Axis Forces in Yugoslavia 1941–45

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INTRODUCTION

On 1 December 1918, the ‘Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes’ was established, uniting the ex-Austro-Hungarian provinces of Slovenia, Croatia-Slavonia, Dalmatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina with the kingdoms of Serbia – including Macedonia, Vojvodina and Kosovo – and Montenegro. The Serbian King assumed the crown. In October 1929, his kingdom was renamed ‘Yugoslavia’.

Yugoslavia had 16 million inhabitants in 1941. These comprised 6¼ million Serbs, 3¾ million Croats, 1½ million Slovenes, 900,000 Macedonians, 800,000 Albanians, 800,000 Moslems, 400,000 Hungarians, 250,000 Germans, 400,000 Montenegrins and some 400,000 Czechs, Slovaks, Rumanians, Jews and Gypsies. Heavy-handed Serbian political control was especially resented by the Croats, and in October 1934 Croatian Fascists, the Ustasas (or Ustashe) had King Alexander assassinated in Marseilles during a state visit to France.

To prevent British forces in Greece threatening Italian troops in Albania and the Italian–German Army in North Africa, Adolf Hitler ordered Operation Marita, the invasion of Yugoslavia and Greece, on 27 March 1941. On 6 April, the German 2nd and 12th Armies (15 divisions, including five armoured), Italian 2nd and 9th Armies (23 divisions), and the Hungarian 4th, 5th and Mobile Corps (8 brigades) invaded Yugoslavia from Italy, Germany, Rumania, Bulgaria and Albania. Few of the Royal Yugoslav Army’s 30 divisions actively resisted – most Croat and many Slovene units deserted to the invader – and after 11 days the Yugoslav High Command surrendered.

Hitler immediately dismembered the Yugoslav state. Germany annexed the central Slovene districts of Carinthia, Upper Carniola and Southern Styria. Italy annexed Western Slovenia, as Lubiana Province, and the Dalmatian coastal districts, occupied Montenegro and awarded Kosovo and Western Mac-
In June 1941, Josip ‘Tito’ Broz, a Croatian communist, established the Partisan Detachments, in November 1942 renamed the Yugoslav National Liberation Army. The struggle between Tito’s Partisans and the Chetniks added civil war to bloody resistance to the Axis. Guerilla war and civil conflict, always vicious, reached new heights of horror in Yugoslavia.

Axis forces occupied the principal towns and patrolled the main road and rail links, abandoning the villages and countryside, with its craggy mountains, deep river-valleys and impenetrable forests, to the guerillas. Guerilla bands included men of all ages, women and even children, all driven from their homes. Dressed in makeshift uniforms, they avoided concentrations of superior enemy forces, picking off soldiers, policemen and collaborators, individually or in small groups. Axis forces responded by killing civilians or captured guerillas out of hand, burning villages suspected of harbouring or supplying the guerillas. The Germans executed 100 hostages for every German soldier killed.

**Axis Offensives**

The 3½-year guerilla war, from June 1941 to September 1944, was characterized by successive Axis drives against Partisan and sometimes Chetnik strongholds. Yugoslav historians call these ‘Enemy Offensives One to Seven’.

In June 1941, Serbs in Eastern Herzegovina rose up against the new Croatian regime and, in July, a general uprising led by Communists and supported by the Chetniks broke out in Western Serbia. It soon spread to Montenegro and Western Bosnia.

In the First Enemy Offensive, of September to December 1941, the Germans and Italians recovered all the liberated territory. In November, Partisans and Chetniks had ceased to co-operate and turned on each other, Mihailović based on Rava Gora mountain, Tito in Užice, Western Serbia.

On 15 January 1942, in the Second Enemy Offensive, 35,000 German and Croatian troops advanced through Eastern Bosnia, forcing Tito to retreat southwards to Foča, where he formed mobile ‘Proletarian brigades’, controlling Eastern Bosnia, Northern Herzegovina and Western Montenegro. In the Third Enemy Offensive, April to June 1942, German, Croatian, Italian and Chetnik forces attacked Foča, but Tito marched 200 miles north-westards to Western Bosnia, where, in November, he established a liberated ‘Titoland’ based at Bihać, just south of the Kozara plateau where German and Croat forces had dislodged local Partisans in Operation Kozara the previous July.

On 15 January 1943, in the Fourth Enemy Offensive, Operation Weiss I, II and III, German, Croatian and Italian units overran ‘Titoland’. But Tito broke through the weak Italian-Chetnik link in the encircling ring. He conducted an epic fighting retreat south-eastwards back across the Neretva, Drina and Lim rivers - capturing Prozor and Konjic but suffering 16,000 casualties - before reaching the safety of Žabljak, on Mount Durmitor, Western Montenegro, at the end of March. On 20 May, he was surrounded there by German, Italian and Bulgarian forces in the Fifth Enemy Offensive (Operation Schwarz), but slipped back to Eastern Bosnia with 3,000 men, leaving 13,000 dead. There he ordered his troops to disperse throughout Bosnia, Serbia and Croatia, and fan the flames of a general revolt.

The Italian Armistice of September 1943 netted Tito huge supplies of equipment, some Italian Partisan recruits and access to Allied bases in Italy to supply his army, now 200,000 strong. However, in the Sixth Enemy Offensive (Operation Kugelblitz), be
Begunning 2 December 1943, Axis troops captured Tuzla, Eastern Bosnia, and Bihać, Western Bosnia. In Operation Herbstgewitter, in December 1943, the Partisans lost their key supply base on Korčula island and, in Operation Schneesturm, Tito’s HQ at Jajce. In January 1944, Tito escaped to Drvar, Central Bosnia, where, on 25 May 1944, he narrowly escaped capture by German paratroopers in Operation Rüsselsprung, the Seventh, and last, Enemy Offensive. Now, in June 1944, strong Partisan forces headed into Serbia to meet the Soviet Red Army advancing through the Eastern Balkans. In Operation Roeslein, in July, the Germans prevented the Partisans reaching Northern Macedonia. Operation Feuerwehr, however, failed to stop their infiltration into Eastern Serbia and Operation Ruebezahl forced them back into western Serbia. Finally, in Operation Treubrück, in September 1944, German forces checked an advance by the Partisans and Bulgarians, now allies, into Macedonia. At this stage, King Petar urged all patriotic Yugoslavs to support Tito.

Axis Defeat
On 29 September 1944, the Red Army entered Serbia and liberated Belgrade in October. Now guerrilla war graduated to conventional war. The Germans, having retreated from Albania and Greece, abandoned Serbia, forming a defensive line on the Bosnian border. Finally, on 20 March 1945, the 800,000-strong Partisan army (redesignated the ‘Yugoslav National Army’) began a general offensive. On 15 May, a week after VE-Day, all Yugoslav territory had been retaken. Tito then took a terrible revenge on thousands of Axis troops who, prevented by British 8th Army from seeking refuge in Southern Austria, surrendered to his forces.

Tito's charisma, brutal secret police and efficient communist organization, prevented nationalist conflicts erupting again in the post-war period, and it was not until June 1991, eleven years after his death, that Yugoslavia, always a fragile creation, began once more to disintegrate.

GERMANY

Ground Forces
In June 1941, Field-Marshal List of the German 12th Army, whose headquarters were in Athens, assigned Lieutenant-General Bader’s 65 Corps to occupy Serbia and the German occupation zone of Croatia. Headquartered in Belgrade, Bader had four 15th Wave’ infantry divisions – the 704, 714 and 717 in Serbia, and the 718 at Banja Luka, Bosnia, with five second-line Landesschützen battalions (447, 823, 923–5) guarding the Croatian section of the Viennasalonika railway vital for supplying to North Africa.

The 700-series divisions were smaller – only 8,000 men – less well-trained and well-equipped than front-line divisions. They contained two three-battalion regiments (instead of three); a three-battery artillery battalion (instead of a regiment); a cycle-reconnaissance, engineer and signals companies (instead of battalions); and a few logistical and motorized services. Their personnel were too old for front-line duty and were intended for static occupation tasks. However, they provided the backbone of the German forces until late 1942.

In the First Offensive into Montenegro, Serbia, Herzegovina, Bosnia, September to December 1941, 704 and 714 were reinforced by the front-line 113 and 342 Infantry Divisions from France and Russia respectively, and the 125 Infantry Regiment from Salonika. 342 and 718 fought in the Second Offensive in Eastern Bosnia in January and February 1942. But in January, 113 left for the Russian Front, and in February, 342 and the Bulgarian 1st Army occupied South-Eastern Serbia to fill the vacuum.

On 1 March 1942, 65 Corps was redesignated

Three Chetniks pose with two German Customs officers, 1944. (Modern History Museum, Ljubljana)
Serbia Command (Militärbefehlshaber Serbien). For the Third Offensive in Eastern Bosnia, in April and May 1942, Bader formed Task Force Bader (Kampfgruppe Bader) with 714, 718, Italian and Croatian forces. And in July, 714 fought in Western Bosnia in Operation Kozara.

By late 1942, guerrilla activity was increasing steadily in Bosnia, but decreasing in Serbia. Accordingly in October, ‘Croatia Command’ (Befehlshaber der deutschen Truppen in Kroatien) was formed under Major-General Lueters at Slavonski Brod. In November, it was assigned ‘Railway Security Staff Croatia’ (Deutscher Eisenbahnsicherungsstab Kroatien, known from late 1943 as Eisenbahnsicherungsstab 6) supervising Landesschützen and German-Croatian police-battalions guarding the railways.

Unwilling to divert front-line units from Russia to Yugoslavia, the German High Command explored local sources of manpower. In August 1942, the 369th Infantry Division, the ‘Devil’s Division’, was established as a Legionary Division with Croatian troops under a German cadre. It had two infantry regiments (369 and 370), an artillery regiment (369), anti-tank, reconnaissance, engineer and signals battalions. 369 Infantry Regiment and 1st Battalion, 369 Artillery Regiment, formed earlier in July 1941, served as the Croatian Legion in Russia. It was replaced in the Division by the 969 Infantry Regiment and 969 Artillery Battalion. These units adopted their predecessors’ numbers when the Croatian Legion was destroyed at Stalingrad in December 1942. In January 1943 a second Legionary Division, the 373 ‘Tiger Division’, was formed.

In October 1942, the ‘Prinz Eugen’ SS-Mountain Division joined Serbia Command. Led by the charismatic Lieutenant-General Arthur Pheps, it contained 19,000 ethnic Germans from Banat, Rumania and Croatia, illegally conscripted into the Waffen-SS. With two mountain infantry regiments; a mountain artillery regiment; reconnaissance, engineer and signals battalions, a company-strength battalion of French Hotchkiss H-38 light tanks and an attached Luftwaffe squadron of Fieseler Storch spotter aircraft, ‘Prinz Eugen’ was probably the toughest and most feared German division in Yugoslavia.

In December 1942, the 187 Reserve Division, with Austrian recruits undergoing basic training, arrived in Serbia. It had three infantry regiments, artillery and engineer battalions, and signals and medical companies.

On 1 January 1943, 12th Army, whose headquarters had moved to Salonika, was redesignated ‘Army Group E’ (Heeresgruppe E), under Luftwaffe General Lohr. It then controlled Serbia Command (704 Division and the 1st Bulgarian Army) and Croatia Command (187 Reserve; 369, 373, 714, 717, 718 Infantry Divisions; and the ‘Prinz Eugen’ Division).

Most of Croatia Command fought in the Fourth Offensive in Western Bosnia, January to March 1943. Later, on 1 April 1943, 704, 714, 717 and 718 were revitalized with younger personnel and redesignated 104, 114, 117 and 118 Jäger (Rifle) Divisions. Trained for hilly terrain, they had two three-battalion rifle regiments; a three-battalion artillery regiment; reconnaissance, anti-tank, engineer and signals battalions. And in December 1943, 187 Reserve became the 42 Rifle Division.

For the Fifth Offensive in Herzegovina and Western Montenegro, in May and June 1943, ‘Prinz Eugen’, 118 and 369 were reinforced by the elite 1st Mountain Division in Army Group Reserve in Serbia, and the 4th Regiment of the Brandenburg Commando Division. In June 1943, 100 Jäger Division was assigned to Croatia Command and, in July, 28 Infantry Division joined Serbia Command before both were transferred to Albania.

The Allied landings in Sicily in July 1943 convinced the Germans of the imminent collapse of Italy, and so the German forces in Yugoslavia were strengthened to repel the expected Allied invasion of
Dalmatia from the Italian coast. In August 1943, Army Group F, headquartered in Belgrade under Field-Marshal von Weichs, assumed command of all Axis forces in the Balkans with 2 Armoured Army (2. Panzerarmee) from the Russian Front; ‘South-East Command’ (Militärbefehlshaber Südost), formerly Serbia Command, now almost entirely Bulgarian; and Army Group E in Greece.

The 2 Armoured Army, with HQ at Kragujevac, Serbia, under Lieutenant-General Rendulić and paradoxically without any armoured divisions, was the main strike-force, with 15 Mountain Corps (114, 369, 373 and ‘Prinz Eugen’ Divisions) and 69 Reserve Corps (187 and 173 Reserve – formerly Croatia Command); 21 Mountain Corps (100, 118 Jäger and 297 Infantry Divisions) and, from September to November 1943, III (Germanic) SS Armoured Corps, with the German-Danish-Norwegian mechanized division, Nordland, and the Dutch Nederland Mechanized Brigade.

On 9 September 1943, the day of the Italian Armistice, Rendulić, with seven divisions (114, 118 Jäger; 297, 369, 373 Infantry; 187 Reserve and ‘Prinz Eugen’ Divisions), disarmed the Italian divisions in Croatia and Montenegro and secured the Adriatic coastline. Only ‘Prinz Eugen’ encountered serious resistance, at Split.

Meanwhile 2 Armoured Army continued its buildup. In October 1943, the 1st Cossack Division, formed in August from anti-Soviet Russians, arrived. With two mounted brigades, each with three mounted regiments, a mounted artillery battalion and logistical services, the cossacks had fought Soviet partisans in Russia and left a string of burned villages and terror-stricken peasants while with 69 Reserve Corps in Eastern Croatia. In November, V SS-Mountain Corps HQ and the 181, 264, 367 and 371 Infantry Divisions arrived to boost German strength.

V SS-Mountain Corps (118 Jäger; 181, 369 Infantry; 1 Mountain; ‘Prinz Eugen’ Divisions) fought in the Sixth Offensive in Bosnia in December 1943, with the Bosnian-Moslem 13th SS-Mountain Division Handschar. It had been formed in March 1943, and returned in January 1944 from Le Puy, Central France, to join the new ‘Syrmia Command’ (Befehlshaber Syrmien) in Eastern Croatia. Meanwhile, XV Mountain Corps, with 264 and 373 Infantry and 392 ‘Blue Division’, the third Legionary Division, formed 17 August 1943, cleared Korčula Island in Dalmatia of Partisans.

Anxious to regain the tactical initiative, the Germans launched the Seventh, and last, Offensive in May 1944 in Western Bosnia. 202 Armoured Battalion, 92 Motorized Regiment, elements of the ‘Brandenburg’ and 1st Mountain Divisions, and Croatian units supported SS-Parachute Battalion 500’s unsuccessful attempt to capture Tito at Drvar.

In August 1944, a reinforced Corps called Army

Croatian dictator Ante Pavelić visiting troops of a Croatian Legion Division, wearing German Army uniforms with the Croatian chequerboard on the right upper arm (Croatian Legion in Russia, left arm), June 1944. (Croatian History Museum, Zagreb)
Section Serbia (Armeeabteilung Serbien) was formed from South-East Command with two Corps-status groups, to defend Serbia from the advancing Red Army. Korpsgruppe Schneckenburg (117 and Brandenburg Divisions, and 92 Infantry Brigade) defended Belgrade, surrendering on 27 October. Korpsgruppe Müller guarded the flank of General Löhr’s 340,000-strong Army Group E in its epic 1,500-mile retreat from Greece through Macedonia into Bosnia where, in November 1944, it absorbed Army Section Serbia.

In December 1944, the 2 Armoured Army joined Army Group South in Southern Hungary, leaving Army Group F (abolished as a Staff in March 1945) with the four weak Corps of Army Group E to defend Northern Yugoslavia. These were 15 Mountain Corps (373 and 392 Infantry Divisions); 21 Mountain Corps (963, 966, 969 and 1017 Fortress Brigades); 34 Corps (41 Infantry and 117 Jäger Divisions) and 91 Corps (11 Luftwaffe Field, 297 Infantry, 104 Jäger and ‘Prinz Eugen’ Divisions; 967 Fortress Brigade). Fortress Brigades (Festungsbrigaden) were Fortress Regiments manning static coastal fortifications in Greece, redesignated brigades in July 1944. Later, 69 Corps arrived, along with 15 Cossack Cavalry Corps (under Major-General von Pannwitz), formed in February 1945 from the 1st and 2nd Cossack Cavalry Divisions (formerly Brigades), 11 Luftwaffe Field and 22 Infantry Divisions.

Four other noteworthy Waffen-SS units served in Yugoslavia. The Ukrainian 14 Infantry Division fought briefly in Slovenia in March and April 1945. The Bosnian-Moslem 23 Mountain Division Kama was formed in June 1944 but disbanded in October in Southern Hungary. The Albanian 21 Mountain Division Skanderbeg, formed May 1944, served in October and November in Kosovo and Macedonia, and from December 1944 to May 1945 as a Regimental Task-Force with ‘Prinz Eugen’. And the Command Battalion ‘SS-Jagdverband Südost’, was based in Zagreb. It had seven companies, of which two – the Serbienv-Kroatien and Albanien – operated in Croatia from January to February 1945.

On 20 March 1945, Tito’s Yugoslav National Army launched an offensive against Army Group E. 15 Mountain Corps retreated up the coast until it was reinforced in Istria by 97 Corps (188, 237 and 392

Members of the 13th SS-Mountain Division Handschar, in German mountain infantry uniform with a scarlet (service-dress) or grey-green (field uniform) fez with SS insignia, and the scimitar (Handschar) on the right collar-patch. January 1944. (J. Charita)

Infantry Divisions). Central Bosnia and Eastern Croatia held until 10 April, then the Army Group was in headlong retreat towards Southern Austria. Most units surrendered to the British in Austria on 15 May. The Cossacks were handed over to the Red Army by the British, and suffered imprisonment and death. 104 Jäger; 181, 297, 373 and 392 Infantry and ‘Prinz Eugen’ Divisions capitulated to Tito and were appallingly mistreated as prisoners-of-war – 50,000 lost their lives in captivity.

Air and Sea Forces
German Naval and Air Forces in Yugoslavia were modest. The Corps-level Staff ‘Admiral Adria’ (HQ Belgrade) controlled two brigade-status coastal units – Seekommandant Norddalmatien (HQ Šibenik) and
Seekommandant Süddalmatien (HQ Mostar) with three Naval Artillery and four Naval Infantry Battalions from September 1943 to December 1944.

In 1941, the Corps-level ‘Air District XVII’ (Luftgaukommando XVII), headquartered in Vienna, supervised training squadrons in Croatia and Serbia. From January 1943, the Army-Group status ‘Air Force Command Southeast’ (Luftwaffenkommando Südost) operated 20 Flakdivision and brigade-level ‘Air Command Croatia’ (Fliegerführer Kroatien), attacking 15 USAAF bombers from Italy. Most aircraft were destroyed in September 1944 in Operation Ratweek, leaving a few to defend Zagreb until May 1945.

German police units are covered under ‘Croatia’, ‘Serbia’, ‘Montenegro’ and ‘Slovenia’.

ITALY

Ground Forces

The Italian High Command assigned 24 divisions and three coastal brigades to occupation duties in Yugoslavia.

The 2nd Army was headquartered in Sušak, Northern Dalmatia, from March 1942 to May 1943. Designated the Slovenia-Dalmatia Command (Supersloda), it was commanded by Acting General Ambrosio from April 1941. Acting General Reatta took over in February 1942 and Acting General Robotti in February 1943. Supersloda comprised 12 infantry, two mobile divisions and, from 1942, three coastal brigades. These were allocated to four corps (XI, V, XVIII and VI) covering Western Slovenia; the coastal provinces of Zara (Zadar), Spalato (Split) and Cattaro (Kotor) – annexed by Italy as the Governorship of Dalmatia and the western half of the Independent State of Croatia, with Western Croatia proper, Western Bosnia, Dalmatia and Herzegovina. These regions, excluding Slovenia, were divided into three zones: the Annexed Zone – the Governorship; the Demilitarized Zone – a 40-mile wide coastal strip with Italian garrisons; and the Occupied Zone – a 40-mile strip adjacent to the German Occupation Zone, with Croatian and weak Italian garrisons.

The 9th Army was headquartered in Tirana, Albania, from July 1941 to May 1943. Designated the Albania Armed Forces Command (Superalba), it deployed two infantry divisions in Yugoslavia, in districts annexed to Albania. XIV Corps – with four infantry, one infantry (mountain) and three mountain (Alpini) divisions – garrisoned Montenegro. On 15 May 1943, the 9th Army, XIV Corps and 2nd Army’s VI Corps were reorganized as ‘Army Group East’.

An M1940 ‘binary’ Infantry Division, 14,300 strong, had two three-battalion infantry regiments, one three-battalion artillery regiment, a mortar and an engineer battalion. Some divisions received, as a third infantry regiment, a Blackshirt Assault Legion, volunteers from the Fascist Voluntary Militia for National Security (MVSN), with two infantry battalions and a support company. An Infantry Division (Mountain), intended for hilly terrain, had extra pack-horse transport. A 7,750-strong Mobile (Celere) Division had two cavalry regiments, each with one machine-gun and four mounted squadrons, a three-battalion Bersaglieri cyclist regiment, a three-battalion artillery regiment, a 61-tank light-tank battalion and Bersaglieri motorcycle, anti-tank and engineer companies. A 13,000-strong Mountain Division had two three-battalion mountain regiments, a three-battalion artillery regiment, engineer battalion and anti-tank platoon. A Coastal Brigade had one coastal infantry regiment and supporting units.

Sixteen Independent Blackshirt Battalions (3, 4, 8, 16, 29, 33, 54, 58, 61, 71, 81, 85, 115, 144, 162, 172, 173, 174) (Rottwachtmeister) and Slovene Village Guards, South-Eastern Slovenia, 1942. (Modern History Museum, Ljubljana)
215) operated in Yugoslavia and six (8, 16, 29, 71, 81, 85) were redesignated as elite M (Mussolini) Battalions for distinction in combat. There were also organic Army and Corps troops.

When concentrated in viable units, Italian troops were a match for the Partisans, but usually they were dispersed in isolated garrisons or escort columns vulnerable to attacks and ambushes. Occupation duty was unpopular, and the fragile morale plummeted in July 1943 with the Allied invasion of Sicily and the fall of Mussolini.

XI Corps, headquartered in Ljubljana, garrisoned Western Slovenia and Karlovac District in Northern Croatia with three infantry divisions – the 14th Isonzo; the 153rd Macerata from June 1942, replaced in May 1943 by the 57th Lombardia; and the 21st Granatieri di Sardegna, repatriated to Italy in September 1942 after replacement, in July, by the 22nd Cacciatori delle Alpi. They contained Partisan activity, especially after a successful campaign from July to November 1942.

The 1st Mobile Division Eugenio di Savoia operated in 2nd Army reserve in Karlovac, and from October 1941 on the Northern Dalmatian coast.

V Corps, headquartered in Crikvenica, garrisoned Southern Dalmatia, Western Croatia proper and Western Bosnia with three infantry divisions – the 13th Re; the 57th Lombardia, replaced in May 1943 by the 153rd Macerata; and, from February 1943, the 154th Murge; and the 14th Coastal Brigade.

The 2nd Mobile Division Emanuele Filiberto Testa di Ferro returned to Italy in November 1941, after service with the Corps.

XVIII Corps, headquartered in Split, took over Central Dalmatia and Central Bosnia from the overstretched VI Corps in February 1942. It inherited three infantry divisions from VI Corps – the 12th Sassari, repatriated in April 1943; the 15th Bergamo; and, from November 1941 to July 1942, the 151st Perugia, the 158th Zara, formed in September 1942, and the 12th Coastal Brigade were added.

VI Corps, headquartered initially in Split and from February 1942 in Dubrovnik, garrisoned Southern Dalmatia and Herzegovina with three infantry divisions – the 32nd Marche; from August 1942, the 18th Messina; and from September 1941 to July 1942 the 22nd Cacciatori delle Alpi – plus the 25th Coastal Brigade.

An MVSN captain (centurione) of the 16th M’B Battalion (left), compares notes with an official (Segretario federale) of the Italian National Fascist party (PNF) with a member of the 2nd Grenadier Regiment, 21st Infantry Division, looking on, Slovenia, 1942. (Modern History Museum, Ljubljana)

In the First Offensive, September to December 1941, the Marche division reoccupied Eastern Herzegovina and the Cacciatori delle Alpi division fought in Eastern Bosnia in the Third Offensive (Italian codename Trio) from April to May 1942. Partisan pressure forced the evacuation of Zone 3 in late 1942. Lombardi, Re, Sassari and elements of the Murga, Bergamo and Marche fought in the Fourth Offensive, from January to March 1943.

XIV Corps, headquartered in Podgorica from December 1941 to June 1943, became ‘Montenegro Command’. It controlled two mountain divisions – the 5th Pusteria, replaced in August 1942 by 1st Taurinense (previously in 2nd Army reserve); and, from March to December 1942, the 6th Alpi Graie along with four Infantry Divisions – the 19th (Mountain) Venezia; the 48th Toro, replaced from July 1942 to August 1943 by the 151st Perugia; from July to September 1941, the 22nd Cacciatori delle Alpi; and from May 1942, the 23rd Ferrara. The 18th Messina, replaced in April 1942 by 155th Emilia, garrisoned Kotor for the 2nd Army under XIV Corps control.

The communist-led revolt of 13 July to 12 August 1941 was suppressed by the Venezia, Messina,
Pusteria, Taro and Cacciatori delle Alpi divisions, and all contained local attacks in the First Offensive in September to December 1941. The Taurinense and Pusteria divisions fought in Operation Trio in April 1942 and the Ferrara, Venezia and Taurinense divisions participated in the Fifth Offensive, in May and June 1943.

The 9th Army allocated the 38th Puglie division to Sector Z, the Kosovo Region of Serbia, and the 41st Firenze to the Debar and Struga Districts of Western Macedonia. Partisan activity there was minimal, allowing Firenze’s 127 Infantry Regiment to fight in the Fifth Offensive in Montenegro.

**Italy Surrenders**

On 8 September 1943, the Italians concluded an armistice with the Allies, leaving seventeen Italian divisions stranded in Yugoslavia. All divisional commanders refused to join the Germans. The Taurinense and Venezia divisions joined the Montenegrin Partisans as complete units. Firenze joined the Albanian Partisans. Other units surrendered to the Germans, to face imprisonment in Germany or summary execution. Others surrendered to the Croats or the Partisans, simply disintegrated, or reached Italy on foot via Trieste or by ship across the Adriatic.

**Air and Sea Forces**


Slovenia-Dalmatia Air-Force Command, headquartered in Mostar, controlled six Air-Force Wings and eleven squadrons. There were ten Carabinieri (Rural and Military Police) battalions; seven regimental-status Frontier Guard ‘sectors’ and eight Customs Guard battalions.

**CROATIA**

On 10 April 1941, the Ustaša underground leader in Croatia, Slavko Kvaternik, proclaimed the ‘Independent State of Croatia’ (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, or NDH), and on the 16th Dr Ante Pavelić returned from exile in Italy as Poglavnik (Leader) of the new state.

Croatia, technically a kingdom under the absentee King Tomislav II, the Italian Duke of Spoleto, had 6.1 million inhabitants – 3.2 million Croats, 1.8 million Serbs, 700,000 Moslems, 100,000 Germans and 300,000 Czechs, Slovaks, Jews and Gypsies. The Government was strongly nationalistic/Roman Catholic, pro-Axis, anti-Serb, anti-Semitic and anti-communist, yet the existence of Italian and German occupation-zones belied Croatia’s independence. Furthermore the large Serb minority and many Croats rejected the Ustashe and turned to Tito, plunging the country into civil war.

On 16 April 1941, the ‘Croatian Home Defence Force’ (Hrvatsko Domobranstvo) was formed by Field-Marshal Kvaternik, with an Army, Navy, Air-Force, National Guard, Gendarmerie and Labour Service. In January 1943, the Force was redesignated the ‘Croatian Armed Forces’ (Oružane snage NDH), incorporating the Ustaša Army.

**The Croatian Army**

The Army (called the Kopnena vojska, and from January 1943, the Domobranstvo) was commanded, from August 1941, by Lieutenant-General August Marić as Chief of Staff. He was replaced in November by Lieutenant-General Vladimir Laxa. General Slavko Stancar was Army Inspector. There were 55,000 men organized in the old Yugoslav Divisional Districts, each district comprising three infantry regiments with two to three battalions each. Sava in

![Newly promoted Croatian Army second lieutenants in parade-uniform, with two air-force officers far right in Zagreb, 13 June 1941.](https://example.com/photo)
Croatia proper and Dalmatia had 1 to 3 Infantry Regiments. Osijek in Slavonia had 4 to 6. Bosnia in Southern Bosnia had 7 to 9; Vrbas in Northern Bosnia had 10 to 12. And Jadran in Herzegovina had 13 to 15. There were also two artillery battalions with two batteries each, one medical, one labour and three replacement battalions per district. There was also the Zagreb Cavalry Regiment with two battalions and an independent cavalry battalion; an engineer regiment of three battalions; I–V Frontier Battalions on the Serbia–Montenegro border; a railway security and a signals battalion; and Motor Transport Battalions 1–2. From December 1941, ethnic Germans formed the 1st and 2nd Rifle Battalions and a local militia, absorbed into the ‘Prinz Eugen’ SS-Division in April 1943; and three railway Security Battalions (II–13), reformed as German–Croatian Police Volunteer Regiment 3 in December 1943.

The fledgling Army crushed the revolt by Serbs in Eastern Herzegovina in June, and fought in July in Eastern and Western Bosnia. They fought in Eastern Herzegovina again, when Croatia-Dalmatian and Slavonian battalions reinforced local units.

In November 1941, the Army reorganized into three Corps Regions, each with a Corps – I (Croatia proper, Northern Dalmatia); II (Slavonia, Northern Bosnia); III (Southern Bosnia, Herzegovina), each with two infantry divisions. A Division – with only 4,000 men, so really a Brigade – had 2–3 Infantry Regiments and 1–2 Artillery Battalions, all in Bosnia.

**Mountain Division**

Soon more units were formed. The most important was the 17,000-strong 1st Mountain Division, activated in April 1942 with four mountain brigades, each with a three-battalion mountain infantry regiment, a rifle battalion, a mountain artillery battery and support services. There were the Banja Luka, Šrijem and Tuzla Independent Brigades, I Bicycle Battalion, I Assault Battalion, and 18 Railway Security Battalions under the German Railway Security Staff Croatia. Total Army strength was about 100,000.

The 4th and 5th Infantry Divisions fought in the Second Offensive in Eastern Bosnia in January 1942, and 1st–3rd Mountain Brigades in Operation Kosara in Western Bosnia in July. In October 1942, the 1st Mountain Division fought in Slavonia and, in early 1943, the 1st–3rd Mountain Brigades were in Western Bosnia for the Fourth Offensive. In October, Pavelić dismissed Kvaternik and appointed himself Armed Forces Commander, with Lieutenant-General Ivan Prpić as Army Chief of Staff.

On 1 May 1943, the six Divisions were reorganized into four mountain and four rifle brigades, an operation mostly completed in January 1944 (6th Division survived until December). A mountain brigade (Gorski Sdrug) had two mountain regiments (ex-Mountain Division brigades or divisional infantry regiments) and 1–2 Artillery Battalions. A rifle brigade (Ložački Sdrug) had two rifle regiments (ex-infantry regiments) and one or two artillery battalions. In February 1944, each Corps received a replacement brigade (Doknadni Sdrug) and in March 11 garrison brigades (Posadni Sdrugovi) were established from existing garrison and Dondu village militia battalions. In Autumn 1943, the Mobile Brigade (Brzi Sdrug) was formed from the Zagreb Cavalry Regiment, and I and II Bicycle Battalions. The 23
Italian and Croatian Army, and Ustasha officers, 1943, in Bosnia. The Ustasha officer standing fourth from the left is Major Rafael Bohan, the notorious commander of Ustasha V Active Service Brigade. The officer far right is a military chaplain (captain equivalent) with special collar-patches and sleeve rank rings. Moslem Imams wore a fez and different collar-patches. (Croatian History Museum, Zagreb)

Railway Security Battalions were organized in five sectors grouped in I Region (Sectors A–C) and II Region (Sectors D–E). There were also three labour regiments.

Armoured Units

Croatian Armoured Forces consisted of three Corps armoured-car battalions – I (Zagreb), II (Slavonski Brod) and III (Sarajevo). By 1943, these were attached to the appropriate Replacement Brigades. A 41-man Armoured Platoon formed in November 1941 and by 1943 Ustasha Active Service Brigades I–V had an army tank company in support, and the rifle and mountain brigades had support platoons of two light and three medium tanks. There were also Armoured Train Companies 1–3.

The 4th Rifle Brigade fought in the Fifth Offensive in May 1943 in Herzegovina. In September

<table>
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<tr>
<th>BATTLE ORDER OF CROATIAN FORCES</th>
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<td>1 Inf. Div. 1, 2, 11 Inf. Rgt, 1, 2 Art. Bn.</td>
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<td>Zagreb Cav. Rgt, 1 Bicycle Bn, 1, 3 Eng. Bn.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>II Corps (vonslavonski Brod)</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Inf. Div. 5, 8, 10 Inf. Rgt, 6, 7 Art. Bn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banjaluka Bde 10 Inf.Rgt, 8 Art. &amp; 1 Asst. Bn,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Domdo Bns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Srijem Bde 5 Front, 2, 4 Eng. Bn.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>III Corps (Sarajevo)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>21 Domdo Bns.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Army (1 May 1943 - 20 November 1944)</strong></td>
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<td>2 Rifle Bde 1, 10 Rfl. Rgt, 4, 8 Art. Bn.</td>
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<td>1 Garr.Bde 1-4 Bn</td>
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<td>2 Garr.Bde 1-5 Bn</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Garr.Bde 1-3 Bn</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Garr.Bde 1-3 Bn</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zagreb Garr.Bde 1-3 Bn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Repl. Bde Pokuplje, Kvarner, Velebit Reg.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commd. Istrian Def. Rgt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zenica Bde 1 Arm. Car. Bn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>II Corps (Slavonski Brod)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Garr. Bde 1-4 Bn</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 Garr. Bde 1-5 Bn</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 Garr. Bde 1-4 Bn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Garr. Bde 1-10 Bn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Repl. Srijem, Tuzla Bdes 2 Arm. Car Bn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>III Corps (Sarajevo)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>8 Garr. Bde 1-5 Bn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Garr. Bde 1-6 Bn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Repl. Bde 3 Arm. Car Bn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mob. Bde 1-3 Bn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rail Sect. A(4-7 Bn), B(1-3, 8-10 Bn),</td>
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<tr>
<td>C(1-3, 18-9 Bn)</td>
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<td><strong>Ustasha Army (1 June - 31 December 1943)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>PTS 1.2 Rgt; Cav. Mob. Art. Gd, Eng. 1.2 Rep. Bn</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Bde 2,3,14,21,3-28 Bn</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Bde 4,6,8,15-6,18-9,36, Rail Sec.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bn, 2 Mtn. Batt</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Bde 5,10-3,30,33,35,37 Bn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Bde 9,17,19,31-2,34 Bn, 4 Mtn Bn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Bde 1,7,20,24-7 Bn, Eng. Coy, 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mtn Bn</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 Bde 1-4 Bn</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Comm. Bde 1-4 Bn</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Comm. Bde 1-4 Bn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Def. Bde Rgt, Mob. Bn, 3-5 Gd. Bns</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Def. Bde</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
1943, following the Italian Armistice, Croatian troops occupied Italian-annexed Dalmatia (Zone 1), establishing three regional commands to defend this territory and the Istrian Home-Defence Regiment at Sušak. There was also a Zénica Brigade. Lieutenant-General Fedor Dragoljov was Chief of Staff. He was succeeded in Autumn 1944 by Ustasha Colonel Tomislav Sertić. By late 1944, the performance of the Croatian Army, by then only 70,000 strong, had deteriorated sharply. Many recruits avoided enlistment. Others were creamed off into Ustasha Brigades or Croatian Legion Divisions, and whole units were deserting to the Partisans.

In November 1941, the Italians formed their own ‘Motorized Croatian Legion’ (Legione Croata Autotrasportabile), comparable to the German-sponsored Croatian Legion. It had 1,320 men in two infantry, one replacement and one artillery battalion, and one mortar company. They were dressed in Italian Army uniforms with fasces collar-badges and a national armshield. In March 1942, the Legion joined Italian 8th Army in Russia, and was destroyed at Stalingrad in December 1942. It reformed in May 1943 at Lake Garda as the 2nd Legion, then disbanded in September, its personnel joining 373 and 392 Legion Divisions.

**Ustasha Units**

The Ustasha Army (Ustaška Vojnica) was established on 10 May 1941 from the Ustasha Penetration Detachment – 300 emigrés from the Fontencchio and San Demetrio camps in Italy and the Yanka-Puzta camp in Hungary, formed in 1932 as the Ustasha Forces (Ustaška vojska) – and the Ustasha Detachments, which had sprung up in April 1941. On 27 May the Ustasha High Command was formed in

### Ustasha Army (1 January - 20 November 1944)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>PTS</th>
<th>1, 2 Rgt; Mob, Armd, Art, Gd, Eng, Bn</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Bde</td>
<td>2,24,29 Bn</td>
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<td>2 Bde</td>
<td>6,15-6,18, Repl.Bn</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Bde</td>
<td>5,10,13,30,33, Repl.Bn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Bde</td>
<td>9,19,20,31-2,34-5, Otcac. Def. Bn</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 Bde</td>
<td>1,7,20,35 Bn</td>
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<td>1-4, 26 Bn</td>
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<td>8 Bde</td>
<td>1-4,6,8,11 Bn</td>
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<td>9 Bde</td>
<td>1-5 Bn</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 Bde</td>
<td>1-6 Bn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Bde</td>
<td>1,3,4,6 Bn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Bde</td>
<td>14,23,25-6,29 Bn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Bde</td>
<td>6,16 Bn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Bde</td>
<td>1 Rail.Sec, Repl.Sec, Moslavac Rail.Sec.Bn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Bde</td>
<td>5-7 Bn</td>
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<tr>
<td>16 Bde</td>
<td>Brod, Derventa Grr.Bn; 2 Rail.Sec.Bn</td>
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<tr>
<td>17 Bde</td>
<td>Oguin, Vrbovska, Susak, Rijeka, Ozalj, Karlovac Grr.Bn</td>
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<td>18 Bde</td>
<td>Otcac, Brinje, Senj, Lovinac Grr.Bn</td>
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<td>Zagreb Grr.Bde</td>
<td>1-4 Bn</td>
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<tr>
<td>Camp Def.Bde</td>
<td>1-4, Mob, Art.Bn</td>
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### Croatian Armed Forces (21 November 1944 - 15 May 1945)

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<td>20-2 Inf Rgt; 20-1 Art Bn; Mob.Bn</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 Div</td>
<td>5 Ust, 11 Inf Bde; 2 Art.batts/April</td>
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<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>23-5 Inf.Asst.Rgt, Mob.Brig</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12 Div</td>
<td>3 Mtn, 12 Ustt Bde; 2 Eng.Repl.Bn; 3 Art.batts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Div</td>
<td>14 Ust, 19 Inf. Bde</td>
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<td>17 Div</td>
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</table>

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<th>III Corps</th>
<th>3 Div</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7 Mtn Div</td>
<td>1 Rfl, 2,13 Ust.Bde; 7,18 Art.Bn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Div</td>
<td>1,14 Mtn.Bde; 1,6 Art.Bn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Mtn Div</td>
<td>1,11 Ust, 16 Inf.Bde; 1 Art.batt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Div</td>
<td>2 Mtn, 9 Ust.Bde; 3 Art.batts</td>
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</tbody>
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<tr>
<th>IV Corps</th>
<th>4 Div</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 Div</td>
<td>7 Rfl, 8,19 Ust, 14 Inf Bde; 12 Art.Bn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Div</td>
<td>10 Ust, 15 Inf.Bde; 2 Art.batts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Div</td>
<td>16 Ust, 16 Inf.Bde</td>
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<tr>
<th>V Corps</th>
<th>10 Div</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11 Div</td>
<td>10 Rfl, 7 Ust.Bde, 8 Art.Bn; 2 Art.batts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Div</td>
<td>4,18 Ust, 13 Inf.Bde, 1 Art.batt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Div</td>
<td>3,17 Ust, 12 Inf.Bde; 1 Art.Bn/April</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Baranja, Vuka, Posavje Rgt Coy |
concentrated in the Armoured Battalion (comprising two armoured, two infantry assault and one support company) and a Mobile Battalion (with one armoured, one motorized and one support company). The unit was based in Zagreb, conducting military operations north of the City.

Defensive Battalion

The Defensive Battalion, formed in 1941 by Colonel Vjekoslav ‘Maks’ Luburić, was part of his Ustaška obrana service, which organized the concentration camps. This itself was a part of the 15,000-strong Ustasha Control Service (UNS), the Croatian Gestapo/SD apparatus, under Lieutenant-Colonel Eugen ‘Dido’ Kvaternik, son of Slavko Kvaternik. In January 1942, the Battalion became a brigade (I. Ustaški Obrambeni Sdrug), and in summer a 2nd Brigade was established. It disbanded December 1943. From December 1943 to March 1945, the 1st Brigade was known as Camp Defence Brigade (LOS) before reverting to its original title. By 1944, it had 10,000 personnel, guarding the notorious Jasenovac and Stara Gradiska death-camps for Serbs, Jews, Gypsies and anti-fascist Croatians, and acting as an elite combat unit. In January 1945, 13,000 strong, it joined 18th Croatian Assault Division and in April became 30th Assault Regiment.

Ustaša Regiments

The 1st Ustaša Regiment was formed in September 1941 in Sarajevo by Major Jure Francetić for service in Eastern Bosnia. In December, then 1,500 strong, it was unofficially designated the Black Legion (Crna Legija) after adopting black uniforms. It had already become the most ruthless Croatian unit, killing Chetniks, Partisans and Serb civilians indiscriminately, eventually prompting German protests. Its four battalions fought in the First to Third Offensive and Operation Kozara in 1942, and its proudest hour was the defence of Kupres in August 1942, just before Francetić’s transfer and the Legion’s disbandment.

Active Battalions

The backbone of the Ustaša Army were the Ustaša Active Battalions (Ustaške Djelatne Bojne), each comprising 400-1,000 men. Battalions I–XII were formed in 1941. Battalions XIII–XXXVII and 27
Preparatory Battalions (Ustaške Pripremne Bojne), numbered I–XXXIV with gaps – part-time guard units with older reservists and Ustasha Youth undergoing pre-military training – were formed in 1942. In late 1942, the 39 Active Battalions then constituted were formed into Active Service Brigades I–VI. Later 12 more – VII–XVIII – and the Zagreb Garrison Brigade were formed. Each brigade (Ustaški Stajači Dželatni Sdrug) had four to nine battalions and, usually, artillery support. By then there were 19 brigades with 89 battalions – 66 active, two replacement, one defensive, four railway security and 16 garrison. The garrison battalions (Posadne Bojne) were conscripts from the former Preparatory Battalions.

Waffen-SS style uniforms and insignia, in action in Syrmia and Slavonia. In April 1943, they joined ‘Prinz Eugen’ SS-Division.

The Ustasha Army earned a reputation for fanatical bravery and brutality, but never matched the systematic savagery of the Partisan mass-executions. Captured Ustahas neither asked for, nor received, mercy.

On 21 November 1944, Croatian Army and Ustasha units were combined into the Croatian Armed Forces (Hrvatske Oružane Snage), in order to create a more effective fighting machine. Pavelić was Supreme Commander, assisted by Army General Gjuro Gjurić, with Ustasha Colonel Sertić as Chief of Staff.

New Units

The army’s 19 mountain, rifle and garrison brigades were reorganized into four mountain (1–4), three rifle (1, 7 and 10), ten infantry (11–20) and two replacement (21 and 23) brigades. The Ustasha Zagreb Garrison and 18 Active Service Brigades became one replacement (XXI) and 22 Ustasha brigades (I–XX, XXII–XXIII). All these units were grouped into 13 infantry, two mountain, two assault and one replacement Croatian Divisions (from 20 April 1945, Ustasha Divisions) and the Poglavlник Bodyguard Division. Each division, often only 5,000 strong, had one to three brigades (in March–April 1945, redesignated as regiments), one or two artillery
battalions and minimal support units. The Army Mobile Brigade became an Ustaša unit.

In January 1945, the Poglavnik Bodyguard Corps (Poglavnikov Tjelesni Sbor, or PTS) was formed from the Poglavnik Bodyguard Division, 1st Croatian Assault and 5th Croatian Division. From 5 February, this comprised the 1st Bodyguard Division – which from 5 March included the Ustaša Mobile Brigade – and the 1st and 5th Croatian Assault Divisions. In April 1945, Croatian Corps (from 20 April, Ustaša Corps) 2 to 5 were formed from the remaining 14 Divisions, leaving the replacement division in Zagreb.

From early 1945, the Croatian Divisions were allocated to various German Corps, and by March were holding the Southern Front. By 1 May, much reduced by casualties, they crowded into the Zagreb region. On the 6th, 200,000 troops and civilians retreated through Slovenia into Austria while Pavelić and his top officials fled abroad. At Bleiburg, the British forced the Croats back, insisting they surrender to the Partisans. Some 20,000 escaped, leaving the rest to Tito’s revenge. About 100,000 were shot or died from exhaustion on death-marches to camps in Banat.

Air and Sea Units

The small Croatian Navy (Hrvatska Mornarica) was commanded by Rear-Admiral Djuro Jakin until late 1943. Commodore Edgar Angeli took over until 1944, and Rear-Admiral Nikola Steinfl commanded until May 1945. The three Naval Commands – North Adriatic (based at Crikvenica, later Sušak), Central Adriatic (at Makarska, later Split) and South Adriatic (at Dubrovnik) undertook coastguard and customs duties until September 1943, when the Italian Armistice nullified the veto on Croatian seagoing forces. A river flotilla (based at Zemun) patrolled the Danube and Sava, and there was a Naval Infantry Battalion at Zemun, later Zagreb.

The Croatian Naval Legion, eventually about 1,000 strong, under Commander Andro Vrkjlan and later Captain Stjepan Rumenović, served as the German 23rd Minesweeping Flotilla in Crimea, Black Sea and Sea of Azov. In 1943, a Coastal Artillery Battery was added. The Legion repatriated to Trieste in May 1944 as a torpedo-boat flotilla under German 11th Escort Flotilla. The Germans disbanded it in December 1944 to prevent defection to the Allies.

The Croatian Air Force (Hrvatsko Zrakoplovstvo), formed 12 April 1941, was 9,775 strong in 1943. It was commanded by Major General Vladimir Kren until 14 September 1943 and Colonel Adalbert Rogulja until 4 June 1944, when Kren took over again. The four airbases controlled seven Wings (Skupina), subdivided into squadrons (Jato). There were 19 squadrons in 1943, operating Italian, German and obsolete French aircraft. 1st Airbase (Zagreb) had 1st, 5th Bomber and 11th Fighter Wings; 2nd (Sarajevo) had 2nd Wing; 3rd (Mostar) had 3rd Wing; and 5th (Banja Luka) had 6th Wing.

From July 1941, the Croatian Air-Force Legion fought in Russia. The 4th Fighter Wing operated as 15th Squadron, 52nd Luftwaffe Fighter Group (15/J.G.52), scoring 263 kills over Ukraine up to July 1944, when it returned to Croatia. Then it absorbed the Pilot Training School, which had been redesignated in December 1943 1st Air Force Legion Fighter Wing. The 5th Bomber Wing fought as 10th Squadron, later 15th Squadron, 53rd Luftwaffe Bomber Group (10-15/K.G.53) over Leningrad until repatriation in December 1942.

The Air-Force Parachute Company, formed January 1942, became 1st Parachute Battalion (1.Padobranska Lovačka Bojna), fighting Partisan
Members of the Ustasha V Brigade, 27 February 1943, wearing ex-Yugoslav greenish-grey greatcoats, German M1916 and ex-Yugoslav French M1915 helmets, and the black ‘Black Legion’ field-caps. (Croatian History Museum, Zagreb)

Below: A Croatian Naval Lieutenant leads a squad of sailors, Dubrovnik 1943. Note the title ‘Mornarica’ on the cap-tallis. (National and University Library, Zagreb)

in labour companies on military fortification and air-raid clean-up duties. In January 1945, they were absorbed into the 18th Croatian Assault Division.

State Reserve Units

In Summer 1944, older armed forces reservists were formed into the independent People’s Uprising Corps (Pučko Ustaški Sbor), with army or Ustasha officers, under Major-General Josip Metzger. There were four regiments – Vuka, Baranja, Posavje and Ličac-Zaprešić. The last joined the Camp Defensive Brigades in December 1944 as the 1st People’s Uprising Regiment. The other units were disbanded in March 1945.

The various Croatian armed forces established village militias in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The army’s Home Defence-Force Volunteers (Domča units) eventually comprised 21 battalions. The Ustahas organized the Ustasha Militia (Ustaška Milicija) and Ustasha Peasants’ Protection Force. The Gendarmerie had a 7,500-strong Moslem Militia (Militija). And the German Army formed the South Dalmatian Legion. From 1943, the UNS organized a Serbian militia, the Serbian Self-Protection units (Srpske Samozaštitne Postroje) in the Banija Region south of Zagreb.

There were also some semi-autonomous village militias, including the Husko Legion (Huska Legija). This comprised 3,000 men in 11 battalions in Western Bosnia under Husko Miljković. It was formed in Summer 1943, defecting to the Partisans in February 1944. Hadžiefendić’s Legion (Hadžiefendića Legija) operated in several detachments in North-Eastern Bosnia.
Police Units

The Croatian Gendarmerie (Hrvatsko Oružništvo) was formed on 30 April 1941 as rural police under Major-General Milan Miesler, then Major-General Tartaglia, and from August 1942 Ustasha Colonel Vilko Pećnikar. By September 1943, there were 18,000 men in seven regiments – 1 (Zagreb), 2 (Split), 3 (Banja Luka), 4 (Sarajevo), 5 (Mostar), 6 (Knin), 7 (Zemun). These were divided into 23 companies (one per county plus one for Zagreb). The companies were subdivided into 142 district platoons, each with several posts. In early 1942, a three-battalion Combined Gendarmerie Regiment, in July redesignated Petrinja Brigade, was established for anti-partisan operations in Slavonia.

The Croatian Urban Police (Redarstvena Straža) was established in April 1941 with 5,000 personnel covering the 142 Districts. It was controlled by the Ministry of Interior’s Public Order and Security Directorate (Rasigur) until June 1942, when the Police joined the Ustasha Army, transferring back in January 1943.

No German police regiments operated in Croatia, but on 10 March 1943 a German–Croatian Police (Deutsch-Kroatische Polizei) was established by SS–Police Major-General Konstantin Kammerhofer, manned by German Police, ethnic Germans and Croats, for internal security duties. It was deeply mistrusted by the Croatian authorities. By December 1944 there were 32,000 men in Police Volunteer Regiments 1–5 (with three battalions each) and independent Police Volunteer Regiments (Croatia) 1–15, twelve of which formed the Croatian Gendarmerie Division in 1945. German Einsatzgruppe E (Action Group E) of the SS Security Service, with battalion-sized Commands 1–5, and other units, were included. The German Police also supervised a village militia, the Ortswehr, in Bosnia.

Following the military co-operation agreement of 11 January 1942 between the Italian 2nd Army and Trifunović-Birčanin, the Italian Zones’ Chetnik Commander, most Chetniks, about 22,000 in all, joined the Italian Voluntary Anti-Communist Militia (MVAC), with Italian weapons and maroon-dyed uniforms. It was organized in battalions and companies and included some Croats and Moslems. Most Bosnian Chetniks in the German Zone signed one of

Above: A Croatian paratrooper corporal, already sporting the German infantry assault badge and two Croatian bravery medals, receives a third Medal, 1943. Note that the collar-patch rank wings are thinner and flatter than those in the German Air-Force. (Josip M. Novak)

Croatian paratroopers in 1943, showing a good range of uniforms and insignia. Note the parachute sleeve-badge. (Josip M. Novak)
three agreements with the Croatian authorities in May and June 1942. These 'legal' Chetniks fought the Partisans in the Third to Fifth Offensives, and in September 1943 reverted to their former 'illegal' status or joined the Germans.

The Croatian Forces, established to protect legitimate national aspirations for independence, were compromised by association with the Axis cause and an authoritarian Ustasha regime lacking widespread popular support. Their military defeat led to the Bleiburg massacres, and 46 more years of political discrimination until their independence was achieved again on 25 June 1991.

SERBIA

The German Military Command (Befehlshaber Serbien), established 25 April 1941, controlled four regimental-status Sub-Area Commands – Feldkommandantur 509 (based in Belgrade), 610 (Pančevo), 809 (Niš), 816 (Užice). Each had 1–3 battalion-status District Commands (Kreiskommandanturen) and a Landesschützen Garrison Battalion (562, 592, 920, 266 respectively, in 1941). On 13 August 1943, it was absorbed by South-East Military Command.

Serbian State Guard

Milan Aćimović's Serbian Administration, established 30 April 1941, was superseded on 29 August by General Milan Nedić's ‘Government of National Salvation’. On 10 February 1942 Nedić expanded the ex-Yugoslav Drinski and Dunavski Gendarmerie Regiments into a 17,000-strong static security force, the Serbian State Guard (Srpska Državna Straža), under Colonel Jovan Trišić, and later Major-General Borivoje Jonić. It was deployed as Municipal Police (Gradsku Stražu), Rural Police (Poljsku Stražu), Village Guard (Seljačku Stražu) and a 2,500-strong Frontier Guard (Srpska Granična Straža), organized in five regions (Belgrade, Kraljevo, Niš, Valjevo and Zaječar). Each region (oblast) had one battalion. Each region was divided into three districts. Each district (Okręg) had several companies. The Guard was royalist, pro-Chetnik and, despite desertions, initially performed creditably against the Partisans.

On 6 October 1944, 5,000 Guards, under Lieutenant-General Stefan Radovanović, joined the Chetniks in Bosnia as 1st Serbian Assault Corps (1. Srpski Udarne Korpus), with 1st and 2nd Assault, and 3rd Frontier Guard Divisions. The Germans sent 3,000 to Austria as Organization Todt workers. The remaining 2,000 joined the Chetnik Šumadija Division in Slovenia under Lieutenant-General Miodrag Damjanović in March 1945 and surrendered to the British in Southern Austria in May.

Serbian Volunteer Command

On 15 September 1941, the conservative politician Dimitrije Ljotić formed a Serbian Volunteer Command from Chetniks and his Zbor Movement activists. It had twelve 120–150-strong detachments. In January 1943, it became the 7,000-strong Serbian Volunteer Corps (Srpski Dobrovoljački Korpus) with five 500-man battalions, expanding in early 1944 to five 1,200-man regiments (1–5) and a 500-man Artillery Battalion, under German tactical command but reporting to General Nedić. The pro-Chetnik, royalist Corps was admired by the Germans for its effective performance in combat. In October 1944, it retreated to Slovenia where, on 9 November it became, nominally, a Waffen-SS unit. On 30 March 1945, it joined the Chetnik Šumadija Division. The three regiments surrendering to the British in Austria in May were sent back to Tito; two others surrendering in Italy remained in the West.

The Russian Defence Corps

On 12 September 1941, the Independent Russian Corps – redesignated the Russian Defence Corps on 2 October – was formed from Russian Imperial Army
veterans exiled to Serbia in 1921. Lieutenant-General Boris Alexandrovich Shteyfon took over command on 15 September 1941 and expanded the Corps to an 11,197-strong force in September 1944. It comprised one Cavalry Regiment – 1st Cossack Regiment Generala Zborovskogo – and four infantry regiments (2–5). The veterans were reinforced by younger emigrés and former Soviet POWs, and deployed by the Germans as factory guards. Later they fought against the Partisans. In September 1944, the Corps helped defend Belgrade against the advancing Soviet Army, before transferring to anti-Partisan duties in Bosnia. There, on 10 October, it became the Russian Corps in Serbia (Russkiy Korpus v Serbi). Colonel Anatoliy Ivanovich Rogozhin assumed command on 30 April 1945 and, in May, surrendered to the British, who allowed the pre-Soviet era emigrés to settle in the West.

Other Units
Nedić formed a Serbian labour service, the ‘Reconstruction Service’, claiming 16,000 members in 1942. In August 1941, Konstantin ‘Kosta’ Pećanac placed his 8,000 Chetnik troops under German command as ‘legalized Chetniks’, followed in November by 2,000 Mihailović Chetniks. In February 1943, the Germans dismissed them, but in November concluded new agreements with Mihailović’s 16,000 ‘loyal Chetniks’. Mihailović retreated in October 1944 to the Vučjak Mountain, Derventa, Northern Bosnia, with a 12,000-man force. It was destroyed by the Partisans near Kalinovik, Eastern Bosnia, in May 1945. Mihailović was captured near Višegrad in March 1946.

Banat military units were under German Police control. The 1,500-strong Banat State Guard (Banater Staatswache), nicknamed the Black Police, was commanded by Colonel Ernest Pelikan, reporting to Franz Reit, the Police Commissioner. It was formed in February 1942 as municipal and rural police. The Auxiliary Police (Hilfspolizei) was formed September 1941 as a mobile anti-partisan force for Serbia. It comprised ten Battalions (1–10), 5,800 men organized in June 1944 into Police Volunteer Regiment (Serbia) 1–3, in German Police uniforms. Decimated in October–November 1944, the survivors joined the German-Croatian Police in Croatia.

In April 1941, the 6,000-strong SS-style German Force (Deutsche Mannschaft) was formed for village security. Six battalions were raised. Each Battalion (Sturmbann) had four to seven companies (Sturm). The Force, under Lieutenant Michael Reiser and from spring 1942 Captain Hein, defended the Banat in October 1944, before withdrawing to Croatia.

**MONTENEGRO**

**Ground Forces**
Anti-Partisan forces in Montenegro comprised the Greens – separatists wishing to restore the pre-1918 Kingdom; Whites – Nationalists wanting union or federation with Serbia; and the Chetniks.

In August 1941, the Italians formed separatist Voluntary Anti-Communist Militia (MVAC) companies, superseded, in January 1942, by Krsto

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*Serbian Volunteer Corps marching to the front, 1944, wearing Italian helmets, uniforms and webbing. (Jan-Poul Petersen)*
Popović's Montenegrin Troops, renamed Katun Troops. In February 1942, Colonel Bajo Stanišić formed a nationalist National Army of Montenegro and Herzegovina in six battalions with some nationalist Chetnik battalions. Meanwhile, in October 1941, Mihailović appointed Major Djordjije Lašić as Montenegrin Chetnik Commander.

In July 1942, the Montenegrin National Troops were established as Italian auxiliaries, with the 1,700-strong separatist Lovčen Brigade, the 1,500-strong nationalist Zeta Flying Detachment, and 1,500 Chetniks in the Lim-Sandžak Flying Detachment, leaving the new Chetnik Commander, Blažo Djukanović, with 17,300 Chetniks and 5,000 nationalists.

Some 4,000 Chetniks and Nationalists fought at the Neretva in the Fourth Offensive in February 1943, but in June the Germans and Italians disbanded almost all anti-partisan units.

In September, the Germans succeeded the Italians in Montenegro, establishing Feldkommandantur 1040. In November, they formed the 2,000-strong nationalist-separatist National Militia. In December, Major Jovo Djukanović reformed the Chetnik-nationalist-separatist Montenegrin National Troops. 7,000 strong, it was badly mauled by thePartisans in March 1944.

In June 1944, Lieutenant-Colonel Pavle Djurišić, perhaps the finest Yugoslav Chetnik leader, became Montenegrin Chetnik Commander, with 7,000 Chetniks under his command. He formed the 2nd Serbian (Montenegrin) Volunteer Corps - 5,650 men in 6th, 7th and 8th Volunteer Regiments. From August to December 1944, the Chetnik Sanjak Commander, Major Vojislav Lukačević, operated a breakaway Independent National Resistance Group, which attacked German units.

On 6 December 1944, Djurišić retreated with Chetniks, the Volunteer Corps and Montenegrin National Troops to Eastern Bosnia. These reformed in January 1945 as the 10,000-strong Chetnik 8th Montenegrin Army, with 1st, 5th, 8th and 9th (Herzegovina) Divisions. This force was defeated by Croatian Ustasas near Banja Luka, and Djurišić was killed. The survivors formed a new separatist Montenegrin National Army, under Boško Agram. It reached Austria in May 1945, only to be handed back to the Partisans.

Police Units

Police duties were discharged from April 1941 by the ex-Yugoslav Zeta Gendarmerie Regiment, succeeded in July 1942 by the 3,000-strong National Gendarmerie. The Germans formed a Banat-German Police Volunteer Battalion Montenegro in June 1944, and a Police Volunteer Battalion Sanjak in July.

In Sanjak, the border region between Southwest Serbia and Northern Montenegro, the Italians formed a 3,000-strong anti-Partisan Moslem Militia, under Hoxha Patchariz, reformed in early 1944 as the Moslem Legion, under SS-Major Karl von Krempler.

BULGARIA AND MACEDONIA

Ground Units

In 1935, Bulgaria expanded its Armed Forces. By 1939, the Army (Bulgarska Voyska) had ten line infantry divisions (1-10), two Mobile (ex-Cavalry) Divisions (1-2) and a Mountain Brigade. There were also 24 Frontier Battalions, organized into regiments.

A 15,500-strong Infantry Division had three to four three-battalion infantry regiments, one three-battalion artillery regiment, a reconnaissance battalion (with one cyclist, one heavy machine-gun and two mounted companies), an anti-aircraft artillery battalion, a machine-gun battalion, an engineer battalion, a signals battalion, a labour battalion and logistical services. A Mobile Division had two mounted cavalry brigades, each with two five-squadron regiments, one two-battalion motorized infantry regiment, one artillery regiment (one motorized and one mounted battalion), an anti-aircraft artillery battery, a motorized engineer company, a signals company and logistical services. The Mountain Brigade was disbanded 1942 and reformed early 1943. It had two infantry regiments and a mountain artillery battalion.

The 1st Tank Company, formed in March 1935, became the Armoured Vehicle Battalion in April 1939 (with 1, 2 Tank Companies and a repair battalion). In early 1941, it became the Tank Group, with 1-4 Tank Companies. On 15 August 1941, it was
redesignated the Armoured Regiment and, on 1 October 1943, the Armoured Brigade. This had 4,226 men in an armoured regiment (with two armoured, one anti-tank and an anti-aircraft artillery battalion), a reconnaissance battalion with light tanks, a two-battalion motorized infantry regiment and an artillery regiment.

**Organization**

All divisions and brigades were grouped into four corps-sized Armies (I–IV Armiiya). The 1st Army (based in Sofia) guarded Western Bulgaria with 1 and 7 Infantry and 1 Mobile Division and the Mountain Brigade; the 2nd Army (Plovdiv) guarded Southern Bulgaria with 2, 8 and 10 Infantry Divisions; the 3rd Army (Varna) guarded Eastern Bulgaria with 3, 4 Infantry Divisions, 2 Mobile Division; and the 4th Army (Pleven) guarded Northern Bulgaria with 5, 6 and 9 Infantry Divisions.

Germany forced the cession of Southern Dobrudja by Rumania on 21 August 1940 under the Treaty of Craiova, and on 1 March 1941 Bulgaria confirmed its Axis status by signing the Tripartite Pact. King Boris III avoided committing troops to the invasions of Greece and Yugoslavia, claiming that all battleworthy divisions were in 3rd Army guarding the German flank against Turkey, but German 12th Army was permitted to use Bulgaria as a springboard to attack Greece and Yugoslavia on 6 April 1941.

In 1941, four line (12 and 14–16) and four reserve (11, 13, 17 and 21) divisions were formed, in early 1943 six reserve (22–27) were added and, later, two more reserve (28–9) divisions were formed. Only the 12th Infantry Division (3rd Army, Southern Dobrudja) was a true line division. The other fifteen, including the locally recruited 14–16 Divisions, were units raised during the war for occupation duties. They drew cadres from line divisions whose numbers they usually carried as duplicates (for example, 11 and 21 from 1st Infantry Division). Lacking a metropolitan recruiting district or continuous existence, they were usually understrength in men and equipment. The High Command retained the best line divisions in Bulgaria proper.

Army Chiefs of Staff were Lieutenant-General Gheorgi Popov (from 1938), Nikola Hadzhi-Petrov (from 1940) and Konstantin Lukash (from December 1941).

On 19 April 1941, Bulgaria occupied Macedonia and some districts of Eastern Serbia, which, with Western Thrace and Eastern Greek Macedonia (the Aegean Province), were annexed by Bulgaria on 14 May.

The 1st Army (1, 7, 9, 11, 13 and 16 Infantry Divisions) garrisoned the Aegean Province. Its policy of forcible ‘Bulgarianization’ drove the Greek puppet government in Athens to consider mass evacuation of Greeks to German-occupied territory. In
German Units
1: Gefreiter, German Army, Eastern Herzegovina, May 1943
2: SS-Hauptsturmführer, Dalmatia, September 1943
3: Paratrooper, Western Bosnia, May 1944
Italian Units
1: Colonnello titolare, Eastern Montenegro, 1942
2: Vicecaposquadra, Slovenia, August 1942
3: Sergente-Maggiore, Western Croatia, September 1941
Croatian Army Units
1: General Zagreb, Croatia, February 1943
2: Poručnik, Bosnia, January 1944
3: Bojnik, Zagreb, February 1945
1: Razvodnik, Tuzla, Bosnia, December 1941
2: Stužerni Narednik, Western Bosnia, June 1943
3: Domobran, Eastern Bosnia, December 1943
Croatian Naval/Artillery Units
1: Bojinik, Bosnia, October 1942
2: Narednik, Koprivnica, September 1943
3: Vodnik, Dubrovnik, February 1944
Ustasha Units
1: Dupukovnik, Croatia, 1942
2: Rojnik, Croatia, January 1944
3: Porucnik, Central Bosnia, March 1942
Bulgarian Units
1: Rotmistr, Macedonia, 1942
2: Podofitser, August 1943
3: Officer, Macedonia, 1943
Slovene Units
1: Nadporočnik, Slovenia, December 1943
2: Podnarednik, Slovenia, November 1944
3: Stražmojster, North-East Italy, May 1944
February 1942, the 1st Army transferred to Serbia, leaving 16th Infantry Division, bolstered by elements of 1st and 10th Infantry Divisions as an embryonic Aegean Command. In July 1943, the 7th Infantry Division was posted to Salonika under the German Salonika-Aegean Command. Later 2nd Corps (7, 26 and 28 Infantry Divisions) garrisoned Aegean Province against expected Allied landings, and in February 1944 it occupied Greek Western Macedonia.

The 5th Army, headquartered in Skopje, was formed to garrison Macedonia with the 14th Infantry Division in the North, the 15th in the South-West, the 4th Cavalry Brigade and later the 27th Infantry Division. The Macedonians had initially welcomed the Bulgarians as liberators from Serb oppression, but soon resented Bulgarian assimilation policies. Resulting partisan activity was ruthlessly suppressed and had virtually ceased until early 1943. Meanwhile the Italians, hoping to extend their Western Macedonina occupation zone into Bulgarian territory, in order to reach valuable mineral deposits, caused serious clashes between the Axis partners in August and October 1942.

On 15 January 1942 the 1st Army (7, 9 and 21 Infantry Divisions) transferred to South-East Serbia. Headquartered at Niš, under German Serbia Command, it replaced German divisions needed in Croatia and Russia. On 7 January 1943, it also occupied South-West Serbia. Savage pacification measures reduced Partisan activity appreciably. This allowed the 1st Army to return to Bulgaria in spring 1943, leaving 1st (Occupation) Corps, with five reserve divisions (22–5 and 27). On 31 July 1943, the corps garrisoned all of Serbia, with the exception of the North-West and Belgrade. From mid-1943, Partisan attacks intensified and in May 1943 the 23rd Infantry Division moved into Northern Montenegro, blocking the Partisan escape-route to Serbia during the Fifth Offensive. In December 1943, the 24th Infantry Division moved to Eastern Bosnia for the Sixth Offensive.

King Boris died suddenly on 28 August 1943, having avoided Bulgarian involvement on the East-ern Front. He had claimed his russophile troops would desert. He had also vetoed the 1942 German proposals for the formation of a Bulgarian SS-Legion, although a Regiment was established by emigrés in Germany in November 1944.

**Bulgaria joins the Allies**

On 10 September 1944, Bulgaria changed sides and declared war on Germany as an Allied Power. The Germans swiftly disarmed the 1st Occupation Corps, but 5th Army resisted tenaciously Operation Treibisch. Survivors of both armies retreated to Bulgaria, joining the new 450,000-strong Bulgarian National Armed Forces (Bulgarska Narodna Armiiya) under Lieutenant-General Ivan Marinov. On 8 October, the 1st and 4th Armies occupied Serb Macedonia with Partisan permission. The 2nd Army occupied South-Eastern Serbia. The 1st Army then swung north with the Soviet 3rd Ukrainian Front, through Eastern Yugoslavia and South-Western Hungary, and linked up with British 8th Army in Austria in May 1945. The 3rd Army remained on the Turkish frontier.

*Bulgarian troops handling machine-gun ammunition, 1942. Note that the rank insignia of the Corporal far right consists of two yellow shoulder-loops with central branch-colour stripes probably intended for fatigue uniforms.* (Varna Military Museum)
Air, Sea and Police Units

The Bulgarian Navy (Morski Voyski) had Black Sea, Danube and Aegean (headquartered in Kavala, Greek Macedonia) fleets; four coastal artillery regiments (two in Greece, at Kavala and Alexandropolis) and a 630-man Naval Infantry Battalion, formed 1942, on the Aegean islands of Thassos (with two companies) and Samothraki (one company).

The 5,000-strong Air Force (Vazdushni Voyski), under Major-General Airanov, had eight wings. Each wing (orlyak) had three or four squadrons. Deployed on Black Sea coastal patrols, they formed a defence against USAAF bombers from August 1943. From April 1944, they were used against Partisans in Serb Macedonia. And they supported the 1st Army from October 1944. The Parachute Battalion, formed early 1943, fought in Serb Macedonia under the 5th Army and with the 1st Army from October 1944.

The Military Police (Voenna Politsia) also functioned as Security Police. It had a fearsome reputation. By July 1944, each army had an MP Battalion (1–5) attached to it.

The National Police (Darjažna Politsia) under Director Hristo Dragalov, then from October 1942 Anton Kozarov, deployed 4,000 uniformed personnel in Serbia and Serb Macedonia in two regional, three municipal and 21 district commands. There were motorized units and at least one combat battalion, at Skopje.

From August 1941, the National Police controlled Anti-Partisan Units (Kontračete) in Serb Macedonia. These had about 2,000 men, recruited from the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (VRMO). The units – each Kontračeta comprised about 30 men – were dispersed across the twelve Macedonian district commands: Bitola, Gevgelija, Kačanik, Kavadarsi, Kočani, Kratovo, Prečevo, Prilep, Skopje, Skopska crna gora, and Veles. There were also Albanian units and units in Greek Macedonia, but virtually all were destroyed by Partisans in summer 1944.

Bulgaria also had a 24-battalion Labour Corps (Trudovi Voyski) under Colonel Konstantin Avramov, for Jews and Bulgarians not liable for military service. From January 1941 to September 1944, there was a 200,000-strong Brannik (‘Defender’) compulsory Youth Organization.

SLOVENIA

Ground Forces

In April and May 1941, Slovenia – Drava Province – was divided amongst the Axis belligerents. Western Slovenia was annexed by Italy as Lubiana (Ljubljana) Province and an extended Fiume (Rijeka) Province. Central Slovenia was incorporated into the German Reich – Carinthia (Kärnten) and Upper Carniola (Obkerain) joining Carinthia Province, Lower Styria (Untersteiermark) joining Styria. The Prekmurje District of Eastern Slovenia became Hungarian. There was also a substantial Slovene minority in the North-East Italian provinces of Gorizia and Trieste.

In April 1941, the Drava Governor, Dr Marko Natlačen of the Catholic Slovene People’s Party, formed a National Committee for an independent Slovenia, and his Slovene Legion (Slovenska Legija) began disarming defeated Yugoslav Army units. Independence denied, the Legion continued in Western Slovenia as Italian auxiliaries.

In March 1942, the outlawed Slovene political parties formed the Slovene National Alliance with the Slovene Legion, 10,000 former University Student Guards (Stražari) and High School Fighters (Borci), organizations of the pre-war ‘Catholic Action’ movement. These were joined by the Sokol Legion (Sokolska Legija) – 1,000 Liberals and Socialists in the ‘Sokol’ gymnastic organization – and the 1,000-strong National Legion (Narodna Legija) made up of smaller parties. These legions considered themselves part of Mihaïlovic’s Chetniks and in September 1942 were largely absorbed into Voluntary Anti-Communist Militia (MVAC), leaving three to four hundred men organized in early 1943 as four Chetnik detachments unofficially named the Blue Guard (Plava Garda), operating in Eastern Lubiana Province under Major Karlo Novak.

On 6 August 1942 the Italians formed the MVAC in Slovenia – a thousand men under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Ernest Peterlin. These had originally been Village Guards (Vaške Straže), formed in May 1942 as a village protection force widely known as the White Guard (Bela Garda). The MVAC companies formed bore the name of the locality. By December 1942, there were 4,500 guards in 41 companies with 71 posts. By July 1943, 6,000 in
Area’ (Adriatisches Küstenland) of North-East Italy. On 24 September the Governor, ex-Yugoslav army Lieutenant-General Leon Rupnik, formed the ‘Slovene Defence Legion’ (Slovenska Domobranska Legija) with three Battalions (1–3 bataljon) formed from 2,000 former MVAC troops. On 30 September, the Germans took it over as the Slovene Home Defence Force (Slovensko Domobranstvo) under German Police control, with Rupnik as nominal Commander-in-Chief and Colonel Franc Krener as tactical commander.

The Force comprised 63 infantry companies (1–7, 11–29, 31–48, 51–6, 61–3, 65–7, 71–2 and 111–5) – 43 as local garrisons, the others grouped into battalions. There were also engineers, signals, medical and labour companies, and four artillery batteries, with a fifth operating five armoured trains.

The battalions underwent many reorganizations. In October 1943, Battalions 1–5 were formed, with 4th Battalion as a Training Battalion. In December, compulsory military service was introduced. This brought the strength up to 10,500 men. The Battalions were reformed as seven combat groups (1–7 Bojna Skupina) and Training Groups 1 and 2.

On 25 February 1944, it reorganized again into four groups (Skupine) – the 1st Training Group (ex-1st Group); the 2nd Railway Security Group (ex-Groups 4 and 5); the 3rd Operational Group (ex-2, 6 and 7) including Assault Battalion Krix; and 4th Novo Mesto Protection Group.

On 16 May 1944 the Force, now 12,000 strong, was divided into four Operational Zones, each recruiting an Assault Battalion (Udarni bataljon). On 5 July 1944, these were designated N (Nord) – 1st Battalion; W (West) – 2nd Battalion; M (Mitte) – 3rd Battalion, disbanded March 1945; and O (Ost) – 4th Battalion. The 5th Battalion was formed in August 1944; the 6th in March 1945. In December 1944, as desertions increased, German 14th and 17th Police Regiments contributed a company to each battalion (except the 2nd) and German officers took command.

Finally, on 28 March 1945 the Battalions were renumbered: 1 remaining as 1; 2 became 5; 4 became 2; 5 became 6; 6 became 10. By this time there was also a 12th Battalion.

A State Security Service (Državna Varnostna Služba) was formed on 29 October 1943 by Lovco
Carniolan Slovenes also joined the Wehrmacht and some enlisted in its Selbstschutz platoons. At least seven were formed, operating from May–Autumn 1942 under German Gendarmerie command. From 2 November 1942 to 20 April 1943, some Village Guards units were operational, but the most effective anti-partisan units were the five mobile Anti-Guerilla units (Protibande) – ‘Martin’, ‘Ludvig’, ‘Filip’, ‘Stefan’ and ‘Lux’. These were formed in July–August 1942 from ex-Yugoslav Dravski Regiment Gendarmes, volunteers and Partisan deserters. From July 1942, Slovenes were liable for German military service. Slovenes in Eastern Slovenia were liable for Hungarian Army conscription.

On 9 January 1944, 1,000 Slovenes in Upper Carniola formed a Home Defence Force (Gorensko domobranstvo) as a local guard force on the Western Slovene model. By May 1945 there were 2,600 men in about 46 Posts and a mobile assault company, headquartered at Kranj. Nominally commanded by Slavko Krek, later Franc Erpič, it was under the Gestapo control of Sergeant Erich Dichtl. The Black Hand (Crna roka), formed early 1944, tracked down, tortured and killed about 1,000 Partisans and their civilian sympathizers.

German Police Regiments 13, 14, 25 and 28 served from February 1944 in Upper Carniola.

On 12 November 1943, Colonel Anton Kokalj formed the Slovene National Security Corps (Slovenski Narodni Varnostni Zbor or SNVZ) from Slovenes in three North-East Italian Provinces. There were few volunteers. Many Slovenes conscripted into the Italian Army had been taken prisoner in North Africa and had joined the Royal Yugoslav Forces in Egypt. As a result, compulsory military service was introduced, but the desertion rate was so high, that the SNVZ never exceeded 2,000 men.

A Headquarters Reserve at Trieste and 16 Rifle Companies were formed. These were divided into posts to guard individual villages. These Companies were organized into the following Groups (Skupine): Postojna (Trieste Province); Gorica (Gorizia Province); Ilirska Bistrica and Idria (Rijeka Province). On
24 October 1944, these were reorganized as 1st to 4th Battalions of the 1st Slovene Coast Assault Regiment, with the 1st to 16th Companies allotted sequentially. SS-Major Georg Michalsen took over command in February 1945 when Kokalj was killed in action, and was himself succeeded in April 1945 by Major Janko Debelják.

The SNVZ established three sub-units – the Urban Police (Policija), formed March 1944 and eventually comprising two security companies and five platoons; a Rural Police (Orožniški Zbor) formed February 1945; and the Reserve Defence Force (Resavna Deželna Bramba). This was formed in early 1945, under Major Šinkovec, to train SNVZ reservists.

On 3 May 1945, the Slovene National Alliance proclaimed Slovene independence, and on the 4th revived the Slovene National Army, which had been stillborn in July 1943. This time it had three Divisions – Ljubljanska (Slovene Home Defence Force), Gorenjska (Upper Carniola Home Defence Force) and Primorska (SNVZ). The commander was Major-General Krener. Most of Primorska surrendered to the British 8th Army near Gorizia on 3 May. On 7 May, Ljubljanska and Gorenjska retreated with the Germans and Croats into Southern Austria, only to be handed back to Tito’s concentration-camps and firing-squads.

**THE PLATES**

A1: Gefreiter, 738 Jägerregiment, 118 Jägerdivision, German Army, Eastern Herzegovina, May 1943

The M1943 tunic differed from the M1935, being brownish-grey rather than greenish-grey. It had a brownish-grey collar, shoulder-straps and arm-badge backings (rather than dark blue-green), squared off pocket-flaps and no pleats. And there were six (not five) front buttons. Since 25 April 1940, NCO collar and shoulder-strap braid, shoulder-loops (here for an NCO Candidate) and chevrons were in matt-grey artificial silk, not aluminium braid. The plain mouse-grey silk collar-patches were introduced 9 May 1940. Special Jäger distinctions were adopted 2 October 1942. These comprised Mountain Troops’ light-green branch-colour and peaked field-cap; oak-leaf cap-badge (here with unofficial branch-colour backing for Austrian units); and right arm-badge. This Lance-Corporal wears the Iron Cross 2nd Class ribbon, Signaller’s arm-badge, and black wound-badge, signifying one or two wounds.


This Captain wears the M1938 SS version of the Army M1935 black AFV uniform, distinguished by a straighter-cut front flap and shallower collar, but has omitted the usual officer’s aluminium cord collarpiping. Against regulations he wears the M1938 NCO’s field cap often favoured by officers. Rank is on Army shoulder-boards with ‘Panzer pink’ and ‘SS-black’ underlays, and the left collar-patch. ‘Prinz Eugen’ affiliation is indicated by the Odal Rune on the right collar-patch (theoretically SS runes were not permitted to the ethnic Germans), cuff-title and Mountain-Troops’ arm-badge – the only German Armoured unit so entitled. Breast decorations comprise (clockwise) the Iron Cross 1st Class, a bronze commemoration badge for six months Einsatzstaffel service, runes indicating full SS membership and the M1939 tank battle badge. The unofficial Croatian armshield indicates past ‘Einsatzstaffel’ service.
A3: Paratrooper, SS-Fallschirmjägerbataillon 500, Waffen-SS, Drvar, Western Bosnia, May 1944

A member of the sole Waffen-SS parachute unit, this trooper wears Air-Force equipment – the M1937 paratrooper’s helmet with Air-Force eagle decal, the M1941 camouflage smock still showing the Air Force breast eagle and Air-Force parachute webbing. His SS membership is only revealed by the peakless field-cap for NCOs and Men (officers had aluminium wire badges and flap-piping) introduced November 1940.

B1: Colonello titolare, 83 Infantry Regiment, 19 Infantry Division ‘Venezia’, Italian Army, Eastern Montenegro, 1942

The grey-green officers’ field uniform, introduced 5 June 1940, adapted the M1934 uniform by substituting a plain collar (instead of coloured) and plain shoulder-straps (instead of pipings, braids and branch-badge). Branch-colour collar and cuff pipings were also omitted, only breeches piping remaining. Cuff rank-bars were of yellow rayon, and longer. The M1942 peaked field-cap had a yellow infantry branch-badge, with regimental number, and the cloth rank-rectangle with yellow stars and braid. The smaller collar-patches indicate the division, as does the ‘St. Mark of Venice’ tradition breast-badge, introduced 6 November 1940. This replaced the divisional arm-shield, which was abolished July 1940. The Colonel’s position as Regimental Commander (titolare) is indicated by scarlet underlay on cap and cuff insignia.

B2: Vicecapsosquadra, 81 ‘M’ Blackshirt Battalion, Italian Blackshirt Militia, 21 Infantry Division ‘Granatieri di Sardegna’, Novo Mesto, Slovenia, August 1942

MVSN troops wore the standard Army M1934 grey-green Other Ranks field uniform (also recommended for officers) with the Bersaglieri undress fez in black, or the M1933 helmet; black tie; and M1939 arm- chevrons, modified 1940, silver for Junior NCOs and red for Privates. This Senior Lance-Corporal wears the black collar-patches (derived from Aridit assault troops in the First World War) with silver fasces and ‘M’ monogram, introduced 1941. He also wears M1934 webbing and the traditional Blackshirt dagger.

B3: Sergente-Maggiore, Motorcyclist Company, 11 Bersaglieri Regiment, 1 Mobile Division ‘Eugenio di Savoia’, Italian Army, Karlovac, Western Croatia, September 1941

The elite Bersaglieri, originally light infantry, then cyclist, motorcycle and lorried infantry, had worn the traditional dark-green cockerel feathers on headdress since 1936. Here they appear on the M1933 steel helmet. This soldier wears the black ‘Motorcycle’ helmet decal stencil, introduced in 1937 for members of Corps motorcycle companies. The greatcoat has no insignia, except the metal collar ‘activity star’, worn by all Italian Armed Forces personnel. Gold was worn by generals; silver metal by other officers; and aluminium by NCOs and men. Sleeve rank chevrons were introduced on 4 October 1939. They were gold for junior NCOs and red for privates. From 5 June 1940, they were in plain yellow or red rayon. Note the M91 Moschetto carbine.

C1: General, Croatian Army, Zagreb, Croatia, February 1943

Croatian Army uniforms, introduced 24 May 1941, show German influence. The officers’ greenish-grey service tunic had a dark-brown collar with gold buttons for generals and greenish-grey buttons for other officers. They had a pattern of ornamental ‘troperlet’ edging and a trefoil. The peaked-cap had a dark-brown band and branch-colour piping. The 1st Pattern cap-badges, worn May 1941 to November 1942, were a gold ‘NHD’ in an oval, above a tricolour cockade in a gold or silver wreath. Generals had a double gold knotted chin-cord. Field-Officers had the same in silver. Captains and Subalterns had a (gold—Generals). Collar patch cloth: scarlet—Generals; scarlet, black, velvet inset – General Staff; light-red – Infantry, Mtn. Infantry, Railway Security; grass-green – Riflemen; dark-yellow – Cavalry; black (until Nov. 1943) – armour; bright-red – Artillery; dark-green – Eng./Signals; light-beige – Medical Officers; dark-brown – Medical orderlies. (13, 17) – braids worn May 1941–March 1942, (14, 16, 18) – worn March 1942–January 1945.
THE CROATIAN ARMY (KOPNENA VOJSKA/DOMOBRANSTVO)
24 MAY 1941–12 JANUARY 1945

1. DOMOBREN (Privato)
2. DESETNIK (Lance-Corporal—Engineers)
3. RAZVODNIK (Corporal—Signals)
4. VODNIK (Lance-Sergeant—Railway Security)
5. NAREDNIK (Sergeant—Armour)
6. STOŽERNI NAREDNIK (Warrant Officer II—Medical Corps)
7. June 1941 ČASTNIČKI NAMJESTNIK (Warrant Officer I)
8. Sept 1941 ZASTAVNIK (Junior 2nd Lieutenant)
9. PORUČNIK (2nd Lieutenant—Band)
10. NADPORUČNIK (Lieutenant)
11. SATNIK (Captain)
12. Sept 1941 NADSATNIK (Senior Captain)
13. BOJNIK (Major)
14. PODPUKOVNIK (Lieutenant-Colonel)
15. PUKOVNIK (Colonel—General Staff)
16. GENERAL (Major-General)
17. PODMARŠAL Aug 1942 GENERAL-PORUČNIK (Lieutenant-General)
18. GENERAL PJEŠAŠTVA, TOPNISTA, KONJANISTVA (General of Infantry, Artillery, Cavalry)
19. VOJSKOVODJA (Field-Marshall)
silver patch-piping and collar-piping. And generals had a gold patch and gold collar-piping. The black AFV helmet had a national shield on the right side. The peakless field-cap had a gilt ‘NDH’ in an oval, from November 1942 a bronze or aluminium ‘NDH’ in an oval.

**C3: Bojnik, Croatian Infantry, Zagreb, February 1945**

The January 1945 combined Army and Ustasha uniform comprised a modified German M1943 greenish-grey tunic with gold/silver plain or patterned buttons. Trefoils on intricately plaited shoulder-boards indicated officer rank, flat shoulder-boards NCO rank, and arm-chevrons privates. Branch-colour collar-patches had army, Ustasha or PTS badges. The peaked-cap had dark-red piping and dark-brown cap-band, with an ‘AP’ (Ante Pacelić) above oval Ustasha or army badges for officers. NCOs and men had ‘AP’ above ‘U’ and chequerboard or ‘U’ and grenade respectively. This insignia was also worn on the army peaked or Ustasha peakless field-cap. On the peaked-cap, generals had gold knotted cap-cords, field-officers dark-red and silver, captains and subalterns dark-red, senior NCOs black leather. Note the M1944 officers’ sabre and the ‘Armed-Forces’ badges on the right breast – ‘U’ and chequerboard on the tricolour flag, equivalent to the German breast-eagle. Personnel of the 1, 5 and 18 Assault Divisions wore ‘H’, large Ustasha ‘U’ and ‘D’ on a tricolour flag on the left breast. Wartime shortages necessitated limited issue of this uniform so most troops retained the 1941 version.

**C2: Poručnik, Croatian Army Armoured Units, Bosnia, January 1944**

From November 1943, AFV personnel wore an Air-Force style uniform and cap in black (grey in summer) with Air-Force shoulder-boards (see plates E1 and E2) with red piping and black underlay. Privates wore a silver tank on a black collar-patch with 2mm red patch piping. NCOs added 0.8cm silver collar braid (like Air-Force NCOs). Officers had 2mm braid spirals. Senior Capt. wore Capt.’s insignia shown (August 1942–44; otherwise Capt.’s insignia. ‘Zbornik’ (Lt.Gen.), ‘Vojkovodja’ (Gen.), ‘Ratovojda’ (Field Marshal) existed 1 April, 1941–21 June 1941, but no insignia prescribed, and no officer held the rank.
on branch-colour collar-patches. Engineers, Signals, Railway Security, Medical Corps personnel and Bandsmen added special badges. Other ex-Yugoslav badges were worn unofficially. No unit badges or numerals were worn. Moslems wore a scarlet fez. Other troops wore the M1941 peaked field-cap, with the 1st pattern cap-badge – a gold ‘NDH’ in an oval – or 2nd pattern – a bronze or aluminium ‘NDH’ in an oval. Moslem personnel were represented throughout the armed forces but to forestall Moslem nationalism, they were not concentrated in separate units. Only the 1st–4th, 6th and 9th Infantry Regiments had significant proportions of Moslems.

**D2: Stožerni Narednik, Croatian Artillery, Western Bosnia, June 1943**

The greenish-grey M1941 field tunic, with a dark-green collar (dark-brown for generals) and dark-green shoulder-strap for NCOs and men, with plain greenish-grey buttons, was similar to the German Army M1935, but had distinctive pocket-pleats. As a veteran of the Croatian Legion 1941–2, this senior NCO wears a linen–leaf badge on the left side of the field-cap, although wearing it on the left breast-pocket was more normal. Members of Mountain Brigades wore Roman numerals I–IV between two Edelweiss flowers on the left side of the cap. From 1944, the German army M1943 uniform was issued. Ethnic German troops wore a white-wreathed swastika badge on the upper left sleeve. Gendarmerie wore dark-red collar-patches (lowest rank was Oružnik, equivalent to Razvodnik) and special gold, silver or grey aiguillettes. New dark-brown uniforms and rank insignia were introduced in 1944.

**D3: Domobran, 7 Rifle Regt, 4 Rifle Brigade, Croatian Army, Eastern Bosnia, December 1943**

Initially Croats wore ex-Yugoslav greenish-grey greatcoats, but the Croatian greenish-grey version was issued from mid-1941. Generals had a dark-brown collar with scarlet spearhead collar-patches with a gold patterned button, and scarlet collar, cuff, pocket-flap and front edge piping. Officers wore the dark-brown service-dress and dark-green field-uniform collars with greenish-grey patterned buttons on branch-colour patches, and branch-colour pipings. NCOs and men had dark-green collars and shoulder-strap, branch-colour collar-patches without buttons, cuffs or pipings. There was no specific rank insignia. Rifle Brigade personnel wore an Edelweiss on a black triangle piped silver on the left upper sleeve. German M1935 and Italian M1933 helmets were worn; also ex-Yugoslav French M1915 ‘Adrian’ and Czech M1934 models.

**E1: Bojnik, Croatian Air Force, Bosnia, October 1942**

The grey-blue officer’s uniform had rank on German Air-Force-style branch-coloured collar-patches piped silver (gold for generals), a peakless field-cap or peaked service-cap with a silver ‘NDH’ in an oval over a silver eagle and half-wreath. Generals had double gold knotted peaked-cap chin-cords. Field-officers wore silver. Captains and subalterns had two intertwined plain silver cords. The Air-Force badge was worn above the right breast-pocket.

In November 1941, German-style shoulder-boards on branch-colour underlay were added. Field-Marshall Kvaternik wore collar-patch with gold eagle, wreath and chequerboard shield, gold-silver-gold knotted shoulder braids and crossed silver batons. General-Officers had 3–1 gold wings and wreath with 3–1 gold trefoils on gold-silver-gold knotted shoulder-braids. Field-Officers had 3–1 silver wings and wreath with 3–1 gold trefoils on silver knotted braids. Captains and subalterns had 3–0 silver wings above half-wreath with 4–0 gold trefoils on silver flat braids. A senior captain had captain’s collar insignia in gold. In November 1942, peaked-caps had a silver ‘U’ in a patterned square above a silver eagle above a wreathed ‘NDH’ in an oval. Field-cap insignia was as before. In December 1944, peaked-caps had a tricolour cockade with ‘AP’ monogram above a grey-green strap. Ptes. (9–11) – dark-red chevron and white metal trefoil on upper sleeves. Jnr. NCOs (12–13) grey-green strap with dark-red edging and white metal trefoils. Sr. NCOs (14–16) yellow braided edging. Officers wore grey-green uniform straps with dark-red braid and silver (Sr. Capt. gold) metal trefoils (17–21), silver-dark-red braids, gold trefoils (22–4), gold braids, silver trefoils (25–7).
THE CROATIAN ARMED FORCES (HRVATSKOE ORUŽANE SNAGE)
13 JANUARY 1945–15 MAY 1945

1. Ustasha and PTS NCOs and men
2. Army NCOs and men
3. Ustasha and PTS officers
4. Army officers
5. PTS officers
6. Ustasha officers
7. Army officers
8. VOJNIK (Army)/VOJNIČAR (PTS & Ustasha) (Private)
9. Privates & Lance-Corporals
10. STRIELAC (Senior Private)
11. DOROJNIK (Lance-Corporal)
12. ROJNIK (Corporal)
13. VODNIK (Lance-Sergeant)
14. STRAŽNIK (Sergeant)
15. STOŽERNI STRAŽNIK (Warrant Officer II)
16. ČASTNIČKI NAMJESTNIK (Warrant Officer I)
17. ZASTAVNIK (Junior 2nd Lieutenant)
18. PORUČNIK (2nd Lieutenant)
19. NADPORUČNIK (Lieutenant)
20. SATNIK (Captain)
21. NADSATNIK (Senior Captain)
22. BOJNIK (Major)
23. DOPUKOVNIK (Lieutenant-Colonel)
24. PUKOVNIK (Colonel)
25. GENERAL (Major-General)
26. GENERAL-PORUČNIK (Lieut.-General)
27. GENERAL-PUKOVNIK (General)
THE BULGARIAN ARMY (BULGARSKA VOYSKA)
1941–1945

1. REDNIK (Private)
2. EFREYTOR (Lance-Corporal)
3. KANDIDAT (Corporal)
4. PODOFITSER (Sergeant)
5. FELDFEBEL (Warrant Officer)
6. OFITSERSKI KANDIDAT (Junior 2nd Lieutenant)
7. PODPORUCHIK (2nd Lieutenant) (Signals)
8. PORUCHIK (Lieutenant) (Cavalry)
9. KAPIKANT (ROTMIESTER – Cav.) (Captain – Medical Corps)
10. MAYOR (Major)
11. PODPOLKOVNIK (Lieutenant-Colonel)
12. POLKOVNIK (Colonel)
13. GENERAL-MAYOR (Major-General) (Air Force)
14. GENERAL-LEYTENANT (Lieutenant-General)
15. GENERAL (General)
16. MARSHAL NA BULGARIA (Field-Marshal)
17. Generals (13–16)
18. Officers (7–12)
19. Junior 2nd Lieutenant (6)
20. NCOs (4–5)
21. Privates (1–3)
silver winged chequerboard. On field-caps, there was the winged chequerboard only. Finally in March 1945, army shoulder-strap were prescribed (see C3).

The branch-colours were: light-blue – flying and parachute troops; light-red – anti-aircraft artillery; dark-red – technical; brown – medical; and light-grey – auxiliaries. Pilots and radio-operators wore a German-style wreathed silver eagle badge on the left breast-pocket.

The National Guard wore a grey uniform with black facings, and air-force collar-patches with trefoils instead of wings.

E2: Narešnik, 1st Parachute Company, Croatian Air Force, Koprivnica, September 1943
In May 1941, NCOs and men wore a grey-blue tunic with silver wings and brass on branch-colour collar-patches with a silver ‘NDH’ in oval on the peakless field-cap. From November 1941, they also wore German-style shoulder-strap with branch-colour piping and silver insignia. Senior NCOs and sergeants had 3-1 wings on the collar-patch with 0.8cm silver collar-braid, with 3-1 trefoils on the strap with silver braid encircling the strap. Lance-sergeants and privates had 3-0 wings – lance-sergeant had braid around strap edge, privates plain straps. In November 1942, silver ‘NDH’ in an oval appeared on the field-cap.

From 1942-3, paratroops wore ex-Yugoslav greenish-grey uniforms with army collar-insignia and a silver metal parachute on the left upper arm, and a wreathed diving eagle on the left breast-pocket. In 1943, camouflage field uniforms were introduced. As a company sergeant major (Stegovni Đućastnik), this NCO wears German-style double cuff braids.

E3: Vodnik, South Adriatic Command, Croatian Navy, Dubrovnik, February 1944
In April 1941, Royal Yugoslav uniforms and rank insignia were worn. Officers adopted a tricolour cockade above a gold ‘NDH’ on a wreathed anchor cap-badge. NCOs wore an anchor in an oval. Seaman had a gold ‘NHD’. From November 1942, the ‘NDH’ appeared in an oval. In July 1941, new rank insignia appeared, with officers wearing a gold trefoil above rank rings. And in January 1944, all ranks adopted Croatian air-force-style shoulder-boards on navy-blue backing. Finally in December 1944, the officer’s cockade was replaced by a ‘U’ on a chequerboard badge with ‘wavy wings’, also worn on the seaman’s cap. Seamen also wore a navy-blue beret.

F1: Dopukovnik, Croatian Ustasha Army, Croatia, 1942
In May 1941, Ustasha troops adopted greenish-grey tunics and trousers or breeches with a distinctive peakless field-cap with an aluminium grenade and chequerboard within a ‘U’, and the pre-war tricolour rectangular collar patches changed to red with an aluminium ‘U’ and grenade. In December 1941, a yellowish-brown uniform was adopted, with a peaked-cap with a tricolour cockade with the ‘AP’ monogram (which was now added to the field-cap) above a wreathed ‘U’ and grenade in an oval. Officers wore red braid rank spirals and bars on both cuffs and the left side of the field-cap, NCOs and Men insignia on both upper sleeves only. Ex-Yugoslav Army, Croatian Army M1941, German Army M1943 and Italian M1940 uniforms were also worn, and occasionally locally produced versions.

In January 1945, the combined Army-Ustasha uniform was introduced, Ustasha officers retaining their cuff rank-insignia. Officers commanding Divisions or Corps were given dual army and Ustasha rank to compensate for the lack of Ustasha active General-Officer ranks – for example, General-porucnik i Ustaški Pukovnik.

F2: Rojnik, 2 Regiment, Poglavnik Bodyguard Brigade, Zagorje, Croatia, January 1944
The PTB wore standard Ustasha tricolour collar-patches, adding a large aluminium ‘U’ and grenade in June 1941. In February 1942 they adopted pent
angular patches with small badges for officers or large badges for NCOs and men. In May 1942, the PTS changed to a red metal pentangular patch, but old ‘PTB Hands’ kept their tricolour patches until May 1945.

In mid-1944, a red metal collar-patch with a ‘U’ in a patterned square was adopted for German M1943 uniforms. In December a new grey-blue uniform was introduced, with special shoulder-strap rank insignia. The design is unknown. PTS armoured personnel wore a black uniform with a tank-badges above the left breast-pocket. Note the Zbrojkomka machine-gun.

**F3: Poručnik, 1 Battalion, Black Legion, Croatian Ustasha Army, Han Pijesak, Central Bosnia, March 1942**

Black Legion troops wore standard Ustasha insignia on a black tunic and field-cap, which they adopted January 1942. On their disbandment in August 1942, some men joined II Communications Brigade, but most retained their black uniforms and joined V Ustasha Active Service Brigade, which continued the name ‘Black Legion’ until May 1945.

**G1: Rotmistr, 2 Cavalry Regiment, 4 Cavalry Brigade, Bulgarian 5 Army, Macedonia, 1942**

Bulgarian officers wore the M1935 grey-green tunic, breeches and greatcoat, with dark-green collars, and peaked caps. Branch-colours were shown on the cap-band and cap-piping, underlays to the German-style tunic collar-patches and the Russian-style overcoat collar-patches, breeches stripes, greatcoat cuff and collar-pippings, and shoulder-board pipings. The buttons carried a branch-badge. Labour Corps officers had special tunic collar-patches. Regimental monograms and numerals were omitted in wartime, and officers could wear field shoulder-boards of grey-green cloth, but branch-badges were retained. General-officers, regimental commanders and general-staff officers wore a double breeches-stripe. The distinctive M1936 helmet, with a national shield on the right side, replaced the German M1916, which was still encountered in reserve units. This Cavalry Officer, easily identifiable from his silver shoulder-boards, white pipings and cavalry-boots, carries a German M1908 9mm Parabellum pistol.

**G2: Podofitser, 63 Infantry Regiment, 22 Infantry Division, 1 Occupation Corps, Bulgarian Army, Niš, August 1943**

Bulgarian NCOs and men wore a tobacco-brown tunic and trousers, with a peaked service-cap with branch-colour cap-band and Russian-style cockade in white, green and red with gold Bulgarian lion, or peakless field-cap. The pre-war branch-colour shoulder-straps, with yellow/white unit numerals or monogram, were replaced by plain straps piped in branch-colour, and collar-patches lost their button. NCOs added gold/silver shoulder-strap and collar-braids. The field-cap (grey-green for officers) had a gilt Bulgarian lion on the front and tricolour national shield on the right side, and officers added rank-class braid stripes. Generals had one thick gold stripe. Field-officers had one thin one and one medium one in silver. Captains and subalterns had one single thin silver stripe. Armoured Corps wore the German black double-breasted tunic with a red collar-patch piped yellow and a silver skull and crossbones for officers and NCOs, black peaked field-cap and long trousers tucked into ankle-boots. Motorized Infantry wore a grey-green version. Labour Corps wore a black ‘T’ on an oval – striped horizontally white, green and red – on the left upper arm.

*Croatian labour service troops in summer 1942 wearing German-style insignia, introduced 30 July 1941, replaced in 1942 by coloured shoulder-strap bars, with new German RAD-style insignia adopted on 20 July 1944. (National and University Library, Zagreb)*
G3: Officer, Parachute Battalion, Bulgarian Air Force, Macedonia, 1943
The Battalion wore Italian camouflage field-smocks over grey-blue field tunics and trousers. The field-cap had the silver metal air-force winged cockade, a national shield on the right side and silver rank-class braid. This officer carries the MP38 German Schmeisser sub-machine-gun and magazine pouches. The M1938 Air-Force uniform was grey-blue, with light-blue collar-patches and pipings and silver braid.

H1: Nadporočnik, 3 Assault Battalion, Slovene Home Defence Force, Ljubljana, Slovenia, August 1944
Officers wore a light grey-green tunic and breeches or trousers with riding-boots or ankle-boots. The Force badge, on the left upper arm, was a dark-blue eagle on a white shield edged dark-blue. General-officers (Divizijski General and Brigradni General) had 1-0 silver pips on German gold-silver-gold plated shoulder-boards with red underlay piped in gold wire. Field-Officers (Polkovnik, Podpolkovnik and Major) had 3-1 silver pips on flat gold braid shoulder-boards piped red. Captains and subalterns and warrant officer IIs (Stotnik, Nadporočnik, Poročnik and Štabni Narednik) had 3-0 gold pips on flat silver braid boards piped red. There was no branch insignia. The peakless field-cap had the Slovene tricolour cockade, adding a white eagle to it in mid-1944.

The grey-green peaked cap had a silver eagle with outstretched wings. AFV crews had black overalls.

H2: Podnarednik, 2 Assault Battalion, Slovene Home Defence Force, Rakek, Slovenia, November 1944
NCOs and men wore a light grey-green tunic with peakless field-cap with tricolour cockade, or the Italian M1933 helmet with a national shield on the left side. NCOs (Višji Narednik, Narednik, Podnarednik and Kaplar) wore dark-green shoulder-boards completely edged in silver braid and 3-0 silver bars. Privates (Domobranci) had a plain strap. Roman battalion numerals were sometimes worn on the shoulder-boards and straps.

The Upper Carniola Home Defence Force regulations of 4 December 1944 prescribed German SIPO uniforms with an M1943 field-cap with a German eagle on the right side. The arm-badge was a dark-blue eagle on a red (left) and white (right) shield edged dark-blue. On the right cuff, 10cm wide braids indicated rank. Officers (Poveljnik Centra Gorenjskega Domobranstva, Narednik and Namestnik Načelnika) had 3-1 gold bars. NCOs (Poveljnik Postojanske, Vodnik and Desetar) 3-1 silver bars. The Assault Company (Udarna četa) wore a silver skull on the left collar.

H3: Stražmojster, 8 Company, Postojna Group, Slovene National Security Corps, Postojna, North-East Italy, May 1944
The SNVZ wore Italian uniforms, Slovene Home Defence Force cap-cockades and helmet decals. They also sometimes wore Italian camouflage field-uniforms. The Force arm-badge was a red Illyrian galley on a white (upper) and waved dark-blue (lower) shield, piped dark-blue. Rank insignia and officers’ rank titles (highest rank Polkovnik) were as the Home Defence Force, but NCOs and Men initially adopted translations of German Police titles — Glavni Stražmojster, Stražmojster Vodnik, Nadstražmojster, Stražmojster, Krdehi stražmojster, Podstražmojster (July 1944, Nadstražar), Pripravnik (July 1944, Stražar). They adopted Home Defence Force titles in October 1944 (Nadstražar and Stražar became Stražar – Private).
Farbtalen
The uniforms, equipment, history and organisation of the world's military forces, past and present.

Axis Forces in Yugoslavia 1941–45

On 6 April, the German 2nd and 12th Armies, Italian 2nd and 9th Armies, and the Hungarian 4th, 5th and Mobile Corps invaded Yugoslavia. Few of the Royal Yugoslav Army's 30 divisions actively resisted, and after 11 days the Yugoslav High Command surrendered. In Croatia, a puppet state was installed. Axis forces quickly occupied the principal towns and patrolled the main road and rail links, but in the villages, countryside and mountains a vicious and complex guerrilla war was brewing. This title takes a close look at the German, Italian, Croatian, Serbian, Montenegrin, Bulgarian, Macedonian, and Slovenian units that fought for the Axis powers in Yugoslavia.