

= Gudovac massacre =

The Gudovac massacre ( Serbo @-@ Croatian : Pokolj u Gudovcu ; Serbian Cyrillic : ?o?o? ? ????? ) was the mass killing of around 190 Bjelovar Serbs by the Croatian nationalist Usta?e movement on 28 April 1941 , during World War II . The massacre occurred shortly after the German @-@ led Axis invasion of Yugoslavia and the establishment of the Usta?e @-@ led Axis puppet state known as the Independent State of Croatia ( NDH ) . It was the first act of mass murder committed by the Usta?e upon coming to power and presaged a wider Usta?e @-@ perpetrated campaign of genocide against Serbs in the NDH that lasted until the end of the war .

The Usta?e used the mysterious deaths of two of their local followers as a pretext for the killings . The victims were drawn from Gudovac and its surroundings on 28 April . Most were arrested under the guise that they were Serb rebels loyal to the ousted Yugoslav government . They were taken to a nearby field and collectively shot by a firing squad of up to 70 Usta?e guards . Five of the prisoners managed to survive the initial volley and crawled away to safety . The Usta?e forced Gudovac 's surviving inhabitants to dig a mass grave for the victims and pour quicklime on the bodies to speed up decomposition . The following day , relatives of one of the victims informed the Germans of what had transpired . The Germans ordered a partial exhumation of the mass grave and had forty suspected perpetrators arrested . Mladen Lorkovi? , a senior Usta?e official , used his influence to have the detained men released and promised German ambassador Siegfried Kasche that the Croatian authorities would carry out a thorough investigation . No such investigation ever took place .

An ossuary and mausoleum were erected on the site of the massacre in 1955 , as was a monument by the sculptor Vojin Baki? . In 1991 , amid inter @-@ ethnic violence during the Croatian War of Independence , the monument and mausoleum were destroyed by Croatian nationalists , as was another one of Baki? 's works , Bjelovarac ( The Man From Bjelovar ) . The ruins of the ossuary were removed by the local authorities in 2002 . That same year , residents signed a petition to have the Bjelovarac monument erected once again . The restored monument was unveiled in December 2010 .

= = Background = =

= = = Inter @-@ war period = = =

Gudovac is a village near Bjelovar , about 80 kilometres ( 50 mi ) east of Zagreb . It was first settled during the Middle Ages , and had an ethnically mixed population through much of its history . In 1931 , Gudovac had 1 @, @ 073 inhabitants living in 330 households . Croats formed two @-@ thirds of the population , while the remaining inhabitants were ethnic Serbs . The Gudovac municipality had a population of 8 @, @ 000 , including 3 @, @ 000 Serbs .

Gudovac had been part of a common South Slav state since November 1918 , when the Kingdom of Serbs , Croats and Slovenes was proclaimed . At its creation , the Kingdom included six million Serbs , 3 @. @ 5 million Croats and one million Slovenes , among others . Being the largest ethnic group , the Serbs favoured a centralized state . Croats , Slovenes and Bosnian Muslims did not . The Vidovdan Constitution , approved on 28 June 1921 and based on the Serbian constitution of 1903 , established the Kingdom as a parliamentary monarchy under the Serbian Kara?or?evi? dynasty . Belgrade was chosen as the capital of the new state , assuring Serb and Orthodox Christian political dominance . In 1928 , Croatian Peasant Party ( Hrvatska selja?ka stranka , HSS ) leader Stjepan Radi? was shot and mortally wounded on the floor of the country 's parliament by a Serb deputy . The following year , King Alexander proclaimed the 6 January Dictatorship and renamed his country the Kingdom of Yugoslavia to deemphasize its ethnic makeup . Yugoslavia was divided into nine administrative units called banovinas , six of which had ethnic Serb majorities . In 1931 , the king issued a decree which allowed the Yugoslav Parliament to reconvene on the condition that only pro @-@ Yugoslav parties were allowed to be represented in it . Marginalized ,

far @-@ right and far @-@ left parties thrived . The Usta?e , a Croatian fascist movement , emerged as the most extreme of these . The movement was driven by a deep hatred of Serbs . In 1932 , the Usta?e launched the so @-@ called Velebit uprising , attacking a police station in the village of Bru?ane in Lika . The police responded harshly to the attack and harassed the local population , leading to further animosity between Croats and Serbs . In 1934 , an Usta?e @-@ trained assassin killed Alexander while he was on a state visit to France . Alexander 's cousin , Prince Paul , became regent and took up the king 's responsibilities until Alexander 's son Peter turned eighteen .

Following the 1938 Anschluss ( union ) between Germany and Austria , Yugoslavia came to share a border with the Third Reich and fell under increasing pressure as her neighbours became aligned with the Axis powers . In April 1939 , Italy opened a second frontier with Yugoslavia when it 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 . Intending to secure his southern flank for the impending attack on the Soviet Union , Adolf Hitler began placing heavy pressure on Yugoslavia to join the Axis . On 25 March 1941 , after some delay , the Yugoslav government conditionally signed the Pact . Two days later , a group of pro @-@ Western , Serbian nationalist air force officers deposed Prince Paul in a bloodless coup d 'état . The conspirators declared the 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 . " Even if Yugoslavia at first should give declarations of loyalty , " he stated , " she must be considered ... a foe and ... destroyed as quickly as possible . " He then ordered the invasion of Yugoslavia , which commenced on 6 April 1941 .

= = = Fall of Bjelovar = = =

The Royal Yugoslav Army ( Vojska Kraljevine Jugoslavije , VKJ ) was quickly overwhelmed by the combined German , Italian and Hungarian assault . Much of its equipment was obsolete , its military strategy was outdated and its soldiers were ill @-@ disciplined and poorly trained . To make matters worse , many of the VKJ 's Croat personnel refused to fight against the Germans , whom they considered liberators from Serb oppression . This attitude was shared by many soldiers of the 40th Infantry Division Slavenska 's largely Croat 108th Regiment , which was stationed in the village of Veliki Gr?evac . The regiment had been mobilised in Bjelovar , and on 7 April was marching towards Virovitica to take up positions , when its Croat members revolted and arrested the Serb officers and soldiers . Led by Captain Ivan Mrak , the regiment disarmed a Yugoslav gendarmerie post in Gare?nica and began marching back to Bjelovar alongside a band of Usta?e rebels under Mijo Hans . The following morning , elements of the 108th Regiment entered Bjelovar and clashed with the local gendarmerie , sustaining losses of two killed and three wounded . At about noon , the regiment joined up with elements of the 42nd Infantry Regiment and other units of the 40th Infantry Division . At around the same time , Julije Makanec , the Croat mayor of Bjelovar , joined Usta?e official Ivan ?estak and HSS representative Franjo Hegedu? in demanding that the VKJ surrender the town to the rebels . When the 4th Army 's commander , General Petar Nedeljkovi? , learned of the rebel approach , he ordered the local gendarmerie commander to maintain order , but was advised that this would not be possible as local Croat conscripts would not report for duty . Fourth Army headquarters reported the rebels ' presence to the headquarters of the 1st Army Group , which requested that HSS leader Vladko Ma?ek intervene with the rebels . Ma?ek agreed to send an emissary to the 108th Infantry Regiment urging them to obey their officers , to no avail .

Later in the day , two trucks of rebels arrived at 4th Army headquarters in Bjelovar with the intention of killing the staff . The headquarters guard force prevented this , but the operations staff immediately withdrew from Bjelovar to Popova?a . After issuing several unanswered ultimatums ,

around 8 @, @ 000 rebels attacked Bjelovar , assisted by Croat fifth @-@ columnists within the town . Bjelovar surrendered , and many Yugoslav officers and soldiers were captured by the Germans and Usta?e rebels . Local Croats welcomed the revolt with great enthusiasm . When Nedeljkovi? heard of Bjelovar 's capture , he called Makanec and threatened to bomb the city if VKJ prisoners were not immediately released . Detained officers from 4th Army headquarters and the 108th Infantry Regiment were then sent to Zagreb . At about 16 : 00 , Nedeljkovi? informed the Ban of Croatia , Ivan ?uba?i? , of the revolt , but ?uba?i? was powerless to influence events . At about 18 : 00 , Makanec proclaimed that Bjelovar was part of an independent Croatian state . This was the only significant pro @-@ Usta?e revolt in Croatia and Bosnia @-@ Herzegovina prior to 10 April . Usta?e propaganda celebrated it as " an uprising of the Croatian people against the April War " and claimed that it proved Croats wholeheartedly supported the destruction of Yugoslavia .

= = = Creation of the NDH = = =

On 10 April , senior Usta?e commander Slavko Kvaternik proclaimed the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia ( Nezavisna Dr?ava Hrvatska , NDH ) . The declaration came exactly one week before the VKJ 's unconditional surrender to the Axis powers . The leader of the Usta?e , Ante Paveli? , was in Rome at the time and made arrangements to travel to Karlovac , just west of Zagreb . He arrived in Karlovac on 13 April , accompanied by 250 ? 400 of his followers . Paveli? reached Zagreb on 15 April , having granted territorial cessions to Italy at Croatia 's expense and promised the Germans he had no intention of pursuing a foreign policy independent of Berlin . That same day , Germany and Italy extended diplomatic recognition to the NDH . Paveli? was declared Poglavnik ( " leader " ) of the Usta?e @-@ led Croatian state , which combined the territory of much of present @-@ day Croatia , all of present @-@ day Bosnia and Herzegovina and parts of present @-@ day Serbia .

Paveli? and his followers intended to create an " ethnically pure " Croatia through the mass murder and deportation of Serbs , Jews and other non @-@ Croats . However , only about fifty percent of the NDH 's 6 @. @ 2 million inhabitants were Croat . Nearly two million Serbs , about one @-@ third of the NDH 's total population , now found themselves within the borders of the newly formed state . In addition , Serb @-@ majority areas covered between 60 and 70 percent of the NDH 's total landmass . " The Croatian state cannot exist if 1 @. @ 8 million Serbs are living in it and if we have a powerful Serbian state at our backs , " Croatia 's future Foreign Minister Mladen Lorkovi? explained . " Therefore , we are trying to make the Serbs disappear from our regions . " In his memoirs , Slavko Kvaternik wrote : " Living abroad as émigrés for twelve years , during which time they lived only in the yearning for revenge , had turned [ the Usta?e ] into psychopaths , mentally deranged people with a desire to kill . " His son Dido Kvaternik , a senior Usta?e official , was entrusted with " cleansing " Bjelovar and its surroundings . The younger Kvaternik recalled : " When we triumphantly returned home from abroad and when Paveli? decided that I should take over the implementation of the measures against Serbs and Jews , I obeyed immediately and without hesitation because I knew that this question had to be resolved for the future of the Croatian people and state , and that someone had to make the sacrifice so that these odious but necessary measures could be carried out . " Paveli? 's orders for the extermination of non @-@ Croats in and around Bjelovar were likely delivered orally to ensure that no written evidence remained .

= = Prelude = =

Immediately after seizing Bjelovar , the Usta?e set about strengthening their hold of the city . Josip Verhas , an ethnic German , was appointed the acting head of Bjelovar district , ?uro Vojnovi? was appointed Usta?e representative to the Bjelovar district , and Hans was named the Usta?e commissioner for Bjelovar county . Alojz ?ukman was appointed chief of police . He immediately decreed that all of Bjelovar 's Serbs had to wear a red armband with the word " Serb " written in both Croatian and German . Ivan Gar??i? , a public notary , was appointed acting commander of the Bjelovar armoury and set about reorganizing local Usta?e formations . Mrak , who had distinguished

himself as one of the leaders of the 108th Regiment 's revolt , was tasked with overseeing the city centre .

Between 9 and 14 April , groups of soldiers from the disbanded 108th Regiment roamed the Bjelovar countryside looking for a way home . Serb officers that had refused to surrender raided Croat homes , hoping to find food , money and civilian clothing that would make it easier for them to pass through German and Usta?e checkpoints . In some villages , Croat peasants disarmed defeated VKJ units and plundered their warehouses . Some of these peasants , especially those in Gudovac , entered local units known as " readiness battalions " . On 10 April , the Germans reached Bjelovar and set up a series of command posts but left the Usta?e in de facto control of the city . The Usta?e were wary of the possible danger that the Serb peasantry posed . Many male peasants had been in the VKJ at the time of the invasion and had simply discarded their military fatigues and taken their rifles home . Mi?o Sabolek , a local Usta?e commander , reported : " Bjelovar and its surroundings are besieged by Serbs , who are ... killing and looting homes in the villages of Nart , Gudovac and the ?esma forest . " In mid @-@ April , Sabolek reported that he had sent 35 gunmen to " quell violence " around Bjelovar . His superiors in Zagreb ordered him to " take any measures necessary to restore order " in the district . Local Usta?e searched dozens of Serb homes , hoping to find illegal weapons . This was followed by the arresting of " undesired elements " , mostly members of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia ( Komunisti?ka partija Jugoslavije , KPJ ) . " The disarming of Serbs ... is vital to securing the future of the young Croatian state , " wrote Edmund Glaise @-@ Horstenau , the German Plenipotentiary General in the NDH . Julius Eker , the local KPJ chairman , was arrested on 12 April .

On 16 April , Slavko Kvaternik announced that Serb peasants in the NDH had eight days to hand their weapons over to the Usta?e . Another influential communist , Milan Baki? , was arrested in Bjelovar on 20 April . On 22 April , the Usta?e arrested most of the town 's remaining KPJ members . Communist organisers such as Stevo ?abi? , Franko Winter and Sándor Király were arrested on 24 April . By 25 April , several hundred known or suspected anti @-@ fascists were arrested by the local Usta?e . Some were spared death and given prison sentences , but most were executed without trial . That same day , an Usta?e patrol discovered 80 rifles and several machine guns in the home of a local KPJ member . Forty rifles and two machine guns were found in the home of another local communist .

Alarmed by the prospect of an armed rebellion in Bjelovar and the surrounding countryside , Kvaternik selected a broad area in and around the town where Serbs were to be " cleansed " . " For every Croat killed , " he said , " we must execute 100 Serbs . " The disarming and arresting of VKJ personnel by the Usta?e was accompanied by numerous incidents , in which about twenty armed VKJ troops and Serb civilians were killed . Kvaternik feared that these deaths would only increase the likelihood of an armed revolt , and became even more wary when he heard rumours that Bjelovar 's Serbs were planning an uprising to coincide with the feast day of St. George ( ?ur?evdan ) , on 6 May . Interior Minister Andrija Artukovi? arrived in Bjelovar after hearing such rumours . At a meeting with Verhas and his lieutenants , he stated that " serious action " would have to be undertaken to " send a message to the enemies of the Usta?e and the NDH " . On 26 April , Kvaternik and his closest assistant , Ivica ?ari? , organised the mass arrest of 530 Serb villagers from Grubi?no Polje . Thirty Usta?e took part in the arrests . The detainees were transported to the Danica camp , near Koprivnica , and from there taken to Usta?e camps at Gospi? , Pag Island , Jasenovac and Stara Gradi?ka , where most were killed .

= = Timeline = =

= = = Arrests = = =

On 25 April , the Usta?e had arrested a Serb named Milan Radovanovi? when he stopped by the Bjelovar police station to hand over his rifle . He had fought with the VKJ at the time of the invasion and spent two weeks hiding in the forests before returning to his home in the village of Prgomelje .

His relatively late return home had prevented him from handing over his rifle before the Usta?e deadline on 24 April . On the morning of 26 April , as Radovanovi? and another Serb peasant were being escorted from the county jail by two Usta?e guards , two unidentified gunmen opened fire on the detainees and guards . A skirmish ensued , and Radovanovi? and one of the guards were killed . The second guard was wounded . That afternoon , a Home Guard ( or domobran ) was killed by a stray bullet in his yard while on leave . Kvaternik immediately blamed Serb " agitators " for the deaths . In their internal documents , the Usta?e blamed the deaths on " local Chetniks " , a claim that has never been proven . Some historians have proposed that the attack on the county jail and the death of the Home Guard were false flag attacks intended to rally Croats against local Serbs . This allegation has also never been proven .

Upon hearing news of the attack at the county jail , Kvaternik ordered the arrest of 200 Serb peasants from Gudovac and the neighbouring villages of Veliko and Malo Korenovo , Prgomelje , Bol? , Kloko?evac , Tuk , Stan?i?i and Breza . The arrests occurred in the early morning hours of 28 April . The action was personally supervised by Kvaternik and carried out by members of the local Croatian Peasant Guard , which had been turned into a " quasi @-@ military unit " under the command of Martin ?iko? , whom the journalist Slavko Goldstein describes as a " sworn pre @-@ war Usta?a " . Most of the more prominent or wealthy inhabitants of Gudovac were arrested , including teachers , businessmen and Serbian Orthodox priests . " Their sole crime , " Goldstein asserts , " was that they were of the Orthodox faith and perhaps a little more prosperous than their neighbours . " Shortly before the killings , Verhas , ?iko? and local Usta?e officials Rudolf Srnak , Nikola Pokopac and Mirko Pavle?i? held a meeting where it was decided that the prisoners would be executed en masse .

= = = Killings = = =

The prisoners were taken to the Gudovac municipal building and held there for a time . They were told that they would be taken to Bjelovar for interrogation . Instead , they were ordered to march in the opposite direction , towards a field beside the river Plavnica where an open @-@ air market was held each week . The prisoners left Gudovac just before sunset , supervised by as many as 70 armed guards . Many of the prisoners sensed the fate that awaited them but were unable to escape . According to one post @-@ war testimony , ?iko? was " upset , uneasy ... and in no mood to talk " . As the arrested Serbs were being marched out of Gudovac , he pulled one of his Serb neighbours from the group and told him to " get lost " before ordering the remaining 200 detainees to line up against a wall . Kvaternik appeared before the group and asked if it contained any Croats . Four stepped forward and offered their identification papers . Three were permitted to return to their homes once their identities had been confirmed but the fourth was sent back among the Serbs because he was a communist . Kvaternik , ?iko? and several newly appointed Usta?e officers supervised the march . According to survivors , the guards hurled insults at the prisoners , and forced them to sing Usta?e songs and chant " Long live Paveli? ! Long live Kvaternik ! " .

The prisoners reached the field just after sunset and were ordered to line up in ranks and make a left face ; the guards then raised their rifles and opened fire . Some of the executioners hesitated before firing , and many of the victims were struck in the legs . Some of the wounded cursed the Usta?e and others cried in agony . Kvaternik observed the massacre from a distance of about 50 metres ( 160 ft ) , accompanied by Hans , Verhas and Pavle?i? . Pavle?i? was dissatisfied with the speed of the killings and shouted at ?iko? , telling him to " finish the job " . ?iko? 's men then went about looking for survivors and bayonetting anyone that moved . Five prisoners escaped before ?iko? 's men could kill them and fled to a nearby forest .

The killings were the first act of mass murder committed by the Usta?e upon coming to power . Estimates of the number of people killed vary . Marko Attila Hoare , a historian specializing in the Balkans , puts the figure at 184 killed . The journalist Tim Judah writes that there were 187 fatalities . Historian Ivo Goldstein asserts that the Usta?e killed 196 people .

= = Aftermath = =

== Reaction ==

Kvaternik and the Ustaše never attempted to conceal the killings, which were deliberately carried out in a relatively public space so as to cause terror among the Serb population. Local Croats had full knowledge of the events. Following the massacre, the Ustaše forced Gudovac's remaining inhabitants to dig a 150 m<sup>2</sup> ( 1 @, @ 614 @. @ 59 sq ft ) mass grave and cover the remains of the victims with quicklime to speed up decomposition. Once the dead had been buried, the villagers were permitted to return to their homes.

News of the massacre spread through Bjelovar, and the following day the wife and daughter of a Serb named Nikola Gvozden<sup>evi</sup> heard that their husband and father was among those killed. Deeply upset, Mrs. Gvozden<sup>evi</sup> and her daughter hurried to a German command post, reported the massacre, then led two German officers to the mass grave. The officers informed their superiors that a massacre had taken place and complained that the " disorder " in their area of responsibility was beyond their control. Their superiors ordered a partial exhumation of the mass grave and requested that the exhumed corpses be photographed. They also requested an investigation, as well as the arrest and punishment of those responsible. On the orders of a local German commander, forty of those involved in the massacre were arrested on the evening of 29 April. Their weapons were seized and they were temporarily detained in the Bjelovar high school. That same evening, Lorkovi<sup>ć</sup> requested an urgent meeting with German ambassador Siegfried Kasche. According to Kasche, Lorkovi<sup>ć</sup> told him that eleven Croats had been killed by the Serbs and that a massacre of 192 men from Gudovac and its surroundings was carried out in retaliation for these deaths. According to Goldstein, the figure of eleven dead Croats was made up by Lorkovi<sup>ć</sup> in order to justify the massacre. The Croatian historian <sup>?</sup>eljko Karaula contradicts Goldstein's assertion, claiming the VKJ marched into several hamlets on 11 April and summarily executed eleven Croat villagers that had refused to report for mobilisation several days earlier. Goldstein posits that 25 of the 27 Croats whose deaths the Ustaše attributed to " Serb agitators " prior to the massacre had perished in combat operations during the rebellion of the 108th Regiment. Historian Michele F. Levy agrees that there was no mass killing of Croats. Lorkovi<sup>ć</sup> maintained that the Gudovac massacre was an " internal political issue under the jurisdiction of the Croatian government ", and requested that the detained Ustaše members be handed over to Croatian authorities. He promised Kasche that Zagreb would carry out a full investigation. Kasche accepted Lorkovi<sup>ć</sup>'s proposal, likely at the urging of his superiors. The Ustaše detained at the Bjelovar high school were released and had their weapons returned to them. The promised investigation never took place.

== Legacy ==

The National Archive in Bjelovar contains extensive documentation of the massacre, including a list of victims compiled by Ustaše officials in May 1941 which describes many prisoners as being " shot as Chetniks ". A statement describes the " fright " of the Serb population and the " distress " of local Croats. The HSS party leadership distanced itself from the massacre and condemned the actions of the Ustaše, as did the majority of local HSS activists, many who ended up joining the Partisans. According to some sources, even Mikanec tried to distance himself from the killings, and allegedly protested to the " appropriate authorities " in Zagreb. He went on to become the Croatian Minister of Education in 1943, and served in this capacity until May 1945. Lorkovi<sup>ć</sup> was implicated in a conspiracy to overthrow the NDH government in mid @-@ 1944, arrested, and executed in the last weeks of the war by Paveli<sup>ć</sup>'s henchmen. Kvaternik survived the war and the destruction of the NDH, fled to Argentina with his family and was killed in a car accident in 1962. Paveli<sup>ć</sup> also fled to Argentina, survived an assassination attempt by Yugoslav government agents in Buenos Aires in 1957, and died of his wounds in Madrid two years later, aged 70.

Ustaše killings of Serbs continued throughout the war, and concentration camps were established to detain Serbs, Jews, Gypsies, anti @-@ fascist Croats and others opposed to Paveli<sup>ć</sup>'s regime.

Contemporary German accounts place the number of Serbs killed by the Ustaše at about 350 000 . According to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum , between 320 000 and 340 000 Serbs were killed by the Ustaše over the course of the war . Most modern historians agree that the Ustaše killed over 300 000 Serbs ( about 17 percent of all Serbs living in the NDH ) . At the Nuremberg trials , these killings were judged to have constituted genocide .

An ossuary and mausoleum were built on the site of the massacre in 1955 . A monument called 'Before the Firing Squad' , by sculptor Vojin Bakić , was erected on the same spot . In 1991 , amid inter-ethnic violence during the Croatian War of Independence , the monument and mausoleum were destroyed by Croatian nationalists . At the same time , one of Bakić 's most famous monuments , Bjelovarac , was destroyed because Bakić was a Serb and the monument had been dedicated to his brothers , who were killed by the Ustaše . What remained of the ossuary was removed by the local authorities in 2002 . That same year , several residents signed a petition to have a replica of Bjelovarac erected at the same spot . The local government promised to supply only half the amount needed to restore the monument . In 2005 , the Croatian Ministry of Culture told the petitioners to apply for the other half of the amount through a tender . The restored monument was unveiled in December 2010 .

= = = Explanatory notes = = =