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UDK 94:355.425.2(497.11)"1942/1944"

pregledni rad / review article
primljeno / received: 15. 3. 2022.
prihvaćeno / accepted: 25. 5. 2022.

<https://doi.org/10.29362/ist20veka.2022.2.sta.323-344>

SERBIAN STATE GUARD IN OCCUPIED SERBIA 1942-1944

ABSTRACT: *The subject of this article is the Serbian State Guard – an armed formation created in occupied Serbia in early March 1942. It arose out of the need of the occupiers and collaborators for a stronger and more organized unit that would more successfully confront the insurgent forces in the territory of Serbia. The primary objective of our research was the reconstruction of its creation, organization, mode of operation, combat activities, and make-up XXX. Created on the basis of the pre-war gendarmerie, in the specific conditions of wartime chaos in Serbia, it retained its primarily police character, although it formed larger and more mobile military units when needed. Finally, the fate of this formation after its inclusion in the ranks of the Yugoslav Army in the Homeland (i.e., the Chetniks of Draža Mihailović) and its going into exile was presented. The source-materials used for this paper are kept mostly in the Military Archive in Belgrade. We have also used documents kept in the Belgrade Historical Archives, the State Archives of Serbia, as well as in the local historical archives in Niš.*

KEYWORDS: Serbian State Guard, Collaboration, Milan Nedić, Stevan Radovanović, Borivoje Jonić, Occupation, Serbia, Second World War, Gendarmerie, Third Reich

Introduction

Researching and explaining the circumstances and processes surrounding the Second World War in Serbia presents historians with a multifaceted challenge. As much as eight decades after the war's end, deep-rooted and widespread prejudices, based on selective choice of facts, dominate the public discourse. The need for simplified answers ("who was right and who was wrong", who were "the bad and who the good guys" etc.) ignores the deep complexity and layered character of events. As heavily ideologized preferences rule, the favorites are chosen according to current political beliefs. It is not easy for a historian to avoid the trap

of bolstering such excessive generalizations and simplifications. Limited access to archival institutions (due to their mode of operation and limitations), indispensable for researching this topic, presents another significant obstacle. Lastly, a large number of works on this topic are tarnished by ideology, which makes it necessary to use such literature critically, taking into account the context of the time in which it was created as well as the authors' leanings. However, many of these works are also the fruit of thorough research, so their findings are an ineluctable starting point for the troubled state of the art in this field.

Yugoslav and Serbian historiographies on the Second World War are very extensive. However, historians have focused mainly on political and diplomatic history related to the two opposing resistance movements (the Partisans and the Mihailović's Chetniks). Works on the activities of the collaborationist administration in Serbia are few, and collaborationists' armed forces remained particularly under-researched. It was not until the late 1970s and early 1980s that more serious research on the subject emerged. Among those, Milan Borković's two-volume study stands out, as the author tried to deal in a comprehensive manner with the activities of collaborationists in Serbia during the occupation.¹ The functioning of the political organization Zbor and the activities of its volunteer units were studied by Mladen Stefanović.² These studies, although strongly influenced by the ruling socialist ideology are based on serious archival research and are therefore very useful. Although published somewhat later, the works by Branislav Božović were written in similar manner.³ To understand the general context, the syntheses by Professor Branko Petranović are irreplaceable.⁴ Complex and multilayered facets of the Royalist resistance are impossible to understand without the studies of Kosta Nikolić.⁵ The most important study on this subject is of more recent date. Bojan Dimitrijević's monograph provides an overview of all armed formations under the formal control of the collaborationist government, including the Serbian State Guard for the first time.⁶ Although the author states in the preface that his book was created on the basis of his "earlier research, literature and published sources", it is the most important scholarly work, written so far, on functioning, organization and relations of the military formation that is the subject of this article.

¹ Milan Borković, *Kontrarevolucija u Srbiji. Kvislinška uprava 1941–1944. Knj. 1–2* (Beograd: Sloboda, 1979).

² Mladen Stefanović, *Zbor Dimitrija Ljotića 1934–1945*. (Beograd: Narodna knjiga, 1984).

³ Branislav Božović, *Beograd pod komesarskom upravom 1941. godine* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1998); Branislav Božović, *Specijalna policija u Beogradu 1941–1944*. (Beograd: Srpska školska knjiga, 2003).

⁴ Branko Petranović, *Revolucija i kontrarevolucija u Jugoslaviji 1941–1945. Knj. 1–2* (Beograd: Rad, 1983); Branko Petranović, *Srbija u Drugom svetskom ratu 1939–1945* (Beograd: Vojnoizdavački i novinski centar, 1992).

⁵ Kosta Nikolić, *Istorija Ravnogorskog pokreta 1941–1945. Knj. 1–3* (Beograd: Srpska reč, 1999); Kosta Nikolić, *Strah i nada u Srbiji 1941–1944. godine: svakodnevni život pod okupacijom* (Beograd: Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, 2002).

⁶ Bojan Dimitrijević, *Vojska Nedićeve Srbije. Oružane snage srpske vlade 1941–1945* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2011).

It is also necessary to mention the exiles' publications, which are very important because they offer useful testimonies of persons who were members of the Serbian State Guard or eyewitnesses of the events in occupied Serbia. Among them, the work by Petar Martinović Bajica, a senior officer of the Serbian State Guard, stands out.⁷ In addition to his personal testimony, this book also contains a short note on the last commander of Serbian State Guard, General Borivoje Jonić. The books by Stanislav Krakov and Borivoje Karapandžić are also worth mentioning as very useful.⁸ These émigré publications represent another dimension to the war, but must be used with caution because of the strong propaganda note and open support for the Nedić regime.

By carefully reading and comparing Yugoslav socialist and Serbian emigrant historiography, researchers can learn a lot about the complex relations between the various participants in the war in occupied Serbia. However, caution must remain constant.

Resistance Movements and the Nedić Regime

The capitulation of the Yugoslav Army and capture were avoided by many of its members. On early May 1941, General Staff Colonel Dragoljub Mihailović arrived on foot on Mount Suvobor, precisely on Ravna Gora, with two dozen officers and soldiers. From his later testimonies, we learn that after crossing the Drina and entering Serbia, Mihailović decided to organize a resistance movement. This task was not at all easy because the fear of the Germans and the threatened punishment, but also the initial distrust of the population, significantly hindered their activities. However, despite many obstacles, living in an area where the population was patriotically educated and “fed up with the insurgent mentality”, the movement grew over time.⁹

With the beginning of the Third Reich attack on Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia made the decision to start the fighting. Enthusiasm and optimism prevailed among the members due to the belief in the imminent end of the war and the outbreak of revolutions in the fascist countries. The first armed incident occurred in Bela Crkva, on July 7, 1941, when members of the Valjevo Partisan Detachment killed two Gendarmes who tried to disarm them after a propaganda rally. After the incident in Bela Crkva, communist actions followed in other places in Western Serbia. The targets of the Partisan attacks were Gendarmerie stations, archives and headquarters of rural municipalities, bridges, communications, telegraph and telephone wires, wealthier peasants...¹⁰

⁷ Petar Martinović, *Milan Nedić* (Čikago: [b. i.], 1956).

⁸ Stanislav Krakov, *General Milan Nedić. Knj. 1–2* (Minhen: Iskra, 1963–1968); Borivoje Karapandžić, *Građanski rat u Srbiji (1941–1945)* (Klivland: [b. i.], 1958).

⁹ Bojan Dimitrijević i Kosta Nikolić, *Đeneral Mihailović. Biografija* (Beograd: Srpska reč, 2000), 113–162.

¹⁰ Nemanja Dević, *Za partiju i Tita. Partizanski pokret u Srbiji 1941–1944* (Beograd: Službeni glasnik, 2021), 104–162.

Unlike the communist strategy, Colonel Mihailović believed that raising a general uprising and armed opposition to the German occupier, should happen when the German military force weakens on the other fronts and when the Allies should be able to become more actively involved in the war in the Balkans. However, due to the growing influence of the Communist detachments on the people and the creation of an insurgent atmosphere, Colonel Mihailović's detachments began to join the armed uprising.¹¹

The upswing of the uprising in Serbia in late August and early September 1941 forced the German occupation authorities to intensify their efforts to suppress it. One of the envisaged measures involved the creation of a stronger and more authoritative domestic administrative apparatus that would replace the Council of Commissioners led by Milan Aćimović. The name of General Milan Nedić began to appear in Serbian collaborationist circles, as suitable head of the government. According to post-war testimonies, the initiative for the appointment of General Nedić came from the leader of the "Zbor" (Yugoslav nationalist, conservative and monarchist movement founded in Ljubljana in 1935), Dimitrije Ljotić, and it was also supported by Milan Aćimović. After consultations with representatives of the Belgrade political and economic elite and the German occupation administration, Nedić visited the Military Commander of Serbia, General Heinrich Dankelmann, on August 27, 1941, and handed over a list of conditions for accepting the position. After securing some concessions from General Dankelmann and Chief of Administrative Staff Harold Turner, as well as promises that other conditions would be met after consultations with the Reich government, Nedić accepted the offer to head the "Government of National Salvation". Two days later, on August 29, the new government received a mandate from General Dankelmann in the National Assembly building.¹²

Regardless of the limited political, military and economic room for maneuvering, that was strictly determined by the Germans, but also by other factors of the "Yugoslav war-time drama", the government of Milan Nedić tried to be active in various fields. One of the main directions, pursued towards the end of the occupation, was an attempt to build "a new system of values that is largely based on nationalism, idealized perception of national history and the importance of certain social groups, especially the peasantry".¹³

As part of these aspirations, a new educational and cultural policy was imposed, the reform of the University of Belgrade was decreed and carried out, and the transformation of the entire Serbian society was foreseen in the framework of the plans for a "Serbian Peasant State" and "Serbian Civil/Cultural Plan". Such tendencies of the collaborationists remained for the greater part unrealized. The Germans, who put off X reshaping X Serbian territory until the

¹¹ Kosta Nikolić i Nebojša Stambolija, "Royalist Resistance Movement in Yugoslavia during the Second World War", *Istorija 20. veka*, br. 2, (2018), 9–36.

¹² M. Borković, *n. d.*, knj. I, 87–105.

¹³ Aleksandar Stojanović, *Ideje, politički projekti i praksa Vlade Milana Nedića* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2015), 412.

end of the war, were the main obstacle on this path, remaining distrustful of the Serbs, even of the German-friendly ones.¹⁴

Creation

By the end of 1941, occupied Serbia was mostly pacified after the German occupying and collaborationist units did away with the centers of the two resistance movements. In late November 1941, German forces entered Užice, and in early December, they destroyed the center of the Royalist Resistance movement on the mountain of Ravna Gora. Immediately after the end of the action aimed at destruction of the insurgent territory, and simultaneously with the territorial reorganization of the country, the need arose for reorganization of Government Armed Detachments and some kind of unification of various formations. Instead of the Gendarmerie, a relic of the previous state, which proved ineffective, it was necessary to create a new, stronger and better organized formation. The initial action came from the collaborationist government. In November 1941, General Nedić asked Harald Turner to help him organize a police formation.¹⁵ This coincided with Germany's plans to reorganize its own security system. So, on December 1, 1941, Turner made a plan that he sent to the Wehrmacht Commander of the Southeast (Oberbefehlshaber Südost). According to that plan, all existing collaborationist military-police formations (Gendarmerie, Volunteers¹⁶ and Pećanac's Chetniks) were supposed to number no more than 17,000 people. However, Nedić did not agree with this proposal because he believed that such forces would not be able to successfully pacify Serbia. He believed that this task could be successfully completed by arming 30,000 soldiers who would be deployed in barracks in larger towns and would be able to react with strong units in the event of insurgency. In his opinion, such formation would be much more efficient than a large number of smaller stations, that could easily be disarmed. However, the German occupation administration was not in the mood to arm and equip such a large number of Serbs.¹⁷

In the first half of December 1941, Lieutenant Colonel Andreas May came to Serbia with several officers. He was sent to Serbia by the head of the German Order Police (Ordnungspolizei), Kurt Daluege, with the task of helping to form a collaborationist police. He believed that Germany's role in such a police force should be limited to general management, training and supervision.¹⁸

¹⁴ More in: Ljubinka Škodrić, *Ministarstvo prosvete i vera u Srbiji 1941–1944: sudbina institucije pod okupacijom* (Beograd: Arhiv Srbije, 2009); Aleksandar Stojanović, *Srpski civilni/kulturni plan Vlade Milana Nedića* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2012); Zoran Janjetović, *Collaboration and Fascism under the Nedić regime* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2018).

¹⁵ *Nemačka obaveštajna služba*. Knjiga IV (Beograd: Uprava državne bezbednosti, 1959), 656.

¹⁶ Members of the Serbian Volunteer Command, formed by the youth of the "Zbor" movement and professional officers in mid-September 1941. More in: B. Dimitrijević, *n. d.*, 63–83.

¹⁷ M. Borković, *n. d.*, knj. I, 286–287.

¹⁸ *Nemačka obaveštajna služba*, knj. IV, 656–657.

On December 17, 1941, Lieutenant Colonel Andreas May sent a request worded as order, to the Minister of the Interior, Milan Aćimović, to immediately start building up an organizational headquarters in the Ministry of the Interior for a “new organization under responsible leadership, which would include 3 branches - city, field and border police”. In the end, Andreas May “begged” to be informed about the implemented measures by January 5, 1942. This document is the first concrete source in which the contours of the basis of the formation dealt with in this paper were clearly seen.¹⁹

It is obvious that the collaborationist authorities seriously dealt with this problem, since on January 1, 1942, a new formation called the “state police” was mentioned in the daily newspaper “Novo vreme”. The newspaper text stated that “it was decided to establish schools and courses, through which all state police officers would pass”. From the text we also learn that the Main School was opened by “the newly appointed commander of the state police, Colonel Mr. Ljubo S. Babić, in the presence of 150 officers and non-commissioned officers and instructors”.²⁰

On January 14, 1942 “Novo vreme”, featured an extensive article about the new formation, now with a national epithet, “Serbian State Police”. The text, full of propaganda tones, stated that the organization of the newly established police was carried out in “all basic lines at a fast, almost incredible pace” and that this work is carried out with “unparalleled zeal and dedication, under the personal leadership of Colonel Commander Mr. Ljubo Babić”. In the attached call for applications of men and non-commissioned officers, to the Field, City and Border police, the requirements were stated. Priority in admission was granted to those candidates “who responded to the call for the reconstruction of Serbia and participated in the fight (Chetniks, Serbian Volunteers, members of Armed Detachments, etc.) and former non-commissioned officers, including reservists, as well as former cadets of various military schools”.²¹

In late January 1942, the German security and police apparatus was re-organized. The Security Police Task Force (Sicherheitspolizei) and the Party Intelligence Service (Sicherheitsdienst) were merged into the office of the Commander of the Security Police and the Security Service (Befehlshaber der Sicherheitspolizei und des Sicherheitsdienst - BdS) and Colonel Dr. Emanuel Schäfer was appointed to this position. At the same time, the office of the Commander of the Order Police (Befehlshaber der Ordnungspolizei - BdO) was created, and the already mentioned lieutenant colonel Andreas May, who came to Serbia a little earlier, was appointed to that post. By Hitler’s order on January 22, 1942, August Meyszner was appointed Senior Leader of the SS and the Police (Höherer SS- und Polizeiführer). The offices run by Schaefer and May

¹⁹ Istorijiski arhiv Beograda (IAB), Uprava grada Beograda (UGB), Specijalna policija (SP), k. 591.

²⁰ „Osnivanje škola i tečajeva za službenike državne policije“, *Novo vreme*, 1. 1. 1942, 3.

²¹ Vojni arhiv (VA), Nedićeva arhiva (NdA), kutija 33A, fascikla 3, reg. br. 9, Uslovi za prijem u Srpsku državnu policiju; „Veliki, svetao i častan zadatak Srpske državne policije“, *Novo vreme*, 14. 1. 1942, 3.

were subordinated to him, and he was also in charge of the general organization of the SS and the German Ethnic Group in Serbia (Volksdeutsche). The order also stated that Meyszner “had the right to supervise and give orders the Serbian authorities and police” and that his special duty was “supervision, construction and use of Serbian police forces”.²²

In “Novo vreme”, the Serbian State Police is mentioned again on January 28, 1942, when, by Nedić’s order, a large number of officers who participated and distinguished themselves in the “fight to save Serbia from destructive and communist action” were promoted. The first in that line was Colonel Ljubo Babić, who was promoted to the rank of general on that occasion. In addition, 69 other active and reserve officers were promoted. Also, 30 active and 6 reserve non-commissioned officers were promoted to the rank of sub-lieutenant, as well as 32 cadets of the Military Academy.²³ In a special text with a picture of Ljubo Babić, who was presented as “commander of the newly established Serbian State Police”, it was mentioned that “in a very short time he managed to organize the state police and establish all necessary bases for its work”.²⁴

As soon as he came to Serbia, on February 4, 1942, August Meyszner visited General Nedić. Conversation revolved mostly around “organizing the new Serbian police”. They agreed on the initial strength of this formation - 15-16 thousand people. However, there were doubts as to where so many people could be recruited from. Although Nedić wanted to include volunteer units that he intended to “distribute to all police sectors in the country”, Meyszner was of the opinion that volunteers should be organized as a closed formation on their own, so that they “could not be ideologically seduced in alien environment”. Nedić presented a plan according to which 500 people would be recruited from 12 districts. With the 7,500, who were already in the armed detachments and gendarmerie, that would make a total of 13,500. The name of the new formation was also discussed at the meeting. Although Meyszner thought that the most appropriate appellation would be “police”, Nedić was against the names “police” and “gendarmerie”, because they were compromised during the previous regime of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The name Nedić favored was “National Guard”, and he pointed out that it was Dimitrije Ljotić’s proposal. At the end of the meeting, Nedić raised the issue of the officers of the new formation, marking as unreliable a certain number of officers of the Armed Detachments and the Gendarmerie. He begged Meyszner for help in releasing officers from captivity “who voluntarily made themselves available to fight communism in Serbia”. Meyszner did not want to promise anything on this point, but suggested that a

²² *Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o Narodnooslobodilačkom ratu naroda Jugoslavije*, tom XII, knjiga 2 (Beograd: Vojnoistorijski institut, 1976), 59–60; Radosav Tucović, „Policijski represivni aparat nacističke Nemačke i njegovi domaći instrumenti: Analiza delatnosti Dragomira Jovanovića i Augusta Majsnera u okupiranoj Srbiji (1941–1944)“ (doktorska disertacija, Univerzitet u Beogradu, Filozofski fakultet, Odeljenje za istoriju, 2021), 107–113.

²³ „Unapređenje velikog broja aktivnih i rezervnih oficira“, *Novo vreme*, 28. 1. 1942, 5; B. Dimitrijević, *Vojska Nedićeve Srbije*, 145.

²⁴ „G. Ljuba Babić novi brigadni general“, *Novo vreme*, 28. 1. 1942, 5.

certain number of non-commissioned officers who had shown themselves deserving in the fighting so far, be promoted officers.²⁵

After that, work on giving the final shape to the appearance and the role of the new military formation intensified, so that on February 7, 1942, Nedić held a meeting with the Military Commander of Serbia, General Paul Bader. Milan Aćimović and Harald Turner also participated at that meeting. It was stated that the number of 9-10 thousand people, as many as Nedić had at his disposal, was insufficient to maintain peace, that “the Chetniks as well as the Volunteer Detachments were unreliable”. They agreed with Harald Turner’s proposal to proceed gradually, i.e., to organize at least 10,000 police officers, and to disarm the Pećanac’s Chetniks and unreliable Volunteers later on.²⁶

The earliest official documents that feature the name of the new formation, the “Serbian State Guard,” are the first three orders of the Commander of the Serbian State Guard (SSG), issued on February 26, 1942. The first order assigned officers to the SSG Command, its departments, divisions and district commands. By the same order, Stevan Radovanović, General of the Yugoslav Army and commander of the Gendarmerie, was appointed SSG commander, and another 287 officers were deployed next to him.²⁷ The second order deployed non-commissioned officers in the SSG Command.²⁸ The third ordered the “formation and activation of the Serbian State Guard Command”, with the beginning of the activation on February 28, 1942 at 9 am.²⁹

Finally, on March 3, 1942, the Decree on the Organization of the Serbian State Guard was published in the Official Gazette, and this information was accompanied by articles in the daily press. According to that decree, the SSG was defined as “a uniformed and armed troop that performs police executive and border service”. It included members of the former Gendarmerie, Police Guards, Armed Detachments and Border Financial Control bodies. Members of the SSG were in the service of the Ministry of the Interior. During the formation of the SSG, it was divided into: 1) the Town State Guard, 2) the Field State Guard and 3) the Border State Guard. The SSG was supposed to include fire brigades on the territory of occupied Serbia, and temporarily, in situations when it was “necessary for public safety”, it could also include Forest Guards, Road Supervisors, Municipal and Village Guards. The future Guards had to meet certain requirements regarding height and age. Also, “belonging to the Aryan race and the Serbian nationality” was obligatory. Ministry of the Interior was able to release the candidate from the conditions of belonging to the Serbian nationality and other conditions, except belonging to the Aryan race. Candidates had to make a written commitment to stay in the service for at least three years, and in case of voluntary premature departure, they had to return half of all the

²⁵ *Nemačka obaveštajna služba*. Knjiga VIII (Beograd: Uprava državne bezbednosti, 1956), 535–537.

²⁶ M. Borković, *n. d.*, knj. I, 288.

²⁷ VA, NdA, 144–1–1, Naredba pov. br. 1 Komandanta SDS za 26. februar 1942.

²⁸ VA, NdA, 144–1–2, Naredba pov. br. 2 Komandanta SDS za 26. februar 1942.

²⁹ VA, NdA, 144–1–3, Naredba pov. br. 3 Komandanta SDS za 26. februar 1942.

salaries they had received until then. The final provisions of the Decree regulated financing, and it is interesting that the Town Guard Detachments were partly financed by local self-governments.³⁰

General Paul Bader's report to the Commander of the Southeast of March 10, 1942, in the chapter entitled "Serbian Armed Detachments", briefly stated that it was approved to rename the Serbian police into the Serbian State Guard, which was divided into Serbian Field, Serbian Town and Serbian Border Guard. Further, the report stated how many members the new formation had. According to the formation, it was foreseen that it would have 580 officers and 14,420 guards, i.e., a total of 15,000 members. There were more officers in reality - 635, but there was a lack of Guards, there were 12,470 of them, i.e. the total number was 13,105. In addition, the SSG of the Belgrade City Administration had 48 officers and 1,223 men, a total of 1,271, and the SSG in the Banat district (which consisted exclusively of Volksdeutsche) had 94 officers and 846 guards.³¹

Organization

At the head of the Serbian State Guard was the Commander, who together with the headquarters formed the SSG Command. The commander had two assistants, who were directly subordinated to him. The command was divided into departments which were further divided into sections. During its existence, the Serbian State Guard had only two commanders. From the moment of its formation until June 7, 1942, it was led by General Stevan Radovanović. From June 7, 1942 until the disbandment, the SSG commander was Colonel Borivoje Jonić, who returned from German captivity.³²

According to the territorial division, the SSG was divided into regional, district and county commands. The counties were further divided into the required number of station departments. The regional commands were a direct consequence of the need to create parity with German police formations, and over time the boundaries of the regional commands changed, and new ones were created. By June 1942, three were formed - Kraljevo, Niš and Belgrade. In February 1944, Šabac region was separated from Belgrade, and the Moravian region was separated from Kraljevo.³³

³⁰ *Uredba o ustrojstvu Srpske državne straže (sa uredbom o ustrojstvu Policijske straže uprave grada Beograda) i Uredba o postupku suda Srpske državne straže u krivičnim delima* (Beograd: Jugoistok, 1942), 5–34; „Uredba o ustrojstvu Srpske državne straže“, *Službene novine*, 3. 3. 1942, 1–7; „Ustrojstvo Srpske državne straže“, *Obnova*, 3. 3. 1942, 5; „Osnovana je Srpska državna straža“, *Novo vreme*, 4. 3. 1942, 3.

³¹ *Zbornik dokumenata i podataka...*, XII–2, 214–215.

³² VA, NdA, 26–12–24, Privremena naredba Ministra unutrašnjih poslova o uređenju i nadležnosti Komande Srpske državne straže, od 8. maja 1942; Nebojša Stambolija, *Srpska državna straža 1942–1944* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2021), 331–346.

³³ Državni arhiv Srbije (DAS), Fond Zemaljska komisija za zločine okupatora i njihovih pomagača (G–25), f. XVI, br. 15, Komanda Niške oblasti Ministru unutrašnjih poslova 24. aprila 1942;

The borders of the district and county commands coincided with the territorial organization of occupied Serbia. Each district command was marked with Roman numerals, and the county commands subordinated to it were marked with Arabic numerals. The Banat district did not fall under territorial changes and was not under any regional command, but retained a special status throughout the occupation. The State Guard in Banat was under the command of the local Volksdeutsche. It was similar with the Mitrovica district, where the Serbian State Guard was organized only in late April 1942 on the German initiative. Most of the Guards were former members of the Albanian Gendarmerie, which had functioned in the area before.³⁴

The most numerous branch of Serbian State Guard was the Field Guard. It was the direct successor of the gendarmerie, i.e., it was in charge of maintaining security on the entire territory of occupied Serbia, except in the seats of districts and in towns, as well as in the state border area. According to the formation of the SSG Command of the Niš Region, from the beginning of 1944, out of a total of 3,888 members of all branches, as many as 3,123 (80.32%) belonged to the Field Guard.³⁵

According to the Decree on Organization, the Serbian State Town Guard was in charge of maintaining security in “Belgrade, the headquarters of district administrations and towns”. It was divided into town detachments, these into neighborhood detachments and station departments. It could also contain special departments (traffic, equestrian, motorcycle). In terms of “official use”, they were subordinated to the “head of the state authority” in the place where they were serving, who was also their disciplinary head. The most numerous detachment of the Town Guard, which consisted of 2/3 of all members of this branch of SSG, was the Serbian State Guard of the City Administration of Belgrade. This formation had a special status and the authority over it was held by the Manager of the City of Belgrade, who was subordinated to the Minister of the Interior. The Decree on the Organization of the Police Guard of the Belgrade City Administration regulated the rights and obligations of its members. However, in terms of salaries and pensions, they were equal to other members of the Serbian State Guard. At the head of this formation was a commander in the rank of colonel.³⁶

Like the Field Guard, the Border Guard was divided into district and county detachments, and the lower units were platoons and station divisions.

VA, NdA, 140–2–6, Ministarstvo unutrašnjih poslova načelniku Vojnog odeljenja pri Predsedništvu Ministarskog saveta 4. juna 1942; Istorijski arhiv Niš (IAN), fond Komisije za ratne zločine (KOZARA), f. 37, Naredba pov. br. 8 Komandanta SDS od 3. februara 1944.

³⁴ VA, NdA, 144–1–23, Naredba br. 14 Komandanta SDS od 28. marta 1942; Akiko Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941–1944* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2003), 158–161; Branislav Božović i Miroslav Vavić, *Surova vremena na Kosovu i Metohiji – kvislinzi i kolaboracija u Drugom svetskom ratu* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1991), 109–112.

³⁵ *Uredba o ustrojstvu Srpske državne straže...*, 6, 8–9; VA, NdA, 26–10–22, Pregled formacijskog brojnog stanja jedinica (jačina i raspored).

³⁶ *Uredba o ustrojstvu Srpske državne straže...*, 5–8; „Uredba o ustrojstvu policijske straže Uprave grada Beograda“, *Službene novine*, 26. 9. 1941, 1–5.

The Decree on Organization also stated that, in addition to the Minister of the Interior, the Minister of Finance was also in charge of the Border Guard in terms of performance of service and professional training. The district detachment of the Border Guard was headed by a commander, who was part of the SSG command of a respective district and was subordinated to the commander of the Field Guard. Its jurisdiction extended to the border area of the district and existed only in the districts that were on the border, i.e., in their border counties. Probably in order to simplify the functioning due to the double competence, on October 16, 1942, the Decree on the Serbian Border Guard was passed. It completely separated the Border Guard from the Serbian State Guard, forming an independent unit and subordinating it to the Minister of Finance. Ljudevit Pogačar, officer of the Yugoslav Army and the former head of the Border Guard Department in the SSG Command, was appointed commander of the newly formed Serbian Border Guard. The decree specified that all other regulations on the organization of the SSG continued to apply to the SBG.³⁷

Although the Decree on the Organization envisaged that all fire brigades “as the fourth branch of the Guard” would join the SSG, this was not fully implemented until the end of the occupation. This type of Guard was never completely formed and the firefighters remained mostly under the jurisdiction of local authorities.³⁸

In order to secure more efficient control and prevention of various aspects of crime as well as to maintain security, special types of police forces have been formed within the SSG over time. In September 1942, the Commercial Police was created to “supervise the production, trade and distribution of all items of the regimented economy”, as well as to control observance of government-designated prices. In order to perform these tasks, a Commercial Police Department was formed with the local Command of the Guard at each seat of the district and county. These sections received official orders from the “general administrative and state local police authorities”.³⁹

Due to the need for more efficient protection of railway traffic, on March 1, 1943, the Railway Security Guard was formed, as a branch of the SSG. A special command was formed to manage this type of Guard. The commander had the “right and power” of the district commander of the SSG, and he was subordinated to the head of the General Department at the SSG Command. The RSG command was located at the Belgrade railway station, and in addition to the commander, there were three other officers on duty. Within the Railway Security Guard, there were three detachments for escorting and securing trains – in Belgrade, Niš and Kraljevo.⁴⁰

³⁷ *Uredba o ustrojstvu Srpske državne straže...*, 9–10; „Uredba o Srpskoj graničnoj straži“, *Službene novine*, 20. 10. 1942, 1; B. Dimitrijević, *Vojska Nedićeve Srbije*, 160.

³⁸ *Uredba o ustrojstvu Srpske državne straže...*, 6; „Pravilnik o rukovanju Vatrogasnim fondom“, *Službene novine*, 30. 11. 1943, 2.

³⁹ „Naredba o delatnosti Privredne policije“, *Službene novine*, 8. 9. 1942, 3; Nataša Milićević, „Osveta sela: seljaci i građani u okupiranoj Srbiji 1941–1944“, *Istorija 20. veka*, br. 2 (2019), 121–136.

⁴⁰ VA, NdA, 145–2–1, Naredba pov. br. 16 Komandanta SDS od 1. marta 1943.

Although primarily a police formation, the situation on the ground sometimes required the SSG to form larger and more mobile detachments to oppose partisan units, which were often better armed. For these reasons, in the fall of 1942, the Motorized Detachment of the SSG was created, which had motorcycle and automobile companies. Apparently, this was too ambitious, so this detachment was disbanded in February 1943. At that time two SSG Battalions were created from the men of the Motorized Detachment, but also by gathering more capable and younger members from all districts. The first battalion was based in Belgrade, and the second in Niš. Members of the Serbian State Guard also secured the Banjica Concentration Camp and the Institute for X Re-Education of Youth in Smederevska Palanka.⁴¹

In addition to the branches, there were also services in the Serbian State Guard, as a necessary part of every military and police formation. To maintain morals and discipline, there was a developed system of disciplinary and criminal measures and regulations. Punishments for breaches of discipline fell within the jurisdiction of the Serbian State Guard Disciplinary Court, whereas more serious offenses and crimes were tried by the Court of the Serbian State Guard. From the surviving reports of the SSG Command in 1943, it is possible to follow the number of processed cases in both of these institutions. While 16 new cases were received in the Disciplinary Court in the mentioned period, as many as 1,108 were received in the SSG Court. Although the structure of prosecuted crimes is not stated, we assume that most of them were desertions of Guards, which was a big problem for the functioning of the Serbian State Guard.⁴²

The organization of health care of the Guards, the care of the wounded, the procurement of medicines and the veterinary service were managed by the Medical Service. It was based on regional and district doctors, as well as medical assistants. Since most members of the SSG were young people, refraining from enjoying the benefits of life turned rare outings into a problem. Frequent examples of alcoholism and sexually transmitted diseases can be traced through documents. Many health problems also arose due to poor hygiene. In addition to many milder diseases such as mild skin diseases, shoe wounds and scabies, there were also more serious diseases such as typhus, which led to deaths.⁴³

⁴¹ VA, NdA, 144–3–44, Naredba br. 103 Komandanta SDS od 12. septembra 1942; IAN, KOZARA, f. 20, Naredba pov. br. 12 Komandanta SDS od 15. februara 1943; VA, NdA, 145–1–25, Naredba br. 13 Komandanta SDS od 15. februara 1943; VA, NdA, 145–1–22, Naredba pov. br. 11 Komandanta SDS od 11. februara 1943; Sima Begović, *Logor Banjica 1941–1944*, knj. 1 (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1989), 73–74; Maja Nikolova, *Zavod za prinudno vaspitanje omladine u Smederevskoj Palanci 1942–1944* (Beograd: Pedagoški muzej, 2010), 44–45.

⁴² „Uredba o Disciplinskom sudu Srpske državne straže“, *Službene novine*, 18. 9. 1942, 1–6; „Uredba o ustrojstvu Suda Srpske državne straže“, *Službene novine*, 28. 8. 1942, 1–2; VA, NdA, 24A–5–21, Mesečni izveštaj Komandanta SDS Šefu SDB od 21. decembra 1943.

⁴³ „Uredba o sanitetskoj i veterinarskoj službi u Srpskoj državnoj bezbednosti“, *Službene novine*, 30. 3. 1943, 1; Nebojša Stambolija, „Sanitetska služba Srpske državne straže“, u: *Istorija medi-*

The supplies were managed by the Commissariat, which performed its function through the Main Commissariat Warehouse in Belgrade and the commissariat departments in district centers. In practice it was very difficult to equip and supply the troops due to poor quality of clothing and footwear. Since more durable and high-quality materials were used for the needs of the German occupying units, uniforms for Guards deteriorated quickly and were short-lived being made from old rags, domestic wool, wood wool and poorly tanned leather.⁴⁴

To strengthen morale, during 1943, a music service was organized within the Serbian State Guard, whose frequent performances in the interior of the country were covered in the collaborationist press.⁴⁵

Timely collection of information and leadership based on them has been recognized as a very important factor in countering “destructive elements”. Therefore, since its inception, great attention has been paid to the formation of a successful intelligence service. According to post-war testimonies, Lieutenant Colonel Djordje Ćosić, who led the intelligence service for the longest time, had developed a well-organized network of intelligence agents that functioned outside the borders of occupied Serbia.⁴⁶

In order to train the guards for the newly created formation, “district schools” were initially established in seats of each district. However, as early as April 1942, nine of them were abolished, and only the Permanent Schools in Belgrade, Kragujevac and Niš remained. In the fall of 1942, the Permanent Schools in Kragujevac and Niš were closed, and entire classes were taken over by the Permanent School in Belgrade, which was located in the building of the former Military Academy. Teaching was decentralized again at the beginning of 1944, when Preparatory and Patrol Schools were formed in the centers of regional commands (Belgrade, Kraljevo, Niš, Jagodina and Šabac), while the Permanent School in Belgrade changed its name to the Training Center.⁴⁷

cine, farmacije, veterine i narodna zdravstvena kultura (zbornik radova sa V naučno-stručnog skupa održanog 1. novembra 2013. u Zaječaru), urednik Nadežda Pedović (Zaječar: Istorijski arhiv Timočka Krajina, 2014), 191–196.

⁴⁴ VA, NdA, 26–12–24, Privremena naredba Ministra unutrašnjih poslova o uređenju i nadležnosti Komande Srpske državne straže, od 8. maja 1942; VA, NdA, 144–3–10, Naredba pov. br. 65 Komandanta SDS od 15. jula 1942.

⁴⁵ IAN, KOZARA, f. 20, Naredba pov. br. 17 Komandanta SDS od 4. marta 1943; „Vojničko i kulturno delovanje Srpske državne straže“, *Srpski narod*, 4. 3. 1944, 4.

⁴⁶ VA, NdA, 26–12–24, Privremena naredba Ministra unutrašnjih poslova o uređenju i nadležnosti Komande Srpske državne straže, od 8. maja 1942; IAB, Fond Bezbednosno-informativne agencije (BIA), fascikla I, predmet 2, Zapisnik o saslušanju Božidara Bečarevića, 62–63.

⁴⁷ „Veliki, svetao i častan zadatak Srpske državne policije“, *Novo vreme*, 14. 1. 1942, 3; VA, NdA, 144–4–13, Naredba br. 115 Komandanta SDS od 19. oktobra 1942; VA, NdA, 140–14–1, Jedinični spisak štaba Komande SDS i komanada van sastava oblasnih komandi.

Activities

After its creation, the situation in the Serbian State Guard was far from ideal. The new formation has encountered a number of problems. The limited resources allocated to it, as well as the poor weapons, were not in line with the expected tasks of maintaining peace and order in occupied Serbia. Variety of uniforms, faulty discipline, limited resources, poor weapons, insufficient nutrition and lack of accommodation were just some of the problems.⁴⁸

However, very soon after the creation, the Guards were sent to combat operations. The first action of the new formation, recorded in the archives, took place in Western Serbia when “one detachment of Guards from Užice” took part in the chase of the remnants of the Suvobor partisan detachment. The first major military action in which members of the SSG participated was the so-called “Aćimović’s offensive”, which began in mid-July and ended in late August 1942. The goal of this offensive was the destruction of partisan detachments in the Niš and Leskovac districts. This action ended with partial success, and the engaged Guards were mostly from the district command in Leskovac.⁴⁹

A significant change in the structure of the security forces of the collaborationist government occurred in late August 1942, when the Serbian State Security was created. The Command of the Serbian State Guard and the Department for State Protection and Public Security at the Ministry of the Interior fell under the direct authority of the newly created institution. Dragi Jovanović, the most loyal German collaborator during the occupation, was appointed chief. All district and county chiefs were subordinated to him, except in Banat. Although conflicts between collaborationists are mentioned as reasons for the creation of this institution, for the key reason we consider the need to form counterparts of the institutions of the occupation apparatus. With the arrival of August Meyszner, who commanded all German police formations, there was a lack of an opposite number in the collaborationist apparatus. With the creation of the Serbian State Security and the appointment of Dragi Jovanović as its chief, that situation was resolved. Also, one of the reasons for the creation of Serbian state security was Meissner's aspiration to bridge the collaborationist government and take direct control through Dragi Jovanović.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ VA, NdA, 144–1–19, Naredba pov. br. 21 Komandanta SDS za 20. mart 1942; VA, NdA, 144–2–16, Naredba pov. br. 46 Komandanta SDS za 23. maj 1942; VA, NdA, 144–2–24, Naredba pov. br. 52 Komandanta SDS za 31. maj 1942; VA, NdA, 144–1–51, Naredba br. 33 Komandanta SDS za 30. april 1942; DAS, fond BIA, I/46, 26/1.

⁴⁹ *Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o Narodnooslobodilačkom ratu jugoslovenskih naroda*, tom I, knjiga 21 (Beograd: Vojnoistorijski institut, 1965), 244–248; Jovan Zlatić, *Stradalaštvo srpskog naroda u niškom ratnom okrugu (1941–1944). Knjiga 2: oružana sila srpske vlade generala Milana Nedića 1941–1944.* (Niš: Prosveta, 1995), 122–132.

⁵⁰ B. Dimitrijević, *Vojska Nedićeve Srbije*, 193–194; M. Borković, *n. d.*, knj. I, 294; „Uredba o obrazovanju celokupne službe Srpske državne bezbednosti”, *Službene novine*, 25. 8. 1942, 1.

At the end of 1942, there were two organizational changes that significantly affected the structure of the Serbian State Guard. At German request, by decree of October 16, 1942, the Serbian Border Guard was formed and separated from the Serbian State Guard. On December 1, 1942, the Command of the Serbian Border Guard began to function as a separate institution, and on January 1, 1943, the new formation received its own material supply, so it was effectively separated from the SSG. Due to their unreliability and indiscipline, and simultaneously with the numerical strengthening of the Serbian State Guard, the German occupying authorities decided to completely disband the Chetnik detachments of Kosta Pećanac, as well as the Serbian Chetnik Command. This process began in the spring of 1942. By mid-November the Chetnik units had been reduced by half, and by the end of 1942 they had been completely disbanded. A number of Chetniks joined the Field and Border Guards, some joined the Serbian Volunteer Corps, some the Yugoslav Army in the Homeland, commanded by General Dragoljub Mihailović, and some were arrested and sent to German prisoner-of-war camps.⁵¹

A great problem for the functioning of the Serbian State Guard was the deep intertwining and connection of many of its members with the Yugoslav Army in the Homeland (YAH). The Germans tried to prevent this infiltration with arrests. At the end of July 1943, because of this cooperation, the Gestapo arrested almost the entire headquarters of the Niš Regional Command, headed by Commander Colonel Filip Dimitrijević. Also, the mass desertions of the Guards and their defection to YAH culminated during 1943. The arrest warrant from December 1943, issued by the SSG Command, which states the number of “active fugitives”, contains 808 members of the Serbian State Guard. The capitulation of Italy on early September 1943, and the increased activity of the YAH were the main reasons for defection en masse. Italy's exit from the war caused some of their commanders to believe that the war was coming to an end and that action was needed. Thus, organized mass desertions were recorded in the Valjevo district, so all district detachments of the Serbian State Guard were ordered to leave the district centers and withdraw to Valjevo. Similar situations were recorded in Šabac, Užice and Niš districts.⁵²

However, due to strong partisan activity the most endangered district during 1943 was that of Leskovac. In order to improve the situation, a system with a smaller number of stronger stations was established in the middle of the year. Until then, stations with a small number of members were easy targets for

⁵¹ VA, NdA, 144–5–1, Naredba pov. br. 104 Komandanta SDS od 3. decembra 1942; Dragoljub Petrović, „Vojna organizacija četnika Koste Pećanca u okupiranoj Srbiji 1941/42. godine“, *Vojnoistorijski glasnik*, br. 3, (1969), 205–215.

⁵² VA, NdA, 146–3–10, Naredba pov. br. 79 Komandanta SDS od 18. oktobra 1943; R. Tucović, *Policijski represivni sistem nacističke Nemačke i njegovi domaći instrumenti*, 189; VA, NdA, 24–1–58, Pregled opšte situacije u zemlji po okruzima za septembar 1943; Bojan Dimitrijević, *Valjevski ravnogorci. Jugoslovenska vojska u otadžbini u valjevskom kraju 1941–1945*. (Valjevo: Srpska reč, Istorijski arhiv, 1998), 103–104; VA, NdA, 146–4–18, Poternica pov. br. 45 od 30. decembra 1943.

partisan detachments. In the whole district, 26 stations were formed with a capacity of 20–50 Guards. Since this did not help either, the stations were abandoned and the Guards retreated to the district centers. In September 1943, the district chief from Leskovac stated that “in two thirds of the district, the functioning of state and municipal authorities has ceased and the absolute masters of this territory are the communists”.⁵³

At the beginning of November 1943, there was a great reshuffling of the collaborationist administration regarding the competence over security forces. This reorganization was a consequence of the visit of the Prime Minister Milan Nedić to Hitler on September 18, 1943, but also the activities of Hermann Neubacher, the newly appointed special envoy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Third Reich for Southeast Europe. Serbian State Security was abolished, and Nedić took over the Ministry of the Interior. This takeover was not only cosmetic. Nedić was given back direct jurisdiction over the Serbian State and Serbian Border Guards. However, all these units still remained under the supervision of August Meyszner. As a consequence of this, there were changes in the structure and organization of the Serbian State Guard.⁵⁴

Due to the strengthening of the Partisan Movement in southern Serbia, but also due to increasingly serious attempts to penetrate into western Serbia from Sandžak, Nedić’s government passed a decree at the end of January 1944 to fill the Serbian State and Border Guard with “Recruit Guards”. This was actually supposed to be the mobilization of young men born between 1919 and 1924. This “filling” did not have much effect due to the partisan pressure, whereas young men went into hiding in order to avoid it.⁵⁵

In mid-March 1944, strong partisan forces of 5,000 men attempted again to break through from eastern Bosnia. Significant German, Bulgarian and collaborationist forces have been engaged to oppose this group. In fierce fighting, which lasted until May 20, 1944, this partisan group penetrated as far as the mountains of Povlen and Maljen, but did not fulfill its goal and was eventually repulsed. SSG units had a secondary role in these battles, but they also had several serious clashes with the partisans.⁵⁶

In June 1944, between the villages of Vrelo and Kravlje near Aleksinac, the largest independent battle of the Serbian State Guard took place. Under commander of the Niš regional command, lieutenant colonel Mirko

⁵³ VA, NdA, 26–10–21, Komanda SDS Okruga Leskovačkog 3. juna 1943; VA, NdA, 24–1–58, Pregled opšte situacije u zemlji po okruzima za septembar 1943.

⁵⁴ „Uredba o ukidanju Uredbe o obrazovanju celokupne službe Srpske državne bezbednosti“, *Službene novine*, 6. 11. 1943, 1; B. Dimitrijević, *Vojaska Nedićeve Srbije*, 328–329; M. Borković, *n. d.*, knj. I, 194–195.

⁵⁵ DAS, Zbirka NOR i revolucija – Ž28, kutija 8, Načelstvo Sreza ariljskog svim opštinskim upravama 2. februara 1944; IAN, KOZARA, f. 37, Naredba pov. br. 11 Komandanta SDS od 14. februara 1944; Živan Stojković, Hranislav Rakić, Nikola Ilić, *Okupacija u leskovačkom kraju 1941–1944*. (Leskovac: Narodni muzej, 1994), 151–152.

⁵⁶ VA, NdA, 146–5–10, Naredba br. 43 Komandanta SDS od 1. juna 1944; *Oslobodilački rat naroda Jugoslavije 1941–1945*, knj. 2 (Beograd: Vojnoistorijski institut, 1965), 227–235.

Stanković, some 600 Guards from the Moravian and Niš districts clashed with the partisans from the Ninth Serbian Brigade and the Niš detachment on June 13, 1944. They were completely defeated – six officers and 49 non-commissioned officers and guards were killed in action. This defeat convinced the SSG Command that its detachments were not capable of opposing larger partisan units, so until the end of the occupation, were no longer engaged in such actions.⁵⁷

Significant partisan units from Sandžak tried to break through again at the end of July 1944, this time successfully. The partisans managed to penetrate Kopaonik mountain and merge with the newly created Partisan divisions that operated in the area of southeastern Serbia in mid-August. In late August 1944, the penetration of elite partisan divisions under the direct command of the Supreme Staff began from northern Montenegro.⁵⁸

Due to the common danger of Partisan break through, the previous informal contacts between the collaborationist government and Yugoslav Army in the Homeland were formalized at the meeting in Belgrade on September 2, 1944. At this meeting, joint cooperation and future unification of forces was agreed upon. However, that did not have the desired effect either. In early September 1944, YAH units launched a counter-offensive against the advancing partisans. In the area of Jelova Gora, north of Užice, on September 8-9, 1944, one of the decisive battles took place. Mihailović's units were completely defeated, and on September 13, the First Partisan Division broke out on the river Kolubara and approached Valjevo. At the same time, in eastern Serbia, partisans attacked larger centers. Without a fight, the partisans entered Svrlijig on September 2, and Knjaževac on September 4. In the battles for Zaječar, September 6-7, 1944, many Guards were killed, and the partisans conquered the first district center.⁵⁹

Epilogue

In early October 1944, due to Soviet Army advance on the borders of occupied Serbia, Serbian collaborationist government of general Nedić was dissolved by the German Command in Belgrade (Armeeabteilung Serbien) and went to Vienna. Before he left, General Nedić suggested General Borivoje

⁵⁷ VA, NdA, 27–3–8, Naredba Komandanta SDS Komandantu SDS Oblasti niške od 6. juna 1944; VA, NdA, 27–3–18, Izveštaj komande Niške oblasti SDS Komandantu SDS od 18. juna 1944; Ivan Gligorijević, *Deveta srpska udarna brigada* (Beograd: Vojnoizdavački zavod, 1970), 86–88.

⁵⁸ VA, NdA, 25–6–27, Izveštaj o stanju u zemlji po okruzima od 25. avgusta 1944; Dimitrije Trifunović i Pavle Babac, „Prodor Operativne grupe divizija u Srbiju i forsiranje Ibra polovinom jula i početkom avgusta 1944. godine“, *Vojnoistorijski glasnik*, br. 6, (1951), 27–63; Dušan Pejčić, „U Kuršumlji i Prokuplju“, *Zapisi iz dobrovoljačke borbe*, br. 3, (1955), 65–73.

⁵⁹ B. Karapandžić, *n. d.*, 329–330; K. Nikolić, *Istorija Ravnogorskog pokreta 1941–1945*, knj. II, 379–380; Miladin Ivanović, „Borbe za Zaječar septembra 1944. godine“, *Vojnoistorijski glasnik*, br. 5, (1956), 82–104.

Jonić, commander of the Serbian State Guard, to join the ranks of the Yugoslav Army in the Homeland.⁶⁰

Remaining units of the Serbian State Guard gathered in Jagodina on October 6, 1944, and entered officially the Yugoslav Army in the Homeland as the Serbian Strike Corps. After reorganization Serbian Strike Corps went to Kraljevo, where its Second Division was formed. After Kraljevo, Corps was transferred to Raška by train planning to go to Greece. That plan was changed and Corps joined German forces from Army Group “E” that were retreating from Greece. Following the Germans, the Corps proceeded west along the line Raška-Noví Pazar-Duga Poljana-Sjenica-Prijepolje and on that way had many clashes with partisan forces. From Prijepolje the Germans proceeded to Višegrad, while the Corps and other units of Yugoslav Army in the Homeland went to Pljevlja which was recaptured from the partisans. After few days of rest the Corps moved on and arrived to Čajniče on November 27, 1944.⁶¹

Corps was wandering around without a clear goal in Bosnia, going southwest and then northwest and approaching Sarajevo. In mid-December they were ordered to go north as part of the plan to capture Tuzla. At the end of December, the Corps reached Tuzla and there, in a battle with substantial partisan forces, suffered great losses. Because of many ill and wounded and lack of ammunition, commander of the Corps, general Stevan Radovanović, decided to go west and on January 1, 1945 the remains of the Corps entered Zavidovići which was under German control. After negotiations with the Germans the Corps went north to Slavonski Brod, where its soldiers were disarmed and transported to Vienna by train. They arrived in Vienna on January 18, 1945.⁶²

At the end of February 1945, most of the Corps’ soldiers withdraw from Vienna to Slovenian Littoral (Operationszone Adriatisches Küstenland – OZAK). In that area other “Serbian national forces” gathered in late autumn 1944. On May 1, 1945, after the final partisan offensive, forces in Slovenia retreated to Italy where they surrendered to ally forces and were sent to POW camps.⁶³

Conclusion

In the whirlwind of the Second World War, the Serbian State Guard was a formation the occupiers and collaborators intended to make the main force for the “pacification” of occupied Serbia. This task was emphasized by both, but for different reasons. The occupiers needed the territory under the nominal control of the Nedić government as source of free raw materials, to be run with minimum use of German forces, which were much needed on other

⁶⁰ P. Martinović Bajica, *n. d.*, 371; B. Dimitrijević, *Vojska Nedićeve Srbije*, 423.

⁶¹ Nebojša Stambolija, „Osnivanje i dejstva Srpskog udarnog korpusa 1944–1945“, *Vojno-istorijski glasnik*, br. 2, (2014), 70–87.

⁶² Bojan Dimitrijević i Nemanja Dević, *Bosanska golgota. Slom snaga JVuO u Bosni 1945. godine* (Beograd: Svet knjige, Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2021), 133–144.

⁶³ Kosta Nikolić, *General Miodrag M. Damjanović „Čika Beli“ 1893–1956*. (London: Udruženje boraca Kraljevske jugoslovenske vojske „Draža Mihailović“, 2008), 65–66, 72–73.

fronts. The collaborationists emphasized the “pacification” of Serbia as necessity for preserving the existence of the Serbian people under occupation and preventing reprisals. However, with the arrival of German officials in Belgrade who used different methods and were seemingly more sympathetic to the Serbs, the collaborationist ideologues showed aspirations for more serious inclusion in the “new European order”. The futility of such plans was shown in the following months. The chaotic situation in occupied Serbia, deep influence of the General Mihailović’s Royalist Resistance, weak motivation of members to fight, great distrust of the German occupying forces and the poor equipment and weapons resulting from that, are the most important factors preventing the Serbian State Guard from fulfilling the intended tasks.

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SERBIAN STATE GUARD IN OCCUPIED SERBIA 1942-1944

Summary

The subject of this research is Serbian State Guard, a collaborationist formation created in early March 1942 in occupied Serbia. It arose from the need of the occupiers and collaborators for a stronger and more organized unit that would more successfully oppose the insurgent forces on the territory of Serbia. The initiative for the formation came from the collaborationist government. Information about the new formation appeared in the daily press as early as the beginning of January, and the organization was completed in February 1942. The decree on the organization was published on March 3, 1942. According to that decree, the Serbian State Guard was defined as a uniformed and armed troop performing the police executive and border service. At the beginning it was divided into: the Town State Guard, the Field State Guard, and the Border State Guard. On the territory of the City of Belgrade, as a special unit that was directly subordinated to the Governor of the City of Belgrade, the service was performed by the Serbian State Guard of the Administration of the City of Belgrade. Due to more efficient control and prevention of various aspects of crime as well as maintaining security, special branches have been formed over time, like Commercial Police and Railway Security Guard. The situation on the ground sometimes required the SSG to form larger and more mobile detachments to oppose partisan units, which were often better armed.

For these reasons, in the fall of 1942, the Motorized Detachment and in February 1943 two mobile Battalions were created. Although it was created by collaborationist government, Serbian State Guard, during the whole period of its existence, was very influenced by the Yugoslav Army in the Homeland. On the beginning of October 1944, due to Red Army advancement on the borders of occupied Serbia, remaining units of Serbian State Guard gathered in Jagodina in October 6, 1944, and there officially entered into the Yugoslav Army in the Homeland as Serbian Strike Corps. The remnants of this Corps surrendered to the Allies in Italy in early May 1945, ending their war journey. Primarily, the material stored in the Military Archive in Belgrade was used, as well as the corresponding published material, literature and periodicals.

KEYWORDS: Serbian State Guard, Collaboration, Milan Nedić, Stevan Radovanović, Borivoje Jonić, Occupation, Serbia, Second World War, Gendarmerie, Third Reich