

= 27th Infantry Division Savska =

The 27th Infantry Division Savska was an infantry formation of the Royal Yugoslav Army that formed part of the Yugoslav 4th Army during the German @-@ led Axis invasion of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in April 1941 . It was raised from the Savska military district , and was a very large and unwieldy formation which was almost entirely reliant on animal transport for mobility . Largely manned by Croat troops , many of whom saw the Germans as potential liberators from Serbian oppression during the interwar period , the division also lacked modern arms and sufficient ammunition .

Along with the rest of the Yugoslav Army , the 27th Infantry Division Savska began mobilising on 3 April 1941 , and was still engaged in that process three days later when the Germans began an air campaign and a series of preliminary operations against the Yugoslav frontiers . These attacks ignited rebellion within the Croat troops of the division . Even the chief of staff of the division became involved , countermanding orders for the sabotage of a bridge over the Drava river at Zákány . The division briefly established a defensive line on the Yugoslav side of the river , but German troops began crossing on 7 April , forcing the division to begin withdrawing . A planned counterattack delayed the Germans for a day , but the division began to disintegrate due to fifth column actions , rebellion and desertion . When the German 14th Panzer Division broke out of the bridgehead at Zákány on 10 April , the 27th Infantry Division Savska numbered only 2 @,@ 000 men , mostly Serbs . In a single day , the German panzers with overwhelming air support brushed aside the remnants of the division and captured Zagreb , covering nearly 160 kilometres ( 99 mi ) and meeting little resistance . On that day the divisional headquarters was captured , and the division effectively ceased to exist .

= = Background = =

The Royal Yugoslav Army ( Serbo @-@ Croatian : Vojska Kraljevine Jugoslavije , VKJ ) was formed after World War I as the army of the Kingdom of Serbs , Croats and Slovenes ( Kingdom of SCS ) , when that country was created on 1 December 1918 . To defend the new kingdom , an army was formed around the nucleus of the victorious Royal Serbian Army combined with armed formations raised in the former parts of the Austro @-@ Hungarian Empire that joined with the Kingdom of Serbia to form the new state . Many former Austro @-@ Hungarian officers and soldiers became members of the new army . From its beginning , the army , like other aspects of public life in the new kingdom , was dominated by ethnic Serbs , who saw the army as a means by which to secure Serb hegemony in the new kingdom .

The development of the army was hampered by the poor economy of the kingdom , and this continued through the 1920s . In 1929 , King Alexander changed the name of the country to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia , at which time the army became the VKJ . The army budget remained tight , and as tensions rose across Europe during the 1930s , it became hard to secure weapons and munitions from other countries . Consequently , at the time World War II broke out in September 1939 , the VKJ had several serious weaknesses , which included reliance on draught animals for transport , and the large size of its formations . For example , Yugoslav infantry divisions had twice the number of men of contemporary British infantry divisions . These characteristics resulted in slow , unwieldy formations , and the inadequate supply of arms and munitions meant that even the very large Yugoslav formations had low firepower . Older generals better suited to the trench warfare of World War I were combined with an army that was not equipped or trained to resist the fast @-@ moving combined arms approach used by the Germans in Poland and France .

The weaknesses of the VKJ in strategy , structure , equipment , mobility and supply were exacerbated to a significant degree by the lack of unity across Yugoslavia which had resulted from two decades of Serb hegemony , and the attendant lack of political legitimacy achieved by the central government . Attempts to address the lack of unity came too late to ensure that the VKJ was a cohesive force . Fifth column activity was also a serious concern , not only from the Croatian nationalist Usta?e , but from the Slovene and ethnic German minorities in the country .

= = Structure = =

= = = Peacetime organisation = = =

According to regulations issued by the Royal Yugoslav Army in 1935 , the Savska divisional district was headquartered in Zagreb during peacetime , and was under the control of the 4th Army district also headquartered in Zagreb . The division was named for the Sava river , a tributary of the Danube that flows along the northern border of modern @-@ day Bosnia and Herzegovina . In peacetime , the Savska divisional district included :

- 35th Infantry Regiment , based in Zagreb
- 36th Infantry Regiment , based in Varaždin
- 53rd Infantry Regiment , based in Karlovac
- 14th Artillery Regiment , based in Varaždin
- 30th Artillery Regiment , based in Zagreb

= = = Wartime organisation = = =

The wartime organisation of the Royal Yugoslav Army was laid down by regulations issued in 1936 ? 37 , and the strength of an infantry division was 26 @, @ 000 ? 27 @, @ 000 men . A total of 11 @, @ 200 horses and other pack and draught animals were required to provide mobility for each infantry division . The theoretical wartime organisation of a fully mobilised Yugoslav infantry division was :

- headquarters
- divisional infantry headquarters , with three or four infantry regiments
- divisional artillery headquarters , with one or two artillery regiments
- a cavalry battalion with two squadrons , a bicycle squadron and a machine gun platoon
- a pioneer battalion of three companies
- an anti @-@ tank company , equipped with twelve 37 mm ( 1 @. @ 5 in ) or 47 mm ( 1 @. @ 9 in )
- anti @-@ tank guns
- a machine gun company
- an anti @-@ aircraft machine gun company
- a signals company
- logistics units

Each infantry regiment was to consist of three infantry battalions , a machine gun company , and the divisional artillery regiments were animal @-@ drawn and largely equipped with World War I @-@ vintage pieces . An artillery regiment consisted of four battalions , one of 100 mm ( 3 @. @ 9 in ) light howitzers , one of 65 mm ( 2 @. @ 6 in ) or 75 mm ( 3 @. @ 0 in ) mountain guns , and two of 75 mm ( 3 @. @ 0 in ) or 80 mm ( 3 @. @ 1 in ) field guns . The 36th Infantry Regiment and the 14th and 30th Artillery Regiments , which were administered by the Savska divisional district in peacetime , were earmarked to join other formations when they were mobilised , and the division was brought up to its wartime strength by the 104th Infantry Regiment and the 27th Artillery Regiment .

= = Planned deployment = =

The 27th Infantry Division Savska was a component of the 4th Army as part of the 1st Army Group , which was responsible for the defence of northwestern Yugoslavia . In the event of mobilisation , the 4th Army was to deploy in a cordon along the western sector of the Hungarian border , with the 27th Infantry Division Savska positioned opposite the Hungarian village of Gyékényes , between the confluence of the Mura at Legrad and Kloštar Podravski . In this disposition , the divisional headquarters was planned to be located at Kapela , north of Bjelovar . On the left flank of the

division it was planned that the 42nd Infantry Division Murska would be positioned opposite the Hungarian city of Nagykanizsa , and on the right flank the 40th Infantry Division Slavenska was to establish itself opposite the Hungarian town of Barcs . Border guard units in the division 's area of responsibility would consist of the 3rd Battalion of the 393rd Reserve Regiment and 576th Independent Battalion .

= = Operations = =

= = = Mobilisation = = =

As the Axis invasion began , the 27th Infantry Division Savska had only commenced mobilisation , and was largely in its mobilisation centres or moving to concentration areas . On 4 April , the commander of the 4th Army , Armijski ?eneral Petar Nedeljkovi? had reported that the division could not move for another 24 hours due to lack of vehicles . Only a small proportion of the division was in its planned positions on 6 April :

the divisional commander Divizijski ?eneral August Mari? and his headquarters staff were mobilising in Zagreb

the 35th Infantry Regiment ( less its 3rd Battalion ) was marching from Zagreb to Kri?evci , with its 3rd Battalion still in Zagreb

the 53rd Infantry Regiment , with about 50 percent of its troops and 15 percent of its animals , was moving by rail from its mobilisation centre in Karlovac via Kri?evci to Koprivnica , with its 1st Battalion detraining in Koprivnica

the 104th Infantry Regiment was marching from its mobilisation centre in Sesvete via Dugo Selo to Bjelovar

Two battalions of the 27th Artillery Regiment were in position in Novigrad Podravski and near Koprivnica , with the rest of the 27th Artillery Regiment still mobilising in Zagreb and Vara?din

the divisional cavalry battalion was mobilising in ?akovec but had no horses , and the divisional machine gun battalion was mobilising in Zagreb but also had no animal transport

the remainder of the divisional units were at their mobilisation centres in and around Zagreb

= = = 6 April = = =

Early on 6 April 1941 , the German XLVI Motorised Corps launched preliminary attacks along the Drava between ?dala and Gotalovo in the area of the 27th Infantry Division Savska with the intention of securing crossings over the river , but they were unsuccessful . By the evening , German successes along the Hungarian border made it clear to the Germans that the Yugoslavs would not be resisting stubbornly at the frontier . The XLVI Motorised Corps was then ordered to begin seizing bridges over the Drava right along the 4th Army front , including at Zákány near Gyékényes . These local attacks were sufficient to inflame dissent within the largely Croat 4th Army , who refused to resist the Germans which they considered their liberators from Serbian oppression during the interwar period .

The continuing mobilisation and concentration of the division and the whole of the 4th Army was hampered by escalating fifth column activities and propaganda fomented by the Croatian nationalist Usta?e . Some units stopped mobilising , or began returning to their mobilisation centres from their concentration areas . During the day , Yugoslav sabotage units attempted to destroy the bridge over the Drava at Zákány . This attempt was only partially successful , due to the influence of Usta?e propaganda and the countermanding of the demolition orders by the chief of staff of the 27th Infantry Division Savska , Major Anton Markovi? . The Yugoslav radio network linking the division with the 4th Army and flanking divisions was sabotaged by the Usta?e on 6 April , and radio communications within the 4th Army remained poor throughout the fighting .

= = = 7 April = = =

About 05 : 00 on 7 April , two to three battalions of the XLVI Motorised Corps commenced crossing the Drava at Zákány , and attacked towards Koprivnica . In response to the German crossing , the 53rd Infantry Regiment withdrew towards Koprivnica and took up defensive positions in a series of villages including Toržec . In order to stop this German penetration and gain more time for the concentration of the division , elements of the 27th Artillery Regiment were sent to support the defensive line near Toržec , which was placed under the command of the division 's commanding officer for infantry . About 07 : 30 , the commander of the Yugoslav 1st Army Group , Armijski General Milorad Petrović met with Nedeljković at Zagreb and ordered him to go to Koprivnica and prepare a counterattack against the bridgehead , to commence at 15 : 00 . The counterattack plan was unable to be carried out , as the necessary units could not reach their positions .

About 10 : 30 , the Germans reached the defensive line near Toržec , and fighting began . A few Breguet 19s of the 4th Air Reconnaissance Group attached to the 1st Army Group which had survived an early morning raid on their airfield the previous day , mounted attacks on the bridge over the Drava at Zákány . After the Germans reinforced their bridgehead with two more battalions , they overcame the Yugoslav defenders , who had suffered significant losses and were running low on artillery ammunition . About 18 : 00 , the 53rd Infantry Regiment withdrew to Koprivnica along with its artillery support , and remained in the town during the night . The bridge at Zákány was destroyed later that day by sabotage units . At 23 : 00 , following orders from Petrović that he was to attack on 8 April at all costs , Nedeljković issued orders for a counterattack to be carried out early on 8 April .

= = = 8 April = = =

On 8 April , the German XLVI Motorised Corps continued with its limited objective attacks to expand their bridgeheads on the 4th Army front , including at Zákány . The resistance offered by both flanking divisions was very limited . The 36th Infantry Regiment of the 42nd Infantry Division Murska , which had been concentrating in the Ludbreg district northwest of Koprivnica , was transferred to the 27th Infantry Division Savska , in an attempt to bolster the left flank of the divisional sector .

On the morning of 8 April , the 27th Infantry Division Savska was deployed around Koprivnica . The 104th Infantry Regiment supported by elements of the 27th Artillery Regiment was deployed northeast of the town behind the Drava between Molve and Hlebine . The 2nd Cavalry Regiment of the 1st Cavalry Division , which had been riding from its mobilisation centre in Virovitica to Zagreb , was allocated to the 27th Infantry Division Savska to assist with establishing its forward defences , and was deployed with two artillery batteries between the outskirts of Koprivnica and Bregi . The 53rd Infantry Regiment , and the remnants of the 2nd Battalion of the 36th Infantry Regiment and the 1st Battalion of the 35th Infantry Regiment ( totalling around 500 men ) , and the 1st Battery of the 27th Artillery Regiment were located in the town itself . The 2nd Battalion of the 36th Infantry Regiment had not yet arrived in Koprivnica , and the divisional cavalry squadron had reached as far as Ivanec . The majority of the 81st Cavalry Regiment , which were army @-@ level troops , were on the road from Zagreb to Koprivnica , although its 1st Squadron , which had been transported to Koprivnica in cars on 7 April , was deployed as part of an outpost line forward of Koprivnica supporting the 1st Battalion of the 53rd Infantry Regiment . The divisional headquarters was located 5 kilometres ( 3 @.@ 1 mi ) southwest of Koprivnica at Reka .

In accordance with Nedeljković 's orders , Marić 's 27th Infantry Division Savska was to undertake a counterattack against the Zákány bridgehead on 8 April . Supported by two batteries of Skoda 75 mm Model 1928 mountain guns of the 27th Artillery Regiment , the attack consisted of three columns converging on the bridgehead . The right column , attacking from the area of Bregi , was to consist of the 2nd Cavalry Regiment supported by the divisional machine gun company . The centre column , consisting of the 53rd Infantry Regiment and the remnants of the 2nd Battalion of the 36th Infantry Regiment and the 1st Battalion of the 35th Infantry Regiment , directly supported by the 1st Battery of the 27th Artillery Regiment , would attack from Koprivnica . The left column , attacking from the vicinity of Herešin , was to consist of the dismounted 81st Cavalry Regiment . As promised support from the 36th Infantry Regiment , 81st Cavalry Regiment and army @-@ level artillery had

not materialised , Mari? postponed the counterattack to 16 : 00 . By noon , a full scale revolt had broken out within the flanking 40th Infantry Division Slavonska , resulting in the capture of the town of Bjelovar and a large portion of the 4th Army headquarters by the rebels that afternoon . When the attack on the bridgehead at Zákány was eventually launched , only the 2nd Cavalry Regiment and the 1st Squadron of the 81st Cavalry Regiment remained in contact with the Germans , south of Peteranec , and the 2nd Cavalry Regiment held that area throughout the night of 8 / 9 April , despite heavy German artillery fire . Of the other units involved in the counterattack , most were only at 25 percent of their full strength due to Usta?e @-@ influenced desertions sparked by the rebellion within the 40th Infantry Division Slavonska . Two battalions of the 36th Infantry Regiment deserted during the day .

= = = 9 April = = =

On 9 April , the left flanking 42nd Infantry Division Murska withdrew from the Drava to conform with the line being held by forward elements of the 27th Infantry Division Savska , while the German XLVI Motorised Corps completed its preparations for full @-@ scale offensive action by expanding its bridgehead at Zákány . The cavalry units continued to fight the Germans around Peteranec , but the left sector of the divisional front line began to disintegrate . The commander of the right sector , Pukovnik Mihailo Georgijevi? ordered his troops to hold their positions and went to divisional headquarters to ask approval to discharge the Croats in his units . Mari? would not inform 4th Army headquarters of this idea , so Georgijevi? went to Zagreb to speak to Petrovi? , and to further urge him to withdraw all troops that still wanted to fight to a line south of the Sava . According to Georgijevi? , Petrovi? ordered him to tell Mari? to consider disarming his Croat troops , and to continue to hold positions on the line of the Bilogora hills , but to conduct a fighting withdrawal towards Zagreb and Sisak if the German pressure was too great . The intent of these orders was not implemented , as fifth column elements changed the wording so that orders were issued to discharge Croat troops and to retreat towards Zagreb without fighting .

About 09 : 00 , Mari? and Markovi? went to Zagreb to see Petrovi? , who ordered them to immediately return to their division and continue to resist the Germans . On the return journey , they encountered most of their division withdrawing towards Kri?evci , with the exception of the cavalry units still fighting north of Koprivnica . Mari? halted the retreat , and established positions around Mali Grabi?ani , making his headquarters at Kri?evci . Georgijevi? dismissed his Croat troops and retreated with the rest of his force towards Zagreb , and the commander of the 104th Infantry Regiment discharged all his troops . In the afternoon , the hard @-@ pressed cavalry units began to withdraw . About 14 : 00 , the 2nd Cavalry Regiment withdrew to Novigrad Podravski via Bregi , but receiving a hostile reception from the Croat population , continued towards Bjelovar . About 18 : 00 , the 1st Squadron of the 81st Cavalry Regiment withdrew via Koprivnica , reaching the rest of the division about 23 : 00 . About 19 : 00 , the Germans occupied Koprivnica without resistance . By evening , Mari? 's division numbered about 2 @, @ 000 troops , the 36th Infantry Regiment and 81st Cavalry Regiment were widely dispersed , the 53rd Infantry Regiment had effectively ceased to exist , and his artillery regiment had only two horses to pull guns .

Prior to its disbandment , the rebels in Bjelovar had used the telegraph station and telephone exchange in the town to issue false orders to parts of the 104th Infantry Regiment directing them to withdraw from their positions . The rebels also contacted the Germans by telephone and sent representatives to meet the Germans at the Drava bridgeheads , to advise them that the roads had been cleared of obstacles , and the rebels invited them to enter Bjelovar . Rebels and deserters began to converge on Bjelovar , bringing with them many Serb officers and soldiers who soon filled the town 's jails .

Elements of the 4th Army began to withdraw southwards on 9 April . On the evening of 9 April , Generaloberst Maximilian von Weichs , commander of the German 2nd Army , was ready to launch major offensive operations from the bridgeheads on the following day . His plan involved two main thrusts . The first would be spearheaded by the 14th Panzer Division breaking out of the Zákány bridgehead and drive towards Zagreb , and the second would see the 8th Panzer Division break out

of the bridgehead in the sector of the 40th Infantry Division Slavonska and turn east between the Drava and Sava to attack towards Belgrade . On the night of 9 / 10 April , those Croats that had remained with their units also began to desert or turn on their commanders , and in the 40th Infantry Division Slavonska on the right flank of the 27th Infantry Division Savska , almost all the remaining troops were Serbs . Due to the increasing momentum of the revolt , Petrović concluded that the 4th Army was no longer an effective formation and could not resist the Germans .

== Fate ==

Early on 10 April , Pukovnik Franjo Nikolić , the head of the operations staff with the headquarters of the 1st Army Group , left his post and visited the senior Ustaše leader Slavko Kvaternik in Zagreb . He then returned to headquarters and redirected 4th Army units around Zagreb to either cease operations or to deploy to innocuous positions . These actions reduced or eliminated armed resistance to the German advance . On the same day , the 14th Panzer Division , supported by dive bombers , crossed the Drava and drove southwest towards Zagreb on snow - covered roads in extremely cold conditions . Initial air reconnaissance indicated large concentrations of Yugoslav troops on the divisional axis of advance , but these troops proved to be withdrawing towards Zagreb .

Degraded by revolt and fifth - column activity , the 27th Infantry Division Savska numbered about 2 ,000 effectives when the German attack began . The 14th Panzer Division vanguard reached their positions in the Bilogora range around 08 : 00 , and the remnants of the division began withdrawing towards Križevci under heavy air attack . When they reached the town around 14 : 00 , they were quickly encircled by German motorised troops that had outflanked them . The divisional headquarters staff escaped , but were captured a little further down the road at Bojnikovec . The remnants of the 2nd Cavalry Regiment had to fight its way towards Bjelovar , but was attacked by German tanks on the outskirts , captured and detained . The 14th Panzer Division continued its almost completely unopposed drive on Zagreb using two routes , Križevci - Dugo Selo - Zagreb and Bjelovar - Azma - Ivanić - Grad - Zagreb .

About 17 : 45 on 10 April , Kvaternik and SS - Standartenführer Edmund Veessenmayer went to the radio station in Zagreb and Kvaternik proclaimed the creation of the Independent State of Croatia ( Croatian : Nezavisna Država Hrvatska , NDH ) . The 35th Infantry Regiment of the 27th Infantry Division Savska was disbanded by its commander when he heard news of the proclamation . By 19 : 30 on 10 April , lead elements of the 14th Panzer Division had reached the outskirts of Zagreb , having covered nearly 160 kilometres ( 99 miles ) in a single day . By the time it entered Zagreb , the 14th Panzer Division was met by cheering crowds , and had captured 15 ,000 Yugoslav troops , including 22 generals .

About 19 : 45 , the 1st Army Group held a conference in Zagreb , just as German tanks were entering the city . Nedeljković told Petrović that he could no longer hold his positions , but despite this , Petrović ordered him to hold for at least 2 - 3 days to enable the withdrawal of the 7th Army to the Kupa river . Nedeljković replied that he no longer had an army , and suggested that all Serb officers and men be ordered back to form a defensive line along the Sava and Una rivers . Petrović refused to consider this , but ordered the 1st Cavalry Division to form a defensive line along the Sava between Jasenovac and Zagreb . The XLVI Motorised Corps encountered little resistance from the 4th Army , particularly from the 27th Infantry Division Savska and 40th Infantry Division Slavonska on its right , and by the evening of 10 April the whole 4th Army was disintegrating . Petrović wanted to dismiss Marić as commander of the 27th Infantry Division Savska due to suspicions that he was an Ustaše sympathiser , but could not identify a suitable replacement .

On 11 April , Petrović and the staff of 1st Army Group headquarters were captured by Ustaše at Petrinja , and the rear area staff of 4th Army headquarters were captured by Ustaše at Topusko . The personnel of both headquarters were soon handed over to the Germans by their captors . Nedeljković and his operations staff escaped to fight on for a few days , but the 27th Infantry Division Savska had ceased to exist . On 15 April , Nedeljković received orders that a ceasefire had been agreed , and that all 4th Army troops were to remain in place and not fire on German

personnel . After a delay in locating appropriate signatories for the surrender document , the Yugoslav Supreme Command unconditionally surrendered in Belgrade effective at 12 : 00 on 18 April .

== Books ==

== Journals and papers ==

== Websites ==