

= Marija Bursa? =

Marija Bursa? (Serbian Cyrillic : ?????? ?????? ; 2 August 1920 ? 23 September 1943) was a Bosnian Serb member of the Yugoslav Partisans during World War II in Yugoslavia and the first woman proclaimed a People 's Hero of Yugoslavia . Bursa? was born to a farming family in the village of Kamenica , near Drvar . After the invasion of Yugoslavia by the Axis powers and their creation of the Independent State of Croatia in April 1941 , Bursa? supported the Partisan resistance movement led by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ) . Like other women in her village , she collected food , clothing , and other supplies for the Partisan war effort . Bursa? became a member of the League of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia in September 1941 . The following August she was appointed political commissar of a company of the 1st Krajina Agricultural Shock Brigade , which harvested crops in the Sanica River valley , and was admitted to the KPJ at the end of that summer .

Bursa? became a Partisan in February 1943 , joining the newly formed 10th Krajina Brigade . With the brigade , she fought in the Grahovo , Knin , Vrljika and Livno areas and served as a nurse . In September 1943 , Bursa? was wounded in the leg while throwing hand grenades during an attack on the German base at Prkosi in northwestern Bosnia . As she was being transported to a field hospital at Vidovo Selo , she sang Partisan songs . Bursa? 's wound soon developed gangrene , and she died at the hospital on 23 September 1943 . She was proclaimed a People 's Hero of Yugoslavia the following month . Schools , streets and organisations were named in her memory following the war , commemorating her service to the Partisan cause .

= = Early life = =

Bursa? was born on 2 August 1920 in the village of Kamenica , near Drvar in the region of Bosanska Krajina , the north @-@ western sector of Bosnia and Herzegovina (then part of the Kingdom of Serbs , Croats and Slovenes , renamed as Yugoslavia in 1929) . The Drvar area was inhabited primarily by ethnic Serbs , with Bosnian Muslims and Croats forming less than four percent of the population . Bursa? was the oldest of five children of stonemason Nikola Bursa? and his wife , Joka , who mostly raised sheep and cattle on their family farm . Like other village girls , Bursa? did not go to school ? only the boys attended elementary school in Drvar . A shepherdess until age fourteen , she later helped her mother with housekeeping and agricultural work . Bursa? became skilled at weaving , spinning , knitting and embroidery before completing a six @-@ month tailoring course in Drvar .

In 1938 , an elementary school opened in Kamenica at which Velimir Stojni? was a trainee teacher . Stojni? , a member of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (Serbo @-@ Croatian : Komunisti?ka partija Jugoslavije or KPJ , outlawed since 1921) , organised a public library , reading and sports clubs and a cultural @-@ artistic group . He established a secret KPJ cell in Kamenica in 1939 , the first communist organisation in the area . His ideological convictions earned him a following among the village youth , including Marija 's brother Du?an . The authorities soon became aware of Stojni? 's activities , and he was removed from Kamenica in February 1940 .

= = World War II = =

On 6 April 1941 Yugoslavia was invaded from all sides by the Axis powers , led by Nazi Germany . The Royal Yugoslav Army (Serbo @-@ Croatian : Vojska Kraljevine Jugoslavije or VKJ) capitulated on 17 April , and the Germans , Italians and Hungarians dismembered the country . A fascist puppet state , the Independent State of Croatia (Serbo @-@ Croatian : Nezavisna Dr?ava Hrvatska or NDH , including almost all of modern @-@ day Croatia , all of modern @-@ day Bosnia @-@ Herzegovina and parts of modern @-@ day Serbia) was proclaimed on 10 April . The NDH was an " Italian @-@ German quasi @-@ protectorate " , controlled by the Croatian nationalist Usta?e movement under Ante Paveli? . One of the NDH 's policies was to eliminate the state 's ethnic Serb population with mass killings , expulsions and forced assimilation . The first Drvar Serbs

were killed on 18 June 1941 . The atrocities accelerated the formation of two large resistance movements in occupied Yugoslavia . Royalists and Serbian nationalists led by VKJ Colonel Draža Mihailović founded the Ravna Gora Movement , whose members were known as Chetniks . The KPJ , led by Josip Broz Tito , decided in Belgrade on 4 July to launch a nationwide armed uprising and the members of the KPJ @-@ led forces became known as Partisans .

= = = Pro @-@ Partisan activity = = =

Between 20 and 26 July 1941 local KPJ leaders organised three Partisan detachments , armed with about 200 rifles and seven light machine guns , in the immediate vicinity of Drvar ; one was the Kamenica Detachment . Men from Kamenica had previously established a camp in a nearby forest for weapons and supplies . Bursa was one of the village 's most active women , collecting food and clothing for the insurgents and serving as a courier for the Kamenica camp . On 27 July the Partisans liberated Drvar , beginning the uprising in Bosnia @-@ Herzegovina . Over the next few days , other parts of Bosanska Krajina were also liberated , although at this stage the KPJ had little control of the Serb villagers who took up arms . The liberated area around Drvar and Grahovo , under constant attack by the Ustaše , was defended by the Partisans from their surrounding positions . Bursa and other women from Kamenica joined Odbor fonda (the Funds Committee) , collecting food , clothing and other supplies for the Partisans , and she made clothes for them from wool and cloth . She joined the League of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia (Serbo @-@ Croatian : Savez komunističke omladine Jugoslavije , or SKOJ) in September 1941 .

On 25 September 1941 Italian troops captured Drvar and Grahovo , but the Partisans retained control of most of the area 's villages . By the end of 1941 , SKOJ 's Kamenica branch had 23 members ; the men served in Partisan units and the women , including Bursa , joined labour companies to support the war effort . A literacy course was organised for female members , which Bursa attended . Some villagers gave agricultural products such as milk , cream and eggs to the Italians , receiving salt , kerosene and rice in return . This practice was strongly condemned by the KPJ , which gathered people from several villages in the hall of the Kamenica school in January 1942 to dissuade them from trading with the enemy . After several KPJ members spoke , Bursa began her speech , but was interrupted by disparaging comments and threats from a young man in the audience . At that moment , a group of men stormed into the hall with wooden poles and pitchforks . In the ensuing chaos Bursa shouted , " You can do nothing to us , you will not hinder us ! " as the other women fled through the windows . In early 1942 she joined the village committee of the Women 's Anti @-@ Fascist Front (Serbo @-@ Croatian : Antifašistički front žena or AF) , a major KPJ @-@ affiliated women 's organisation .

On 13 June 1942 Drvar was retaken by the Partisans , with Bursa 's labour company clearing rubble and repairing houses in the town . The company also helped in working the land of families whose men were away fighting with the Partisans . In July , Partisan units composed of fighters from Serbia and Montenegro came to Drvar , and Bursa helped carry their wounded to field hospitals in the mountains . She was one of the most active members of Kamenica 's SKOJ organisation , which sometimes met at her house . The Partisan @-@ held territory around Drvar expanded significantly , and included the Sanica River valley in late July 1942 . The valley 's primarily non @-@ Serb population had fled before the advancing Partisans , whom they feared because of Ustaše propaganda . The Partisan command engaged young people from western Bosanska Krajina to harvest wheat and other crops from the valley , transporting them to storage facilities on Mount Grmeč . The workers (mostly young women) were organised into military @-@ style units , which were merged in mid @-@ August into the four @-@ battalion 1st Krajina Agricultural Shock Brigade . Bursa was appointed political commissar of the 3rd Company of the brigade 's 2nd Battalion . Guarded by Partisan units , the brigade completed its work despite attacks by enemy planes . Bursa was admitted to the KPJ at the end of summer 1942 ; at the beginning of 1943 , she was president of the village committee of the United Federation of Anti @-@ Fascist Youth of Yugoslavia (Serbo @-@ Croatian : Ujedinjeni savez antifašističke omladine Jugoslavije , or USAOJ) .

=== Yugoslav Partisan ===

Tito came to Drvar at the end of January 1943 , during a major Axis offensive against the Partisans (code @-@ named Fall Weiss in German) . After consulting with ?uro Pucar , the head of the KPJ regional committee for Bosanska Krajina , Tito decided to form a Partisan brigade around a battalion of experienced fighters from Drvar . Additional manpower would consist of recovered Partisans who had been wounded or ill , older men not previously in combat units and young male and female volunteers . The four @-@ battalion 10th Krajina Brigade , intended to play a primarily @-@ defensive role at this stage , was established on 4 February 1943 ; its 800 members included about 120 women . Bursa? , one of the volunteers , was assigned to the 2nd Battalion and was transferred to the 3rd Battalion 's 3rd Company the following month . Until September 1943 , she fought the Usta?e , Germans , Italians , and anti @-@ communist Chetniks around Grahovo , Knin , Vrlika , Livno and Mount Dinara , was commended for her courage and skill in combat , and served as a nurse . In February and March 1943 , during the Axis offensive , the brigade experienced constant enemy attacks , food shortages , cold , deep snow and outbreaks of typhus . Emaciated , Bursa? was transferred to the military kitchen at brigade headquarters at the beginning of spring ; after a month , she was returned to her company at her insistence . When she became ill some time later , Bursa? was sent home to recover .

The Germans had a fortified base , Stützpunkt Podglavica , near Podglavica in the village of Prkosi (between Vrto?e and Kulen Vakuf) . The base , with about 500 members of the 373rd (Croatian) Infantry Division and an artillery battery , secured the roads from Petrovac to Biha? and Kulen Vakuf . In September 1943 , the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 10th Krajina Brigade and a battalion of the Drvar ? Petrovac Partisan Detachment were directed to attack it . Bursa? volunteered to throw hand grenades at the pillboxes and machine @-@ gun nests protecting the base . Although her company commander objected because she still appeared ill , Bursa? insisted on throwing the grenades . The three Partisan battalions attacked the base from three directions on 18 September at 11 pm . Bursa? and her group of grenade throwers destroyed several pillboxes before they came under fire from another . They destroyed the pillbox , but Bursa? received a serious leg wound and was carried to a less exposed area .

The Partisans overran portions of the base , retreating before daybreak after the arrival of German reinforcements from Vrto?e and Kulen Vakuf . The brigade reportedly captured four howitzers , two mortars , a heavy machine gun , ten light machine guns , five rifles , a mobile radio and 29 enemy soldiers , and Stützpunkt Podglavica reported 31 German soldiers missing after the attack . The Germans described the night attack as eerie , with female Partisans ' shrill shouts of " Forward ! " (Serbo @-@ Croatian : Napred !) . The battle at Prkosi was the first major offensive action by the 10th Krajina Brigade ; in 1944 , they participated in the liberation of Belgrade .

After the battle , Bursa? and other heavily @-@ wounded Partisans were carried on stretchers to the field hospital in the village of Vidovo Selo , about 40 kilometres (25 mi) away over rugged terrain . During the arduous journey (which took over three days) , she sang Partisan songs such as :

Bursa? had lost much blood and her wound developed gangrene , which the field hospital was poorly equipped to treat . She died in Vidovo Selo on 23 September 1943 , and was buried with military honours at Kamenica ; deputy commissar Veljko Ra?natovi? spoke on behalf of the 10th Krajina Brigade . Bursa? 's final eulogy was delivered by her brother Du?an , leader of the SKOJ district committee for Drvar .

== Legacy ==

Bursa? became a People 's Hero of Yugoslavia on 15 October 1943 , the first woman to receive the honour . Her proclamation was published in the October 1943 issue of the Bulletin of the Supreme Headquarters of the National Liberation Army and Partisan Detachments of Yugoslavia :

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" By decision of the Supreme Headquarters of the National Liberation Army and Partisan Detachments of Yugoslavia , and at the proposal of the 5th Corps of the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia , the Order of the People 's Hero has been conferred on comrade Marija Bursa? , a hand @-@ grenade thrower of the 3rd Battalion of the 10th Krajina Brigade . Comrade Marija was an example of heroism in all fights and ultimately gave her life for the freedom of her people charging enemy trenches at the village of Prkosi . "

Yugoslav writer Branko ?opi? wrote a poem , Marija na Prkosima (" Marija at Prkosi ") , about Bursa? . Its title , which may also be interpreted as " Marija defiant " , is a play on words . Bursa? " entered the triptych of history , legend , and poetry in the Yugoslav lands " , according to author Jelena Batini? . After the war , schools , streets , and organisations in Yugoslavia were named after her ; a Belgrade neighborhood bears her name . A 2013 comic strip , Marija na Prkosima , was published in the Serbian daily newspaper Danas as part of its Odbrana utopije (" Defense of Utopia ") comic @-@ strip project . Graphic artist Lazar Bodro?a 's strip combines events from Bursa? 's life with verses of ?opi? 's poem and left @-@ wing visual symbolism .