

= Zdenko Blažeković =

Zdenko Blažeković (23 September 1915 ? 12 January 1947) was a Croatian fascist official who held several posts in the World War II Ustaše regime in the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) . He was the student commissar at the Ustaše University Centre (USS) , leader of the male Ustaše Youth organisation and a sports commissioner in the NDH .

Born in the town of Bihać , he graduated from high school in Osijek before applying to join a polytechnic college in Zagreb with the intention of becoming a builder . He was a member of various Croatian cultural and athletic organizations during his youth , and even played as goalkeeper for Hajduk Osijek and HAŠK football clubs .

Briefly a member of the conservative Croatian Peasant Party (HSS) , Blažeković was imprisoned several times by the Yugoslav authorities because of his involvement with various Croatian youth organizations which saw him often involved in clashes with left @-@ wing students . He joined the far @-@ right Ustaše in 1939 , and following the Axis invasion of Yugoslavia and the establishment of the Ustaše @-@ led NDH in April 1941 , went on to be appointed to the newly formed Ustaše supervisory committee by Slavko Kvaternik . That same month he also became the leader of the Ustaše University Headquarters and the Ustaše Youth , charged with organizing student bodies at the University of Zagreb and promoting Ustaše 's policy of preventing all non @-@ Croats from attending universities in the country .

In 1942 he was involved in the formation of the 13th Ustaše Assault Company and by 1943 had attained a seat in the Croatian Parliament . Between 1942 and 1943 he was involved in recruiting students to join Ante Pavelić 's personal bodyguard and was promoted to the rank of major . He held the position of head of the Ustaše University Headquarters and Ustaše Youth until January 1945 , when he was appointed Commissioner for Physical Education and Sport . Blažeković fled Zagreb from the advancing Yugoslav Partisans in May 1945 and ended up in a refugee camp in Salzburg , Austria . In August , he was arrested by American forces who extradited him to Yugoslavia on 12 February 1946 . He was tried in Zagreb on 12 January 1947 , sentenced to death , and executed the same day .

= = Early life and family = =

Zdenko Blažeković was born on 23 September 1915 in the town of Bihać , the son of local politician Emilijan " Milan " Blažeković . Ethnically Croat , the Blažeković family was descended from 15th century tribesmen in the town of Livno .

Blažeković finished high school in Osijek and later applied to join a polytechnic college in Zagreb with the intention of becoming a builder . In 1935 , he became a member of the " Croatian Academic Society August Šenoa " (Croatian : Hrvatsko akademsko društvo August Šenoa , HADA) and by 1936 he became its vice @-@ president . A versatile athlete , he played as goalkeeper for the football clubs Hajduk in Osijek and HAŠK in Zagreb . He also played tennis and was one of the founders of the Drava rowing club in Osijek . For a short period of time , Blažeković was a member of the Croatian Peasant Party (Croatian : Hrvatska seljačka stranka , HSS) . After leaving the party , he became involved in various Croatian youth organizations and was imprisoned several times in Zagreb and Osijek as a result . During this time , he was also involved in numerous violent confrontations with Communist students .

After attending a public celebration of HSS leader Vladko Maček 's birthday on 20 June 1935 , Blažeković was imprisoned by Yugoslav authorities and tortured for twelve days in a prison on the island of Korčula . He was subsequently taken to Dubrovnik and charged with conspiring against the Yugoslav state , but was not convicted . In 1939 , he joined the Ustaše , a Croatian fascist organization which advocated armed struggle in achieving Croatia 's independence from the Kingdom of Yugoslavia . During this period , he came into contact with the fascist leader Slavko Kvaternik . From late 1940 to early 1941 , Blažeković was pursued by Yugoslav authorities because of his association with the Ustaše and hid in Zagreb to avoid capture .

= = World War II = =

= = = Invasion of Yugoslavia = = =

On 6 April 1941 Axis forces invaded Yugoslavia . Poorly equipped and poorly trained , the Royal Yugoslav Army was quickly defeated . The country was then dismembered by the occupying forces and the extreme nationalist and fascist Croat leader of the Usta?e Ante Paveli? ? who had been in exile in Benito Mussolini 's Italy ? was appointed Poglavnik (leader) of a newly established Usta?e @-@ led Croatian state , the Independent State of Croatia (Croatian : Nezavisna Dr?ava Hrvatska or NDH) . The NDH combined almost all of present @-@ day countries of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina , as well as parts of Serbia , into what was described as an " Italian @-@ German quasi @-@ protectorate " . Under the Usta?e regime , genocidal policies were implemented and directed against the Serb , Jewish and Romani populations living within the country .

= = = Command of the Usta?e University Centre and Usta?e Youth = = =

On 11 April , Kvaternik named Bla?ekovi? to the newly formed Usta?e supervisory committee . On 23 April , Bla?ekovi? led a crowd of more than 1 @, @ 100 Croatian students as they gathered in the courtyard of the University of Zagreb before going to St. Mark 's Square in central Zagreb to watch Paveli? give a speech . Here , Bla?ekovi? and the students swore loyalty to the Poglavnik and the NDH . In a speech of his own , Bla?ekovi? told Paveli? that he and the students were ready to follow him " in life and death " . When the Usta?e supervisory committee was disbanded on 9 May , Bla?ekovi? was named a commissioner in the main headquarters of the NDH . That same month , he was named the commander of the Usta?e University Headquarters (Croatian : Usta?ki sveu?ili?ni sto?er , USS) . Although this organization technically required all students in the NDH to become members , most kept away from membership . Increasingly , the USS became a wing of the NDH 's student elite with strict rules of membership and privileges , with members attending rallies at which Paveli? spoke and wearing Usta?e uniform .

In an interview with Novi list , Bla?ekovi? stated that all work at the University of Zagreb would be " in harmony with the new Usta?a spirit ... with which youth had been imbued for years in the decades when the university was the " battleground " of the Croatian struggle for liberation . " He went on to say that the first priority of the USS was to be the social welfare of students and the expansion of student dining rooms and residential halls . He declared that the structure of the university would change to conform with Usta?e principles ? each faculty would have its own camp , consisting of a camp leader and seven adjutants responsible for military training , socio @-@ economic welfare , contacts , sports , professional training , education and journals . Bla?ekovi? explained that for the first year of academic study , the university would employ " veteran warriors " as teachers who were to be replaced by fully trained " younger forces " who had spent the previous year preparing for their new roles . Furthermore , he stated that student volunteers would collaborate in the creation and popularization of the USS and other Usta?e organizations , which , once they had established themselves in university life , were to establish a professional , non @-@ ideological student organization meant to incorporate all Croatian students . When asked if Serbs and Jews were to be permitted to attend universities in the NDH , Bla?ekovi? replied : " In the coming academic year , the university will be swept clean of foreigners hostile to Croats and the Usta?e movement , and in this way our endeavours at the university will be made easier . " Later , while dining with the wife of a Swedish diplomat , Bla?ekovi? boasted of the large number of Serbs he had killed , claiming that he placed the ears of murdered Serbs on a necklace worn over his smoking jacket .

At the same time that he was appointed leader of the USS , Bla?ekovi? was also named commander of the male Usta?e Youth organisation . In its first months , many young Croats joined the movement , with recruitment being fuelled mostly by extreme Croatian nationalism . In addition , many were motivated to join because the Youth provided athletic , intellectual and artistic training for " the next generation of Usta?e leaders . " For others , membership gave " a sense of meaning to

their lives " and was appealing because it represented " a youthful rebellion against the Yugoslav state . " By May , some Usta?e Youth camps publicly announced their refusal to accept new members as they lacked the capacity to do so . Although it is unclear how many young Croats joined the movement , Bla?ekovi? claimed a figure of half a million members . He defined the Usta?e Youth as a " secular movement " meant to promote " brotherly cooperation and mutual life " of peasant , working @-@ class and intellectual youths in the NDH .

In late 1941 Bla?ekovi? 's father was appointed mayor of Osijek , holding this position until 1942 . That year , the younger Bla?ekovi? became involved in the formation of the 13th Usta?e Assault Company , using his position as commander of the Usta?e Youth to convince many young Croats to join . In February 1942 , he became a member of the Croatian Parliament . Between 1942 and 1943 he participated in recruiting many students for Ante Paveli? 's personal bodyguards (Poglavnikov Tjelesni Zdrug , PTZ) He was later promoted to the rank of army major . In 1944 , he wrote a book titled The Youth and the State (Croatian : Mlade? i dr?ava) .

= = = Commissioner for Physical Education and Sport = = =

Bla?ekovi? held the post of commander of the USS and commander of the Usta?e Youth until January 1945 , when he was named Commissioner at the State Directorate for Physical Education and Sports (Croatian : Dr?avno vodstvo za tjelesni odgoj i ?port , DVTO?) in the NDH . Upon taking this position , he introduced strict new sports laws that emphasized discipline during football matches and criminalised monetary and material rewards for athletes . Bla?ekovi? justified the new laws by saying : " Croatian sport is an amateur sport , and as such it will remain " . Attempting to tackle the problem of unruly crowds , he introduced new laws banning disorderly spectators from ever entering football stadiums . Warnings by Bla?ekovi? and the DVTO? were regularly printed in daily party newspapers , calling for citizens and athletes to abide by the new laws .

= = = Capture and execution = = =

As Allied forces descended on Zagreb , Bla?ekovi? left the city on 6 May 1945 and fled from Slovenia into Austria . He was subsequently placed in a refugee camp in Salzburg . On 28 August , American forces arrested him and sent him to a detainment camp before having him extradited to Yugoslavia on 12 February 1946 . Bla?ekovi? was tried in Zagreb on 12 January 1947 , sentenced to death , and executed the same day .