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## THE RESCUE OF THE ALLIED PILOTS IN POREČE IN 1944

**ABSTRACT:** *The paper presents the results of the research conducted on the rescue of the seven Allied (American) pilots in Macedonia (Poreče) by the Ravna Gora Movement. This event took place in August, 1944. The paper is composed of several parts: analysis of the sources used the rescue of the pilots and the elaboration of the letter written on the 26<sup>th</sup> of June 1945 by one of the seven rescued pilots.*

**KEYWORDS:** Ravna Gora Movement, Poreče, Voislav Sajković, Mihajlo Andrić, Donald N. Crews, pilots, letter

The paper presents the results of the research conducted on the rescue of the seven Allied (American) pilots in Macedonia (Poreče) by the Ravna Gora Movement.<sup>1</sup> We still do not have enough sources for the complete elaboration of this issue. Despite such obstacles presented to us, we nevertheless proceeded, as the aim of historical scholarship is to raise questions that would be subject of further research, analysis and discussion. On the basis of such partial documentation, we attempted to create a reconstruction of the issue indicated on the basis of the existing sources.

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<sup>1</sup> Poreče represents a separate valley which is located in the northwestern part of the Republic of Macedonia. It occupies the middle course of the river Treska. The region is a typical closed valley surrounded by high mountains on all sides. In the north, the valley is bounded by Suva Gora and Suva Planina, in the east by the offshoots of Mokra Planina, i. e., Karadžica and Dautica, in the south by the offshoots of Buševa Planina, and in the west by the mountains Čeloica and Pesjak. Blagoja Markoski, Milena Taleska, Svemir Gorin, „Geographical present and future of Poreče“ (paper presented at the scientific conference „Poreče throughout the History“, 5–6 September 2009, the village of Samokov, Poreče, Republic of Macedonia).

With this contribution, we raise a new issue in the Macedonian historiography because, based on the literature consulted, we have perceived that so far nothing has been written about this issue. Due to that reason, the paper is a contribution for further research and reflection on the issue we tackle.

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After the capitulation of Italy and the unloading of the Allies in its southern part, in September 1943, the Allies have taken hold of the most airports at which they have transferred around 5000 planes of the strategic and tactical air force. The advantageous position of the airports in Southern Italy and the concentration of important air forces enabled the Allies to provide an air support to their forces at the Italian front and to direct part of the air force towards the targets in the Balkans, Southern and Middle Europe.<sup>2</sup>

As World War II progressed into late months of 1943, the German Armed Forces were pushed northward along the Italian peninsula by the Allies. It was decided to form a strategic air force that from Italy will act against Germany and its allies. This would be the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force of the United States Army Air Forces (USAAF). The 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force was formed on the 30<sup>th</sup> of October 1943. It was activated on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November 1943, with the Headquarters in Tunis (Tunisia). On the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 1943, the Headquarters was relocated in Bari (Italy) and remained there until the 15<sup>th</sup> of September 1945. The 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force began the operations on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November 1943, and was primarily engaged in the strategic bombing of targets in Italy, France, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Austria, Hungary and the Balkans until the end of the war. In the period 1943-1945, the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force included Bombardment Wings, 306<sup>th</sup> Fighter (Ftr.) Wing, 5<sup>th</sup> Photographic Reconnaissance Group, 154<sup>th</sup> Weather Reconnaissance Squadron, 885<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron (BS) and 859<sup>th</sup> BS. The Bombardment Wings included Bombardment Groups (BG) – the 5<sup>th</sup> Wing was composed of the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 97<sup>th</sup>, 99<sup>th</sup>, 301<sup>st</sup>, 463<sup>rd</sup> and 483<sup>rd</sup> BG; the 47<sup>th</sup> Wing: 98<sup>th</sup>, 376<sup>th</sup>, 449<sup>th</sup> and 450<sup>th</sup> BG; the 49<sup>th</sup> Wing: 451<sup>st</sup>, 461<sup>st</sup> and 484<sup>th</sup> BG; the 55<sup>th</sup> Wing: 460<sup>th</sup>, 464<sup>th</sup>, 465<sup>th</sup> and 485<sup>th</sup> BG; the 304<sup>th</sup> Wing: 454<sup>th</sup>, 455<sup>th</sup>, 456<sup>th</sup> and 459<sup>th</sup> BG; in the 305<sup>th</sup> Wing no combat components were assigned until the 13<sup>th</sup> of June 1945; in the 307<sup>th</sup> Wing no combat elements were

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<sup>2</sup> Савезничко бомбардовање Лесковца 6. септембра 1944, студија и документи, Момчило Павловић, Верољуб Трајковић (Лесковац: Институт за савремену историју, Народни музеј Лесковац, 1995), XXXVI.

assigned. The 306<sup>th</sup> Ftr. Wing included 7 Fighter Groups: 1<sup>st</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 31<sup>st</sup>, 52<sup>nd</sup>, 82<sup>nd</sup>, 325<sup>th</sup> and 332<sup>nd</sup>.<sup>3</sup>

In Yugoslavia, the Allied strategic forces started the actions at the beginning of October 1943, the first action being performed in Slovenia. Starting from the spring 1944, they began with day and night attacks on targets in Yugoslavia. Until March 1944, the bombing actions over Yugoslavia were performed by the 12<sup>th</sup> Air Force of the USAAF, and after that by the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force. On Easter day, in April 1944, Belgrade, as a strategic center, was subject to carpet bombing. The Allied air forces bombed strategic targets (marshalling yards and other railway stops, oil warehouses, airports etc.) in Yugoslavia in the spring and summer 1944. During the spring season, they also bombed German troops.<sup>4</sup>

The execution of the operation "Ratweek" was aimed at paralysing the enemy's traffic of principal communication on the Yugoslavian battlefield, and by doing that, to slow down the withdrawal of the German army group "E" from Greece and Albania through Yugoslavia. The operation was carried out so as to prevent the Germans from strengthening the Italian front.<sup>5</sup> The operation was a joint coordinated action, according to the agreement between the supreme commander of the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia (NLAY), Josip Broz-Tito and the general Henri Maitland Wilson, the supreme commander of the Mediterranean Allied forces, concluded in the city of Caserta (Italy) on the 6<sup>th</sup> of August 1944. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of August 1944, the plan for coordinated actions of NLAY and the Allied air force has been developed.<sup>6</sup> The Allied air forces that participated in the operation were the Balkan Air Force (BAF) and the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force. The operation was supposed to be carried out from the 1<sup>st</sup> until the 7<sup>th</sup> of September 1944 (it was supposed to last 7 days and 8 nights). During this operation, the units of NLAY took over 8 populated places and 49 strongholds, destroyed 77 kilometers of railroad and cut tracks at 2903 places, demolis-

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<sup>3</sup> Katherine Sredl, *Defenders of Liberty: 2nd Bombardment Group/Wing 1918–1993* (Paducah: Turner Publishing Company, 1998), 185–187; Charles A. Ravenstein, *The organization and lineage of the United States Air Force* (Washington, D. C.: Office of Air Force History, 1986), 35; Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate, *The Army Air Forces in World War II, Volume Two, Europe: Torch to Pointblank, August 1942 to December 1943* (Washington, D. C.: Office of Air Force History, 1983), 567; Maurer Maurer, *Air Force Combat Units of World War II* (Washington, D. C.: Office of Air Force History, 1983); Maurer Maurer, *Combat squadrons of the Air Force World War II* (s. l.: Albert F. Simpson Historical Research Center, Office of Air Force History, 1982).

<sup>4</sup> Branko Petranović, *Srbija u Drugom svetskom ratu 1939–1945* (Beograd: Vojnoizdavački i novinski centar, 1992), 614–616; *Савезничко бомбардовање Лесковца, XXXVII–XLV*.

<sup>5</sup> *Савезничко бомбардовање Лесковца, LIII*.

<sup>6</sup> Марјан Димитријевиќи, *Македонија во Антифашистичката војна (1944–1945)* (Скопје: Менора, 1995), 59.

hed roads at 100 places, tore down 97 bridges, 35 outflows and 5 tunnels, cut 77 and destroyed 43 kilometers of telephone lines, seized 12 and burnt 318 locomotives, destroyed 5 armored trains and 37 bunkers, killed and wounded in battle around 6000 and took captive around 5800 enemy soldiers. BAF and 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force performed 1973 flights, out of which, the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force performed 1373 flights and released 3000 tons of bombs,<sup>7</sup> and BAF performed around 600 flights with fighter air forces.<sup>8</sup> The main highways in Yugoslavia were completely impassable for a period of time. Due to that, in September, the German units withdrew through the Kačanik gorge and through Kosovo towards Belgrade, instead of through the Vardar-Morava valley.<sup>9</sup> Similar action was planned to be performed in Greece by the Englishmen in collaboration with the National Popular Liberation Army. However, there, it did not produce the expected results as in Yugoslavia.<sup>10</sup>

In the course of the operation "Ratweek", in Macedonia, the units of the National Liberation Army and the Partisan detachments of Macedonia (NLA and PDM) were supposed to disable the railway lines on the route Skopje-Veles-Gevgelija and Gostivar-Kičevo-Struga, as well as the road Bujanovac-Kumanovo. The operation was successfully carried out in Macedonia. The General Headquarters (GHQ) of NLA and PDM engaged the major part of its forces and started operating earlier (on the 28<sup>th</sup> of August 1944) by demolishing 3 kilometers of the railway Struga-Kičevo. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of September Kičevo was liberated, the tunnel over the village of Bogomila (Veles region) was destroyed and the railway line Veles-Prilep was made

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<sup>7</sup> During the seven-day operations, attacking the targets in Yugoslavia (mainly in Serbia), the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force achieved significant results. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September 1944, the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force performed the most intensive attacks on targets in Yugoslavia: 56 planes B-24 bombed the railway stops in Kraljevo, during which the railroad to the north and south of the railway station was completely cut off; 182 planes B-24, accompanied by 76 fighter planes, attacked the railway stops near Niš, releasing around 400 tons of bombs; 28 planes P-38, near Čuprija, bombed the bridge on the river Morava; 179 fighter planes performed an attack on the railway centers and communications in Serbia. During all these attacks, they destroyed 154 motor-transport, 52 locomotives, 113 train cars and 19 fuel and grease tankers. 65–75 motor-transport, 24 locomotives and 113 train cars were damaged. That day, 391 bombers and 255 fighter planes from the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force operated over Yugoslavia. More on the actions of the Allied air force in Serbia see: Milovan Dželebdžić, „Dejstva na komunikacije u Jugoslaviji od 1. do 7. septembra 1944. godine“, *Vojnoistorijski glasnik XXI*, br. 3, (1970), 19–21; *Савезничко бомбардовање Лесковца*, LVIII–XCIII.

<sup>8</sup> BAF, mainly, operated in Bosnia, Herzegovina, Croatia and Macedonia, and on a lower scale in Serbia. There were achieved significant results, especially at the highway Zagreb-Belgrade. M. Dželebdžić, „Dejstva na komunikacije...“, 20–22.

<sup>9</sup> Milovan Dželebdžić, *Borbe s grupom armija „E“ (od Grčke do austrijske granice)* (Beograd: Narodna armija, 1978), 9–11; M. Dželebdžić, „Dejstva na komunikacije...“, 22.

<sup>10</sup> М. Димитријевски, *Македонија во Антифашистичката...*, 60.

impassable. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September, the bridge on the road Debar-Gostivar was demolished, and on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September, a German train was brought down by an explosion in the river Vardar, which led to 1000 deaths. On the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> of September, by setting up diversions on bridges, tunnels and stations, the traffic was stopped on the line Skopje-Veles and on the roads Veles-Prilep, Veles-Kavadarci and Prilep-Bitola. In the following two days, 3 railway stations and 3 bridges were blown up on the road Gradsko-Gevgelija. BAF attacked and demolished traffic facilities and enemy columns, strongholds and garrisons. During the actions of the Allied airplanes along the route Skopje-Niš-Belgrade and Skopje-Kraljevo-Belgrade, 112 locomotives, 413 train cars with ammunition and other material were rendered unusable, and great numbers of German motor vehicles were made inoperable.<sup>11</sup>

The Allied bombings were performed over Bulgaria in 1943 and 1944. In October 1943, it was considered that Bulgaria should be served a 'sharp lesson'; 'the quickest way to promote resistance in Bulgaria and possibly to bring the country out of the war [is] to open a large-scale bombing attack upon it'. Sofia was attacked on the 14<sup>th</sup> of November 1943. "The marshaling yards and airfield were heavily damaged and 187 buildings in the city were reported destroyed. Casualties were not heavy, but Sofia was thrown into panic... Two further attacks were directed against Sofia before the end of the year". Sofia was also bombed in January and March 1944. In March, "the royal palace at Vrana was deliberately attacked and burned to the ground". Plovdiv, the second largest city in Bulgaria, and a key communications point, was bombed on the 18<sup>th</sup> of April 1944.<sup>12</sup>

The most important strategic targets in the Southeastern Europe were the Romanian oil refineries nearby Ploesti and Bucharest. Germany satisfied 30% of its needs by using the Romanian oil sources. Ploesti was the first target in Europe bombed by American aircraft on the 11<sup>th</sup> of June 1942. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of August 1943, the first low-level bombing raid began against Ploesti, code named "Operation Tidal Wave" from an airfield in Benghazi, Libya, and following that, several air battles began over the eastern Balkans and Bulgaria.<sup>13</sup> In 1944, until the 28<sup>th</sup> of August, the petrole-

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<sup>11</sup> Данчо Зографски, „Британските мисии во Вардарска Македонија во 1943 и 1944 година“, in: *Зборник на трудови посветени на академикот Михаило Ајосиолски по повод 75-годишнината од животоот*, уредувачки одбор акад. Михаил Д. Петрушевски (одговорен уредник) и др. (Скопје: Македонска академија на науките и уметностите, 1986), 289–290.

<sup>12</sup> Marshall Lee Miller, *Bulgaria during the Second World War* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1975), 165–169.

<sup>13</sup> Stanimir Stoyanov Stanev and Mark Eugene LaScotte, *289 days near Shumen* (Shumen: Konstantin Preslavsky University Press, 2012), 9.

um plants in Ploesti were attacked 28 times.<sup>14</sup> From 17<sup>th</sup> until 19<sup>th</sup> of August 1944, the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force was able to mount large assaults on Ploesti. With the aid of a night attack by the Royal Air Force, “these assaults brought production down to an estimated 10 per cent of original capacity, and by 24 August all work had ceased”.<sup>15</sup>

In the spring 1944, during the intensified actions of the Allied air forces on the German positions in Romania, the other parts of the Balkans and Middle Europe, after being taken down, a greater number of American pilots and other air force members started to fall on the territory of Serbia. All of them were protected by the Yugoslav Army in the Fatherland (Ravna Gora Movement). Thus, over 500 Allied pilots avoided the German captivity. During the summer, the American mission “Halyard” arrived in Serbia. It had the task to organize an air bridge from Southern Italy to Serbia for the evacuation of the pilots. The improvised airport at the village of Pranjani (near Čačak, Serbia) was expanded and the first group of 48 pilots was evacuated during the night between 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of August 1944. The following night, another 177 Allied pilots were evacuated. The evacuation of the American pilots continued in Western Serbia, at the site Koceljeva, from an improvised airport. On the 17<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> of September 1944, around 50 pilots were evacuated. Furthermore, the evacuation was executed near Doboј (Bosnia). From there, until the 27<sup>th</sup> of December 1944, an evacuation was executed of 417 Allied pilots in total from Serbia and Eastern Bosnia. The last group consisting of 15 American pilots was evacuated in May 1945. They were taken down over Montenegro and withdrew in Bosnia together with the Četniks under the command of Pavle Đurišić. After one battle between the Partisans and the Četniks in April 1945, the pilots joined the Partisans. They transferred them to Banja Luka, and on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May they were brought to Belgrade. From there, they were evacuated to Italy.<sup>16</sup>

The day on the 26<sup>th</sup> of August 1944, the plane Consolidated B-24G “Liberator”, with a code name “Our Love”, who was part of the 15<sup>th</sup> U.S. Air Force/445<sup>th</sup> Bomber Group/742<sup>nd</sup> BS, while returning from a bombing mission over Romania, was attacked by 5 German fighter aircrafts and after 5 minutes it flew over a strong anti-aircraft artillery. The plane crashed over

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<sup>14</sup> *Савезничко бомбардовање Лесковца*, XVI.

<sup>15</sup> Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate, *The Army Air Forces in World War II, Volume Three, Europe: Argument to V-E Day, January 1944 to May 1945* (Washington, D. C.: Office of Air Force History, 1983), 297.

<sup>16</sup> Коста Николић, *Историја Равнојорској покрећа 1941–1945, књига друга, Србија под окупацијом* (Београд: Завод за уџбенике, 2014), 388–391; Драгољуб М. Михаиловић, *раји и мир ђенерала. Изабрани рајни списи*, I, приредили: Милан Весовић, Коста Николић, Бојан Б. Димитријевић (Београд: Српска реч, 1998), 67.

the village of Vratnica (Tetovo region, Macedonia). Out of 9 members of the flight crew in total, only three of them survived the mission.<sup>17</sup> The inhabitants of Vratnica protected the 3 survived members of the crew from the occupation forces; nevertheless, they were tracked down, and in the course of the same day, captivated by the Bulgarian army and transported to Skopje, where they arrived in the evening hours. The 6 crew members who perished were buried in the village churchyard by the inhabitants of Vratnica. In 1947, the Embassy of the United States of America (USA) in Yugoslavia exhumed the graves in the church and transferred the bodies to the American military cemetery in Belgrade. From there, in the course of the years, the relatives transferred the remains of their closest to the USA. The three survived crew members were taken to the prison in Šumen (Bulgaria), where they lived to see the capitulation of Bulgaria in September 1944. In September, they were liberated and delivered to the Allies, the same time when the first report was created by the survived lieutenant Richard T. McCauley on the 14<sup>th</sup> of September 1944. The three survived crew members returned to the USA.<sup>18</sup>

The Ravna Gora Movement of Dragoljub Mihailović-Dražić, during the World War II operated in certain regions on the territory of Macedonia under Bulgarian occupation. Among these regions was also Poreče.

On this occasion we take into consideration the operation performed by the Ravna Gora Movement in Poreče, in August 1944, when seven Allied pilots were rescued.

The sources at our disposal are scarce and have different character. We emphasise that the only available source for the rescue action of the pilots are the minutes from the hearing of Voislav Sajković<sup>19</sup> conducted by

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<sup>17</sup> The survived ones: Lieutenant Edwin C. Kieselbach, Lieutenant Richard T. McCauley and Sergeant Edward Ambrosini. Those who perished: Sublieutenant John T. Edwards, Sergeant David C. Koblitz, Sergeant Bruce B. Tuthill, Sergeant Harold L. Viken, Sergeant William M. Rhodes and Sergeant Willis C. Stephenson.

<sup>18</sup> On the 26<sup>th</sup> of November 2014, in memory of the crew of the plane „Our Love“ and as a gratitude to the inhabitants of the village of Vratnica, the USA Ambassador to the Republic of Macedonia, Paul Wohlers, and the Macedonian Minister of Defense, Zoran Jolevski, unveiled a commemorative plaque at the cemetery in Vratnica. <http://mk.voanews.com/a/2535808.html> (accessed: 7.11.2016); <http://morm.gov.mk/?mainnews=ministerot-jolevski-i-ambasadorot-volers-ja-otvorija-memorijalnata-plocavo-vratnica&lang=mk> (accessed: 27.10.2016); <http://www.vest.mk/?ItemID=1C7FEB-61B8DB9646813ED0E4DC442501> (accessed: 27.10.2016); [http://photos.state.gov/libraries/macedonia/8573/ArchivePDFsNov2014/11262014vratnica-memorial-ceremony\\_eng.pdf](http://photos.state.gov/libraries/macedonia/8573/ArchivePDFsNov2014/11262014vratnica-memorial-ceremony_eng.pdf) (accessed: 27.10.2016).

<sup>19</sup> Voislav Sinadin Sajković (ski) (the village of Breznica, Poreče, 9. VIII 1915 – Skopje, 17. VII 1981). Member of the Ravna Gora Movement in Poreče. According to Petar Pepljugin, after the negotiations carried out in Poreče near the end of August 1944 between the 5<sup>th</sup> Macedonian National Liberation Assault Brigade (5<sup>th</sup> MNLAB) and the Ravna Gora

the Administration of State Security (UDB) of the People's Republic of Serbia, in Belgrade, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July 1949, which implies a time distance of almost 5 years from the event. During that hearing, Sajković also gave statement about the rescue action of the pilots. Quite a serious hindrance during the research and analysis of the issue posed the fact that we have not found other sources for comparison with the minutes of Sajković's hearing, so that we could verify the reliability of his statement on the action performed. Apart from the minutes from the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July 1949, mentioned above, we have also used other documents part of the police documentati-on. Those documents include the minutes of the hearing of Voislav Sajko-vić on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 1946, a statement of his given in 1946, the minu-tes from the hearing of Vera Marković-Toholj<sup>20</sup> on the 26<sup>th</sup> of March 1946, and the minutes from the hearing of her brother Aleksandar Toholj<sup>21</sup> on the 18<sup>th</sup> of April 1946. Furthermore, we also used two letters. The first let-ter was written by Božidar Lešević<sup>22</sup> on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 1944, and it

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Movement, in the spirit of the Agreement between the National Committee for the Liberati-on of Yugoslavia and the Royal Government of Yugoslavia from the 16<sup>th</sup> of June 1944, the Četniks in Poreče were placed under the command of the NLA and PDM and the 6<sup>th</sup> Natio-nal Liberation Brigade of Poreče was formed. By this, in fact, the Ravna Gora Movement in Poreče was dissolved. Sajković was commander of the 6<sup>th</sup> National Liberation Brigade of Poreče. State archives of the Republic of Macedonia, Skopje (SARM), Coll. 885 Republic Secretariat for Internal Affairs /DPP – UDB/ (885), box 113, archival unit 25; Петар Пепе-љугоски, *Незаборавни јодини (сеќавања)* (Прилеп: РО Печатница „11 Октомври“ – При-леп, 1982), 207–234.

<sup>20</sup> Vera Marković-Toholj (Skopje, 1. I 1915 – ?). SARM, Coll. 885, box 309, archival unit 12.

<sup>21</sup> Aleksandar Danilo Toholj (Mostar, 9. VI 1917 – ?). SARM, Coll. 885, box 247, archival unit 1.

<sup>22</sup> Božidar M. Lešević (Prokuplje, 1890 – ?). In the second half of 1943, he joined the Ravna Gora Movement in Poreče. Petar Pepeljugoski wrote that in the headquarters of the 6<sup>th</sup> National Liberation Brigade of Poreče there was a supply officer of the brigade. That supply officer was the captain Dušan Lešević. On other occasion, Pepeljugoski wrote that the supply officer of the brigade was captain Lešević. In the course of the research regarding the operation of the Ravna Gora Movement in Poreče, in the sources, we did not come across a person named Dušan Lešević. In the letter that was written on the 19<sup>th</sup> of July 1944 by the lieutenant colonel Stojan Marković (commander of the Vardar military region that occupied the territory of Macedonia on the right side of the river Vardar) to Vojče Trbić, the person under the name Lešević is mentioned. In the command No. 185 issued by Stojan Marković on the 19<sup>th</sup> of July 1944, Božidar Lešević was mentioned having the military rank of an infantry captain. According to the military ranks of Captain Dušan Lešević and captain Lešević, there is a possibility that this refers to one and the same person, who is the infantry captain Božidar Lešević. Archive „d-r Velimir Brezoski“ at the Institute of National History, Skopje (Arch. „d-r Velimir Brezoski“), Coll. Heritage, box. 2, Command No. 184, 19<sup>th</sup> of July 1944; Letter from Stojan Marković to Vojče Trbić, 19<sup>th</sup> of July 1944. SARM, Coll. 885, box 109, Reg. No. 42201244003; box 111, archival unit 17. П. Пепељугоски, *op. cit.*, 212–231; Петар Пепељугоски-Црвениот, „Учеството и придонесот на Петтата бригада во борбите

was intended for Vojče Trbić.<sup>23</sup> The second letter was written on the 26<sup>th</sup> of June 1945 by one of the rescued pilots, Donald N. Crews,<sup>24</sup> and it was addressed to Mihajlo N. Andrić.<sup>25</sup> As a source of data we also used the memories of Goga Petrovski, who was a political delegate of a squad of the 5<sup>th</sup> MNLAB. We have also used the recollections of Dimče Mire and Draga Manevska-Orajt, who were combatants of the 5<sup>th</sup> MNLAB.

We did not establish what was the task performed by the pilots in the summer of 1944 and why were they flying over Macedonia. To the question asked by the UDB during the hearing on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July 1949 regarding the time and manner of rescue of 7 Americans, Sajković gave the following answer: "In 1944 I was commander of the Četnik Brigade of Poreče. We were in the village of Ramne in Poreče region. In the month of June, the Americans were returning by plane from bombing, and a separate plane showed up that was flying in circles, and then people started jumping out of it. We immediately ran towards them to help them. As the Bulgarian barracks were nearby, we engaged in a combat with Bulgarians because they also ran towards the parachuters. The Bulgarians retreated, and the 7 American parachuters landed into the surrounding forest and came to us...". Two other parachuters, who probably fell within the range of the Bulgarian "barracks", were taken cap-

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за ослободување на Поречието", in: *Зборник на сеќавања и документи за борбениот пати на Пејшиаиа македонска народноослободителна бригада-Прилејска*, редакција Љубен Георгиевски-Љупта и др. (Скопје: Општински одбор на Сојузот на борците од НОБ-Прилеп и Секција за негување на борбените традиции на Петтата МНО бригада-Прилепска-Скопје, 1998), 142–149, 580.

<sup>23</sup> Milivoj Trbić – Vojče (the village of Brailovo, Prilep region, 13. IV 1913 – ?, 24. IX 1947). Son of the Serbian Četnik Duke Vasilje Trbić. Member of the Ravna Gora Movement. Operated in Macedonia in the period from 1942 to 1944. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of January 1947, he was arrested in the village of Zrze, Prilep region. At the court proceedings in Skopje conducted from 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> of June 1947 was convicted to death sentence by shooting, permanent loss of political and citizen rights and confiscation of the entire estate. He was executed on the 24<sup>th</sup> of September 1947. SARM, Coll. 885, box 111, archival unit 17.

<sup>24</sup> We do not have the original letter in English written by Crews. In the course of the research we found the translated letter. The letter was translated in Serbian. The document in Serbian available to the author of the paper has the following transcription „Donald N. Krus“. The transcription of the name in English is according to the assumption of the translator of the paper, guided by the transcription in the document in Serbian. The translator and the author of the paper do not have the original letter in English. Arch. „d-r Velimir Brezoski“, Coll. Heritage of prof. Velimir Brezoski, PhD (Heritage), box 2, Letter from Donald N. Crews to Mihajlo N. Andrić, 26<sup>th</sup> of June 1945.

<sup>25</sup> Mihajlo N. Andrić (Mihajlo Nikodin Andreev) (the village of Rasteš, Poreče, 15. III 1914 – ?), member of the Ravna Gora Movement in Poreče. Arch. „d-r Velimir Brezoski“, Coll. National Liberation Struggle (NLS), box 36, No. 1338. SARM, Coll. 885, box 111, archival unit 2. SARM, Coll. NLS, box 31, archival No. 1338; box 40, archival No. 1734.

tive.<sup>26</sup> Although Sajković stated the month of June, we nonetheless reckon that June is not chronologically compatible, because, according to Crews's letter, the pilots were saved in August 1944.<sup>27</sup> This letter will be accounted for later on in the paper.

What is notable is that in Sajković's statement, he did not explain which forces or who engaged into a combat with the Bulgarians. But, having into account that Sajković at first started to answer that he was commander of the Četnik Brigade of Poreče, and later on he used the words "We were", "We immediately ran", "we engaged" and "came to us", we reckon that such an answer given by him indicates to us that the 7 parachuters (pilots) were rescued by the Ravna Gora Movement. The following statement given by Sajković during the hearing is also an indicator of the conclusion that the Ravna Gora Movement rescued the pilots: "These Americans were with us until August 1944, and then I went to the Partisans together with the brigade (Brigade of Poreče – author's comment), and then I delivered the pilots to them".<sup>28</sup> From the quotation given, it can be perceived that Sajković once again used the word "us", and we consider that Sajković with that word in the statement denoted the Ravna Gora Movement.

What were the names and surnames of the pilots? We have established the name and the surname of one of the pilots. He was called Donald N. Crews from the city of St. Louis in the American state of Missouri.<sup>29</sup> According to the minutes of Sajković's hearing on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July 1949, he remembered only the name Zet. However, because in the minutes the name Zet is written in quotation marks, it is possible that this name was

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<sup>26</sup> The document in Serbian states: „Ja sam bio 1944 godine komandant četničke porečke brigade. Bili smo u selu Ravne u Porečju. Meseca juna vraćali su se Amerikanci avionom sa bombardovanja i pojavio se jedan avion otsečen koji se uvijao i iz njega su počeli da iskaču ljudi. Mi smo odmah potrčali u pomoć njima. Kako je tu blizu bila kasarna bugarska, stupili smo u borbu sa Bugarima jer su i oni potrčali prema padobrancima i Bugari su se povukli a 7 padobranaca – Amerikanaca palo je u okolnoj šumi i oni su došli kod nas i 2 koja su pala u kasarnskom krugu Bugara, bili su zarobljeni“. SARM, Coll. 885, box 113, archival unit. 25.

<sup>27</sup> Arch. „d-r Velimir Brezoski“, Coll. Heritage, box 2, Letter from Donald N. Crews to Mihajlo N. Andrić, 26<sup>th</sup> of June 1945.

<sup>28</sup> SARM, Coll. 885, box 113, archival unit 25.

<sup>29</sup> The translated letter into Serbian, regarding Crews's address, states:

„Room 808 Y.M. C.A.

1528 Lo[...]st Street

St. Louis – Missouri

Uni[ted] Sta[tes] of America“.

Arch. „d-r Velimir Brezoski“, Coll. Heritage, box 2, Letter from Donald N. Crews to Mihajlo N. Andrić, 26<sup>th</sup> of June 1945.

not the real name of the pilot that Sajković remembered. “Zet” told Sajković that he was a law student. Sajković pointed out: “...we talked a little [in] French, and our telegrapher Dušan Leban, who is native of Slovenia, knew a little English”. Sajković did not know the names of the other pilots until he noticed a yellow band on the right side of one of the pilots, and they said that he was second lieutenant and commander of the plane.<sup>30</sup>

All seven pilots were from the USA. Such conclusion is based on the letter from the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 1944. That letter is chronologically the closest to the event, and with this letter, among other things, Lešević informed Trbić regarding the “7 American pilots”.<sup>31</sup> The conclusion is also based on the letter from 26<sup>th</sup> of June 1945, in which, among other things, Crews wrote to Andrić: “...we were returned to the Un[it]ed States of [America]. Our families were very happy to see us again and we had a great time”.<sup>32</sup> Thus, from what has been demonstrated, we concluded that the 7 pilots were from the USA. In the minutes from the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July 1949, UDB used the phrases “Americans” and “American pilots” to refer to the pilots, and Sajković used only the phrase “Americans”.<sup>33</sup> Although Sajković did not use the phrases “American pilots” and “pilots”, it is still obvious that it is a matter of the same persons, i.e. the 7 Americans are the 7 American pilots.

They have remained with the Ravna Gora Movement in Poreče until its disbandment in this region towards the end of August 1944. Then, according to what Sajković stated on the hearing on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July 1949, he, delivered the Americans to the Partisans, i.e. to the 5<sup>th</sup> MNLAB.

In the letter from the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 1944, Lešević wrote to Trbić the following: “The lieutenant colonel Marković,<sup>34</sup> Boža Vidojević and Cole,<sup>35</sup> Leban<sup>36</sup> and Gaicki,<sup>37</sup> the 7 American pilots rescued<sup>38</sup> from the Bul-

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<sup>30</sup> SARM, Coll. 885, box 113, archival unit 25.

<sup>31</sup> SARM, Coll. 885, box 111, archival unit 17.

<sup>32</sup> Arch. „d-r Velimir Brezoski“, Coll. Heritage, box 2, Letter from Donald N. Crews to Mihajlo N. Andrić, 26<sup>th</sup> of June 1945.

<sup>33</sup> SARM, Coll. 885, box 113, archival unit 25.

<sup>34</sup> Stojan.

<sup>35</sup> Sofronie Zlatić (Sofronija Zlatevski) (the village of Slatina, Poreče, 14. IX 1903 – ?). SARM, Coll. 885, box 112, archival unit 18.

<sup>36</sup> Dušan.

<sup>37</sup> Jovan/Ivan Aleksandar Gaicki (Niš, 4. VI 1902 – ?). SARM, Coll. 885, box 110, archival unit 14.

<sup>38</sup> The document in Serbian states: „Potpukovnik Marković, Boža Vidojević i Cole, Leban i Gaicki, 7 – američkih avijatičara otetih od bugara i oba engleza otišli su u operativnu zonu“. We interpret the word „otetih“ as „rescued“. We have written above regarding the manner in which the 7 pilots were rescued in Poreče. Due to the fact that the 7 pilots (parachuters), after jumping out of the plane, were noticed by the Ravna Gora Movement and the Bulgarians, it was a matter which of the both sides would get first to the pilots. In such circumstances a combat ensued between the Ravna Gora Movement and the Bulgarians. In

garians and both Englishmen went into the operative area".<sup>39</sup> Lešević did not write which was the operative area that the pilots went to. According to the writings of Goga Petrovski, he recalled that on the 27<sup>th</sup> of August 1944, he escorted a group of 9 persons from Poreče to the village of Prasad (within the region of Prilep – Macedonia). Among them, there were also three American soldiers from a plane that was taken down, and who managed to land in a territory controlled by the Četniks (the Ravna Gora Movement). Petrovski, in the village of Prasad, delivered the group to the commander Tihomir Miloševski and the political commissioner Naum Naumovski-Borče.<sup>40</sup> The presence of Americans in the Ravna Gora Movement in Poreče was also supported by the statements of Dimče Mire and Draga Manevska-Orajt. According to Mire, in the Poreče region, there were "3-4 Englishmen and Americans",<sup>41</sup> while Manevska recalled "5 Anglo-American soldiers-pilots who, during the carrying out of combative tasks, landed with parachutes on this location (Poreče – author's comment), leaving their damaged planes".<sup>42</sup> Manevska mentioned "5 Anglo-American soldiers-pilots", however, the number she stated is not correct because we have established that there were 7 American pilots. Despite such flaw in the recollection of Manevska, it is still important that according to both Mire and Manevska, there were Americans in the Ravna Gora Movement. Thus, the three American soldiers in Petrovski's recollection were part of the seven rescued pilots in Poreče. We did not find, or at least we do not know of, the presence of some other Americans (American soldiers) in the Ravna Gora Movement in Poreče region. Poreče and Prilep area, according to the military-territorial division of Macedonia at the time made by the GHQ of NLA and PDM, were part of the Second operative zone (Bitola military area). Hence, the operative zone mentioned in Lešević's letter referred to the

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that combat, the Bulgarians retreated, by which the Ravna Gora Movement did not let the Bulgarians to get to the 7 pilots and capture them. For the meaning of the word „otetih“ see: *Речник српскохрватскога књижевног језика*, књига IV, друго фототипско издање, уређивачки одбор Михаило Стевановић и др. (Нови Сад: Матица српска, 1990), 243; *Речник српскохрватскога књижевног језика*, књига V, друго фототипско издање, уређивачки одбор Михаило Стевановић и др. (Нови Сад: Матица српска, 1990), 925–926; *Речник српскохрватског књижевног и народног језика*, књига XVIII, оповргавање – оцарити, уредници књиге Даринка Гортан-Премк и др. (Београд: САНУ, Институт за српски језик, 2010), 555–557.

<sup>39</sup> SARM, Coll. 885, box 111, archival unit 17.

<sup>40</sup> Гога Петровски, „Спроведување на четничкото раководство од Порече до Главниот штаб на НОВ на Македонија“, in: *Зборник на сеќавања и документи*, 124–126.

<sup>41</sup> Димче Мире, „Бригадата формира-нова бригада“, in: *Зборник на сеќавања и документи*, 120.

<sup>42</sup> Драга Маневска-Орајт, „Скромна пријателска вечера“, in: *Зборник на сеќавања и документи*, 122.

Second operative zone. A confirmation of this is the recollection of Petrovski that after the arrival in the village of Prasad “we found the Headquarters of the Zone and the division (41<sup>st</sup> Macedonian National Liberation Division /41<sup>st</sup> MNLD/ - author’s comment)”, and delivered the group to the commander Tihomir Miloševski and the political commissioner Naum Naumovski-Borče.<sup>43</sup> Namely, GHQ of NLA and PDM designated Tihomir Miloševski as commander and Naum Naumovski as political commissioner in the Headquarters of the Second Operative Zone.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, the commander of the 41<sup>st</sup> MNLD was Tihomir Miloševski, and since August 1944, the political commissioner of this unit was Naum Naumovski-Borče.<sup>45</sup> The whereabouts in the operative zone of the other four American pilots are not known.

How did we conclude that Donald N. Crews was one of the rescued pilots in Poreče? Why did we write that we do not have the original letter in English written by Crews to Mihajlo Andrić at our disposal, that the letter was translated in Serbian and that, in the course of the research carried out, we found the translated letter? We shall provide several quotations regarding these questions, and then we will analyse them.

At the hearing on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 1946, Sajković stated that he was released from prison on the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> of August 1945. After some time, according to Sajković: “...a woman from Poreče came, the wife of Mihailo (Mihajlo – author’s comment) Andrić, former commander of the battalion. She said that she had heard that I got out of prison and that she came to ask me whether I know something about her husband Mihajlo. I told her that I was arrested in Kičevo, and he was at that time in the brigade, so I don’t know what happened to him. She asked me where she should look for him.<sup>46</sup> My answer to that was the same, that I didn’t know. [T]he[n] she told me that her husband Mihajlo received a letter from an American who du[ring] the occupation was on a plane that crashed in Porečje (Poreče – author’s comment). I got the letter via [p]ost, but we can’t read it. I told her to send me the letter and I will arrange for a translation. She said that she

<sup>43</sup> Г. Петровски, „Спроведување на четничкото“, 126.

<sup>44</sup> Миле Михајлов, *Военосаднинскиите ортани во Народноослободителната војна на Македонија (1941–1945)* (Скопје: Институт за национална историја, НИО „Студентски збор“, 1992), 205, 227–246.

<sup>45</sup> Марјан Димитријевски, *Македонската војска 1944–1945 (Преглед на Главниот штаб, бригадите, дивизиите, корпусите и V југословенска армија)* (Скопје: Институт за национална историја, 1999), 171.

<sup>46</sup> On the 12<sup>th</sup> of December 1944, Mihajlo Andrić was arrested by the Department for Protection of the People (DPP). The latest data we have on Andrić is from the 9<sup>th</sup> of January 1945, when he was interrogated by a commissioner of the III division for the I military region. SARM, Coll. 885, box 111, archival unit 2.

will send it, but she begged me to ask around about Mihajlo. I promised her that and than she left. As for the letter, she said she will send it...”<sup>47</sup> Thereinafter, in November 1945, at his home in the village of Orizari,<sup>48</sup> Sajković found the letter “from the Americans, which was brought by the wife of MIHAJLO ANDRIĆ”. The same month, Sajković came to Skopje and took the letter at the home of Aleksandar Toholj.<sup>49</sup> Sajković gave the letter to Aleksandar’s sister, Vera Marković-Toholj, and, told her that Aleksandar promised him that he would translate the letter at some friends of his. Then Sajković found Aleksandar and told him that he has brought the letter for translation. Aleksandar promised him that he would translate it. In December 1945, Sajković met with Aleksandar, who told him that the letter was translated, and Vera gave the letter to Sajković, “both the original and the translated one from American”. From what he has read in the “translation of the American letter”, this was Sajković’s recollection in general: “Dear Mihajlo, after our departure from Yugoslavia, we returned to the fatherland and were granted a leave for a period of one month. Our families were happy to see us alive and we are very grateful to Your people and the services which you have provided with regard to our rescue. Those two who were captured by the Bulgarians were taken to a concentration camp in Germany and were freed by our troops. The one who was wounded lost his leg. ‘Then, he described their location and the way they wrote each other’. As soon as we returned from lea[ve], we flew over Your Skopje and bombed it. Here I sen[d] you that photograph,<sup>50</sup> and would you be so kind to send me the photograph of your uniting with the partisans. I wanted to write you sooner, but there was no postal service between USA and Yugoslavia. And I write you as soon as the service has been set up. Therefore, as soon as you receive the letter write me back to tell me about you and your whereabouts. I am in Rome at the radio station. Your American friend /I don’t know the name and the address/”. Sajković came home in the village of Orizari, and the letter “I didn’t send it because I was waiting for the

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<sup>47</sup> SARM, Coll. 885, box 113, archival unit 25.

<sup>48</sup> With the decree of the Ministerial Council of federal Macedonia for establishing the number of territorial regions and headquarters of the districts and local committees from 27<sup>th</sup> of November 1945, the village of Orizari was part of the Đorče Petrov district (Skopje district). *Административно-територијални поделби во Македонија 1944–2004, документи*, избор и редакција проф. д-р Горѓи Чакарјаневски, проф. д-р Тодор Чепреганов, Стојан Аврамовски (Скопје: Институт за национална историја, 2007), 66–146.

<sup>49</sup> Voislav Sajković and Aleksandar Toholj knew each other during the existence of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. SARM, Coll. 885, box 113, archival unit 25; box 247, archival unit 1.

<sup>50</sup> The word „photograph“ is translated from the Serbian word „snimak“ written in the source document in Serbian.

woman (the wife of Andrić – author’s comment) to take it and it is at my home”. Sajković did not explain which letter he took and left at his home, whether it was the original or the translated one.<sup>51</sup>

According to Sajković’s statement from 1946, after his release from prison in August 1945, at the end of August or in September 1945, he left to Šid (Serbia). Sajković stated that after his return to Macedonia: “...the wife of MIHAJLO ANDRIĆ, the comm[ander] [of] battali[on] from the village of Rasteš, comes to my home and asks me whether I know something about her husband MIHAJLO, I answered that I didn’t know anything about him and his whereabouts. She, then, said to me that her husband got a letter from America, from those Americans that were rescued in Poreče, but that she can’t read it, I told her to send it to me and I will find someone to translate it”. Sajković continued: “After some time the wife of MIHAJLO from R[a]steš came once again and asked me about her husband, but my answer to her was the same as the first time, that I didn’t know about his whereabouts. And then she left the letter and went away. After se[ve]ral days I come to Skopje and ask ACA (Aleksandar Toholj – author’s comment) whether he knows who can translate the letter, he answered that I should leave it to him and that he knew someone who will translate it, and I did so... I took the letter, because it was translated by ACO, and left it at home”.<sup>52</sup>

At the hearing on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July 1949, UDB asked Sajković who received a letter of gratitude from the American pilots. He answered: “This letter was received by Mihajlo Andrić, who at that time (the time of the rescue of the pilots in Poreče – author’s comment) was commander of a battalion in my brigade (Poreče Brigade – author’s comment), and now I don’t know of his whereabouts. All I know is that he was arrested in Skopje after my arrest”. They asked him two more questions. The first question referred to whether anyone else beside Mihajlo Andrić received a letter of gratitude, while the second one was how that letter (for Mihajlo Andrić) ended up in Sajković’s hands. On the first question, Sajković answered that he did not know whether someone else received a letter, but that he (Sajković) did not receive a letter. On the second question, Sajković answered: “When I was released from the prison of UDB, Mihajlo Andrić’s wife came to me to ask about him, and when I told her that I didn’t know anything, she told me that she got a letter, but, that she can’t read it, so I told her to send it to me, as she did”. Then another question from UDB followed: “How come the Americans sent this letter to Mihajlo and not anyone else?”. Sajković answered: “I was also amazed that they contacted Mihajlo, and not

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<sup>51</sup> SARM, Coll. 885, box 113, archival unit 25.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

me as a commander since I was the initiator of their rescue". Sajković did not know whether Mihajlo Andrić became friends with the Americans, but in any case, Andrić had the time to do so and was nice to them.<sup>53</sup>

With regard to the translated letter, a statement was also given by Vera Marković – Toholj at the hearing conducted by DPP for the city of Skopje, on the 26<sup>th</sup> of March 1946. She stated: "On one occasion, Voja Sajković brought a letter received from America from the same pilots who were rescued by him when their plane was damaged. He brought that letter to us and asked us to give it to someone who knew English to translate it. That letter was given by Aca (Aleksandar Toholj – author's comment) to someone and after few days he received the translation". According to Vera, the contents of the letter were roughly the following: "Those American pilots genuinely thanked for his (Sajković's – author's comment) engagement regarding the rescue of the lives of the Americans. They asked him to contact them and sent him their address, ending the letter with Re[ga]rds".<sup>54</sup>

At the hearing on the 18<sup>th</sup> of April 1946, Aleksandar Toholj mentioned about a letter from an American: "Vojo (Sajković – author's comment) asked me to find someone who will translate it (the letter - author's comment). I found someone and he translated it". Furthermore, Aleksandar Toholj mentioned a letter that Sajković received from America: "I (Aleksandar Toholj – author's comment) gave that letter for a translation... On one occasion, Voja, as he told me, went to Lapovo and Smederevo to get some flour, but, he returned without accomplishing that. He says that he had some unpleasanties in Smederevo with a partisan, and in Lapovo there weren't enough sacks for the merchandise. At the same time, he was supposed to go to Belgrade and meet with Mislim, who was supposed to give him the translated letter. However, Mislim didn't show up to get the letter".<sup>55</sup>

From what we have presented, several conclusions can be drawn: 1. A letter was sent from America (USA). 2. The letter was sent to Andrić, and not to Sajković, who, at his hearing on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July 1949 said that he did not receive a letter of gratitude. 3. There are data that the letter to Andrić was sent by an American who during the war crashed with a plane in Poreče, that the letter was sent by Americans saved in Poreče or that the letter was sent by American pilots. 4. We reckon that that letter was sent by one American. The American was Donald N. Crews. 5. One of the 7 rescued pilots was Crews, because at the hearing on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July 1949, Sajković

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> SARM, Coll. 885, box 309, archival unit 12.

<sup>55</sup> SARM, Coll. 885, box 247, archival unit 1.

said that he was the initiator of the rescue of the Americans, i.e., he saved 7 Americans.<sup>56</sup> At this hearing, Sajković stated that Andrić received a letter of gratitude. In the letter from 26<sup>th</sup> of June 1945, Crews indeed expressed his gratitude for Andrić. 6. Andrić's wife received the letter from Crews via post and together with some people they could not read the letter, which implies that they did not know English. Because Crews has written the letter on the 26<sup>th</sup> of June 1945, Andrić's wife got the letter after this date. 7. The letter was written in English (hence, there was an original letter that we do not have) and it needed to be translated by someone who knew this language. 8. The wife of Andrić came to ask Sajković about her husband because she did not know where he is and what was happening to him. She told Sajković about the letter and brought him the same. Sajković was supposed to find a person to translate the letter. 9. Andrić's wife brought the letter to Sajković because, most probably, she had confidence in him because he and Andrić were Četniks in the Ravna Gora Movement in Poreče during the war and held the position of commander. 10. After Sajković got the letter from Andrić's wife, he took the same to the home of Aleksandar Toholj and gave it to Vera Marković-Toholj. 11. Someone translated the letter for Aleksandar Toholj. 12. In December 1945, Sajković got hold of the original and the translated letter. 13. At the hearing on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 1946, Sajković broadly remembered the contents of the translated letter. 14. We have the letter from Crews to Andrić translated in Serbian. In order not to repeat the contents of the translated letter which Sajković roughly remembered, some similarities between the translated letter that we have and the contents of the translated letter that Sajković had recollection of will be easily perceived further in the paper. The translated letter which Sajković remembered has a number of inaccuracies. 15. There are also inaccuracies in the statement of Vera Marković-Toholj with regard to the contents of the translated letter of which she roughly recollected.

In the Archive of the Institute of National History - Skopje, there are court documents from 1946 that refer to Sajković. Besides these documents, the letter from Crews to Andrić translated in Serbian is also deposited in the Archives. Because all of those documents are put in one file which says: "From the dossier of Sajkovski Sin[adin] Vojo",<sup>57</sup> it implies that the letter that we have from Crews to Andrić translated in Serbian is actually the letter that was translated for Aleksandar Toholj. Most probably, the translated letter from Crews to Andrić was found by the police during or after the arrest of Sajković in the village of Orizari in February

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<sup>56</sup> SARM, Coll. 885, box 113, archival unit 25.

<sup>57</sup> Arch. „d-r Velimir Brezoski“, Coll. Heritage, box 2.

or March 1946.<sup>58</sup> Because at the hearing on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 1946, Sajković did not state which letter (the original or the translated) he took and left at his home, waiting for the wife of Andrić to take it back, most probably this was the translated letter. We did not manage to discover what happened afterwards with the original letter, nor where it has been deposited.

At the beginning, the letter from Crews to Andrić translated in Serbian states the following: “Written by DONALD N. CREWS”. Then in the text of the letter follows Crews's address, and it has already been presented (see footnote no. 30). The letter further continues:

“Addressed to:       Mihajlo N[ikodin] Andrić  
                               District Poridreg  
                               Skopje, Macedonia.  
                               Written on the 26<sup>th</sup> of June 1945”.<sup>59</sup>

Due to the facts that Crews wrote the letter and that it was addressed to Andrić, we consider that the letter that was received by Andrić's wife was actually written by one American, and not by Americans or American pilots. That American was Donald N. Crews and his letter from English to Serbian was translated for Aleksandar Toholj.

In 1945, the district of Poridreg did not exist in the administrative and territorial division of federal Macedonia, and we consider that this district denoted Poreče.<sup>60</sup> Why? Because Andrić was born in the village of Rasteš in Poreče, as well as because Sajković, at the hearing on the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1946 stated the following: “...a woman from Poreče came, the wife of Mihailo (Mihajlo – author's comment) Andrić... She said that she had heard that I got out of prison and that she came to ask me whether I know something about her husband Mihajlo”.<sup>61</sup> Hence, if Poridreg did not refer to Poreče, then why is it that the letter from Crews to Andrić was delivered precisely to the wife of Andrić who, from Poreče, came to Sajković?

Crews began the introduction part of the letter with “Dear Mihajlo” and pointed out to him: “I wanted to write to you since long time ago, but the air (airplane) mail still wasn't open because the Uni[t]ed States of [America] and Yugoslavia have only just opened it”. Crews wrote: “I hope

<sup>58</sup> SARM, Coll. 885, box 113, archival unit 25.

<sup>59</sup> Arch. „d-r Velimir Brezovski“, Coll. Heritage, box 2, Letter from Donald N. Crews to Mihajlo N. Andrić, 26<sup>th</sup> of June 1945.

<sup>60</sup> *Административно-територијални поделби*, 62–146.

<sup>61</sup> SARM, Coll. 885, box 113, archival unit 25.

that it won't be too difficult for you to find someone who will read it (the letter – author's comment) for you".<sup>62</sup>

Crews noted the following: "You (Mihajlo Andrić – author's comment) most certainly didn't know that we were evacuated from Yugoslavia on the 21<sup>st</sup> of October (1944 – author's comment), 65 days after our (shooting down) crashing over Skopje".<sup>63</sup> Due to the bad translation of the part of the sentence "(shooting down) crashing over Skopje", and if Crews meant to say that the plane shattered over Skopje, then, to what degree did Crews know the geography of Macedonia, because Sajković as the initiator of the pilots' rescue stated the village of Ramne. Maybe Crews located their fall over Skopje due to the closeness of Skopje to Poreče, or if the plane they flew on started to get damaged over Skopje and then it circled over Skopje and Poreče, and in the end the pilots jumped out of it with parachutes near Ramne.

Taking into consideration the writing of Crews "that we were evacuated from Yugoslavia on the 21<sup>st</sup> of October (1944 – author's comment), 65 days after our (shooting down) crashing over Skopje", we date back the rescue of the pilots in Poreče in August, more precisely on the 18<sup>th</sup> of August 1944, and not in June 1944, as Sajković pointed out at the hearing on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July 1949. Crews did not state how many pilots were evacuated. However, the use of the word "our" itself points out that the writing of Crews referred to the 7 pilots who landed in Poreče with parachutes, were rescued by the Ravna Gora Movement and then, on the 21<sup>st</sup> of October 1944, evacuated from Yugoslavia. Of course, Crews wrote the letter from his point of view. Due to that, in his letter, he did not use the word "pilots" at all, nor had he the need to point out how many pilots were rescued and evacuated.

Such is the example when Crews mentioned the return of the pilots to USA. Thus, Crews pointed out that after their evacuation from Yugoslavia: "After a month spent in Italy, we were returned to the Un[ited] States of [America]. Our families were very happy to see us again and we had a great time". After that, Crews was a bombing instructor for 5 months in Texas, after which, he was discharged from the army and was a civilian. In the period when Crews wrote the letter, he was working as presenter in the radio station KSD in St. Louis. This was his job since before he joined the army in 1942.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Arch. „d-r Velimir Brezoski“, Coll. Heritage, box 2, Letter from Donald N. Crews to Mihajlo N. Andrić, 26<sup>th</sup> of June 1945.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

In the letter, there is a part for which we did not establish what it refers to. In that regard, Crews pointed out: "All our other members who were together in Yugoslavia are now in the Unit[ed] States of [America]. Many of them are instructors in the shooting schools. We stay in touch through writing to each other".<sup>65</sup>

In the letter there are also data for the two parachuters who were caught (captured) in Poreče by the Bulgarians. Namely, regarding them, Crews wrote that they returned "here in the country (USA – author's comment)". One of them, the navigator,<sup>66</sup> was freed, with the help of the Bulgarians, by the British before the war ended in Europe from a German prison hospital in Austria. He was in some hospital in the U.S. state of Michigan.<sup>67</sup>

Crews wrote: "Do you remember when you had no choice but to join the partisans?"<sup>68</sup> There were some photographs<sup>69</sup> taken (given) from that day. If it's possible, I would very much like to have one of them".<sup>70</sup>

Crews expressed gratitude to Andrić: "...let me thank you and your people for the help you provided for us when we were in your country. We will always cherish warm memories for you in our hearts. I hope that we will see each other again and please write me a letter to tell me how you are doing".<sup>71</sup>

At the end, Crews finished the letter with the following greeting for Andrić:

"Your American friend  
DONALD N. CREWS".<sup>72</sup>

## Conclusion

During the elaboration of the issue of the rescue of the seven Allied (American) pilots in Poreče 1944, we did not discover the type of the plane with which the pilots flew. Because Sajković was the initiator for the rescue of the pilots in Poreče, which means that he was closer to the events, we

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> In the document: brodilac.

<sup>67</sup> Arch. „d-r Velimir Brezoski“, Coll. Heritage, box 2, Letter from Donald N. Crews to Mihajlo N. Andrić, 26<sup>th</sup> of June 1945.

<sup>68</sup> It refers to the dissolution of the Ravna Gora Movement in Poreče.

<sup>69</sup> The word „photographs“ is translated from the Serbian word „snimaka“ written in the source document in Serbian.

<sup>70</sup> Arch. „d-r Velimir Brezoski“, Coll. Heritage, box 2, Letter from Donald N. Crews to Mihajlo N. Andrić, 26<sup>th</sup> of June 1945.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

rely on his statement that the pilots flew with one plane, contrary to the recollection of Manevska, who mentioned in her statement damaged planes. Petrovski, also a secondary source, gave a statement of a plane that was taken down in Poreče. With regard to the plane, a field research should be conducted in Poreče (the area of the village Ramne) in order to investigate whether there is plane wreckage in this area and what is the knowledge of the local population on this event.

Due to the lack of Bulgarian documents, USA archival records, recollections of the rescued pilots and other necessary sources, the research of the issue regarding the rescue of the pilots in Poreče and all other issues that arose later has been made more difficult. We expect that the emergence of new sources will be confirmed, complement or even correct our early findings.

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Aleksandar Simonovski

## SPASAVANJE SAVEZNIČKIH AVIJATIČARA U POREČU 1944. GODINE

### *Rezime*

Tokom Drugog svetskog rata Ravnogorski pokret je delovao na određenim područjima teritorije Makedonije pod bugarskom okupacijom, među kojima je bilo i Poreče. Na ovom području pripadnici Ravnogorskog pokreta spasili su sedam savezničkih (američkih) avijatičara u drugoj polovini avgusta 1944. godine. Nakon što je sedam avijatičara (padobranaca) skočilo iz aviona, pripadnici Ravnogorskog pokreta i Bugari su ih primetili: radilo se o situaciji koja će od dveju strana prva stići do avijatičara. U takvim okolnostima razvila se borba između ravnogoraca i Bugara. Bugarski vojnici su se na kraju povukli, a saveznički avijatičari su ostali sa pripadnicima Ravnogorskog pokreta u Poreču sve do njegovog razbijanja u ovoj oblasti krajem avgusta 1944. Tada su predati Petoj makedonskoj narodnooslobodilačkoj udarnoj brigadi. Posle toga, 21. oktobra 1944. avijatičari su evakuisani iz Jugoslavije. Mesec dana su proveli u Italiji, pre povratka u Sjedinjene Američke Države. Jedan od spasenih avijatičara, Donald N. Krus, 26. juna 1945. napisao je pismo Mihajlu N. Andriću, koji je u vreme spasavanja avijatičara bio pripadnik Ravnogorskog pokreta u Poreču. Krus je u pismu, uz ostalo, izrazio zahvalnost Andriću za ukazanu pomoć.

KLJUČNE REČI: Ravnogorski pokret, Poreče, Voislav Sajković, Mihajlo Andrić, Donald N. Krus, avijatičari, pismo

## LE SAUVETAGE DES AVIATEURS ALLIÉS EN PORÉTCHÉ EN 1944

### *Résumé*

Pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale le Mouvement de Ravna Gora agissait sur certaines zones du territoire de la Macédoine qui se trouvait sous l'occupation bulgare. Le Porétché faisait partie de ces zones. Les sept aviateurs (américains) alliés furent sauvés en Porétché par le Mouvement de Ravna Gora. Cet événement eut lieu au cours de la seconde moitié du mois d'août 1944. Dès que les sept aviateurs (parachutistes) sautèrent de l'avion, ils furent aperçus par le Mouvement de Ravna Gora et les Bulgares : l'enjeu pour chacun d'eux était d'atteindre plus rapidement le lieu où les aviateurs se trouvaient. Dans de telles circonstances éclata le combat entre le Mouvement de Ravna Gora et les Bulgares. Dans ce combat, le Mouvement de Ravna Gora ne permit pas aux Bulgares d'atteindre le lieu où les sept aviateurs se trouvaient et de les capturer. Les Bulgares se retirèrent alors. Jusqu'au moment de la destruction du Mouvement de Ravna Gora en Porétché vers la fin d'août 1944, les aviateurs restèrent dans cette région auprès de ce mouvement. Puis, ils furent remis à la Cinquième brigade d'attaque de la libération nationale macédonienne. Le 21 octobre 1944, ces aviateurs furent évacués de la Yougoslavie et ils passèrent un mois en Italie. Puis, ils furent ramenés aux États-Unis. Le 26 juin 1945, Donald N. Crews, un des aviateurs sauvés, écrivit une lettre à Mihajlo N. Andrić qui faisait partie du Mouvement de Ravna Gora en Porétché pendant la période du sauvetage des aviateurs dans cette région. Dans la lettre, parmi d'autres sujets abordés, Crews remercia Andrić de l'aide que les aviateurs avaient reçue.

MOTS CLÉS: Mouvement de Ravna Gora, Porétché, Voislav Sajković, Mihajlo Andrić, Donald N. Crews, aviateurs, lettre