

"This is Greater Serbia," yet they didn't take the city. On returning to the region in March I visited the Dubrovnik I had heard but never seen.

As I drove along the Dalmatian coast past gnarled olive trees and black-robed peasant women tending their gardens, the city suddenly appeared in all its solidness, fortress walls squatting at the foot of steep cliffs, the Adriatic Sea sparkling below. Dubrovnik has weathered time and war for so long that historians remain ignorant of its origins. They believe it may have grown out of the Greco-Roman city of Epidaurus, first mentioned in 47 B.C., and legends place a settlement here a thousand years earlier.

Today the city's quiet confidence has been shaken by the reality of modern warfare. "Even Napoleon, whose army blew off the nose of the Sphinx, did not touch Dubrovnik," said Milo, a big, mustachioed Croatian and an unemployed tour guide. "The Saracens, Ottomans, Austrians . . . none of them harmed our city. But the Serbs, our neighbors, tried to destroy us, and we won't forget." He was drunkenly attacking the Serbs when I entered the Troubadour Café, housed in a crowded bar in a 14th-century stone building just off Placa, Dubrovnik's main boulevard.

You hear a lot about revenge in Croatia—people want to get even, and they want their land back. (The Serbs now control a third of Croatia, a slender shard of a state with Dubrovnik near its southern tip.) This doesn't augur well for peace or for the return of tourists, which Dubrovnik needs. Tourism accounted for 80 percent of the city's prewar economy.

Vinko Milutinovitch turned his battered face from the wheel of his beat-up Volvo taxi and said, "There were one hundred and twenty taxis in Dubrovnik. Now there are only seven, and business is still lousy. You're the first tourist I've driven in two years." Like 70 percent of Dubrovnik's inhabitants, he depends on Red Cross food parcels to survive. Once a month, any person in

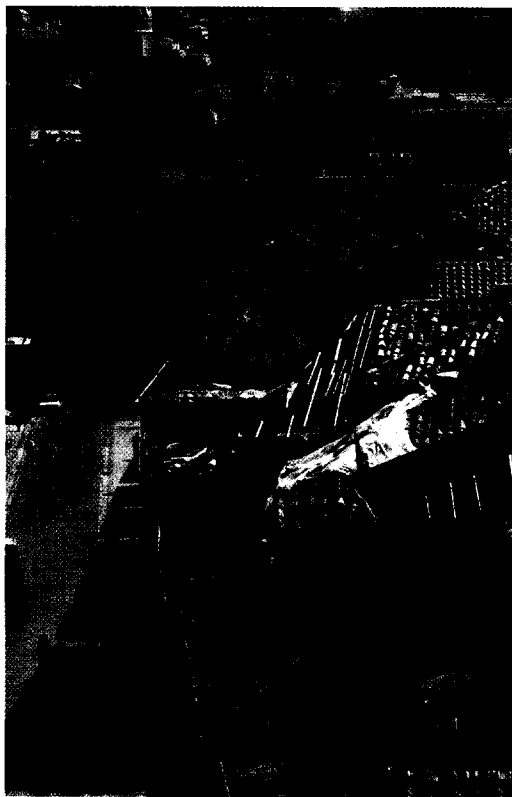
need receives flour, sugar, margarine, oil, cans of beef, mackerel oil and, sometimes, clothing.

One question I asked every official I met was, "If you were an American, would you bring your family here on vacation?" Most answered, "No, not yet." It's just a matter of time though. The city is rebuilding rapidly, repairing red-tiled roofs, clearing debris. As of last March, only one hotel was open, the classic Argentina, but several thousand beds have become available in other hotels and private homes. A few travel companies are returning: Austin, Texas-based Sterling Cruises and Tours scheduled several Dalmatian coast trips with stops in Dubrovnik for the fall.

During a walk I saw trucks delivering 250,000 roof tiles from France; Caritas, the Catholic charity, transporting cement to fix a church; a Belgian company unloading Securit unbreakable glass. As a way of shaking a fist at the Serbs, the city historian Professor Ivo Dabelić was putting the last touches on a temporary exhibition of shells, rockets, grenades and bombs hurled at Dubrovnik by Serb gunners and warplanes. It took him 10 days to turn the famous Nautika restaurant into a war museum. On the terrace, with its splendid view over the

city's western walls and the Adriatic, he'd placed a collection of phosphorous shells and cluster bombs ("two hundred and forty-seven bomblets inside").

Are there still risks? One official said several grenades are hurled into the Dubrovnik region every few days. So far they've exploded harmlessly in fields, but those responsible for security take seriously a threat by General Ratko Mladić, commander of all Serb forces in Bosnia, who said he'd "make sure Dubrovnik has a nice tourist season." His nearest army base is only 15 miles away in Trebinje, capital of the self-styled South Herzegovina Serb Republic. Serb fighters there are reinforced by Russian mercenaries, according to Croatian officers, as well as the notorious White Eagles, fanatic Serb gunmen accused of raping, torturing and



THE TERRA-COTTA ROOFS OF DUBROVNIK, DAMAGED DURING THE SHELLING, ARE MOSTLY RESTORED NOW.