



The Massacre of Yugoslavia

The chief Central European correspondent of the British Broadcasting Company gives an eyewitness analysis of the forces within Yugoslavia that have torn it apart.

by Misha Glenny

AN UNEXPECTED DRIZZLE ONE GLOOMY MORNING late last August served to heighten the tension as I left the northern Croatian town of Karlovac and was waved through the front line by a Croat National Guardsman. Violence had become so common in Croatia by then that nobody bothered to mention the dangers of crossing from one side to another. The checkpoint on the other side was jointly patrolled by the federal army (JNA) and Serb irregulars called Marticevci, from the town of Knin, one hundred miles to the south. The federal soldiers were polite, although they appeared unconcerned when the Marticevci shoved their automatic weapons into my stomach and subjected my car to a meticulous search. They ripped the film out of my cameras, took away my tapes to examine them,

and inquired about my presumed relationship to the Croatian National Guard. Eventually I persuaded them that I was only trying to get an interview with Milan Babic, the Luger-toting prime minister of the self-proclaimed Serbian Autonomous Region (SAO) Krajina, the center of radical Serb nationalism in Croatia, and I was allowed to continue on my way.

To travel through Marticevci country is one of the more unnerving experiences of covering the war in Yugoslavia. The Marticevci, now the largest Serb paramilitary force, emerged when the first serious fighting between Serbs and Croats broke out in Knin in August 1990. Many of them had been Serb policemen who were thrown out of their jobs by the new Croatian government. They got their money, their weapons, and their name from Milan Martić, the first interior minister of the SAO Krajina, who like Babic is supported by both the Serbian president, Slobodan Milošević, and the JNA leadership.

During World War II, Knin was the major center of the Serb nationalist Chetnik movement inside Croatia. In other parts of Croatia

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Serbs mostly joined or supported Tito's Partisans, whose internationalist ideology dominated the Croatian resistance movement. In their tactics and political attitudes the Marticevci have been heavily influenced by the traditions of the Chetnik movement of World War II. They are, however, an integral part of the self-proclaimed SAO Krajina and as such command greater respect among most Serbs than the wilder new Chetnik units from the Serb heartlands, who are largely beyond any systematic control. After reporting for more than a year on the reborn Chetnik movement in Serbia I have found its most striking characteristic to be its obsession with violence. Its members apparently take pleasure in torturing and mutilating civilian and military opponents alike.



In the fall of 1990, President Tudjman of Croatia and President Milosevic of Serbia, the latter working through Milan Babic, his man in Knin, began their struggle for control of three districts with mixed Serb and Croat populations that lie south of Zagreb—Lika, Kordun, and Banija. Initially, most of the conflicts in these districts were provoked by the Croat authorities. President Tudjman and the government of his Croatian Democratic Union were determined to create a new state identified exclusively with the Croat nation, and the new regime in Croatia took steps to discriminate against the Serbs, who make up between 12 and 20 percent of Croatia's population, depending on whose statistics you be-

lieve—there are no reliable figures. After the elections of April 1990, which brought Tudjman to power, the Serbs were stripped of their status as a constituent (*državotvorn*) nation within Croatia. "Literary Croatian," which uses the Roman alphabet, became, according to the new Croat constitution, the only official language in the republic.

Tudjman also refused to offer the Serb population of at least 600,000 cultural autonomy, including, for example, control over schools in districts where Serbs were a majority, or the right to use Cyrillic script in official documents. He ordered the Serb police in such districts to be replaced by Croats, and Serbs in key positions in the local administration were dismissed. At the same time, the principal Yugoslav sym-

bol, the red star, was replaced everywhere by the most important insignia of Croatian statehood, the red-and-white checkered shield, the coat of arms of the historic Croat kingdom, which had also been widely used by the Ustasi, the murderous Croat fascist organization installed by the Nazis as rulers of Croatia in 1941. One now sees the shield, without the Ustasi "U," everywhere in Croatia, whether on official buildings or on police helmets. Serbs view the red star not just as a Communist symbol, but a sign legitimizing their equal status with Croats, and they believe the ubiquitous presence of the checkered shield underlines the loss of that equality.

When the Interior Ministry in Zagreb tried to

impose Croat police forces on Serbian villages, Milan Babic would send his political and military representatives to demand that the local Serb mayor order the storming of the district police station by armed villagers, who were expected to drive out the Croat police. If the local mayor refused, the Marticecvi would often get rid of him either by packing the local council, of which the mayor is president, or by intimidating him with threats or physical attack. Beginning in April 1991 Babic was able to take over another local administration every two weeks or so, and, in many other parts of Lika and Krajina, force the Croat police out without a struggle.

The insensitivity with which the Croats carried out their nationalist policies is well illustrated in the case of Glina, a small town forty miles southeast of Zagreb in Banija with some ten thousand inhabitants, 60 percent of them Serbian. In peacetime, Glina is a picturesque town resting in a gentle, shaded valley between two ranges of hills, which were Partisan strongholds during World War II. The town was the scene of two notorious massacres by the Ustasi. In 1941 some eight hundred Serbs were slaughtered in Glina's Orthodox church, while later over a thousand more lost their lives on the outskirts of town. The memory of Croat atrocities in Glina remains vivid.

Beginning in the early autumn of 1990 Croat police came into Glina in what the local citizens described as "raids." The Croat police took away the weapons of the Serbian policemen, first the reserve police and later on the regular police, and reinforced the Glina station with members of the Croat militia, thereby insuring that most of the armed police in Glina would be Croats. They made it clear that they were now in control, and Serbs from Glina told me that they felt intimidated by them. Tudjman's officials also insisted on displaying the Croat flag throughout the town.

Despite the sense of alarm that first spread through the Banija district in September 1990, the local Serb leaders in Glina maintained

regular contact with the Croatian government in Zagreb. They appealed to the government and the local police chief in the nearby town of Petrinja not to continue intimidating local Serbs by a show of force. The authorities in Zagreb refused to change their tactics. The local Serb leaders tried to keep out of the growing political struggle between Milan Babic's organization in Knin and the government in Zagreb. But when Croatian independence was declared on June 25 of this year, Glina's Serbs, fearing the worst, sided with the thuggish forces of the Marticecvi.

On an extremely hot day early last July, while all attention was concentrated on the fighting in Slovenia, the Marticecvi began their first sustained attack in Central Croatia. Several hundred of them swarmed into the town from their stronghold in the surrounding forest. Despite dozens of reinforcements sent by the Croats into Glina, the Marticecvi sealed off the town in a matter of hours. Several Croat policemen were killed before the police station surrendered. At the time it was still possible to surrender—six months later such incidents almost invariably become fights to the death. On the same day, tanks of the federal army, which has a majority of Serbian officers, started to separate the Serb fighters from the Croat reinforcements sent into the district. While the army announced that it would stop the bloodshed between the two nationalities and did so, it also protected the territorial gains of the Serb militia.

With the fighting in Glina, a real war started in Croatia. This war is largely the consequence of aggression sponsored by the Serbian regime in Belgrade and the JNA, but it also partly originated in the contemptuous treatment of the Serb minority by the Tudjman government. It is also, too, partly a revival of civil war, although in a purer, more nationalist form than was the case between 1941 and 1945, when almost two thirds of the Partisan fighters in Croatia were Croats opposed to the Ustasa

state. In the current war the two sides are divided almost entirely along national lines. Croatian officials say that this is not a nationalist war but a struggle between a Bolshevik administration in Belgrade and their own free-market democracy—a claim as misleading and contemptible as the Serbian view of the conflict as a war of liberation against a revived fascist state. Tudjman and his elected government, like Milosevic's government, still have many connections with the old Communist bureaucracy, and they have acted harshly and provocatively toward Serbs; but they have not revived a fascist state.

By the end of September 1991, the Marticevci and the JNA had occupied all but a narrow strip of land in the Kordun district below the Kupa River in central Croatia. About

25,000 peasants live in this fertile land between the towns of Karlovac and Sisak. Most of the villages are Croat, but they traditionally had good relations with the nearby Serb and mixed villages. On October 1 a joint force made up of the JNA, Chetnik units from Serbia, the Marticevci from Knin (100 miles to the south), and conscripts and volunteers from the local Serb villages began one of the most ruthless offensives of the entire war. Its victims were the defenseless Croat villagers living near the Kupa river, most of them older people, the younger inhabitants having left to work in northern Europe, mainly Germany, since Kordun, in spite of its fertile land, is one of Croatia's poorer regions.

According to several Serb spokesmen, the Serb forces attacked in revenge for the murder, on September 21, of thirteen JNA prisoners of war on the Korana bridge on the outskirts of Karlovac—killings that even the Croat Interior Ministry admitted had taken place. This will-

ingness to justify one atrocity by pointing to another committed by the opposing side has helped to create the current pattern of reciprocal massacre in Yugoslavia.

The tactics of the JNA forces and the Chetniks in Northern Kordun were repeated from village to village. First the artillery would "soften up" the villagers, with bombardments lasting between twenty minutes and four hours. If there was no resistance (as was the case in all but a few of the villages), JNA officers would enter the town and demand the surrender of any National Guardsmen or Croat police, and they would

then allow the Serb irregulars to come into the town. In the eastern part of Kordun, the Chetnik detachments were made up primarily of men from Loznica and Valjevo, two towns from Serbia's

In Kamensko and other villages, the desecration was complete—churches and schools were destroyed while federal tanks ran over the local cemeteries.

Chetnik heartland about 250 miles away. Both groups set about burning and looting the villages, and each village was bombarded continually with gunfire and grenades for between twelve and twenty hours. Houses were searched for weapons and for any young Croat men in hiding. The buildings were then thoroughly plundered.

Croats in the villages to the east were fortunate, since their neighbors from Serb villages warned them to travel north across the Kupa River as fast as they could. While hundreds of people in boats desperately paddled to reach the northern river bank, the JNA pounded them with mortar and tank fire. In Karlovac's hospital, I talked to survivors with appalling shrapnel wounds who described how their friends and neighbors drowned or were blown apart before they were able to cast off.

The people in the nearby villages of Vukmanic, Skakavac, and Kablar suffered even worse treatment. Witnesses from

Skakavac told me of an extensive massacre of Croat civilians there. The numbers of dead are unknown since the JNA has refused to allow the Croat Red Cross into Skakavac to claim the bodies. In Vukmanic, all seven members of the Mujic family were killed after being denounced by a local Serb who had a grudge against them; the Chetnik brigade that took over the village of Kablar slaughtered the remaining men in cold blood, including an eighty-two-year-old Croat. Here too, the bodies have not been turned over to the Red Cross.

In Kamensko and other villages, the bodies of Croats killed during the fighting were allowed to lie decaying in the streets. Between eight and twelve days after their deaths, the JNA finally permitted the Karlovac Red Cross workers to come to collect them. The eighteen

bodies I saw were so badly putrified that the chief pathologist at Karlovac hospital could no longer say with any certainty which injuries had been the cause of death. Whether they were caught in crossfire or deliberately slaughtered, the JNA and the Chetniks had afforded them no dignity in death. The desecration of the Croat villages was complete—churches and schools were destroyed while JNA tanks ran over the local cemeteries.

The attack on northern Kordun was among the most barbaric suffered by Croats during the current war. Nonetheless it remains one of the least known abroad, mainly because major towns such as Vukovar, Osijek, and Dubrovnik were not involved. But at least it can be said that their visible destruction alerted the world to the crimes being committed by the

Forty Eight Hours With Adventists in Zagreb, 1992

By Karl Rhoads

In early February of 1992, I had the opportunity to revisit Zagreb, Croatia. I was only there for 48 hours, but had the chance to again visit my friends, Sretko Kuburic, a pastor of a Seventh-day Adventist Church in the capital of Croatia, and his wife Jasminka. Our conversation focused primarily on the civil war that has pitted Serb against Croat, and in some cases family member against family member, and even Adventist against Adventist. Sretko, who pastors a new Adventist church in Zagreb, and his wife related to me how during the fighting, which was ended at least temporarily after 14 failed cease-fires, they could hear the artillery every night from their house in Zagreb.

It was during my first visit to what was then Yugoslavia in the winter of 1983 that I first met Sretko Kuburic. He was kind enough to take me with him on a pastoral trip to several cities in Croatia, at that time a

constituent member of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. While Yugoslavia was not large by American standards, trains there were not known for their rapidity. Sretko and I had dozens of hours in smoky rail cars to discuss virtually every subject under the sun from Soviet foreign policy, to the weather in Berrien Springs, Michigan, to the restrictions placed on evangelism in Communist Yugoslavia.

From Tito's break with Stalin in the late 1940s, Yugoslavian society had evolved away from the ultra-orthodox Communism that had characterized the immediate post-World War II years. By the time of Tito's death in 1980, restrictions on evangelism were still evident, but paled in comparison to other countries in Eastern Europe. The major obstacle by the time of my first visit was a ban on public meetings which promoted a particular religion, although the importance

public meetings have played in traditional Adventist outreach made the ban a major impediment.

In the 1992 civil war, Zagreb has been spared the devastation that has occurred in other areas of Croatia. But on my second day in Croatia we visited a small town called Karlovac. A quarter of the buildings had major structural damage and many had been completely gutted. Close to 75 percent of all buildings in Karlovac had taken some damage. Nearby villages were abandoned and their residents undoubtedly make up some of the 600,000 refugees and 10,000 casualties already reported in a war that has continued since Croatia and Slovenia declared their independence in June of 1991.

Fortunately, no one in the Kuburic family has been injured, but their future is probably more uncertain than most. Sretko is a Serbian working in the capital of