

= Zaharije Ostoji? =

Zaharije Ostoji? (Serbian Cyrillic : ????????? ; 1907 ? April 1945) was a Montenegrin Serb military officer who served as the chief of the operational , organisational and intelligence branches of the Chetnik Supreme Command led by Dra?a Mihailovi? in Yugoslavia during World War II . He was a major in the Yugoslav Royal Air Force prior to the Axis invasion of Yugoslavia , and was involved in the coup that deposed Prince Paul of Yugoslavia on 27 March 1941 . After the coup , he escorted Prince Paul to exile in Greece , and was in Cairo at the time of the invasion in April . In September 1941 , he was landed on the Italian @-@ occupied Montenegrin coast along with a British Special Operations Executive (SOE) liaison officer and two companions . He escorted the SOE officer to the Territory of the Military Commander in Serbia and introduced him to the Yugoslav Partisan leader Josip Broz Tito then Mihailovi? . Ostoji? soon became Mihailovi? 's chief of staff , and after the German attempt to capture the Chetnik leader during Operation Mihailovi? in December 1941 , brought the Chetnik Supreme staff to Montenegro where they were re @-@ united with Mihailovi? in June 1942 . During the remainder of 1942 , Ostoji? launched a counter @-@ attack against Usta?e troops of the Independent State of Croatia returning to the eastern Bosnian town of Fo?a where they were expected to continue their genocidal anti @-@ Serb policies . As many as 2 @, @ 000 local Muslims were subsequently killed in the town by forces under Ostoji? 's command . Ostoji? later oversaw large @-@ scale massacres of civilians and burning of Muslim villages in the border region between Montenegro and the Sand?ak .

While the Chetniks were an anti @-@ Axis movement in their long @-@ range goals and did engage in marginal resistance activities for limited periods , they also carried out almost throughout the war a tactical or selective collaboration with the occupation authorities against the Partisans . The Chetnik movement adopted a policy of collaboration with the Axis powers , and engaged in cooperation to one degree or another by establishing modus vivendi or operating as auxiliary forces under Axis control . This was demonstrated in late 1942 and early 1943 , when Ostoji? planned and oversaw the Chetnik involvement in the large Axis anti @-@ Partisan offensive Case White alongside Italian troops . In 1944 , he became a leader of the Chetnik forces in Herzegovina , and along with Dobroslav Jev?evi? was involved in attempts to come to terms with the Allied forces . In late 1944 , as the Partisans tightened their grip on the country and the Soviet Red Army captured Belgrade , he re @-@ joined Mihailovi? in northeastern Bosnia but they could not agree on what course of action to take . Ostoji? , along with Chetnik leaders Pavle ?uri?i? and Petar Ba?ovi? and Chetnik ideologue Dragi?a Vasi? decided to move west to the area of the Ljubljana Gap in modern @-@ day Slovenia where other friendly forces were concentrating . In early April 1945 , faced with attacks by the Partisans and the Armed Forces of the Independent State of Croatia (HOS) along their route , the combined Chetnik force was defeated by HOS forces in the Battle of Lijev?e Field , after which Ostoji? was captured by the Usta?e in an apparent trap . According to some sources , he was killed in the Jasenovac concentration camp alongside ?uri?i? , Ba?ovi? and Vasi? .

= = Early life = =

Zaharije Ostoji? was a Montenegrin Serb , and was born in 1907 in the village of Gluhi Do , near the Adriatic seaport of Bar in the Principality of Montenegro . He joined the Yugoslav Royal Air Force and prior to the outbreak of World War II had risen to the rank of major . Little else is known of Ostoji? 's early life , but his sister was married to Royal Yugoslav Army Brigadier General Ljubo Novakovi? .

= = To Cairo and back = =

After the outbreak of World War II , the government of Regent Prince Paul of Yugoslavia declared its neutrality . Despite this , and with the aim of securing his southern flank for the pending attack on the Soviet Union , Adolf Hitler began placing heavy pressure on the Kingdom of Yugoslavia to sign the Tripartite Pact and join the Axis . After some delay , the Yugoslav government conditionally

signed the Pact on 25 March 1941 . Two days later a bloodless coup d'état deposed Prince Paul and declared 17-year-old Prince Peter II of Yugoslavia of age . Ostoja was involved in the coup through his close relationship with one of the main instigators , the commander of the Yugoslav Royal Air Force Brigadier General Borivoje Mirković . Ostoja escorted Prince Paul to exile in Greece and then traveled on to Cairo . Following the subsequent German-led invasion of Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav capitulation 11 days later , Ostoja remained in Cairo until he was selected to join a combined British - Yugoslav Special Operations Executive team which was to infiltrate into occupied Yugoslavia and make contact with resistance groups . The other members of the team were Captain Bill Hudson , a fellow Yugoslav Air Force officer , Major Mirko Lalatović , and a radio operator . They flew from Cairo to Malta on 13 September 1941 , before being landed from the British submarine HMS Triumph on the Montenegrin coast near Petrovac between 20 and 22 September 1941 . They quickly came into contact with Montenegrin Partisans , including Milovan Đilas and Arso Jovanović , who escorted Hudson and Ostoja to Partisan-held Užice in the Territory of the Military Commander in Serbia . While Hudson familiarised himself with the Partisans , Ostoja went on to Mihailović 's headquarters at Ravna Gora , but after briefing Mihailović went back to escort Hudson to Ravna Gora , arriving there on 25 October . When he first arrived at Ravna Gora , Ostoja had delivered a message to Mihailović from the War Minister of the Yugoslav government-in-exile , Bogoljub Ilić , assuring him of the official support of the government-in-exile , but stating that " a rebellion would not be tolerated " . Ostoja also told Mihailović that the communists had taken control of Montenegro . Ostoja and Lalatović then assumed senior staff positions in Mihailović 's supreme command headquarters .

= = Move to Montenegro = =

After Mihailović went on the run in early December 1941 in the wake of Operation Užice , Operation Mihailović and the split with the Partisans , Ostoja maintained a small headquarters consisting mainly of the intelligence branch , which remained close to Mihailović and his small personal staff as he moved around the Rudnik mountain area during the remaining winter months of 1941 - 42 . Mihailović eventually made his way to Montenegro , where he arrived in June 1942 . Ostoja , Hudson and other officers joined him soon after , travelling through Italian-held towns by truck disguised as troops of the Nedić regime .

In a directive letter dated 30 July 1942 , Ostoja urged all Chetnik commanders to " develop the strongest possible oral and written propaganda " . He stated that , " the people must be persuaded that the Chetniks are their only friends and that it is from them that they can expect freedom and a happy life " and instructed the Chetniks to " work day and night and maintain the spirit of the people " . He wrote , " the hour of freedom is near . Allied aid for the Chetniks is assured , and the whole world is admiring them . " In August , he launched a counterattack against Ustaše troops returning to Foča as the Italians withdrew their garrisons from the hinterland . The Chetniks feared the Ustaše were about to unleash another round of genocidal violence on the Serb population in the area . At least 2,000 local Muslims were subsequently killed in Foča by forces under Ostoja 's command .

In November 1942 , Ostoja was encouraged by Mihailović to wage a campaign of terror against the Muslim population living along the borders of Montenegro and the Sandžak , and subsequently reported that Chetniks had destroyed 21 villages and killed about 1,300 people . Between 30 November and 2 December 1942 , Ostoja represented Mihailović at the Conference of Young Chetnik Intellectuals of Montenegro at the village of Čahovići near Bijelo Polje in the Sandžak , which was also attended by Đurić . The conference was dominated by Đurić and its resolutions " expressed extremism and intolerance " , as well as an agenda which was focused on restoring the pre-war status quo in Yugoslavia implemented in its initial stages by a Chetnik dictatorship . It also laid claim to parts of the territory of Yugoslavia 's neighbors .

= = Operation Weiss = =

A few weeks after the conference , Mihailović sent Ostojić to establish a forward headquarters in Kalinovik in south-eastern Bosnia . Ostojić was to command an operation aimed at encircling and destroying Partisan forces in Bosnia , which was to utilise Chetnik units serving as Italian auxiliaries in Herzegovina and Montenegro , as well as other Chetnik units in the Lika region , northern Bosnia and northern Dalmatia . The plan was predicated on an Allied landing on the Dalmatian coast , which Mihailović believed was imminent . The outline concept was that the Chetniks would set up a corridor through the Italian occupied zone of the NDH as far as the Partisan liberated area in western Bosnia and Lika , neutralising the Italians through a combination of vague promises , encouraging them to surrender , and disarming them if necessary . The plan was finalised by early December 1942 at Mihailović 's headquarters in Montenegro , and operations were planned to commence on 5 January 1943 . However , the plan assumed that Mihailović 's forces were unified , which they were not , and also that his authority extended to many more Chetniks than it did in reality .

However , what transpired instead was that the Chetniks that were preparing for the " march on Bosnia " were drawn into closer collaboration with the Axis during the second phase of Case White that took place in the Neretva and Rama river valleys in late February 1943 . During this offensive , between 12 000 and 15 000 Chetniks fought alongside Italian forces , and in one case alongside German and Croatian troops against the Partisans . Despite the fact that the Chetniks were an anti-Axis movement in their long-range goals and did engage in marginal resistance activities for limited periods , their involvement in Case White is one of the most significant examples of their tactical or selective collaboration with the Axis occupation forces . In this instance , the participating Chetniks operated as legalised auxiliary forces under Italian control . Ostojić believed that it was actions such as these that would cost the Chetniks the support of the Allies , and he wrote to Mihailović that the Allies would probably have supported the Chetniks had they been more involved in fighting the occupation . Ostojić told Mihailović that his officers also held this view , and proposed that Chetnik collaboration be reconsidered . However , upon receiving Ostojić 's message , Mihailović did not even consider changing his strategy .

The plan that Ostojić drew up called for the Chetniks to remain south of the Neretva to avoid being outflanked by the Partisans . However , this essentially defensive strategy was rejected by Herzegovinian Chetnik commanders such as Dobroslav Jevčević and Bajo Stanić , who wished to follow the Axis-led offensive strategy . This placed Ostojić in a very difficult position , with some of his key detachment commanders following the orders of the Italians rather than his , while the Chetniks were reliant on Italian air and artillery support , particularly around Jablanica . Ostojić subsequently changed his mind and supported the Italian offensive plans , launching an attack against the Partisans retreating from Jablanica to Prozor on 27 February 1943 . The attack was indecisive and Ostojić reprimanded the detachment commanders responsible , particularly Stanić .

During this phase Ostojić first asked Jevčević to obtain more supplies from the Italians , and then when they refused , threatened to declare war on them . By early March , just as the Partisans were forcing a crossing of the Neretva at Jablanica , Mihailović joined Ostojić . In a letter to one of his other Montenegrin Chetnik commanders , Mihailović stated that he was managing the whole operation through Ostojić , although Mihailović later denied that he was in charge of the operation when questioned during his trial by a Partisan court after the war . Mihailović and Ostojić realised that the large concentrations of Chetnik troops in and around Mostar and the nearby bauxite mines were likely to draw German attention , and while they were focused on this issue , the Partisans forced a crossing of the Neretva .

Within a week of Mihailović 's arrival the Partisans had successfully crossed the Neretva , and within another week they had forced the Chetniks to withdraw , losing Nevesinje then Kalinovik to the Partisans before the end of March . During the fighting , Chetnik commanders had been ill-disciplined and had failed to cooperate , causing Ostojić to threaten them with courts martial and summary execution . Mihailović ordered Ostojić to pull the Chetniks back towards positions on the line of the Drina ? Piva rivers , some 80 ? 90 kilometres (50 ? 56 mi) southeast of Jablanica . By this point the Chetniks had suffered heavy losses , and the Partisans broke through the combined

Italian ? Chetnik defence line in early April . In a report dated November 1944 , Colonel S.W. " Bill " Bailey , the senior British liaison officer with the Chetniks during the war , stated that both Ostoji? and Major Vojislav Luka?evi? had been very critical of Mihailovi? 's " foolhardy , though brave , tactical handling " of Chetnik forces during Case White , which had " contributed largely to the failure of operations " . However , Ostoji? himself did not possess the necessary authority with his subordinate commanders , had been unable to cope with the rapidly changing situation , had adopted an unpopular and ineffective defensive strategy , and had then blamed the detachment commanders for the Chetnik failures .

= = 1943 ? 1944 = =

In July 1943 , the Montenegrin Partisan leader ?ilas contacted both Ostoji? and Ba?ovi? to establish their willingness to work jointly against the Axis occupiers , given that a new government @-@ in @-@ exile was about to be established without Mihailovi? . They reported this contact to Mihailovi? who threatened to exclude them from his Chetnik organisation if they maintained contact with the Partisans .

By September 1944 , Ostoji? had been promoted to lieutenant colonel , and was the Chetnik area commander in eastern Bosnia . In early September 1944 , as Mihailovi? had been removed as Minister of the Army , Navy and Air Force with the demise of the Puri? government @-@ in @-@ exile , Ostoji? tried to make contact with Allied forces in Italy , and agreed with Luka?evi? to issue a proclamation to the people explaining that they were going to attack the Germans . After 12 September 1944 , when King Peter called for all in Yugoslavia to rally around Tito , he and Ba?ovi? warned Mihailovi? that their men were losing their will to fight the Partisans . Concerned that the Russians would hand the Chetniks over to the Partisans , he then contacted the United States Office of Strategic Services (OSS) liaison officer with the Chetniks , Colonel Robert H. McDowell , but was unable to arrange for the Chetniks to be placed under American command .

= = Retreat and death = =

After the fall of Belgrade on 20 October 1944 , Mihailovi? and a force of a few hundred of his Chetniks withdrew from Serbian territory , crossed the Drina and based themselves in the Majevisa mountain area north of Tuzla in north @-@ eastern Bosnia . Ostoji? , who was commanding Herzegovinian Chetniks , was joined by ?uri?i? and his Montenegrin Chetniks and together they withdrew towards Mihailovi? .

From the time he joined Mihailovi? in northeastern Bosnia , ?uri?i? was very critical of Mihailovi? 's leadership , and argued strongly for all the remaining Chetnik troops to move to the area of the Ljubljana Gap in modern @-@ day Slovenia . At this point Ostoji? and Ba?ovi? were also questioning Mihailovi? 's plans . When Mihailovi? remained unconvinced , ?uri?i? decided to move to the Ljubljana Gap independent of Mihailovi? , and arranged for Dimitrije Ljoti? 's forces already in the Ljubljana Gap to meet him near Biha? in western Bosnia to assist his movement . When he left Mihailovi? , he was joined by Chetnik ideologue Dragi?a Vasi? and the Chetnik detachments commanded by Ostoji? and Ba?ovi? as well as a large number of refugees .

In order to get to Biha? , ?uri?i? made a safe @-@ conduct agreement with elements of the Armed Forces of the Independent State of Croatia (HOS) and with the Montenegrin separatist Sekula Drljevi? . The details of the agreement are not known , but it appears ?uri?i? , Ostoji? and Ba?ovi? and their troops were meant to cross the Sava river into Slavonia where they would be aligned with Drljevi? as the " Montenegrin National Army " with ?uri?i? retaining operational command . The Chetniks however , appear to have tried to outsmart the HOS forces and Drljevi? by sending their sick and wounded across the river , but retaining their fit troops south of the river , after which they began moving them westwards . Harassed by both the HOS troops and Partisans , they reached the Vrbas river , which they began to cross . In the Battle of Lijev?e Field , north of Banja Luka , the combined Chetnik force was badly beaten by a strong HOS force which possessed German @-@ supplied tanks .

Following this defeat and the defection of one of their sub @-@ units to Drljevi? , ?uri?i? was induced to negotiate directly with the leaders of the HOS forces about the further movement of the Chetniks towards the Ljubljana Gap . However , this appears to have been a trap , as he was attacked and captured by them on his way to the meeting . According to the historian Professor Jozo Tomasevich , exactly what occurred after his capture is not clear , but Ba?ovi? , ?uri?i? , Vasi? , Ostoji? were subsequently killed , along with some Serbian Orthodox priests and others . According to some sources , on 20 April , ?uri?i? , Ba?ovi? , Vasi? and Ostoji? were taken to the Stara Gradi?ka prison , near Jasenovac . The Usta?e gathered them in a field alongside 5 @, @ 000 other Chetnik prisoners and arranged for Drljevi? and his followers to select 150 Chetnik officers and non @-@ combatant intellectuals for execution . ?uri?i? , Ba?ovi? , Vasi? and Ostoji? were amongst those selected . They and the others were loaded onto boats by the Usta?e and taken across the Sava River , never to be seen again . It is reported that they were killed either in the Jasenovac concentration camp itself , or in a marsh in its vicinity . The website of the Jasenovac Memorial Site says Ostoji? was killed at the camp by the Usta?e in 1945 . The location of Ostoji? 's grave , if any , is unknown . Both the NDH forces and Drljevi? had reasons for ensnaring ?uri?i? . The NDH forces were motivated by the mass terror committed by ?uri?i? on the Muslim population in Sand?ak and southeastern Bosnia while Drljevi? was opposed to ?uri?i? 's support of a union of Serbia and Montenegro which ran counter to Drljevi? 's separatism .

= = = Books = = =

= = = Journals = = =

= = = Websites = = =