Historians of World War II have devoted enormous efforts to the highly sensitive themes of popular resistance to and treasonous collaboration with the Axis occupation order. In virtually all the socialist countries and in some Western nations, like France and Italy, research and publishing on the wartime resistance movements have developed into something of a scholarly industry. In spite of this, however, we are probably just beginning to arrive at an understanding of these problems which is relatively free of the immediate postwar political disputes and clashes over ideology.

Yugoslavia, one of the few nations of Fortress Europe in which a broad-based resistance did contribute significantly to the obstruction of the Axis military effort, is a good example. Yugoslav historians have produced a vast amount of monographs and articles and a highly useful collection of documents, but practically all this material deals with the growth, development, and triumph of the Partisans. Other questions, such as the realities of the occupation system, movements of collaboration of one sort or another, and, finally, the non-Communist resistance, have received inadequate treatment. For obvious reasons, Mihailović and the Chetniks were subjects of intense controversy from the beginning, and until now virtually everything written about the officers' movement either dismisses it as collaborationist or represents it as the legitimate alternative to Titoism.
The first and most immediate aim of this book, then, is to fill a gap in our knowledge of wartime Yugoslavia. By focusing on the Chetnik movement we can gain a more clear understanding of the wide variety of ways in which important segments of the population, especially most of the Yugoslav officer corps and large numbers of the Serb civilians, perceived and responded to the occupation. The Partisans' ultimate success does not conceal the fact that during the greater part of the war several armed groups, owing at least some sort of allegiance to Mihailović, chose very different courses of resistance.

It is unavoidable that a study which deals with a movement whose leaders' long-haul anti-Axis goals all proved abortive and whose short-term arrangements involved a number of tactical accommodations with the occupation order must attempt to clarify the extremely difficult issues of resistance and collaboration. The overriding question is how a movement whose leadership was in no sense pro-Axis found itself progressively drawn into a hopelessly compromising set of relationships with the occupation authorities and the native Quisling regimes. What was it about the situation in occupied Yugoslavia and the Serb officers' response to that state of affairs which prevented them from carrying out serious anti-Axis activity or engaging in effective collaboration? The question is phrased that way because the tactic of collaboration not only discredited the Chetniks with the Yugoslav civilian population and the Allies but also, largely because it was never more than tactical collaboration, failed to increase Mihailović's standing with the occupation authorities.

How was it, then, that the officers' collaborationist tactics actually worked to undermine the effectiveness and cohesion of the movement? To what degree did Mihailović and his coterie of delegate-officers direct this whole effort? Was the officer leadership responding to developments more than initiating them, and was Mihailović ever actually the effective head of a Chetnik movement?

Evidently, the focus of this book is on the situation in occupied Yugoslavia rather than on the diplomacy of the resistance movements. Particular attention is given to the emergence, organization, and failure of the Chetniks, the regional peculiarities of the movement, and Mihailović's efforts to establish his own authority over the widely scattered non-Communist armed formations. The following chapters discuss the domestic opposition to Tito and the complex reality of the national and political civil war in Yugoslavia. The argument will be developed that the failure of the Mihailović movement was basically internal, and that the collapse of their relations with the British was of secondary importance.
This overall focus was made possible by relying very heavily on source materials dealing directly with the resistance and the Axis occupation rather than on external diplomatic materials. In addition to the multitude of Partisan documents and the Chetnik trial materials, the operations and intelligence reports of the Axis occupation authorities have been particularly useful. Special mention should be made of the records of the Italian Second Army and its civil administration in Montenegro, available to researchers only since 1967. These made possible a careful examination of the growth of the Chetnik movement in the western parts of Yugoslavia and also included some invaluable intercepted Chetnik radio transmissions. With the records of the German Foreign Office and Balkan commands, these sources constitute the large bulk of unpublished evidence for this study.

During two trips to the National Archives, Robert Wolfe and his staff saved me a great deal of time working with the German records and the Mussolini papers. I would also like to thank Jean Owen of The Johns Hopkins University Press for kind assistance in preparing this manuscript for publication.

When writing about wartime Yugoslavia, it is virtually inevitable that interpretations will offend one side or another. As I have tried to arrive at an explanation of the Chetnik movement which neither condemns it as strictly collaborationist nor idealizes Mihailović as the rightful defender of a “Western” and democratic Yugoslavia, neither the officers’ detractors nor their apologists will be satisfied. In any event, the judgments expressed here are exclusively the author’s own.