

Miloslav Samardzic

THE SERBS AGAINST THE WEHRMACHT

A History of World War Two in
Yugoslavia Based on previously
unknown German documents

Translated by: Nebojsa Malic

ПОГЛЕДИ
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Foreword: In Search of German Documents

Anyone wishing to give an accurate description of combat operations by the Yugoslav Army in the Homeland (a.k.a. "Chetniks") faces two principal challenges. First, the need to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that such operations took place. That may sound absurd at first, but even though scores of books have been published on the subject since 1990, it is still possible to hear arguments such as the one made by Ljubisa Rajic, PhD, professor at the Belgrade University's School of Philosophy, at a roundtable in June 2011:

"It is a known historical fact that the Chetniks extended partial cooperation with the partisans at the beginning of the war in 1941. However, after they fell out with each other in autumn of 1941, no example has been noted of Chetniks fighting German units."

The "known historical facts" are nothing of the sort, but rather the official history of the Communist Yugoslavia. Until 1990, it was the only history – any attempt of criticism was punishable by law. This official history stubbornly continues to linger, even after two decades of relative academic freedom.

The other, greater challenge was to locate the actual German documents. Some can be found at the Military Archive in Belgrade. Third Reich documents captured by the Western Allies were sent to the National Archives in Washington DC. There, they were copied and the copies sent to military archives around the world, including Belgrade. Some of these documents were translated and published in four volumes. Others were translated and left on microfilm at the archive, or sent to other archives in Yugoslavia.

In 2007, my fourth year of studying the Chetnik documents at the Military Archives, I touched upon the German documents as well. First I looked over the card catalog, which included the brief descriptions of the documents in Serbian. Not a single catalog I've seen mentions Chetnik battles against the Germans; only the September 1943 report of the 369th "Devil's Division" from Višegrad contains a line about the "threat of DM bandits", 'DM' standing for Draza Mihailović. From prior research into Chetnik, British and American sources, I knew that there was an attack on Višegrad on October 5, 1943, and that the Axis forces were defeated. But this catalog ended with September 30, 1943.

I encountered a similar problem with the documents belonging to the 118th Jaeger Division, also under Chetnik attack at the time. Also missing are the files belonging to the two divisions' superiors: the XV Corps and the XI Corps, regional commands in Croatia and Serbia, Southeast Command..

My thought was that the documents existed, but were not entered into the catalog, so as to deter researchers. So I asked for a large quantity of microfilm and brought Vidak Vulić, a professor of German, to translate. For a month, he came to the Archive regularly, writing down and translating what I asked. After thousands of pages, we only came up with a few translated passages; there was nothing about the fighting in the documents.

I sent a memo to the administrator of the Archive, informing him that some German documents from late 1943 were missing, and asked if the Military Archive could request them from the Bundesarchiv in Freiburg (where the originals were eventually repatriated from Washington). This was at the time when the Military Archive moved to the suburbs of Belgrade, so I sent the memo again after the move. Unfortunately, I never received a response. The Military Archive lacked manpower and funding to pursue the matter.

I had no choice but to ask the Bundesarchiv directly, which I did with the aid of translator Branko Petrović and Dr. Voja Milojević. While in Serbia all research still has to be in person,

Western archives allow the use of paid researchers, paid for their time, with the finding scanned and mailed over. Mindful of the expense and uncertain of the outcome, I focused on autumn 1943, asking for daily and periodic reports from the 369th and 118th Divisions and their command authorities.

After several attempts, it emerged that the Bundesarchiv had no documents from the 118th for that period. It is possible that part of its documentation was captured by the Soviet Army and that it might be found in Moscow. On the other hand, researchers at the Bundesarchiv found quite a few documents from the 369th and its superiors, around 640 pages in total. Of greatest value was the October 1943 operations diary, with events noted every hour, and even every minute. Of course, not all of the 640 pages were of interest here, since there were notes about health of the horses and the wear and tear on vehicle tires, for example.

Of capital importance, however, was the detailed account of the Chetnik offensive from Višegrad to Sarajevo. I had previously written about this offensive, along with other Chetnik battles against the Germans that I knew of, in volumes 1 through 5 of "General Draža Mihailović and the Overall History of the Chetnik Movement", but was criticized for not finding a single German document about these events.

The Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv documents shed a new light on the events during autumn 1943. What they indicate was that the Battle of Višegrad was just the tip of the iceberg. There was a much larger battle front on the line Jabuka – Mesići – Rogatica, and after breaking through that front, the Chetniks besieged Sarajevo with as many as 18,500 men. In response, the Germans brought in a motorized regiment from Albania, one Jaeger regiment from the west of Sarajevo, and a SS battalion from the coast.

We were also forced to re-examine our assumptions about the Romanija Corps, which we previously thought numbered around 3,000 men. According to German intelligence, however, the 1st Bosnia Corps of Major Milorad Momčilović alone had 4,000 Chetniks south of Sarajevo, while the forces north of Sarajevo,

commanded by Col. Gojko Borota, were even larger in number.

Perhaps the most important revelation about the nature of the war in Yugoslavia concerns the German reaction to Chetnik attacks near Sarajevo. Namely, the Germans responded by detaining Serb civilians in the city, labeling them “Chetnik hostages.” In present-day Serbia, considered the principal Chetnik stronghold, Germans would routinely take Communist hostages as well – though in far fewer numbers. That was not the case in Sarajevo. In October 1943, the only hostages in Sarajevo were “DM supporters.”

That detail speaks volumes about the extent to which the Communists had falsified history. For example, the 1972 film “Walter Defends Sarajevo,” shows Communist resistance fighters with Muslim and Croat names waging street battles with Germans inside the city. In reality, they never existed. Germans viewed Croats and Muslims in Sarajevo as loyal Axis supporters, while the Serbs were seen as not just the enemy, but Mihailović sympathizers. While German officers made daily references to the possibility of a “Chetnik uprising,” there is no mention of Communists.

In fact, Germans referred to Chetniks anywhere in the country as “Serbs”. Churchill used the terms “Serbian Chetniks” and “Croatian partisans”. Gen.Mihailović himself considered the partisans as a Croat movement – because of their objectives, chiefly to move the border of Serb lands from Kupa and Neretva eastward to the Drina. So the title of this volume – “Serbs against the Wehrmacht” – wrote itself.

Some critics might object that the Serbs who belonged to the Communist movement also fought the Wehrmacht. I would counter with an argument that it was the other way around: the Wehrmacht fought them, and they fought back. Against the Chetniks, however, the Communists always initiated the attacks. The largest anti-Wehrmacht offensive in Yugoslavia prior to the arrival of the Soviet Army was halted by a partisan attack on the back of the Chetniks, relieving the Axis forces in Sarajevo. So sur-

prised were the Germans by this, for at least two days they could not believe they had been saved.

Meanwhile, historian Aleksandar Dinčić found several German documents from between September and November 1943 at an archive in southern Serbia, as well as a very important report on Chetnik sabotage and diversions aimed at disrupting the supply of Erwin Rommel's Afrika Korps.

Having come into possession of several other valuable sources on Chetnik battles against the Germans, I set the following goals for this book:

- First, briefly cite every battle between the Chetniks and the Germans during WW2, listing dates, locations and casualties
- Second, describe in detail those battles referenced in newly discovered German documents, as well as battles described in my previous book, "Chetnik Battles Against Germans and the Ustasha", as it is now out of print and difficult to obtain. This refers to the fighting at Cer and Jadar in October 1941, and German operations in Eastern Bosnia in early 1942, as described in Chetnik and German sources.

Those battles already described in the volumes of "General Draža Mihailović and the Overall History of the Chetnik Movement" are referenced only in brief; sources for those can be found in the original's footnotes and bibliography. However, as several battles from 1941 were insufficiently examined in those volumes, I have corrected that omission here.

I wish to thank Vidak Vulić, Branko Petrović, Dr. Vojo Milojević and Aleksandar Dinčić, without whose help "Serbs Against the Wehrmacht" would have never seen the light of day.

Kragujevac, July 2011

Miloslav Samardžić



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Miloslav Samardzic was born on 22nd November 1963 in Aleksandrovac, Serbia and graduated in Economics at the University of Kragujevac in 1989. While studying, in the winter of 1983/84 he completed a course at the “Vecernje Novosti” School of Journalism and subsequently became their correspondent in Kragujevac. Samardzic joined “Pogledi” – a journal of Kragujevac University Students, in 1984 and left “Vecernje Novosti” as his critical articles on the ruling regime were not published. At the end 1985, he became an editor of a section “The University” in “Pogledi” and 1987 editor-in-chief; Samardzic stayed on at this post with brief interruptions until the termination of the journal’s publication in 2005.

“Pogledi” was the first magazine which published texts about the multi-party system in Socialist Yugoslavia (1988). It was the first journal to publish the “Proposal to Abolish the Law of J. B. Tito’s Person and Work Protection” (1988) and the first affirmative article about General Drazha Mihailovic (1989). “Pogledi” became the first opposition media in Serbia, immediately following legitimization of the multi-party system in the end 1989. In June of 1990 “Pogledi”

reached 200000 copies in circulation and became the best-selling and most read socio-political journal in Yugoslavia.

In the Fall of 1990 "Pogledi" was the first to point to the communists' war and post-war crimes. "Thanks to this" and some other critical articles, Samardzic found himself in court more than 100 times. He was indicted of verbal offenses and defamation in printed media, but never convicted. From 1986 through 1993, Samardzic was summoned to hundreds of so-called "informative talks" by the secret police.

Samardzic published more than 1000 articles in "Pogledi" and dozens of papers he wrote for and still writes.

Samardzic researched archival materials in a number of museums and archives and his greatest scientific achievement is certainly the five volume work "General Drazha Mihailovic and "The History of the Chetnik Movement". This work is undoubtedly the most comprehensive and most documented History project of WWII in Yugoslavia (about 3000 pages and 8000 footnotes). At the same time, it is a best-selling book - over 150000 copies sold.

Miloslav Samardzic has published 37 books in Serbian, and a total of five in English, French, and Slovenian. He is the author of the documentary TV series "The Kingdom of Yugoslavia in World War II" (18 episodes). The series was released in 2017 and has been shown on TV Polska in Warsaw and BN TV in the Republic of Srpska.

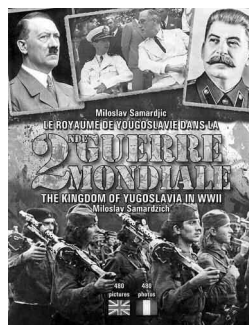
Miloslav Samardzic lives and works in Kragujevac, Serbia.

FROM THE SAME AUTHOR

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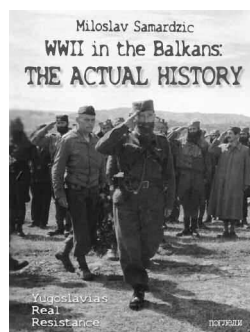
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“WWII in the Balkans: The Actual History – Yugoslavia’s real resistance” In English, the Second World War in the Balkans is mentioned in thousands of books but all of them have few things in common. First, foreign writers didn’t enter local archives due to the language barrier. Second, someone was interested in getting rid of that barrier and spreading their side of the story to the English-speaking world: the Communists. Third, even the Western Allies had things to hide so they, to a certain extent, accepted the Communist side of the story. Thus, the goal of this book is to show sides of the story that haven’t yet appeared in the English-speaking world. Naturally, these sides of the story haven’t been shown in Communist historiography either.

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