

# Fra Krig og Fred

Journal of the Danish Commission for Military History  
Volume 2016



**Article:** Danish Waffen-SS Soldiers in Croatia, Autumn 1943: The Fighting at Glina and Hrastovica

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**Keywords:**

Second World War, Yugoslavia, Croatia, Partisans, Waffen-SS

**Abstract:**

On 23–25 November 1943, *Regiment Dänemark* of the 11<sup>th</sup> *SS-freiwilligen Panzer-Grenadier-Division* “Nordland” became involved in two cases of local combat with Yugoslav Partisans. Both took place in a small area of the so-called Independent State of Croatia. The events have attracted interest among Danish scholars as well as in popular literature. Unfortunately, western scholarship has largely been restricted to memoirs by former Waffen-SS soldiers and a few reports from German military units. Narratives were developed in almost complete isolation from sources and literature in the region of former Yugoslavia. As a result, a number of misunderstandings and factual errors concerning the events became repeated in the latest scholarly work. This article adds the Partisans’ perspective to the episodes, thus contributing to a more complete picture of clashes that cost both Danish and Yugoslav lives. In addition, it highlights the importance of critical source evaluation in the analysis of controversial historical events.

## Danish Waffen-SS units in Yugoslavia: The fighting at Hrastovica and Glina, Autumn 1943

### Introduction

On 23-25 November 1943, *Regiment Dänemark* of the 11<sup>th</sup> *SS-freiwilligen Panzer-Grenadier-Division* “Nordland” became involved in two military clashes with the 7<sup>th</sup> Banija and 8<sup>th</sup> Kordun Divisions of the People’s Liberation Army of Yugoslavia (Narodnooslobodilačka vojska Jugoslavije, NOVJ). The event took place in the Croatian region of Banija in relative proximity of the Bosnian border and was subsequently described by a Danish soldier as “the worst moments I have endured so far”.<sup>1</sup> The reaction is not surprising, considering the Danes had recently been recruited and arrived in Croatia before their unit had been fully equipped and trained for counter-insurgency warfare.



The enemy of the Waffen SS soldiers, Partisans of 7<sup>th</sup> Banija Division two months after the fighting (source: [www.znaci.net](http://www.znaci.net)).

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1 Bundgård Christensen, Claus et al., *Under hagekors og Dannebrog: danskere i Waffen SS* (København, 1998), p. 209.

In the town Glina and the village Hrastovica they faced Yugoslav Partisans, many returning from one of the largest single counter-insurgency operations during the Second World War. While battered and decimated, the Partisans found an opportunity to recuperate and add to their strength due to the Italian surrender in early September, which also led to the acquisition of huge amounts of arms and ammunition for the continuation of the struggle.

The military clashes in Glina and Hrastovica have attracted interest among scholars as well as in popular literature; no doubt because these events represented the “baptism of fire” for many Danish soldiers. Due to the language barrier, however, western scholarship has developed in isolation from sources and literature in former Yugoslavia that could have shed more light on the events. This, in turn, has resulted in a number of misunderstandings and factual errors concerning the events in late November 1943. The aim of this article is to add the Partisans’ perspective to the episodes and thus contribute to a more complete picture of clashes that cost Danish and Yugoslav lives.

## Previous Research

The experience of the Waffen-SS has been the topic of a substantial amount of interest over the years, with the activities of the *Nordland* Division receiving particular attention in Scandinavian countries.<sup>2</sup> However, inasmuch as western popular historiography (mainly consisting of descriptive military-historical analyses and memoirs by former members of the Waffen-SS) provides interesting details of the military operations and vivid description of warfare, such works often contain problematic assertions and descriptions of events. In his memoirs, Herbert Poller for instance discusses the fighting in Hrastovica, portraying it as a particularly vicious and deceitful form of warfare, where Partisans would “murder the Danes in their silent partisan manner”.<sup>3</sup> Another frequent problem lies in the way sources are used, such as when journalist Eirik Veum on the one hand criticises statements by former Waffen-SS soldiers concerning their own acknowledgment of participation in atrocities.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, however, when dealing with

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2 For books specifically dealing with Nordland, see for instance Trigg, Jonathan, *Hitler's Vikings: The History of the Scandinavian Waffen-SS: The Legions, The SS-Wiking and The SS-Nordland*, Paperback edition. (Stroud 2012). Wallin, Erik and Thorolf Hillblad, *Twilight of the Gods: A Swedish Waffen-SS Volunteer's Experiences with 11th SS Panzergrenadier Division Nordland, Eastern Front 1944-45* (Solihull, West Midlands 2005); Michaelis, Rolf, *The 11th SS-Freiwilligen-Grenadier-Division "Nordland"* (Atglen, PA, 2009); Gyllenhaal, Lars and Lennart Westberg, *Svenskar i krig 1914-1945*, [Ny utg.] (Lund 2008).

3 Poller, Herbert, *Pansarspaning med Waffen-SS på östfronten: SS-Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 11 "Nordland" och svenska SS-plutonen i Baltikum, Pommern och Berlin, 1943-1945* (Stockholm 2006), p. 42.

4 Veum discusses Egil Ulateig's book on Sverre Ryen, a Norwegian member of *Nasjonal Samling* and Waffen-SS soldier, who in his diary relates incidents where he and other soldiers participated in war crimes; cf. Ulateig, Egil, *Dagbok frå ein rotnorsk nazist* (Oslo 1987).

the Partisans, he uses the same type of sources as evidence of the NOP regularly burning down villages and executing civilians that refused to hand over food-stuffs, while gouging out the eyes and cutting off the ears of captured Waffen-SS members.<sup>5</sup>

Fortunately, there also exist a number of studies from the academic community that can provide a more reliable analysis of the situation. Among the most important are Bundgård Christensen et al.'s *Under hagekors og Dannebrog: danskere i Waffen-SS* (Under the Swastika and Dannebrog: Danes in the Waffen-SS); Terje Emberland and Matthew Kott's *Himmlers Norge: nordmenn i det Storgermanske prosjekt* (Himmler's Norway: Norwegians in the Greater Germanic Project); and Sigurd Sørli's more recent *Solkors eller hakekors* (Solar Cross or Swastika). While Emberland and Kott apply a historical perspective in their discussion of the volunteers as a part of the overall Nazi occupation policy in Norway and Sørli provides an initiated analysis of the war crimes perpetrated during the counter-insurgency warfare involving Norwegian Waffen-SS members,<sup>6</sup> Bundgård Christensen et al. focus on the motives and experiences of the Danish *Waffen-SS* soldiers. Their study is directly relevant for our purposes, since it provides a relatively detailed account of the clashes in Glina and Hrastovica based on German archival sources, memoirs and interviews with former *Waffen-SS* soldiers. The authors opened up new and important ground, showing the Danish soldiers were exposed to a stressful combat situation with unclear frontlines. Of particular importance is the description of the character of guerrilla warfare and its effects, which involved the killing of prisoners on both sides, burning of villages in retaliation for partisan attacks and other forms of atrocious behaviour.

Notwithstanding the positive aspects of Bundgård Christensen et al.'s work, however, some questionable assertions slip through in the analysis as a result of their using sources from one side only. One example is that according to their German military and veteran sources, the clashes in Glina resulted in the death of 2,400 Partisans, which is nowhere near the actual figure.<sup>7</sup> Another example illustrates how the veterans' problematic narrative sometimes has been left un-commented, such as when describing the fate of a captured military patrol:

*The locals told us about the fate of the captured patrol. According to witness statements, all seven of them were ordered to take off their uniforms and other clothes, after which the Partisans started shooting them one by one [...] Then it happened that the leader of the patrol, Unterscharführer Jensen from southern Jutland, suddenly stood there with hand grenades in his hands, which had their*

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5 Veum, Eirik and Geir Brenden, *De som falt: nordmenn som døde i tysk krigstjeneste* (Oslo 2009), pp. 224-27.

6 Sørli, Sigurd, *Solkors eller hakekors* (Oslo 2015), p. 320.

7 Bundgård Christensen et al., *Under hagekors*, p. 206.

*safety pins removed. He bumped them together with a lightning fast stroke to ignite them, and ran in-between the Partisans.*<sup>8</sup>

On the basis of similar descriptions of atrocities, the authors conclude “it is a fact that the executions and torture perpetrated by the resistance groups contributed to increasing the brutality in the hunts for Partisans that in many cases also affected the civilian populations”.<sup>9</sup> Such assertions may seem logical if one takes statements by former Waffen-SS soldiers at face value. However, it seems more likely that the general situation of a guerrilla war with unclear frontlines contributed to the brutalization of a conflict in which reprisal measures against civilians and the killing of prisoners was the order of the day. Considering this, Danish Waffen-SS soldiers may just as well have acted in accordance with instructions, while decades later referring to alleged or real Partisan atrocities in order to rationalize their own behaviour.

The NOP sources often provide a different explanation to the violence than in the Waffen SS veterans’ postwar statements, for which the suicide incident serves as an interesting example. According to a report by the NOP from 22 November 1943 the patrol was ambushed close to the village Jukinci, where the seven prisoners had surrendered to the Partisans. There were no executions and the Partisans suffered one dead and three wounded not because of a heroic dash into NOP ranks, but

*because our Partisans were not careful when they were taking a captured German officer to the battalion headquarters without previously having searched him. When the officer entered the battalion headquarters, he took out a bomb, ignited it, killed himself, the battalion commissar and wounded the battalion commander and two Partisans.*<sup>10</sup>

This first-hand description shows that the “witnesses” had probably not observed the incident themselves, or that the SS veteran remembered incorrectly. These and similar issues illustrate the basic limitations in using memoirs as primary sources, which sometimes were taken down decades after the events. Besides the obvious risk that veterans will remember incorrectly, one also has to keep in mind that they had every reason to create a positive self-image by contrasting their own behaviour to “fanatical” or “deceitful” Partisans. Moreover, Emberland and Kott point out that displaying purportedly mutilated bodies to the soldiery and describing the “Bolsheviks” as pathological murderers was part of an indoc-

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8 Ibid., p. 202.

9 Ibid.

10 Report from the 7<sup>th</sup> Division to the main staff of the Fourth Corps concerning the attack on Glina, 22 November 1943, Vojni arhiv, Arhiva NOVJ, k. 812, reg. br. 2/3.





A group of Polit-Commissars of the 7<sup>th</sup> Banija Division two months after the fighting (source: www.znaci.net).

trination campaign designed to “dehumanize” an enemy with which one was waging a “war of annihilation”.<sup>11</sup>

This brings us to the ex-Yugoslav literature on the situation in Banija during the Second World War. To begin with, one needs to keep in mind that Yugoslav literature has its own problems due to the fact that the narrative about the “People’s Liberation War and Socialist Revolution” was based on a rigid dichotomy between “progressive” communists and fascist “reactionaries” and war criminals,

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11 Emberland and Kott’s argument is firmly corroborated in the ex-Yugoslav context. In the summer of 1942, the NDH authorities published a propaganda pamphlet entitled “The Rebels’ Atrocities and Destruction in the Independent State of Croatia During the First Months of the Life of the Croatian National State”, where much in the same way as the Germans they tried to portray the Partisans as a bunch of cutthroats and murderers; see *Odmetnička zvjerstva i pustošenja u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj u prvim mjesecima života hrvatske narodne države*. (Ministarstvo vanjskih poslova NDH: Zagreb, 1942). While mutilations may of course have happened, there are also potential natural explanations for the observations with “mutilated” bodies. Lost eyes on the corpses can for instance have happened as a result of what in medical terminology is called “traumatic globe avulsion”, while post-mortem putrefaction may also lead to the sinking in of the eyes in the cavity once the body relieves liquids, thus giving the visual impression of the eyes missing. Another explanation is scavenger mutilation, which often affects soft tissues around the genitals and ears, while the removing of eyes has been observed in for instance cattle; Nation, Nick P. and Elisabeth S. Williams, “Maggots, Mutilations and Myth: Patterns of Postmortem Scavenging of the Bovine Carcass,” *Canadian Veterinary Journal* 30, no. September 1989 (1989); Bajaj, M. S. et al., “Traumatic globe luxation with optic nerve transection,” *Orbit* 19, no. 3 (2000); Razmjua, Hassan and Marjan Masjedi, “Traumatic bilateral globe avulsion (case report),” *Journal of Research in Medical Sciences* 14, no. 4 (2009).

which served to motivate the Party's monopoly on power.<sup>12</sup> The most important studies dealing with the situation in Banija are Dušan Korać's dissertation *Kordun i Banija u narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi i socijalističkoj revoluciji* (Kordun and Banija in the People's Liberation War and Socialist Revolution) and Ljuban Đurić's *Banijski partizanski odredi* (Banija Partisan Detachments). The Yugoslav studies focused on the organization of the Partisan Detachments (Partizanski odredi Jugoslavije, POJ) under the leadership of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (Komunistička partija Jugoslavije, KPJ) during the early stages of the war and their struggle with a vastly superior force consisting of foreign occupants and domestic "quislings". The events in Glina and Hrastovica are mentioned briefly, similar to the following description in Korać's work:

*After the successfully completed operations in the Cazin Krajina, the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> [Banija and Kordun] NOV Shock Divisions received the task of moving over [from the west] to the territory of Banija and to destroy the enemy stronghold in Glina, as well as the other strongholds defending Glina. [...] The attack on Glina was carried out on 23 and 25 November 1943 by units from the 7<sup>th</sup> Shock Division, while units from the 8<sup>th</sup> Shock Division carried out a number of operations in the vicinity of Glina and destroyed the enemy stronghold in Hrastovica. The attack on Glina did not succeed because the enemy defended this outlying stronghold, thus defending its strong garrisons in Petrinja and Sisak. Glina was his constant launching ground for attacks against the free territories of Banija and Kordun. The German SS regiment of Nordland Division (sic) had 22 dead and 31 wounded soldiers, while the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> divisions suffered 34 deaths, 101 wounded and 3 missing fighters.<sup>13</sup>*

Adding to the scholarly works are a number of general military historical studies that mention Glina and Hrastovica *en passant*,<sup>14</sup> as well as memoirs by former Partisans. One is *Osma kordunaška udarna divizija* (Eighth Kordun Shock Division), an edition that contains a personal reflection by Dušan Opačić dedicated to "The Liberation of Hrastovica". Another is *Sedma banijska brigada* (Seventh Banija Brigade), a collection of essays similar to the previous one that also contains some information about the military operation. Adding to these is Pavle Jakšić's memoirs, in which he provides a short reflection on the operation at a

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12 For a more detailed analysis of Yugoslav historiography on the Second World War, see Sindbæk, Tea, *Usable History? Representations of Yugoslavia's Difficult Past – From 1945 to 2002* (Aarhus, 2012).

13 Korać, Dušan, *Kordun i Banija u narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi i socijalističkoj revoluciji* (Zagreb 1986), p. 465.

14 See for instance Anić, Nikola et al., *Narodno-oslobodilačka vojska Jugoslavije: pregled razvoja oružanih snaga narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta 1941-1945* (Vojnoistorijski institut: Beograd, 1982); Colić, Mladenko, *Pregled operacija na jugoslovenskom ratištu, 1941-1945* (Vojnoistorijski Institut: Beograd 1988).

time when he was commanding the 7<sup>th</sup> Banija Division. While lacking in terms of analytical depth and displaying their biases, these memoirs do provide interesting insights on the situation from the Partisans' perspective.

As can be seen from this overview, the clashes in Hrastovica and Glina have been described differently in separate literatures that have existed almost in complete isolation from one another. This has created an incomplete and at times problematic image of the character of the fighting on both sides, due to the fact that opponents are judged through the eyes of their enemies only. The aim of this analysis is to revisit the events and by adding ex-Yugoslav sources hopefully provide a more comprehensive analysis that integrates both perspectives. What was the military strategic situation like for the NOP prior to the clashes and why did the Partisans decide to attack Glina and Hrastovica? How were the attacks prepared and what were the specific challenges that the Partisans had to overcome? How was the attack carried out and what explains the entirely different outcomes in the two localities? How did the violence affect the soldiers and civilians? These are the main questions that will be answered in the ensuing analysis, which is divided into three parts. Following an introduction that places the situation in Banija in the context of the overall military and political developments in Yugoslavia, I turn to how the Partisans assessed the situation and organized the attack. The article finishes with a summary discussion.

The primary documents have been collected from the Archives of the People's Liberation Army (Arhiva NOVJ) at the Military Archives (Vojni arhiv, VA) in Belgrade. Some of the archival documents can also be found in *Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o narodnooslobodilačkom ratu naroda Jugoslavije* (Collection of Military Documents about the People's Liberation War of the Yugoslav Peoples), which came out in 139 volumes during the period 1949-1982. I have also consulted German military records from the National Archives microfilm collection (mainly daily reports from Army Groups E and F and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Panzer Army). Adding to these is one document from the Commission for the Establishment of War Crimes Perpetrated by the Occupiers and their Helpers in the Country (Komisija za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njihovih pomagača u zemlji) established in 1943 and kept at the Archives of Yugoslavia (Arhiv Jugoslavije) in Belgrade.

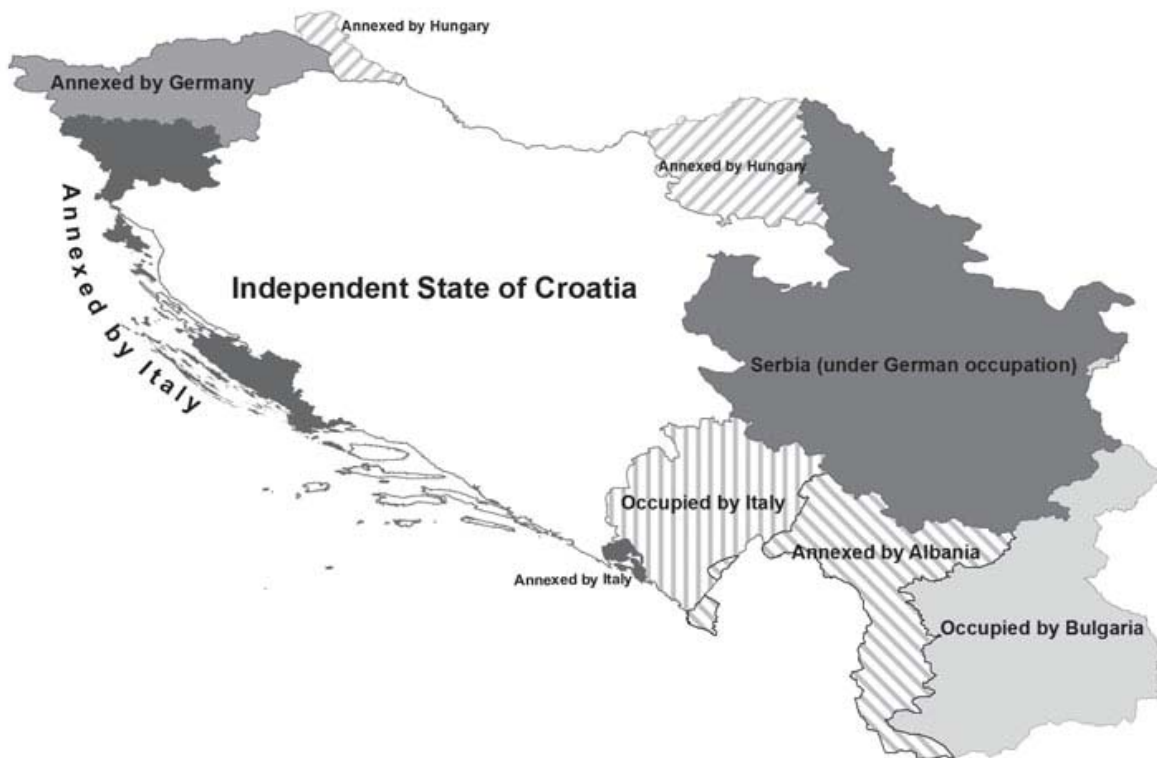
## Historical Context

Following the invasion of Yugoslavia in April 1941, the Axis powers set about dismembering the country and apportioning some of its territories to neighbouring states, while adjoining most of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina into the so-called Independent State of Croatia (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, NDH).<sup>15</sup> The

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15 For more on the dissolution of Yugoslavia, see Nenezić, Dragan S., *Jugoslovenske oblasti pod Italijom* (Vojnoistorijski institut vojske Jugoslavije: Beograd, 1999); von Olshausen, Klaus, *Zwischenspiel auf dem Balkan: Die deutsche Politik gegenüber Jugoslawien und Griechenland von*





Map showing the dismemberment of Yugoslavia.

NDH was ruled by a fascist organization—the Ustaša Croatian Revolutionary Organization (Ustaška Hrvatska Revolucionarna Organizacija, UHRO)—which immediately embarked upon a policy of rendering the state territory free of “undesirable” Serbs, Jews and Roma.<sup>16</sup> As German officers noted,<sup>17</sup> the persecution soon proved to be detrimental to the security situation because it forced the population to defect to the enemy for protection. Some of the disorganized rebel bands that were forming spontaneously to defend the villages from the onslaught of the Ustaša Corps (Ustaša vojnica) and of irregular “wild Ustaša” bands.<sup>18</sup> These rebel elements were gradually co-opted by the communists into POJ units.

The first year of the war was fraught with difficulties for the NOP. Initial successes were achieved in the autumn of 1941, when the movement managed to

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*März bis Juli 1941* (Stuttgart 1973); Ristović, Milan D., *Nemački “novi poredak” i jugoistočna Evropa 1940/41-1944/45: Planovi o budućnosti i praksa* (Vojnoizdavački i novinski centar: Beograd, 1991).

16 See Dulić, Tomislav, “Mass Killing in the Independent State of Croatia, 1941-1945: A Case for Comparative Research,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 3 (2006).

17 For more on the German attitudes towards Ustaša atrocities, see Gumz, Jonathan E., “Wehrmacht Perceptions of Mass Violence in Croatia, 1941-1942,” *The Historical Journal* 44, no. 4 (2001).

18 By “wild Ustašas” is meant locally mobilized units, which were not formally part of the Ustaša Corps (Ustaška vojnica). Even though the authorities occasionally tried to blame crimes on such bands that were purportedly outside anyone’s control, research has shown them to have been quite closely integrated into the security apparatus; Jug, Damir, *Oružane snage NDH: sveukupni ustroj* (Zagreb, 2004), pp. 257-63.

take control of large parts of southwestern Serbia centring on Užice.<sup>19</sup> The period was also characterized by uneasy cooperation between the NOP and the Serbian nationalist Yugoslav Army in the Fatherland (*Jugoslovenska vojska u otadžbini*) under Colonel Dragoljub “Draža” Mihailović (better known as one of several Četnik organizations). In spite of efforts by the government-in-exile, the British and the Soviets to forge a strong union between the organizations, differences in aims and ideology soon led to a split in the insurgency that played into the hands of the German occupation authority in Serbia.<sup>20</sup> The *Wehrmacht* brought in reinforcements and managed to squeeze the NOP out of the “Užice Republic”, forcing the party to move the centre of operations to the NDH.<sup>21</sup>

The decision to leave Serbia was a wise move for a variety of reasons. First, one would encounter substantially weaker armed forces than had been the case in Serbia since the NDH authorities had relatively limited resources to control the mountainous areas of eastern Bosnia in particular. Secondly, one could exploit the inter-ethnic strife and persecution of Serbs to one’s advantage by co-opting the many irregular armed bands that had emerged on account of Ustaša violence.<sup>22</sup> This was made possible by the logic of the highly ideological Ustaša terror, which in opposition to the German *Sühnemassnahmen* (reprisal measures, envisaging the execution of 50-100 civilians for each dead German soldier) was not reactive in nature and instead affected the population regardless of its own actions. And, thirdly, the ethnic composition of Bosnia and Herzegovina provided a long-term advantage for the nationally inclusive NOP, which in opposition to the JVUO could hope to broaden its recruitment base over time to include non-Serbs. The strategy made it possible for the NOP to muddle through the first year and a half of the war, which was plagued by extreme difficulties concerning the organization of resistance and getting support in terms of manpower and material.

### **Military and Political Developments in Banija, 1941-43**

The fact that Banija had a majority Serb population (which was also true for Kordun and Lika)<sup>23</sup> and lay across the main railroad line leading from Zagreb

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19 Anić et al., *Narodno-oslobodilačka vojska*, p. 30.

20 Lazić, Milan, *Ravnogorski pokret: 1941-1945* (Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije: Beograd, 1997), 55. For an overview of the activities of Mihailović and the Četniks in English, see Tomasevich, Jozo, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia 1941-1945: The Chetniks* (Stanford, 1975).

21 Tomasevich, Jozo, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia 1941-1945: Occupation and Collaboration* (Stanford, 2001), pp. 69-70.

22 The revolutionary Svetozar Vukmanović-Tempo provides an interesting view of the deliberations made in early July 1941 by the communist party of Bosnia and Herzegovina, see Vukmanović-Tempo, Svetozar, *Revolucija koja teče: memoari*, vol. 1 (Komunist: Beograd 1971), p. 194.

23 The military and political situation in Banija has to be understood against the military and political developments on the macro level, not least due to the region’s ethnic composition. According to the population census from 1931 (which was the last one preceding the war), Serbs made up two-thirds of the population of Glina municipality (out of 45,000 inhabitants) and half of the almost 33,000 inhabitants of Petrinja. The entire area including the municipalities

via Banja Luka (which the Ustaša leadership envisaged as the future capital of the state) to Sarajevo contributed significantly to its becoming a prime target of Ustaša terror.<sup>24</sup> As a result of mass killings that affected civilians throughout the region, local Serbs initially tried to defend themselves as best they could against the onslaught by organizing irregular self-defence units. Help eventually came when the Sisak POJ (actually the first one in Yugoslavia, established on 22 June 1941) with its sixty fighters moved into the area in order to escape from an attack by NDH forces.<sup>25</sup> Banija provided a good support base for the Partisans, since many of the irregulars joined its ranks for the purpose of protection. As a result of the growth of the NOP, there developed a cat-and-mouse game in the region that lasted for a year, during which NDH forces tried to take control over the region, while POJ units engaged in hit-and-run attacks.

The Axis forces eventually decided that the growth of the NOP had begun to pose a significant security threat and therefore had to be severely put down. The first major Axis offensive affecting the area was *Unternehmen Westbosnien* during the summer of 1942, in which a combination of German, NDH and Četnik forces tried to encircle and crush the NOP in the area of Mount Kozara. Even though the operation affected Banija to a limited degree only, it had a profound impact on the general developments due to its devastating effect on civilians. While thousands of refugees—mainly men—were deported as far as northern Norway as forced labour,<sup>26</sup> tens of thousands were either massacred in the countryside or sent to the nearby Jasenovac concentration camp where most of those unfit for labour—including thousands of children—were murdered by the Ustašas.<sup>27</sup>

While serious, the military setback in Kozara did not result in a complete disaster for the Partisans. By drawing the Germans, Italians, Četniks and Croatian Ustaša and *Domobranstvo* forces to Mount Kozara, the NOP instead made it possible for General Kosta Nađ to open up a new front to the west of Banija and take control over a substantial territory known as the “Bihać Republic” (spanning from an area south of Zagreb over western Bosnia all the way to the Croatian coast around Makarska). The growth of the recruitment base in “liberated ter-

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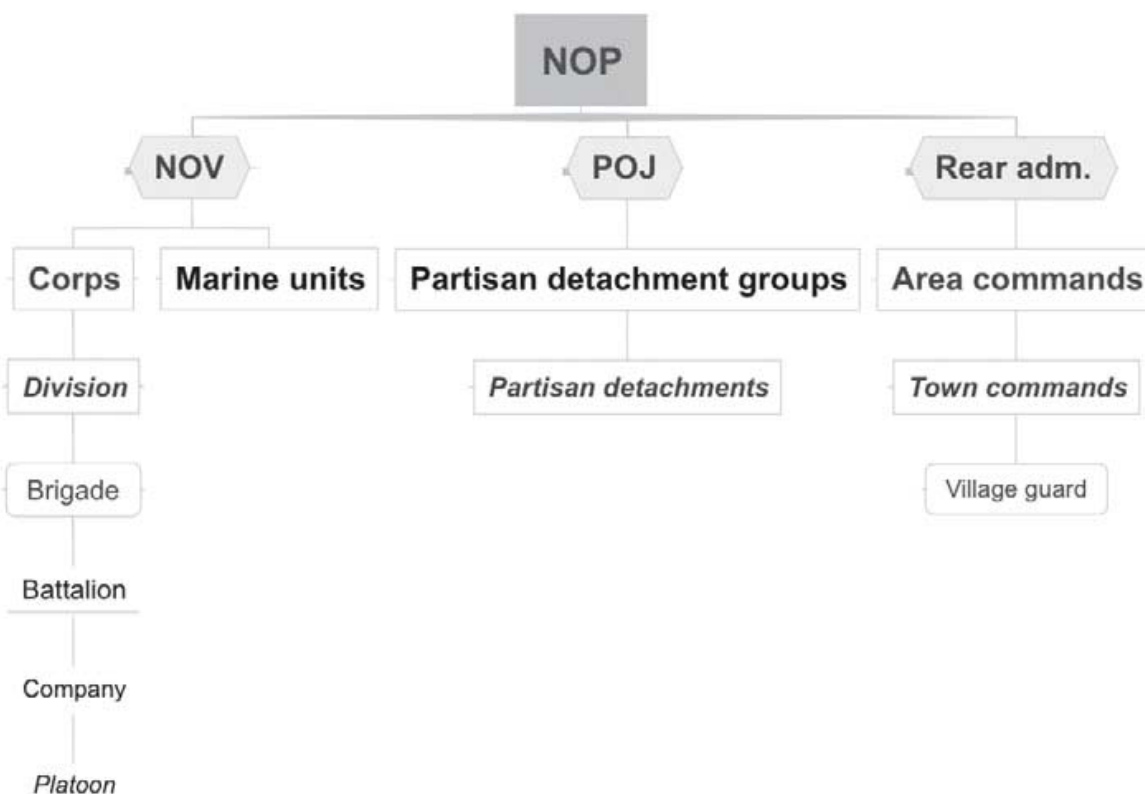
Glina, Petrinja, Vrginmost, Kostajnica and Dvor had a total population of 172,000, out of which 118,000 were Serbs; see *Definitivni rezultati popisa stanovništva od 31 marta 1931 godine*, vol. II, *Prisutno stanovništvo po veroispovesti* (Opšta državna statistika: Beograd, 1938), pp. 86, 88, 91, 94, 111; *ibid.*

24 For more on the mass killings in Banija and the massacre in the Glina orthodox church, see Aralica, Đuro, “Ustaški zločin genocida u srpskoj pravoslavnoj crkvi u Glini 1941,” in *Genocid nad Srbima u II svetskom ratu*, ed. Samardžić, Radovan (Beograd: Muzej žrtava genocida i Srpska književna zadruga, 1995), pp. 188-98.

25 Korać, *Kordun i Banija*, p. 151.

26 For more on the Yugoslavs in Norway, see Dulić, Tomislav, “‘De plågade oss som om de ville att vi skulle dö’: Jugoslaviska krigsfångar i Norge under andra världskriget i ljuset av nytt källmaterial,” *Historisk tidskrift* (2011).

27 Dulić, Tomislav, *Utopias of Nation: Local Mass Killing in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1941-42*, *Studia historica Upsaliensia*, 218 (Uppsala 2005), diss., pp. 243-54.



General Organization Chart of the NOP.

ritories” also allowed for the transformation of the military system through the establishment of NOV divisions in late 1942. On 22 November, Tito ordered the creation of the 7<sup>th</sup> Banija Division under the leadership of Pavle Jakšić, which initially consisted of 2,300 fighters, and the 8<sup>th</sup> Kordun Division with 4,200 soldiers under the command of Vlado Četković (both were later declared *Narodni heroji* or “People’s Heroes” of Yugoslavia).<sup>28</sup>

The fact that the “Bihać Republic” had been created within a year after the destruction of the “Užice Republic”, served as a proof to the *Wehrmacht* that it had failed to pacify the region. On 18 December 1942 Hitler therefore ordered the destruction of the NOP in what became one of the largest single counter-insurgency operation during the Second World War.<sup>29</sup> The ferocity with which the operations were to be carried out are testified to in an order by Field Marshal

28 The terminology might seem a bit confusing, since the “divisions” in Yugoslavia were not equal in size to those in Western Europe (where a division usually amounted to 15-20,000 soldiers). NOP divisions were more akin to regiments and brigades during the initial phases of their organization. Many of them grew substantially, some numbering 10-15,000 soldiers by 1944. The difference between a unit of NOV units and those of the POJ was that the latter were territorially based and operated in a specific region of the country, while the former moved wherever the central command wished.

29 The operation pitted some 20,000 Partisans against a combination of German, Italian, NDH and Četnik forces numbering 90,000 soldiers; Colić, *Pregled operacija*, p. 90.



Wilhelm Keitel from 16 December. By reference to the *Führer* and threatening those who did not act in accordance with instructions with punishment, Keitel outlined the overall goals:

*The enemy is using fanatical communist fighters in the struggle, who do not refrain from any type of violence. This is more than ever before a matter of life and death. This struggle has nothing in common with chivalry and the regulations of the Geneva Conventions. If this struggle against the bands, in the East as well as in the Balkans, is not carried out with utmost brutality, then we will for the foreseeable future not have the resources at our disposal, with which to be able to stop this plague. The troops therefore have the right and duty in this struggle to use any means possible without limitations, including against women and children, as long as it leads to success.*<sup>30</sup>

This type of instruction provided the basis for the treatment of civilians and NOP prisoners during the ensuing military operations codenamed *Fall Weiss* and *Fall Schwartz*. The 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Divisions succeeded in holding their ground for a while before being forced to retreat into the interior of Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>31</sup> However, the routing of the 7<sup>th</sup> Division (the 8<sup>th</sup> moved further west and southwest) did not result in a complete elimination of the NOP from Banija. Soldiers who had lost contact with their units and political activists instead began the process of strengthening and forming new Partisan units. By early February, these had increased to almost 200 combatants, who had the task of performing hit-and-run attacks against enemy forces in the area of Kostajnica-Petrinja-Glina-Dvor.<sup>32</sup>

Following the unsuccessful attempts to destroy the NOP during *Fall Schwartz* in the spring of 1943, the Partisans once again began harassing the German forces. This was done through a combination of enrolling more forces into the Partisan detachments, but also by using 8<sup>th</sup> Division to attack and constantly harass the enemy from the west. The situation improved for the NOP during late summer, when 7<sup>th</sup> Division returned to Banija in early September.<sup>33</sup>

However, inasmuch as the activities of the NOP were important for the strengthening of the units in Banija, nothing the KPJ did to improve the situation could have an impact even close to the effects of the Italian capitulation on 8 September 1943. Apart from creating a huge area in the Croatian coastal area ripe for the taking, the Italian capitulation also made it possible for the NOP to acquire

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30 *Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o narodnooslobodilačkom ratu jugoslovenskih naroda: Dokumenti nemačkog rajha*, vol. XII, book 2 (Vojno-istoriski institut jugoslovenske armije: Beograd, 1976), doc. no. 198.

31 Colić, *Pregled operacija*, 95; Đurić, Ljuban, *Banijski partizanski odredi* (Vojnoizdavački i novinski centar: Beograd, 1988), p. 217-20.

32 Đurić, *Banijski partizanski odredi*, p. 224.

33 Borojević, Branko et al., eds., *Sedma Banijska divizija* (Vojnoizdavački zavod: Beograd, 1967), p. 784.



NOV and POJ Forces in Banija, September 1943.

huge amounts of military equipment to be used in the struggle. Furthermore, some Italian forces and a group of Jews liberated from Italian-controlled Pag Island also decided to join the NOP and became part of 7<sup>th</sup> Division.<sup>34</sup>

The *Wehrmacht* of course followed developments closely. In order to forestall further setbacks and a feared allied landing on the Croatian coast, Field Marshal Alexander Löhr of Army Group E gave the task of “cleansing” the north-eastern region of Slovenia, Istria, Gorski Kotar and Kvarner Bay to none other than Field Marshal Erwin Rommel. He began the counter-insurgency operations *Istrien* and *Wolkenbruch* in late September, in other words just a few week after the arrival of *Nordland* to the region, and they lasted until early November.<sup>35</sup>

34 The Jewish Battalion was created on 9 September and was transferred to the 7<sup>th</sup> Banija Division in mid-September, only to be disbanded at the end of the month and its staff dispersed among the other units; Anić et al., *Narodno-oslobodilačka vojska*, 297. The reason for its disbanding is unclear, but probably had to do with a lack of military experience among the men, considering that the Italian battalion (made up of POWs) was left intact.

35 Colić, *Pregled operacija*, pp. 139-45.

## The Arrival of Nordland

The fact that *Nordland* had arrived in Croatia is first mentioned in connection with the reorganization of the German forces in anticipation of the Italian capitulation, when Army Group F under Field Marshal Maximilian von Weichs took over command of all Axis forces in the Balkans. Army Group F inter alia consisted of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Panzer Army under the command of Lothar Rendulic, including Felix Steiner's 3<sup>rd</sup> Panzer Corps with the 373<sup>rd</sup> and 114<sup>th</sup> Divisions, SS Police Regiment 14 and *Nordland*, as well as elements of the *Nederland* and *Wiking* divisions. 3<sup>rd</sup> Panzer Corps was planned to consist of 22,980 soldiers, including 11,764 from *Nordland* and an additional 5,525 from *Wiking*. As it turned out, however, the majority of *Wiking* never arrived, which means the force included 13,889 troops. Out of these, 2,729 belonged to *Regiment Norwegen* and 2,901 to *Regiment Dänemark* (although a minority of them were Scandinavians).<sup>36</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup> Panzer Corps had its headquarters in Zagreb, while the *Nordland* HQ was based in Sisak. The *Nordland* regiments were spread out in an arch from Generalski Stol south of Karlovac, over Sisak to an artillery regiment in Dubica close to the Jasenovac concentration camp. Insofar as the Danish regiments are concerned, they were positioned just south of Sisak in Glina (1<sup>st</sup> Rgt.), Petrinja (3<sup>rd</sup> Rgt.) in the vicinity of Sunja to the southeast of Petrinja (*Regiment Norwegen* was positioned further south right on the border of Bosnia in Kostajnica and Bosanski Novi, but also in Generalski Stol).<sup>37</sup>

It was *Nordland's* main task to participate in "cleansing operations" in Lika, Kordun and Banija,<sup>38</sup> as well as to fill the power vacuum that developed as a result of the Italian occupation. However, the fact that the unit was rather fresh and not yet fully equipped presented a problem. In a report from 4 November, for instance, it was claimed that the *Nederland* regiment was worst off and woefully unprepared for military operations, while the *Dänemark* and *Norwegen* regiments suffered from serious shortages of equipment and training.<sup>39</sup> The general situation was rather grim:

*The division is immobile. It can be used for lighter intelligence gathering and security operations. The Division is not ready for military combat. It would lead to a breakdown for the Division and to unavoidable high losses in men and material.*<sup>40</sup>

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36 Statistics on the composition of the unit, 29 August 1943, NAW RG T-313, roll 482, fr. 149.

37 Michaelis, Rolf, *Die 11. SS-Freiwilligen-Panzer-Grenadier-Division "Nordland"* (Berlin 2005), p. 27.

38 Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o narodnooslobodilačkom ratu jugoslovenskih naroda, vol. 2, Dokumenti nemačkog rajha (Beograd 1976), doc. no. 44, pp. 226-27, 29-30. The Scandinavian troops were initially dislocated in the area of Lekenik – Petrinja – Kostajnica; Telegram from the General Command of III SS Panzer Corps, 2 September 1943, NAW, RG T-313, roll 482, fr. 148.

39 Report to the High Command of the Southeast, 4 November 1943, NAW, RG T. 313, fr. 928.

40 Report from the High Command of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Panzer Army, 10 November 1943, NAW, RG T-313, roll 192, fr. 7452955.



SS Nordland's operation area

Judging from reports on the overall combat readiness of the troops, it appears that the senior commanders of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Panzer Corps had doubts about not only morale, but also what impact it would have back home if the troops were sent unprepared to the front. More specifically, it was believed that “will lead to a breakdown in whatever confidence there still is in the home countries of the volunteers”.<sup>41</sup> It was thus considered “simply impossible” to prepare and train a corps that consisted of merely 40 percent Germans within the stipulated time frame of four months.<sup>42</sup> Incidentally, NOP intelligence officers echoed their German counterparts, arguing that the Danish troops in Glina were suffering from “weak fighting spirit”.<sup>43</sup>

## Assessments of the NOP Forces

While morale and combat readiness certainly was a concern among German officers, their Yugoslav counterparts had problems of their own to contend with.

41 Ibid., fr. 7452956. As pointed out by Emberland and Kott, there were even examples of Dutchmen, Swedes and members of *Nordland* belonging to the Volksdeutsche minority that deserted during this period of time; Emberland, Terje and Matthew Kott, *Himmlers Norge: nordmenn i det storgermanske prosjekt* (Oslo, 2012), pp. 140-48.

42 Report from the High Command of the III Panzer Army, 10 November 1943, NAW, RG T-313, roll 192, fr. 7452956.

43 Unsigned order to the military units in the area Sisak – Petrinja – Glina, 23 November 1943, VA, Arhiva NOVJ, k. 812, reg. br 20/1.



The most pressing one concerned how to conduct efficient military operations against the enemy without causing too many casualties among the NOP ranks. Already in 1941, Josip Broz “Tito” and the KPJ leadership outlined the doctrine of partisan warfare that was to guide the NOP throughout the conflict. The basic idea was that one should avoid frontal combat with a vastly superior enemy and instead focus on hit-and-run attacks in its rear. This was because the KPJ realized that in order to build a strong and experienced army one had to minimize the damage on morale that would happen with military losses, and therefore considered hit-and-run attacks to have a dual positive purpose. On the one hand, such operations minimized the risk of losses, while victories—even small ones—would have a positive impact on the troops’ fighting spirit.<sup>44</sup>

The rather impressive development of the NOP, which according to an estimate by Field Marshal Maximilian von Weichs grew from a few thousand fighters in 1941 to an estimated army of 100,000 by 1943,<sup>45</sup> shows the KPJ had made a correct analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of partisan warfare. One lesson that was learned in connection with Užice and Kozara was that setbacks often had a tangible and immediate negative effect on troop morale, with the fighters sometimes simply leaving the front. As reported by the politcommissar at the HQ of the Banija POJ on 13 October, severe countermeasures were undertaken against deserters in order to avoid further deterioration:

*A few days ago we executed five rebels [pobunjenika] from 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion by firing squad. They were executed in front of the entire unit, after we had first explained why they were to be executed and about their work. Insofar as we are able to ascertain, the Partisans are very pleased with this punishment. Seven recently mobilized Partisans who had been in the company for training and deserted returned after the executions of these bandits, because they heard that anyone who sabotages the work of the People’s Liberation Struggle or runs away will be most severely punished.<sup>46</sup>*

Another problem plaguing the NOP brings us back to the claim that Partisans were regularly looting villages and killing civilians who refused to hand over foodstuffs. Notwithstanding the fact that such descriptions are often connected

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44 See for instance Tito’s criticism of the Montenegrin communists from October 1941, where he criticized them due to it being “an illusion to think that you would have been able to provide a stronger resistance to a much stronger enemy by frontal defence”; *Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o narodnooslobodilačkom ratu naroda Jugoslavije: Borbe u Crnoj Gori 1941. god.*, vol. III, book 1 (Vojnoistorijski institut jugoslovenske armije: Beograd, 1950), doc. no. 26.

45 *Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o narodnooslobodilačkom ratu naroda Jugoslavije: Dokumenti Nemačkog Rajha*, vol. XII, book 3 (Vojnoistorijski institut jugoslovenske armije: Beograd, 1978), doc. no. 156.

46 Report from the HQ of the Banija Partisan Detachment to the HQ of the Croatian commissars and corps of the NOVJ, 13 October 1943; Vojni arhiv, Arhiva NOVJ, k. 1614, reg. br. 8/25.

to German and NDH attempts to delegitimize the NOP, arbitrary looting did happen. However, it was not part of any policy, but generally carried out by rogue elements that sometimes accompanied the advance of Partisan units, or by NOP soldiers in desperate need of food. The NOP leadership tried to clamp down on this type of activity, since it risked having an adverse effect on popular attitudes towards the movement. In June, for instance, Tito issued a decree forbidding “any taking of livestock and food from peasants, which has been done until now without the approval of the appropriate organs”.<sup>47</sup> After clarifying that expropriation of food had to be done through “voluntary donations”, requisitions and confiscation from so-called “people’s enemies”, he ordered that anyone who is caught looting should “immediately be executed by firing-squad, for others as a warning”.<sup>48</sup>

Another topic that preoccupied party officials was that of the socio-economic, political and ethnic make-up of the NOP. Having presented itself as a nationally inclusive organization and branding the Četniks as “greater Serbian” representatives of a treacherous bourgeois clique represented by the government-in-exile in London, the Communists had to show they were indeed following through on their stated policies. One should therefore not be surprised that politcommissars continuously surveyed their units in order to map out the socio-economic and ethnic structure in each one of them. Some of these lists have been preserved and show that the structure of the organization had not yet reached the desired level. According to a roster of the Banija POJ from 27 October 1943, workers made up a mere fraction of the organization with 52 soldiers against 670 who belonged to the peasantry. While party affiliation was considerably higher with 124 party members and an additional 124 who were “unaffiliated communists”, the unit consisted of 624 Serbs and 180 Croats. The situation was even more problematic from an ideological perspective in the case of the 1<sup>st</sup> Kordun POJ, where out of 411 Partisans, 398 were peasants and 410 ethnic Serbs.<sup>49</sup>

It is a well-established fact that Serbs made up a majority of the soldiers in NOP units until 1943,<sup>50</sup> while the fact that POJs were recruited on a local basis

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47 Order by Josip Broz “Tito” to the staff of the 7<sup>th</sup> Croatian Shock Division, 16 June 1943; Vojni arhiv, k. 812, reg. br. 7, f. 1. The reason why the party paid such a considerable interest to the issue of looting is a rather simple one. Having understood that one needed the support of the peasantry in order to be able to continue the struggle against fascism, Tito and the other leaders of the NOP also understood that transgressions against the very peasantry that was supporting the organization could backfire and have a devastating effect on the NOP’s ability to conduct the type of highly mobile operations that it depended on for its long-term success.

48 Ibid.

49 VA, Arhiva NOVJ, k. 1614, reg. br. 6/23; *ibid.* k. 1613, reg. br. 14/11.

50 According to Cvetković’s detailed analysis based on an incomplete dataset covering over 60% of the total victims, Serbs made up 78-55 percent of the killed partisans during 1941-43, which is a disproportionately high figure considering their part of the population (19%); Cvetković, Dragan, “Stvarni gubici Hrvatske prema popisu Žrtve rata 1941-1945. iz 1964. godine: Analiza trenutnog stanja prema do sada izvršenoj reviziji,” in *Dijalog povjesničara-istoričara*, ed. Fleck, Hans-Georg and Igor Graovac (Zagreb: Zaklada Friedrich Naumann, 2002), p. 60.

partially explains the ethnic composition of such units. However, the implications and effects of the Serbian overrepresentation was problematic for the party, which wanted to change the ethnic composition in order to forestall inter-ethnic tension in NOP ranks. While dissent does not appear to have been rampant, tensions did occasionally arise and were present at the time of the arrival of *Nordland*. In a report from the HQ of the Banija POJ from 31 August 1943, local officers reported that a group of six Partisans had entered the command centre of the second battalion, disarmed the commanding officer and forced him to appear before the unit. The soldiers apparently complained that some former Ustašas in Dvor had been released, even though they had committed atrocities against Serbs. This prompted the soldiers to threaten that they would stop fighting and join the Četniks, since “Serbs have died enough and do not want anymore to die for Croatia [Hrvatstvo]”.<sup>51</sup> The head of the intelligence section finished the report by informing his superiors that a part of the forces in Banija had been sent to “destroy the group before the whole affair takes larger proportions”.<sup>52</sup>

## Intelligence Gathering and Preparation

The preparations for an attack on Glina began around 19 November and were motivated by the need to control an important communication line between Banja Luka and Zagreb, while at the same time providing the Partisans with a base from which to continue disruptive operations along the railway line between the two towns. The first movement order was issued by the 4<sup>th</sup> Corps to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade, 8<sup>th</sup> Kordun Division, on 19 November and contained the following message:

*The situation in the sector Glina-Petrinja demands that your brigade as soon as possible – by fast march – regroup in Topusko sector. The trucks that you will receive should be used to transport those with boots, in other words those who can be used immediately for combat. Barefooted soldiers should not be transported in trucks for now, but you should requisition wagons with which to transport them to Topusko sector.*<sup>53</sup>

The reason for the hurry was that the Partisans had reached the conclusion that the German garrison was preparing for an evacuation from Glina, which provided the NOP with an opportunity to apply pressure and engage in hit-and-run attacks during the move, “and, if a useful opportunity is found, apply an even

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51 Staff of the Banija POJ to the Central Intelligence Section of the Croatian NOV and POJ, 31 August 1943; VA, Arhiva NOVJ, k. 1614, reg. br. 8/25.

52 Ibid.

53 Zbornik DNOR, ser. V, vol. 21, doc. no. 94.



Pavle Jakšić (right), Commander of 11th Corps NOVJ in late 1943, here with Ivan Gošnjak, the Chief-of-Staff of Croatia, in Topusko in 1944 (source: www.znaci.net).

stronger pressure on the enemy, in other words to enter Glina”<sup>54</sup> Particular attention was being paid to the Glina-Petrinja road, and the order stipulated “in the case the enemy retreats, attack him from the side and the back”<sup>55</sup> Skirmishes happened in the evening of 21 November, when 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade of 7<sup>th</sup> Division tried to approach the town from two directions. One was from the village of Majske Poljane towards the town sawmill and the other along the road from Maja River towards Glina. This initial attack was a success as the Partisan units managed to take and destroy the Jukinac bridge across Maja River and capture the seven soldiers connected to the suicide incident. However, already at 10 the next day, an SS unit managed to retake the bridge in a skirmish that resulted in a total death toll of two dead and 4 wounded Partisans.<sup>56</sup>

Unfortunately for the NOP, it turned out that *Nordland* was not retreating from Glina, which prompted 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps to reconsider the overall situation and take the

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54 Ibid., doc. no. 95.

55 Ibid.

56 Report about the attack on Glina, 28 November 1943, VA, Arhiva NOVJ, k. 812, reg. br. 3-1/3; Daily report of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Panzer Army, 22 November 1943, NARA, RG 313, roll 485 fr. 927.



decision to attack the town “regardless of which formation will be defending it”.<sup>57</sup> In its first “note” about the impending attack, 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps envisaged a two-pronged assault that combined an attack by 8<sup>th</sup> Division against Gora in order to cut off Glina from reinforcements in Petrinja with the main assault against Glina by 7<sup>th</sup> Division.<sup>58</sup> However, it seems there was some dissent among the leadership, with Jakšić expressing skepticism about the feasibility of an attack as the defenders were entrenching themselves. Although he had launched skirmishes from the northeast (Majske Poljane and Jukinac) and applied pressure on Gora and Graberje, Jakšić concluded that “we believe the attack on Glina will be more difficult now according to the new plan, because of which we ask you to postpone it until the situation becomes clearer”.<sup>59</sup>

What the sources tell us is that Jakšić’s intervention influenced 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps to postpone the attack on Glina, which had been scheduled for 21 November. Meanwhile, it became even more important to gather intelligence about the strength of the opponent and about the defence in Glina itself. Such information was gathered on the next day from the seven captured Danish soldiers. The source does not say anything about their ultimate fate, but they were certainly not undressed and executed after being captured in Jukinac, as claimed in the Danish statements. The prisoners were instead interrogated and revealed that the defences consisted of four German companies with 30-40 Danes, 70-80 Romanians (actually Romanian *Volksdeutsche*) and 10-15 Germans in each unit, as well as an independent Ustaša Company and 50-60 gendarmes. 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Company defended the western parts of the town on a line stretching from a sawmill to the train station and hospital, while 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Company were lined up in the north-eastern part of Glina along the Church and secondary school; the Ustašas were positioned around the hospital.

Each company was equipped with three heavy mortars and twelve light machine-guns, while 4<sup>th</sup> company also had five cannons that were placed close to the bridge in Jukinac, the church, the school and the municipality building. The report mentioned that fighting morale was low “especially among the Romanians” who had “panicked” during the first skirmish ordered by Jakšić on 21 November. Interestingly, the NOP intelligence also had information that *Nordland* was preparing an evacuation to “Latvia” (actually the destination was Estonia) and would be replaced by Circassians (Cossacks). The Danes also told them about reinforcements coming in from Petrinja in the form of two tanks and two additional artillery pieces (there was no information on the number of soldiers).<sup>60</sup> This was

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57 Ibid., doc. no 94.

58 Ibid.

59 Report by Pavle Jakšić and Đuro Kladarin to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps HQ, 21 November 1943; VA, Arhiva NOVJ, k. 812, reg. br. 58/2.

60 Report by the Main Staff of the 7th Shock Division to the Staff of the 3rd Corps of NOV, VA, Arhiva NOVJ, k. 812, reg. br. 9/10.



From the Glina Hospital Yard (source: [www.kolekcionar.eu](http://www.kolekcionar.eu)).

of fundamental importance, since it narrowed the window of opportunity for an attack significantly and forced 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps to make some crucial decisions:

*Since it can be expected that the enemy will intervene with strong forces from Petrinja tomorrow or the day after in order to save the garrison in Glina and in order not to lose time (the morale of our forces is adequate), our staff has decided to attack Glina tomorrow at 15:00. Our staff is convinced that we will be able to liquidate the garrison in Glina. Our biggest problem is securing the rear and for that purpose we will need the maximal assistance from our comrades from Kor-dun. For that purpose, 8<sup>th</sup> Division needs to move out of its positions and carry out a fierce attack on Gora and organize its position for the purpose of securing the operation against Glina.<sup>61</sup>*

As can be seen from the report, Jakšić based his decision to attack Glina on the information that the Germans were preparing to send reinforcements to the town. However, in a report written at 23:15 on 22 November, he nevertheless seems to display both hesitance and uncertainty. After reporting that 8<sup>th</sup> Division would take over 7<sup>th</sup> Division's position in Graberje on the road between Glina and Petrinja and thus effectively cut off the defenders from reinforcement, he called for the sending of additional mountain artillery pieces from the 8<sup>th</sup> Division to the Glina sector in preparation of the attack. However, he also conceded that “[c]

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61 Ibid.



7th Division soldiers in Zelengora, Bosnia, June 1943 (source: www.znaci.net).

onsidering the situation we are speeding up preparations and want to attack tomorrow afternoon, but that will be difficult to achieve”.<sup>62</sup>

After deliberating the situation, 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps issued an order at 08:00 on 23 November to the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Division for a coordinated attack designed to liberate Glina. According to NOP estimates, there were 680 soldiers defending Glina, 180-200 in Gora, 210 in Hrastovica, almost 3,000 in Petrinja and 2,900 in Sisak (where there also were 2 “Tiger” tanks, 6 smaller tanks and 7 transport vehicles). The plan basically envisaged that 8<sup>th</sup> Division should block Glina by capturing Gora and Hrastovica (from where there was a roundabout road that could be used for reinforcement of Glina). The main attack would be carried out by 7<sup>th</sup> Division, which at its disposal had 4 brigades of 600-700 soldiers each, 3 howitzers, 8 pieces of field artillery, 3 pieces of mountain artillery and 3 light tanks.<sup>63</sup>

The command of the 7<sup>th</sup> Division issued two orders about the attack on the 23 November, in which the main goals of the operation were identified, as was the order of battle. Jakšić specified that he would carry out a three-pronged attack from the villages of Selište (3<sup>rd</sup> Brig.), Joševica (2<sup>nd</sup> Brig.) and Majske Poljane (4<sup>th</sup> Brig.), while 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade would establish a telephone line between Selište and a partisan field artillery battery outside the railway station in Gređani. Meanwhile, the division command would be moved to the village Prijeka to the south of Glina. Combined with already existing forces to the northwest (including a

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62 P. Jakšić to the Staff of 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps of NOV, 22 November 1943 at 23:15; VA, Arhiva NOVJ, k. 812, reg. br. 2/3.

63 Order issued by Ivo Rukavina and Većeslav Holjevac, 23 November 08:00; Zbornik DNOR, ser. V, vol. 21, doc. no. 94.

howitzer battery in Viduševac), the Partisans basically controlled a semi-circular arch around Glina, ranging from the northwest over the southwest and to Majske Poljane in the east of the town.<sup>64</sup>

In his instructions from 9 o'clock on 23 November, Jakšić issued a more detailed order, according to which 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade was to attack from Majske Poljane and capture a bridge over the Maja River. From there it would attack German bunkers towards the Secondary School (Gimnazija) and then onto the brickworks and slaughterhouse on the right bank of Glina River. 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade would attack from the southeast along the railway station and meet up with 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade to the northeast and 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade to the west, which would advance along the main road leading past a Roma settlement and prison and then along the right bank of the Glina River. 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade would also keep contact with 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade on the left bank of the river, which would conduct a diversionary attack from the northwest against a railway bridge, but should pursue a full attack if tanks arrived in time. The artillery in the operational zone of 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade would provide support for the infantry by shelling fortified positions at the railway bridge, prison, town centre, high school and other buildings in the town centre. The attack was planned to commence at 15:00, while captured arms and prisoners should be evacuated to the rear.<sup>65</sup>

### **The Attack on Glina**

Jakšić turned out to be right concerning the problems with commencing the attack already in the afternoon of 23 November, the reason for this being that the units were too far apart to be able to communicate properly.<sup>66</sup> Apart from that, however, the documents suggest that a combination of other factors had an even more negative effect on the situation from the Partisans' perspective. The first problem was that a spell of bad weather forced the Partisans to postpone the attack until the evening. This appears to have been of decisive importance, since the first artillery barrage could not be corrected for precision due to fog and darkness. As a result of the failure to "soften up" Danish positions, 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade became bogged down on its advance to the railway station. 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade was more successful with its initial artillery bombardment and attacked fiercely towards the hospital and prison, but was stopped by entrenched German positions with barbed wire and heavy machinegun fire:

*The enemy dispersed heavy fire and the fighters retreated. The units were not equipped with cutters to cut the barbed wire, so in their first attack they were not*

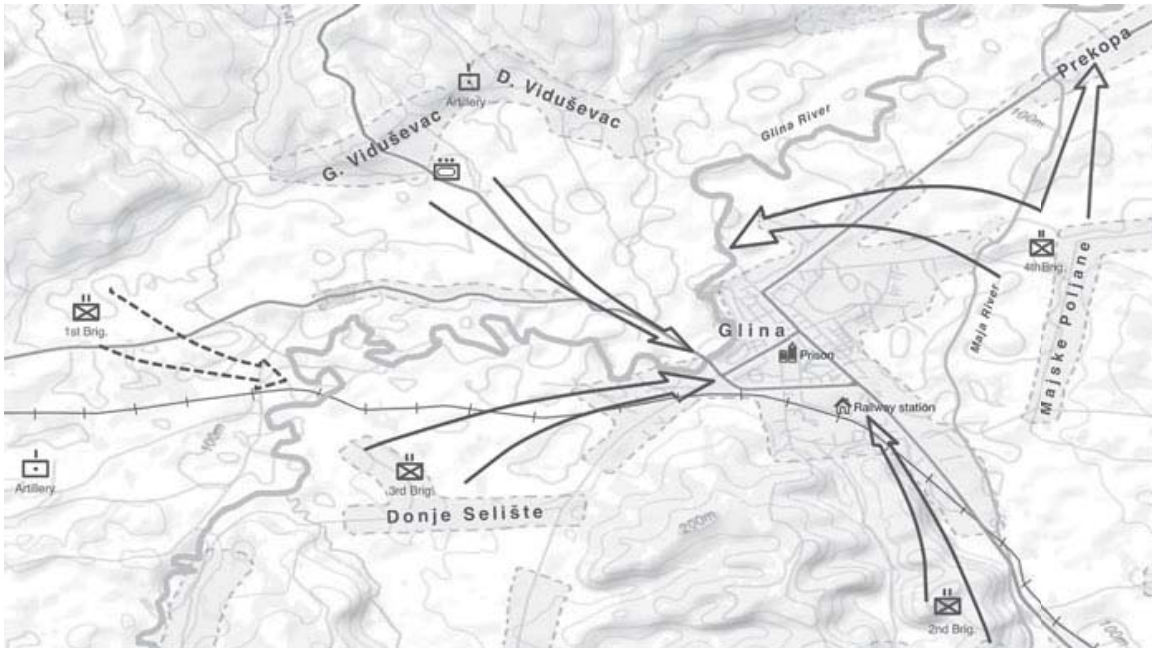
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64 Order from the Staff of the VII Attack Division, IV Corps of NOV, 20 November 1943, VA, Arhiva NOVJ, k. 812, reg. br. 15-1/1.

65 Štab VII. udarne divizije IV. Korpusa NOVJ, 23 November 1943 at 09:00, VA, Arhiva NOVJ, k. 812, reg. br. 16/1-1.

66 Jakšić, Pavle, *Nad uspomenu*, 2 vols., vol. 1, Biblioteka Svedočanstva (Rad: Beograd, 1990), p. 487.





Battle Plan for the Attack on Glina, 23 November 1943.

*even capable of passing the wire. We equipped ourselves with barbed wire cutters and ordered another attack in order to overcome the barbed wire obstacles. The enemy once again waited for us with intense fire, so we were not able to reach the enemy positions this time either.*<sup>67</sup>

One can conclude from the report that the two initial attacks were inadequately prepared and Jakšić subsequently criticized the command for not supplying the troops with barbed wire cutters. Another problem was that coordination of the attack failed, which is evident from the fact that 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade attacked only at dusk, because of which *Nordland* units could focus their firepower on one attack after the other. Adding to the setbacks was the loss of one tank,<sup>68</sup> which was inflicted by *Regiment Dänemark's* soldiers on a battalion of 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade, which unsuccessfully tried to attack from the direction of Gređani.<sup>69</sup>

Concurrently with the initial skirmishes around Glina, units of 8<sup>th</sup> Division advanced on Gora and Prekopa on 22 November, thus effectively breaking the communication between Glina and Petrinja.<sup>70</sup> At the time of the attack on the

67 Ibid., 28 November 1943, VA, Arhiva NOVJ, k. 812, reg. br. 3-1/3. Apparently, Second Battalion succeeded in breaking through the barbed wire and entered the town close to the hospital. However, the Danes attacked them from three directions, thus forcing a withdrawal; *Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o narodnooslobodilačkom ratu jugoslovenskih naroda: Borbe u Hrvatskoj 1943. god.*, vol. ser. V, vol. 21 (Vojnoistorijski institut jugoslovenske armije: Beograd, 1958); *ibid.*

68 Ibid., doc. no. 136.

69 The tank was probably a light fighting vehicle, considering that it was destroyed by machinegun fire while moving in the direction from Viduševac; *ibid.*, 156.

70 Daily report 2<sup>nd</sup> Panzer Army, NARA, RG 314, roll 485, fr. 925.

next day, the Danish reinforcements tried but failed in reaching Glina, as clarified in a report from that evening:

*The relief convoy from Petrinja reached Gora after a fight at 15:00 hours. The enemy has again interrupted the communication between Glina and Gora to the east. Since 15:00 numerically far superior attack on Glina from the west, southwest and south, including with tanks. So far two have been destroyed. The bands have captured the hospital dominating the western end of Glina. The entrenchment at the sawmill southeast of Glina has been cut off. Plans for 24/11: To fight and liberate Glina by the help of Panzeraufklärungsabteilung 11 (scout cars) and parts of Dänemark.<sup>71</sup>*

What happened next is quite interesting, as it illustrates both the difficulties *Nordland* faced when trying to relieve Glina and the treatment of civilians in the context of counter-insurgency warfare. The relief convoy managed to capture Gora but was delayed by Partisan resistance when trying to mend the bridge across Maja River in Prekopa.<sup>72</sup> Meanwhile, the troops from Petrinja also began “mopping up” the area around Gora. Pavao Lipak, a 42-year-old Croat from Marin Brod, was captured and two years later gave an interesting account of his experience:

*On 24 November 1943, there arrived a group of 200 Germans and a tank to our village from Gora, who were armed with automatic weapons. I do not know the name of the unit, or the name of the commander or any other individual. The only thing I know is that it consisted of a mix of Romanians and Danes. As soon as they arrived in our village, Nikola Roksa, aged 47, and Mato Žinić, aged 69, both from the same village and municipality, approached the Germans (Roksa has died and Žinić has been executed by the NOP). They informed the Germans who were party functionaries and who had cooperated with the Partisans. After that, the Germans arrested Nikola Žinić, 42 years old, myself and Nikola Kuko-lić, aged 46, and drove us off to Glina. Since they could not reach Glina because of the fighting with the NOV, they put us in a truck and drove us to Gora. There they untied us, took off our coats and put each of us across a table with our hands on our back and stood on our feet so that we could not move. After that they beat us with chains so that they beat each one 25-30 times. The Germans, their commander, the gendarmerie officer Ivan Cvitković, aged 45, and Nikola Žužić were present during the beatings. They beat us together with the Germans and asked us what connections we had to the partisans. The next day, the Germans took Nikola Žinić and placed him next to the church some 20 metres from*

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71 Transcript of communication, 20:00-21:50, NARA, RG 313, roll 485, fr. 920.

72 Transcript of telegram from 3rd Panzer Corps, 24 November 1943 at 21:45, NARA, RG 314, roll 485, fr. 911. See also *Zbornik DNOR*, ser. V, vol. 21, doc. no. 123.

*our building and executed him with a “schmeisser”. After the killing, they strung him up on a tree for three days with the text “this is a spy” written on his chest.*<sup>73</sup>

After recuperating somewhat during the night, the Partisans reorganized and began another attack on Glina in the morning of 24 November. According to Jakšić’s subsequent report at 11 o’clock, the attack had centred on the hospital, prison, railway station and sawmill. The Partisans had failed to take Jukinac bridge and Jakšić reported that one could not establish contact with 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps due to malfunctioning radio equipment and deficient telephone lines.<sup>74</sup> By 12 o’clock, however, the attack seems to have subsided and a new attack was planned for the evening.<sup>75</sup> Around 3 o’clock in the afternoon, however, the weather cleared and air strikes were called in to bomb the NOP positions.<sup>76</sup> Yet another attack ensued, in which battalions from 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigades managed to break through the barbed wire from the southwest, but were stopped due to “hesitation” and intense enemy fire. 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade managed to break through in front of the hospital, where the soldiers were driven back by intense enemy fire from the basement of the hospital. Another attack ensued and was met with hand grenades from the Danes, who also set fire to a building in order to use the light for observation and fire.<sup>77</sup> After what appears to have been another half-hearted attack by 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade, the Partisans finally decided to abandon the effort to capture Glina.<sup>78</sup>

In its final report, 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade listed a number of deficiencies and circumstances for the failure, including the fact that the soldiers had been forced to march quickly the days before and had no time to rest and prepare prior to the attack. Other issues mentioned included that many experienced soldiers had perished in the previous operations; that those who were left lacked in experience and training in urban warfare; lack of coordination between artillery and infantry, and, finally, that the air strikes disrupted the preparations for the final assault.<sup>79</sup> The failure resulted in 34 killed Partisans and 3 missing in action, while another 101 Partisans were wounded (it was unclear to the Partisans how many Germans had died).<sup>80</sup> This is only a fraction of the figure of 2,400 quoted by Bundgård Christensen et al., which appears to have been based on German “guesstimates” at the time. *Regiment Dänemark* apparently lost 3 officers, 11 non-commissioned officers and 132 privates (out of which 49 dead and wounded; what happened to the remainder is unclear).<sup>81</sup>

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73 Protocol of the Yugoslav War Crimes Commission, 24 April 1945; AJ 110-282-4.

74 *Zbornik DNOR*, ser. V, vol. 21, p. 122.

75 *Ibid.*, p. 123.

76 Transcript of telegram from 3rd Panzer Corps, 24 November 1943 at 21:45, NARA, RG 314, roll 485, fr. 911.

77 *Zbornik DNOR*, ser. V, vol. 21, doc. no. 136.

78 Operational report about the attack on Glina, 28 November 1943, VA Arhiva NOVJ, k. 812, reg. br. 3-1/3.

79 *Zbornik DNOR*, ser. V, vol. 21, doc. no. 137.

80 *Ibid.*

81 Bundgård Christensen et al., *Under hagekors*, p. 208.

Concurrently with the 7<sup>th</sup> Division's attacks on Glina, 8<sup>th</sup> Division began preparing for an attack on Hrastovica. According to Opačić's recollections, the task was given to 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, while 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade would position itself in the hamlet Cepeliš in order to cut off the road leading from Petrinja to Hrastovica and thus prevent reinforcements from being sent in. The task of entering the village was given to 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion under Simo Kozlina, which would advance from the forest-covered height 310 to the south, destroy entrenchments on the outskirts of Hrastovica and break through to the crossroads next to the church. 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion had the task of attacking from the church ruin Sveti Duh and cut off the road to the bridge over Petrinčica, which was defended by a group of 20 *Domobrani*. It was 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion's task to destroy the bridge itself and thus prevent reinforcements from nearby Petrinja to arrive.<sup>82</sup>

The attack on Hrastovica began at dawn on 25 November, when the Partisans approached the village after a short barrage:

*Even though the outlying parts of the enemy formation sensed the movement of the battalion, they did not open fire. The enemy was waiting calmly for the battalions to close in and when they almost reached the bunkers, he opened intensive fire on the infantry formation and managed to throw them back to the starting point.<sup>83</sup>*

While the Danes succeeded in beating back the first attack against their positions, they also suffered a serious setback due to the fact that a mortar shell killed the commander (his deputy was also killed soon after), while destroying the radio equipment and thus disrupting communications with Petrinja. The soldiers appear to have been able to call for reinforcements from Petrinja, but according to a Danish veteran's recollection were told help could not be sent at that point in time.<sup>84</sup>

What happened next can be reconstructed in detail by the help of NOP reports and memoirs by Danish soldiers and Partisans. Following artillery duels in the morning of 25 November, 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade reorganized into small units consisting of 3-5 members of the communist youth organization (*Savez komunističke omladine Jugoslavije*, SKOJ), who equipped with hand grenades and explosives tried to reach the Danish positions. They were held up for a while after facing stiff resistance until being able to break through and capture Danish machine-gun nests at 10:20. According to Opačić, the attack resulted in fierce hand-to-hand combat, after which the Danish ranks started breaking:

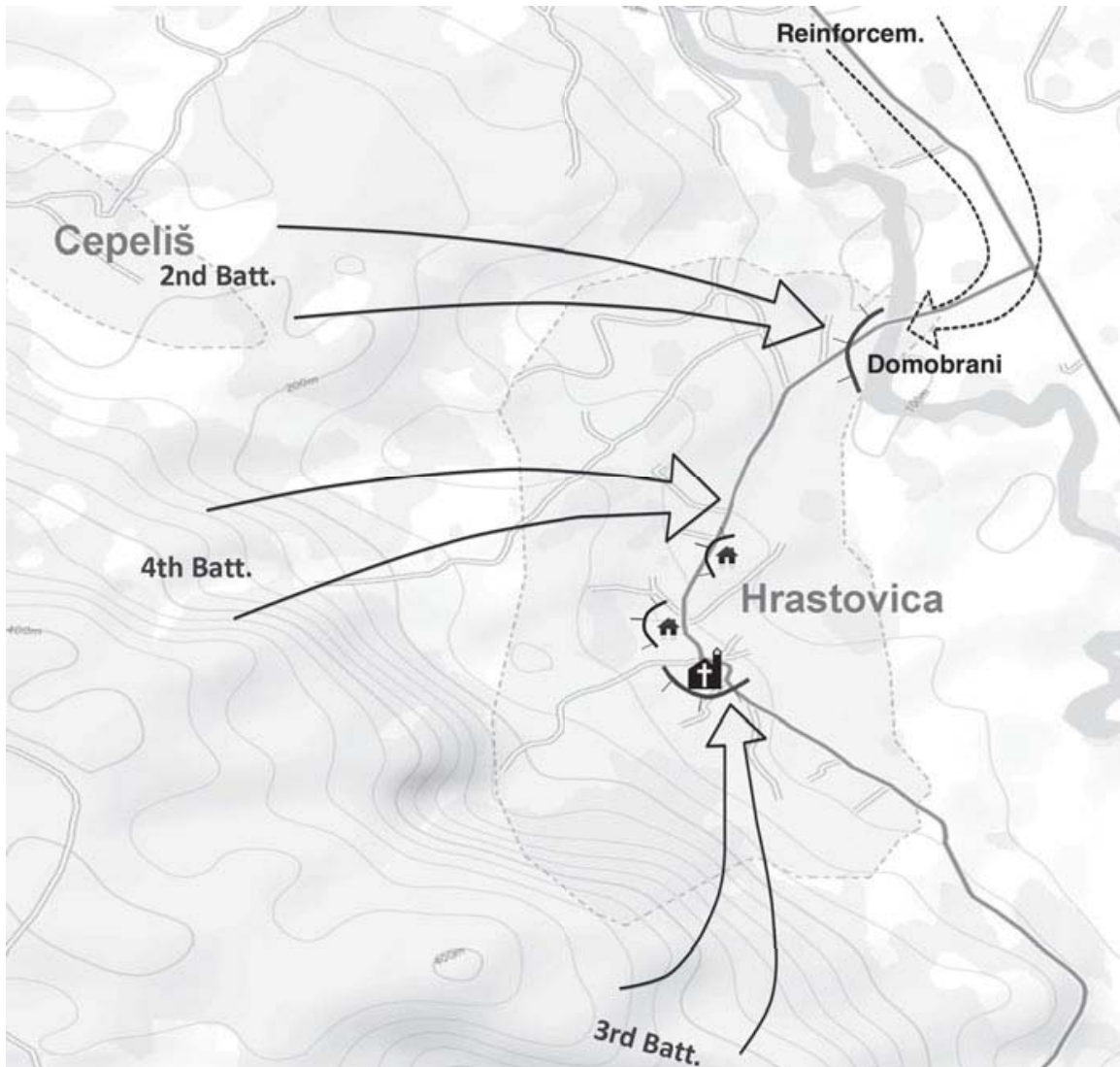
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82 Zatezalo, Đuro, ed. *Osma kordunaška udarna divizija* (Historijski arhiv u Karlovcu: Karlovac, 1977), pp. 489-90.

83 Ibid., 490. A German telegram from 22:40 in the evening mentions this first attack, which "has been beaten back"; Telegram from 3<sup>rd</sup> Panzer Corps to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Panzer Army, 25 November 1943, NARA, RG 314, roll 485, fr. 948.

84 Bundgård Christensen et al., *Under hagekors*, p. 208.





The Battle Plan for the Attack on Hrastovica.

*3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion succeeds in its first attack to capture enemy bunkers and trenches on the small hills to the south of the village, and after that to enter the village itself. The commander of a company, Simo Zatezalo with the nickname Cojle, died a heroic death at that point when advancing with the attacking formation. Confused and fearful of the success of 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, the [Danish] commander of the squad, a platoon commander and two non-commissioned officers, tried to get out and reach Petrinja by hiding in a farmer's wagon. However, they were intercepted at the Petrinčica bridge by Rade Ivković, the commander of 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion and a few fighters who called for their surrender. They refused and resisted, because of which they were liquidated.<sup>85</sup>*

Opačić's description provides an interesting counter-narrative to the one in the veterans' recollections in its description of the Partisans and their "heroic" strug-

<sup>85</sup> Zatezalo, *Osma kordunaška*, p. 490.

gle, where an episode involves the death of eight soldiers who wanted to save their commanding officer lying deadly wounded in front of the Danish trenches. Even though the colourful description of the flight and ultimate fate of the Danes has to be handled with care, the results of the attack are generally confirmed in NOP reports, as is the fact that 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion attacked and destroyed the bridge during the morning, in the process capturing around 30 *Domobrani*. This left the Danes in a very difficult situation as 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion continued its advance and after a fierce battle captured the crossroads and church “which had been turned into a bunker”. By that time, the hard-pressed Danes still appear to have counted on help from Petrinja, which Opačić argues convincingly was the main reason they did not surrender.<sup>86</sup>

The Danes soon understood they could not hold their positions and some of the soldiers tried desperately to break out from the encirclements in what appears to have been a disorganized rout. One group managed to reach a ditch close to an open field. From there, they tried to escape to Petrinja by crossing an open field in plain sight of the Partisans’ reserve 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, which had been sent to close the gap. The gauntlet must have been a bad experience; NOP sources mention that while a group of fifteen to twenty-five men succeeded in escaping to Petrinja, “an equivalent number was left dead in the field”.<sup>87</sup>

Another group of perhaps as many as thirty soldiers, who sought refuge in two stone houses (see map), met a much grimmer fate that has been described in two different ways. According to Bundgård Christensen et al., they

*fought for two days with automatic weapons and hand grenades until they ran out of ammunition and surrendered. One of the survivors from this group could later tell what had happened. The group was taken prisoner, with the offer that those who wished to could join the Partisans. Three of the soldiers accepted this offer, but shortly afterwards tried to flee. Two of them managed to do so. The fate of the other volunteers is unknown.*<sup>88</sup>

This account provides another interesting example of the problem with using statements by former members of *Waffen-SS* to establish “what happened”. Much similar to the description of the suicide attack with the hand grenade, the sources either remembered incorrectly or wished to present the struggle of the *Waffen-SS* as a more heroic feat than it actually was. In fact, there is no mention of any “offer” in NOP sources,<sup>89</sup> while the soldiers met what seems to have been a

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86 Zatezalo, *Osma kordunaška*, p. 491.

87 *Zbornik DNOR*, ser. V, vol. 21, doc. no. 128. According to Danish sources, some twenty soldiers managed to escape; Bundgård Christensen et al., *Under hagekors*, p. 208.

88 Bundgård Christensen et al., *Under hagekors*, p. 208.

89 This information is not trustworthy for a variety of reasons. The NOP was particularly distrustful of members of the ideologized armies such as the Italian “Blackshirts”, Ustašas and the

terrible fate as described in a subsequent report by politcommissar Milan Šumonja:

*At 16:20 one of our platoons managed to sneak up to one of the above-mentioned houses and throw in one kilo of explosives in the basement of the house. The house caught fire as a result of the explosion and the enemies inside were burnt alive. Four non-commissioned officers and four wounded soldiers were burnt alive inside. The attack on the second house did not succeed, even with the use of artillery from a close distance. We also failed to set the house on fire with petrol bombs [“Molotov cocktails” – TD].<sup>90</sup>*

After failing to capture the second house, Partisan units cordoned off the building with a small force and continued the effort the next day. Again, however, the Danish soldiers tried to hold out, no doubt in the vain hope of being relieved from Petrinja. This, however, would not happen, as experienced by Opačić:

*In order to aid the attacked squad in Hrastovica, the enemy sent parts of his forces from Petrinja in the morning of 26 November in the direction of the village Cepeliš, but ran into an ambush by 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade of 8<sup>th</sup> Division. After a short but intensive clash, the German forces were beaten back to Petrinja. Hearing the battle in the direction of Petrinja, the enemy in the surrounded building tried to break out to Petrinja, but paid for that attempt with 20 dead. Around 8 o'clock, an enemy formation reinforced with 6 tanks again moved in the direction of Hrastovica and managed to reach the destroyed bridge from where they opened fire on the positions of 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Battalions. The anti-tank cannon of the brigade at the same time opened fire from its position in Hrastovica, after which the tanks retreated.<sup>91</sup>*

Rather than continuing the fight for another day as described fifty years later, the Danes upon having the last hope of relief crushed took the sensible decision to negotiate surrender, which lasted for two hours until they finally laid down their arms at 13:00 hours.<sup>92</sup> The military operation in Hrastovica thus resulted in what effectively was a complete disaster for *Regiment Dänemark's* 2<sup>nd</sup> Company, 5<sup>th</sup> Bat-

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Waffen-SS, which is illustrated by Opačić's description of them as “engrained fascists”; Zatezalo, *Osma kordunaška*, p. 491.

90 *Zbornik DNOR*, ser. V, vol. 21, doc. no. 156.

91 Zatezalo, *Osma kordunaška*, p. 492.

92 *Zbornik DNOR*, ser. V, vol. 21, doc. no. 156. It is not mentioned in the sources exactly how the negotiations began. According to Nina Panjan, a present-day resident of Petrinja whose grandparents were present in Hrastovica during the attack, the Partisans forced her grandfather (he was an educated person who spoke German and whose wife the soldiers would visit) to approach the Danes with the demand to surrender; telephone conversation and mail communication between author and Nina Panjan, 5 and 11 November 2015.



From the German war cemetery in Sisak with the remains of about 600 soldiers, some with Danish names (photo: Željko Rakarić).

talion. According to the Partisan post-operation report, Danish losses amounted to 91 dead and 16 wounded, while 34 soldiers were taken prisoner.<sup>93</sup> What happened to them is unclear, but a report from 26 November confirms, “11 Germans and 26 Domobrani have been taken prisoner”.<sup>94</sup> The Partisan losses amounted to 18 killed.<sup>95</sup>

## Summary

The fighting in Glina and Hrastovica subsided in late November, in other words just a week before *Nordland* left Croatia for Estonia. The overall losses amounted to some 130 soldiers, most of whom perished in Hrastovica and whose remains today rest in the German war cemetery in Sisak. The Partisans, for their part, had some 34 casualties in Glina and 18 in Hrastovica, which means that the total casualty figure reached 180-200 individuals. In addition to the dead was a large number of wounded, not to mention all those who suffered from severe psychological stress and traumas they would carry with them for the rest of their lives. And what did they achieve? Not very much, it seems, since the NOP attacks con-

93 Đurić, *Banijski partizanski odredi*, 275. The figures seem to coincide well with the Danish statements, where one mentions that about 30 soldiers were left after the battle; *Zbornik DNOR*, ser. V, vol. 21, doc. no. 156.

94 Bundgård Christensen et al., *Under hagekors*, p. 209. It is evident from the report that the 11 Germans actually belonged to the group of thirty or so that had entrenched themselves in the house, while the 26 *Domobrani* were those who had been captured during the attack on the bridge over Petrinčica. The NDH forces tried to recapture Hrastovica on 27 and 28 November, but failed “due to fierce enemy resistance”; *Zbornik DNOR*, ser. V, vol. 21, doc. no. 133. In a subsequent report from 4 December, Colonel Ivo Rukavina reported about the capture of 39 “German” soldiers in Hrastovica; *ibid.*, doc. no. 199. Opačić gives a somewhat different statistic and claims there were a total of 91 dead including 4 officers and 4 non-commissioned officers, 16 wounded and 59 captured SS-soldiers and *domobrani*.

95 Zatezalo, *Osmo kordunaška*, p. 492.



tinued throughout December until Jakšić could ride into the liberated town on 11 January 1944.

The senselessness of death and destruction perhaps also explains the postwar attempts by some of the veterans to create meaning to their plight by trying to cast it as a heroic suffering against an infinitely stronger and depraved enemy. We will never know, but we do know that the ex-Yugoslav sources provide a rather different image of the war from that which emerges in the Danish veterans' recollections. More precisely, the attack on Glina failed due to inept communication and poor preparations on the part of the Partisans. The fact that the NOP forces first delayed an attack and then rushed in once they understood that reinforcements were on their way from Petrinja contributed significantly to the failure, even though bad weather and the stiff resistance put up by the Danish troops was important.

While the Partisans' fears of reinforcements actually helped *Nordland* in Glina, it paradoxically appears that the hope of relief sealed the Danes' fate in Hrastovica. Partisan sources suggest the main reason for the Danes' decision to keep fighting was that they were expecting help from Petrinja. Once this hope failed to materialize in the morning of 26 November, the soldiers took what appears to have been the only rational decision and surrendered.

Perhaps the most important result is nevertheless the clear difference in descriptions that emerge when NOP sources are compared to German primary documents and post-war recollections. Apart from obvious errors such as the claim of 2,400 dead Partisans (which went quite well with the general understanding of the communists as fanatics), it became clear that some of the descriptions given in Danish testimonies were based on misunderstandings, third-hand information and even conscious misrepresentations of the events. The Partisans did not "murder" the Danes in Hrastovica but managed to set fire to the building with explosives; there was probably no offer to the Waffen-SS men in Hrastovica to join the NOP (if it were so, then that in itself would countermand the claims that German POWs were regularly executed); there was no suicidal dash into Partisan ranks in Jukinci and the captured Danes were not undressed and killed, just as the Danes in Hrastovica did not fight until the last bullet. These results would not have been obtained without access to Partisan sources, which contributed to a fuller and indeed more correct picture of "wie es eigentlich gewesen ist".