo doba i gladne godine", Arso je, sa majkom Zorkom i sestrama, iz rodne Zavale (10 km od Podgorice), u četiri ratne godine osluškivao zloslutne odjeke topova i priželjkivao povratak oca Radivoja iz bojeva za oslobođenje Pljevlja (1912), za osvajanje Skadra i sa Bregalnice (1913), od Glasinca (1914) i sa Mojkovca, da bi ga dočekao oslijepjelog od eksplozije švapske granate u jurišu na Badnje veče 1916. na rovove Bojne Njive, pod komandom serdara Janka Vukotića. Tako je uz njega, trajno lišenog očinjeg vida, na porodičnom ognjištu proveo one godine u kojima se, pod uticajem oca kao nezamjenjivog oslonca, najdublje upijaju predstave o životu, ljudima, o etici.

A život je bio dozlaboga surov: Švabe su opljačkale sve što se moglo ponijeti i spalili ono što je moglo gorjeti, bezdušno ponižavajući Radivoja zbog Mojkovca i tražeći glavu pje[illegible]vog jedinca, pa je rodbina Arsa uporno krila po memljivim p[illegible]će, [illegible]je zauvijek ponio tešku migrenu; hranio se „kaš[illegible]rašna" dobijenog mljevenjem bukove [illegible]kukuruza; gledao kako gusto posijana gla[illegible]španjolke" – pošasti o [illegible]iednoj Zorki

IVAN MATOVIĆ

TRAGOM SUDBINE
ARSA R. JOVANOVIĆA

POSEBAN OTISAK
JUGOSLOVENSKO-SOVJETSKI SUKOB 1948. GODINE
ZBORNIK RADOVA

BEOGRAD, 1999.

ЦРНОГОРСКА АКАДЕМИЈА НАУКА И УМЈЕТНОСТИ
СРПСКА АКАДЕМИЈА НАУКА И УМЕТНОСТИ

ИВАН Р. МАТОВИЋ

ОТНИ ПУТ НАЧЕЛНИКА ВРХОВНОГ ШТАБА НОВ ЈУГОСЛАВИЈЕ

ПОСЕБАН ОТИСАК ИЗ ЗБОРНИКА РАДОВА
ДРУГИ СВЕТСКИ РАТ
- 50 ГОДИНА КАСНИЈЕ
Подгорица 1997.

Breaking the chains of ideological conformity.

the living. Even in early 1994, convinced that the Yugoslav Army must know where the remains of its former Chief of Staff were, they sent a letter to the President of the Federal Government, Dr. Radoje Kontić, requesting an answer to this question; he instructed his Cabinet to forward it "for review and authority" to the Federal Minister of Defence, Mr. Pavle Bulatović; he then forwarded it to his Cabinet with the instruction to pass it to the Chief of the General Staff, Colonel-General Momčilo Perišić, who, seeing no other solution, forwarded it via his Cabinet to the Military History Institute — Military Archive.

The Military History Institute — Military Archive responded to the Chief of Cabinet of the Federal Minister of Defence, Colonel Bora Kovač, that no data on Arso Jovanović could be found in the Military Archive, after which he wrote to the Montenegrin Goli Otok inmates, through the Cabinet of the Federal Prime Minister, that "the Military History Institute, or the Military Archive, based on your letter, a copy of which was received from the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army, is conducting research on the data and facts you requested. Up until this moment, no traces have been found regarding the location of Colonel-General Arso Jovanović's grave. The Military History Institute of the Yugoslav Army, or the Military Archive, will continue further research into this case. After the research is completed, a written report will be submitted to the 'Goli Otok' Association in Montenegro, and depending on the results, further investigation will be suggested in other institutions. Given the significance of your association and the mission it has undertaken, we ask that you accept this response as the only possible one at this time." This effectively closed the "further investigation of this case," and it is clear why, in the meantime, no "new data and facts" were uncovered regarding the location of Arso's grave.



Враћање достојанства

Од његове смрти до данас — породица — мајка, сестре, његова жена и нас двије кћери тражимо гроб како би му поставили споменик, вјечито узглавље и слово о његовом имену, како то одвајкада доликује свакоме ко се родио као човјек. Хвала вам, Црногорци, што овом спомен-плочом мом оцу враћате достојанство човјека, рекла је др Зоја Јовановић. Мој отац, по професији војник, за собом није оставио имовину — до свог угледа, књига из војне науке, војничких скица за чувених седам офанзива. Ова скромна плоча са његовим именом за мене лично и за моју фамилију има већу вриједност него највише југословенско ратно одликовање које је у рату добио, и већу него руски орден Суворова и Орден Кутузова.

Говори др ЗОЈА ЈОВАНОВИЋ, кћерка генерала Арса и захваљује се присутнима на враћању њеног оца у историју

Као кћерка генерала Арса Јовановића имам право да јавно кажем да кости мога оца не би смјеле и даље лежати у корову и да се и данас треба плашити оних људи који се сами не плаше гријеха.

From Zavala: memorial plaque on Arso's birthplace.

The response from the state leadership of the FRY was, unfortunately, identical to the one previously received from the Presidency of the SFRY — that they "were unable to provide the appropriate information about the grave of Arso Jovanović." Thus, the Goli Otok inmates were left with the motto: "If the state doesn't know, or won't say, where Arso is buried — we know where he was born." So, on June 12, 1994, they placed a commemorative plaque on the wall beside the gate of his family house.[1001] The event was attended by Arso's younger daughter Dr. Zoja, revolutionaries and freedom fighters, comrades from the NOB, prominent historians, high representatives of the ruling political party and the Montenegrin Assembly, as well as members of the Yugoslav Army. The words that resonated alongside Arso's strong personality and the nature of this gathering were: that he "was a military strategist and the soul of almost all our victorious battles in the NOB, which cannot be denied, even by the malicious" (Milinko Stojanović); that "he loved Mother Russia and particularly appreciated her role in the Second World War, as well as her contribution to the liberation of Yugoslavia from fascism. That noble love cost him his life" (Dr. Vukašin Milić). I am presenting the words of his daughter Zoja in full, confident that, from a moral standpoint, it is most fitting to conclude this book with them:

"Since his death to this day, our family — mother, sisters, his wife, and us two daughters — has been searching for his grave so we can place a memorial, an eternal headstone and an inscription of his name, as is fitting for anyone who was born a human. Thank you, Montenegrins, for restoring dignity to my father with this memorial plaque. My father, by profession a soldier, did not leave behind wealth — only his reputation, books on military science and military sketches for the famous seven offensives. This humble plaque with his name means more to me personally and to my family than the highest Yugoslav decorations he received during the war, and more than the Russian Orders of Suvorov and Kutuzov.

"As the daughter of General Arso Jovanović, I have the right to publicly say that my father's remains should no longer lie in the weeds and that even today we must fear those people who are not afraid of sin."

[1001] M. Stojanović, *Goli Otok Trilogy,* Belgrade 1994, Vol. 3, p. 653.

BASIC BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Arso R. Jovanović
(Zavala, 1907 — Vršac (?), 1948)

Military Education

- Lower School of the Military Academy, 53rd Class, 1925-1928
- Higher School of the Military Academy, 34th Class, 1932-1934
- Supplementary Course of the Higher Military Academy, 1939-1940
- General Staff Training, 1940-1941
- Voroshilov Higher Military Academy, 1946-1948

Duties

- Platoon leader in the 10th Infantry "Takovo" Regiment, 1928-1932
- Company commander at the Infantry Reserve Officer School, 1934-1936
- Company commander at the Infantry School for Active Officers, 1936-1938
- Battalion commander of the Training Battalion, 1938-1939
- Commander of the Student Battalion during the April War of 1941
- Advisor to the Military Revolutionary Committee of the Provincial Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia
- Commander of the Provisional Supreme Command of the National Liberation Troops of Montenegro, Boka and the Sandžak, July 18-August 8, 1941
- Chief of the Main Headquarters of the NOP detachments for Montenegro and Boka, August 8-November 15, 1941
- Commander of the Montenegrin NOP Detachment for operations in the Sandžak, November 15-December 12, 1941
- Chief of the Supreme Headquarters of the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia, December 12, 1941-March 1, 1945
- Chief of the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army, March 1-September 15, 1948
- Commander of the Higher Military Academy (in formation), from July 1, 1948

Promotions

- Second Lieutenant, 1928
- Lieutenant, 1932
- Captain 2nd Class, 1936
- Captain 1st Class, 1939
- Major General of the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia, May 1, 1943
- Lieutenant General of the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia, November 1, 1943
- Colonel General, December 16, 1947

Wartime Missions

- Caserta (Italy), August 6-12, 1944
- Moscow, January 7-February 14,1945
- Trieste, May 1-June 26, 1945

Interlocutor of

- Marshal J.V. Stalin
- Marshal N.A. Bulganin, People's Commissar of Defence of the USSR
- Marshal F.I. Tolbukhin, Commander of the 3rd Ukrainian Front of the Red Army
- General of the Army A.I. Antonov, Chief of the General Staff of the Red Army
- General H.M. Wilson, Supreme Allied Commander in the Mediterranean
- Vice Marshal W. Elliott, Commander of the Balkan Air Force
- Field Marshal H. Alexander, Supreme Allied Commander in the Mediterranean
- Field Marshal J. Harding, Commander of the 13th British Corps
- General W. Donovan, Director of the U.S. Office of Strategic Services
- General Ira Eaker, Supreme Allied Air Commander in the Mediterranean
- General W. Morgan, Chief of the Supreme Allied Command in the Mediterranean
- General Mark Clark Vane, Commander of the Allied 15th Army Group

Decorations

- 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 for 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
- Order of Suvorov, 1st Class
- Order of Kutuzov, 1st Class

WRITTEN LEGACY

Books and Brochures

Tactics of the Infantry Battalion, Sarajevo, 1939, 300 pp. with 28 sketches.
The Belgrade Operation for Pljevlja, *Narodna armija*, 1945, 36 pp.
Overview of the National Liberation War, People's University, 1946, 67 pp. with 11 sketches.
Tito – Organizer and Strategist of Our Army, *Borba*, 1945, 19 pp.

Articles in Journals

"The Military Collapse of Yugoslavia," *Military-Political Review*, nos. 7-8, 1942, 18 pp.
"Opening of the Second Front," *Weekly Review*, no. 3, August 2, 1942, 4 pp.
"Our Military Schools," *Supreme Headquarters Bulletin*, no. 33, October 1943, 4 pp.
"The Seventh Enemy Offensive," *New Yugoslavia*, no. 10, July 1944, 23 pp.

Lessons and Reports

Defence of Belgrade from Torlak, complete report, February 1941.
Formation of the Detachment, Foča, April 1942, 12 pp.
Attack on a Populated Place, Mliništa, September 1942, 4 pp.
Solving Tactical Tasks, Drvar, April 1944, 12 pp.
Development of the Intelligence Service, Vis, June 1944, 32 pp.
Assessment of Enemy Forces, Vis, August 1944, 36 pp.
Defence Against "Troops," Belgrade, April 1945, 8 pp.
Corps Offensive Operation on Mountainous Terrain, July 1948.
Support of the Air Force and Navy to the Army on the Coastal Strategic Wing, July 1948.

Newspaper Articles

"The Historical Path of Our Army," *Borba*, March 3, 1945.
"The Belgrade Operation," series in *Narodna armija*, beginning October 10, 1945.
"On the Fourth Anniversary of the First Proletarian Brigade," *Narodna armija*, December 22, 1945.
"Let Us Support Military Knowledge," *Narodna armija*, February 9, 1946.
"Historic Victories of the Red Army," *Narodna armija*, February 23, 1946.
"How Belgrade Was Liberated," *Mladi borac,* October 16, 1946.

While studying in Moscow (March 1946-May 1948), he authored three contributions for *Red Star*, the organ of the Red Army.

ABBREVIATIONS

A CC CPY-KI — Archive of the CC CPY, Comintern Collection
A CC LCY — Archive of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia
AJ — Archive of Yugoslavia
AVII — Military History Institute Archive
AVNOJ — Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia
BAF — Balkan Air Force
BBC — British Broadcasting Corporation
BCDA — British Central State Archive
BiH — Bosnia and Herzegovina
CANU — Montenegrin Academy of Sciences and Arts
CC — Central Committee
CDKA — Central House of the Red Army, Moscow
CP — Communist Party
CPSU(B) — Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks)
CPY — Communist Party of Yugoslavia
DFY — Democratic Federal Yugoslavia
DVJ — Volunteer Army of Yugoslavia
ELAS — Greek People's Liberation Army
FNRJ — Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia
Gensec — General Secretary (from the Comintern lexicon)
Gestapo — Secret State Police of the Third Reich
IK KI — Executive Committee of the Communist International
JA — Yugoslav Army (March 1, 1945 – December 22, 1951)
JNA — Yugoslav People's Army (1951–1992)
KI — Communist International
KNOJ — Corps of National Defence of Yugoslavia
KOS — Counterintelligence Service
MNO — Ministry of National Defence
NDH — Independent State of Croatia
NKOJ — National Committee for the Liberation of Yugoslavia
NKVD — People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (USSR)
NOB — National Liberation War
NOO — National Liberation Detachment
NOP — National Liberation Movement
NOPO — National Liberation Partisan Detachment
NOR — National Liberation War (1941–1945)
NOV and PO — National Liberation Army and Partisan Detachments
NOVJ — National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia
OF — Liberation Front of Slovenia
OSS — Office of Strategic Services (USA)

OVRA — Secret Political Police of Fascist Italy
OZNA — Department for the Protection of the People
PIAT — Projector, Infantry, Anti-Tank (British hand-held anti-tank weapon)
POJ — Partisan Detachments of Yugoslavia
PT — Anti-Tank
RAF — Royal Air Force (United Kingdom)
SA — Soviet Army (from June 1946)
SANU — Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts
SDC — State Defence Committee of the USSR
SFRY — Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
SH — Supreme Headquarters (of the National Liberation Army and Partisan Detachments of Yugoslavia)
SIM — Military Intelligence Service of Fascist Italy
SKOJ — League of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia
SNK — Council of People's Commissars (USSR)
SOE — Special Operations Executive (UK)
SS — Schutzstaffel
SSNO — Federal Secretariat for National Defence
SUBNOR — Federation of Veterans' Associations of the National Liberation War
TANJUG — Telegraphic Agency of New Yugoslavia
TASS — Telegraphic Agency of the Soviet Union
UDBA — State Security Administration
UNO — United Nations Organization
UNRRA — United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration
USA — United States of America
USAOJ — United League of Anti-Fascist Youth of Yugoslavia
USSR — Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VVA — Higher Military Academy
ZAVNO — Provincial Anti-Fascist Council for National Liberation

SOURCES AND LITERATURE

Archives

Archive of Serbia, Belgrade
Archive of the Historical Institute of Montenegro, Podgorica
Archive of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, Moscow
Archive of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU), Belgrade
Archive of the Supreme Military Court, Belgrade
Archive of the USSR State Defence Committee, Moscow
Archive of Yugoslavia, Belgrade
British Public Archive, London
Diplomatic Archive, Belgrade
J. B. Tito Archive – Cabinet of the Marshal of Yugoslavia, Belgrade
Military History Institute Archive (Military Archive)
National Archives, Washington

Books

Aćin, Miloš-Kosta. *Draža Mihailović, Apostle of Freedom*. Washington, 1993.
Alexander, Harold. *Memoirs 1940–1945*. Belgrade, 1979.
Anić, Nikola, et al. *The People's Liberation War of Yugoslavia*. Belgrade, 1982.
Antonić, Zdravko. *Rodoljub Čolaković in the Light of His Diary*. Belgrade, 1991.
——. *The Uprising in Eastern and Central Bosnia 1941*. Belgrade, 1973.
Apostolski, Mihailo. *Final Operations for the Liberation of Macedonia*. Skopje, 1953.
AVNOJ. *Revolutionary Change of Power 1942–1945*. Edited by Branko Petranović.
Barker, Elizabeth. *British Policy in the Balkans in the Second World War*. Zagreb, 1987.
Basta, Milan. *War After the War*. Zagreb, 1963.
Bebler, Aleš. *How I Rushed*. Belgrade, 1982.
Bekić, Darko. *Yugoslavia in the Cold War 1949–1955*. Zagreb, 1988.
Beria, Sergo. *My Father Lavrentiy Beria*. Moscow, 1994.
Bjelajac, Mile. *The Army of the Kingdom of SHS*. Belgrade, 1994.
Bjelića, Obrad. *The Army Academy of the Ground Forces 1944–1984*. Belgrade, 1983.
Božić, Nikola. *The Battle of Batina*. Belgrade, 1978.
Božović, Luka. *A Partisan's War Diary*. Belgrade, 1986.
——. *The Foča Partisan Republic*. Foča, 1982.
Božović, Svetolik. *The Goli Otok Genocide*. Belgrade, 1992.
Bombing of Belgrade in the Second World War, *The*. Belgrade, 1975.
Borozan, Đorđe. *Greater Albania*. Belgrade, 1995.
Borković, Milan. *Milan Nedić*. Zagreb, 1985.
——. *The Counter-Revolution in Serbia*. I–II, 1979.
Broz, Josip. *Autobiographical Testimonies*. Vols. 1–2. Belgrade, 1983.

——. *Collected Works*. Vols. 1–28. Belgrade, 1982–1988.
Budyonny, Semyon. *The Path I Travelled*. Belgrade, 1963.
Cemović, Momčilo. *Đilas's Answers*. Belgrade, 1997.
Chuikov, V. I. *The Defense of Stalingrad*. Belgrade, 1961.
——. *The Fall of the Third Reich*. Belgrade, 1982.
Churchill, Winston S. *The Second World War*. Vols. I–VI. Belgrade, 1965–1966.
Čolaković, Rodoljub. *Notes from the War of Liberation*. Vols. I–IV. Sarajevo, 1951.
Colić, Mladenko. *Overview of Operations on the Yugoslav Front 1941–1945*. Belgrade, 1988.
Čulinović, Ferdo. *The Occupation Division of Yugoslavia 1941*. Belgrade, 1975.
Dangić, Jezdimir. *Our Imprisonment*. Tuzla, 1938.
Dapčević, Peko. *How We Fought the War*. Belgrade, 1956.
——. *Reflections on Military Thought*. Belgrade, 1986.
De Gaulle, Charles. *War Memoirs*. Belgrade, 1968.
Deakin, F. W. D. *The Fighting Mountain*. Belgrade, 1973.
Dedijer, Vladimir. *Diary*. I–III. Belgrade, 1945.
——. *New Contributions to the Biography of J. B. Tito*. Zagreb, 1984.
——. *Stalin's Lost Battle*. Belgrade, 1978.
Đelebdžić, Milovan. *The Second Yugoslav Army*. Belgrade, 1989.
——. *Friendship and Cooperation in the Fire of Battle*. Belgrade, 1987.
Đelebdžić, M., and D. Otović. *Tito's Wartime Flights*. Belgrade, 1986.
Đilas, Milovan. *Conversations With Stalin*. Belgrade, 1990.
——. *The Revolutionary War*. Belgrade, 1990.
Đukanović, Pero. *The Uprising on the Drina*. Belgrade, 1994.
Đuretić, Veselin. *A Government at a Dead End*. Belgrade, 1983.
——. *The Allies and the Yugoslav War Drama*. Belgrade, 1985.
Đurić, Ljubodrag. *Diary*. Belgrade, 1966.
——. *Memories of People and Events*. Belgrade, 1989.
Đuričković, Boško. *Memories, Thoughts, Reactions*. Belgrade, 1990.
Ekmečić, Milorad. *The Creation of Yugoslavia*. I–V. Belgrade, 1989.
Eisenhower, Dwight D. *The War to Liberate Europe*. Zagreb, 1957.
Gligorijević, Milo. *War and Peace of Vladimir Dedijer*. Belgrade, 1985.
Glišić, V., and G. Miljanić. *Leadership of the People's Liberation War in Serbia 1941–1945*. Belgrade, 1994.
Glišić, Venceslav. *The Užice Republic*. Belgrade, 1986.
Gošnjak, Ivan. *Tito – Strategist of the Revolution*. Belgrade, 1964.
Grol, Milan. *London Diary 1941–1945*. Belgrade, 1990.
Guderian, Heinz. *Military Memoirs*. Belgrade, 1961.
Hrnječević, Josip. *Testimonies*. Zagreb, 1984.
Humo, Avdo. *My Generation*. Sarajevo, 1984.
Jablan, Radovan. *Accounts of Pero Ćetković*. Cetinje, 1980.
Jakšić, Pavle. *Over Memories*. I–II. Belgrade, 1990.
Jelić-Butić, Fikreta. *The Ustaše and the NDH 1941–1945*. Zagreb, 1977.
Jovanić, Đoko. *War Memories*. Belgrade–Zagreb, 1988.
Jovanović, Arso. *The Battle for the Liberation of Belgrade*. Belgrade, 1946.
——. *The Belgrade Operation for Pljevlja*. Belgrade, 1946.

——. *How Belgrade Was Liberated*. Sarajevo, 1946.
——. *Overview of the NOB*. Belgrade, 1946.
——. *The Sixth and Seventh Enemy Offensives*. Belgrade, 1945.
——. *Tactics of the Infantry Battalion*. Sarajevo, 1939.
Jovanović, Batrić. *Montenegro in the NOB and Revolution*. Belgrade, 1960.
Jovanović, Radivoje. *Introduction to a Critical Analysis of NOB Strategy 1941–1945*. Belgrade, 1998.
Jovanović, Slobodan. *Conversations and Notes*. Belgrade, 1993.
Karabegović, Osman. *Krajina on the Roads of the Revolution*. Belgrade, 1978.
Karapanžić, M. Borivoje. *Civil War in Serbia 1941–1945*. Cleveland, 1968.
Karasijević, Drago. *The Fifth Corps of the NOVJ*. Belgrade, 1985.
Kardelj, Edvard. *Memoirs*. Belgrade–Ljubljana, 1980.
——. *Revolution and Military Thought*. Belgrade, 1979.
Kitanović, Branko. *The Battle for Moscow*. Zagreb, 1975.
Klanjšek, Zdravko. *The NOB in Slovenia 1941–1945*. Belgrade, 1984.
Kljakić, Dragan. *The Hebrang Dossier*. Belgrade, 1983.
Kovačević, Branislav. *From the Vizier's Bridge to Zidani Most*. Belgrade, 1993.
Kosanović, N. Sava. *Yugoslavia – She Was Sentenced to Death*. Zagreb–Belgrade.
Kostić, Uroš. *The Liberation of Istria, the Slovenian Littoral and Trieste*. Belgrade.
Krakov, Stanislav. *General Milan Nedić*. Vols. I–V. Munich, 1963–1969.
Krizman, Bogdan. *NDH Between Hitler and Mussolini*. 2nd ed. Zagreb, 1983.
Kulić, Dimitrije. *Bulgarian Occupation 1941–1945*. Niš, 1970.
Kučan, Viktor. *Sutjeska: Valley of Heroes*. Belgrade, 1978.
Lazarević, Božo. *Memoirs of War and Revolution 1941–1945*. Belgrade, 1987.
Lazović, Goran. *Đilas on Himself – Others on Đilas*. Belgrade, 1989.
Latas, B., and M. Dželebdžić. *The Chetnik Movement of Draža Mihailović 1941–1945*. Belgrade, 1979.
Levičnik, Karel. *Artillerymen from Overseas*. Nova Gorica, 1968.
Leković, Mišo. *Bihać Operation*. Belgrade, 1972.
——. *The March Conversions of 1943*. Belgrade, 1985.
——. *The Proletarian Brigades' Offensive in the Summer of 1942*. Belgrade, 1965.
——. *The Role of the NOP Leadership*. Belgrade, 1989.
Leigh, Randolph. *48,000,000 Tons for Eisenhower*. Belgrade, 1953.
Luburić, Radoica. *The Hot Peace of the Cold War*. Podgorica, 1994.
Lukač, Dušan. *The Third Reich and the Countries of Southeastern Europe*. Vols. I–III. Belgrade, 1982.
——. *Uprising in Bosanska Krajina*. Belgrade, 1967.
Ljubičić, Nikola. *The Užice Detachment "Dimitrije Tucović"*. Titovo Užice, 1981.
Maclean, Fitzroy. *Eastern Approaches [War in the Balkans]*. Zagreb, 1980.
Manstein, Erich von. *Lost Victories*. Belgrade, 1968.
Marjanović, Jovan. *Draža Mihailović Between the British and the Germans*. Belgrade, 1979.
——. *The Uprising and the NOB in Serbia 1941*. Belgrade, 1963.
Marković, Dragan. *The Truth About Goli Otok*. Belgrade, 1987.
Martinović, Ratko. *From Ravna Gora to the Supreme Headquarters*. Belgrade, 1979.
Maček, Ivan. *Memoirs*. Zagreb, 1983.

Miljanić, Gojko. *Cadres of the Revolution 1941–1956*. Cetinje, 1975.
——. *Leadership and Command in the War of Liberation 1941–1945*. Belgrade, 1980.
Minić, Miloš. *Liberation or Civil War in Yugoslavia 1941–1945*. Novi Sad, 1993.
Mirković, Iko. *Comrades of My Youth*. Gornji Milanovac, 1978.
Mićunović, Veljko. *Moscow Years*. Zagreb, 1977.
Mihajlović, Živorad Šilja. *The Serbian People in the War*. Kragujevac, 1992.
Mišić, R. Živojin. *Strategy*. Belgrade, 1993.
Mladenović, M., and S. Kružavac. *In the Company of the Supreme Commander*. Belgrade, 1977.
Morača, Milutin. *The Fifth Krajina Division*. Belgrade, 1985.
——. *War Diary*. Belgrade, 1962.
Morača, Pero. *1942 – The Turning Point of the NOB*. Belgrade, 1957.
——. *The CPY and the Creation of a Revolutionary Army*. Belgrade, 1959.
Nađ, Kosta. *War Encounters With Tito*. Gornji Milanovac, 1977.
——. *War Memoirs 1942*. Belgrade, 1979.
National Heroes of Yugoslavia. Vols. I–V. Belgrade, 1975.
Nenadović, Aleksandar. *Conversations With Koča*. Zagreb, 1989.
Nešović, Slobodan. *The Foundations of the New Yugoslavia*. Belgrade, 1973.
——. *The World About Us 1941–1945*. Vols. I–III. Belgrade, 1983.
Nikoliš, Gojko. *Roots, Trunk, Twigs*. Zagreb, 1980.
Novak, Viktor. *Magnum Crimen*. Zagreb, 1948.
Orović, Savo. *War Diary*. Belgrade, 1972.
Pajović, B., and M. Radević. *Bibliography on the War and Revolution in Yugoslavia*. Belgrade, 1969.
Pajović, Radoje. *Counter-Revolution in Montenegro 1941–1945*. Cetinje, 1975.
——. *Pavle Đurišić*. Zagreb, 1987.
Panajotović, Zoran. *Bibliography on the NOB and Revolution in Serbia 1941–1944*. Belgrade, 1989.
Patton, George S. *War As I Knew It*. Belgrade, 1953.
Pejnović, Nikola. *Reflections on War and Revolution*. Belgrade, 1987.
Petranović, Branko. *AVNOJ – A Revolutionary Change of Power 1942–1945*. Belgrade, 1986.
——. *Historiography and Revolution*. Vols. I–V. Belgrade, 1984.
——. *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Yugoslavia 1941–1945*. Belgrade, 1983.ž
——. *Serbia in the Second World War 1939–1945*. Belgrade, 1982.
——. *The Historian and the Contemporary Epoch*. Belgrade, 1994.
Petranović, B., and Lj. Marković, eds. *Minutes of Sessions of the NKOJ and the Provisional Government of the DFY 1943–1945*. Belgrade, 1991.
Petranović, B., and M. Zečević. *Yugoslavia 1918–1988*. Belgrade, 1988.
Plenča, Dušan. *International Relations of the New Yugoslavia During the Second World War*. Belgrade, 1962.
Pleterski, Janko. *Nations – Yugoslavia – Revolution*. Belgrade, 1985.
Popović, B. Nikola. *Yugoslav–Soviet Relations in the Second World War*. Belgrade, 1988.
Popović, Koča. *Notes on Warfare*. Belgrade, 1978.

Proektor, D. C. *Aggression and Catastrophe 1939–1945*. Belgrade, 1975.
Radovanović, Jovan. *Draža Mihailović in the Mirror of Historical Documents*. Belgrade, 1986.
Radonjić, Radovan. *Lost Orientation*. Belgrade, 1985.
Ranković, Slavka. *Life with Leka*. Belgrade, 1988.
Ribar, Ivan. *Memories from the National Liberation War*. Belgrade, 1961.
Ribar, Ivo Lola. *War Letters*. Zagreb, 1978.
Rumm, Rudolf. *The Chinese Revolution*. Belgrade, 1948.
Savić, S., and Ž. Atanacković. *The Third Army*. Novi Sad, 1981.
Scotti, Đ., and L. Vijazi. *Eagles of the Black Mountains*. Milan, 1987.
Sherwood, Robert. *The War Secrets of the White House*. Vols. I–V. Washington, 1952.
Smodlaka, Josip. *Partisan Diary*. Belgrade, 1972.
Stanišić, Milija. *Cadres of the Revolution*. Titograd, 1984.
——. *Currents of the Revolution in Montenegro*. Vols. I–V. Nikšić, 1980–1984.
——. *Leading Cadres of the NOP in Montenegro 1941–1945*. Podgorica, 1995.
——. *The CPY in the Building of the Armed Forces 1941–1945*. Titograd, 1973.
Stanković, Đ., and Lj. Dimić. *History Under Surveillance*. Vols. 1–2. 1996.
Stojadinović, Milan. *Neither War Nor Pact*. Rijeka, 1982.
Stojanović, Milinko. *The Goli Otok Trilogy*. Podgorica, 1993.
Strugar, Vlado. *Yugoslavia at War 1941–1945*. 3rd ed. Belgrade, 1975.
——. *Yugoslavia for Victory and Freedom 1941–1945*. Belgrade, 1985.
Šepić, Dragovan. *The Government of Ivan Šubašić*. Ljubljana, 1983.
Štrbac, Čedomir. *Yugoslavia and Relations Between Socialist Countries*. Belgrade, 1975.
Terzić, Velimir. *The Collapse of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia*. Vols. I–V. Belgrade, 1987.
Todorović, Vojo. *The Podgorička District in the July Uprising*. Belgrade, 1954.
Tomasevich, Jozo. *The Chetniks in the Second World War 1941–1945*. Zagreb, 1979.
Vasić, Miroljub. *The Revolutionary Youth Movement of Yugoslavia 1941*. Belgrade, 1977.
Velebit, Vladimir. *Memoirs*. Zagreb, 1983.
Višnjić, Petar. *The Penetration of the Second and Fifth Divisions into Serbia*. Belgrade, 1968.
Vujović, Mitar. *Economic Service of the Supreme Headquarters of the NOV*. Belgrade, 1990.
Vukanović, Radovan. *On the War Path*. I–V. Belgrade, 1985.
——. *The Second Shock Corps*. Belgrade, 1982.
Vukčević, Slavko. *Battles and Resistance in Occupied Cities of Yugoslavia 1941–1945*. Belgrade, 1985.
Vukmanović, Svetozar. *The Ongoing Revolution*. I–III. Belgrade, 1981.
Vuksanović, Miloš. *The First Proletarian Brigade*. Belgrade, 1981.
Vučković, Zvonko. *War Memoirs*. Belgrade, 1990.
Zanussi, Giacomo. *War and the Catastrophe of Italy*. Zagreb, 1953.
Zhukov, G. K. *Memoirs and Reflections*. Belgrade, 1969.
Zogović, Radovan. *Becoming and Being*. Novi Sad, 1993.

1941–1942 in the Testimonies of NOP Participants. Vols. 1–25. Belgrade, 1975.
Air Battles for the Wounded. Belgrade, 1985.
April War, The: Document Collection. Edited by A. Miletić. Belgrade, 1987.
Atlantic Charter, The. Novi Sad, 1946.
Battle for Moscow, The (Assessments by Soviet Marshals). Moscow, 1962.
Belgrade Operation, The. 2nd ed. Belgrade, 1989.
Bibliography of Publications from the People's Liberation War 1941–1945. Belgrade, 1964.
Bibliography of the Journal Military Affairs 1949–1983. Belgrade, 1983.
Chronology of the War of Liberation of the Peoples of Yugoslavia 1941–1945. Belgrade.
Communications in the People's Liberation War. Memoir collection, I–II. Belgrade, 1981.
Contribution of Yugoslavia's People's Liberation War to the Victory Over Fascism, The. Collection of papers, vol. 1. Belgrade, 1997.
Count Ciano's Diary. Zagreb, 1948.
Document Collection on the People's Liberation War. Vols. II and XIV.
Documents of the Central Bodies of the CPY, the People's Liberation Movement, and the Revolution 1941–1945. Vols. 1–19. Belgrade, 1986.
Documents on the Foreign Policy of the SFRY. I–V. Edited by B. Popović. Belgrade, 1981.
Durmitor Partisan Republic, The. Collection of papers. Titograd, 1979.
Encyclopedia of Yugoslavia. Zagreb, 1955–1990.
Fifth Congress of the CPY, The. Stenographic Notes. Belgrade, 1969.
First Proletarian, The. Memoir collection, vols. 1–4. Belgrade, 1963.
For Victory and Freedom. Collection of papers. Vols. 1–9. Belgrade, 1986.
Herzegovina in the National Liberation War. Memoir collection, vols. 1–14. Belgrade.
History of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia. Belgrade, 1985.
Historical Atlas of the War of Liberation in Yugoslavia. Belgrade, 1952.
Law on the Five-Year Development Plan of the People's Economy. Belgrade, 1947.
Lexicon of the NOB and the Revolution in Yugoslavia. Vols. I–V. Belgrade, 1980.
Marshal Tito Centre for Higher Military Schools 1942–1982. Belgrade, 1982.
Meetings of the CC of the CPY 1948–1952. Edited by B. Petranović. Belgrade, 1985.
Meetings of the Politburo of the CC of the CPY 1945–1948. Edited by B. Petranović. Belgrade.
Medical Service in the NOP 1941–1945. Vols. I–IV. Belgrade, 1989.
Military Encyclopedia. Vols. 1–10. 2nd ed. Belgrade, 1970–1975.
Military Lexicon. Belgrade, 1981.
Military-Political Conference in Stolice. Collection of papers. Belgrade, 1980.
My Word to the Serbs (Speeches of General M. Đ. Nedić). Belgrade, 1944.
National Heroes of Yugoslavia. Vols. I–V. Belgrade, 1975.
Neretva. Memoir collection, vols. I–III. Belgrade, 1960–1963.
Neretva–Sutjeska 1943. Collection of papers. Belgrade, 1969.
On Our Own Land (Development of the Armed Forces of the SFRY). Belgrade, 1980.

Party Conference in Ivančići 1942. Sarajevo, 1983.
Relations Between Yugoslavia and Russia (USSR) 1941–1945. Edited by B. Petranović et al. Belgrade, 1996.
Revolutionary Movement of the Municipality of Titograd 1919–1945, The. Titograd, 1975.
Second World War 50 Years Later, The. I–V. Collection of papers. Podgorica, 1997.
Secret Documents on Vatican–NDH Relations. Zagreb, 1952.
Spain. Memoir collection, vols. 1–5. Belgrade, 1971.
Sutjeska. Memoir collection, vols. I–VI. Belgrade, 1956–1966.
Tito in Vršac 1944. Edited by M. Dželebdžić. Vršac, 1984.
Tito–Churchill: Strictly Secret. Edited by D. Biber. Belgrade–Zagreb, 1981.
Uprising of the Peoples of Yugoslavia 1941, The. Vols. I–V. Belgrade, 1963.
War Crimes of the Italian Occupier in Montenegro. Belgrade, 1946.
War Memories from the NOP. Vols. 1–5. Belgrade, 1981.
War of Liberation of the Peoples of Yugoslavia 1941–1945, The. Vols. I–V. Belgrade, 1965.

Manuscripts

Nenezić, Dragan, *Yugoslav Regions Under Italy 1941–1943*, Master's thesis, defended at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade.
Poljanac, Branko, *War Notes*, Military History Institute.
Simović, Milan, *Memoirs*, Military History Institute.
Terzić, Milan, *The Missions of Vladimir Velebit 1943–1945*, Master's thesis, defended at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade.

Journals

20th Century History.
Historical Records, Podgorica.
Historical Review, Belgrade.
Military-Historical Review, Belgrade.
Proceedings of Matica Srpska, Novi Sad.
Proceedings of the Faculty of Philosophy, Belgrade.
Yugoslav Historical Journal.

Newspapers

Borba, 1941–1949.
Bulletin of the Supreme Headquarters of the NOVJ 1941–1944.
Narodna armija, 1945–1949.
Narodne novine, 1941–1944.
Novo vreme, 1941–1942.
Official Gazette of the Government of Gen. M. Nedić, Belgrade.
Official Gazette of the NDH, Zagreb.
Politika, 1945–1949.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Ivan R. Matović was born in 1933 in Radeći, a village of the highland Piperi tribe, Montenegro.

He completed primary school in his hometown, graduated from secondary school in Podgorica and attended military academies in Belgrade.

He has dedicated his entire career to military journalism — holding positions ranging from freelance reporter to editor-in-chief and responsible editor of "Narodna armija," and later "Vojska."

He retired in 1993 with the rank of colonel in the Yugoslav Army.

As a researcher and writer, he studies the liberation wars of Serbia and Montenegro in the last century, with a focus on the anti-fascist war.

He has published books on members of the Supreme Headquarters of the National Liberation Army, Lola Ribar and Ivan Milutinović, as well as records of the wartime paths of the 8th Serbian and 2nd Vojvodina Brigades of the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia.

He has completed an extensive manuscript on officers of the Royal Yugoslav Army — participants in the anti-fascist struggle during the National Liberation War, in Allied war formations across all continents and in prisoner-of-war camps throughout Europe, as well as on the "leftist deviations" (civil war) in Montenegro and Herzegovina at the end of 1941 and in the spring of 1942.

He is documenting the history of his fellow tribesmen in the wartime turbulence of the pivotal 20th century.

He lives in Belgrade.

Proof