

= Momčilo Ćujić =

Momčilo Ćujić ( Serbian Cyrillic : ??????o ????? , Serbo @-@ Croatian pronunciation : [ momčt ? ?i?lo d ? ?u?jit ? ? ] ; 27 February 1907 ? 11 September 1999 ) was a Serbian Orthodox priest and self @-@ appointed Chetnik commander ( Serbo @-@ Croatian : vojvoda , vo????? ) who led a significant proportion of the Chetniks within the northern Dalmatia region of the Independent State of Croatia during World War II . After the assassination of King Alexander of Yugoslavia in 1934 , he joined the Chetnik Association of Kosta Pećanac . After the invasion of Yugoslavia , he defended local Serbs against the Ustaše regime and collaborated with the Axis powers against the Yugoslav Partisans throughout the remainder of the war as the commander of the Chetnik Dinara Division ( Dinarska divizija , ????????? ????????? ) . He survived the war , surrendering to the British and eventually emigrating to the United States , avoiding several denied extradition attempts by the Yugoslav government , who accused him of being responsible for the deaths of 1 @,@ 500 people . Settling in California , Ćujić played an important role in Serbian émigré circles and founded the Ravna Gora Movement of Serbian Chetniks alongside other exiled Chetnik fighters . He later retired to San Marcos , where he wrote poems and jokes that were published in both the United States and Serbia . He was instrumental in perpetuating Chetnik ideas in the Yugoslav Wars and controversially appointed Vojislav Vukelić as a Chetnik vojvoda in 1989 . In 1998 , Ćujić said that he regretted awarding the title to Vukelić on account of his involvement with Slobodan Milošević . On 21 May 1998 , Biljana Plavšić , President of the Republika Srpska at the time , awarded him the Order of the Star of Karađorđević ( First Class ) . Ćujić died at a hospice in San Diego in 1999 , aged 92 .

= = Early life , education and priesthood = =

Momčilo Ćujić was born in the village of Kovačica , near Knin , on 27 February 1907 . He was the oldest of five children born to Rade and Ljubica Ćujić ( née Milošević ) . The family was of Bosnian origin . Rade had moved to Kovačica with his disabled veteran father , Gligo , and his brother , Nikola , in the late 1880s and lived off his father 's Austro @-@ Hungarian Army pension for a time . Ljubica hailed from the village of Ljubač , southeast of Knin . Shortly after his marriage to Ljubica , Rade established himself as a successful agricultural worker . The couple went on to have three sons and two daughters .

Ćujić 's mother originally intended to name him Simo , after his uncle . Ćujić 's father disliked the name and , having been raised listening to the gusle and reciting Serbian epic poetry , named his son after Momčilo , a 14th @-@ century brigand in the service of Serbian Emperor Dušan the Mighty . Ćujić finished primary school in 1918 , and graduated as the best student in his class . Between 1920 and 1924 , he attended lower gymnasium in Knin . After a two @-@ year pause , he began attending the higher gymnasium in Šibenik but did not graduate . In 1929 , he began attending the Serbian Orthodox seminary in Sremski Karlovci , graduated in 1931 and was ordained a priest two years later . He was assigned to the Orthodox parish in Strmica , near Kovačica . Shortly after , he married Zorka Dobrijević @-@ Jundžević , the daughter of a wealthy merchant from Bosansko Grahovo . The two were married in the Church of St. George in Knin , where Ćujić had been baptised as an infant . Businessman Jovo Jelić and Reverend Mirko Sinobad acted as witnesses . Ćujić 's first child , Siniša , was born in 1934 . In 1935 , the couple received twins ( a son named Radomir and a daughter named Radojka ) .

Ćujić and his family were relatively wealthy by the standards of Depression @-@ era Yugoslavia . Although a sizeable number of parishioners were not particularly religious and only attended church three or four times per year , Ćujić earned a monthly salary of 1 @,@ 000 dinars , and received numerous gifts from locals . He also had a poultry farm , and owned a property which produced about 900 kilograms ( 2 @,@ 000 lb ) of wheat annually . Although most of the inhabitants of Strmica were impoverished , Ćujić 's home was always filled with food . Due to his wealth , Ćujić became the most influential person in the village . He sought to use his money and influence to help the Serb peasants in the Dalmatian Hinterland . In 1934 , he organised the construction of a cultural centre in Strmica , financed and oversaw the irrigation of farmland west of Mračaj and approved the

reconstruction of a pair of church bells on the Church of St. John the Baptist . The reconstruction of the church bells , which had been destroyed by Austro -@- Hungarian artillery in 1916 , was done with money donated by the Yugoslav government and greatly improved his reputation among the local population , though ?uji? 's critics accused him of misappropriating funds .

= = Interwar Chetnik Association = =

In October 1934 , a Bulgarian nationalist assassinated Yugoslavia 's King Alexander in Marseille . ?uji? 's reputation was such that he was chosen to stand by Alexander 's coffin as the funeral train travelled through Knin . On this occasion , he met future Chetnik commander Dra?a Mihailovi? for the first and only time . As the king 's assassination was partially orchestrated by the Usta?e , a Croatian fascist movement , ?uji? armed himself and began organising Serb paramilitary groups in and around Knin . " I knew that the country would not survive , " ?uji? explained , " because nobody can put Serbs and Croats in the same bag . " In late 1934 , he met with Kosta Pe?anac , the head of the interwar Chetnik Association , and formed eleven Chetnik bands in the vicinity of the town . Chetnik insurgency did not have a long tradition in Dalmatia , and only emerged in the 1930s . ?uji? subjected local Serbs to constant propaganda , hoping that it would convince them to join the Chetniks . Most ignored his appeals , and continued living peacefully with their Croat neighbours .

On 9 January 1935 , ?uji? presided over a gathering of twenty newly ordained Chetniks in a village just north of Knin , together with General Ljubo Novakovi? and one of Pe?anac 's commanders . The gathering was held in full view of the villagers , and marked the first time that ?uji? publicly donned a Chetnik uniform ( World War I @-@ era Serbian Army battledress and a black lambswool cap ? or ?ubara ? with skull and crossbones insignia ) . On 6 September 1935 , ?uji? formed a Chetnik organisation in Vrlika . Several months later , he assembled a band of 70 Chetniks in the villages of Otri? and Velika Popina .

?uji? became known for his fiery speeches , which earned him the nickname " Father Fire " ( Serbo @-@ Croatian : Pop vatra ) . The tone of his speeches changed depending on the course of political developments in Yugoslavia and his ideological convictions ranged from right @-@ wing royalist to left @-@ wing progressive . At certain points , ?uji? appeared to embrace the fascism of Dimitrije Ljoti? , and at others , he strongly propagated conservative Chetnik ideology . ?uji? 's repeated calls for " democracy " and " national rights " prompted the regency of Prince Paul to brand him a " left @-@ wing agitator " . In any case , he received considerable support from the Serbian Orthodox Church in Knin . He also used his position as a priest and respected local leader to influence how the people of Strmica would vote , instructing his parishioners to cast ballots for a candidate of his choosing in the 1935 Yugoslav parliamentary elections .

In May 1937 , ?uji? held a sermon in which he accused the Yugoslav government of being responsible for the poor working conditions of railroad workers in Dalmatia and western Bosnia . In particular , he criticised Niko Novakovi? @-@ Longo , a minister without portfolio in Milan Stojadinovi? 's government . In mid @-@ May , ?uji? led a massive strike between Biha? and Knin in which more than 10 @, @ 000 disenchanted railroad workers participated . The Una ? Butu?nica railroad was one of eight being built in Yugoslavia by two French civil engineering companies , Société de Construction des Batignolles and Société Edmond Bayer de Agner . ?uji? wished to minimize the influence that the United Workers Syndicate Union of Yugoslavia ( Ujedinjeni radni?ki sindikalni savez Jugoslavije , URSSJ ) held over the work force in Dalmatia , and presented himself as a man out to defend the rights of workers throughout the country . The strike began on 15 May , on the Srb ? Dugopolje road . After three days , it was broken up by the Yugoslav gendarmerie . ?uji? then led the striking workers south to Vrpolje , where he attempted to negotiate a deal with the authorities . After negotiations broke down , ?uji? led the workers north to Strmica , via Golubi? and Pile?i kuk . According to police records , he held a large rally at Pile?i kuk and delivered a speech criticising the regency for its " pro @-@ Catholic , anti @-@ Orthodox and anti @-@ worker " policies . An eyewitness reported that ?uji? waved " a red [ communist ] flag and greeted followers with a clenched fist , all while being the leader of a Chetnik band . " In Knin , ?uji? and the striking workers clashed with police . The police fired a hail of bullets at the protesters , wounding three and

killing a young girl that was watching the commotion . ?uji? was subsequently arrested and spent ten days in prison for " insulting His Majesty " during the rally at Pile?i kuk , which was attended by a crowd of over 800 people . He later received financial compensation from the Yugoslav government for the time he spent in prison . ?uji? 's actions greatly enhanced his reputation amongst Dalmatian peasants , who referred to him as a " brave leader of working men " . Local authorities continued to view ?uji? with suspicion , describing him as a " priest of left @-@ wing democracy " in internal documents . Unsubstantiated rumours circulated that ?uji? supported Ljoti? 's Yugoslav National Movement ( or Zbor ) , and that he was one of the few people that had voted for Ljoti? in the 1938 Yugoslav parliamentary elections . Dalmatian authorities even suspected that ?uji? was an " old Italian spy " who received orders from the Italian intelligence headquarters in Zadar , but never uncovered any evidence to substantiate these suspicions .

= = World War II = =

Following the 1938 Anschluss ( union ) of Germany with Austria , Yugoslavia shared a border with the Third Reich and came under increasing pressure as her neighbours became aligned with the Axis powers . In April 1939 , Yugoslavia gained a second frontier with Italy when that country invaded and occupied neighbouring Albania . At the outbreak of World War II , the Yugoslav government declared its neutrality . Between September and November 1940 , Hungary and Romania joined the Tripartite Pact and Italy invaded Greece . From that time , Yugoslavia was almost completely surrounded by the Axis powers and their satellites , and her neutral stance toward the war came under tremendous pressure . In late February 1941 , Bulgaria joined the Pact . The next day , German troops entered Bulgaria from Romania , closing the ring around Yugoslavia . With the aim of securing his southern flank for the pending attack on the Soviet Union , Adolf Hitler began placing heavy pressure on the country to join the Axis powers . The Yugoslav government conditionally signed the Pact after some delay , on 25 March 1941 . Two days later , a group of pro @-@ Western Serb @-@ nationalist air force officers deposed Prince Paul in a bloodless coup d 'état . The conspirators declared 17 @-@ year @-@ old Prince Peter of age and brought to power a government of national unity led by General Du?an Simovi? . The coup enraged Hitler , who declared : " even if Yugoslavia at first should give declarations of loyalty , she must be considered as a foe and therefore must be destroyed as quickly as possible . " He then ordered the invasion of Yugoslavia , which commenced on 6 April 1941 .

?uji? did not support the coup , and was in Strmica with his family when the Axis invasion began . He realized that Yugoslavia 's collapse was inevitable after seeing a column of demoralised troops from the half @-@ mobilised 12th Infantry Division Jadranska pass his home . Once it became clear that the Royal Yugoslav Army ( Serbo @-@ Croatian : Vojska Kraljevine Jugoslavije , VKJ ) could not hold the Axis advance , ?uji? started blaming Croat fifth column activity for the VKJ 's military defeats . On 10 April 1941 , the Usta?e @-@ led Independent State of Croatia ( Nezavisna Dr?ava Hrvatska , NDH ) was proclaimed in Zagreb and divided into German and Italian zones of occupation . Between April and August , NDH authorities implemented a policy of widespread incarcerations , massacres , forced emigration , and murder of Serbs .

= = Collaboration agreements with the Italians = =

Following the NDH 's establishment , ?uji? narrowly escaped capture by Croat nationalists . As early as April , ?uji? 's Chetnik 's began killing and mutilating Croats . This was done in retaliation for the wave of Usta?e atrocities that had befallen Serb communities across the NDH around the same time . According to Italian reports , ?uji? had around 300 Chetniks under his command that month , centered mainly around Knin . By mid @-@ month , his Chetniks were launching raids against communist @-@ held villages between Bosansko Grahovo and Drvar in conjunction with the Italians , who considered him a filibuster ( filibustiere ) . His Chetniks also successfully kept the Usta?e out of Knin and its surroundings , sparing the local Serb population from further massacres . As summer approached , ?uji? 's Chetniks captured Drvar from the Usta?e . By early summer , he and Chetnik

commander Stevo Rađenović contacted the Italians and asked them to put a halt to the Ustaše mistreatment of Serbs , enable the return of Serb refugees , and repeal a decree that enabled the confiscation of Serb @-@ owned property in the NDH . The Italians obliged in the hope that doing so would win the Chetniks over to collaboration and seriously weaken any future uprising in the area , which would have further disrupted rail traffic along the Split - Karlovac line . On 13 August , at a meeting in the village of Pašane , Đujić and several other Serb nationalists agreed to collaborate with the Italians . They secretly signed a pact of non @-@ aggression with the Italian military , and in exchange , the Italians acquiesced to Đujić 's 3 @, @ 000 Chetniks operating in and around Knin . On 31 August , at a Drvar assembly , Đujić was given the task of stopping the Italian advance on the town . Immediately afterwards , he made an agreement with the Italians granting them free passage .

#### = = = Establishment of the Dinara Division = = =

In early January 1942 , the Dinara Division was formed after Đujić was contacted by supreme Chetnik commander Draža Mihailović via a courier . Chetnik commander Ilija Trifunović @-@ Birčanin played a central role in organizing the units of Chetnik leaders in western Bosnia , Lika , and northern Dalmatia into the Dinara Division and dispatched former Royal Yugoslav Army officers to help . Đujić was designated the commander of the division and its goal was for the " establishment of a Serb national state " in which " an exclusively Orthodox population is to live " . Đujić says the Dinara Division was " under Draža 's command , but we received news and supplies for our struggle from [ Dimitrije ] Ljotić and [ Milan ] Nedić . [ ... ] Nedić 's couriers reached me in Dinara and mine reached him in Belgrade . He sent me military uniforms for the guardists of the Dinara Chetnik Division ; he sent me ten million dinars to obtain for the fighters whatever was needed and whatever could be obtained . " By mid @-@ April Đujić and his troops began collaborating with the Italians in anti @-@ Partisan raids . He operated in northern Dalmatia under commander Trifunović @-@ Birčanin who acted as liaison officer between the Chetniks and Italians and whose collaboration agreements were condoned by Mihailović . By June 1942 , Đujić and other Chetnik leaders had established co @-@ operation with the Ustaše , although these relationships were " based only on their common fear of the Partisans " and " characterised by distrust and uncertainty " . Đujić actively co @-@ operated with Italian forces , with whom he had concluded a non @-@ aggression pact . In late September 1942 , Đujić 's Chetniks killed up to 200 Croats in the village of Gata near Split , causing outrage by the Italians .

On 10 February 1943 , Đujić , Ilija Mihić , Petar Bađović and Radovan Ivaničević , the Chetnik commanders of east Bosnia , Herzegovina , Dalmatia , and Lika , signed a joint proclamation declaring to the " people of Bosnia , Lika , and Dalmatia " that " since we have cleansed Serbia , Montenegro , and Herzegovina , we have come to help to crush the pitiful remnants of the Communist international , criminal band of Josip Broz Tito , Moša Pijade , Levi Vajnert and other paid Jews " . The Partisan rank and file was called upon to " kill the political commissars and join our ranks right away , " like the " hundreds and hundreds who are surrendering every day , conscious that they have been betrayed and swindled by the Communist Jews . "

Following the death of Trifunović @-@ Birčanin in February 1943 , Đujić , along with Jevčević , Bađović , and Ivaničević vowed to the Italians to carry on Trifunović @-@ Birčanin 's policies of closely collaborating with them against the Yugoslav Partisans . Đujić 's detachments in Dalmatia and western Bosnia were used by the Italians almost up to the point of their surrender . Following Italian capitulation in September 1943 , the Germans were less supportive of Đujić than the Italians had been , and restricted his activities to guarding railway tracks from Partisan sabotage . On 19 or 20 November 1943 , Mihailović ordered Đujić to collaborate with the Germans , adding that he himself was unable to openly do so " because of public opinion . "

#### = = = Retreat and surrender = = =

On 25 November 1944 , the Yugoslav Partisans attacked the town of Knin , which was defended by

14 @, @ 000 German troops , 4 @, @ 500 of ?uji? 's Chetniks , and around 1 @, @ 500 Usta?e . On 1 December , ?uji? was wounded and sent an emissary to General Gustav Fehn of the German 264th Division in Knin with the following message :

The Chetnik Command with all of its armed forces has collaborated sincerely and loyally with the German Army in these area from September last year . Our common interest demanded this . This collaboration has continued to the present day . [ ... ] The Chetnik Command wishes to share the destiny of the German Army in the future , too . [ ... ] The Command requests that [ the village of ] Pa?ene be the base for supplying our units , until a further common agreement is reached .

On 3 December 1944 , ?uji? 's force of between 6 @, @ 000 ? 7 @, @ 000 withdrew to Biha? with help from the Wehrmacht 373rd Division . The Chetniks received ammunition and food from the Germans and began a joint German @-@ Chetnik offensive against the Partisans . General Fehn organized the transportation of ?uji? 's wounded Chetniks through Zagreb to the Third Reich . ?uji? requested a written guarantee from Ante Paveli? , leader of the NDH , to afford him and his forces refuge in German @-@ occupied Slovenia . In addition , Dimitrije Ljoti? and Milan Nedi? petitioned to Nazi party official Hermann Neubacher in Vienna that ?uji? 's forces should be allowed passage , as did Slovene collaborationist General Leon Rupnik . On 21 December 1944 , Paveli? ordered the military forces of the NDH to give ?uji? and his forces " orderly and unimpeded passage " . However , ?uji? went through an alternate route towards the Istrian peninsula , as the routes offered by Paveli? were not secure from Partisan attacks , and killed the Croatian population along the way . When ?uji? reached Slovenia , his forces joined Dobroslav Jev?evi? 's Chetniks , Ljoti? 's Volunteers , and Nedi? 's Serbian Shock Corps forming a single unit that was under the command of Odilo Globocnik of the Higher SS and Police Leader in the Adriatic Littoral . Together , they tried to contact the western Allies in Italy in an attempt to secure foreign aid for a proposed anti @-@ Communist offensive to restore royalist Yugoslavia .

In May 1945 , ?uji? surrendered his division to Allied forces and they were then taken to southern Italy , from there to displaced persons camps in Germany and then dispersed . After staying in Paris from 1947 to 1949 , ?uji? emigrated to the United States , to where many of his former followers may have followed him .

= = Life in exile and failed extradition attempts = =

In 1947 , ?uji? was tried and sentenced in absentia for war crimes by Yugoslavia . He was declared a war criminal who as commander of the Dinara Division was responsible for organizing and carrying out a series of mass murders , massacres , tortures , rapes , robberies , and imprisonments , and collaborating with the German and Italian occupiers . He was accused of being responsible for the deaths of 1 @, @ 500 people during the war .

From 1947 to 1949 ?uji? was in France . Following his arrival in the United States , ?uji? and his fighters played a role in the foundation of the Ravna Gora Movement of Serbian Chetniks . Later , he enraged some in the Serbian diaspora when he endorsed a Communist @-@ authorized Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church . However , he remained strongly opposed to the Communist regime in Yugoslavia . ?uji? retired to San Marcos , where he wrote poems and jokes that were published in both the United States and Serbia .

On 28 June 1989 , the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo , ?uji? granted the title of vojvoda to Vojislav ?e?elj , and ordered him " to expel all Croats , Albanians , and other foreign elements from holy Serbian soil " , stating he would return only when Serbia was cleansed of " the last Jew , Albanian , and Croat " . ?e?elj was at the time an anti @-@ Communist dissident and was subsequently described for his activities in the Yugoslav Wars as " a man whose killer commando units operating in Croatia and Bosnia carried on the very worst of the Chetnik tradition . " Later ?e?elj became leader of the Serbian Radical Party ( SRS ) , a government coalition partner of Serbian President Slobodan Milo?evi? . In 1998 , ?uji? publicly stated that he regretted awarding that title to ?e?elj . He was quoted as saying , " I was naïve when I nominated ?e?elj [ as ] Vojvoda ; I ask my people to forgive me . The greatest gravedigger of Serbdom is Slobodan Milo?evi? " and that he is " disappointed in ?e?elj for openly collaborating with Milo?evi? 's Socialist Party , with

Communists who have only changed their name . [ ... ] ?e?elj has sullied the reputation of Chetniks and Serbian nationalism . " According to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia ( ICTY ) testimony of Croatian Serb leader Milan Babi? , ?uji? financially supported the Republic of Serbian Krajina in the 1990s . On 21 May 1998 , Biljana Plav?i? , President of the Republika Srpska at the time , awarded ?uji? the Order of the Star of Kara?or?e ( First Class ) . ?uji? 's wife Zorka died on 23 August 1995 , aged 84 .

On 28 May 1999 , Croatian Justice Minister Zvonimir ?eparovi? attempted to have ?uji? extradited based on lengthy evidence drawn from proceedings carried out by the ?ibenik @-@ Knin County Court , but to no avail .

= = Death = =

?uji? died on 11 September 1999 at a hospice in San Diego , California at the age of 92 . He was survived by his three children , two granddaughters , four great @-@ grandchildren , his brother , Bo?ko ?uji? , and his sister , Ilinka ?uric , all of whom were residents of California . A New York Times obituary following his death , written by journalist David Binder , wrote that ?uji? was " a fierce foe of the Nazis , Fascists and Communists , " that participated in " epic World War II battles " and carried out many " acts of wartime bravery . " The article and its author were criticized by the Croatian government which said it was " dissatisfied and disappointed " with what it stated was " false " information included in ?uji? 's biography . Editorial writer for the Washington Post , Benjamin Wittes , observed that the obituary only mentioned " in passing " the war crimes and collaboration accusations against ?uji? , as well as his influence in the Yugoslav Wars . Historian Marko Attila Hoare stated that Binder 's piece displayed his " admiration of Serb Nazi @-@ collaborator Mom?ilo ?uji? . "

A commemoration marking six months since ?uji? 's death , organized by the " Vojvoda Mom?ilo ?uji? " Dinara Chetnik Movement , was celebrated at St. Mark 's Church in Belgrade in March 2000 . The Serbian diaspora in the United States set up a monument dedicated to ?uji? at the Serbian cemetery in Libertyville , Illinois . The management and players of the football club Red Star Belgrade visited it on 23 May 2010 .