

Plus tard, ces détachements recurent effectivement le nom de compagnies, puis furent des bataillons formés. La physionomie définitive du détachement, trois bataillons (Šekovački, Sprečanski et Stuparski) et deux compagnies autonomes (Čikotska et Udarna četa). La force du détachement variait continuellement, d'une part en raison de la venue de nouveaux combattants, de l'autre comme conséquence des pertes et des défections partielles de ceux qui rejoignaient les tchetniks. En fait, le nombre de combattants variait, au sein du dit détachement de 500 à 700.

Le centre des combats, Vlasenica une fois libérée, fut transporté à „Kladanjski front”. En tout, 4 attaques eurent lieu à Kladanj.

La première fut effectuée le 24 Août. Les forces des partisans comptaient environ 250 hommes avec 180 fusils et 2 fusils-mitrailleur. Il avait été entendu qu'une partie des tchetniks d'Aco Babić participeraient à l'action, (50 à 60 fusils) mais ils se dédirent au dernier moment.

Kladanj était défendu par une garnison ennemie, composée d'oustachis sous le commandement d'un commerçant de la ville, Avadag Hasić, plus quelques gendarmes — en tout environ 300 personnes, armées de fusils et disposant de 2 mitrailleuses lourdes et de 3 à 4 fusils mitrailleur.

Le plan prévoyait une attaque sur trois colonnes.

L'attaque débuta le 24 Août au matin, dans toutes les directions, sauf dans celle dont auraient dû attaquer les tchetniks. L'ennemi fut pris par surprise et se retira jusqu'aux limites de la ville. Vers midi, la colonne du milieu avait réussi à s'emparer de la gendarmerie, et à pénétrer en partie jusqu'au centre de la ville. La colonne de droite occupa le nord-ouest, et la colonne de gauche le nord-est de la ville. Seule l'attaque n'avait pas été menée sur les côtés sud et est — tâche incombant aux tchetniks. L'ennemi, profitant de l'occasion, se regroupa sur la partie est de la ville, ligne d'attaque des partisans. Vers 14 heures, les partisans avaient été totalement repoussés de la ville. Les pertes des insurgés furent les suivantes: 4 morts et 3 blessés, celles de l'ennemi: 7 morts et un nombre inconnu de blessés.

Après ce premier échec, les insurgés se retirèrent vers l'endroit dont ils étaient partis à l'attaque, entre les villages de Trnovan et Pepići, et se préparèrent à de nouvelles attaques, qui eurent lieu: la deuxième, le 29—30 Août, la troisième le 5 Septembre et la quatrième le 14 Septembre. Toutes ces tentatives furent vouées à l'échec. Ces échecs furent dûs principalement au sabotage mené par les tchetniks. A part cela, au cours des seconde, troisième et quatrième tentatives l'une des raisons d'échec fut la défense toujours plus au point des oustachis, encouragés par leur victoire au cours de la première attaque, et qui, après chaque assaut, recevaient de nouveaux renforts de Tuzla. Une autre raison de ces échecs fut la banale tactique des insurgés, qui menèrent toutes les attaques pour ainsi dire, de la même façon.

Plus tard, durant la seconde moitié de Septembre, le centre de la lutte se transporta sur le front "Zvornički". Quoiquel le but des dirigeants tchetniks n'eut pas été de se battre contre l'occupant, ils durent céder

aux masses de paysans enrôlés dans leurs rangs, et qui exigeaient de lutter aux côtés des partisans contre les occupants et les oustachis. Ainsi, ils devaient, du moins en apparence, collaborer avec les dirigeants partisans. C'est pourquoi les chefs tchetniks furent contraints de participer, dans une certaine mesure, aux opérations du front „Zvornički”.

L'attaque sur Zvornik, partant de la route Tuzla — Zvornik, fut effectuée le 22 Septembre. Toute une série de points furent occupés; Capardi, Bulotovci, Memići, Jelovo Brdo — mais Zvornik ne put être pris. Les raisons de ce nouvel insuccès furent, en gros, les mêmes qu'à Kladanj (la trahison des tchetniks).

Par contre, les partisans, seuls et sans la participation des tchetniks, menèrent à bien toute une série d'opérations.

Au mois d'Août, les points ennemis suivants furent pris: Nova Kasaba, Drinjača, Papraća et Stupari. L'ennemi connut en ces occasions des pertes sensibles, particulièrement à Stupari où il eut: 20 morts, un grand nombre de blessés et 14 prisonniers, alors que le butin suivant était saisi: 1 mitrailleuse lourde, 40 fusils et 10 caisses de munitions, des vêtements militaires et autre équipement. Nos pertes: 4 morts et 3 blessés.

Durant la première moitié de Septembre, une compagnie de „domobranci” fut mise en déroute près du village de Matijević, („Secteur de Stupari”) eut 12 morts, un grand nombre de blessés et 4 prisonniers. Le butin saisi: 15 fusils, 2 caisses de munitions et autre équipement militaire. Pertes des insurgés: 1 mort et 1 blessé.

Du 6 au 12 Octobre, des actions particulièrement heureuses furent menées contre les forces „oustachi-domobranci” et ellamandes, qui essayaient de repousser les partisans de la route Tuzla — Zvornik. L'ennemi attaqua le 6 Octobre et au début, réussit en partie à avancer. Le 7 Octobre, les forces partisans se regroupèrent (compagnies „Sprečanska”, „Brinačka” et „Čukotska”) et vers 15 heures procédèrent à une contre-offensive. Au cours d'une forte avance, les unités battirent l'ennemi et le repoussèrent le long de la route. Un combat violent s'engagea près des villages Capardi et Snagovo. L'ennemi fut mis en déroute et repoussé vers Zvornik. La poursuite cessa à la tombée de la nuit. Le 8 Octobre, à l'aube, les partisans repartirent à la poursuite de l'ennemi. Les forces des tchetniks s'étant jointes à eux, ils réussirent à le repousser jusqu'à Zvornik même. Le 9 Octobre, l'ennemi effectua une sortie de Zvornik vers le village de Capardi. A ce moment-là, il avait reçu de Tuzla une colonne de renfort. Lorsque la nuit tomba, les forces ennemies s'étaient réunies dans le rayon Capardi — Snagovo, environ un régiment. Le lendemain matin, 10 Octobre, l'ennemi commença à avancer, soutenu par un feu puissant. Une partie des troupes ennemies attaquèrent la position occupée par les tchetniks, près de Velja Glava, mais le gros de l'action fut dirigé vers la position occupée par les partisans, le mont Rudnik. Une lutte féroce s'engagea, qui dura toute la journée. L'attaque ennemie était en outre, soutenue par l'intervention de quelques avions. Lorsque la nuit tomba, l'ennemi avait réussi à s'emparer d'une partie du mont Rudnik, mais une (jusqu'au cimetière) autre partie

était restée entre nos mains. L'aile droite ennemie s'était emparée du village d'Omask et la gauche de la position près de Vela Glava.

Dans la nuit du 10 au 11 Octobre, les unités partisans s'organisèrent, et renforcées de la compagnie „Sekovački”, arrivée du front „Kladanj”, partirent en contre-offensive à l'aube du 11 Octobre. Le gros de l'action était dirigé contre les forces ennemies, ayant occupé une partie du mont Rudnik.

Le combat s'enagea dès que les forces des insurgés se furent mis en branle. La lutte fut féroce, car l'ennemi, s'attendant à une contre-offensive, riposta par un feu parfaitement organisé. La lutte fut particulièrement forte sur les terrains empruntés par les compagnie „Sekovački” et „Brinački”. Les compagnies des partisans avançaient avec obstination, et réussirent à conquérir, pas à pas, les positions ennemies. Vers 14 heures, les principales positions, sur le mont Rudnik, avaient été reprises à l'ennemi. Durant l'après-midi, le combat continua, féroce et sanglant. L'ennemi était soutenu par l'artillerie et quelques avions, malgré quoi, dès le soir sa résistance fut brisée et il fut repoussé jusqu'à la route. De même, les unités ennemies durent quitter le village d'Osmaci et une partie des positions près de Vela Glava.

Les combats du Mont Rudnik, comptent parmi les plus grands succès du détachement de partisans „Birčanski”. Au cours de ces combats, l'ennemi eut 70 morts et un grand nombre de blessés, et laissa le butin suivant: 1 canon anti-tank, 2 fusils mitrailleur („šarci”), environ 70 fusils, 8 caisses de munitions et une grande quantité d'autre équipement militaire. Les pertes partisans: 2 morts et 7 blessés.

Le 12 Octobre, l'ennemi renonça à l'attaque et commença à renforcer ses positions le long de la route Tuzla — Zvornik. De la même façon, les positions dans la direction Spreča — Zvornik, furent renforcées. Pendant un assez grand laps de temps, aucun combat sérieux ne s'engagea.

A la fin du mois d'Octobre, les combats reprirent dans le „secteur de Stupari”. Une compagnie partisane arriva d'Ozren, et avec elle le commissaire politique du détachement partisan d'Ozren, Pašaga Mandžić. La compagnie devait participer à une attaque sur Kladanj, mais cette attaque ayant été remise, elle se joigna à l'action menée par le détachement „Birčanski” et la compagnie d'Ozren contre le village Stupari. C'est ainsi que le 30 Octobre, une attaque fut menée avec succès contre les positions ennemies près des villages de Matijevići et Stupari. Le bataillon ennemi fut mis en déroute totale, comptant 30 mars et un grand nombre de blessés. Butin saisi: 2 mitrailleuses lourdes, environ 30 fusils, 5 caisses de munitions et une grande quantité d'équipement militaire. Les pertes des partisans: 1 mort et 3 blessés.

Ce fut là le dernier combat violent mené par le détachement partisan „Birčanski” au cours de l'année 1941. Aux mois de novembre et décembre, en raison de l'attitude tout à fait passive adoptée par les forces des tchetniks, le détachement dut se contenter de défendre son territoire, et mener quelques petites actions sur les voies de communication Tuzla — Zvornik et Tuzla — Kladanj, se mettant en embuscades et coupant les lignes téléphoniques et télégraphiques.

FORMATION D'UN POUVOIR POPULAIRE ET ORGANISATION DU PARTI

La gendarmerie de Šekovići une fois prise, un commandement fut institué à Šekovići. Ses tâches, au début, consistaient à approvisionner l'armée, maintenir l'ordre à l'arrière, s'occuper des prisonniers, ect... Ces tâches s'élargirent de jour en jour. Il n'y avait aucun autre pouvoir à l'arrière.

Déjà durant les premiers mois, l'insurrection avait institué tout un réseau de comités populaires qui s'agrandiront de plus en plus. Les comités furent d'une utilité inappréciable comme base du développement du mouvement de libération nationale, car partout où existait la moindre autorité populaire, les partisans étaient sûrs de trouver aide et soutien.

Parallèlement au développement de la lutte, se créa et se développa l'organisation du parti. Les meilleurs combattants étaient reçus au Parti.

Au début Octobre, fut formée la première cellule dans les maquis. Un comité local fut formé à Šekovići. L'école élémentaire servit de "Maison du Parti" et l'on y ouvrit une bibliothèque. Là se trouvait également le centre technique du Parti. Des nouvelles étaient régulièrement émises à la radio. Les combattants qui traversaient Šekovići, venaient toujours à la "Maison du Parti". De temps en temps, on y donnait des séances culturelles, le soir, auxquelles assistaient quelques centaines de combattants se trouvant dans les environs. L'organisation du parti de la jeunesse communiste yougoslave fut créée en novembre et décembre.

L'organisation du parti, au sein du détachement et dans le maquis, menait une action politique constante, luttant contre la propagande subversive des leaders tchetniks, contre leurs trahisons et leurs machinations. Elle expliquait le sens de la lutte et soulignait qu'il était nécessaire qu'elle se poursuive jusqu'au bout.

LIAISON AVEC LES DÉTACHEMENTS ET ÉTATS-MAJORS PARTISANS. VOISINS.

La liaison la plus sûre était celle que nous avions avec le détachement des partisans de Romanija. Nos premiers courriers ont été dépêchés vers Romanija dès la prise de la gendarmerie de Šekovići. Ils portaient la nouvelle du soulèvement de Šekovići. Quelques jours plus tard, l'insurrection commençait également à Romanija. Un détachement de partisans de Romanija fut créé, mené par le célèbre Čiča. Ce détachement vit son effectif s'agrandir rapidement et atteindre jusqu'à plus de 2.000 hommes. Le courrier entre les détachements "Bircanski" et "Romanija" s'échangeait de façon régulière.

Une liaison, moins régulière, existait également avec le détachement d'Ozren. Cette irrégularité étant due à l'éloignement et autres difficultés. Les premiers courriers pour Ozren partirent le 15 Août, en même temps que Pašaga Mandžić, qui avait pour tâche d'accélérer le mouvement d'insurrection à Ozren. Les courriers étaient de retour fin Août, porteurs de la nouvelle du soulèvement du peuple (le 23 Août) et de l'augmentation de l'effectif du détachement d'Ozren à plus de 1.000 combattants. Vers le 20 Septembre, Pašaga Mandžić arriva à Šekovići, accompagné,

d'une unité d'Ozren (parmi laquelle quelques mineurs de Husinska) et nous donna des détails sur le développement de l'insurrection à Ozren. Il nous parla de leurs actions journalières, et raconta comment ils avaient démoli les voies ferrées, Doboj — Sarajevo et Doboj — Tuzla. L'unité d'Ozren resta à Šekovići une dizaine de jours, durant lesquels elle participa aux quelques actions menées par les unités du détachement de Birčanska. Plus tard, la liaison fut en gros maintenue, par l'intermédiaire de courriers, et au moment de l'attaque sur Stupari, une compagnie d'Ozren vint se joindre au détachement de Birač (ce dont nous avons parlé plus haut).

La liaison avec le détachement partisan de Majevisa, était constante, malgré tout le mal qu'avaient les courriers à traverser les villages à tendance oustachi, le long la route Tuzla — Zvornik. L'insurrection à Majevisa débuta également quelques jours après celle de Šekovići, et s'amplifia largement. Mais là-bas, les officiers de Draža Mihailović, qui étaient venus de Serbie en traversant la Drina, de même qu'à Birač et les environs, eurent une influence destructive et réussirent à détourner une partie des insurgés, politiquement moins sûrs. Au début, le détachement partisan de Majevisa comptait 350 combattants. Vers le 20 Septembre, Ivan Marković-Irac (l'Irlandais) vint à Majevisa et prit le commandement. Le détachement, sous le commandement de ce guerrier endurci, vit son effectif grandir continuellement et accomplit un nombre incalculable d'actions. A la fin de l'année, le détachement comptait 500 combattants.

Avec les partisans de Serbie, la liaison était également maintenue. Déjà au début Septembre, 3 courriers étaient venus de Krupnja, envoyés par le détachement partisan "Podrinjska", et apportant à leurs camarades bosniaques un cadeau, un fusil mitrailleur. Plus tard, d'autres courriers arrivèrent, et le détachement "Birčanski" envoya les siens en Serbie. Fin Septembre, Cvijetin Mijatović partit à Užica libéré, pour se mettre en contact avec l'Etat-major du détachement partisan d'Užica, et avec l'Etat-major suprême. Il ramena une grande quantité de fusils, produits par les usines d'Užica, pour ceux des combattants qui n'étaient toujours pas armés. A plusieurs reprises, des armes et des munitions arrivèrent d'Užica, dont une partie était réexpédiée vers Birač et vers le détachement Majevisa.

Au début d'Octobre, l'Etat-major général pour les détachements de Bosnie et Herzégovine s'installa à Milići. Il était formé de: Svetozar Vukmanović-Tempo, Rodoljub Čolaković et Slobodan Princip-Seljo.

Ainsi, le détachement partisan "Birčanski" avait un bon réseau de liaison avec les détachements voisins, ainsi qu'avec les insurgés de Serbie. Par ailleurs, étant à proximité de l'Etat-major général, il en recevait une aide constante. De cette manière, la tâche du détachement se trouvait simplifiée et il était en mesure de mieux diriger sa lutte. La proximité de l'Etat-major général a beaucoup contribué à permettre au détachement de venir à bout avec succès des trahisons des tchetniks, de leurs machinations et propagande mensongère, les tchetniks étant particulièrement actifs dans cette région de la Bosnie Orientale.

SITUATION FIN 1941.

Fin 1941, une partie importante de la Bosnie Orientale avait été libérée et était sous le contrôle de 7 détachements partisans: "Romanij-ski", "Ozrenski", "Zvijezda", „Birčanski", „Majevički" et „Zenički". L'effectif total de tous ces détachements comptait environ 6.000 combattants. A part les forces partisans, il existait en Bosnie Orientale de fortes forces de tchetniks, avec un effectif d'environ 4.000 hommes.

Avec le total de ces forces, de larges actions militaires auraient pu être effectuées, n'eut été la trahison des chefs tchetniks.

La partie la plus compacte du territoire libéré se trouvait dans la région limitée par la ligne Višegrad, Zvornik, Tuzla, Kladanj, Sarajevo Višegrad. Cette région ne comptait pas un seul point ennemi. Mais l'arrière du territoire se trouvait dans un désordre total, en raison du dérèglement et de l'arbitraire des troupes des tchetniks, qui pillaient, brûlaient et massacraient les villages musulmans. La propagande tchetnik faisait tout pour amener la cession du mouvement de libération nationale. Les mois de novembre et décembre s'écoulèrent dans une lutte intransigeante et un travail politique intense tendant à contrecarrer les activités subversives des leaders tchetniks, et leur directe collaboration avec l'occupant, qu'ils camouflaient sous leur slogan sur le "Sauvetage de la Serbie", etc... Mais, à la fin de l'année, les officiers tchetniks commencèrent à attaquer ouvertement les forces partisans et les dirigeants du mouvement de libération nationale. En raison de tout cela, une certaine indécision et même séparation se manifestèrent parmi les détachements de Bosnie Orientale, parmi les combattants politiquement non-orientés. Le travail destructif des tchetniks se fit ressentir jusques dans le détachement "Birčanski", dont une partie se sépara et se plaça sous commandement tchetnik tandis que la majorité restait fidèle aux partisans.

C'est au beau milieu de cette situation qu'arrivèrent à Romanija le camarade TITO et l'Etat-major Général, accompagnés de la Première Brigade des Prolétaires. Ceci marqua un tournant dans l'histoire du développement du mouvement de libération en Bosnie Orientale. L'Etat major Général prit les mesures nécessaires pour empêcher la propagande destructive des tchetniks. Les unités de la Première Brigade des Prolétaires reprirent les positions abandonnées, et, par la prise de mesures sévères, mirent fin au pillage et meurtres de la population musulmane par les tchetniks. L'ordre fut rétabli à l'arrière du front, les positions prises assurées, tandis qu'un nouvel élan combatif gagnait les rangs des détachements partisans. Les actions contre l'ennemi recommencèrent. C'est ainsi que la Bosnie Orientale devint une nouvelle base de la lutte armée en Yougoslavie.

RÉSULTATS ET CONCLUSION

Les résultats atteints par le détachement "Birčanski" — du début de l'insurrection à la fin de l'année 1941, furent les suivants:

L'ennemi subit les pertes suivantes: 330 morts, 215 prisonniers, environ 400 blessés — en tout, plus de 900 soldats, sous-officiers et offi-

ciers ennemis mis hors de combat. Prise de butin: 750 fusils, 11 fusils mitrailleurs, 7 mitrailleuses lourdes, un canon anti-tank et environ 70 caisses de munition (soit près de 100.000 balles).

Les pertes des insurgés: 33 morts et 49 blessés.

Le détachement, à la fin de 1941, comptait 2 bataillons, dont 3 compagnies régulières et 2 compagnies indépendantes, tandis que l'effectif, en partie réduit, en raison des défections et du passage de certains soldats aux tchetniks, comptait environ 500 combattants avec 3 mitrailleuses lourdes, 5 fusils mitrailleur et 450 fusils.

L'un des résultats les plus notables obtenu au cours de la première année de l'insurrection, fut la création de cadres solides et à toute épreuve, parmi les gens de Birač. De jeunes commandants et commissaires politiques naquirent parmi les rangs des paysans.

Les commandants apprirent à mener au combat et avec succès, des centaines de soldats. Quoique ne se retrouvant pas toujours bien dans toutes les situations créées par la guerre, ils savaient déjà préparer une embuscade, effectuer une attaque, mener une unité à l'assaut.

Les commissaires politiques étaient formés de gens à peine lettrés. Leur vocabulaire était restreint, mais ils savaient exprimer leurs idées. Ils luttèrent féroce pour venir à bout des trahisons des tchetniks, veillèrent sans relâche à ce qu'aucun combattant ne fléchisse ou ne se laisse aller à la trahison.

De cette manière, tant dans le détachement que sur le terrain même de Birač, furent créées des conditions solides, permettant la poursuite de la lutte. L'unanimité et la compacité régnant parmi ce détachement, lui permirent de venir à bout avec succès de la crise, connue par tous les détachements de la Bosnie Orientale⁵⁾ au printemps 1942, et que certains ne pûrent surmonter. En fait, le détachement de Birač "Birčan-ski" sera le seul à sortir indemne de cette crise, en Bosnie Orientale. Il restera compact jusqu'à la libération, durant toutes les années de la lutte de libération nationale, servant d'origine à de nombreuses unités, telles que la VIème Brigade Proletaire de Bosnie Orientale, et lui-même constituera la XIXème Brigade de Birač. Son point de base, Birač, libéré, restera toujours imprenable pour l'ennemi. Il servira de retraite sûre à nos hopitiaux, de lieu de repos à nos combattants le traversant ou y reprenant haleine, avant de repartir vers de nouveaux combats.

⁵⁾ En Février 1942, les tchetniks, par une trahison sournoise, réussirent à attaquer l'état-major du détachement de Majeвица et à en massacrer tous les membres, ce qui amena une crise sérieuse parmi les rangs des partisans de Majeвица, mais le détachement sut surmonter cette crise, au prix de l'abandon temporaire d'une partie de son terrain. Ceci prouva une fois de plus la conscience politique et la valeur de détachement de Majeвица. C'est pourquoi il fut intégré à la 4ème Brigade prolétaria de la Bosnie Orientale, en formant le 11ème bataillon.

MILOŠ ZEKIĆ,
Colonel-General

THE UPRISING IN BIRAČ IN 1941

The Uprising in Birač began with an attack upon the ustashi barracks in Šekovići on August 5, 1941. This was at the same time the beginning of the Uprising in eastern Bosnia, for after the attack on the Šekovići barracks the Uprising manifested itself in wide-spread attacks on all the gendarmes' stations, and in attacks on the major towns of the district (Vlasenica, Srebrenica, Rogatica and others) and the formation of liberated territory.

Birač is a region located in the Vlasenica district, covering almost the whole of the district except for the southern, mountainous part (Han Pijesak).

Birač was of considerable importance in the People's Liberation War in eastern Bosnia. From the beginning of the Uprising in 1941 until the liberation in 1945, Birač was one of the centres of the People's Liberation War in eastern Bosnia and was a secure partisan base, from which contact was maintained with the other parts of eastern Bosnia (Romanija, Majevica, Ozren) where partisan detachments were operating and also with Serbia.

The village which proved to have the greatest amount of fighting spirit in Birač was Šekovići.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE UPRISING

The preparation and organization of the Uprising in Birač began immediately after the April capitulation of old Yugoslavia. The preparations were guided by the Regional Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia for the Tuzla region, through the Party group in Šekovići which at the outset was very small (only two Party members), but it found support among a good number of reliable and militant peasants, Party sympathizers, whose number grew constantly, so that by the time the Uprising broke out the Party group had 20 members. Out of this group the first Party cell was later formed, and these members later were the nucleus of the partisan units.

The preparations consisted of the following: 1. the formation of military squads, the first form of military organization; 2. the consolidation of the Party nucleus; 3. gathering arms, ammunition and other

military equipment (an accurate list of the arms which could be counted on for the Uprising).

The formation of squads began in June, and by the time of the Uprising (August 5) eight squads had been formed, named after the villages in which they had been formed: Šekovići, Brajiinci, Strmica, Betanj, Pobedar, Stupari, Sprečani, Dubnica. There were a few more armed groups which had not been formed into squads owing to lack of contact with them. They were the "Planina" (near Han Pijesak) and the Paprača groups as well as the youth group in Vlasenica.

The squads were formed in the following manner: a certain number of persons would be invited to a meeting not far from the village where the squad was to be formed (usually in a small woods). Only the most militant were invited, those we were sure were ready to fight. After explaining the situation in which our country had found itself after the April capitulation and pointing out to them the only way to free ourselves — by fighting, we began to form a military unit (squad) for that village. The squad leader was elected immediately, then count was taken of the number of arms, ammunition and other military equipment to be found in the village.

The members of these squads lived at home until the outbreak of the Uprising, but constantly on guard. Regular meetings were held with them at various well-concealed places. At such meetings the current situation was explained, Party directives explained and the men were prepared for combat with the occupiers and the ustashi.

Each squad had from 20 to 30 members but only 6 to 8 of them had rifles.

The total number of people prepared to fight numbered 60 armed, and 200 unarmed.

The situation in the Birač region as in other parts of the Independent State of Croatia¹⁾ was unbearable at that time. The ustashi had begun arresting and murdering people everywhere. Over 80 people were brutally massacred in a gulley near Rašica Gaj (5 kilometres from Vlasenica, towards Šekovići). Everywhere people were talking of this with horror. Fear and bitterness reigned everywhere. The fear had to be overcome, and bitterness had to be turned into an organized force ready for battle. Our communists worked tirelessly for this right up until the outbreak of the Uprising. The will to fight grew, it was immense. The enemy was unable to learn anything about our preparations, for there was not a single traitor among us to give away the cause. But the ustashi suspected that something was going on. They too began to know the meaning of fear. The ustashi commander in Vlasenica, just before the outbreak of the Uprising, when suspicions were the strongest, summoned a prominent village elder, a Serb, and tried to persuade him to go to Šekovići with a message "that they should not play with fire there and that the state would see to better law and order". The old man answered: "Why do you want me to go down there and tell them that? If they come here

¹⁾ The Independent State of Croatia — a puppet state set up by the occupying forces on the territory of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina (Editor's note).

they will meet the massacred from Rašica Gaj and they'll hear all about it."

Early in July the Regional Committee of the Party in Tuzla formed a Regional Military Staff made up of: commander Ivan Marković-Irac, political commissar Cvijetin Mijatović-Majo, deputy commander Pašaga Mandžić-Murat¹⁾. Immediately afterwards, district military staffs were formed for Ozren, Majevisa and Birač. The staff for Birač was composed of: commanding officer Miloš Zekić, political commissar Brano Savić, deputy commanding officer Drago Melezović.

Towards the end of July the Regional Staff transferred its Headquarters from Tuzla to Birač, in Šekovići, from where it would direct operations in this region.

The Regional Staff chose Šekovići as its Headquarters for several reasons: first, from Šekovići it was easiest to keep in touch with the other parts of eastern Bosnia (Majevisa, Ozren, Romanija). Šekovići is also near the Drina River, the border with Serbia, in the frontier belt of the Independent State of Croatia, a region where the invader could not keep complete control over the border, which made it possible to stay in contact with the liberation movement in Serbia and eastern Bosnia. From the military geographical point of view Birač and Šekovići are very important, for they are near the enemy's weak points: important communication lines between Serbia and Bosnia — the road leading through Sarajevo, Vlasenica, Zvornik, Beograd, and it was also an important economic centre — the industrial centre of Tuzla and the mines nearby. And finally Šekovići and Birač were surrounded by high mountains, such as Konjuh, Javor, Milan and others. The fact that the units, in case of need, could count on refuge in the high mountains was one more reason for the choice of Birač as Headquarters for the Regional Staff.

THE BEGINNING OF THE UPRISING AND COURSE OF BATTLE

From the coming of the Regional Staff to Šekovići until the beginning of the Uprising (August 5), the time was spent in making the last preparations and testing the preparedness of the squads for combat. First the squads located on the territory of the Birač district staff were tested. A plan of attack on the gendarmes' barracks nearby was drawn up for August 5. That date however had not been fixed for the beginning of the rising. The situation in Šekovići made it necessary to move up the date for the beginning of actual combat. On August 3 the ustashi began to arrest prominent people of this region. They had been arresting such people in other villages of Birač but now they had begun in Šekovići. They arrested fifteen peasants and took them to the Šekovići prison. It was expected that the ustashi would take their prisoners to Vlasenica, on Monday, August 4. The squads from the nearest villages (Šekovići, Brajinci and Strmica) were ordered to gather on Sunday evening near a

¹⁾ Before that existed a larger military leadership composed of among others: Fadil Jahić-Španac, Todor Vujasinović, Josip Jovanović (from Doboj), etc....

small stream about five kilometres from the Šekovići barracks, beside the road leading from Šekovići to Vlasenica, and to set an ambush there. The peasants were to be freed at any cost. The squads spent the whole night (August 3—4) in ambush and the next day, but the ustashi did not take the prisoners to Vlasenica.

In the evening of August 4, at the same stream, it was decided that the squads would attack and take the Šekovići barracks and free the arrested peasants, and then continue operations, attacking all the gendarmes' stations in the neighbouring villages (Paprača, Stupari, Milići). Then the squads would attack the ustashi forces and liberate the district centre, Vlasenica.

After this decision, a detailed plan of action was drawn up. All the members of the Regional Staff and the Birač District Staff were present at this meeting. There were 6 ustashi and 3 gendarmes assigned to the Šekovići barracks. Two of them were absent. That left only seven in the barracks. The insurrection forces numbered 12, armed with rifles, and 40, unarmed. There were several proposals as to how the barracks should be taken. Some suggested that the barracks should be taken and the ustashi disarmed by trickery: that a group of fighters disguised as peasants, with pistols in their pockets, attack the barracks by surprise and without firing a shot kill the ustashi. That was possible. But most of the men wanted it to be a real attack, so that the sound of gunfire would be heard in all the surrounding villages.

We finally adopted the following plan: to draw as near to the barracks as possible — one group (right) armed with 4 rifles was to attack from Sunarić's shop, and the left, with three rifles, from the town hall. For security's sake, three ambushes would be set. Two would be nearer to the scene of action (by the bridge over the Drina and by the bridge over the stream, Lovnica). The men lying in each ambush would have two rifles. One ambush was to be set a little farther towards Vlasenica, near the stream, Bjelašnica (2 kilometres from Šekovići), and the men there would have one rifle, to sound the alarm if danger approached from that direction. Those without arms were divided up evenly among the groups and ambushes. The attack was scheduled for three in the morning.

After having made their plans, the fighters set off in a column for Šekovići. A warden whose house was beside the road was disarmed on the way. His gun was given to those setting the farther ambush near the Bjelašnica stream. The bridge over the stream Bjelašnica was destroyed (the first time we destroyed a bridge) and the ambush was set, the others continuing on their way to Šekovići. Excitement mounted with every step.

The attack on the barracks began at the fixed hour. It began thus: a hand grenade was thrown on the barracks, as a sign to open fire. The men opened fire immediately afterwards. The sound of explosion and gunfire resounded down the Drinjača valley and the surrounding mountains.

Then the guns stopped firing as had been planned and there were a few seconds of silence. The sound of steps on the stairs in the barracks

could be heard. We called to them to surrender, but the barracks commander stubbornly refused to do so, and the ustashi opened fire from the barracks.

The battle went on almost five hours. We called to the ustashi several times to surrender. But the battle wore on without any hope that they were ever going to surrender.

It was evident that we would have to charge, but the barracks building was strong and the ground around it lacked cover. The battle dragged on and we were almost at the end of our ammunition. But before charging we would have to make the following preparations: someone would have to make a dash to the barracks door, pour gasoline on it, and set fire to it. The door was of wood and we supposed it would burn. At the same time another fighter would have to reach the cellar window and throw a hand grenade into the cellar where most of the ustashi had taken refuge. Then we were all to charge.

Three men volunteered for these tasks and we gave them detailed instructions.

They carried out orders as planned. We covered them by firing at window height. We saw the flames blaze up and heard the hand grenade explode in the cellar. But the flames started to die out. They lasted as long as there was gasoline and then extinguished. That meant that the door had not caught fire and would not burn.

We wondered how we were going to charge now. But there was no time to delay. It was already eight in the morning. We passed the word to everyone to get ready to charge. We planned to charge together and break down the door.

A few minutes later "Hurrah!" was heard from all sides. The door went down as if made of paper. We rushed into the barracks... But there were no prisoners!

A few minutes later one of the peasants who had been arrested appeared. He had joined the group of fighters. He told us how that morning when the battle began, they had managed to escape. The ustashi it seemed, had managed to escape too, a few minutes ago, just before the hand grenade was thrown. But they were soon rounded up. Of the seven who had been in the barracks that morning, only one who was on guard duty managed to escape at the very beginning of the attack.

Afterwards, a large public meeting was held. The people of the village came, surprised at the way this day had started, — with the gunfire of insurrection. Cvijetin Mijatović-Majo, political commissar of the Regional Staff, spoke at the meeting. He spoke for the first time in the name of the Party. He told them that our Party was leading this battle and he spoke of our aims. The people acclaimed his words with enthusiasm.

After the meeting the ustashi were tried. A People's Tribunal composed of peasants-fighters, was formed and it sentenced the ustashi and gendarmes. All were sentenced to death, except one gendarme for whom the people said was a good man.

In that battle two were killed and one suffered minor wounds. Those were the first losses of the insurrection. Eighteen rifles and several crates of ammunition were found in the barracks.



The next task was to organize this insufficiently organized army of insurgents.

The squads which had taken part in the attack were too few in number to take in so many new fighters. New squads were formed. Those who proved their valor and courage that morning were chosen as squad leaders.

We sent most of these forces towards Vlasenica. We sent another group of them to guard the roads leading from other directions (Paprača, Spreča, Stupari). At the same time messengers were sent from Šekovići in all directions calling on the people to rise in arms against the invader. But the news of the attack on the Šekovići barracks spread faster than the messengers could carry it and the people everywhere joined the Uprising.

August 5, the first day of the Uprising, was spent in lively movement and in grouping the new forces of the insurrection.

In the evening of August 5 the Regional and District Staffs held a meeting at which the situation was discussed and a detailed plan of further action was elaborated. The plan provided for the following:

1. The main force was to continue towards Vlasenica and to capture it. In the advance, all forces were to be firmly linked, especially the left wing towards the villages of Cikota and Milići. The Milići forces were to take the gendarmes' station in Milići (Jovovac). The group from Javor mountain ("Planina") was to be ordered to take Han Pijesak and, crossing Ploče to attack Vlasenica from the south. Contact was to be made with the partisans in Romanija.

2. The forces in the villages of Paprača and Spreča were to take the gendarmes' station in Paprača and continue their advance towards the Zvornik — Tuzla road. Patrols were to be sent to Majevica to try to contact the Majevica partisans.

3. The forces in the village of Stupari were to advance upon the communication lines Tuzla — Kladanj, to tear up the road and block traffic. A messenger was to be sent over Mt. Konjuh to contact the Ozren Partisans.

The battle for Vlasenica lasted from August 6—10 and evolved in the following manner:

On August 6 the main force of the Uprising which had set out from Šekovići advanced along the road and the slopes near the road for Vlasenica and reached a point five kilometres from the town.

On August 7, the insurgents from the village of Milići, after having taken the gendarmes' station and the village hall, sent their main force towards Vlasenica, joined up with the Šekovići group, and sent part of their forces to block any advance from the direction of Zvornik.

On August 8, the encirclement of Vlasenica from all directions, except that leading from Han Pijesak was completed.

On August 9, the "Planina" insurgents took Han Pijesak without firing a shot because the frightened Domobran group (a company) had fled to Olovo. The main force advanced upon Vlasenica and part of their forces blocked the way from Sarajevo. At the head of the "Planina" group was Aćim Babić, a well-to-do peasant from the vilage of Kusača.

who called himself "vojvoda" and the group he commanded, "chetniks". Some even wore the chetnik cockade. Svetozar Kosorić, sympathetic to our movement and the Party, also was in the "Planina" group and enjoyed considerable of influence.

During the night of August 9—10 liaison was established with all the different groups and a plan for attack on Vlasenica drawn up. The hour of attack was set for noon, the next day. Cvijetin Mijatović, who drew up the plan of attack, was to direct the operations.

At noon on August 10, the attack on Vlasenica began. Fierce battle raged all afternoon. Vlasenica was defended by the Fourth Battalion of Vojna Krajina (lacking one company) and the ustashi aided by armed civilians sympathetic to their cause. The total enemy forces numbered over 500 soldiers with two heavy machine guns and 6 light machine guns.

The insurrection forces were divided into three groups: the Šekovići, Milići and "Planina" groups. They numbered about 800, with 150 rifles and a machine gun.

At about seven in the evening the Šekovići group broke through into Vlasenica and took the District Administration Building and the northern part of the town. At about eight, parts of the Milići group entered the town and took the southern part (as far as the hospital). A half hour later the whole town was taken, except for two barracks which were in the sector the "Planina" group was to have attacked. This group however refrained from attacking and remained outside the town.

Part of the Šekovići group commanded by Cvijetin Mijatović-Majo formed a group of hand grenade throwers who, led by Drago Melezović, charged and took the barracks. At about nine o'clock the whole town was liberated. Parts of the defeated enemy forces retreated towards Zvornik.

An enemy Domobran company, sent from Tuzla as reinforcement arrived too late (at the end of the battle) and was beaten off by a group of partisans who had laid an ambush on the outskirts of the village²).

In the battle for Vlasenica the enemy losses amounted to 50 killed, 30 wounded and 150 taken prisoner. Five machine guns, 400 rifles, 30 crates of ammunition and other equipment were seized. The commander of the Domobran battalion was killed during the battle.

The insurgents' losses in the battle to liberate Vlasenica numbered 8 dead and 10 wounded.

Immediately after the liberation of Vlasenica, difficulties developed with the chetnik command in the town. Cvijetin Mijatović, political commissar of the Regional Staff (following Party directives to mobilise all patriots in the struggle against the invader), tried to come to some sort

²) The company was attacked and beaten in the morning of August 12. About 20 Domobrars were killed, 22 were taken prisoner (including 2 officers and 4 non-commissioned officers), and 2 heavy machine guns, 2 light machine guns and about 40 rifles, munition and other equipment were seized. Our losses were: one wounded. The men laying the ambush had only 17 rifles between them.

of an agreement with Aćim, so as to maintain unity among the insurrection forces. He made several such attempts with the aim of settling at least the most urgent problems, for example the question of authority in the liberated territory, the distribution of the seized arms and munition and other problems affecting further action. The "vojvoda" however, answered that he was for "work and common understanding" and promised to order his men to conduct themselves in this way, and in fact he gave orders — to the contrary³).

After the liberation of Vlasenica, a sizeable liberated territory was formed and forces were re-grouped, i. e. the forces were sent from Vlasenica towards Kladanj and Zvornik. The main insurrection forces were kept near villages of Stupari and Spreča. Positions were taken and there. Smaller forces (which received reinforcements when attacked) were kept near villages of Stupari and Spreča. Positions were taken and given the names of "Kladanj front", "Zvornik front", and the fronts were also divided, into sectors (Kladanj, Stupari, Spreča, Zvornik).

The most urgent task was to strengthen the organization of the insurrection forces. With this in view the Birač Partisan Detachment was organized. The Detachment was formed between August 15—20. The internal structure of the detachment changed several times (later in 1941). At the outset the Detachment was made up of several smaller detachments about the strength of a company. Later they were called companies and then formed into battalions. The final structure of the detachment was as follows: the Detachment Staff, 3 battalions (Šekovići, Spreča and Stupari) and two independent companies (Cikota and the shock company). The strength of the detachment was constantly changing, growing with the influx of new fighters and diminishing with losses in action and occasionally because some of our fighters went over to the chetniks. The detachment numbered between 500 and 700 fighters.

After the liberation of Vlasenica operations were concentrated on the "Kladanj front". Four attacks were made on Kladanj.

The first attack was made on August 24. The partisan forces numbered 259 fighters with 180 rifles and 2 machine guns. Part of Aćim Babić's chetniks were to join in this operation but they pulled out at the last moment.

In Kladanj the enemy forces consisted of ustashi commanded by Avdaga Hasić, a Kladanj merchant, and a few gendarmes — a total strength of about 300 armed with rifles, 2 heavy machine guns and 3—4 lighter machine guns.

The attack was to be carried out in three columns.

On the morning of August 24 the attack began on all sides except that of the chetniks. At first the enemy, taken by surprise, retreated to the outskirts of the town. At about noon the middle column took the barracks and forced its way to the centre of the town. The right column took the northwestern and the left column, the northeastern part of the

³) The regional leadership of the Party felt that this conflict should not be aggravated further, so that breaking up of the insurrection forces would be avoided, at least as far as the main objective was concerned, that is, the common struggle against the invader.

town. Only the eastern and southern parts were not attacked. This was where the chetniks were to have attacked. The enemy took advantage of this and grouped its forces to face the north, i. e. the direction from which the partisans were attacking. At about two in the afternoon the partisans were completely driven out of Kladanj. The insurgents' losses were: 4 killed and 3 wounded and the enemy losses were 7 killed and an unknown number wounded.

After this unsuccessful attack on Kladanj, the insurrection forces withdrew to their earlier positions in the villages of Trnovo and Pepici where they prepared further attacks: the second on August 29—30, the third on September 5 and the fourth on September 14. These attacks also ended in failure as did the first. The main reason for this was again the chetnik betrayal. Besides, in the second, third and fourth attacks the ustashi defense was far stronger, because they had been encouraged by their first successful defense, and after each attack they received reinforcements from Tuzla. Another reason for these failures was the fact that all the attacks were carried out in almost the same way, with no change of plan whatsoever.

Afterwards, in the second half of September, the main operations were directed towards the "Zvornik front". Although the chetniks leaders had no intention of fighting the invaders, they were forced to comply with the wishes of the peasants who had joined their ranks and who wanted to fight the occupying forces and the ustashi. Thus there was apparent cooperation with the partisan leaders. The chetnik leaders were obliged to lend at least part of their forces to the attacks on the "Zvornik front".

The attack on Zvornik and the enemy strongholds along the road leading from Zvornik to Tuzla was made on September 22. Several strongholds were taken — Capardi, Bulatovci, Memići, Jelovo Brdo — but not Zvornik. The reasons for this failure were in general the same as in the Kladanj attack (chetnik treachery).

On the other hand the partisans carried out a number of operations with success single-handed, without the chetniks.

In August the following enemy strongholds were taken: Nova Kasaba, Drinjača, Paprača and Stupari. The enemy losses were considerable, especially in the attack on Stupari, where enemy losses totalled 20 killed, a large number of wounded and 14 captured. On that occasion we seized 1 machine gun, 40 rifles and 10 crates of ammunition, uniforms and other equipment. Our losses at Stupari were: 4 killed and 3 wounded.

In the first half of September, a Domobran company was routed near the village of Matijevići ("Stupari sector") and the Domobran losses were: 12 killed, a large number of wounded and 4 captured while we added 15 rifles, 2 crates of ammunition and other equipment to our supplies. Insurrection losses: 1 killed and 1 wounded.

On October 6—12 the partisans successfully resisted ustashi-domobran and German forces which tried to force the partisans to withdraw from the Tuzla—Zvornik road. The enemy attacked on October 6, and at first achieved partial success in its advance. On October 7 the partisans closed their ranks (the Spreča, Brajinci and Cikota companies)

and at about three in the afternoon counter-attacked. In a vigorous onslaught the partisans routed the enemy and drove them towards the road. A fierce battle was waged near the villages of Capardi and Snagovo. The enemy was beaten and retreated to Zvornik. On October the enemy left Zvornik and advanced again in the direction of Capardi. This time an enemy column from Tuzla lent them a hand. By nightfall enemy forces about the size of a regiment had gathered near Capardi—Snagovo. On October 10 the enemy forces began their attack supported by heavy artillery fire. Part of their forces attacked the chetnik positions near Velja Glava, but the enemy's main force concentrated its attack on the partisans, on Mt. Rudnik. Fierce battle raged the whole day. The enemy forces were supported from the air by several aircraft. By nightfall the enemy had succeeded in taking our positions on Mt. Rudnik (near the cemetery), but a part remained in our hands. The right wing had taken the village of Osmaci and the left wing part of the chetnik positions on Velja Glava.

During the night of October 10—11 the partisans were reinforced by the Šekovići company, which had been sent from the "Kladanj front", and at dawn on October 11 the partisans counter-attacked. The main thrust was made on the enemy positions on Mt. Rudnik.

The battle began as soon as the partisans started to change their positions. The enemy had expected a counterattack and answered with heavy fire. The fighting was especially heavy for the Šekovići and Brajinci companies. The partisans advanced resolutely, step by step. By two in the afternoon most of the positions on Mt. Rudnik had been re-captured from the enemy. Bloody battle continued all the afternoon. The enemy received strong air and artillery support. But by nightfall its resistance had been broken and the enemy troops had retreated to the road. The enemy forces had also been forced to withdraw from the village of Osmaci and from part of the chetnik positions on Velja Glava.

The Rudnik battle was one of the most successful of the Birač Partisan Detachment. Enemy losses were 70 killed and a large number of wounded, and the enemy troops left behind 1 anti-tank gun, 2 machine-guns, and about 70 rifles, 8 crates of ammunition and a considerable amount of equipment. Partisan losses: 2 killed and 7 wounded.

On October 12, the enemy decided against further attack and began to strengthen its positions along the Tuzla — Zvornik road. They also installed themselves in the Spreča — Zvornik direction. For a time there was no serious action.

At the end of October, action was renewed in the "Stupari sector". A partisan company, with the Ozren Detachment political commissar, Pašaga Mandžić, came from Ozren. The company was to join in an attack on Kladanj, but when further attack was decided against, joint operations for the Birač Detachment and Ozren company were prepared. On October 30 the joint partisan forces attacked the enemy near the villages of Matiljevići and Stupari. The enemy battalion defending positions there was completely routed, suffering losses of 30 killed and more wounded. We seized 2 heavy machine guns, 30 rifles, 5 crates of munitions and a sizable amount of equipment. Partisan losses: 1 killed and 3 wounded.

This was the last heavy battle of the Birač Detachment in 1941. In November and December owing to the passiveness of the chetnik forces the Birač Detachment had to limit its activities to defending its territory and making minor attacks on the Tuzla — Zvornik and Tuzla — Kladanj communications, attacking from ambush and cutting the telegraph and telephone lines.

THE CREATION OF THE PEOPLE'S GOVERNEMENT AND PARTY ORGANIZATIONS

After the attack on the Šekovići barracks, a command was set up in the village of Šekovići. At first it saw to supplying the army, keeping order, making arrangements for prisoners, etc. Its duties increased with every day. There was no other form of authority.

In the very first months of the Uprising People's Liberation Committees were set up which later grew in importance. The Committees were of great value in the further development of the People's Liberation Movement, for wherever there existed the nucleus of a people's government, the partisans found support and assistance.

As the Uprising spread, Party organizations were formed. The best fighters were taken into the Party.

Early in October the first Party cells were set up on the liberated territory. A local Committee was also set up then in the village of Šekovići. A Party centre was organized in the elementary school and a reading room opened. The Party printing and communications was set up there. Radio news was received regularly. The partisans leaving their positions for a time and passing through the village would stop at the Party centre. Occasionally in the evening entertainment was offered which several hundred partisans and local citizens attended.

In November and December the first Party organizations for the youth were set up.

The Party organizations in the detachment and on the liberated territory were constantly active, fighting the subversive propaganda of the chetniks, their treachery and scheming. They explained the reasons for struggle and showed the prospects which lay ahead if the battle was fought to a victorious end.

CONTACTS WITH NEARBY PARTISAN DETACHMENTS AND STAFFS

Contacts were strongest with the Romanija Detachment. The first messengers left for Romanija immediately after the attack on the Šekovići barracks. They carried the news of the Uprising in Šekovići. A few days later the Uprising began in Romanija. The Romanija Detachment grew rapidly in number, reaching a total of 2,000 fighters. Messengers travelled regularly between the Romanija and Birač detachments.

There were also contacts with the Ozren Detachment, not so strong, however, because of the distance and other obstacles. The first messengers left for Mt. Ozren on August 15 together with Pašaga Mandžić, who had orders to speed up the Uprising in Ozren. The messengers returned at the end of August with the news that the Uprising had broken out there (on August 23) and the Ozren Detachment numbered over 1,000 fighters. About September 10 Pašaga Mandžić, accompanied by an Ozren squad (including several miners from Husin) came to Šekovići and gave

us a detailed account of the Uprising on Mt. Ozren. He told us of the daily operations on the Doboј — Sarajevo and the Tuzla — Sarajevo railway lines. The Ozren squad spent ten days or so in Šekovići and took part in several operations together with units of the Ozren Detachment. Later messengers were sent from time to time, and near the village of Stupari a joint attack was made by the Birač Detachment and an Ozren company (as mentioned above).

Contact was maintained regularly with the Majevisa Partisan Detachment although the messengers had great difficulty in getting through to Majevisa, it being necessary to pass through several ustashi-held villages along the Tuzla — Zvornik road. The Uprising in Majevisa also began a few days after the attack in Šekovići and the insurrection forces multiplied rapidly. But there as in Birač and the surroundings, Draža Mihajlović's officers who had crossed over the Drina from Serbia, spread their subversive propaganda and managed to persuade some of the people who were less informed politically to join the chetniks. The Majevisa Partisan Detachment numbered 350 fighters at the beginning. On September 20 or thereabouts Ivan Marković-Irac headed for Majevisa and took command of the detachment and from then on, under the leadership of this battle-hardened revolutionary, the detachment gained in strength and carried out a number of operations. By the end of the year the detachment numbered 500 partisans.

Contact was also maintained with the partisans in Serbia. At the beginning of September three messengers came from Krupanj from the Podrinje Partisan Detachment and brought a machine gun as a gift to their Bosnian comrades. Later other messengers came, and messengers were also sent by the Birač Detachment to Serbia. At the end of September Cvijetin Mijatović went to Užice to the Supreme Command and the Užice Partisan Detachment Staff located on free territory. He received a large number of rifles from the arms factory in Užice for the fighters who were still without arms. Later on several occasions arms and ammunition were sent from Užice, part of which was sent on to Majevisa.

Early in October the General Staff for Bosnia and Herzegovina (Svetozar Vukmanović-Tempo, Rodoljub Čolaković and Slobodan Princip-Seljo) set up Headquarters in Šekovići.

The Birač Detachment was thus in touch with the partisan detachments nearby, and with the insurrection forces in Serbia, and regularly received aid from the General Staff, which was quite near. The nearness of the General Staff helped the detachment in fight against the chetnik treachery, their scheming, their false propaganda, the effect of which was felt the most in this part of eastern Bosnia.

THE SITUATION AT THE END OF 1941.

By the end of 1941, a sizable amount of territory had been liberated by seven partisan detachments: Romaniја, Ozren, "Zvijezda", Birač, Majevisa, Kalinovnik and Zenica. The total strength of all these detachments numbered 6,000 fighters. In addition to the partisan forces in eastern Bosnia, there was a good number of chetniks, about 4,000.

With forces of this size it would have been possible to carry out successfully large operations, that is, if it had not been for the chetnik treachery.

The most compact part of the liberated territory lay between Višegrad, Zvornik, Tuzla, Kladanj and Sarajevo. On that territory there was not a single enemy stronghold. But within that territory the situation was very insecure owing to the arbitrary, disorderly conduct of the chetniks who plundered, burned and murdered people in the Moslem villages. Chetnik propaganda was being spread everywhere with the aim of destroying the People's Liberation Movement. November and December were spent in uncompromising and intensive political activity against the subversive propaganda of the chetnik leaders and in a struggle against their direct collaboration with the occupiers, which the chetnik leaders masked with the slogan of "the defense of Serbianism" and the like. By the end of the year, however, the chetnik officers had begun to attack openly the partisan forces and the leaders of the People's Liberation Movement. Because of all this a certain amount of indecision was to be felt in the partisan detachments of eastern Bosnia and some of the fighters who were not well informed politically left the partisan detachments. The effect of the chetnik propaganda made itself felt in the Birač detachment and a group of the fighters left the detachment to join the chetniks, while most remained faithful to the partisans.

This was the situation when Comrade Tito with the First Proletarian Brigade came to Romanija. This marked the turning point in the liberation movement in eastern Bosnia. The Supreme Command took steps to combat the chetnik propaganda. Units of the First Proletarian Brigade took up abandoned positions, introducing severe measures to put a stop to the plundering and murdering of the Moslem population, which the chetniks had been carrying on. Order was made in the rear lines, and on the front lines security was felt, for a fighting spirit again prevailed among the partisan ranks. Operations against the enemy were begun again. Eastern Bosnia became a new base for the armed Uprising in Yugoslavia.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

The results by the Birač Detachment — from the beginning of the Uprising to the end of 1941 — were the following:

Enemy losses were about 330 killed, 215 captured, about 400 wounded — a total of over 900 soldiers, officers and non-commissioned officers out of action. 750 rifles, 11 machine guns, 7 heavy machine guns, and 1 ant-tank gun and about 70 crates of ammunition (nearly 10,000 shells) were seized.

Insurrection losses were: 33 dead and 49 wounded.

At the end of 1941 the Detachment had 2 battalions with three companies each and 2 independent companies. Its numerical strength which had decreased somewhat owing to a certain amount of desertion and

going over to the chetniks, amounted to about 500 fighters with 3 heavy machine guns, 5 machine guns and 450 rifles.

One of the most important achievements of the first year of the Uprising was the fact that strong, battle-hardened fighters had been made out of the local inhabitants of Birač. Peasants turned into young commanders and political commissars.

The commanders learned to lead hundreds of fighters in action. Although they were not always adept in more complicated situation of warfare, they knew how to set an ambush, to prepare and lead their men in a charge.

The political commissars were barely literate men. They had command of few words, but they suited their actions to their words. They fought valiantly against the chetnik treachery and tirelessly watched over every fighter to keep him from falling prey to chetnik propaganda or taking the road to treachery.

In this way sound foundations were laid in the detachment and in Birač for further battle. The inner unity and strength of the detachment helped it get through the crisis which all the partisan detachments of eastern Bosnia experienced and which some did not come through, in the spring of 1942.⁴) In fact the Birač detachment was the only partisan detachment in all of eastern Bosnia to come out of this crisis intact. In later years of the People's Liberation War, the Birač detachment was to stay compact and become a source of fighting resources for other units, for example the Sixth Proletarian Brigade of Eastern Bosnia, and it was to become itself the Nineteenth Birač Brigade. Its base, Šekovići, was to remain unconquerable and many partisan brigades in passing were to rest there in safety and prepare for further combat.

⁴) In February the chetniks treacherously attacked the Majevisa Staff and killed all the members of the Staff, which was followed by a crisis in the partisan ranks of Mt. Majevisa, but the detachment resisted, mainly having to give up, temporarily, some of its territory. This proved political consciousness and firmness of the Majevisa detachment, and was the reason why it was chosen to form the 44nd battalion of the Vith Proletarian Brigade of Eastern Bosnia.