

d'autant plus que la liaison entre les divers unités (de dix) étaient impossible à réaliser. La bataille une fois engagée, ne pouvait se terminer que par la reddition de l'ennemi, ou lorsque les partisans auraient usé jusqu'à leur dernière balle. C'est pourquoi, Španac, donna l'ordre à chaque combattant de son unité d'arrêter le feu, et demanda à l'ennemi de se rendre. Il n'obtint pour toute, réponse que des jurons, et un feu encore plus intense.

Španac se rendit compte que malgré tout, l'ennemi était indécis. Il tira cette conclusion des commandements lancés à voix de plus en plus haute et nerveuse, du lancement de plus en plus fréquent de fusées et des voix énervées et visiblement effrayées qui se faisaient entendre durant les intervalles de silence, preuve d'un état certain de démoralisation chez l'ennemi.

Španac donna de nouveau l'ordre d'ouvrir le feu. Mais il se heurta dès ce moment-là à un facteur essentiel — qui fut souvent cause, et plus tard, de l'échec ou demi-échec des actions menées par les partisans — le manque de munitions! L'échange de feu accéléré avait rapidement épuisé les réserves des partisans, et au lieu de crépitements assourdissants, l'on n'entendait plus, venant du camp des partisans, que des coups de feu espacés et isolés, dont on ne pouvait plus rien attendre.

Pourtant, Španac n'était toujours pas décidé à abandonner. Il avait même décidé de passer à l'assaut et au combat corps à corps, ce qui aurait pu amener un dénouement rapide, lorsqu'il y eut un changement de situation. De l'aide arrivait à l'ennemi, venant de deux directions, Bijeljina et Brčko. Les phares des automobiles rayonnaient de loin.

L'ennemi, accéléra son tir, tout en envoyant sans cesse des fusées dans le ciel.

Venant des automobiles, le son de mitraillettes commençait à se faire entendre, perçant les ténèbres de balles innombrables.

Le combat cessa, les partisans s'étant retirés.

Le groupe de partisans se retrouva à l'aube à l'endroit même d'où il était parti, dans la forêt, près de Gradac.

Španac se mit à expliquer ce qui s'était passé, à encourager ses hommes, leur expliquant qu'en temps de guerre l'on doit s'attendre à se trouver dans des situations semblables, quelquefois pires. Mais il vit que cela n'était pas nécessaire, et que les partisans ne s'étaient pas laissés décourager, ce qu'ils ressentaient n'était pas de la peur, mais de la colère, et que loin d'être démoralisés ils ne pensaient qu'à se venger. Tous avaient compris que, d'une façon ou de l'autre, l'ennemi avait été averti que l'attaque aurait lieu, et s'était préparé, et chacun proposait un moyen pour démasquer l'espion, et le rendre à jamais impuissant.

Les partisans étaient passablement agités, mais non découragés. Tous étaient groupés autour des trois blessés, qui saignaient abondamment, et dont deux étaient grièvement atteints, s'efforçant d'aider dans sa tâche Nikola Spasojević, qui en tant qu'étudiant en médecine, était devenu le docteur du groupe. Ils disaient tous que les blessés s'en tiraient, qu'au fond tout cela n'avait pas été si terrible, que s'ils avaient eu au moins une mitrailleuse ils auraient pu partir à l'attaque des automobiles, ect...

Le groupe avait en fait supporté le choc, résisté au feu sans se désagréger et, ce qui était l'essentiel, tous étaient là. C'était là aussi la pensée de Španac, et c'était la pure vérité. Délivré du souci d'avoir à encourager ses hommes, lorsque le jour se leva, Španac avait pris une décision: diriger le groupe sud dans la direction de Brodac, renforçant ainsi le groupe nord-est et le rendant capable d'entreprendre des actions plus importantes. Le groupe nord-est, ainsi augmenté, devrait se rapprocher le plus possible de la Drina, rester, à tout prix, dans les environs, et établir et conserver une liaison avec les partisans de Mačva. Le groupe nord-ouest resterait sur son terrain actuel, c'est-à-dire près du village de Crnjelovac, et près de la rivière Sava.

Le lendemain, on découvrit qui avait trahi. Quelques paysans de Gradac assuraient qu'il s'agissait d'un dénommé Anto, "Madžar" (le Hongrois) et qui était vraiment hongrois de naissance, mais qui vivait depuis des années à Gradac, où il exerçait le métier de forgeron. Dès les premiers jours du règne oustachi, Anto s'était prononcé grand admirateur et patriote du nouveau gouvernement, et avait déjà à plusieurs reprises, informé les organes du pouvoir en ville, de choses qu'ils n'arrivaient pas à savoir et qu'ils étaient désireux d'apprendre.

Španac nomma une patrouille de deux combattants, et leur donna l'ordre d'aller chercher Anto le Hongrois. Il leur conseilla d'être prudents, Anto ayant déjà pu essayer de s'enfuir. Španac avait nommé pour cette tâche deux hommes d'un certain âge, estimant qu'ils sauraient la mener à bien. Mais les deux partisans exécutèrent les ordres de Španac à leur manière. Ayant surpris Anton chez lui, ils l'emmenèrent en route et le jetèrent dans un torrent.

"Pourquoi te l'amener, que diable", dirent-ils en réponse aux reproches de Španac, "quand tout le monde sait très bien que c'est un espion oustachi!" Ils se turent un peu lorsqu'il leur fut expliqué que justement pour cette raison ils auraient dû l'amener que de telles actions individuelles ne sauraient être permises mais restèrent, malgré tout, persuadés d'avoir bien agi et mécontents qu'on ne veuille pas le reconnaître.

## V

L'attaque des partisans de Bijeljina sur la gendarmerie de Draga-ljevac constitua la première véritable action armée dans la région. Quoique le résultat obtenu ne fût pas tel qu'on l'eût souhaité, la gendarmerie n'ayant pas été prise, et malgré les pertes — trois blessés dont l'un mourut quelques jours après la bataille<sup>3)</sup> — alors que l'ennemi n'en avait subi aucune, cette action eut une certaine importance politique et une influence essentielle sur le futur développement du mouvement de libération dans la région de Sembenija. Avant tout, elle servit de baptême du feu à ce petit groupe de partisans, isolé et éloigné des centres plus importants du mouvement de libération en Bosnie — Romanija, Šekovići et même Majeвица — et séparé de la province libérée de la

<sup>3)</sup> Stevan Lucić, jeune de Trnova.

Serbie du Sud par la rivière Drina, obstacle naturel important servant de frontière entre la Serbie et "l'Etat Croate Indépendant" et constamment contrôlée et gardée par les soldats allemands et ceux de "l'Etat Croate Indépendant". Les partisans de Bijeljina, installés sur un terrain pas particulièrement favorable au développement de la guerre de maquis, — sur un plateau, sans grandes régions forestières, avec un réseau de communications sensiblement développé et permettant à l'ennemi à tout moment de procéder à un transport de troupes — étaient persuadés que même dans ces conditions il devrait leur être possible de mener à bien quelques actions militaires, d'obliger l'ennemi à la lutte, de le troubler et l'embarasser.

Par ailleurs, l'action menée à Dragaljevac avait eu un bon retentissement parmi le peuple. Au cours de cette fameuse nuit, entendant les coups, de fusil, les rafales de mitraillettes tirées par les oustachis apeurés les paysans se mirent à penser: puisqu'ils tirent tellement, puisqu'ils sont obligés de chercher du renfort c'est qu'il s'agit de quelque chose de sérieux, c'est que cela a commencé.

Les gens commençaient à se rendre compte qu'il y allait de leur peau, du futur de l'ensemble du pays et du peuple, et ils se mirent à mieux respirer, sentant que la fusillade de Dragaljevac avait anéantie leur peur, leurs hésitations.

Finalement, le moral des représentants du gouvernement oustachis à Bijeljina fut grandement atteint par cette action. Elle accrut le sentiment de panique et d'incertitude régnant déjà parmi eux et avec lequel ils considéraient le développement de la situation dans cette région qu'ils avaient espéré conserver du moins un certain temps, jouissant de ses richesses. Se trouvant dans une région essentiellement serbe, dans un milieu qui leur était hostile, ne possédant pas l'appui de la masse et dans l'impossibilité de s'attacher les musulmans de la ville et des villages avoisinants, conscients qu'à cet égard, à part un cercle restreint de beys, ils avaient rencontré un échec total, se trouvant à la limite de la Serbie libérée d'où résonnaient le son des armes, sans appui militaire suffisant de la part de leurs maîtres allemands, les chefs oustachis tout-puissants étaient presque fous de terreur. Déjà avant l'attaque sur la gendarmerie ils écrivaient des rapports pleins de panique à leurs supérieurs, dramatisant la situation de façon extraordinaire, demandant de l'aide, de l'aide, de l'aide... prévoyant la débâcle au cas où les autorités compétentes ne prendraient pas leur demande au sérieux et ne leur enverrait pas l'aide demandée" ... Les communications autour de Bijeljina ont été coupées", lit-on dans le rapport journalier du Ministère de la Défense Croate, du 14 Août 1941. "... Le chef d'arrondissement demande du renfort à Vinkovci", est-il souligné dans le même rapport." ... la situation à Bijeljina reste inchangée, c'est-à-dire sérieuse. Les communications avec les environs ont été coupées, les attaques-surprise sur les postes de gendarmerie, les patrouilles et les agents du fisc, se font de plus en plus nombreuses. Un régiment est arrivé à Bijeljina pour renfort, venant de Vinkovci..." -est-il dit dans le rapport du 15 Août 1941 "... Les insurgés continuent à couper les lignes téléphoniques et à attaquer les patrouilles de gendarmes dans la région de Bijeljina..." —

rapport du 16 Août 1941. Le rapport du 23 Août déclare: "... vers 17 heures Bijeljina ainsi que tous les villages situés près de la frontière, de Rača à Drinjača, ont été attaqués. Bijeljina demande de l'aide d'urgence (3 bataillons — un pour Brčko, Bijeljina et Zvornik), Bijeljina est menacée du côté de Majevisa et des montagnes, où les villages des environs de Lopar se sont soulevés."

Si l'on tient compte du fait que ces rapports furent écrits à une époque où seules quelques rares actions, de peu d'importance, avaient été menées, et dont le but était surtout de troubler (attaque sur une patrouille d'agents fiscaux dont un fut tué — attaque sur une patrouille d'oustachis sur la route Bijeljina — Janja, démolition des poteaux et section des fils télégraphiques, quelques coups de revolver tirés par un de nos camarades du parti alors qu'il était tombé dans une embuscade — attaque-surprise sur la gendarmerie de Crnjelovo, et finalement attaque de Tavan qui réussit si mal aux insurgés (on peut se rendre compte à quel point les représentants du pouvoir à Bijeljina furent épouvantés après l'action menée contre la gendarmerie de Dragaljevac.

Cette terreur des oustachis, amena la première contre-offensive dans la région de Bijeljina: un bataillon entier procéda à une action de "nettoyage" couvrant l'espace allant de Brčko à Bijeljina, et comprenant les villages de Bukovica — Dragaljevac — Crnjelovo. Cette action de nettoyage ne donna aucun résultat, comme on peut le voir d'après le rapport journalier, en date du 31 Août 1941, qui dit: "... Une action de nettoyage a été menée à l'aide d'un bataillon, au nord de Bijeljina, dans les villages de Dragaljevac — Crnjelovo — Bukovica.

Après l'attaque de Dragaljevac, et l'opération de "nettoyage", les forces partisans, toujours peu nombreuses, se regroupèrent de nouveau. Les groupes sud et nord-est se réunirent en un seul. Ainsi renforcé et réorganisé, muni d'un nouveau commandant (Mirko Filipović, avocat de Bijeljina) ce groupe manoeuvrait sur le territoire situé entre la Save et la Drina, servait d'organe de liaison avec la Serbie, s'enjoignit un groupe de combattants qui opéraient jusqu'alors à Mačva<sup>4</sup>) et menaient des actions minimales contre les forces ennemies. Au début septembre, le groupe fut contraint, ayant été attaqué par les forces ennemies plus nombreuses, de rejoindre la Serbie, où il agit de concert avec les forces partisans de cette région, participant activement à diverses sévères batailles au cours des premières offensives de l'ennemi contre le territoire libéré de la Serbie orientale. Au mois d'Octobre, au cours de combats au-dessus de Vidojevica, où les Allemands menèrent l'attaque sur terre et par les airs, le groupe souffrit de lourdes pertes, dues au bombardement aérien. Au mois de Novembre, renforcé et ragailardi, le groupe passa de nouveau la Drina et rejoignit le premier détachement de libération du peuple de Majevisa.

Le groupe nord-ouest changea également le champ de ses actions, se dirigeant surtout vers le sud et le sud-ouest, se mit en contact avec

<sup>4</sup>) Borislav Borika Stančić, étudiant de Bijeljina — Brano Gavrić, étudiant de Bijeljina — Srbo Sekulić-Čaruga, étudiant de Bijeljina — Đoko Marinović, Dragiša Maksimović et Brano Jakšić, également étudiants de Bijeljina — Ilijaš Kabiljo, agronome de Bijeljina, Nenad Petrovi, avocat de Bijeljina Veljko Simić, agronome et Buki Kabiljo, ouvrier de Bijeljina.

le groupe des partisans de Majevisa, et un peu plus tard s'étant joint à lui, fit partie du premier détachement de libération nationale, de Majevisa, qui dirigea le gros de ses activités contre les communications Tuzla — Brčko, et déjà en septembre 1941, avait sous contrôle toute la région de Majevisa et de Semberija.

Sur le territoire du canton de Bijeljina, où avaient agi les premiers groupes de partisans, resta l'organisation du parti, de plus en plus forte, et qui eut une influence politique décisive dans la région. En novembre, fut créé le Comité régional du Parti communiste pour la région de Bijeljina ainsi qu'un Comité régional de l'Union de la Jeunesse communiste de Yougoslavie, qui à l'aide des organisations déjà instituées, et en en créant de nouvelles, conquièrent de plus en plus les masses, et les persuadèrent à joindre la lutte contre l'occupant et ses collaborateurs.

A cette époque, automne 1941, l'organisation du Parti dans la région de Bijeljina dut s'attaquer à une nouvelle tâche: la lutte contre les tchetniks qui par l'intermédiaire des officiers de la "Armée au sein de la patrie" passaient à l'exécution de leurs plans de trahison.

#### PARTISANS MEMBRES DES PREMIERS GROUPES FORMES DANS LA REGION DE BIJELJINA, QUI TROUVERENT LA MORT AU COURS DE LA GUERRE.

1) Fadil Jahić-Španac, membre de l'Etat Major pour la Bosnie Orientale, commissaire du premier bataillon de Majevisa de libération nationale, tué au cours de la tâche attaque menée par le capitaine tchetnik Stevan Damjanović-Leka, sur l'Etat-major du bataillon de Majevisa. Héros National.

2) Veljko Lukić-Kurjak, sergent, commandant de troupe — commandant de bataillon commandant de détachement commandant de la 17ème brigade de Majevisa, tué par les tchetniks au village de Kojcinovac en 1944. Héros National.

3) Nikola Spasojević, étudiant en médecine du village de Patkovac, un des organisateurs du soulèvement dans la région de Bijeljina, tué par les tchetniks fin février 1942.

4) Veso Gavrić, étudiant en droit de Bijeljina, un des organisateurs du mouvement communiste parmi la jeunesse estudiantine, tué par les tchetniks, sous l'ordre du capitaine Leka, en février 1942. Héros National.

5) Jovo Kokanović, jeune de Crnjelovo, tué en tant que commissaire de bataillon, au cours de la Sixième offensive ennemie en 1943.

6) Bogdan Kokanović, agriculteur de Crnjelova, premier commandant du groupe nord-ouest des partisans de la région de Bijeljina, tué par les tchetniks en 1942.

7) Drago Tojić, ouvrier de Crnjelovo, membre du comité régional, secrétaire du Comité régional du Parti de la région de Bijeljina, tué par les tchetniks en 1944.

8) Savo Jovanović, čiča Savo (Oncle Savo), agriculteur de Čenlić, secrétaire du comité cantonal du Parti, tué lors d'une rencontre avec une patrouille ennemie à Čengica ("Vražja" division) et août 1943.

9) Vukašin Pajkanović, étudiant de Bijeljina, l'un des organisateurs du soulèvement dans la région de Bijeljina, tué à Mačva en octobre 1941, au cours de la première offensive ennemie.

10) Stevan Joković, cultivateur de Glogovac, premier commandant du groupe sud, tué à Mačva en octobre 1941, au cours de la première offensive ennemie.

11) Sreten Glišić, agriculteur de Međaš, membre connu du parti parmi les paysans, tué à Mačva en octobre 1941, au cours de la première offensive ennemie.

12) Nikola Maksimović, agriculteur de Međaš, membre connu du parti parmi les paysans, mort à Mačva en octobre 1941, au cours de la première offensive ennemie.

13) Brano Gavrić, étudiant de Bijeljina, mort à Mačva en octobre 1941, au cours de la première offensive ennemie.

14) Branko Jakšić, étudiant de Bijeljina, tué à Mačva en octobre 1941, au cours de la première offensive ennemie.

15) Srbo-Sekulić-Čaruga, étudiant de Bijeljina, tué en septembre 1941 lors du passage en Serbie d'un groupe de partisans, par la Drina, et où la mitrailleuse lui avait été confiée.

16) Pero Simić, artisan de Bijeljina, mort à Mačva en octobre 1941, au cours de la première offensive ennemie.

17) Buki Kabiljo, ouvrier de Bijeljina, mort à Mačva en octobre 1941 lors de la première offensive ennemie.

18) Djoko Marinković, étudiant de Bijeljina, l'un des organisateurs du parti de la jeunesse communiste de Yougoslavie dans la région de Bijeljina, tué par les tchetniks en avril 1942.

19) Dušan Obrenović, cultivateur de Magnojevići, tué par les tchetniks et sous l'ordre du Capitaine Stevan Damjanović-Leka en novembre 1941, soi-disant par malentendu — première victime des traîtres tchetniks à Majeveca et Semberija.

20) Albert Levi, agronome de Bijeljina, commissaire de la troupe du bataillon des partisans de Majeveca, tué au cours d'une bataille avec les četniks en 1942.

21) Stevan Lucić, jeune de Trnova, mort des blessures reçues au cours de l'attaque contre la gendarmerie de Dragaljevac au début de septembre 1941.

22) Elijas Kabiljo, agronome de Bijeljina, tué au cours d'un combat avec les tchetniks en février 1942.

23) Ivan Manjić, cultivateur de Dragaljevca, tué par les tchetniks en 1942.

24) Milan Petrović-Amidža, jeune de Crnjelovo, tué en tant que commissaire de la VIème brigade de Bosnie orientale, fin 1942.

25) Gajo Andrić, agriculteur de Pučila, tué par les tchetniks au début du mois de novembre 1942.

26) Boško Andrić, tué au cours de l'été 1943.

27) Ivica Karnas, ouvrier de Bijeljina, tué par les tchetniks en 1942.

28) Djoko Kostić, agriculteur de Gradac, tué par les tchetniks en 1942.

29) Vaco Nikolić, agriculteur de Gradac, tué par les tchetniks en 1942.

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## BEGINNING OF THE ARMED STRUGGLE AGAINST THE GERMAN INVADER AND THE USTASHI IN THE BIJELJINA DISTRICT

In the night between August 28 and 29, 1941, the Bijeljina district partisan forces attacked the gendarmerie post at the village Dragaljevac which lies on the Bijeljina — Brčko road, some 16 kilometers far from Bijeljina.

The post was manned by about thirty gendarmes and ustashi armed with rifles and protected by the thick walls of their barracks, trenches, and barbed wire.

There were also some thirty partisans and they were armed with twenty-odd "Mauser" military rifles, several double-barrelled hunting guns and two handgrenades.

The fight began at two o'clock in the morning and lasted for about an hour. The gendarmes and ustashi offered a fierce resistance and when their reinforcement which had started from Bijeljina and Brčko approached the scene, the partisans withdrew.

### I.

The armed struggle of the partisan forces in Bijeljina district had been preceded by many years of organized Communist Party activities at Bijeljina. These activities had begun several years before the outbreak of World War II and had relied upon the rich freedom-loving and revolutionary traditions which had been founded earlier by Rodoljub Čolaković, Alija Alijagić, Dimitrije Lopandić, and others. Although this was a predominantly agricultural area with no modern industry and only with poorly developed craft industries, the workers' movement here had its early organizers who knew how to associate with people and how to influence them. The town of Bijeljina as a natural center of a relatively rich agricultural area represented an important stronghold of democratic political resistance against the reactionary regimes of prewar Yugoslavia. Among other factors, this was to a great extent due to the fact that a number of communists at Bijeljina itself and in the surrounding villages developed more or less organized activities towards the awakening of the revolutionary consciousness of the masses.

In 1933 the first trial against communists which ended with a series of 1—3 years prison sentences was held in Bijeljina. Since then,

i. e., since 1933 up to the outbreak of World War II and the fall of prewar Yugoslavia, the organized activities of the Communist Party in Bijeljina district had never ceased for a moment. They developed in several directions. First: among the workers employed in the craft industries with an objective of organizing militant trade union organizations. Second: among the secondary school and university students. Third: in the field of developing cooperation with those bourgeois political parties which were willing to cooperate with the communists. Fourth: among the village population with a view of winning communist sympathizers and eventually organizing Party cells in the villages.

These activities which had been carried out relentlessly and systematically for a number of years began to yield notable results in the period immediately preceding the outbreak of World War II and the Axis aggression against Yugoslavia. A vigorous political and cultural life imbued with revolutionary ideal prevailed in the town and caused quite serious trouble to the local political authorities who were not able either to prevent it or to suppress it. Lacking the support of the population as well as efficiency and ingenuity, the local political authorities were not able to organize any new court trials against communists, but they still used other methods in their attempts to prevent the growth of the revolutionary movement. Thus, numerous individual arrests were made, lists of suspected "fellow travelers" or communist agitators who were to be sent to concentration camps were compiled, the activities of certain organizations such as student associations, trade unions, the Filip Visnjic Library and Reading Room were banned, as well as a number of public recitals of the Youth Choir, etc. And, in 1937 the district Prefect decided to make mass arrests of students, workers, and village youth and thus "put an end to the destructive activities of the bolshevik agitators".

However, all these actions produced no results. The Local Bijeljina Party Committee which relied upon the students' and workers' Party cells, as well as upon the communists youth organizations and the revolutionary peasant masses, was always able to minimize the effect of the various measures taken by the regime's police. Moreover, the marked revolutionary character of the legal political opposition against the Stojadinović's regime in the prewar days, when the peasant masses were at any moment ready to come to Bijeljina and demonstrate in a way which often took the form of a struggle for political power, could be explained only with the incessant activities and strong influence of the Local Bijeljina Party Committee.

On several occasions the police had to resort to force in order to prevent various mass political actions and demonstrations. Such was the case when the authorities banned the march to commemorate the victims of the so-called "December Slaughter of Students" organized by the local Students Association, or when the mass demonstration against the Concordate was dispersed by force and one of the demonstrators killed. However, the use of force could not have brought the desired effect; the masses were already on the move, and their feelings could not have been changed by bullets.



Following is a brief outline of the political situation in Bijeljina district in the days when the war began to rage over Yugoslavia:

A Local Party Committee in permanent contact with the Provincial Committee in Tuzla directed the activities of two Party organizations — one among workers, and another among students — existed in Bijeljina. Party organizations had been already existing for some time in the villages Crnjelovo Gornje and Popovi, while communist groups or individual communists directly linked with the Bijeljina Local Party Committee had been active in the following villages: Brodac, Medjaši, Dvorovi, Balatun, Obarska, Petkovača, Pučile, Golo Brdo, Kovanluci, and Trnova. In addition, there had been quite a number of communist sympathizers, both in the town and in the villages, who were ready to carry out Party directives. Furthermore, militant feelings prevailed among the population and offered very favourable conditions for spreading of the Communist Party political influence. Some local leaders of certain bourgeois political parties as well as certain representatives of the Moslem reactionary forces made attempts, both in Bijeljina itself and in the villages, to oppose this influence, but their efforts for the most part produced no results.

Fadil Jahić-Španac, a carpenter, native of Bijeljina and an old Party member who had already fought against the fascists in the Spanish Civil War was in Bijeljina at the moment when Yugoslavia surrendered to the fascist invaders and when subsequently her territory was torn apart. As a member of the Partisan Regional Military Headquarters for eastern Bosnia he was given the assignment to carry out the directives of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia on the organizing of armed struggle against the invader and his collaborators in Bijeljina district.

First he studied thoroughly the political situation in the district and talked personally to all active Party members and sympathizers, and then he proceeded vigorously to carry out the assignment entrusted to him. In the new situation he requested the communists to maintain all their existing contacts and to create new contacts, particularly among the village population. Fadil Jahić-Španac further demanded that military units were immediately formed in the villages and that fire arms should be collected to equip them. These units were to be composed, inasmuch as possible, with young men who had gone through regular military training in prewar Yugoslavia and who therefore were not completely unfamiliar with the military skills. He also alerted every individual Party member and sympathizer, known as such to the police, against the imminent danger of mass arrests and demanded maximum vigilance to avoid them. Finally, Fadil Jahić-Španac made a plan for evacuation from Bijeljina of all Communist Party members and sympathizers in case of emergency. This plan also determined localities where they were supposed to evacuate and wait for further instructions and directives.

And exactly at the time when these organizational preparations to meet an emergency situation were completed, the actual emergency arose; it was the attack of Germany against USSR. At the same time it was a signal for the ustashi authorities to proceed to mass arrests of communists, and a signal for the communists that the hour of history had

struck. However, the ustashi mass arrests operation failed because the men according to the emergency plan had evacuated Bijeljina. The several more or less accidental arrests which the ustashi succeeded to make could not have possibly produced any serious harm.

However, the evacuation from the town which had been executed as a single breath operation did not mean that Bijeljina was left empty. In Bijeljina remained a number of Party members who were not known to the police, as well as an even greater number of people who were not Party members but who desired to become Party members and who were ready to carry out a Party directive.

As soon as the emergency evacuation operation was completed, Fadil Jahić-Španac, who had decided to stay temporarily in the outskirts of the village Obarska, started to establish contacts and communications, both, with the groups in various villages, and with the men who had remained in Bijeljina.

He issued an instruction to the Party organization in the village Crnjelovo to form immediately an armed partisan group. Similar instructions were issued to the communist group around the villages Brodac and Balatun, as well as to the group which had been stationed in the area between the villages Petkovača, Pučile, and Glogovac.

In this way, the following three partisan groups were formed in Bijeljina district already at the beginning of July 1941:

#### SOUTHERN GROUP

At the beginning this group was stationed in the villages Glogovac, Pučile, and Petkovača. The group included: Milenko Stojanović, from Bijeljina; Nikola Spasojević, student of medicine from the village Petkovača; Vojin Bobar, veterinary student from the village Batra; Veso Gavrić, student of law from Bijeljina; Andrija Blagojević, office employee from the village Kojčinovac; Gajo Andrić, farmer from the village Pučilo; Boško Andrić, also Pučilo; Drago Stevanović, young worker from the village Kojčinovac; Savo Jovanović, farmer from the village Čengić; Stevan Joković, farmer from the village Glogovac, and Stevan Lučić, young farmer from the village Trnova.

#### NORTHEASTERN GROUP

This group was stationed in the villages Brodac, Balatun, Veliko Selo, and Medjaši. The group included: Rado-Radika Ilić lawyer from the village Medjaši; Nikola Maksimović, farmer from the village Medjaši; Mirko Filipović, lawyer from Bijeljina; Vukašin Pajkanović, student of law from Bijeljina; Pero Simić, craftsman from Bijeljina; Žarko Kalabić, farmer from the village Brodac; Strajko Kalabić<sup>1)</sup>, also farmer from Brodac;

<sup>1)</sup> Strajko Kalabić later changed sides, deserted the partisans and went over to the chetniks. He formed an independent chetnik group under his command which was known as "Committas"; he was killed in inter-chetnik strife in 1942.

Vlado Trifković, farmer from the village Balatun, Djojo and Vujadin Trifković, also from Balatun; Teodor Sofrenić-Tendo, born in the village Brodac, non-commissioned officer of the prewar regular Yugoslav Army; Jovo Perić-Cicin, farmer from the village Balatun, and Savo Stefanović, farmer from the village Madjaši.

#### NORTHWESTERN GROUP

At the beginning this group was stationed in the village Gornje Crnjelovo. The group included: Fadil Jahić-Španac; Svetolik Gospić, student of law from Bijeljina; Slavko Mićanović, graduated student of philosophy from Bijeljina; Albert Levi, agronomist from Bijeljina; Bogdan Kokanović, farmer from the village Crnjelovo; Jovo Kokanović, young farmer from the village Crnjelovo; Drago Tojić, worker from Crnjelovo; Mladen Jeftić, farmer from Crnjelovo; Djordje Djojić, leather worker from the village Bukovice; Veljko Lukić-Kurjak, farmer from the village Bukovice; Ljubo Kikiš-Dikičević<sup>2</sup>), farmer from the village Gradac; Vačo Nikolić, also farmer from the village Gradac; Milan Petrović-Amidža, young farmer from the village Crnjelovo; Djoko Kostić, farmer from the village Vršane; Vojo Ivanović-Crnogorac, worker from the village Bukovice; Dušan Obrenović, farmer from the village Magnojević; Ivan Manjić, farmer from the village Dragaljevac, Jovan Kordić, farmer from the village Crnjelovo, and Boško Jović-Šumar, young man also from Crnjelovo.

The above territorial disposition of the first partisan groups in Bijeljina district was dictated both, by the location of the already existing centers of communist political influence within the district (existing Party cells or groups of active Party members), and by the location of the communications network which was to be threatened and attacked.

## II.

These groups, organized and deployed in the above described way, were armed very poorly only with the small number of fire arms which was possible to collect from the population in the very first days. They lived under open sky, in forest camps in their respective territories, while Party members and sympathizers supplied them with food. At the beginning their operations were limited only to political action. Moving from village to village at night, they assembled people to meetings where prominent Party members (Fadil Jahić-Španac, Svetolik Gospić, Slavko Mićanović, Drago Tojić, and Mladen Jeftić from the Northwestern Group; Rade Ilić, Vukašin Pajkanović, Vujadin Trifković, Sreten Glišić, Nikola Maksimović, Stevan Perić, and Mirko Filipović from the Northeastern Group, and Milenko Stojaković, Nikola Spasojević, Veso Gavrić, and Vujin Bobar from the Southern Group) called the people to Uprising, explained the political situation in the country and in the world, interpreted the historical significance of the struggle against fascism waged by all progressive forces in the world, exposed the real character of the

<sup>2</sup>) Ljubo Kikiš-Dikičević changed sides and in the autumn of 1941 deserted over to the chetniks; was killed as a chetnik in 1942.

Hitler's puppet regimes in the Balkans, and particularly in the territory of Yugoslavia, in Serbia and in the so-called Independent State of Croatia. Meetings of this type with groups of peasants as well as with outstanding individuals who had enjoyed the respect of the population for their personal and political integrity, were held in the greatest number of the Bijeljina district villages and they indeed contributed substantially towards developing and strengthening of the people's will to resist and fight. It should be noted here that the influence of certain elements who for any reason did not want to see an armed struggle, or who in any way stood or worked for a compromise with the rulers in the newly created puppet states, had to be neutralized and paralyzed at these meetings from the very beginning. The majority of the village headmen and a part of the rich peasants who feared the communists and who believed them to represent danger stood for such policy.

However, in addition to the convinced enemies of the people's struggle, there were people who purely for reasons of personal fear spread suspicion and defeatism. "How should we, barehanded fight against the state", they used to say, "when even the generals who had under them such an army were not able to do anything? A state is a state, whatever it might be", they maintained, "and we have to be loyal and obedient citizens, and, of course, the state can not act against its own citizens. Who needs an empty and destroyed country?" they asked, convinced that nobody could counter their argument. Such was their attitude and they continued peacefully to show up at the local authority headquarters, which employing various excuses summoned them and sent them in increasing numbers to concentration camps.

It was not always easy to argue against such attitudes, neither was the argument always successful. Generally speaking, it was a time of increasing fear. The German armed force had impressed profoundly a great number of people among a population which had been bitterly disappointed by the inexplicably speedy collapse of the royal Yugoslav Army which up to its defeat had always reminded them of the glorious victories at Kolubara, Crni Vrh, Cer, and Vidojevica.

However, the systematic and relentless efforts of the Party members were able to abate gradually the initial fear among the people. On the other hand, the convinced enemies, after some of them had been arrested and tried before people's tribunals for treason, withdrew from overt political action, and went, so to say, underground, continuing their treacherous activities secretly.

Another task which had to be tackled immediately by the three groups was collecting of hidden fire arms which, as it had been known, were hidden in considerable quantities by the population. Namely, when the royal army was defeated and when its soldiers threw their rifles, ammunition, and equipment, the people took it over, buried it underground, hid it under haystacks, etc., in the belief that time would come when it would be needed again. This time had actually come now but the majority of those who possessed concealed arms did not think so, and there was almost not a single case when they were willing to part with their arms without much trouble. Sometimes it was necessary

to apply even drastic measures to grab a well concealed rifle from a particularly stubborn peasant. And, in the case of an anti-aircraft machine gun negotiations which lasted for weeks were necessary. They could have been closed successfully only after serious armed fightings had spread. Yet, although rather slowly and in small numbers, rifles kept coming into the hands of the partisans. And, at the end of July the three groups had the following armament: the Southern Group had eight "Mauser" rifles; the Northwestern Group had three, the Northeastern Group also three, and, in addition, all the three groups had a number of double-barrelled hunting guns and few more or less usable pistols.

Such was the situation when the day of the first armed operation against the enemy in Bijeljina district approached.

### III.

The Regional Partisan Headquarters for Eastern Bosnia brought decision to start the armed operations against the enemy in Majeвица mountain and Semberija plain in the night between August 9 and 10, 1941. Fadil Jahić-Spanac, as a representative of this Headquarters and chief military commander in Bijeljina district accordingly issued orders to make an attack against a train and the railway line Bijeljina — Rača. According to these orders, a section of the railway line, the train, and its military escort, if any, were to be destroyed.

The narrow-gauge railway line Bijeljina — Rača represented at the time a very important, if not the most important enemy communication line in the area. It was connected over Sava river to the main normal-gauge Belgrade — Zagreb railway line and offered the safest and fastest communication between Bijeljina and the rest of the Independent State of Croatia, including its capital Zagreb. It was used to transport coal from the Ugljevik and Mezgraja coalmines, to transport food supplies extorted from the agriculturally rich Semberija plain and to supply the German and ustashi garrisons in the area. And, last, but not least, it was also used to transport death candidates to the ustashi concentration camps. To cut this line and make it useless even for a short period of time would have meant to inflict a serious blow to the enemy in the town, to disorder his communications and disorganize his supply system.

At the time the Bijeljina partisans had no equipment for any sizeable demolitions. They had no explosives, and even if they had, they had no men who would know how to use them, for among them there were no trained army engineers. Therefore, they were to destroy the railway line almost barehanded, using only most primitive tools which could be found among the peasants, such as pickaxes, spades, shovels, etc. The best tool which they possessed were a couple of monkey wrenches which could be used to unbolt the railway tracks and then throw them into a nearby pool. Then, they could use the pickaxes to pick up the sleepers, pile and burn them.

In order to ensure the success of the first partisan armed operation, Fadil Jahić-Spanac issued orders to the three groups to assemble during

the night of the attack at an assembly point in the operational area of the Northeastern Group, near the village Gornji Brodac which was not far from the target of the planned attack. This concentration was necessary for a number of reasons. First of all, in this way a concentration of armament, which was still scarce, could be made. Fourteen "Mauser" rifles, about the same number of hunting guns, and some 10-odd pistols represented a fire force which under the conditions could be rather efficient. A reason of psychological nature also induced Fadil Jahić-Španac to favour concentration. All three groups consisted of men, the majority of whom had never passed military training, nor had ever handled firearms. Fadil Jahić-Španac felt the need to assemble all these men immediately before their first armed action, to give them opportunity to get together and to get to know each other better, to gain a feeling of self-reliance and strength which is developed by a large group with common aims and purpose.

The groups were supposed to part immediately after the operation against the railway had been completed. The Southern Group was to retreat to its own operational area where it was supposed to proceed immediately to cutting enemy wire communications along the Bijeljina — Zvornik road, to attack enemy patrols, etc., primarily with an aim to show its presence in the area. The Northwestern Group was supposed to attack the small gendarmerie post at the village Crnjelovo, and then to proceed to the Bijeljina — Brčko road where it was also supposed to cut wire communications and attack enemy patrols. The Northeastern Group, in whose operational area the attack against the railway was to be made, was supposed to withdraw after the attack in the woods around the village Brodac and in the marshes around Sava river. In case of emergency, it might move to the operational area of the Northwestern Group and maneuver in a vast, rarely populated and almost impassable area which offered ideal possibilities for hiding of such a small group.

If materialized completely, this simple plan would face the enemy, who at the time did not have sufficient forces, with the difficult problem: what decision to make and where to direct its counter-blow?

However, no matter how apparently simple and efficient this plan seemed, it was, too difficult to carry out. Namely, the time and distance factors for the march of the Southern and Northwestern groups which were supposed to reach the assembly area at a predetermined time were calculated and planned wrongly. Thus, instead of the planned four hours, the Northwestern group actually needed eight hours to reach the assembly area and arrived there at four o'clock in the morning, instead at midnight. Moreover, contact with the Southern Group was not made at all. Later it was established that due to an inexplicable misunderstanding the Southern Group had arrived at the assembly area during the previous night, and not able to establish contact with the Northwestern Group moved back to its operational area.

The Northeastern and Northwestern groups now assembled waited during the whole next day in a forest. It was assumed that the Southern Group would arrive in the course of the following night and that the

planned operation would be carried out, although with a 24 hours delay. But, when the Southern Group did not show up in the course of the following night, Fadil Jahić-Španac, not willing to risk and undertake the operation only with six rifles, reluctantly made decision to abandon the plan. He led the Northwestern Group back to its operational area, and at the same time issued orders to the then commander of the North-eastern group Rade Ilić immediately to proceed to cutting enemy wire communications and to keep cutting them until further orders.

Such an outcome of the planned operation left a hard effect upon the both groups. Therefore Fadil Jahić-Španac felt forced to prepare speedily another operational plan. First he immediately took measures to re-establish the contact with the Southern Group from which no news had come for quite a time. He also accepted a plan to attack the gendarmerie post at the village Crnjelovo. According to the information brought by Milan Petrović-Amidža, a partisan, his post was manned only by three gendarmes. One of them was Ivica Karinaš from Bijeljina, known to be communist sympathizer, the other one was politically neutral, while the third was an ustashi sympathizer. The attack was successful, and Ivica Karinaš joined the partisan group. In this way, the Northwestern Group obtained three more rifles and a radio, the first one in the hands of the Bijeljina partisans, and also captured some other supplies.

Then, Fadil Jahić-Španac began to prepare a plan for an attack against the gendarmerie post at the village Dragaljevci.

In the meantime, Drago Stevanović-Šico, a member of the Southern Group succeeded to re-establish contacts with Fadil Jahić-Španac through an underground channel in Bijeljina. It was then learned that the Southern Group which had come back to its own operational area from the assembly area where, due to a misunderstanding, it had gone one night before the schedule, cut down many telephone and telegraph poles and disrupted the enemy wire communications along the Bijeljina — Rača road. It was done in the night between August 9 and 10, which was exactly the night of the planned operation against the railway. Also, the Group had accepted the suggestion of Cvijetin Pešaljević, a taylor and a Party member from the village Tavna, to participate in an attack against the gendarmerie post at Tavna. According to Cvijetin's assurances, this attack was certainly to be a success because the commander of the gendarmerie post himself had anti-ustashi feelings and was ready to surrender without resistance. Moreover, Cvijetin asserted that he had already prepared a mass march of villagers against the post and that hundreds of people from Tavna and the nearby villages would participate. Milenko Stojanović, who at the time was Fadil Jahić's deputy in the Southern Group, moved his Group and contacted Cvijetin and several other Party members who had been together with him at Tavna. Cvijetin's assurances that the villagers had been ready to rebel proved to be partially correct; some two hundred peasants had assembled at the point from where the march against the gendarmerie post was supposed to start. However, the whole operation was poorly organized and the assumption that the post crew would surrender without resistance proved to be utterly wrong. In

fact, the enemy had resorted to a stratagem, gained time until his reinforcements arrived, and when they finally arrived made an attack. The enemy's initiative came to the rebels and the Partisan group as a surprise and the action failed.

In an effort to improve the bad effect which this unsuccessful operation had left upon the population, the Group laid a night ambush on the Bijeljina — Janja road, surprised an ustashi bicycle patrol and the result was: three enemies killed and some 20-odd bicycles destroyed.

Fearing that another poorly organized and unsuccessful armed action like the one against the Tavna gendarmerie post might happen and endanger the overall successful organizing of the armed struggle against the enemy within the district, Fadil Jahić-Španac decided to prepare an attack against the gendarmerie post at Dragaljevac as thoroughly as possible and to carry it out as soon as possible. The feelings and the state of mind of his men made him act even more speedily. The men had already become discontent and nervous. They felt a need to put an end as soon as possible to the standstill, inactivity, and uncertainty, whatever the results of an action might be.

#### IV.

On or about August 25, the Northwestern Group moved from the Crnjelovo woods towards the village Dragaljevac and stopped in Gradac, outskirts of the Cadjevica village, some 8 kilometers from the Dragaljevac gendarmerie post. At the same time, the Southern Group, guided by Ivan Manjić, a member of the Northwestern Group also arrived at this locality.

Fadil Jahić-Španac decided to lead personally this force which consisted of some 30 men and which was armed with 20 rifles, 2 handgrenades and several hunting guns in the intended attack.

Three days were necessary to collect information about the post, the surrounding trenches and barbed wire obstacles, about gendarmes, their feelings, etc. This time was used to reorganize the two groups, to form squads and to appoint leaders of the squads which, according to the operational plan, were to attack simultaneously, but independently.

Although every possible security precaution was taken to conceal the target of the attack from the men in order to prevent any leakages, yet it became soon apparent that they knew which was the target, as well as that the news of the intended attack against the gendarmerie post at Dragaljevac had spread among the population. Therefore it was necessary to speed up the preparations, and about 9 o'clock in the night between August 28 and 29, Fadil Jahić-Španac issued orders to start towards the post.

Marching in a dark night through a dense forest and across cornfields, the partisans advanced slowly and with difficulties approached the target of their attack. And not until midnight the partisan company arrived at a point not far from the gendarmerie post. Then the squads parted and each one directed by its leader started towards the predetermined squad positions.



The signal to open fire — explosion of the two handgrenades, or if anything made it impossible, two shots from the Fadil Jahić's pistol — was to be given at two o'clock.

The squads took their positions according to the schedule. But, since the man who was supposed to throw the handgrenades was discovered by an enemy sentry who fired at him was prevented to do so, Fadil Jahić fired his pistol exactly at two o'clock and the fight began.

The enemy readily returned the fire from the trenches which surrounded his barracks; it was obvious that the attack had been expected and that the defense had been organized beforehand.

It should be noted here that the partisans in this first attack were faced with a difficult task. In the dark night the enemy trenches were invisible and the partisan fire could be directed only by the flame of the enemy rifles. On the other hand, the enemy, protected by his trenches aimed low and on the whole his fire was more efficient than the partisans'.

Already at the very beginning of the attack Fadil Jahić-Španac realized what a setback represented the fact that he had no possibilities to direct the partisan fire since it was not possible to establish contact between the squads while the fight was going on. As it was, once started, the fire was to continue until the enemy offered surrender, or until the partisans fired out their last bullet. If such situation occurred, they would have to run out from the field instead of making a planned tactical withdrawal. Therefore Fadil Jahić ordered his squad to cease fire and ordered the enemy to surrender. The answer which came from the trenches was cursing accompanied with even fiercer fire.

However, Fadil Jahić-Španac felt that the enemy was already shaken. He could deduce this from the nervous and too loud orders and from the frequently fired red rockets; also in the periodical breaks of the fire he could hear the excited voices of the frightened and probably demoralized men in the trenches.

Then Fadil Jahić ordered to resume fire. But soon an important factor, which would later often cause failure of the partisan operations, appeared; it was the lack of ammunition! The continued firing soon exhausted the meager ammunition supplies of the partisan troops, and now instead of the deafening roar from the partisan side, one could hear only occasional individual shots which could achieve nothing.

However, Fadil Jahić-Španac was not willing to withdraw yet. Some time before the turning point came, he even decided to lead his men in an assault and an arm-to-arm fight, which, he believed might have brought a speedy decision. And then, the turning point came.

Both, from the direction of Brčko and from the direction of Bijeljina reinforcements were coming to the enemy. The lights of the trucks could be seen from a great distance.

The enemy in the trenches began to cry victoriously, intensifying his fire and continuing to send his red rockets way up in the sky. At the same time, machine guns mounted on the trucks began to send long bursts of bullets into the dark night.

The fight stopped and the partisans withdrew.

Not long before dawn the partisan company met at an assembly point in the same forest near Gradac from where it had started for its unsuccessful attack.

Fadil Jahić-Španac began to explain what had happened, to encourage the men, to tell them how in war one should always count with similar and even more serious exigencies. But he soon stopped to do it. Simply it was not necessary for the partisans had not lost courage; what they now felt was not fear, but rage, and not despondency, but desire and eagerness to revenge. Apparently they were all aware that the enemy had somehow learned in advance about the attack and had prepared his defense. Therefore they all competed to suggest what should be done to discover the spy as soon as possible and shut his mouth forever.

In other words, the men were excited, but not discouraged. They grouped around the three wounded who bled heavily; they all wanted to help Nikola Spasojević who as a student of medicine performed the duties of company medical man. They assured each other that the wounded would be soon well and there was no reason to worry about anything. But they all felt sorry for the lack of ammunition and complained to each other why they had not had a machine gun which they could have used against the enemy troop trucks, etc.

It was clear that the partisan company had stood up under fire, had shed blood and had not dispersed — and that was most important. That was how Fadil Jahić-Španac thought and that was the actual truth. Free from the worry how to encourage his men, Jahić took a decision before dawn that Southern Group should be sent towards Brodac where it should reinforce the Northeastern Group and make it able to undertake more serious operations. Also, the reinforced Northeastern Group should come as close as possible to Drina River, stay there and establish and maintain contacts with the partisan groups across the river in Mačva. The Northwestern Group was to stay in its territory, i. e., near the village Crnjelovo and Sava river.

The following day it was learned who had disclosed to the enemy at Dragaljevac the information about the approaching partisan company and its intentions. Some villagers from Gradac maintained that it was done by some Anto, also called the Hungarian, who indeed was Hungarian by origin, and who as a blacksmith had lived for many years at Gradac. Already during the first days of the ustashi rule Anto declared himself to be "patriotically loyal" to the new state, and as it was known, he had on several occasions informed the local ustashi authorities about matters of great interest to them which they had no other ways to learn.

Fadil Jahić-Španac ordered two men in a patrol to arrest and bring to him Anto — "Madžar". He warned them to keep alert, because he believed, Anto might try to run away. Fadil Jahić-Španac chose two older men, Vačo Nikolić from Gradac and Jovan Kordić from Crnjelovo for this mission in the belief that they would carry it out properly. But the men took his order in their own way. They surprised Anto at his home and told him that they were taking him to the "Headquarters", as they used to say, but they actually did not bring him to Jahić. Instead,

they shot him in a creek. "Darn it, why we should have brought him", they defended themselves later against the Jahić's attack, "when everybody knows that he was an ustashi spy?" They stopped their argument for a while only when they were told that such independent actions could not be allowed. But still they remained convinced that they had acted properly and they even were hurt because nobody seemed to recognize the fact.

## V.

The attack against the Dragaljevac gendarmerie post was the first real military operation of the partisans in Bijeljina district. Although the partisans did not achieve their objective — the enemy stronghold remained unconquered — and although they had casualties, three wounded one of whom died several days later<sup>3</sup>), while the enemy apparently had no casualties, this operation had a certain political effect. It played the role of a real battle trial for the small partisan group. The Group was otherwise isolated and far away from the important centers of the liberation movement in Bosnia — from Romanija mountain, Šekovići, and even from Majevisa mountain, which geographically was not far away — and also from almost completely liberated Western Serbia which was separated by a large natural obstacle, the River Drina, which, as a frontier between the Independent State of Croatia and occupied Serbia was heavily guarded and controlled both, by German forces and forces of the Independent State of Croatia. However, the Bijeljina partisans, although operating in a terrain which did not offer advantages for partisan warfare — vast plain lacking large forests and having relatively developed communications used by the enemy for fast deployment of forces at any time — believed that even under such conditions it was possible to undertake military operations, to choose the place and the hour of the attack, to force upon the enemy the partisan tactics, to embarrass and disturb him.

The Dragaljevac operation also found a favourable echo among the population. The peasants had heard the fire during that memorable night, they had heard the long machine gun blasts which the ustashi had used to disperse their own fear, and they began to think: after such a fire and after so many appeals for assistance, these are not only words, it has really begun. They had already realized that their own skin and the future of the whole country and nation were at stake and now they felt relieved because the roaring fire at Dragaljevac had killed their fears, and their hesitations.

Finally, the partisan attack against the Dragaljevac gendarmerie post had a serious adverse effect upon the moral of the local ustashi authorities at Bijeljina. It intensified even more the general feelings of panic and uncertainty through which they looked upon the developments in this region which they had hoped to keep at last for a certain time. Being

<sup>3</sup>) Stevan Lučić from the village Trnova.

in a district in which Serbian population prevailed, which according to their outlook meant in an enemy district, lacking any popular support, not able to win the support of the Moslem population in the town and in the several Moslem villages, being not far from the freedom-loving Serbia where the liberators' rifles kept firing, and not enjoying sufficient military support from their German masters, the ustashi big shots simply lost their heads in the horror which they had been experiencing. Already long before the partisan attack against the Dragaljevac gendarmerie post was made, they had been writing to their superiors panicky reports in which they had dramatized the situation to a monstrous degree and kept asking for help, help... "The wire communications around Bijeljina have been cut", informed "The Daily Report of the Ministry of the Croatian Home Guard" of August 14, 1941. "The District Prefect has asked for reinforcement in the strength of a regiment from Vinkovci", continued the same report. "The situation around Bijeljina remains unchanged — serious. The wire communications have been cut and the attacks against gendarmerie posts, patrols, and guard units have continued. A regiment from Vinkovci arrived in Bijeljina as reinforcement..." This was an excerpt from the Report of August 15, 1941. "The rebels have continued to cut telephone lines and to attack gendarmerie posts around Bijeljina..." stated the report of August 16, 1941. And, the August 23, Report pointed out: "...Bijeljina and almost all the villages along the frontier from Rača to Drinjača were attacked about 5 p. m. Bijeljina urgently requested reinforcements (3 battalions — one for Brčko, one for Bijeljina, and one for Zvornik). Bijeljina has been threatened from the direction of Majeveca and the Mountain where the villages around Lopar have rebelled..."

If one keeps in mind the fact that these reports were written at the time when only small scale, almost purely sabotage and so-called "disturbance operations" had begun (an attack against a guard patrol, one guard killed; an attack against an ustashi patrol in the Bijeljina — Janja road; cutting of telephone poles and wires; several pistol shots fired by a Party member surprisingly caught in an enemy ambush; the attack against the Crnjelovo gendarmerie post, and finally, the completely unsuccessful operation at Tavna, then it is not difficult to imagine what a tremendous fear was felt by the representatives of the ustashi authorities after the operation at Dragaljevac.

In fact, this fear brought about the first enemy counter-offensive in Bijeljina district. A complete battalion undertook a "screening operation", started from Brčko towards Bijeljina and covered the area of the villages Bukovica — Dragaljevac — Crnjelovo. However, this operation produced no results, a fact which was confirmed in the August 31 Daily Report which stated: "A battalion force screened the area north of Bijeljina around the villages Dragaljevac — Crnjelovo — Bukovica."

Following the attack against the Dragaljevac gendarmerie post and the subsequent enemy "screening operation" a regrouping of the then small partisan forces in Bijeljina district was made. The Southern and Northeastern groups joined into a single group. Reinforced and reorganized in this way, the group now headed by a new commander (Mirko

Filipović, a lawyer from Bijeljina) manoeuvred in the area between Sava and Drina rivers, established and maintained contacts with the partisans in Serbia and accepted a small partisan group which had hitherto operated in Mačva, Serbia<sup>4</sup>). Also, the group engaged in small scale operations against the enemy. By the beginning of September 1941 under the pressure of superior enemy forces the Group was forced to cross over to Serbia where, as part of the Serbian partisan units, took an active part in the fierce battles in the liberated Western Serbia during the so-called First Enemy Offensive against the National Liberation Forces. In October, in the battle at Vidojevica where the Germans undertook combined ground and air operations the Group suffered heavy casualties from air bombardment. In November 1941, reinforced and enriched with experience gained in fierce battles, the Group re-crossed Drina river near the village Drinjača and joined the First Majejica National Liberation Partisan Detachment.

The Northwestern Group also shifted its area of operations farther west and southwest, came into contact with the Majejica Partisan Group, and, soon afterwards, both these groups joined the First Majejica National Liberation Partisan Detachment. This Detachment concentrated its operations against the Tuzla — Brčko enemy communications and already in the autumn of 1941 kept under its control almost the whole area of Majejica mountain and Semberija plain.

In the territory of Bijeljina district, where at the beginning the first partisan groups had operated, a strong and very extensive Party organization existed. It had a decisive political influence in the district. In November, the District Communist Party Committee and the District Committee of the Union of the Communist Youth of Yugoslavia (SKOJ) were formed. Relying upon the existing Party and communist youth organizations and forming new organizations, they kept winning an ever increasing number of the population for the struggle against the invader and his collaborators.

And then, in the autumn of 1941, the Bijeljina district Party organization had to engage into a new struggle, in the struggle against the chetniks, who through the officers of the so-called "Army in the Fatherland" had just started to carry out their treacherous plans.

#### MEMBERS OF THE EARLY BIJE LJINA DISTRICT PARTISAN GROUPS WHO FELL DURING THE WAR

1. — FADIL JAHIC-SPANAC, Order of National Hero; member of the Regional Military Headquarters for Eastern Bosnia; political commissar of the Majejica National Liberation Partisan Detachment; killed in the treacherous attack of captain Stevan Damjanović-Leka's chetniks against the Majejica Partisan Detachment Headquarters.

2. — VELJKO LUKIĆ-KURJAK, Order of National Hero; sergeant; company commander; battalion commander; commander of Partisan Detachment; commander of the 17th Majejica Partisan Brigade; killed in action by the chetniks in 1944.

<sup>4</sup>) Following were the members of this group: Borislav-Borika Stančić, Branko Gavrić, Srbo Sekulić Čaruga, Djoko Marinković, Dragiša Maksimović, Branko Jakšić, all students from Bijeljina; Elijas Kabiljo, agronomist from Bijeljina, Nenad Petrović, lawyer from Bijeljina, Veljko Simić, agronomist from Bijeljina, and Buki Kabiljo, worker from Bijeljina.

3. — NIKOLA SPASOJEVIĆ, student of medicine from the village Petkovača; one of the organizers of the People's Uprising in Bijeljina district; killed in action by the chetniks in 1942.
4. — VESO GAVRIĆ, Order of National Hero; student of law from Bijeljina; one of the organizers of the students communist movement; upon orders by captain Leka, killed by the chetniks in February 1942.
5. — JOVO KOKANOVIĆ, from the village Crnjelovo; killed in action as a battalion political commissar during the Sixth Enemy Offensive against the National Liberation Army in 1943.
6. — BOGDAN KOKANOVIĆ, peasant from the village Crnjelovo; first commander of the Northwestern Partisan Group in Bijeljina district; killed by the chetniks in 1942.
7. — DRAGO TOJIĆ, worker from the village Crnjelovo; member of the District Party Committee; Secretary of the Bijeljina District Party Committee; killed by the chetniks in 1942.
8. — SAVO JOVANOVIĆ-ČIČA, peasant from the village Čengić; secretary of the Local Party Committee; killed in a skirmish with an enemy patrol ("Devil's Division") in August 1943.
9. — VUKAŠIN PAJKANOVIĆ, student from Bijeljina; one of the organizers of the People's Uprising in Bijeljina district; killed in action in Mačva in October 1941, during the First Enemy Offensive against the Partisan forces.
10. — STEVAN JOKOVIĆ, peasant from the village Glogovac; first commander of the Southern Partisan Group in Bijeljina district; killed in action in Mačva in October 1941, during the First Enemy Offensive.
11. — SRETEN GLIŠIĆ, peasant from the village Medjaši, prominent village communist; killed in action in Mačva in October 1941, during the First Enemy Offensive.
12. — NIKOLA MAKSIMOVIĆ, peasant from the village Medjaši; prominent village communist; killed in action in Mačva in October 1941, during the First Enemy Offensive.
13. — BRANKO GAVRIĆ, student from Bijeljina; killed in action in Mačva in October 1941, during the First Enemy Offensive.
14. — SRBO SEKULIĆ-ČARUGA, student from Bijeljina; killed in action, crossing the River Drina with a Partisan group in September 1941.
15. — PERO SIMIĆ, craftsman from Bijeljina; killed in action in Mačva in October 1941, during the First Enemy Offensive.
16. — BUKI KABILJO, worker from Bijeljina, killed in action in Mačva in October 1941, during the First Enemy Offensive.
17. — DJOKO MARINKOVIĆ, student from Bijeljina; one of the organizers of the SKOJ in Bijeljina district; killed by the chetniks in April 1942.
18. — DUŠAN OBRENOVIĆ, peasant from the village Magnojević; upon orders from captain Stevan Damjanović-Leko killed by the chetniks, allegedly due to a misunderstanding, in November 1941; first victim of the chetnik treason in Majevisa and Semberija.
19. — ALBERT LEVI, agronomist from Bijeljina; company political commissar in the Majevisa Partisan Detachment; killed in action by the chetniks in February 1942.
20. — STEVAN LUČIĆ, young peasant from Trnova; died from wounds suffered at Dragaljevac at the beginning of September 1941.
21. — ELIJAS KABILJO, agronomist from Bijeljina, killed in action by the chetniks in February 1942.
22. — IVAN MANJIĆ, peasant from Dragaljevac; killed in action by the chetniks in 1942.
23. — MILAN PETROVIĆ-AMIDŽA, young peasant from the village Crnjelovo; killed in action as a company political commissar in the Fourth East Bosnian Partisan Brigade at the end of 1942.
24. — GAJO ANDRIĆ, peasant from the village Pučile, killed by the chetniks at the beginning of November 1942.
25. — BOŠKO ANDRIĆ, killed in the summer of 1943.
26. — IVICA KARNAŠ, worker from Bijeljina, killed by the chetniks in 1942.
27. — DJOKO KOSTIĆ, peasant from the village Crnjelovo; killed by the chetniks in 1944.
28. — VACO NIKOLIĆ, peasant from the village Gradac; killed by the chetniks in 1942.

RADE JAKŠIĆ,

Member of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Bosnia and Herzegovina

### ACTIVITY OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF YUGOSLAVIA IN BIRAČ IN FURTHERING BROTHERHOOD AND UNITY DURING THE UPRISING IN 1941

Birač, a region located in the basin of the Jadar and Drinjača Rivers near Vlasenica, was already well-known in the Middle Ages. Old caravan routes led from the Pannonian plains and northern Serbia across this region towards the Adriatic between high, wooded mountains. Those who wanted to control the country bounded by the Drina, Bosna and Sava Rivers fought over this region. Even today the ruins of fortresses and keeps of feudal lords may be seen. They left behind them in Birač waste, illiteracy, poverty, religious and national dissension, disease and other evils.

The anti-people's régime of prewar Yugoslavia aggravated even more the situation in which Birač found itself after First World War. Taking advantage of the corrupt state apparatus of prewar Yugoslavia, the former beys, agas, landlords and other extortioners in Birač organized between the two wars the pillage of the forests and other natural wealth of this region (the Kadić affair), disregarded the rights of the people and did everything possible to maintain the old social relations, inequality among the people, religious and national intolerance, etc. All the bourgeois political parties and their supporters in Birač further deepened the disunity of the people and through various forms of trickery endeavoured to grab something for themselves from whatever régime, for example Rasin Begović who in 1918 was the notorious Austro-Hungarian hireling and later a pillar of support to Aleksandar Karadjordjević and bearer of the Order of St. Sava. The extortioners made compromises with every régime which permitted them to plunder and perpetrate acts of violence. Certain landlords, Aćim Babić for instance, became so rich and powerful that they were able to commit such infamies as forcing people to go to tavern to eat hay before him. Their true character was exposed especially during the People's Liberation War.

After the capitulation of the old Yugoslav Army, all the misery that the centuries (occupation and an anti-people's régime) had left as a legacy to this region became even more manifest. All those who had been the pillars of prewar Yugoslavia joined immediately the German occupiers and their collaborators. They were the old beys, agas,

landlords and officials, among them the Kadić brothers, Slavko Kurtović, Medo Brgulija, Mahmut Mamić and others from Vlasenica, Avdaga Hasić from Kladanj, etc. When Pavelić the ustashi head of state decreed laws against the Serbs, they organized the ustashi conference in Zaklopača, in Kadić's keep, and a list of Serbs who were to be liquidated immediately was drawn up. Soon after that, the persecution of the Serbs began, led by the notorious ustashi commander, Mutevelić, a well-known smuggler from Zagreb and a native of Sarajevo. In a gulley near Rašića Gaj 80 innocent people were massacred without trial. The ustashi who had come from other regions to Birač and their collaborators in Vlasenica, Kladanj, Zvornik and the surrounding towns seized people in the streets, in their homes, day and night and led them away allegedly to Sarajevo and Zvornik but in reality to kill them or rather massacre them near Vlasenica, Kladanj and Zvornik. The beatings, acts of violence and other tortures perpetrated by the criminals against the innocent people, driving them through the town, beaten and chained, embittered and frightened Serbs and they began to flee from their homes and hide in the forests. The prisons were overflowing.

Before the Uprising in Birač the Communist Party did not have its cells and for that reason could not exercise strong influence. There were no enterprises in Birač, except a few sawmills in which peasants chiefly worked. The few Party members and sympathizers were in general not in contact with one another.

At the end of May 1941, Miloš Zekić, one of the two Party members in the Birač village of Šekovići, was in Tuzla and carried to Birač the instructions of the Tuzla Regional Committee of the Communist Party to begin collecting arms and to form armed groups. Zekić also brought the information that Brano Savić and Vlado Bošković from Šekovići and Čedo Jakšić from Milići had been taken into the Party.

The increased activity of the Party in Birač received the full support of the oppressed people. The gathering of arms and the formation of armed groups as well as the linking up of the Party members were initiated immediately.

In July the members of the Regional Committee of the Communist Party, Pašaga Mandžić, Ivan Marković-Irac, Cvijetin Mijatović and several others went to Šekovići and began preparations for the Uprising. Through the members of the Regional Committee contact was established with Majevisa, Ozren and Romanija where preparations for the Uprising were also under way.

Under the leadership of the members of the Regional Committee of the Communist Party, organized action with the aim of exposing the real intentions of the occupiers, the ustashi and their collaborators was begun. At the same time opposition was offered to the vengeful tendencies of chauvinistically inclined Serbs who regarded all the Croats and Moslems as ustashi and threatened to kill them all and thus avenge the victims of Rašića Gaj and other massacres. The activity of the Party against such tendencies was not easy at all, for the ustashi crimes kept inflaming chauvinistic passions and made various malefactors among



the Serbs come to the fore (Rajko and Miloš Čolonja, Rajko Bobar, etc.). The correct Party line of furthering brotherhood and unity in the struggle against the occupiers and the traitors, although difficult, met however with increasing support among almost all the people of Birač. This was especially manifest after the first armed operations and the formation of the partisan units. The first insurrection shots were fired in Šekovići on August 4, 1941. A gendarmes' barracks with some ustashi and gendarmes was attacked. The men who attacked the barracks had 12 rifles among them and the rest were armed with axes, pitchforks, poles improvised as spears, etc. After the barracks had been taken in Šekovići and in Milići, an attack on Vlasenica from all sides was organized. Five hundred domobrans of the Vojna Krajina group, a number of foreign and local ustashi and gendarmes with two heavy machine guns and six light machine guns were in Vlasenica. Vlasenica was liberated nevertheless, for under the leadership of Cvijetin Mijatović, Miloš Zekić and other Party leaders, who had spoken of aims of the Party, the young and the old took up arms and joined the attack.

The news of the victories of the Birač partisans spread over the region between the Drina and Bosna Rivers. At the same time the news reached Birač of the successful operations of the partisans in Romanija, led by Slaviša Vajner-Čiča and Pavle Goranin-Ilija, of the partisans on Ozren, led by Pašaga Mandžić and Todor Vujasinović, of the partisans in Majevisa, led by Fadil Jahić-Španac, the partisans in Serbia, on the other side of the Drina and in other regions. The Party's reputation was growing and it became imperative to organize Party cells and units as soon as possible. Soon after the attack on Vlasenica, the Birač Detachment, with its seat in Šekovići, was formed. The Staff included Ivan Marković-Irac, a Croatian miner from Kreka and a former political prisoner in the Sremska Mitrovica prison, Miloš Zekić, a Serb and a teacher from Šekovići as deputy commander, Cvijetin Mijatović-Majo, a Serb from Majevisa and a Party member from Belgrade University, as political commissar and Brano Savić, a Serb from Šekovići and a lawyer, as deputy political commissar. The first company commanders were Drago Melezović, Tešo Piljanović, Andrija Marković and Žarko Mitrović, progressively-minded Birač peasants.

In those sections of Birač where the Party had no members nor reliable sympathizers, at the head of the Uprising companies and detachments which took up arms at the call of the Communist Party were to be found so-called chetnik "leaders" and "voivodas". One of them was gendarme major Jezdimir Dangić, a native of Bratunac, who proclaimed himself commander of all chetniks in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and another was "voivoda" Aćim Babić from Han Pijesak, a peasant and landlord who proclaimed himself "commander of the Uprising in Bosnia and Herzegovina". At the very outset they betrayed the aspirations of the insurgents, because they spread propaganda according to which the insurgents should not fight the Germans because Germany was a great power but rather attack the Communists. With that in mind Aćim Babić even sent a letter to the German field command in Sarajevo, and Dangić

soon joined forces with Draža Mihajlović and Milan Nedić, and through them with the Germans.

The chetnik treason had a grave effect upon the further development of the Uprising and the People's Liberation War in Birač. At every step the chetniks sabotaged the activities of the Prativ and the Birač Detachment and tried to disunite the insurgents who had taken up arms to fight the occupiers and their collaborators. In September 1941 the members of the General Staff of the Partisan Detachments in Bosnia and Herzegovina came to Vlasenica. They were Svetozar Vukmanović-Tempo, Rodoljub Čolaković-Ročko and Slobadan Princip-Seljo. In an effort to unite the insurrection forces and the people, to save the people from internecine slaughter they made an agreement concerning joint action with Dangić. This agreement however, was useless, for Dangić and his officers violated it. Under the influence of the Germans, Draža Mihajlović and Milan Nedić, Dangić and his chetnik officer continuously plotted against the communists and the partisans to attract the chetnik inclined fighters to Kladanj, Zvornik, and other places held by the Germans, domobrans and the ustashi.

Opposing the treacherous and rapacious policies of Dangić, Babić, the officers of Draža Mihajlović and Milan Nedić, and pursuing at the same time an intensive battle against the Germans and the ustashi, the Party decided to form a District Committee for Birač. This committee was formed in September, 1941, and its members were Milutin Đurašković, a metal worker from Sarajevo as secretary and Vaso Gavrić, Ibro Kunosić as members. Later Rade Jakšić and Svetozar Kosorić also became members of the committee. The committee had its propaganda section. The task of the committee was to enlarge and strengthen the Party cells in the rear and in the partisan units, to make them more active, and through them to inform the people of the Party's struggle, to unmask the traitors, etc. With this in view various leaflets and proclamations were printed, news reported, copies of „Borba“ from Užice circulated as well as certain material of a propaganda value. In October a propaganda section was set in the partisan unit in Vlasenica.

The Party's influence was growing constantly, and at the same time the number of its members and sympathizers, members of the SKOJ and fighters in the partisan units. The people especially welcomed the policy of brotherhood and unity. They began to see through the perfidious policy of the occupiers and their collaborators to spread discord and disunite the people, to turn Croats and the Moslems against the Serbs, and the Serbs against the Croats and the Moslems, according to the old formula of all occupiers, "Spread the seed of discord, then rule". In these efforts the Party received particular support from the youth, many of whom before the war had been members of the SKOJ. The names of these young people were Mirko Ostojić, Zarija Sunarić-Mile and others from Vlasenica; Dejan Vučković and others from Milići; a large group of members in Srebrnica among whom were Vaso Jovanović, Đoko Krmanović, an agronomist named Pašić and others.

Just how much support the Party line of brotherhood and unity received in Birač may be seen in the resistance offered by most of the Serbs to Dangić, Babić and the other chetnik commanders. Dangić liked to make speeches, encouraging elements of vengeance, saying that he could stand "neither Turkish blackmail nor poor Serb". In this way he encouraged the massacre of the Moslems so that allegedly their homes, land and other property would be divided among the poor Serbs. He always ended his speeches with "Long live the King!" but most of the people turned a deaf ear. Instead the people answered the appeal for brotherhood and unity and the slogan that each could live alongside the other, the Serbs and the Moslems, all honest people who did not betray the cause of the people. An interesting example is the conference of representatives of the people and fighters of Birač which took place in Vlasenica on November 16 and 17, 1941, at which both Rodoljub Čolaković and Jezdimir Dangić spoke. At the conference the chetnik treason was condemned, and Dangić left the meeting, he was followed only by his cousin Rade Tuševljaković, a chetnik butcher and former officer of the Guards.

A significant role in the furthering of brotherhood and unity and the strengthening of the forces of the People's Liberation Movement was played by the People's Liberation Committees, the formation of which began in Birač early in October 1941. The first People's Liberation Committees were formed in Šekovići, Vlasenica, Srebrnica, Bratunac, Milići, Fakovići and Skela. The committees were elected at mass public meetings and almost everywhere Serbs, Moslems, Croats, according to the number in that particular place were elected. Comrade Rodoljub Čolaković, President of the General Staff of the People's Liberation Partisan Detachments in Bosnia, and Herzegovina, attended the meetings for the election of People's Liberation Committees in Srebrnica, Bratunac and Fakovići. He exposed to the people the treacherous policy of the prewar royal government of Cvetković — Maček, the king, the police and the other pillars of that régime, explained the aims and struggle of the Party and the People's Liberation Movement, emphasizing the importance of brotherhood and unity which was met with complete understanding on the part of the majority of the people. A very interesting incident occurred at the meeting in Fakovići. When the candidates to the People's Liberation Committee were nominated, on the list was the name of the former mayor of the town, Đorđe Pavlović, who before the war had caused the people much misery. A din arose in the hall. The people began to criticize the nomination of Pavlović to the Committee and began to shout in unison: "We don't want him. We don't want him. He was for the king and the old government." They crossed Pavlović's name from the list and nominated another who was elected.

Working in close coordination with the Party committees and cells, and with the command of the partisan units, the People's Liberation Committee in Birač became not only the true people's revolutionary authority on the liberated territory but also an important factor in the further strengthening of the solidarity and unity of the people in

the struggle against the invader and traitorous ustashi, chetniks, the troops of Nedić and Ljotić and so on.

The Party organizations, the partisan units and the People's Liberation Committees encouraged the formation of the first youth organizations, women's organizations and later the organization of the People's Liberation Front. Through the joint action of all these organizations in Birač, soon after the outbreak of the Uprising in Birač it was possible to enlarge the partisan units, to form the Srebrenica Detachment, the Birač Brigade and other units. The Sixth East Bosnian Brigade and later other brigades were also formed in Birač. The Party, Union of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia (SKOJ) the People's Liberation Committees, the People's Liberation Front, the women's organization, formed shortly after the outbreak of the Uprising, rallied the people together so that outside of these organizations and the partisan units there remained only a handful of traitors and butchers. Later many punitive expeditions and enemy offensive (the Germans, Francetić's Black Legion, the chetnik brigades from Serbia) lay waste to Birač but the people, despite the blackest terrorism of the invaders and the traitors, remained true to the People's Liberation Movement. The merit for this belongs to the tireless efforts of the Party in furthering brotherhood and unity of our peoples.