

Degenerate

Trash History for the Gentle Reader • \$3.00





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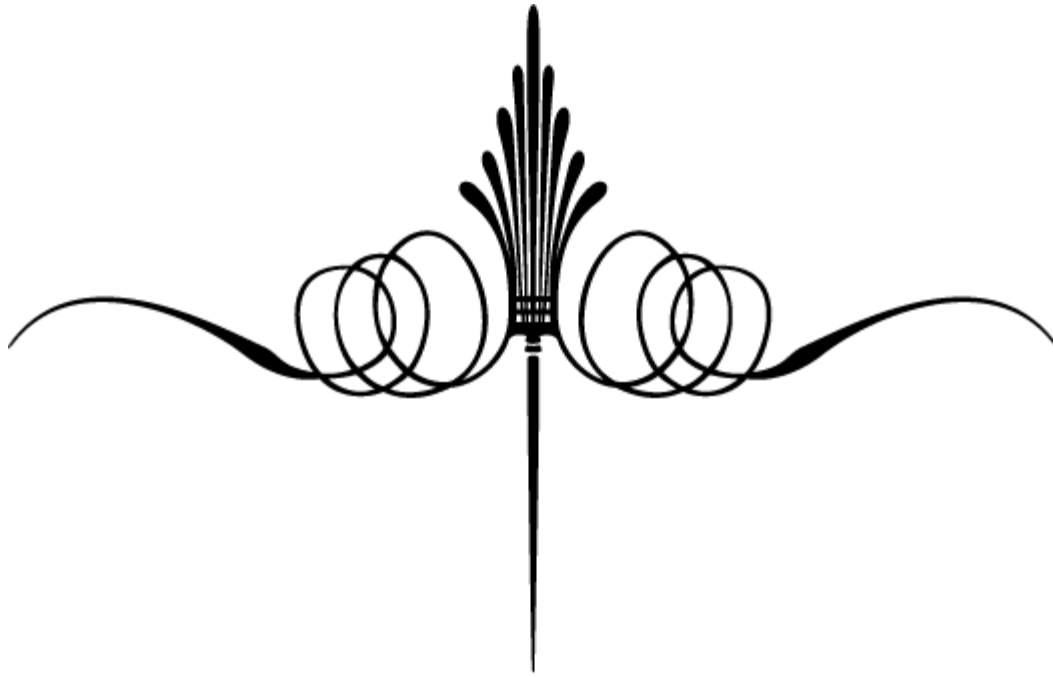
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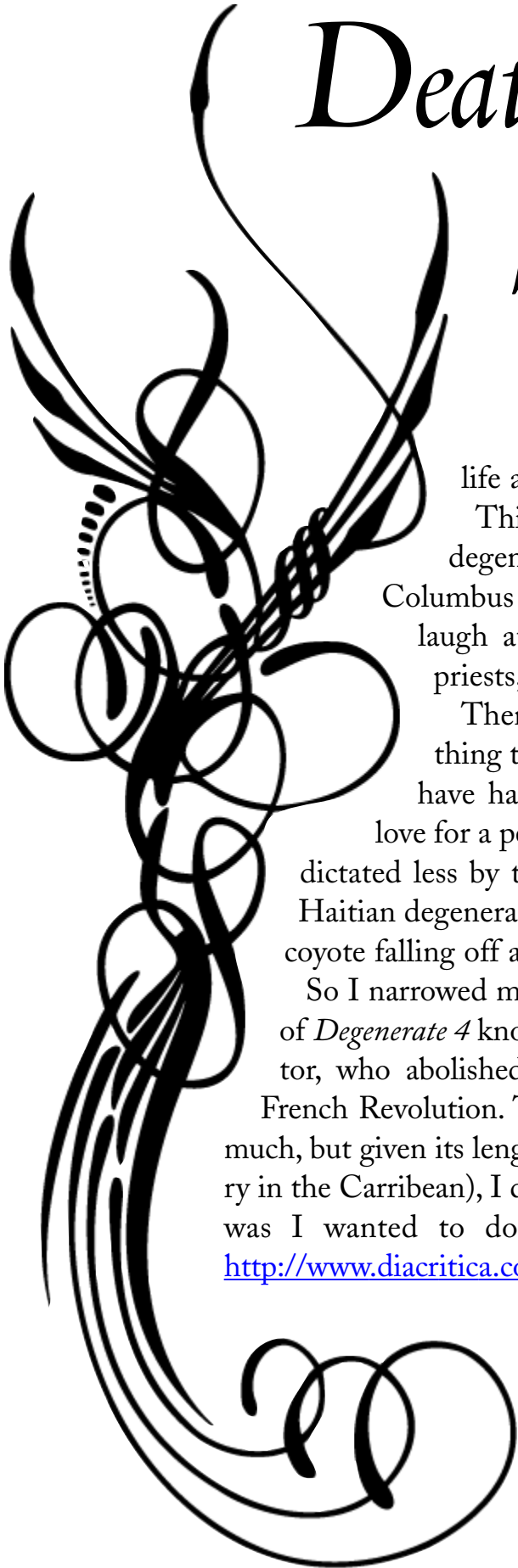
This is the third time I have attempted to write an introductory text for *Degenerate 5*. For some reason, it has never been more difficult to find a few simple words to encapsulate all that has occurred, both in my life and in the world, since the last issue appeared.

This issue, the reader may recall, was intended to be a study of degeneracy on the island of Hispaniola, from the arrival of Columbus to the departure of Baby Doc Duvalier. We'd have a good laugh at self-proclaimed emperors, voodoo priests and Catholic priests, discoverers and conquerors and, most of all, destroyers.

Then I made a trip to Haiti, which was quite possibly the best thing that could have happened for me—and the worst that could have happened to *Degenerate 5*. I fell in love—a deep passionate love for a people, a marvelous landscape, and a way of life which seems dictated less by the former than the latter. My notes for a grand study of Haitian degeneracy shriveled away to insignificance. It's hard to laugh at the coyote falling off a cliff after you've shared a dirty jar of *clarin* with him.

So I narrowed my focus—always a challenge, as readers of the two volumes of *Degenerate 4* know—to a man named Sonthonax, the world's first race traitor, who abolished slavery in Haiti while on assignment there during the French Revolution. This article may still appear, so I don't want to bitch it too much, but given its length and scope (covering more than 200 years of social history in the Caribbean), I decided to put it on hold until I could figure out just what it was I wanted to do with it. For now, it's on the *Degenerate* website at <http://www.diacritica.com/degenerate/>.

So it comes to this. I'm not sure what brought me to consider Ante Pavelic as a subject for *Degenerate*—nor what took me so long to write about him. He was the leader of the ephemeral Independent State of Croatia, created in the wake of Nazi aggression in World War II. His rule was so violent and so exceptionally brutal that





Pavelic became a personification for evil to everyone touched by his presence, including several high-ranking Nazis. Pavelic's Italian allies—patrons during his fugitive exile before the war—were forced to aid and protect his enemies, not out of the goodness of Mussolini's heart but from a reflexive instinct of outraged humanity.

Unlike most high-ranking Nazis and their chief quislings (including the man who gave the gaggle of lackeys their name, Scandanavian collaborator Vidkun Quisling), Ante Pavelic eluded justice after the war, becoming the world's most wanted—yet least pursued—war criminal. There is an obvious echo with current events, with the horrible carnage of September 11th, 2001 in New York City and the alleged mastermind behind it.

Nevertheless, I felt the need to divorce the narrative from present realities. If you've missed an issue of Diacritica Press' Balkan tabloid *Sobaka*, here's the scoop: Balkanoids are pretty sensitive about this history thing. Most Croats will freely admit that Pavelic was insane. But with political realities being what they are, they are often inclined to compare him with more recent Balkan despots like Milosevic—who was known, of course, for killing lots of Croats. The whole routine is a game of psychic ping-pong that I tried to avoid in my story as well as my life. I hope I succeeded.

Cali Ruchala
November, 2001





Lord
of the
Danse
Macabre

Ante Pavelić and the
Independent State
of Croatia
by Cali Ruchala
www.diacritica.com



The Scene of the Crime



ever underestimate the power of kitsch. It compels some men to open their souls and separates fools from the burden of their wallets. And though I felt a strong desire to stay in Split and kick up a *tsunami* on Croatia's famed beaches, the sea chantey of kitsch has some power over me as well. When the opportunity arose I simply could not pass up a chance to wallow in Bosnia's most famous tourist trap, the Holy City of Medjugorje.

Medjugorje exists at the intersection of gullibility, theatricality and blunt, brutal nationalism. In 1981, six local children had a sighting of the Virgin Mary. They told their elders, and the most common manifestation of kitsch—religious merchandising—flooded this backwater, causing Croatia's edgy Communists a good deal of consternation.

Care for the cult of Our Lady of Medjugorje was taken up by the local Croatian clergy. They are mostly Franciscans, but Franciscans of a peculiar, Balkan variety. Balkan Franciscans have jettisoned most of Francis of Assisi's maxims about love for all living creatures, replacing his hymns to spiders and squirrels with romantic rhapsodies about the beauty of all things Croatian. To ancient slaughters they helped themselves with both hands. In the more recent war, their activity was limited to blessing troops and tanks and Croatianizing the wide swathes of torched, empty houses left in their wake.

Enter gullible (and rich) Americans. Spread through the tentacles of the Croatian émigré community, word of the Madonna sightings and the ten secret messages entrusted to her six pre-pubescent witnesses brought an avalanche of salvation



seekers rolling in from Mexican villages where they begged for redemption from a likeness of Christ burned into a taco. The Vatican adopted its usual ambiguous attitude as to the legitimacy of the apparitions, but it hardly mattered. Even the Archbishop of Split claimed the Virgin of Medjugorje had healed his poor eyesight. The architects of Greater Croatia squealed with glee as Hercegovina, that sparse suffix, was separated from Bosnia and attached by sacred ties to the Vaterland.

But I must confess: it wasn't just the intangible lure of kitsch that pulled me into a motor coach across the barren Dalmatian hinterland to Medjugorje. Being an equal-opportunity

cynic, I wanted a chance to make fun of Catholics. Croatians had an easy time in the PR battles of the Bosnian Civil War. Serbs were personified as toothless descendants of the Hun, worshipping a medieval Orthodox god of fire and pain. Bosnjaks were colloquially known as "Bosnian Muslims," an ethnicity defined by their confession, though they are the least dogmatic Muslims in the world. Foreign reporters on their obligatory junket of Balkan mayhem composed ominous dispatches to warn of the arrival of Iranian and Afghani volunteers. Only the Croatians, as medieval as the next but practicing a more agreeable faith, escaped caricaturization.

I would do my part to remedy that.

It was a two-hour drive from Split to Medjugorje—two hours longer than eternity. Except for the driver and a pair of guides, there wasn't a single Slav hitching a ride





on this Caravan of Love. And a journey of passion it was, as my fellow passengers prayed to the potholes, sang tuneless melodies in praise of a tone-deaf Jesus and ended every conversation with tight, soulful hugs. Some of them had paid a fortune for this “pilgrimage”—three or four times the cost of airfare by my calculations, and much more than they would have doled out to visit the real Holy Land. There are probably many reasons why they preferred a chicken-shit Balkan village to the place where their Saviour walked, talked and died on Friday. In plain fact, there are far more *kaffirs* in Pagan Jerusalem than in Holy, Ethnically-Cleansed Medjugorje.

My fellow pilgrims grew excited as the bus wound through the limestone cliffs of Hercegovina, inching closer to the shrine. A few minutes before we arrived, our driver was flagged down by three Franciscans in loose, brown robes tied at the waist. They came on board, clutching rosaries and praying. Everyone lowered their heads and joined in, echoing this trio’s English mutilation of the Lord’s Prayer. I watched the monks stop at the back of the bus, turn around and begin a second procession through the pew-like seats of the motor coach, this time soliciting donations. Flush with cash, the pilgrims eagerly fed their dirty porcelain bowls with folding money. The monks stopped at the head of the bus, nodded to the driver, made the sign of the cross and left.



The crush of pilgrims in Medjugorje reminded me of a small college campus on Freshman Orientation Day. Groups of tourists who had raided their children’s trust funds for a shot at salvation trampled the desert-like vegetation of one of the world’s ugliest places, determined to get their money’s worth. They would meet with other pilgrims, pray together, share a group hug and move on to the next site. Their tour guides would spur them on, taking them to “shrines” with the durability of instant coffee. They would climb “Apparition Hill,” gush excitedly about feeling the presence of the Virgin and kneel again in prayer. Some were crying, their sobs fogging up the shiny, plastic amber beads of the rosaries twisted between their fingers. It



occurred to me Apparition Hill might be nothing more than a landfill of animal waste. It probably occurred to the guides as well, but at five dollars a group and twenty groups per day, they would make a shrine where they damn well pleased.

Mass was held every morning at “St. James Church”. The native appellations for local landmarks have long since fallen into disuse. The mass was held in English; local believers would have to wait until late in the evening for a chance to talk to God in a language they understood.



They say you can only see the Madonna if you really believe in her. Though a heathen, I saw Mary everywhere. Men squawked in the universal language of commerce over her six-inch porcelain and plastic likenesses. The pilgrims couldn't buy enough. The souvenirs were mostly neutral in character, though the local ideologues couldn't help but to put a little touch of propaganda to the overpriced trinkets, like the painting of the Virgin standing over a map of Croatia which seemed to have swollen its size in a few places, or poorly-printed books about Croatia authored by apologists for Hitler's local quislings, the Ustasha. But they were the exception, as most of the merchandise violated few standards but those of good taste.

Beside me in the hollow beneath Apparition Hill, an elderly lady from Florida turned and exclaimed, “They say one of the children will be coming to meet us tomorrow!” We talked about Medjugorje, about Catholicism and the Church. She told me she had been to a shrine dedicated to Our Lady of Guadeloupe, and launched into a casual but well-informed dissertation on the differences between that Central American tourist-trap and the one we were standing on. She was some kind of salvation junkie, embarking on geriatric crusades to hellholes like Bosnia with simple-hearted faith, hoping her devotion would reserve a place at the front of the line come Judgment Day.



On matters more earthy, my friend was a bit less erudite. The war had been terrible, she lamented, but seemed unsure of who was actually fighting. “I think it’s a shame to make those people go back to Turkey,” she sighed mysteriously. The poverty of Hercegovina and Central America disturbed her, “but these people like to live this way.” The salvation of the world is too heavy a burden for most believers. That is why the church makes such a clear distinction between pilgrims and missionaries.

Ignorant about events which had taken place here just two years before, I was doubtful she knew anything about the Ustasha or the true history of this town. That wouldn’t be so bad, but I couldn’t help but to wonder if she and other pilgrims praying for forgiveness, healing—oh, and world peace

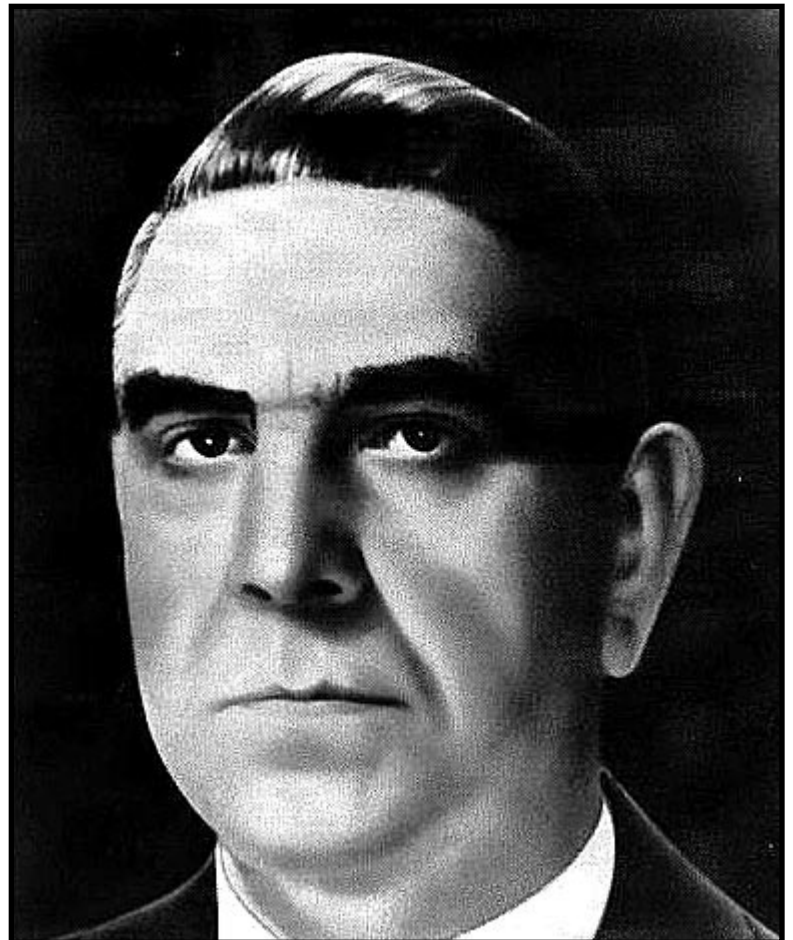
would be nice, too—would be in the least bit perturbed if told they were standing on one of the largest mass graves in Bosnia-Hercegovina, a country with the world’s most prosperous tombstone industry. Would she care that this Catholic shrine was built on the bones of Christian believers? And did she have an inkling that this entire charade—the children, the messages, the existence of the shrine itself—was one of the most successful propaganda campaigns of a movement which had blown up airplanes, assassinated diplomats, planted bombs in movie theaters and airports and had presided over the extermination of thousands of fellow Christians, right on this very spot? It was an empty question, I knew, self-righteous perhaps but sincere. I didn’t press the point. But I did manage to pick up some great religious merchandise.



One could measure how quickly Yugoslavia was unraveling by counting his pictures displayed in the streets of Zagreb. His rehabilitation began as a nondescript ornament in the corners of political tracts and brochures shilling for marginal ideologies. But within a matter of months, his cult—as well as the physical size of his portraits—had grown to truly Khomeini-like proportions. It was still more common in the countryside, especially in the badlands of Hercegovina where shrines to the beloved *Poglavnik* have never really gone out of style.

But it was in the charming city of Zagreb, on placards held aloft at rallies of masturbatory nationalism and in the pews of cathedrals where the clergy sang his praises, that Croatia and the rest of the world were forced to refamiliarize themselves with the menacing gaze and the murderous legacy of Dr. Ante Pavelic.

The portrait gave a false impression of the *Poglavnik* (a designation roughly akin to *Führer* or *duce*). In the high style of Fascist aesthetics, it was a face crafted of steel, full of determination and perseverance, the eyes projecting a menacing and disapproving gaze typical of dictator paraphernalia. Real photographs of Ante Pavelic—even official photographs of the *Poglavnik* meeting with pious clergymen, reviewing his black legions before unleashing them on the countryside, or taking advice on race relations from Adolf Hitler—reveal the seasoned terrorist to be a prematurely aging bureaucrat, a flabby man with a Goering-like paunch, a creature more likely to be found shuffling papers than laughing maniacally as he quaffs blood from a human skull. His writings are fairly boring, lacking the passion of *Mein Kampf* or any similar manifesto. His speeches likewise failed to reach the ecstatic pinnacle of Mussolini's sermons from the balconies.



Ante Pavelic, from a propaganda leaflet



While the *duce* wrestled with lions and the *Führer* organized totemistic parades that would later inspire a thousand gay porn movies, Pavelic shut himself away in his spare time to pursue his mania for stamp collecting.

But while Eichmann and other desk murderers from World War II had their day in the dock or were buried in anonymous pits, quite nearly the entire braintrust of the Ustasha—from Maks Luburic, the creator of Croatian archipelago of concentration camps and a dead ringer for Ralph Malph, to the *Poglavnik* himself—escaped. Some went to Argentina to kick sand at Jozef Mengele and blow kisses at Evita. Some went to Spain to sip margaritas with Generalissimo Franco. Still others settled in dreary Ohio industrial parks and sleepy California suburbs, publishing manifestos, detonating bombs, curing dynamite and carrying on the struggle that officially ended in the waning days of World War II but never in the hearts beneath their black tunics.

Even so, the injustice of Croatia's mass murderers living off Nazi gold in a tropical paradise pales before the striking contradiction of their leader. Ante Pavelic—the bloodiest Balkan tyrant since Vlad the Impaler, one who decreed the death sentence for half of his five million subjects on the day he came to power—probably never pulled the trigger on a man himself.



Sons of One Mother

If there is a place in the world where devils are born, it is Hercegovina. The limestone cliffs and the barren, skeletal hills rise up to meet the aching sun, punishing the interloper trapped between earth and sky. History has it that Hercegovina was once a broad, leafy forest used by the Romans as a primary source for the ships that ruled the Mediterranean. By the 17th century, the woods had been totally denuded. Without a film of greenery to filter out the sun's reflection from the face of stone, Hercegovina becomes the hottest spot in Europe during the summer months. Cretinous Greenpeace activists might designate Hercegovina as Europe's first ecological catastrophe.

It should surprise no one that the God of Hercegovina is a mean, angry son of a bitch, blood brother to the Aztec sun god and the fire-breathing Jehovahs of other wastelands. The Brotherhood of the Franciscans holds sway in ugly, hut-like monasteries and cowshed churches, but follow a creed so warped by the sweat of the land that the sweet, wholesome Francis of Assisi would not recognize his descendants. The first Franciscans were brought here to convert the heathens of Hercegovina by fire: the propensity of the brothers to dress local uprisings and fratricides in the clothing of a Crusade suggests they haven't grown much beyond their origins.

Hercegovina was on the periphery of the most recent Bosnian War, the place where the three warring nationalities converged in their struggle to reach the Adriatic Sea. Only the most demented warlords entertained the fantasy that Hercegovina could be conquered by force. The Croats held sway in the 1990s and even formed their own breakaway state, the Republic of Herceg-Bosna, with its capital at the smashed

The Ustasha won't refrain from killing, because when the order to spill blood is issued, rivers of blood will flow... Every Ustasha is waiting for an order to attack the enemy, to butcher and destroy.

Ante Pavelić



city of Mostar. Today, Croats are the dominant tribe of Hercegovina. Local boy Ante Pavelic made sure it got that way.

The future Poglavnik was born in Bradina in 1889, a hang-nail into the 19th century. Hercegovina, with the rest of Bosnia, was claimed by the Ottoman Turks, longed for by Serbia and Montenegro but occupied by the Austrians.

The Austrian occupation was supposed to be temporary; many German and Hungarian political leaders were willing to fight their own Emperor to get rid of this accursed ruin of rocks and snakes. Driving the Empire's borders further into the Balkans, these Cassandras warned, would cause nothing but trouble, with little tangible gain. In the early years of the 20th century, when Ante was graduating from a Jesuit school, the occupation was made permanent when the Emperor annexed Bosnia-Hercegovina and attached it to his family's domains.

The Hapsburgs took relatively good care of Bosnia. In the end, they loved it too much. Their empire was being ripped apart by internal divisions—Slavs against Magyars, Magyars against Germans. One proposal to patch up the eclectic social demographic was “Trialism”: to turn the dual monarchy—where the Austrians and Hungarians were theoretically two states joined in the body of the Emperor—into a triple monarchy, with the Slavs given their own parliament.

The idea of a Triple Monarchy had little support among the Empire's peoples but one influential supporter in the heir to the throne, Franz Ferdinand. Then he went for a drive through Sarajevo, on a day so beautiful he just *had* to take the top down. The Archduke and his pregnant wife Sophie were shot by a Serb, a tool of one of the most destructive secret societies of the day, the Black Hand. The Emperor delivered an ultimatum to Serbia, and the First World War was on.

While Russia's war effort was paralyzed by Bolshevism in the ranks, the Austrians had a more moderate yet still more dangerous demon with which to contend: Yugoslavism. The movement which gave its name to the ill-starred state had its roots in that great European equalizer, Napoleon, and his leveling of age-old traditions and political structures. In his drive east, he had grouped together his Balkan possessions under the name *Illyria*,



in pretentious imitation of Roman antiquity. After the midget was exiled to St. Helena, many Croats looked back with fondness to their short-lived existence in a South Slavic state. The crude yearning and romanticism of Illyrianism evolved into Yugoslavism, which had resonance beyond the unhappy Austrian lands into the adjacent Slavic states of Serbia and Montenegro.

Yugoslavism and other Slavic ideologies undermined morale in the Austrian lands, especially in the army. Sometimes whole units composed of Slavs surrendered to the Russians. But most Croats—and indeed, most Serbs in the Empire as well—fought heroically. One was a young Croat/Slovene from the region of peasant villages and rolling hills known as Zagorje, “the land beyond the mountains”. His name was Josip Broz, but he is far better known by the *nom de guerre* he never abandoned, even when he bore a closer resemblance to a chubby golfer tossing nickels to the lads on the Senior Tour than a war leader: Tito.

Born in Kumrovec in May of 1892, Josip Broz was one of seven surviving children (out of fifteen) born to a rather horny Croatian father and his magnificently fertile Slovene wife. His official birthday, May 25th, later celebrated as a “Day of Youth”, was an invention by Party comrades; Tito was actually born on May 7th according to parish records.

Broz left Kumrovec at the age of 15 to work in the Krajina, formerly a militarized frontier against the Turks that lost its strategic importance after the annexation of Bosnia. In 1910, his father wanted to move to the United States and bring his son with him as part of the great exodus from the Croatian lands. For Josip Broz, the idea of making it in America was a kind of fantasy, a daydream that would linger for the next ten years. For now, he wandered around the Austrian domains, from Ljubljana to Trieste to Prague and Vienna, part of a huge internal migration of Slavic peasants looking for work in the new industries. Then, in 1912, having reached compulsory





draft age, he returned to Croatia and entered the Austrian army. The young Broz flourished there, was recommended to an officer's training school and became the youngest sergeant-major in the Empire.

Immediately after the beginning of the First World War, Broz and his unit, the 25th Croatian Territorial Infantry, took part in an invasion of Serbia. Owing to the desperate defense of Belgrade by the Serbs ("the most thrilling feat of arms that this war had witnessed," wrote British historian G.M. Trevelyan, who was on the scene as a kind of celebrity war correspondent), Broz's unit was repelled. Perhaps because of Yugoslavism in the ranks, his unit did not take part in future assaults on Serbia, and was transferred to the Eastern Front in Ukraine instead.

Though the bulk of his later memories were coloured by ideology, Broz would make light of his accomplishments in the field in World War I. This was not because he was modest, but because the future terror of the bourgeoisie had fought in service of an "imperialist" power. It was not discovered until after his death that Sergeant-Major Josip Broz had in fact received a major commendation for bravery and initiative on the Eastern Front.

The Croat officer's conversion to Communism—and thus Josip Broz's transformation into Tito—came about by chance. On March 21, 1915, the Russian Army launched a surprise attack. It was Catholic Easter, and the Austrians were caught with their pants down. Broz was wounded and taken prisoner. Two years later he was in a POW camp in the Urals when local workers threw open the gates and invited the prisoners to join them in the streets. The Czar had been overthrown; the Bolshevik Revolution had begun.



Rats in the Pantry

The Kingdom of Serbia wound up on the winning side of the war, though at a terrible price in terms of human life. Yet one of the national uprisings which brought the Austrians to their knees occurred in Croatia. On the first of December, 1918, a heavily Yugoslavist national council or *Sabor* in Zagreb voted to join Serbia, and departed for Belgrade to lay the laurels across the temples of the Serbian king. The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes—later renamed Yugoslavia—was formed.

Was the Croat population behind the decision of the *Sabor*? In the absence of pollsters and *Time* magazine “Power Ratings” back in 1918, it’s hard to tell. We can assume that the Croats were at least as bitterly divided as the Montenegrins. The Montenegrins voted to join the new state, though in conditions so filled with lawlessness and strife that it could hardly be considered a pristine gesture. The last King of Montenegro, Nikola, was prevented from returning to the country before the referendum, and a violent revolt by his adherents in 1919 known as the Christmas Uprising refutes the idea that it was a bloodless union. Nikola died a bitter exile in Italy, a stone from Montenegro’s towering Mount Lovcen gripped in his palm.

Some Croats in the army of the collapsed Empire (in fact, from the 25th Croatian—Josip Broz’s old unit) revolted when they heard of the new state’s formation. One could be against Yugoslavia while still wishing the Serbs well, but there was a base of support in Croatia for politicians who held violently anti-Serbian views. The most notorious was Ante Starcevic, a former Yugoslavist who later proselytized that Serbs were originally brought to the Balkans as slaves, and far from being closely relat-



ed, Croats were actually a “lost tribe of Goths” who had somehow lost their names, language—basically, every semblance of a Germanic identity but the mysterious purity of their blood.



More than your average hate group, Starcevic’s political tool, the Croat Party of Rights, based their entire political platform on a total demonization of the Other. In the immortal words of Walter Sobchak: “Say what you will about the tenets of National Socialism, but at least it’s an ethos.”

A less bigoted opposition to Yugoslavism was led by a man who would become the ubiquitous wet blanket to the Serbian kings. Leader of the populist Croatian Peasant Party, Stjepan Radic was one of the most charismatic politicians in Balkan history. Nothing illustrates his wily

charisma more than the fact that Croatian Fascists (including Ante Pavelic), Communists (including Tito) as well as most of today’s leaders consider Stjepan Radic their political ancestor.

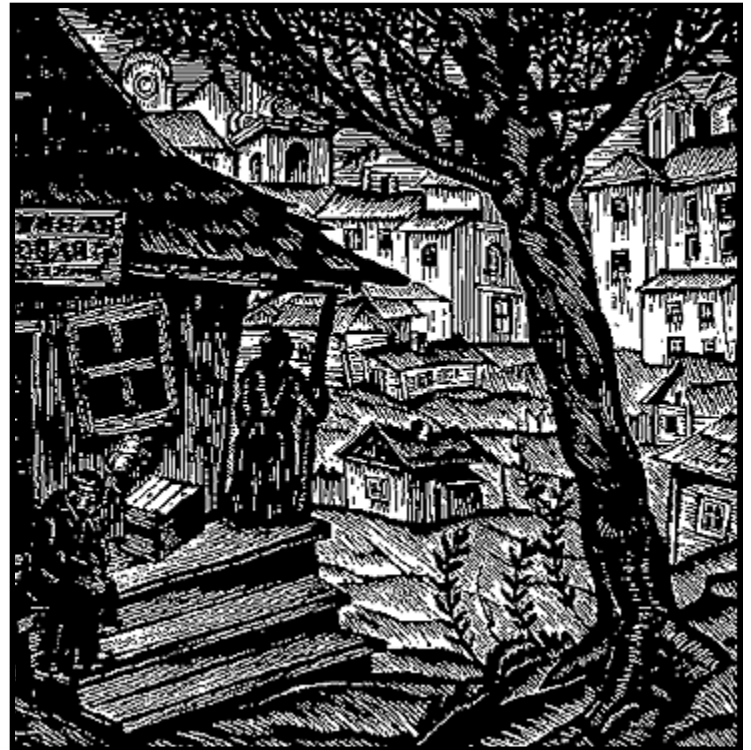
Radic believed that the vote of the *Sabor* was illegal and in any case not representative of the nation. He led a parliamentary boycott, refusing to recognize the new state until Croatian statehood was acknowledged.

Ante Pavelic had practically nothing to do with the events described above. While Europe was in turmoil, he was studying at a Jesuit seminary in Travnik. While Radic was cracking jokes and snapping towels in the lockerroom, Ante was making his way through the University of Zagreb as a mediocre student of law. Hack biographers have created an entire mythology around their *Poglavnik*, transforming the dull teenager into a tireless campaigner for Croat rights from the time he moved from the nipple to the cup. But while he was not yet known and was incapable of shaping the events taking place around him, the founding of Yugoslavia and the fate of Stjepan Radic were two events which had a profound impact on his life.



In the early 1920s, nationalist Croats weren't the gravest threat to Yugoslavia. In the closing days of World War I, the Hungarian Communist Party under their leader Bela Kun seized power in Budapest. It was a heady time, almost forgotten today, when the whole world shuddered in reflection of Lenin's prophesy that the senseless carnage of the war would bring about the collapse of capitalism. Russia supported the Hungarian reds and made a stab at stirring up revolt in Poland before the Allied armies in the east smashed Bela Kun's regime. Lenin stroked his goatee and decided that perhaps he should be a little more realistic, and focused on defeating the White Armies at home instead.

The Yugoslav Communist Party at the conclusion of the war was one of the largest in Europe. Their leader was a gentle, eccentric academic who replaced the atheism of Marx with the metaphysics of Hinduism. Through vegetarianism and a "conscious recognition of the other," he believed that the need for a bloody and distasteful class war could be done away with and the chaos Russia was suffering through averted. The militant members of the party thought he was a joke. In December 1920, after a series of strikes and uprisings, the Crown Prince and Regent of Yugoslavia, Alexander Karadjordjevic, outlawed the Communist Party. The Serbian Hindu was later lured to Moscow and swept away in a purge.



A secret organization of Communist youth, calling itself "Red Terror", set out to avenge the arrest and persecution of their comrades by murdering the Crown Prince. The attempt failed, and Red Terror was broken up by police. A Bosnian Marxist, Alija Aliagic, murdered the police minister in retaliation. These tit-for-tat disputes fueled a spiral of violence, in a confrontation the government was destined to win. The Yugoslav Communist Party literally conspired itself out of existence. Party membership just five years after the war had dwindled from 120,000 to 700.

Hoping to escape the famine which accompanied the col-



lapse of the Czarist regime, Josip Broz joined the Red International Guard. Probably the most dangerous action he saw in service was among babushkas jostling on a tram. The Guards, mostly former prisoners of war, were unreliable for frontline duty, and too often got in the way when the CheKa or secret police were clearing villages of their bourgeoisie. Tito later went AWOL and wandered about, from Finland (a springboard he hoped would launch him to the United States) to Siberia, not quite free but not quite a prisoner, adrift in the turmoil of Red Armies, White Armies and raging mobs. Eventually, he found his way to St. Petersburg, and with a new Russian wife, Pelagija, set off for Kumrovec. Finding a job at a mill in Croatia, part of the new Yugoslavia, he thrilled fellow workers with his eyewitness account of the worker's revolution and shortly thereafter joined the illegal Communist Party.

Bolshevik aims will be far more easily achieved in a Yugoslavia disrupted by the Serb-Croat struggle, than in a strong and homogenous Croat national state.

Ante Pavelic

As an anti-Communist, Ante Pavelic welcomed the King's suppression of the reds. But with diseased reasoning, he suspected something more was going on. Was it possible that the Serbian monarchy controlled the Communist Party? He wasn't willing to go that far—yet. Most of the Communists he had met while at the University of Zagreb were Serbs. Had he gotten to know them, he would have realized they were from a belt of mountainous land and small villages along the present-day border of Croatia and Bosnia, called the Krajina. They had settled there at the invitation of the Austrian Emperor to act as a bulwark against the Turks. With the country's small proletariat, Yugoslav communism in the 1920s was primarily represented by these intellectual sons of peasants. Not knowing the Communists, the Serbs, or his country for that matter, Ante Pavelic saw the sinister hand of Serbdom in the Communist students, as he did in all evils which flourished like tumours in the supple body of Mother Croatia. In his subtle treatise, *The Enemies of the Croatian Liberation Movement*, Pavelic wrote that "Communism has not been able to penetrate wider layers of Croat society. Nevertheless, the Belgrade government has sent a large number of Marx-infected Serbian students to attend the Croat University of Zagreb, at the cost of the state. Together with the Jews, these students spread Communist propaganda in Croatia, demonstrate at every oppor-



tunity and falsify before the outside world the true position of the Croat nationalist student body.”

How exactly does someone, apparently intelligent enough to graduate from law school, fall prey to this kind of tripe? Asking how Ante Pavelic developed such a ferocious antipathy to Serbs and Jews is no different than inquiring into the origins of any man emblazoned in history for the searing force of his hatred. Perhaps we could find its origins was a bruised ego, a mother caught in a *flagrante delicto* with a Serbian neighbour, or a sweetheart who submitted to the temptations of an Orthodox beau. This still wouldn't explain much, because it assumes that hatred and prejudice have some sort of rational bearing. Those who carried out Ustasha crimes could claim a temporary insanity. The respected politicians and clergymen who paved the road to Jasenovac said their only crime was a blindness caused by their insatiable love of freedom and their homeland. But what alibi can there be for a man who rehearsed the genocidal frenzy of the Independent State of Croatia for twenty years, who carried within him the kernel of evil almost from birth?

In banal reality, we take our Pavelices to the madhouse, because it's easier to slap them with a label as mental defectives than to admit that normal, even happy circumstances can nourish such evil men.



Death of a Saviour

With the communists defanged, some in Belgrade urged the newly-crowned King Alexander to do the same to the arrogant Croatian nationalist leaders, most notably Stjepan Radic. In 1924, Radic's Croat Peasant Party had scored an immense electoral victory. In a shrewd move, Radic decided to head to Belgrade to take his seat in parliament. His Croats forged an alliance with opposition Serbian parties, and together they toppled the government, which had a reputation of protecting racketeers and was, in any case, deeply unpopular irrespective of nationality. Many radical Croats, including members of the Party of Rights, condemned Radic as a traitor for acknowledging the government as legitimate.

Those who counseled Alexander to cut the uppity Croat leader down to size had their day. Because kings by nature are rather stupid, Alexander had no idea how unpopular the previous government had been; he viewed the opposition's exercise of their rights as tantamount to a personal affront. The King outlawed the Peasant Party and returned the toppled government to power. Radic himself was imprisoned on an outrageous charge of treason, ostensibly for being overheard quipping, "We are republicans, but if the Serbs want a monarchy, good luck to them."

After seven years of political trenchwork, Ante Pavelic finally saw some return on his sweat equity when he was elected to the Zagreb city council in 1927, and later to the national parliament as a member of Starcevic's proto-fascist Party of Rights. He had a small law practice in Zagreb. His clients were typically debtors and aggrieved parties to contracts and wills, though he would often lend his expertise to those who had fallen under the scrutiny of the increasingly repressive royal government.

Radic was released from prison in 1925, and again returned

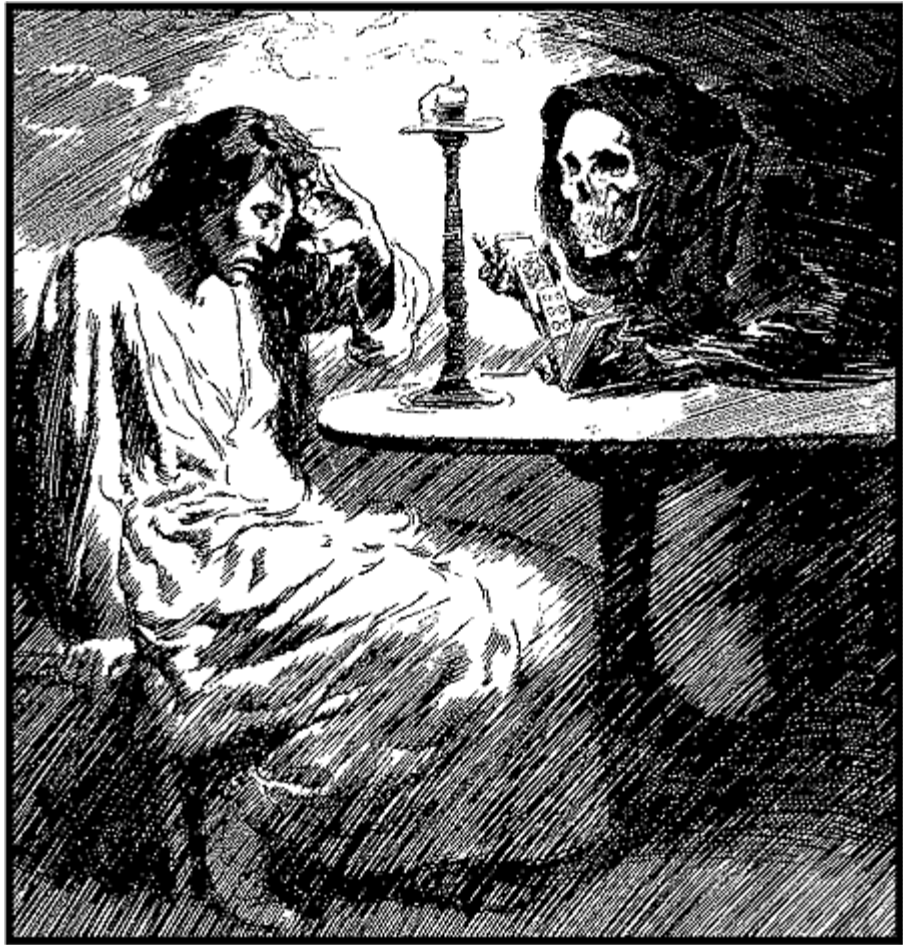


to parliament. He did himself no favours with his sharp tongue. On the floor of parliament, he proclaimed that “Our Serbian friends are always reminding us of the price they paid in the war. I would like to invite them to tabulate the costs, so we may square accounts and be on our way.”

Unjust as it is, that last statement has become his epitaph. On June 20, 1928—with Pavelic looking on—a thuggish Montenegrin deputy, Punisa Racic, drew a pistol from his belt and blew away Radic and two other deputies from the Peasant Party on the floor of parliament.

Not even the stupidest observer could fail to note at the awful irony of the triple homicide—the first shot of the Croat-Serb civil war, one might call it—and on the floor of parliament, an institution devoted to the suffocation of friction beneath layers of bureaucratic largesse. Stupid observers were enlightened, but the blind were not. Punisa Racic, renowned in his Montenegrin district as a foul-mouthed jerk and troublemaker (which is sort of why they liked him) became a hero to those who believed Radic and the Croats were going too far. Rumours that the assassination had royal sanction have never been proven, nor have they ever gone away.

Alexander made a brief visit to Radic in the hospital where he languished for two long months. Contrary to latter-day speculation, Radic wasn't just an enemy to avowed Serb nationalists, but to an entire class of politicians and businessmen getting fat at a time of unrelenting poverty for peasants of all nationalities. This, not a hatred of Croats, is why Alexander sacked him and restored the old administration of racketeers and jaundiced defenders of the *status quo*. Yugoslavia was not so polarized that





Serb and Croat peasants (who, it must be remembered, lived side by side in the vast majority of the country) saw each other as monsters rather than a people with much in common, including, in many cases, sympathy for Radic.

All the same, and no matter who supported him, Radic wasn't murdered because he threatened the *status quo*. He was murdered because he was a Croat.

On August 28, 1928, the leader of the Croatian Peasant Party died. His widow appeared in the White Palace, residence of the king, and lay the blame upon Alexander and his household minister. She was joined on her voyage back to Zagreb by every Croatian deputy. They formed a separatist "shadow parliament" and refused to acknowledge the authority of the King or legitimacy of the state. The minuscule Communist Party called on the masses to avenge the murder of Radic by taking out their frustration on policemen.

Neither threats nor flattery persuaded the Croats to return to Belgrade. Politicians benighted by 19th century scruples didn't necessarily believe that was a bad thing. Alexander, who had dispensed with democratic norms a long time ago, was determined to hold together the state. As in the past, his actions would only serve to drive his peoples further apart. On January 6, 1929, he suspended the constitution and declared his personal dictatorship.

All political parties were dissolved, including the Croat Party of Rights, which had recently elected Ante Pavelic their vice president. Several members were arrested. The shots leveled at Stjepan Radic had a devastating impact on the young lawyer. Three weeks after the king became the law, Ante Pavelic gathered together as many belongings as he could carry on his back and crossed the Italian frontier, on his way to exile in Vienna.



The Exiles

Vienna, former capital of the Austrian Empire, was now the center of operations for every sort of parasitic fiend burned out of the fur of their bipedal carriers. There were leftists, rightists, Nazis, Trotskyists, Stalinists and other fringe operators nestled away in the cafes, flophouses, attics and cellars along her baroque and pristine streets. Though the police made it a point to keep them under surveillance, subversive activities largely went on without too much interference.

Ante Pavelic arrived in Vienna in early February, 1929. His arrival was acknowledged in the papers as a curiosity—after all, by title if not by influence, the former parliamentarian was a very prominent exile. One of these write-ups got the attention of a student named Branimir “Branko” Jelic, leader of the Croat Youth Movement, a nationalist group resisting the Royal Dictatorship back home. According to his memoir, *Fight for the Croatian State*, Jelic invited Pavelic to take the leadership of the Youth Movement, largely by virtue of his status in the Croat Party of Rights and his parliamentary seat. Pavelic accepted.

Branko Jelic and the other students hoped Pavelic’s prestige as a member of parliament would help recruitment. It did not. Even those exiles ideologically predisposed toward Pavelic—including fellow members of the Party of Rights—didn’t take the youth group very seriously.

But Pavelic did make other important contacts in Vienna, as the city was boiling over with the rhetorical froth of Yugoslavia’s discontent nationalities. First among the disgruntled in Vienna—and indeed, their notoriety was renowned throughout the world—was the Macedonian Internal Revolutionary Organization, known by their Bulgarian acronym, VRMO.

By the time Pavelic came on the scene, VRMO was beset

The entire press in Croatia is in Jewish-masonic hands. After the establishment of the dictatorship in 1929, the Croat press was infiltrated and destroyed, with these immigrant foreigners brought in.

Ante Pavelic



by internal squabbles and rivalries, giving rise to the occasional shoot-out between balconies at the opera and anonymous, headless corpses dredged up from the silt of the Danube. Macedonia had been ceded to Yugoslavia during the Balkan conflicts preceding the First World War. Very few people then recognized the Macedonians as a distinct ethnicity. To the new Yugoslav state, Macedonians were “Bulgarized Serbs”. To the Bulgarians, they were “Serbianized Bulgarians”. The Greeks didn’t know quite what they were, but kept the doors locked and the porchlight on just to be sure.

VRMO’s aim was to make Macedonia ungovernable to Yugoslavia, and thus effect its transfer to Bulgaria. This was to be accomplished by labour strikes, assassinations, punitive raids and outright invasions along the Bulgarian-Yugoslav border. VRMO fought under a banner emblazoned by a skull and crossbones, and

lived up to it.

By the time Pavelic hit Austria, Ivan “Vance” Mihailov was emerging as the top dog in VRMO’s bloody civil war. His fiancée lived in Vienna, and it was probably through her intervention that Pavelic wrangled an invitation to Banka, Mihailov’s headquarters in the suburbs of Sofia. At this meeting, Mihailov gave Pavelic the phone number and zip code for Europe’s foremost Law and Order guy, Italian *duce* Benito Mussolini. Yugoslavia and Italy had quarreled at the conclusion of World War I over possession of Croatia’s Adriatic coastline,

which Italy had long lusted after. As such, Mussolini, Mihailov suspected, would be a friend to anyone who lived and breathed the death of Yugoslavia.

The *duce* was then receiving dozens of adventurers every day, scoundrels and bandits seeking the protection and blessing of the High Pope of Fascism. After Pavelic’s first meeting with government officials, Mussolini adopted a wait-and-see posture, as he had with a certain Viennese housepainter before.

Pavelic was undeterred by Mussolini’s cold reception. After





all, the deputy was now meeting with some of the most notorious men in Europe. He made the unflattering comparison between VRMO, the *fascistas*, and his own Croat Youth Movement, and decided that a sexier image was necessary if he was to mine the bullion of his dreams out of the ether. Invigorated by the gospel of Fascism, he plunged into recruitment as he never had before, aided by depredations in Croatia that led to a great influx of refugees to Budapest and Vienna. Many of them made up the foot soldiers of Pavelic's still-undefined new movement. In addition, some of the more seasoned Croatian nationalists in exile began to take Pavelic seriously after his meetings with Mihailov and Mussolini. Ivo Percic was one of his earliest protégés, a former officer in the Hapsburg army who later took charge of one of Pavelic's training camps provided by right-wing elements in the Hungarian government. Andrija Artukovic, future Minister of the Interior and often referred to as the "Yugoslav Himmler" in yellowed newspaper clippings from the 1950s, also joined the movement at this time. But the crowning achievement of his recruitment drive was Ante's seduction of the storied Kvaternik family. The earliest Kvaternik of note was Eugen, friend and contemporary of Ante Starcevic and his right-hand man in the Croat Party of Rights. His son Slavko had married the daughter of another Starcevic disciple, Ivo Frank. The Kvaterniks apparently enjoyed playing waterboys to stud quarterbacks, because Slavko and his own son Eugen (or, as he was known, "Dido") immediately swore loyalty to Pavelic, despite his inexperience as a hell-raiser.



While Pavelic was building up his organization abroad, Josip Broz had become a nomad, hounded by police, spies and employers who tipped off the government once they discovered a Communist in their shops. The police caught him with forbidden socialist literature and several crude explosives (which he insisted had been planted on him), beat him unmercifully and put him on



trial. So neutered was the Communist threat, right-wing newspaper columnists treated it as a kind of curiosity, even going so far as to show some sympathy with the firebrand:

The Communist trial which has become known as the 'Bomb-Thrower's Trial' was concluded yesterday, its dominant tone struck once more by Josip Broz. After the sentence was read he rose and turning to the large audience which was already rising to leave the courtroom, shouting three times, 'Long live the Communist Party! Long live the Third International!'

Thus it was that this unyielding Communist disappeared behind prison walls, for all the world like a sea-captain who bellows when his ship is sinking.

Broz spent the next five and a half years at Lepoglava, a former monastery and university. The guards largely left him alone, free to commiserate with other prisoners. It was at Lepoglava that he met Mosa Pijade, a Serbian Jew who had been a Communist only slightly longer than he'd been a prisoner. He tutored Josip Broz in Marxist dialectics. The quarrelsome, pedantic Pijade wasn't the best teacher, but neither was Broz a very good student. He never indulged in the monotonous dialogues about theory that Communists revel in, leaving his subordinates to sort through his proclamations and put a Marxist spin on them.

Broz emerged from prison in March of 1934. For his criminal record he was rewarded with a job as a full-time party worker. Traveling with false documents, one step ahead of the police, Broz rarely slept in the same place two nights in a row. Eventually he was sent to Vienna where he worked for the Communist International (aka the "Comintern"). Getting across the frontier was no easy trick, but Broz made it, thanks to a novelistic device that owes more to Groucho Marx than to Karl. At the last Yugoslav border post, an Austrian mother asked him to hold her baby while she rifled through her papers. The baby pissed on his lap, and the border guards had such a good laugh at Broz's expense that he passed through unmolested.

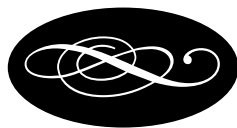
Broz was once more roaming through the great cities of Europe. In Paris he helped organize volunteers for the Spanish Civil War. He was later transferred to Moscow where he saw the tail end of the purges lash out against the head of the Yugoslav



Communist Party, Milan Gorkic. Broz was first named as interim General Secretary of the Party, which thanks to King Alexander's police, then had its headquarters exiled in Paris. He took over for good in 1939, and moved the Party back into the maw of the beast, Zagreb.

Broz had risen through the party ranks for no other reason than his complete obedience to the leaders of the Party in the USSR. In a country where every man with an argument believes the weight of God is on his side, Broz was the only Croat who had none. At a party congress, he had made a name for himself and attracted the attention of the Soviets by denouncing the "factionalism" of his fellow Yugoslav Communists. No one knows for certain just what role he played in the downfall of Milan Gorkic. He was typical of the rank-and-file Communist of the 1930s, prepared to back anything, so long as it came from the lips of Stalin.

Broz had been traveling for so long on false papers that his identity was still a closely guarded secret, especially to the new generation of Communists emerging from the universities. When employed by the Comintern, Broz had gone by the codename "Walter" (not Sobchak). Back home, he was known to Yugoslav Communists only as "Tito", which was a common enough name in his home region of Zagorje.



Promising reports from Vienna convinced Mussolini that his Croatian friend was someone to be taken seriously after all. Pavelic's newest disciple, Andrija Artukovic, made headlines across Europe by leading an uprising inside Croatia itself. The insurrection was crushed by the army without much trouble, and was notable only for its symbolism, taking place in the Velebit Mountains in the shadow of a shrine to the Virgin Mary (or, as local mythology has it, "Mother of Croatia").

Pavelic had a new dream, new friends, and a new organization in his bag in 1932 when he accepted the offer of Mussolini's



foreign minister and son-in-law, Count Galeazzo Ciano, and relocated to a villa supplied by the Italian government. His dream was “Croatia from the Alps to the Sava”. His new friends have already been described. And his new movement, which emerged from the shell of the Croat Youth Movement like a pupilla, he christened the *Ustasha* (“insurrection”; I use here the more common Western spelling and pronunciation instead of the original *ustase*).

Though Ustasha ideology, for what it was, never grew beyond the stunted nationalism and primitive xenophobia which lay at the center of Pavelic’s own beliefs, he did adapt to the fashions of his protector. He dressed his toy soldiers in black tunics and his speech became a stilted mimicry of Mussolini’s florid poetry of the barricades. And with the rhetoric of violence, real acts began to follow.

The first terrorist attack the Ustasha took credit for occurred in a suburb of Belgrade. An Ustasha agent planted a bomb on a railroad track; the explosion and derailment caused the death of a large family. Later, another bomb was planted at the same location, but a joint operation by the Austrian and Serbian police defused the plot and the explosive before either could be executed. And the hits continued to come.



Crime of the Century

King Alexander of Yugoslavia was a popular target for discontent from the day he exchanged his family jewels for those of the crown. Attempting to kill him was something of a participatory sport. The first attempt on his life, if that's what it was, came during the First World War, when the Regent and Crown Prince became irritated that some of his senior military officials seemed to hold their oath to the society whose conspiracy had launched the war, the Black Hand, higher than the one sworn to their monarch. The Grand Master of the Black Hand, Colonel Dimitrijevic, was executed for trumped-up charges of plotting Alexander's assassination—"a fine example of judicial murder," as historian Barbara Jelavic describes it. The Black Hand fell into disgrace and then obsolescence, except in the minds of paranoiacs who read too many books about the Knights Templar.

Europe in the 1920s and '30s was afflicted by an outbreak of assassinations, putsches and revolutions. So dark was the horizon, it wasn't until the Ustasha made their first attempt on Alexander's life that the government realized there was something new under the sun. The King had gone to Zagreb to celebrate his *slava* or the feast of his name-day saint. Because kings are inbred idiots who never learn from their predecessors, Alexander insisted on driving in parade fashion, and in an open car. Pavelic sent two commando squads from two different locations to converge on the King. Neither party of assassins knew of the existence of the other. One Ustasha had a clear shot at Alexander, but hesitated. He couldn't stomach the thought that the bomb he was holding might harm innocent bystanders. At this point, the other group attacked a police detachment for no apparent reason. Someone shouted that a guy had a bomb, and the revolutionary with a heart of gold was arrested with the explosive device still in



his hands.

Obviously, the Croatian exile movement still hadn't shed its farcical side. Later in 1933, they were scandalized in Hungary where they had wrested control of a refugee camp on the border and transformed it into a command post for Ustasha incursions across Yugoslavia's northern border. Ivo Percic, the camp's commander, had a bit of a domestic situation on his hands when his common-law wife, Jelka, indulged in some freelancing of the heart. Her beau was Josip Zarko, one of his prized recruits and a man wanted for the attempted murder of the Yugoslav ambassador to Belgium. Josip died in mysterious circumstances, supposedly from a self-inflicted wound. Jelka suspected that he had actually been murdered, particularly from dark hints that Percic

dropped during one of their many stormy arguments. She became deranged and her sister took her to be examined by one of Sigmund Freud's pupils in Vienna. After recovering, Jelka made contact with agents of the king and agreed to act as a spy.

Pavelic was outraged, not by the internal feuding that characterized his movement (which few revolutionaries would tolerate), but that Percic had allowed a mere woman to set him up. Jelka fled to Yugoslavia when she was discovered, and her testimony led to the Hungarian bases being closed down. Pavelic dealt with Percic, who had been one of his first recruits in Vienna, first. Using his knowledge of motivational techniques, Pavelic had him shot in the head. It took longer to get to Jelka, but Pavelic finally settled the score with her after the Ustasha took power in Zagreb, sending a special

police squad to slit her throat.

After the failed assassination in Zagreb, the Ustasha really could claim to be persecuted. A wave of arrests rounded up suspects inside Yugoslavia. Nor were Ustasha abroad safe from summary justice. The leader of the Ustasha exiles in Czechoslovakia





was found hanged in his room in Karlsbad; public opinion had that it was not a suicide but an assassination. Attempts were also made on the lives of Ustasha leaders in Budapest and Vienna, and on Pavelic himself when he was visiting members of the Munich branch of the Mussolini Fan Club, the Nazi Party.

Having never lived in the time of kings, with no emotional connection to a vista in the past when Your Royal Majesties and Your Excellencies were spoken, it is difficult to feel love, respect, or even pity for King Alexander. For sure, he was a loving father and probably a hale fellow. In matters of introspection and instinct, however, Alexander was definitely wanting. For one thing, though political leaders, from President McKinley to Austrian Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss were dropping like flies, he could not be persuaded to abandon his pretension for marching in parades. To you or I, the murder of Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo might have been an encouragement to sidestep the open car procession, or at least put the top up. The failed attempt in Zagreb would have us waving behind the glass of a customized PopeMobile. But Alexander reveled in these kinds of events, which provided one of the few occasions for a king to wallow in the love of the herd in the manner of his ancestors.

While in Marseilles, France for meetings with his western allies, Alexander decided to indulge in his passion for displaying the Royal Wave. In the same car was the Louis Barthou, the French Foreign Minister, and several high ranking generals. They were surrounded on all sides by French gendarmes marching on horseback.

Halfway through the parade, Alexander was feeling the people's love. He was looking spiffy in his Admiral's uniform, with the French Legion of Honour pinned to his chest. France and Serbia were allies in the First World War, as Serbian propagandists never tire of reminding us. Having overthrown three kings and two emperors in the previous hundred and fifty years, the spectacle of a monarch from the peasant kingdoms of the east was truly a sight for the French Marseillais.

One of those deliriously happy citizens jumped on the hood of the sedan Alexander and Barthou were riding in, shouting "Long Live the King!" A moment later, he drew a pistol from



his frock coat.

And Alexander just then remembered why he hated Sarajevo.

Gasps and cries of pain rippled through the dense crowd as more shots were fired from their midst. A French colonel pounced on the overexcited Alexanderphile, though the assassin continued firing until his weapon was empty. The crowd grabbed the perp from the colonel's grasp and tore him to pieces, ripping off his clothes, tearing out his hair and mutilating his body. Only one identifying mark remained: on the right wrist, a tattoo of a skull and crossbones.

Alexander had been pierced by two bullets and died shortly thereafter. Barthou bled to death. Three innocent bystanders watching the procession were killed, nine wounded by the random gunfire coming from the crowd.



Though some controversy about the disemboweled assassin's origins would simmer (as the skull-and-bones tattoo indicated, he was a member of VRMO, Mihailov's former chauffeur and a seasoned killer "loaned" in Mihailov's words for the job at Marseilles after Pavelic's boys had goofed in Zagreb), there was no doubt about the identity of the men who had fired from the

crowd. The men arrested with pistols in their hands were Croats, recruited from among the bitter Croatian émigrés in Hungary by Dido Kvaternik to carry out a death sentence on the King ordered by Ante Pavelic.

The entire continent of Europe gasped, as they do whenever another Balkan fanatic succeeds in rubbing out another tyrant. They had no reason to. Though there were several raucous confrontations in the League of Nations, the Yugoslav government was determined to act with the somber reflection and tact-



fulness which Alexander so acutely lacked. There was no *Krystallnacht* in Zagreb. As the King's son and heir was but a schoolboy, a regency was set up under Prince Paul, who immediately began the dismantling of his cousin's repressive regime.

For Mussolini, this whole affair was a bridge too far. Before European powers could react, he arrested Pavelic, Kvaternik and several other Ustasha leaders in Italy. He would later refuse to extradite them to serve the death sentence passed in absentia in France, on grounds that France itself was harbouring several men who had tried to kill *him*. Many historians have taken for granted that Mussolini, as Pavelic's protector and Yugoslavia's enemy, was apprised of the plot in advance. He was not. In the archives of the Fascist government is a cable confirming an earlier report that the King and the Foreign Minister were dead. In the margin, Mussolini has scrawled the instruction, "Ask our Croat friends who the murderer could be and who could have inspired him." Though this could be read in a few different ways, it at least shows that he had no intimate knowledge of the plot. Some months later, Pavelic and Kvaternik were quietly released. The aspiring revolutionaries could now pick up chicks with the claim that they had been sentenced to death in absentia in two different countries.



While Prince Paul was a backer of many of his cousin's policies, he considered his time as Regent more of a duty than a right—to hold the state together until the Crown Prince, Alexander's son Peter, came of age. As such, relaxation of his cousin's repression was an absolute necessity.

Alexander had imprisoned Stjepan Radic's successor as head of the Croat Peasant Party, Vladko Macek, and had permitted the release of the leader of the Serbs in Croatia, Svetozar Pribicevic, only when he developed a terminal illness while in prison. It's true that Alexander's policies had favoured Serbs in general, but he was as hostile to the Serbian opposition as he was



to the Croats.

Prince Paul commuted Macek's sentence and released other political prisoners, including many Communists. In 1935, a coalition comprised of the Croat Peasant Party and the Serbian opposition took more than a third of the votes in grossly unfair elections. In 1938, their vote percentage had grown to 45%. Though the racketeers Alexander favoured had been supplanted by an assortment of increasingly bizarre governing coalitions (one contained parties representing Serbian military veterans, Bosnian Muslim merchants and Slovene farmers), the Croats could no longer be cut out of the deal.

With Paul's prompting, a new government, headed by Dragisa Cvetkovic, came to a historic agreement with Vladko Macek, the *Sporazum* (Understanding) of 1939. Croatia was made an autonomous, federated republic, subordinate to Belgrade in matters of foreign policy and military affairs but self-governing in most other respects. Macek himself, after years as a pariah, became Vice Premier of the Yugoslav government.

The *Sporazum* was absolutely the worst thing that could happen to the Ustasha. Croats becoming satisfied with the political situation inside Yugoslavia would end Pavelic's dream of killing lots and lots of people. To Pavelic, the *Sporazum* was a betrayal of the highest sort—Macek had sold out not only to Serbia, but to the nefarious forces of Croat-hating Judaism and International Freemasonry as well. From 1939 to 1941 the Ustasha accelerated attacks both in and outside of Yugoslavia. It was to no avail. Political leaders condemned them, but didn't really seem that interested.

Facing political oblivion, Ante Pavelic was saved, as so many scoundrels are, by the fortunes of war.

The King is, as a rule, the grand master of the Yugoslav Freemason lodges... Freemasonry does not attack any of the Croat party politicians who demand Croat autonomy, because these are themselves connected with Jewry and Freemasonry.

Ante Pavelic



The Denouement

Yugoslavia remained neutral in the early days of World War II, despite pressure from both the Germans and those vaunted French allies. It was Italy's *duce*, Mussolini, who would be responsible for the physical destruction of Yugoslavia, though not in the manner he would have preferred.

The Italians had fashioned a pathetic "Mediterranean Empire" by the annexation of Ethiopia and Albania. Hitler by this point had already taken Poland and blasted France out of existence. Jealous of his former pupil's success, and with his syphilitic mind filled with delusions of grandeur about the ancient union of Athens and Rome, Mussolini launched a war of conquest on Greece. He was shocked when Greek soldiers, seasoned by years of mountain warfare, turned on the Italian invaders in a blistering counter-offensive, driving deep into Italian-occupied Albania.

Mussolini, his tail between his legs, scurried back to cower behind his German master. Hitler was obliged to help, not least of all because of British intervention in Southeast Europe could destabilize the entire southern flank of his European empire. Someone playing *Risk* would say, "Just throw two XX and one V army down into the Balkans," but it's not that easy, not even for *der Führer*. The only railway link to the port of Thessaloniki originated in Southern Serbia. Furthermore, he needed to act quickly—the countdown was on to *Operation Barbarossa*, his momentous invasion of the Soviet Union, and the launch had already been delayed to allow for this pathetic Balkan adventure.

Alternating threats and flattery, the Germans spent weeks attempting to get Prince Paul and his Prime Minister Dragisa Cvetkovic to declare themselves for the Axis. The Yugoslavs wanted to remain neutral. Hitler insisted on outright declaration



for the Germans. In a hopeless situation, the Yugoslav leaders caved. On March 24, 1941, Yugoslavia officially became a party to the Tripartite Pact.



The Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church had a stormy meeting with Prince Paul and denounced the agreement on the radio. The reaction from the country's institutions was even more belligerent. On the night of March 26th, junior officers from the Yugoslav Air Force carried out a *coup d'etat*, sacking Cvetkovic and ousting Prince Paul. At their prompting, King Peter II, 17 years old and destined for one of the shortest reigns of any Serbian monarch, took the throne.

People in the streets of Belgrade came out *en masse* to support the new government, in demonstrations with a distinctly anti-German pallor. An immense crowd gathered in Belgrade and chanted anti-Nazi slogans. They advanced on the building housing the German Tourist Board, which, it was said, was a front run by the Gestapo. Demonstrators smashed all the windows, set a fire inside, and ritualistically defiled a swastika flag.

Adolf Hitler at first could not believe what he was being told about the happenings in Belgrade. It had to be some kind of sick joke. He then called in the heads of the German military and informed them he had decided to “destroy Yugoslavia as a military power and sovereign state”—to “cauterize the Serbian ulcer”.

In a tender telegram, Hitler advised the Italians not to start



any new ventures in the Balkans for the moment. Given that the *duce* was getting his lights punched out in Greece, that was easy enough. But Mussolini, who had precipitated this whole affair, was able to help rather than hurt his German allies for once, and not just because the demoralized Italian Army wouldn't be spearheading the invasion. Mussolini put Hitler in touch with the Ustasha.

The Nazis launched *Operation Enterprise 25*, the conquest of Yugoslavia, on the morning of April 6, 1941. Belgrade was emerging from Orthodox Easter services when *Luftwaffe* bombers appeared in the sky. Their bombs pinpointed anti-aircraft batteries and airfields, including the camouflaged hangars which housed most of the Yugoslav Air Force. Without the slightest resistance, Stuka divebombers then skipped across the rooftops, blowing the city into cinders and killing close to 17,000 civilians in a firestorm. The Nazis had been given precise instructions on the location of targets by a Croatian officer in the Air Force who had gone AWOL the week before. This was the primary contribution of the Ustasha to the war effort: wiping out the entirety of the Yugoslav Air Force before they had a chance to leave the ground.

Citizens of Zagreb turned on their radios to find out what was happening over the river. They had seen the swarms of aircraft from the north, but the *Luftwaffe* passed over Croatia and Slovenia without dropping their payloads. The radio relays in Belgrade had been destroyed; a deep, cloistered voice greeted them instead. It was Ante Pavelic broadcasting from Rome, calling for a mutiny. "Croat soldiers, use your weapons against the Serbian soldiers and officers. We are already fighting shoulder to shoulder with our German and Italian allies."

Many Yugoslavs had been lulled into the belief that the crisis precipitated by the signing of the Tripartite Pact had ended with the coup. Tito, after arriving in Belgrade following the coup, assumed the danger was over and returned to his hideout in Zagreb a few days later. Many units of the army were not even mobilized. One bemused German soldier wrote about a "confrontation" with a barracked unit in Croatia which had ignored



the mobilization order. Instead of preparing for mortal combat, they were having a party. The Croat officers interrupted festivities long enough to negotiate their surrender, before continuing on as if nothing had happened.

The collapse of Yugoslavia was swift and anti-climactic. Twenty-four hours after the on-slaught began, on April 7, the government was already making preparations to flee. On April 10, with the Royal Army still in the field, Slavko Kvaternik disembarked fresh from Italy and declared the Independent State of Croatia in the name of his *Poglavnik*, Ante Pavelic.

The head of the post-coup government, Air Force General Simovic, had spent a good deal of time in meetings leading up to the invasion going on about Serbia's storied history of resistance to aggressors. Vladko Macek, who with the other Croatian deputies retained his position after the coup, rebuked him, saying that one couldn't establish a sound national policy by stirring up strong emotions. Macek later confirmed that he was contacted before the invasion by German agents and asked to head an independent Croatia himself—an offer which he declined. Regardless, on April 9, he deserted the embattled government. Two days later he met with Kvaternik in Croatia and announced on the radio, "I invite all members of the Peasant Party to recognize the change, to help the new Croatia, and above all, to obey all its laws." To lead by example, Vladko Macek dutifully obeyed one of new Croatia's first laws which sentenced him to a concentration camp.

Ante Pavelic, accompanied by scarcely a hundred hardened Ustasha—the core of his organization after twelve years of fitful exile—arrived in Zagreb on April 16, where he was met by a congregation of notable citizens, including leaders of political parties, civic organizations and the hierarchy of the Croatian Catholic Church. Though it was a *fait accompli*, their acclaim would have made him *Poglavnik* even if German tanks not done so. "A wave of enthusiasm pervaded Zagreb at the time," Macek later wrote, "not unlike that which had swept through the city in 1918 when ties with Hungary were severed."



The Poglavnik

True to their master's word, Hitler's armies put an end to the short-lived (and, it should be noted, all-around disastrous) Yugoslav experiment. The government (including, notably, the Croat Peasant Party's governor of autonomous Croatia, Ivan Subasic) together with the 17 year old monarch fled to the Middle East and onward to Britain. With no one left behind to sign the articles of surrender, the Germans sprung a former Minister of Foreign Affairs from a Belgrade prison to do so. Eventually the Nazis found a more prominent figure, former Minister of War Milan Nedic, to act as the Marshal Pétain of a puppet Serbia. A group of junior officers led by Col. Dragoljub "Draza" Mihailovic were miffed by the quick surrender of the army and took to the hills in resistance.

The Germans had annexed small bits of Yugoslavia directly, and dished out vittles from the dead state to Bulgaria, Romania, and Hungary. The Italians took the lion's share of territory. As the locals had feared, Dalmatia was annexed outright, according to an agreement between Ante Pavelic and Count Ciano which was deeply unpopular even within the ranks of the Ustasha. Much of Kosovo and Macedonia was attached to Mussolini's puppet Albanian state. Montenegro was established as a "kingdom" without a king. None of the descendants of King Nikola wanted anything to do with it, and so it was ruled for the remainder of the war by the Italian army command.

Hitler was reluctant to grant the Ustasha, a party with minimal popular backing, control of such a large swath of territory. Had the support they gave to the invasion been critical (or even necessary), he may have overlooked the fact that none of the leaders of the group which purported to represent the soul of Croatia had stepped foot in their own country for a decade. Perhaps



remembering its position in the Hapsburg Empire, Hitler was inclined to grant Croatia “an autonomy in close liaison with Hungary”. Mussolini pressed for a puppet state he could better control. It was only by the *duce’s* persuasion, and after Macek turned down German overtures to lead the state, that Pavelic was granted his fief. The Independent State of Croatia (or NDH by its Serbo-Croatian acronym) was a swollen monster, including modern Croatia and Bosnia and swaths of territory in Serbia up to Zemun, at the gates of Belgrade itself.



Most important is the dedication, guns, bombs and sharp knives of Croatian Ustasha, who will clear and cut all that is rotten from the healthy Croat body. And then, let the world observe the murdered and burned corpses of traitors.

Ante Pavelic

Pavelic and his henchmen were still ordering new nameplates and stationary when newspapers throughout the NDH printed a memo from the desk of Ante Pavelic that must have made his subjects’ blood run cold. Pavelic explained that the primary aim of his government the “purification” of Croatia and the elimination of “alien elements”. Though the world was not yet familiar with the language of Dachau, such words couldn’t portend a bright and merry future. Reading excerpts from his deranged political tracts reprinted with devotion in every newspaper, Jews, Serbs, and Gypsies (and Freemasons) shuddered for what was to come.

According to his own figures, just less than half of the Independent State of Croatia’s inhabitants were actually Croatian. Even this figure was deduced using the *Poglavnik’s* arithmetic, which diverges greatly from the science we use to send rockets into space and tabulate our grocery bills. The Croats, then as now, were but the third-largest ethnic group in Bosnia, and their position in Hercegovina was by no means as dominant as it is today.

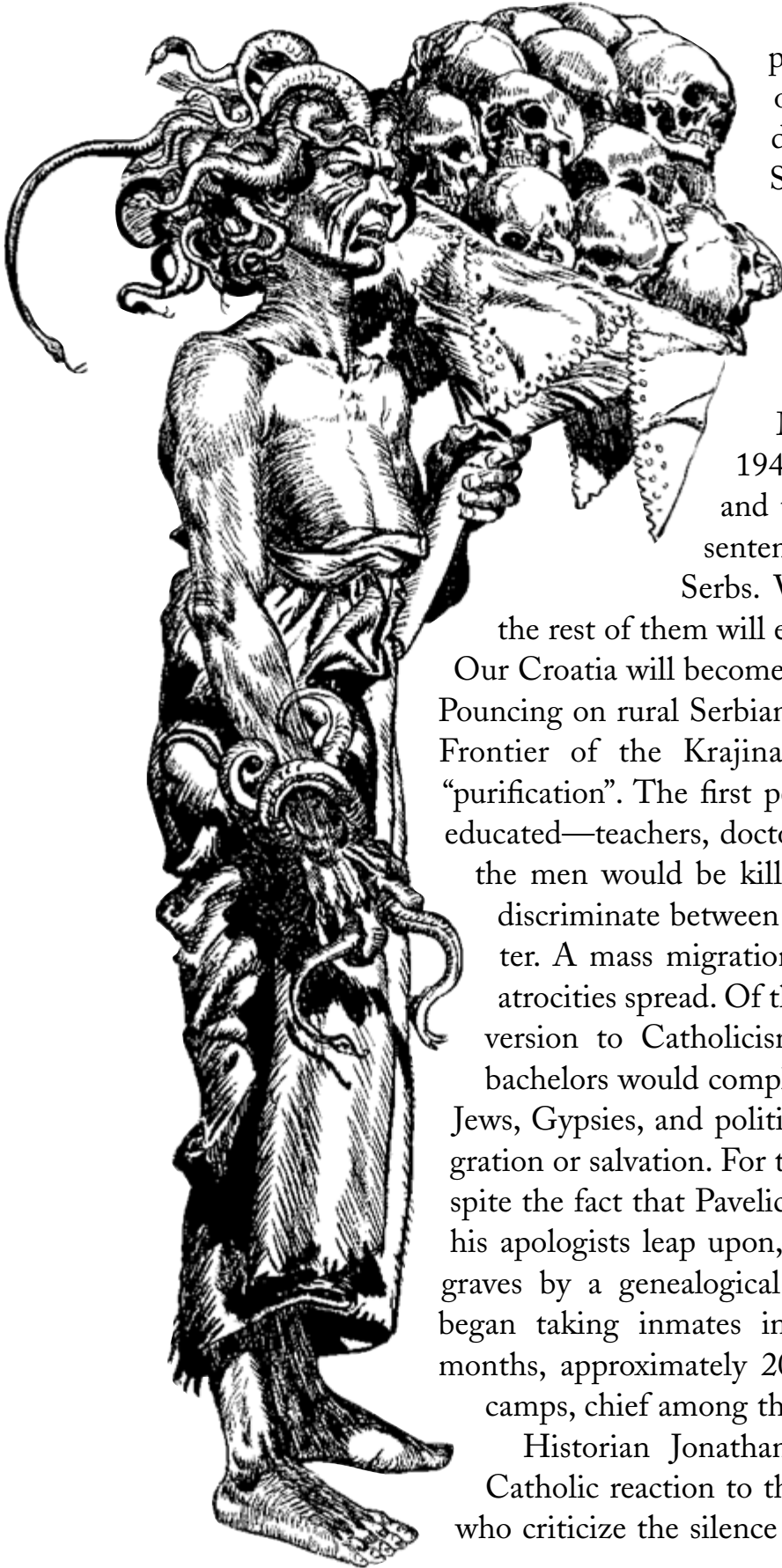
The *Poglavnik*, for all of his blind intolerance, had a rather liberal definition of Croat in this sense. Bosnjaks were hereafter considered apostate Croats who had adopted Islam (and Croats were, you recall, apostate Germans who somehow adopted names



like Ivo and Miroslav). The Ustasha Minister of Education, Religion and Cults and their chief cultural figure, Mile Budak, assured the Bosnian Muslims that “The state religion of Croatia is Islam, where the Croats are Muslims.” Great efforts were made to insinuate the common folk of both Bosnia and Croatia into collaboration with the Ustasha, through special recruitment, compulsory service of teenagers in either construction projects or Junior Ustasha paramilitary training, and handing over ownership of property belonging to dead or exiled Serbs to Muslim or Catholic peasants largely indifferent to the new rulers.

On April 27, 1941, just two weeks into the life of the Independent State of Croatia, there was no longer any doubt that Pavelic walked the walk. On that day, a newly-organized detachment of the Ustasha Army pounced upon the primarily Serbian village of Gudovac. They broke down doors, threw old women from windows, stabbed villagers in their beds. One group of Ustasha ordered ten men to stand in a line as if they were preparing to march. He then fired a single shot to see how many he could kill—a small contribution to the study of forensics, as well as an exposition of traditional Balkan thriftiness.

One hundred and ninety six Serbs perished in this small village. Over the next two weeks, the pogrom intensified. On May 8, the chief of one of the dozen secret police organizations set up in the NDH, Vjekoslav “Maks” Luburic, set aside his blueprints for the first of 26 concentration camps to lead the assault on another village, Blagaj. Four days later, he was back at it, rounding up and killing 260 Serbs in the mixed village of Prekopa. The methods of execution belied an absolute genius for cruelty. The Italians had been slow in securing ammunition for Ustasha units, but the Ustasha preferred these more savage forms of execution even after they were flush with guns’n’ammo. The vast majority of their victims were killed by truncheons, knives, axes, and clubs, suffering snapped necks, slit throats, and even live burial. In areas where the terrain was favourable—for instance, the future site of the nervous Virgin, Medjugorje—they were thrown from cliffs into one of the spontaneous cemeteries forming at the bottom of Bosnia’s snaking stone ravines. To make sure no one survived, Ustasha



pranksters would toss grenades or sticks of dynamite into the pits to blow the dead apart.

Something gruesome was happening in the Croatian countryside. Yet not even those familiar with the river of frayed press releases Ante Pavelic plowed through in his exile would guess that this was only the beginning.

Mile Budak, in a speech on July 22, 1941, crystallized the horror of the NDH and the Ustasha ideology with a few banal sentences: “We shall kill one part of the Serbs. We shall transport another third, and the rest of them will embrace the Roman Catholic religion...

Our Croatia will become Catholic within ten years.”

Pouncing on rural Serbian villages in the old Hapsburg Military Frontier of the Krajina was Pavelic’s way to bring about “purification”. The first people the Ustasha took away were the educated—teachers, doctors, and local leaders. Of the peasants, the men would be killed, though Ustasha certainly wouldn’t discriminate between the sexes in the passion of the slaughter. A mass migration towards Serbia began as rumours of atrocities spread. Of those left—widows especially—the conversion to Catholicism and marriage to eligible Croatian bachelors would complete Pavelic’s diabolical plan.

Jews, Gypsies, and political dissidents had no recourse to emigration or salvation. For them, there was only death. This was in spite the fact that Pavelic’s wife was part-Jewish (a detail which his apologists leap upon, hoping to erase a few thousand mass graves by a genealogical trick). Maks Luburic’s death camps began taking inmates in the Summer of 1941. After three months, approximately 20,000 Jews had been deported to the camps, chief among them Jasenovac.

Historian Jonathan Steinberg, in his overview of the Catholic reaction to the Holocaust, has written, “Even those who criticize the silence of [then Pope] Pius XII never suggest



that the Vatican caused the massacres; the issue is whether the pope and the clergy did enough to stop them. The Croatian case will not fit such comfortable secular categories.” Many of the attacks on Orthodox villages, as impossible as it is to believe, were spearheaded by dressed members of the Catholic clergy. Nowhere else in Europe was faith to become so ruthlessly prostituted for such evil.

The Archbishop of Sarajevo, Ivan Saric, was a fervent devotee to the Ustasha, his oath to the *Poglavnik* taking precedence over his oath to the Lord. “How many times have I heard the Ustasha ask where they would be without their priests!” he wrote on May 11, 1941. “I sang with the Ustasha with all my heart and voice, ‘Our Beautiful Homeland’, all with big tears in our eyes. And with eager hope in its beautiful, sweet and golden freedom, uplifting ourselves to God, we prayed to the Almighty to guide and protect Ante Pavelic for the freeing of Croatia.”

The stark reality that the Ustasha stood for the murder in principle of more than 2 million people never dissuaded the Archbishop of Sarajevo and other high-ranking members of the Croatian Catholic Church from their belief in the righteousness of their hero. Those priests and monks not bathing in human blood were invited to assist in mass conversions. *Te Deums* were sung in churches on the *Poglavnik's* birthday (one parish priest who refused to do so was sent to Jasenovac). Archbishop Saric, who was also a bad poet, loved his big brute more than ever on Christmas Day, 1941, when he wrote a 22 verse epic called “Ode to the *Poglavnik*”:

Embracing thee was precious to the poet
as embracing our beloved Homeland.
For God Himself was at thy side, thou good and strong one
so that thou might perform thy deeds for the Homeland...
And against the Jews, who had all the money,
who wanted to sell our souls,
who built a prison around our name—
those traitors!—
Dr. Ante Pavelic! the dear name!
Croatia has therein a treasure from Heaven!
May the King of Heaven accompany thee, our Golden Leader!



My Favourite Fascist

But there is, after all, more to life than driving a pickaxe into the skull of your enemies. With the founding of the NDH and the introduction of Rule by Massacre, Pavelic launched a diplomatic blitz to thank and further ingratiate himself with his allies, knowing their support was necessary to solve the minority problem troubling his masticated state.

In Italy, Pavelic and Count Ciano discussed some details about the Italian zone of influence in the NDH and their annexation of the Dalmatian coast. The *Poglavnik* also made a visit to the Vatican, where he made a favourable impression on the Catholic hierarchs. Though they would not recognize the new state, seeing as how it had declared war on the free world, they made it clear to the chieftain that this was but a formality. The Ustasha representative was recognized as an ambassador. Throughout the fitful life of the NDH, only one high-ranking cleric in Rome—Cardinal Eugene Tisserant—had the courage to criticize the Croatian aspect of what Pope John Paul II has scandalously characterized as “the wise and skilful diplomacy” of Pope Pius XII.

While in Rome, Pavelic also had the rather difficult task of finding a king for his new Kingdom. Mussolini insisted that Ante Pavelic and the Ustasha replicate in Croatia his own bizarre arrangement with the Italian King, Victor Emmanuel III. Victor himself proposed his second cousin, the dissolute Duke of Spoleto, as a candidate. The Duke accepted but, as he later said, “I was drunk at the time.” With surprising resolve, Spoleto learned something about the bloody pandemonium of his new realm from returning Italian officers. Using a diverse repertoire of stunts, bluffs and lies, the newly-ordained King Tomislav managed to delay his expected departure date for more than two years,



by which time Italy had dropped out of the war and Spoleto was free to return to his delicious Milanese mistress. Croatia remained a kingdom, even though their monarch never stepped foot in the country.

On June 6, 1941, Pavelic had his first meeting with Adolf Hitler. In the two months since he had advocated that Croatia be liquidated as an appendage of Hungary, Hitler had warmed to his lost Gothic kinsman. Pavelic appealed to his good side when he offered to send Croatian volunteers to fight the Soviets on the Eastern Front. Hitler in turn encouraged the expulsion of Serbs and offered to settle their lands with leftover Slovenes and Croats from the Reich. The growing pains of the NDH would be torturous, Hitler warned his fellow barbarian, but this would in the end be better than a “permanent suffering”. *Also sprach der Führer*: “If the Croat state wishes to be strong, a fifty year policy of intolerance must be pursued, because too much tolerance on such issues can only do harm.”



Pavelic hardly needed the encouragement. On June 28th, 1941 the center of terror moved south from the Krajina. Hercegovina, Ante’s old stomping ground, was stamped with blood and gore, with the ferocity of the massacres even more intense than the atrocities of May. Villages were literally depopulated overnight by Ustasha, drunk on blood, playing with the severed body parts of their victims.

On that same, dreaded day (June 28th is St. Vitus’ Day, *Vidovdan* to the Serbs, on which horribly bad things occur with uncanny frequency), an Italian squadron investigating reports of gunshots came under fire in the Krajina. The Italians thought it was the Ustasha. “Don’t shoot!” one shouted. “We’re Italians!”



A moment later, several Serbs climbed out of the brush and apologized. These were the first Chetniks in Croatia, under the command of a former Orthodox priest, socialist, trade unionist and a bear of a man, Momcilo “Duke” Djujic.

As soon as he got word of the German invasion, Tito emerged from his Zagreb hideout and set out for Belgrade, traveling in disguise as a wealthy man of leisure. On July 4th, in the swank Belgrade villa of the publisher of the newspaper *Politika*, he dispatched members of the Communist Party’s Central Committee to different parts of the dismembered country to organize resistance to the invader. Tito would never live down the fact that, though he claimed the decision to fight was motivated by patriotism, the Party didn’t move an inch until the Soviet Union was attacked by Hitler. Up until then, Germany and the USSR had a “Non-Aggression Pact,” and in states which had fallen to the Nazis the Communist Party remained dormant even when, as happened in Belgrade, high-ranking members were rounded up by the Gestapo.

On July 13, 1941, the Montenegrins rose in arms—the first mass rebellion in Occupied Europe. Reports leaked out to England and the Soviet Union, cheering the Allies that the rugged mountain folk, whose defiance had been celebrated in the poems of Milton and Shelley, had not lost their love of freedom. During the uprising, before the Italians resorted to brutal reprisals to quell the population, Royalist Chetniks fought side-by-side with Communist-led insurgents (who imported the word *partizan* to designate their soldiers). Tito met with Draza Mihailovic on three occasions to smooth relations, but their minions were already at each others’ throats.

The Italian campaign of pacification in Montenegro, in which whole villages were burned in retaliation, was nothing compared to what the Germans did in the Serbian city of Kragujevac, where in October 1941, 7,000 Serbian men and boys and one German soldier who refused to stand in the firing squad were executed in retaliation for a squadron of Germans killed in an ambush. This unfathomable barbarity was repeated at Kraljevo with 1,700 civilians butchered. For the Serbian Chetniks, the survival of their nation took precedence over every foolish skirmish



with an overpowering enemy. They were far more powerful than the Partizans, and more popular as well. Their forces could better withstand punishing assaults from the Germans, but were also more at risk. Nonetheless, in the Bosnian city of Foca, self-defense against the Ustasha had spiraled out of control, resulting in a massive bloodletting against the city's Muslim inhabitants and adding another ethnic dimension to the Balkan Golgotha.

Though they later cried foul, the Communists were brazenly attempting to undercut the Chetniks from the very beginning, throwing away resources to build cadres in Serbia where the Chetniks had popular support. It was a dismal failure, and the Serbian divisions of the Partizans were completely decimated.

The Partizans were driven out of Serbia by the Chetniks, and then out of the Sandzak, a narrow belt of predominantly Slavic Muslim communities on the border between Serbia and Montenegro. Tito and the Supreme Staff relocated to Bosnia, to lick their wounds and regroup for yet another suicidal penetration into Serbia or Montenegro. Instead, they received an influx of new recruits. These were Serbs from the NDH, hardened by the murderous rampage of the Ustasha. During 1942 and most of 1943 the units of the Supreme Staff ranged throughout Bosnia, building mobile units capable of fighting anywhere in the country without ties to the land, forming ephemeral local "soviets" wherever they parked, and attempting to link up their belt of "liberated territories".

It was to be Ante Pavelic's fate that the two ideas he despised most—Communism and Yugoslavism—would prosper because of him.



Blues for Adolph

It is truly astounding to see, in the handwriting of loyal Germans, reports of atrocities inscribed not with words of pride and smug superiority, but descriptions such as “nauseating” and “disgusting”. In an the illustrated catalog of headless bodies and mutilated corpses called *What the Ustasha Did At Bjelovar*, German investigators describe how Pavelic’s troops had broken into an Orthodox Church (which Pavelic deemed a “political organization” rather than a faith), forced the worshippers to lay face down and speared them with bayonets like fish on a trident. “If a stop isn’t put to this,” one German intelligence officer wrote with astonishing vehemence, “there won’t be a Serb left in this country.”

Croatia’s other ally went further than expressions of condemnation and disgust. Italian commanders initially provided food and protection, and later even guns and ammunition to bands of Chetniks for defense against the Ustasha. At Trebinje, the Italian military governor actually disarmed an Ustasha detachment emerging from a massive bloodletting and placed them under arrest. The Chetniks took over the town the next day.

And then reports critical of the Ustasha began appearing in the Italian press. Mussolini, a former newspaper editor, controlled the tabloids with an iron hand, and there’s little doubt they appeared with his approval. Turin’s *Gazetto del Popol* opined: “It would be ludicrous to deny that the powers-that-be in Croatia are former terrorists. These criminals have become generals, ministers, ambassadors, newspaper editors and police chiefs. In spite of their promotion to higher ranks, they have not changed fundamentally. In fact they are exactly what they used to be, including Pavelic and all members of his government.” Just six months after the invasion, after Pavelic’s meeting with Hitler, Mussolini had lost all influence over his former protégé.



But no *fascista*, SS trooper or Gestapo goon could compete in a game of The Dozens with the crusty Nazi plenipotentiary for the region, General Edmund Glaise von Horstenau. His first contact with the Ustasha came at Petar Kvaternik's funeral (the brother of Slavko and uncle of Dido Kvaternik had been murdered by members of the Royal Army in revenge for his family's sabotage). The General told Slavko Kvaternik he looked forward to working with him, but warned against adopting the "comic opera" title of Field Marshal. That Field Marshal Slavko Kvaternik, a man who had no experience as a commander, ignored his advice told the General that this was going to be a tough job.

In June of 1941, with the NDH hemorrhaging from Ustasha attacks and Chetnik retaliation, von Horstenau began his report to Berlin:

According to reliable reports from countless German military and civilian observers, during the last few weeks, in town and country, the Ustasha have gone raging mad.

Horstenau set up his own intelligence network in the NDH, knowing he could never rely on Dido Kvaternik ("the pathological son of the pathological Field Marshal") for accurate information. In the Autumn of 1942, the Austrian General concluded a report with his assessment of the "unspeakable swineishness of this gang of murderers and criminals."

The General had heard about the "internment camps" for undesirables, and demanded to be taken to one. His host—"a rogue"—had cleaned up the place but it still stank of death and excrement. "And then worst of all: a room along whose walls, lying on straw just lain down for my inspection, something like fifty naked children, half of them dead, the other half dying... Such places have reached the peak of abomination here in Croatia, under a *Poglavnik* installed by us."

On this occasion, von Horstenau turned to his roguish guide and summed up his opinion of the NDH, the Ustasha, and Ante Pavelic in general: "This is enough to make you puke."

"The Croat Revolution was by far the bloodiest and most awful among all I have seen firsthand or from afar in Europe since 1917," von Horstenau goaded Pavelic. According to von



Horstenau, the Ustasha had done “more evil in a day than the Serbian regime had done in twenty years.”

When historians (or propagandists, as it is) mention that the Ustasha regime was so barbaric that “even Nazis” were sickened by it, they are referring primarily to Edmund Glaise von Horstenau. He was typical in some respects of the old Austrian military aristocracy, but a few things do have to be kept in mind before repeating clichés. First, few people knew what was really being done to the Jews, other than that they were being transported to camps. Horstenau was regular army, not SS, and like many Wehrmacht officers, probably didn’t know Jews in Poland and Germany were being kept in places at least as bad as Jasenovac. The massacres in the NDH also predate adoption of the Final Solution, when German camps where undesirables were worked to death were replaced by extermination camps where the only escape was through the chimney.

Second, not even Nazi true believers wished for the extermination of the Serbs—it was off the radar of their indoctrination. Some believed Serbs were barbaric savages; others admired their fighting prowess from anecdotes from the First World War. Officers such as von Horstenau saw that Pavelic’s demented policies were driving docile and largely indifferent peasants into the ranks of the insurgents. The Germans had no desire to police Croatia more than they had to, which would mean diverting troops from where they were needed on the Eastern Front.

And, finally, as often happens in war, occupying troops weighed down by bureaucratic burdens and concerned with the administration of political objectives sympathized with the wild crazies they were fighting, who had no similar restrictions.

That said, Glaise von Horstenau wasn’t the only Wehrmacht officer to complain about the Ustasha’s barbarity and sadism to Berlin. Field Marshal Wilhelm List, famous for having been sacked from the siege of Stalingrad by Hitler before the latter threw his troops into catastrophe, also protested against the wickedness of his Ustasha “allies”, as did many others.



The Poglavnik with Slavko Kvaternik, Zagreb 1943



One of the first inmates in the concentration camp of Jasenovac was none other than Vladko Macek. Pavelic considered the popular successor to Stjepan Radic more of a threat than any Serb, but, possibly realizing the value of public relations for the first time in his life, released him to serve under house arrest before his three-month term expired (inmates sent to Jasenovac were imprisoned for three months, after which death was certain). Macek was repeatedly contacted by von Horstenau and others and asked to take a public role in the NDH to balance out Pavelic's Ustasha lunacy. On every occasion, he listened, but he refused.

In his memoirs, Macek writes that there was a Catholic chapel in the death camp where priests heard confession from the guards. On seeing one Ustasha torturer emerge from confessing his sins, Macek asked him if he did not fear the judgment of God. "Don't talk to me about that," the guard retorted. "I am perfectly aware of what is in store for me. For my past, present and future sins I will burn in hell. But at least I will burn for Croatia."



This fanatical devotion to a primitive national ideal permeated the hardcore of the Ustasha. Pavelic transformed the former terrorist organization into a ruling elite, a Nazi Party for the Balkans, with their own Gestapo and SS fighting units. There were probably about 15,000 members of the Ustasha Army during the war years. They would fight to the last bullet, then pull the pins on their grenades before surrendering, knowing that death, possibly horrific but in any case certain, awaited their capture by Chetniks or Partizans.

Beneath the Ustasha were the *Domobranici*—the Home Guards and Croatia's regular army. Pavelic showed absolute dis-



dain for the Domobrans, believing that anyone who would pass up the chance to become an heroic Ustasha was hardly worthy of the name Croat. Subsequently the Domobrans were a completely unreliable force, heavily infiltrated by Communists, Socialists and other political undesirables who thought it wise to get some military training and find a few things to steal before defecting to the Partizans. The less cunning often surrendered before the first shot was fired. Cynical Ustasha dubbed the Domobrans “the Partizan Supply Unit” for their tendency to throw down their weapons as soon as the enemy came near. One Domobran even landed an aircraft at Partizan headquarters. Others, upon surrendering, bragged that it was the third or fourth time they had been disarmed.

With the Domobrans largely on the sideline, and the Ustasha Army busy protecting Croatianism from little old ladies, the Partizans were soon able to lay claim to large swathes of Bosnia, Slavonia and even pockets on the outskirts of Zagreb as liberated territory. To explain the situation, in a meeting with Hitler in November 1942 at the *Führer's* command post on the Eastern Front, Pavelic fell back on a typical scapegoat. The problem, as always, was the Serbs. The Italians were protecting up to 30,000 Chetniks in Bosnia and the Krajina. Because of them, the *Poglavnik* was unable to exercise authority over most of his own territory.

Some German commanders in Berlin, privy to the reports of von Horstenau, had begun to doubt the wisdom of placing Pavelic in power on the ashes of Yugoslavia. Hitler was not one of them. He came down hard on his aides, who in turn pressured Mussolini to order his commanders to stop protecting Serbs and Jews in the NDH. On Ciano's memo detailing the German demands, Mussolini scrawled “No objection.” But if they ever received the order, his commanders in the Balkans ignored it. They refused to hand over Jews and Serbs to the Ustasha because, as Italian General Mario Roatta explained in his memoirs, “they would be interned at Jasenovac, with well-known consequences.”

While the Italians were being transformed from allies to enemies, Pavelic spent most of this period—most of the entire war, actually—behind his desk in Zagreb. The *Poglavnik* was a



puritan, a homebody. While he reveled in lavish military parades and bizarre fascizoid holidays, Pavelic was an imperfect fit for his role as a jerkwater Hitler. For one thing, he lacked the personality. Pavelic was so awful at public speaking (and the mass rally was an essential component of Fascism) that he began to consciously mimic his idols, watching hours of newsreels to study Hitler's unparalleled control of an audience and Mussolini's fits and faints of impossible drama.

Pavelic and his handlers threw out every trick in Goebbels' Bible to make the *Poglavnik* into a Demigod, but his personality cult never took root. For one thing, Pavelic, like many Slavic leaders ashamed of his peasant origins, had a terrible inferiority complex. He had obtained a doctorate in law from the University of Zagreb. Subsequently it was illegal to print his name without the honourific title of "Doctor" included. Propaganda posters with his face generously rendered swore eternal loyalty to "Poglavnik *Dr. Ante Pavelic*".



Ante Pavelic, Zagreb, 1944

The Ustasha had officially supplanted Macek's party as the champions of the peasantry ("In Croatia, whoever is not of peasant origin is, nine times out of ten, not a Croat at all but an immigrant foreigner," Pavelic wrote), but nevertheless agents of his sprawling security apparatus noted that the Balkan art form of composing obscene odes to their leaders was enjoying a popular renaissance at the *Poglavnik's* expense.

Besides micromanaging Dante's Inferno, Pavelic really only applied himself to one other administrative task during the war. Having long been an avid stamp collector, he threw himself into the task of making Croatia the international capital of philately. Among the loot from murdered Serbs and Jews, the *Poglavnik*



would help himself to all collections of old or rare postage stamps. He was outraged at his Ustasha administrators at the beginning of the war, who merely seized Royal Yugoslavia's postage and stamped the NDH's insignia, the red and white checkerboard, on top of it. He consulted with his culture mogul Mile Budak about selecting the best Croatian artists to illustrate the postage of their new country. Pavelic suggested Ivan Mestrovic as a good candidate. The self-proclaimed Father of his Country had no idea that the internationally acclaimed Mestrovic was not a painter at all but a sculptor.



Collapse

The NDH never regained control over its territory, and the boundaries of the state were theoretical from 1942 until the end of the war. The Partizans in Bosnia would not be dislodged despite two punishing operations by Axis forces. Duke Djujic's Chetniks struck deep into the NDH heartland with impunity. In 1943 alone, 58 Ustasha mayors of Bosnian towns were assassinated, and nearly two hundred town halls burnt to the ground.

A few months after Pavelic's meeting with Hitler, the German army suffered their major defeat at Stalingrad. Ustasha troops under German command were annihilated. Axis forces were also beaten in North Africa, leaving Southern Europe wide open to an Allied landing. With the situation on the ground unraveling, the only reliable Domobrans—the so-called "Legion" units of Croatian soldiers commanded by German officers—began deserting as well.

The Allied invasion of Europe began on July 10, 1943 with the capture of Sicily. Bombers were rushed to captured airfields for raids on Italian cities. After an air attack on Rome, the long-silent Italian king decided that something had to be done. Mussolini was deposed. A month later, the Italians surrendered.

The Germans had anticipated Italy's collapse, but there was too much ground for them to cover. More than 380,000 Italian troops were stationed in the Balkans, many of them policing the Italian sphere of influence in the NDH. Few elected to continue fighting on the German side. Many, in fact, elected to join their erstwhile enemies. In Dalmatia and Slovenia alone more than 4,000 Italian troops joined the Partizans or the Chetniks.

But the vast majority of Italians simply shrugged and tried to figure out a way to get home. They were almost knocked down



in the race to grab the weapons they left behind. It was Tito's ability to seize the city of Split, supply center for the Italian Army in the NDH and Dalmatia, that really won the war for the Partizans. Far from becoming *fascistas* during the occupation, the shipworkers of Split threw open the city gates for the Communists. In Dalmatia, Croats were not asked to murder their brothers or neighbours, but to give up their language and become Italians. They too were fighting for national survival, and gravitated to the Partizans as the only force which would have them. With the Germans advancing, the Partizans were forced to evacuate Split soon thereafter. But they did so happily, as units mauled by offensives healed up and retooled with their new toys.

Until 1943, the Partizans were a minor irritant to the Ustasha. Certainly the Germans didn't care much about them, as their only point of interest in the Balkans was security for the railways and the procurement of certain metals necessary to

feed the war machine. Now, with German forces in retreat from Russia, the prospect of an Allied landing in the Balkans turned Yugoslavia into a major theater of the war. Growth in the size of the Partizan army, the equipment seized from the Italians and the emergence of several talented commanders made the Partizans the largest, most militant resistance force in Occupied Europe.

Oddly enough, Tito, Hitler and Pavelic all feared the same thing: an Anglo-American landing in the Balkans. Tito calculated that if this were to occur, Western forces would back the Chetniks—and his real objective wasn't just to win the war but to add Yugoslavia to the short list of red republics. In secret negotiations carried out with the Germans (Communist historians later referred to them euphemistically as the "March Consultations"),



the Partizans declared unambiguously that they would attack the British and Americans if they attempted a landing. The “consultations” never amounted to more than a prisoner exchange and a lull in the fighting, which the Partizans used to attack the Chetniks. The Germans on the other hand used the ceasefire to give their forces time to prepare for an offensive intended to encircle and destroy the Partizans in Bosnia and Montenegro.

Tito’s paranoia (and Hitler’s too) was fed by British disinformation. As is well known, the English had cracked the German’s “Enigma” code and knew the Nazis feared an invasion force landing in the Balkans, driving north and cutting off their troops still fighting in the Soviet Union. The Germans, in turn, had cracked *Tito’s* code, and knew from his messages to Moscow that the Wehrmacht would have an unusual ally in the event of an Allied penetration into the Balkans.



The year 1943 was an awful prophesy of things to come for the Ustasha. Domobrans continued to desert, until the Ustasha Army had to be dissolved and their troops placed in line with their Domobran comrades to fortify their resolve. The Partizans, who had previously shot themselves in the foot repeatedly by acting as brutal as the invader to local peasants they considered Chetniks (which came to be defined as “Serbs who are not Communists”), finally began to understand how things worked and would accept many former Domobran and Chetnik grunts without asking too many questions. As season turned into season, Pavelic’s enemies grew stronger, fortified now by airdrops and reinforcement from the British and to a lesser degree, the Soviets.

According to the erstwhile NDH “president”, a non-entity named Nikola Mandic (whoops... *Doctor* Nikola Mandic), Ante Pavelic never gave up hope that the Germans would win the war. He confided in Mandic that Hitler was developing “super-weapons” that would throw the Russian hordes back from the



threshold of Germany. It was an article of faith, unbending before logic. Mussolini, before being deposed at a meeting of the Grand Fascist Council, also babbled on about these superweapons vanquishing his enemies in Sicily. To men who tied their fortunes so closely to the Nazis, it was their only hope.

At least two Ustasha chieftains didn't see such a rosy picture. Mladen Lorkovic, who had held several minister-level positions in the government, had established contact with the British military mission to the Partizans. British documents on the war are, maddeningly, still classified, so we have little indication how much consideration was given to a minor member of the government considering a *coup*. Some nationalist historians have deluded themselves that Lorkovic would be recognized as the head of a neutral Croatia and the country would suddenly join the Allied camp—a game the King of Italy had previously tried to play with the Allies, to no avail. It's unthinkable that the Independent State of Croatia, born in the Nazi onslaught and on the periphery of a shrinking Reich, would fetch a better price—or a less draconian punishment—than Germany's chief ally.

Regardless, Lorkovic met frequently with the Ustasha Minister of War Ante Vokic about his plans, and the two began to sound out other officers in the Domobrans for a *coup d'état* against the mad *Poglavnik*. Pavelic got wind of the conspiracy before it got that far. Lorkovic and Vokic were arrested and imprisoned in that hotbed of sedition, Lepoglava, where Tito had once been taught the difference between a factionalist, a deviationist and a neo-capitalistic dupe. In an act of spite, the conspirators were executed by the retreating Ustasha in May of 1945.

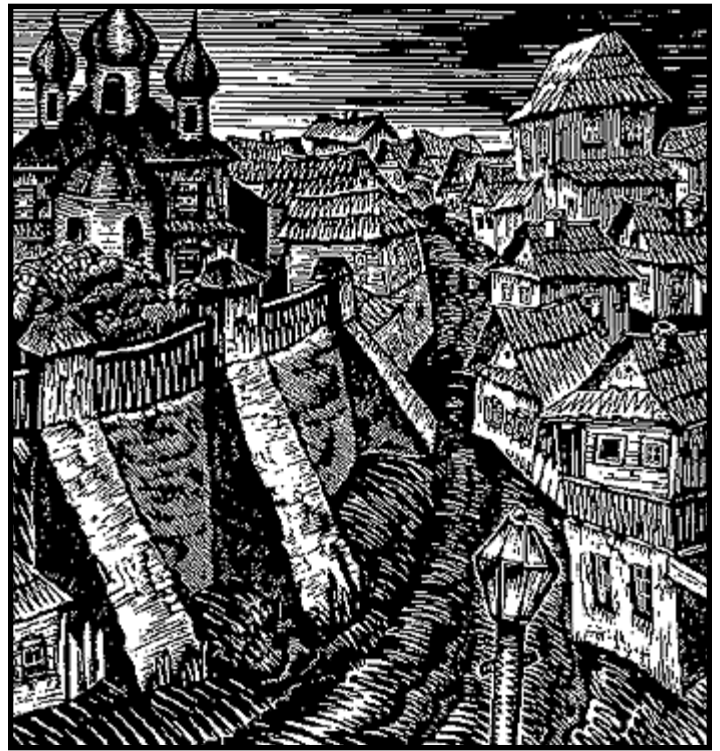


On May Day, 1943, Tito promised his ragged soldiers that they would be celebrating their next Communist Christmas in Belgrade. His optimism seemed ludicrous at the time. But after a rapid advance following Stalingrad, the Soviets were on the cusp



of eastern Serbia a year later. By late September, 1944, the Red Army was fighting north of Belgrade in an attempt to encircle the capital, and on October 20 they took the city.

The Wehrmacht took overall command of the forces still fighting in the Balkans and established a front-line at Srem. After savage fighting, their defenses were breached and Croatia was virtually defenseless. To the last, however, Pavelic stuck to his insane principles. Hunted by the Partizans, the Chetnik commander of Montenegro, Pavle Djuricic, attempted a breakout to reach British and American troops north of Yugoslavia by crossing the meager territory Pavelic still controlled. The temptation of killing one last handful of Serbs was too great. The *Poglavnik* gleefully diverted troops from the front to intercept Djuricic's desperate band and annihilate them to a man.



Djuricic's fate notwithstanding, Chetniks had more to fear from Tito than from Pavelic. Tito was looking to settle the score with everyone, but most of all with Draza Mihailovic. Duke Djuricic had led a huge detachment of Serbian soldiers and refugees to exile in Italy. Instead of following suit, which would have meant crossing the whole of Yugoslavia with clashes the entire way, Draza decided to take his chances in Serbia. There have been claims that the Partizans, after recruiting one of Draza's radio operator, led the Chetnik leader into a trap. Whatever the case, he was captured, put on trial a year later, and executed.

For the *Poglavnik*, too, the end was near. In March of 1945, Pavelic asked Archbishop Stepinac, head of the Croatian Catholic Church, to take over as leader of the NDH. It wasn't to forestall the Partizans and Russians, or to give an independent Croatia untainted by his brutal legacy a chance in post-war bargaining sessions. Pavelic wouldn't dream of a Croatia without himself at its head. Instead, his "abdication" was a transparent attempt to preempt his old rival, Vladko Macek, who was weighing the possibility of declaring an independent Croatia under the



protection of the British. Stepinac seriously considered Pavelic's proposal while the skies exploded above him. Macek, for his part, hardly had a movement to lead anymore. Some Peasant Party leaders became exasperated by his unwillingness to openly oppose the Ustasha, or to lead his own movement which would siphon off the support of anti-Fascist Croats from the Partizans. The indecisiveness of their leaders led several Peasant Party members to contact the Partizans on their own, though they were prevented by party elders from attending the planned meetings.

Thus, despite having fought through and survived an unmerciful enemy, in one of the most violent theaters of the most horrendous war the world has ever known, Tito and the Communists were handed Croatia by default.

The Nazis signed their surrender on May 9th, but the Ustasha kept on fighting. Croatia, not Germany, was the last Axis state in Europe to succumb.

In mid-May, 1945, Tito informed his commanders that the ringleaders of the NDH were at the head of a large column of refugees fleeing at top speed for the Austrian border. All Partizan units in Croatia, Vojvodina and Slovenia were put on alert and ordered to apprehend them.

Dr. Ante Pavelic, Dr. Andrija Artukovic, Dr. Mile Budak, Archbishop (and Dr.) Ivan Saric and a horde of less degreed henchmen were among the 50,000 or so desperate Croats running this marathon of the damned. Partizans were on their every side, as were former Domobrans and others pissed about what had happened to their country. This long column of refugees was pursued by the Communists, strafed by the Soviets from the air, riddled with bullets from the forests and ravines, as if the dead were rising from their pits to seek revenge.

They finally reached the Austrian frontier at the city of Bleiburg. The British met them there. Pavelic and the other Ustasha ringleaders wore disguises—the British already knew who they were and were looking for them. After some time, the British decided to send the entire column—refugees, Ustasha and all—back into Yugoslavia for the new régime to sort out. The Partizans, now Yugoslavia's government, met them. Some were shot immediately. Others were marched until they collapsed on



their feet. The survivors were put into camps where typhus and disease further cut them down. This is what nationalist historians refer to as *Krizni Put*, “the Way of the Cross”, comparing the march of these Croats to the path of Jesus on the way to Crucifixion.

No one can be sure how many Croats died on the march from Bleiburg—a mass grave reputed to be from this time was just recently discovered beneath a highway in Slovenia. For that matter, no one can reasonably estimate how many human beings were driven through Ante Pavelic’s slaughterhouse. The Yugoslav Communist government put the war dead at 1.8 million, but this included all those killed on the territory of Yugoslavia. The Italian War Ministry put the Ustasha’s victims at 300,000 *in 1941*, when the death camps, which operated until the collapse of the NDH, were just getting started. The truth is that nationalist historians have too often played tit-for-tat with war dead, Croats assuming the highest number possible at Bleiburg and the Serbs doing the same for the victims of the NDH, and the Bosnian Muslims pointing to the massacre of thousands by Chetniks at Foca as proof that they were actually the ones who suffered the most.

As for the victims of the Ustasha—the NDH, while many of its records have been preserved, wasn’t inspired by the anal retentiveness of the Germans in noting its victims’ height, weight and eye colour before they were turned into kindling. The Simon Weisenthal Center, which has sought not to get involved in the Balkan bloodshed of the later 20th century, has put the number at 30,000 Jews killed (about 75% of the pre-war population), and 29,000 Gypsies (97%). For Serbs, they estimate 600,000 were murdered in cold blood by the Ustasha, which, Mile Budak would be pleased to know, was just under a third of the pre-war Serbian population of the lands gathered together in the hideous nightmare of the Independent State of Croatia.



The Ratline

The story of Tito in the years after the war is well known. Filled with delusions that they were a great power, the Yugoslav Communists tossed around nuclear-tipped sticks of dynamite in the stand-off between East and West, first by funding the Communists in the Greek Civil War after the Soviets cut them off, then by attempting to lay claim to parts of Austria and Italy, nearly setting off World War III by their intransigence over the Italian port city of Trieste, which had a Slovene minority. The Russians weren't pleased by the freelancing done by their fraternal subordinates, and with Stalin's megalomania feeding an insipid feud, in 1948 Yugoslavia was expelled from the merry Bolshevik family of nations. The state apparatus was gradually liberalized, though outbreaks of repression followed any overt national revivals in the lands aching with the fresh wounds of mass graves.

As well-known as the story of Yugoslavia is, the story of Croatia during these years—or the tale of those fanatics who claimed to represent her—is barely known, glimpsed only through the propaganda of her self-mythologizing historians. If this were the story of Nazi Germany, it would end right here, at the end of the war, while a chorus of lawyers and journalists grandstand on the concepts of international law at Nuremberg. The story of Ante Pavelic and the Independent State of Croatia, however, is far more complicated.

For years, all that was known was that Ante Pavelic escaped justice through a net of darkness, surfacing several years after the war in Argentina. No one knew how he got there, or the complicated interests of the Americans, Argentines, and Papal envoys watching over this orphan of fortune. While we have nothing approaching a complete narrative, both time and the emergence



of an independent Croatian state in the 1990s have cast some light on just how it was that the worst mass-murderer to survive the war escaped from justice and lived quite openly in the years following the immolation of the Independent State of Croatia.

Pavelic and many other Ustasha chieftains slipped away from the British camp in Bleiburg, thus evading the fate of the others who were turned over to the Partizans. It was alleged that there was a significant pay-off to buy their escape, but no evidence has ever been produced.

Pavelic spent several months laying low in Austria. Despite speculation, the only eyewitness account of his time there comes to us from his daughter, Marija, who gave a number of interviews when she returned to Croatia in the 1990s to lead an extremist movement and reclaim her family's political dowery:

We were lucky. We landed on an Austrian who saved Father. For money. He put him up on a peasant estate in the Alps, with false Austrian papers. The only person who lived with Father in that house was a maid, an Italian woman. We (the family) lived elsewhere in San Egilgen. We reported to the Americans, as this zone was under American control...

We met up with Father one to three times a week, in the woods. He spent his time in the woods, picking mushrooms and catching fish. He even sent us some of these and we in turn sent him some of the bread rations we had received. One day at the end of summer 1945, it was raining and mother wasn't feeling well and she asked me to go out and meet Father. I found him alone in the woods, with a backpack, preparing to escape. When he had gone home the maid had waved a signal that the police were there.

In the same interview, Marija's husband Srecko Psinicik, a former Ustasha officer who would later resurface as Pavelic's right hand man and editor of one of the reborn Ustasha movement's chief propagandists, added, "Had he been arrested he would certainly have been handed over to Yugoslavia. He had already once been in the hands of the Americans and English but they hadn't recognized him." The facelessness which had impeded the growth of his personality cult while Pavelic was in power benefited him greatly as a fugitive.



Naif painting of Ante Pavelic from a post-war émigré journal

Far from the idyll of the mass-murderer in flannel with his trout and mushrooms—and even further away from the killing fields around Bleiburg—clergy and laymen at the College of San Girolamo degli Illirici in Rome were abuzz with activity. San Girolamo was a place of rest and refuge for Croatian priests come to study at the See of St. Peter. Unofficially, it was a waystation for hunted Ustasha chieftains desperate to catch a steamer out of Europe.

Monsignor Juraj Madjerec was the head of San Girolamo. He was reputedly a favourite of Pope Pius XII, and ably assisted by his secretary, Father Krunoslav Draganovic. Father Draganovic was a Franciscan. As posterboy for the satanic marriage of the Crucifix and the Dagger, he was also an officer in the Ustasha. He achieved the rank of Colonel in Pavelic's corps of wonderboys, and as an official of the Ministry of Internal Colonization was responsible for the confiscation of Serbian and Jewish land and its reappropriation to Croats.

In 1943, Col./Father Draganovic was convinced to lay aside his Ustasha Oath and join, of all clubs that would have him, the Red Cross. As Croatia's representative, he went to Rome, probably to assist in diplomacy with the Vatican. His timing was fortuitous. Because of his connections in the Red Cross, Draganovic was able to expedite the vetting process Croats in Allied hands went through to check if they were wanted for war crimes. Draganovic, this scandalous Scarlet Pimpernel in the collar of a cleric, made sure to keep one foot in the gutter of his underworld connections. When God and the Holy Father weren't enough, he kept several master forgers from the Calabrian mafia



on speed-dial, to procure false identity papers for his charges.

Draganovic was the commander the Croatian arm of the many-legged *Der Spider*, a secret organization dedicated to linking up with Nazi fugitives and shepherding them out of Europe to Latin America. *Der Spider* is better known, and perhaps better described, as the infamous “Ratline”. As a Ratline operative, Father Draganovic was sometimes required to extend a helping hand to refugees from places other than Croatia. The most famous of his foreign beneficiaries was Klaus Barbie.

The new faultline in Europe had formed in the volcanic ashes of Hitler’s cratered Germany, and the tainted refugees of the Nazi Vesuvius were eagerly recruited by the Americans and Soviets. The American Counterintelligence Corps’ (CIC) Roman headquarters was the power behind the Ratline, whose main obstacle was the democratic governments of Western Europe, including their own. Undoubtedly, the CIC helped many intellectuals and prominent non-Communists escape before Stalin’s henchmen could organize an army of shovels and wheelbarrows to cart off their corpses to Siberia. But the CIC didn’t ask too many questions, and directives issued by the CIC to protect and aid notorious Nazi criminals such as Barbie have been well-publicized.

For nearly two years, Ante Pavelic lived in Rome, beneath the nose of the CIC, among the brothers of San Giorlamo and in safehouses provided by mysterious sources. The CIC knew who he was, and they knew *where* he was. When an agent first pinned down Pavelic’s exact location, the Supreme Allied Commander in Italy contacted Washington to ask for instructions. The return cable from the State Department, revealed in a Freedom of Information Act request, states that “the United States should cooperate with the Italian authorities to the extent necessary in this particular case.” It was an ambiguous statement that could mean anything. In context, we are led to believe that it meant to do nothing.

In early 1948, Ante Pavelic left Rome for an even stranger “safe” location—near Castel Gandolfo, the Pope’s summer residence. Disguised as a priest again, he lived among the monks at a nearby monastery. There is no evidence he met personally with



Pius XII—no evidence at all, in fact, about who exactly was protecting him in a country occupied, administered and policed by the Armed Forces of the United States. A good deal of the CIC correspondence regarding Pavelic’s Italian holiday is still censored or otherwise unavailable.

Six months later, with the man the CIC described as “Pavelic’s alter-ego”, Father Draganovic, at his side, Ante Pavelic boarded a ship, the *Sestiere*, bound for Argentina. He had with him a falsified ID card identifying him as a Spanish national named “Dal Aranyos”.

How did Ante Pavelic, the highest ranking war criminal to elude justice after the war, manage to escape? So long as Western governments continue to drag their feet—even at the precise moment that munitions smash through countries accused of harbouring other, more swarthy terrorists—we may never know. The reasoning of the State Department, as much as we can surmise, is perhaps epitomized in a September 12, 1947 memorandum from the Roman headquarters of the CIC. An agent opines that “Pavelic’s contacts are so high, and his present position is so compromising to the Vatican, that any extradition of Subject would deal a staggering blow to the Roman Catholic Church.”



The Stranger

Not long after arriving in Buenos Aires, intrepid traveler Dal Araynos shed the mask. Ante Pavelic lived openly in Argentina for more than eight years. Argentine strongman Juan Peron took advantage of his guest's know-how and used several members of the Ustasha leader's inner-circle to train his security staff.

Buenos Aires had a large Croatian community even before the war. Blinded by anti-Communism, they welcomed their prodigal son with open arms. Ante, exiled on Main Street again, organized a new émigré movement, the *Hrvatska Drzavotvorna Stranka*. While it attracted many Croats who had no connection with the sinister legacy of the NDH, it is impossible to characterize a movement founded by a Nazi, controlled by a Nazi, dedicated to whitewashing a Nazi past and reestablishing a Nazi regime as anything but a Nazi organization. Vladko Macek went into exile in America in 1948, but, again, refused to lend his credibility to a movement contesting the reanimated Ustasha. With no other contenders among the Croatian exiles, Ante was still the man.

Six large meetings were held to inaugurate the new incarnation of the Croatian extremist movement. Most were held in Church property, such as the Catholic Croat Parish Hall on Avenida Belgrano (though not “Belgrado”, one has to wonder if this was an ominous oracle). Ante was in top form. While still an awful public speaker, his study of the posture and delivery of Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini had served him well.

Émigré papers—most of which had as their initials the letters N, D, and H—churned out Ante's writings, both his old pulp and a few new rubies sprinkled in the mud. Pavelic's prosaic “The Call of Blood” became the intro to this kinder, gentler Ustasha



Party platform.

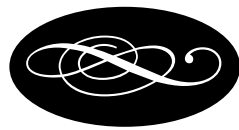
But it was the title of another work—"The Ideological War"—that defined Ante Pavelic's post-war movement. Many scholars have commented on the pagan aspects of Adolf Hitler's rule. Among them was the belief in an apocalyptic conflict that can only end in the destruction of one side or the other, a universe without compromise. Ante shared these Strangelovian views to the marrow. "War will soon break out," Ante warned his followers in a speech on May 13, 1949 which further elucidated the concepts of "The Ideological War". The Soviets and Americans would duke it out, "and then the liberation of Croatia will come." It's hardly necessary to note the rather loony, cultish quality of this sort of rhetoric. Like a doomsday movement, the new Ustasha waited with bated breath for the apocalypse of World War III. There's no indication Pavelic also believed that Communists were responsible for adding fluoride to the water supply.

The fallen *Poglavnik* began to receive distinguished visitors from abroad, curious about the sinister reputation (and increasing mainstream acceptance) of Hitler's most devoted quisling. One was a young French ideologue of the right-wing named Jean Marie Le Pen, who walked away mightily impressed by the "powerful virility" of the *Poglavnik*. Soon after Le Pen published a book about his new hero called *La Croatie Martyre*.

But most of Ante's guests were old friends, late arrivals on Father Draganovic's exile train. One by one, worn-out Ustasha henchmen arrived in the paradise of the sun, rested up and shared war stories about decapitating babies and snapping the necks of babushkas. Franjo Cvijic, head of the National Bank of the NDH, arrived in 1949. He had been making a deposit at a Swiss bank when Croatia fell. His arrival in Buenos Aires was interpreted by still-watchful American intelligence agents to mean that Pavelic had access to his wartime booty, though the majority of the Ustasha treasury has never been accounted for. The recent fiasco of Nazi Gold in the Swiss banking industry essentially cleared that country of harbouring the treasure of Yugoslavia's massacred Jews and Serbs. Considering the Vatican's role in assisting the escape of Pavelic and dozens of other Ustasha, the Church has



been understandably reticent about opening up their wartime records relating to the Ustasha. A special commission—made up entirely of Vatican agents—“cleared” the Church in the 1960s, claiming that no reference to the missing Ustasha gold had been found in their archives. They refused to allow outside investigators to examine their findings, and the evidence they based their report on has never been presented to anyone, in spite of repeated demands.



The new Ustasha found it difficult to break with old habits. As Mussolini’s press had suggested, their time as ambassadors and ministers was but an interlude, for once again in exile, they returned to the path of conspiracy and terror they knew best. From 1955 to 1980, Croat extremists connected with the Ustasha were implicated in no less than 50 violent attacks, from assassination attempts on diplomats to terrorist bombings, most notably in the “October 20” theater in Belgrade, which wounded 85 people, and the bombing of a Yugoslav Air Transport (JAT) jet flying from Copenhagen to Zagreb.

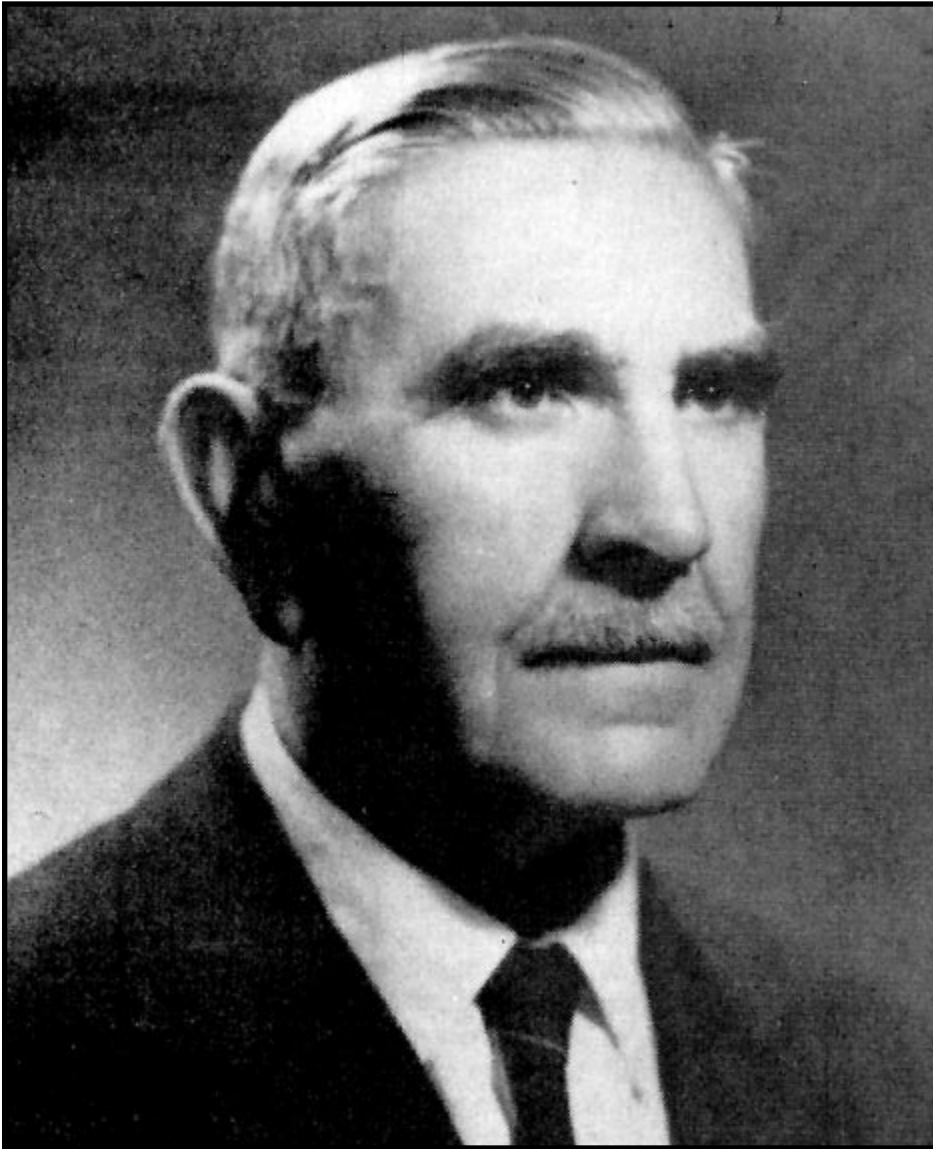
There was also the issue of the Ustasha left behind. Small groups of die-hards formed units in the woods of Zagorje and elsewhere in Croatia, assisted for a time by the Catholic Church. They called themselves the “Crusaders”, which pretty much says all that needs to be. They were gradually snuffed out.

The Americans were not the only ones to monitor Pavelic’s visitors in Buenos Aires. Being a Communist, foreign policy for Tito always went finger-to-trigger, and soon specially-trained UDBA (Yugoslav secret police) agents were scrounging abroad, looking for the opportunity to take out their Boss’ garbage. One of them finally got to Pavelic in April of 1957. It is believed that the *Peronistas* had withdrawn their support; indeed, there is convincing evidence that at least one native Argentine participated in the attempt on the *Poglavnik’s* life. Pavelic survived, but was shak-



en enough that he moved his entire organization to higher ground. For an unrepentant Fascist, that meant Franco's Spain.

Some say Pavelic began to mellow in the acculturated climate of Madrid. He was contacted by several right-wing Serbian exile groups (one of whose members bragged that he had been the one who slit the throat of Ivan Goran Kovacic, a Croatian poet



Ante Pavelic in Spain

who in the white heat of the Ustasha mayhem wrote one of the most enduring works of Balkan literature, "The Pit", about the massacre of the Serbs in the NDH). Together, Pavelic and these Serbs, these two mortal enemies, agreed over a handshake and tiny cups of coffee on how they would split up Yugoslavia once Tito was deposed. Those who see some reflection of the byzantine world of Yugoslav politics in the 1990s, when Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic and his Croatian counterpart, Franjo Tudjman, made a few backroom deals on the partition of Bosnia, shouldn't question their instincts. However, while many of these mutually-repellant scumbags returned to the Balkans after the collapse of Yugoslavia, it's rather silly to imagine that Pavelic's doodles on cocktail napkins had any-

thing to do with post-Yugoslav realignments.

But the UDBA *did* get Pavelic back in Buenos Aires after all. He began to suffer from complications relating to his injury, and was rushed to the German hospital in Madrid in December



of 1959. There his family watched over him as he breathed his last breath. He said nothing extraordinary. Indeed, his passing on December 28, three days before the New Year, was hardly noted at all, by the world press or in Yugoslavia. It was anonymous, and it was in exile, and if one is embittered by the *Poglavnik's* evasion of justice, one can at least take solace in the fact that Ante Pavelic's body is far removed from the soil of the homeland he drenched in blood.



Appendix I

*The fate of
several
personages
after the
war...*

Slavko and Eugen “Dido” Kvaternik turned against Pavelic and—some say with his cooperation—were captured by the UDBA and taken back to Yugoslavia for trial. Father and son were executed by the Communists.

Andrija Artukovic, the “Yugoslav Himmler”, slipped through the Allies’ porous dragnet and spent a year hiding in a Catholic monastery in Ireland before continuing on to California. He remained there for nearly forty years, raising a family and living quite openly. Pressure from the Jewish Defense League and the Simon Weisenthal Center finally led to his extradition to Yugoslavia in the mid-1980s. For his crimes he was sentenced to death by firing squad, but his execution was delayed owing to ill health. Artukovic died in 1988 in a Yugoslav prison hospital.

Archbishop Stepinac, who apologists and Church fathers claim lived in fear of Pavelic, suddenly recovered his courage when the latter fled and issued a pastoral letter denouncing the Communists. Tito demanded the Vatican recall him from the country; instead, Pope Pius XII made him a Cardinal. He was arrested and tried on charges including treason relating to his recognition of the NDH before Royal Yugoslavia had surrendered. He was sentenced to an jail term (later commuted to house arrest). Stepinac was beatified by Pope John Paul II.

Vjekoslav “Maks” Luburic carried out the execution of conspirators Vokic and Lorkovic in May of 1945, and by final order of the *Poglavnik* was named Commander-in-Chief of the Independent State of Croatia. He coordinated resistance to the Partizans and the formation of “Crusader” units until November, 1945. Luburic escaped from Yugoslavia via Hungary, eventually joining Pavelic



in Spain. He broke with the *Poglavnik* after the latter's concordat with right-wing Serbian groups and formed a splinter group, the Croatian People's Resistance. On April 20, 1969, Luburic's corpse was discovered in his villa in Valencia, his skull smashed by repeated blows from an iron bar and his chest lacerated by slashes from a dagger.

Father Krunoslav Draganovic was disowned by the Vatican after the death of Pope Pius XII. He was dropped from the CIC's payroll in 1962 "with prejudice, for security reasons and a lack of control." In 1967, Draganovic walked across the Yugoslav-Italian border. He had been granted amnesty in exchange for telling the UDBA everything he knew. A few days later Draganovic's voice was heard on a Yugoslav radio station, denouncing Pavelic and the Ustasha and praising Tito and the progress of Yugoslavia. He never made another public statement, living a quiet life in a monastery near Sarajevo until his death in July of 1983.



Appendix II

Suggestions for future reading...

Degenerate is not a work intended for a scholarly audience (present company excluded). However, I do like to provide a few notes at the end as an encouragement for future reading on each issue's themes.

Richard West's *Tito and the Rise and Fall of Yugoslavia* is a rather light work, though it does encapsulate the history of the South Slavs nicely up until 1993 or so. The author would echo a chronicler of Renaissance Florence, who stated, "If Lorenzo il Magnifico is a dictator, one could hardly ask for a better one." The last half of his book is sadly an anecdotal recital of Tito's *bonhomie*.

Edmund Paris' *Genocide in Satellite Croatia* is a lurid narrative on the bloody history of the Independent State of Croatia. It has a few virtues, but the reader should know that it was originally published in the United States as an anti-Catholic political tract by an Evangelical printing company under the even-handed title *Convert or Die!*

Possibly the best book on World War II in Croatia is Viktor Novak's *Magnum Crimen*, which had the notable distinction of being the only work of scholarship I know of banned by the Communist Yugoslav government, which was eager to sweep a few hundred thousand bodies under the rug and expunge the past (hence their hunt for Pavelic abroad), as well as by the Vatican, which placed it on the notorious Papal Index of Forbidden Works. Unlike most chroniclers of the Ustasha horror, Novak was neither Serbian nor a Communist, nor an anti-clerical. He was a Roman Catholic Croat, who did time in Pavelic's concentration camps before writing his unchallenged critical history of the Catholic Church in Croatia.

Hubert Butler, a Protestant Irishman, wrote extensively on



Andrija Artukovic, who was once held up by a world in the throes of anti-Communist hysteria as a kind of suffering saint. After the war, Butler was granted access to the NDH archives stored in Zagreb, which he characterized as “the rosetta stone of Christian corruption.” His collection of essays *The Sub-Prefect Should Have Held His Tongue* contains his articles about Croatia’s *Poglavnik* and the “Yugoslav Himmler”.

Possibly the the most unusual work on Pavelic is *Fight for the Croatian State* by Branimir “Branko” Jelic. Mr. Jelic, referenced earlier in the text, was a Croat nationalist from before World War II, and shared imprisonment in Italy with Pavelic and Dido Kvaternik after the assassination of King Alexander. After the war Jelic became a dentist in Germany and led the independent *Hrvatski Narodni Odbor* (Croatian National Council) with his brother Ivan. The HNO’s platform is notable for its suggestion that an independent Croatian state could achieve recognition by offering the Soviet Union a series of ports on the Adriatic Sea—a political idea which owes more to the legacy of Stjepan Radic than Ante Pavelic. Though at times flirting with the ideological obnoxiousness, Jelic’s book offers a valuable insight on the genesis of the Ustasha organization.

— *End* —

Published by Diacritica Press
100 E Walton #31H
Chicago, IL 60611
<http://www.diacritica.com>

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