The Chetnik Movement and the Yugoslav Resistance

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II
THE MIHAIOLOVIĆ
MOVEMENT IN SERBIA, 1941

The Yugoslav High Command, which exercised almost no control over the Croatian troops during the two-week war, wielded just as little authority when it concluded the formal capitulation of 17 April 1941. While large numbers of the Croats were reluctant to fight and welcomed, or at least tolerated, the new order, dismay and bitterness were widespread among the Serbian detachments, where many refused to accept defeat and German capture. Rather than obey the orders to capitulate, several of them broke up into small, straggling bands, especially in the interior provinces of the country, like Bosnia, where German supervision was minimal.

Colonel Dragoljub-Draža Mihailović’s behavior during the confused days of April and May 1941 was probably very similar to that of several members of the Serbian officer corps. Mihailović, who had held a number of General Staff positions in the interwar period, acted as the chief of

1Dragoljub “Draža” Mihailo Mihailović was born on 27 April 1893 in Belgrade, attended a military academy from 1910 to 1912, became a private in 1911, and served as platoon leader in an infantry regiment during the Balkan Wars of 1912–13; as a
staff of the Second Army in Bosnia for a short while in early April before taking over a far smaller and hastily formed motorized "Rapid Unit" (brzi odred) on April 13.² His formation reconnoitered the situation along the Second Army's collapsing front, had a brief clash with an Ustaši unit, and, on 15 April, moved toward the area around Doboj, Bosnia, where they skirted a German armored column and received first word of the Yugoslav High Command's decision to capitulate. With only part of his followers, Mihailović immediately withdrew into the surrounding hills and, shortly after, began his journey to the east with a few dozen loyal officers and troops.³

After a march of a few weeks, during which the small group of about eighty men attempted some minor sabotage activity and clashed with a local armed Bosnian Muslim band, Mihailović reached and crossed the Drina River on 29 April.¹ Now in rump Serbia, they began to receive rumors and reports, probably from Serb refugees or other escaping troops, on the situation in other parts of the country, and, at a meeting in early May, word circulated that there were "strong, armed illegal bands in Serbia," that Chetnik Vojvoda Kosta Pećanać was moving toward the

lieutenant, Mihailović again served as a platoon leader during World War I. After the war he was promoted to the rank of captain (1920), attended officers' schools, and began serving as a staff officer in the late 1920s. By 1930, now a lieutenant-colonel, he served with the chief of the General Staff of the Royal Guard; in 1935 he moved to the General Staff section of the War Ministry and was advanced to the rank of colonel. In the following year he was stationed in Sofia and in Prague as Yugoslav military attaché. From 1937 to 1939 Mihailović was in Yugoslavia, where he held a number of lesser General Staff positions. A detailed summary of his prewar military career, based on the records of the Yugoslav War Ministry, may be found in Auswert­estelle Ausland, "Zusammenarbeit der Tschetniki mit dem jugoslawischen Generalstab u. deren heutiger Führer Mihailovic," 5 November 1941, T-314, roll 1457, frames 1203-6.

² This account of Mihailović's activities during and immediately after the Axis invasion is taken from Radoje L. Knezević, ed., Knjiga o Draži (The book on Draža), vol. I (Windsor, Canada: Srpska Narodna Odbrana, 1956), especially the articles by Knezević, Major Mirko Stanković, and Lieutenant Colonel Pavel Mešković. The last two officers were with Mihailović from 28 April to 6 May 1941. Although many of the contributors to this volume fought in Chetnik formations during the war and are all blatantly pro-Mihailović, it remains the best source for tracing the first stages of the movement immediately after the capitulation.

³ Knezević, in ibid., pp. 8-9.

⁴ The details of these incidents are, to say the least, somewhat vague. While Knezević claims that Mihailović, on 25 April, beat back an attack by a group of Muslims armed by the Germans near the village of Olovo, Stanković asserts that the clash took place on 26 April at Zepo. ibid., pp. 9, 25. At any rate, in view of Mihailović's later directives to his subordinates in Bosnia and Montenegro and the whole Chetnik treatment of the Yugoslav Muslims during the war, the incident was one of the first and typical examples of the officers' military strategy and was part of a major pattern of the civil war in wartime Yugoslavia.
Kopaonik area in southwest Serbia, and that General Ljuba Novaković had refused to surrender and was gathering troops.\(^5\)

As it turned out, these reports were wildly exaggerated. Moreover, Mihailović’s group was almost completely destroyed when it was surrounded by the Germans in the Užice area on 6 May. Several officers despaired and deserted the colonel, and, by the time Mihailović reached his future headquarters at Ravna Gora in western Serbia sometime in the middle of May, only seven officers and twenty-seven lower officers and troops accompanied him.\(^6\)

Before they could engage in any feasible resistance strategy, the small officers’ band had to gain time to recover, attract new recruits, and establish contacts with other still uncaptured officers. The task of organizing also meant that they needed a relatively safe regional “sphere” in which to operate; this in turn required the establishment of friendly relations with the local civilian population and administration. First they developed ties with some peasants in nearby villages, but even more important was their rapid success in winning over the gendarme and police forces of the area. In a short time the officers’ ranks were swelled by gendarmes from nearby Brajica, Mijonica, Gornji Milanovac, and Valjevo, and, according to Chetnik sources, Mihailović encouraged this alliance by capturing some runaway convicts who were plundering the countryside and turning them over to the local police forces.\(^7\) Aided by the active support, or at least toleration, of these police officials, Mihailović was able to expand activities. Gendarmes loyal to Mihailović rather than to the puppet Serbian civil administration in Belgrade enabled his group to set up a system of communications through couriers, to collect lists of military personnel who had escaped German captivity, and to provide them with some badly needed financial support.\(^8\)

During this initial phase, the officers desperately needed money to obtain food and supplies and to support anything larger than a small band. Financial resources for the movement, however, were uncertain and inadequate. On the day after they arrived at Ravna Gora, all the officers pooled what money they had in a common treasury \(^9\) and received contributions from sympathizers in the local villages in the form of food, clothing, and money. These measures were barely sufficient, though, and

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\(^7\) Pavel Mešković, in *ibid.*, pp. 52, 54. Present-day Yugoslav historians, not surprisingly, claim just the opposite. Marjanović (*Ustanak i Narodnooslobodilački Pokret*, p. 78) asserts that the Chetniks began to attract several marauding bands in western Serbia. Mešković relates, for example, that the gendarme commander of Vinkovica, Captain Milojko Uzelac, gave Mihailović 300,000 dinars. *Ibid.*, p. 58n.

Mihailović was quickly forced to ask one of his female relatives for help; she collected about 50,000 dinars from friends.

The question of material support was crucial because, without adequate money and supplies, Mihailović’s group either had to resort to plunder and rupture their emerging alliance with the nearby police officials and civilian population or restrict their activities. Moreover, the pressure to expand the scope of the movement was mounting rapidly as other officers got word of Mihailović and aligned their followings with Ravna Gora. A typical example was Major Vojislav Lukačević, who fled to the woods after the capitulation, returned to Belgrade, where he heard about Mihailović, and then left the capital with a small number of officers and soldiers to organize a Chetnik detachment in the countryside. Others traveled directly to the Ravna Gora headquarters. Major Boško Todorović, for instance, knew about the Mihailović group by the end of May and soon after left Belgrade to join him. Belgrade, in fact, appears to have been the principal place of recruitment for many of the officers who originally joined the Chetniks in western Serbia. This was possible mainly because the Germans apparently made no effort, at least before the outbreak of the Partisan revolt, to track down uncaptured Yugoslav military personnel in the Serbian capital.

A rapid influx of troops and officers into the Ravna Gora area was a mixed blessing at first because they strained the already meager supplies and would ultimately attract the attention of the German occupation authorities. Mihailović rightly feared that too large a collection of recalcitrant troops in western Serbia would result in a reprisal raid which he was not prepared to resist. During the summer months, military considerations dictated a strategy of breaking the organization into small groups rather than trying to create large armed detachments. The immediate objective of organizing over a wide area rather than preparing for imminent military operations also reflected Mihailović’s long-range political goals and his perception of the necessary outcome of the war.

The strategy of asserting control over as many “illegal bands” as possible and expanding the movement at least throughout Serbia and prob-

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10 Lukačević’s testimony is found in Državni Sud, Sudjenje Članovima Političkog i Vojnog Rukovodstva Organizacije Draže Mihailovića (The sentence against the members of the political and military organization of Draža Mihailović) (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1945), pp. 137-38.
12 The German authorities did not concern themselves seriously with the presence or number of former Serbian officers in Belgrade until the second half of September. At that time they believed there were about twelve hundred, while Serbian Minister-President Nedić preferred the figure seven hundred. General Bader, the commander of the German forces in Serbia, immediately ordered a new count. Gen. Kdo. XVIII A.K./Jc, “Tätigkeitsbericht für die Zeit vom 14.4–6.12.41.” 22 September 1941 (Anlage 14), T-314, roll 1457, frame 317.
ably in several other parts of Yugoslavia was designed to build an organization capable of seizing effective political power when the Germans withdrew or were defeated, rather than focusing on fighting them during the occupation. Mihailović revealed these aims to several individuals at Ravna Gora. Either at the end of May or beginning of June, for example, Radivoje Jovanović traveled to Chetnik headquarters to confer with their leader and was told that the strategy was to “organize, not to fight, and when the Germans begin to withdraw, then to move in and seize power.”

Two future Partisan leaders, a Dr. Jovanović and Dragoilo Dudić, received the same advice from Mihailović at the end of June. In addition, Vojislav Pantelić, when he arrived at Ravna Gora in early July with a band of twenty-seven men, mostly gendarmes, was informed by the colonel that the Chetniks planned to organize the entire country militarily before awaiting the opportune moment for a general uprising.

In order to win time during which they could develop their organization and expand contacts with other armed groups, Mihailović permitted the establishment of indirect links with the puppet Serbian administration in Belgrade. The purpose of these maneuvers was essentially to encourage an attitude of “salutary neglect” on the part of the Serbian civilian and—more important—German military authorities. In late May he sent Second Lieutenant Vladimir Lenac to Belgrade to ask the collaborationist and Serb nationalist Dimitriji Ljotić for the names of Belgrade civilians who could offer the Chetniks financial assistance. Shortly thereafter a Lieutenant Pipan came to the capital to inform Ljotić of the progress of the Ravna Gora movement and to point out that Mihailović had no plans for attacking Germans. Similarly, another Ravna Gora emissary, Lieutenant Neško Nedić, met a special envoy of Belgrade’s Ministry for Internal Affairs in mid-July and emphasized that the Chetnik strategy had absolutely nothing to do with “communist terror.”

Mihailović’s efforts to avoid a confrontation with the occupation administration were temporarily successful. The Germans, in fact, in July even encouraged Acimović to make an arrangement with the officers.

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13 From an interview with Radivoje Jovanović-Bradonija, cited in Marjanović, Ustanak i Narodnooslobodilački Pokret, p. 76.
15 Pantelić, in ibid., p. 158.
16 Before the war Lenac was the head of the right-wing Ljotić “Zbor” youth movement at Zagreb University. Bosko Kostić, Za Istoriju Naših Dana (Toward a history of our times) (Lille: Jean Lausier, 1949), pp. 32–34. Kostić served as intermediary between Ljotić and the Germans.
17 Ibid., p. 34.
Mihailović refused to go this far, yet there is no evidence that either the Quisling government or the German occupation forces took any effective measures during the summer to hinder the development of the Ravna Gora movement.20

The Chetnik officers pursued a basically wait-and-see strategy, not only because they thought it was the only realistic one but also because, as loyal officers who considered their activities to be a continuation of the royal Yugoslav army struggle of April, they believed it had the approval of the émigré High Command. As long as they were convinced that success depended heavily on political and military support from the British, they must have felt it was absolutely necessary to coordinate their actions with the orders of the London government. The émigré officers' authority flowed from the fact that virtually all the still uncaptured Serb generals were among their number, whereas the Chetnik officers in Yugoslavia were for the most part captains, majors, and colonels.

In September, when a Chetnik agent, Miloš Sekulić, succeeded in making his way from Belgrade to Constantinople in order to receive instructions from the Simović government, he finally got directives which explained that the aim of Mihailović's "Yugoslav Army" would be the seizure of power "when the interregnum comes, i.e., after the defeat of the German army." 21 In the meantime, its main tasks were to "preserve order in the country and to permit no brutal measures or robbery." Similarly, General Simović himself, in a radio broadcast of mid-August, advised his compatriots in the occupied homeland to avoid provocations because they would only lead to cruel reprisals. 22

In order to make these strategic guidelines effective, Mihailović had to undertake the difficult task of imposing some sort of control over the illegal bands of stragglers and fugitives outside his own stronghold in the Ravna Gora area. This meant winning the loyalty of several other officers to his own command and establishing a civilian political arm to complement military activities.

Before leaving for Turkey Miloš Sekulić had met with Mihailović at the village of Ba, where they agreed to set up a Chetnik political committee at Belgrade. Shortly before, some pro-Chetnik political figures in Belgrade began to work out a program which served as the basis for the

20 A Chetnik document, dated 1 October 1941, which was essentially a situation report by a certain Gradimir Bajloni, pointed out that "up to now, the Germans have not weeded out the supporters of the Mihailović movement (except for one light bombing attack on his Ravna Gora staff) because [the Chetniks] have taken absolutely no measures against the Germans, figuring that it is still too early." Marjanović, Ustanak i Narodnooslobodilački Pokret, p. 185.

21 Ibid., p. 185, n. 97.

creation of the “Central National Committee” (Centralni Nacionalni Komitet).23 Most of the early membership appears to have come from the prewar Serb Agrarian and Republican parties. Dragisa Vasić, a leading Republican and also former vice-president of the Serbian nationalist Srpski Kulturni Klub, became Mihailović’s “deputy” at Ravna Gora.21

Standing behind this rudimentary and secret political arm was a military organization which by early fall numbered probably no more than three thousand or four thousand officers and men.25 Despite the steady growth of the main group near Ravna Gora and the fact that it soon commanded significant support from some of the major Serb political figures who had not fled the country, Mihailović was constantly faced with the extremely difficult task of reinforcing his position as the leader of the uncaptured officers and their armed followings. Without any official recognition of the émigré government until the very end of 1941, the Ravna Gora group had to parley and maneuver with a number of officers, some of whom were openly collaborationist, others of whom outranked Mihailović or disagreed with him on fundamental strategy. Before the Germans resorted to a full-scale anti-rebel action in November, the situation in Serbia outside Belgrade and the larger cities was totally anarchic, and several leaders of armed detachments were free to act as virtual warlords within their regions. Mihailović tried to deal with this problem by co-opting and, in some cases, even ostracizing his competitors but never succeeded completely. Although the often very personal disputes between the officers now appear far less significant than the ensuing military struggle between the Chetniks and Partisans, Mihailović’s inability to impose his authority over many of the other officers’ bands was a tremendous failure for the Chetnik movement and one which he never really overcame at any point during the war.

The Ravna Gora movement was, in fact, one of several “illegal” Chetnik groups. The leader of the “official” Chetnik organization was an aging World War I veteran, Kosta Pećanac. During Serbia’s struggle for independence against the Turks in the nineteenth century the Chetniks were small guerrilla detachments which fought in the enemy’s rear and

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21 Ibid., p. 187.
25 It is impossible to give any precise figures on the strength of the Mihailović movement at this time. Historians like Marjanović (Ustanak i Narodnooslobodilački Pokret, p. 184) tend to downgrade his numerical strength, giving figures like three thousand for the early fall. German intelligence reports were extremely vague on this question. One analysis of the Chetnik organization, prepared by the S.D. (Sicherheitsdienst) at Belgrade, estimated its strength at between one thousand and four thousand. Befehlsblaber Serbien/Ia, “Aufstellung über die wichtigsten Cetnik­Gruppen,” 20 September 1941, T-314, roll 1457, frames 640–42.
represented the whole tradition of grass-roots resistance to foreign domination. Pećanac was an organizer of the Serb uprising of 1917 and after the war became head of the Chetnik Union, a strongly nationalist and conservative veterans' association. By the early 1920s, shortly after the assassination of the minister of the interior, Milorad Drašković, Pećanac became a key figure in the rightist agitation to suppress the Yugoslav Communist party and was lionized by Serb conservatives. In the summer of 1941 Pećanac was in at least nominal command of a number of armed bands, mainly in southern Serbia, but immediately after the German invasion of the Soviet Union he publicly renounced any intention of resisting the occupation forces and issued an order in late June forbidding his subordinates from attacking German and Italian troops who "behave politely" toward the Serbs.26

Mihailović knew that Pećanac still possessed some potential military significance in the southern parts of Serbia. In mid-August he tried to form an alliance with the old Chetnik head on the basis of a division of Serbia into spheres of influence whereby Pećanac would confine his activities to southern Serbia, the Sandzak, and parts of Albania.27 In a letter to Pećanac of 15 August, Mihailović made clear that he opposed immediate action against the Axis occupation because "the time . . . is not yet ripe," but he demonstrated that his long-range plans were anti-German, for Pećanac's work in the south was explicitly designed to prevent the enemy from sending reinforcements into Serbia from Greece and Bulgaria.

Already committed to a collaborationist line, Pećanac ignored this attempt to subordinate his units to the Ravna Gora leadership; a week later, he ordered a meeting of his detachment leaders to make plans for operations against the recently launched Communist uprising. By the end of August, he had issued an appeal to civilians to return to order and cooperation with the Axis authorities. Shortly thereafter, he moved to Belgrade, where he set up a so-called Staff of All the Chetnik Units in the Homeland,28 which had the support of about three thousand armed followers, about the same number as those under Mihailović's direct command.29 Ultimately—and this was typical of several of the non-Communist guerrilla detachments in wartime Yugoslavia—the Pećanac movement was of little use to either Mihailović or the Germans, and it appears that his bands made their major effort in skirmishes with Albanian Muslim armed groups near the Sandzak and Kosovo-Metohija.

Pećanac's refusal to join the Ravna Gora organization showed the

26 Marjanović, Ustanak i Narodnooslobodilački Pokret, p. 75.
27 Mihailović to Pećanac, 15 August 1941, cited in ibid., pp. 189–90.
28 Ibid., pp. 174–75.
lengths to which some unit leaders would go in order to retain at least nominally exclusive authority over their own detachments and probably reflected the growing tensions between the older World War I officers and the younger leaders of the Ravna Gora Chetniks. The immediate and decisive issue, as indicated by Pećanac's behavior in August, was the Partisan uprising which broke out in Serbia in early July. The revolt meant that German countermeasures were inevitable and forced each officer with a real or potential guerrilla following to take sides, either joining the Communist operations or giving tactical support to the occupation order. Mihailović tried to restrain the Communists through negotiations rather than compromise his movement and sacrifice the Chetniks' independence by collaborating with Belgrade. This middle course, however, failed, and the Chetniks did not succeed in taming the Communists' zeal for open revolt, in maintaining discipline over all the leading officers, or in dissuading the Germans from turning to a policy of mass reprisals.

The Yugoslav Communist party never recovered fully from the official repression of 1920–21 and, at the beginning of 1940, still numbered only eight thousand members. Between April and June 1941 the party grew to about twelve thousand, but it is debatable what portion of these new adherents were attracted by its anti-German activities. By early July there were apparently only about two thousand Communists in rump Serbia, with about six hundred concentrated in the Belgrade area. After the German invasion of the Soviet Union, they set up a “Supreme Staff of the National Liberation Partisan Units of Yugoslavia” (Glavni Štab Narodnooslobodilačkih Partizanskih Odrada Jugoslavije), headed by Tito, Kardelj, Milutinović, Ranković, and Vukmanović-Tempo, and on 4 July the order for an immediate revolt was issued.

Tito began with a small popular base, and his basic strategy was to
remove the party underground from the cities to the poorly supervised rural areas, seek support in the villages and among the roving groups of refugee Serbs, and create enough disorder to stimulate German reprisal actions, which would further radicalize the civilians and create more recruits for the Partisans. The initial armed encounters in early July were directed more against the local native administration, especially gendarmerie stations, and the communications network than against the small but well-armed German garrisons. In addition, village heads who cooperated too readily with the occupation regime were special targets of the Partisan revolt. By August rebel activities had spread all over western Serbia, and the Communist leaders were soon in a position to rival the Chetnik officers for predominant influence in the Chetniks' own sphere. Moreover, the Communists' early success was due in large part to their raids against the local police and administrative authorities, who were the very groups the officers depended on for support and tolerance.

Neither the Acimović gendarmerie nor the weak German occupation divisions were able to cope with the growing chaos in the western parts of rump Serbia. By early September, when Tito moved to Partisan headquarters, normally at Užice, to begin planning a political program to accompany the armed revolt, the Communist-led resistance was rapidly taking over the anti-German cause. Also, the Partisans' strategy of aggressive and immediate action naturally attracted the "activist" wing of the officers and worked to undermine Mihailović's authority over the non-Communist armed bands.

Some leaders of Chetnik groups began to break with Ravna Gora and to collaborate with the Partisans in joint operations. In the Valjevo area, Chetnik formations led by a local priest, Pop Vlada Sečević, and by Lieutenant Ratko Martinović agreed to work with the Communists and launched a joint attack in early September. Even more significant was the collaboration between the Partisans and the Cer Chetniks, commanded by Captain Dragoslav Račić. In this instance, a detachment leader, nominally under the authority of Mihailović, made a sharp break with the officers' strategy.

Račić was something of a model Balkan revolutionary. Wearing a large beard and the local peasant dress, this former artillery captain represented the aggressively anti-German wing of the Chetnik officers. According to German information, he was also the son of the Montenegrin Serb fanatic who shot the Croat leader Radić in the Belgrade Skupština in 1928. In late August he signed an agreement with a Partisan

34 Marjanović, Ustanak i Narodnooslobodilački Pokret, pp. 101–3.
35 Ibid., p. 140.
detachment and wrote Mihailović to praise the Communist rebels as “sons of our people who are filled with hatred of the enemy” and to warn that “it is the clear duty of your Chetnik organization to hold a meeting between the Chetnik command and the representatives of the Partisan units to approve joint actions for success in defeating the enemy.” The Partisans, he stressed, were “irrevocably committed to a struggle to the end, whether the Chetniks participate or not.” 37

Račić’s Chetniks and the nearby Partisans carried out combined operations through September and most of October. They even succeeded in capturing a number of German troops and planned a full-scale assault on Šabac for 22 September. 38 When the Germans decided to launch a cleaning-up action in the Cer region, however, Račić, with about fifteen hundred Chetniks and a few thousand Partisans, drew back quickly to avoid a risky confrontation. 39

Račić was not the only officer whose aggressive patriotism seemed to be pulling the Chetnik movement toward increasingly open collaboration with the Partisans. Artillery General Ljubo Novaković, who had been smuggled out of a hospital by Chetnik sympathizers in May, not only advocated the same course of action as Račić, although inconsistently, but also, as the only officer with the rank of general, posed a very serious threat to Mihailović’s leadership. 40

When he arrived at Ravna Gora, Novaković was at first received rather coldly. When he proposed to the officers that they establish three Chetnik commands, in Montenegro, eastern Serbia, and near Skopje, for the purpose of waging immediate anti-Axis resistance, he was excluded altogether. Novaković stole away from Ravna Gora, began to disarm some of Mihailović’s nearby followers, and, in mid-June, moved to the Šumadija in northern Serbia. 41 There, like Mihailović, he tried to make an alliance with the collaborationist Chetnik Kosta Pećanac. 42 By the end of August, after a fruitless meeting with Pećanac, he returned to the Šumadija, where he resumed his original strategy, beginning negotiations with the local Partisans. Although these talks failed, probably because of Novaković’s demand that he assume complete command of joint opera-

40 Mešković, in Knjiga o Draži, 1: 18–19.
41 Marjanović, Ustanak i Narodnooslobodilački Pokret, p. 77.
tions, he obviously did not abandon the idea of military collaboration with the Communists. In mid-September he issued an appeal for a general uprising in the Arandjelovac area and called for the “brotherly . . . collaboration with all other armed groups who are willing to work with the Chetniks for the national liberation of our Fatherland.”

After trying to make an alliance with the Chetnik Mihailović, the collaborationist Pećanac, and the Communist-dominated Partisans, Novaković launched a premature action in the Arandjelovac area in late September with a motley assortment of about three thousand followers, several of whom were armed only with picks and scythes. A good number deserted during the march, and the rest scattered and fled when a small German garrison opened fire. Totally discredited, General Novaković lost practically his entire following and was never again a threat to Mihailović or the Partisans.

The actions of officers like Račić and Novaković, even if short-lived and at time abortive, were typical of the chaotic situation in Serbia before the various armed resistance groups finally coalesced in late 1941 into distinct and mutually hostile Chetnik and Partisan movements. Before the end of the year, Mihailović, although rapidly emerging as the leading Chetnik officer, found himself parleying with a number of other leaders of non-Communist armed detachments who favored everything from open collaboration with the occupation order against the Communists to immediate general uprisings in league with the Partisans.

In Belgrade, the Germans naturally approved only the behavior of Pećanac, were confused and misled by the activities of Račić and Novaković, and suspected that Mihailović was ready to make a military alliance with Tito. Before the end of the summer they had already concluded that the small police force of the Acimović administration was not reliable and began to worry about Chetnik-Partisan combined actions.

Without a strong occupation contingent, though, the Germans still had to rely on native support. On 29 August, when they replaced Acimović with a “government of national salvation” (vlada narodnoga špasa), headed by the former minister of war, Milan Nedić, they hoped that, with a collaborationist general in charge of the administration, they could strengthen the “legal” Chetniks of Pećanac, restrain the drift of the other officers into the pro-Partisan camp, and restore order without having to call for a massive German military intervention.

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44 Bezirksamt Orosac (Stellvertreter Cujetar Djordjević) to Innenministerium, 23 September 1941 (German translation). T-314, roll 1457, frames 575–76.
46 Benzler to Aus. Amt, 29 August 1941, cited in Marjanović, Ustanak i Narod-
In a short time, however, as the revolt in western Serbia grew more serious, the Germans gave up the Nedić strategy. New gendarme units proved untrustworthy, and different Chetnik groups, although seldom fighting openly against the occupation troops, had apparently made pacts with the Communists for common actions in the future. Already burned by the events of 27 March, the Germans lost all confidence in the prudence of the Chetnik leaders and quickly convinced themselves that the rebellion was now “clearly in the hands of the nationalist Serb officers.”

Despite the appraisal of the military authorities in Belgrade, the Chetnik officers were losing control of the national movement. At Ravna Gora Mihailović continued to advocate the postponement of armed clashes with the Germans and finally compromised temporarily with the Partisans’ strategy only after he felt he had no other alternative. All evidence indicates that he remained convinced that extravagant actions would only compound the suffering of civilians, force the Germans to strengthen their occupation contingent, and reduce his chances of ultimate success. The overall plan was still to organize the entire resistance under Chetnik command, avoid needless provocations against the Germans in order to avoid costly reprisals, and, finally, link up with an Allied landing in the Balkan peninsula.

To a large degree, the officers must have felt that this course of action would preserve at least one sanctuary in rump Serbia for the Yugoslav Serbs. They also thought that immediate action was safer and more justified in those parts of Yugoslavia under the control of the Croatian Ustaši. The anti-Serb massacres in the western parts of Yugoslavia were part of an open policy and took place for the most part in the villages rather than in concentration camps. The Serb officers knew about them in the summer of 1941 and were determined to prevent the policy of mass reprisals from being employed in Serbia. Moreover, the Chetnik officers must have perceived the situation in this way to some extent as a result of their experience in World War I, when Serbia lost about 20 percent of its population, many in a typhus epidemic in 1915, suffered terribly at the hands of the Austrian and especially the Bulgarian occupations, and was finally liberated by an Allied breakthrough at the Saloniki front.

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nooslobodilački Pokret, pp. 177-78. Not only did the Germans have to overcome their own reservations about the wisdom of establishing the Nedić government, but they also had to cope with the wrath of the Ustaši leaders, who denounced the move as an act of cooperation with Serb nationalism. Kasche to Aus. Amt, “Telegramm N. 1096 vom 1.9.1941,” 1 September 1941, T-120, roll 1127, frame 2120H/462026.


Throughout September and most of October the tactics of the Ravna Gora group were essentially defensive. In this period the Chetnik leadership first tried to dissuade the Partisans from their aggressive designs and finally decided to make certain tactical changes, basically in order to maintain themselves on an equal footing with the Communist bands. In mid-August and early September Mihailović, his chief political aide, Dragisa Vasić, and officers in Belgrade had meetings with Partisan representatives in which they all argued that the uprising was premature and that the resistance movements had to postpone rebel activities at least until the Germans were defeated on the eastern front. When these efforts failed, Mihailović agreed to meet Tito personally. Their first encounter took place on 19 September, only a day after Tito had left Belgrade, at a village in western Serbia, Struganik. According to Tito's account, Mihailović stubbornly refused to take part in immediate action against the Germans but did promise that his followers would not attack Partisan units. Other Partisan sources indicate that the Chetnik leader apparently mistook Tito for a Russian and proceeded to harangue him on the treason of the Croats and the reproachable behavior of some of the Serb Partisans. Thus, this first meeting produced no collaboration but little more than a temporary truce. Neither believed in the possibility of real cooperation, but both thought they could derive some benefit from a show of compromise.

The Communist leaders probably recognized that the Chetniks had a good deal of support among the peasants and Serb politicians and that some active cooperation from the officers would be necessary to train and command the Partisan detachments, at least in the first part of the war. Tito also certainly knew that at least some of the officers were ready to break with Mihailović because of his attitude toward the revolt, and he must have hoped that when he offered to collaborate with the Chetniks, Mihailović would refuse and therefore isolate himself from the more aggressive elements in the non-Communist rebel camp.

For the first encounter, see Marjanović, Ustanak i Narodnooslobodilački Pokret, pp. 201–2; the second meeting, which took place in Belgrade on 8 September between the Serb Communist Alexander Ranković and the officers, Colonel Branislav Pantić and Major Velimir Piletić, can be followed in Ranković to Tito, 11 September 1941, Zbornik, vol. 1, bk. 1, no. 34. The best account of the Chetnik-Partisan negotiations of 1941 is Kruno M. Dinečić, "Tito et Mihailovitch," Revue d'histoire de la deuxième guerre mondiale 29 (1958): 3–31. For the role of former Yugoslav officers in the Partisan movement seen through the eyes of the British S.O.E., see F. W. D. Deakin, The Embattled Mountain (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 105.

Partisans had no illusions about the intentions of the Chetnik leadership. Tito was convinced immediately after the talks at Struganik that Mihailović was trying to play a double game and was in fact maintaining contacts with the Germans through Nedić. At the end of September he sent Ranković to the Chetnik headquarters. Little was accomplished, but another meeting was arranged between the two heads to be held on 16 October.

While Tito's immediate aim was to prevent a Chetnik assault from the rear, Mihailović was trying to make sure that the Partisans did not gain the complete upper hand in the anti-German cause. Therefore, although he refused to commit his own followers against the Axis at Struganik, in mid-September he did permit some of his subordinate commanders to take part in joint operations with the Partisans. Chetnik sources indicate that the officers were alarmed at the rapid progress of the Communist bands, especially their seizure of a number of small towns and considerable amounts of rifles and munitions. Mihailović allowed a few of his detachment leaders to collaborate with the Partisans so that the Chetniks could claim a voice in the political affairs of the liberated towns and, more important, share in the captured spoils. By collaborating on this limited basis with Tito, Mihailović was seeking a "guarantee" against

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55 Titoist historians attempt to add credibility to the Partisans' fear of deals between Mihailović and Nedić by pointing out that in early September a Chetnik officer and a Nedić gendarmerie commander were captured near Belanovica carrying a plan for coordinated Chetnik-gendarmerie operations against the Partisans hidden inside a spare auto tire. See Marjanović, Ustanak i Narodnooslobodilački Pokret, pp. 192-93. Although there is little doubt that Mihailović's agents were in contact with Nedić, there is no proof that any concrete agreements were made. Chetnik sources, obviously, deny the whole thing. Pantelić, for example, writes (Knjiga o Draži, I: 60-61) that on 5 September he met Reserve Major Alexander Misić, who, having just conferred with Nedić at Belgrade, attacked the minister-president violently. Moreover, if Nedić made any sort of an arrangement with Mihailović in September, he certainly did not so inform the Germans. Sometime in the middle of the month, one of Pećanac's liaison men visited Ravna Gora at Nedić's request and returned with the report that Mihailović could not be trusted to carry out anti-Partisan operations in conjunction with the Serb police. German sources indicate that Nedić's effort to come to terms with the Chetniks was initiated with the approval of the German commanding general in Serbia. Gen. Kdo. XVIII A.K./Ic, "Tätigkeitsbericht für die Zeit vom 19.9.-6.12.41," 25 September 1941 (Anlage 19), T-314, roll 1457, frame 329; Bevall. Kdr. Gen. in Serbien/Verwaltungsstab, "N. 65/41 vom 3.12.41," 3 December 1941, T-175, roll 126, frame 2651861.

56 Marjanović, Ustanak i Narodnooslobodilački Pokret, p. 276.

57 According to one German source, Mihailović had only a little over a thousand armed followers under his direct command around Ravna Gora. Gen. Kdo. XVIII A.K./Ic, "Tätigkeitsbericht für die Zeit vom 19.9-6.12.41," 25 September 1941 (Anlage 19), T-314, roll 1457, frame 329.

58 Both Zvonimir Vučković and Pavel Mešković grant that these were Mihailović's basic motives in agreeing to partial collaboration with the Partisans. Knjiga o Draži, I: 63, 135.
the Communists and trying to reassert his own authority over a badly split officers' movement.

In no way, however, did these tactical shifts represent a major change in the Chetniks' long-term strategy and political goals. Only a few days before the Struganik meeting, in fact, Mihailović had conferred with a Serb employee of the Belgrade Bankverein; he explained that he planned no operations against the German occupation troops and that he was opposed to the Communists, but he also implied that he would not attack the Partisans because he wanted to avoid a civil war. His long-range goal was “to be ready, when the German occupation troops are weakened or withdrawn, to maintain and restore order in the land with his own forces.”

The exact nature and extent of Chetnik-Partisan armed collaboration is extremely difficult to determine. Some unit leaders like Račić, who had begun working with the Communists on his own initiative, may have been completely out of Mihailović's control. However, by early October, it is clear that he did issue instructions to some of his subordinates to work with Partisan detachments. The most important joint operations took place near Krupanj, Valjevo, and Kraljevo, and, in at least one instance Chetnik units reinforced the Partisans as a result of Tito's personal request to the Ravna Gora headquarters.

From the very beginning, though, the alliance of arms was severely strained. When, for instance, the Germans pulled out of Užice and Požega on 21 September, the nearby Chetnik unit leaders who moved in were immediately surrounded by local Partisans and were expelled from Užice on 24 September. The incident proved to be very significant


61 Pantelić received the order from Mihailović to join the Partisans on 10 October. Knjiga o Draži, 1: 163.

62 See Marjanović, Ustanak i Narodnooslobodilački Pokret, pp. 248, 260. The operations around Kraljevo provide an excellent example of how difficult it is to reconstruct with any accuracy the facts behind the Chetnik-Partisan military collaboration. Defending the Chetnik point of view, Zvonimir Vučković (Knjiga o Draži, 1: 136–37) claims that over 3,000 Chetniks and about 1,000 Partisans fought at Kraljevo, where several Chetnik unit leaders were lost. Marjanović, on the other hand, asserts (pp. 264–66) that only “about 800” Chetniks fought alongside 2,600 Partisans. He goes on to blame the failure of the operation on the “lack of preparation . . . and hard drinking in the villages” on the part of the Chetnik allies.

63 Marjanović, Ustanak i Narodnooslobodilački Pokret, p. 243.
because Užice had an arms and munitions factory which the Partisans could later use as a bargaining tool with the Chetniks. In other liberated areas, friction developed when the Partisans and officers tried to mobilize among the same civilians. There is evidence, too, that Mihailović was preparing all along for a possible future change of allies by treating German prisoners with unusual generosity.\footnote{While the Chetnik Zvonimir Vučković reports (Knjiga o Draži, p. 135) that their units “captured” Gornji Milanovac on 2 September, taking over a hundred German prisoners, he goes on to admit that they were treated “most correctly” at Ravna Gora. German intelligence at Belgrade received a report that the small garrison had in fact been surrounded by larger Partisan forces and had sent a message to Mihailović for help. The colonel, according to the report, immediately sent a detachment to Gornji Milanovac and “escorted” about eighty Germans to Ravna Gora. Furthermore, a Chetnik captured in early October near Gornji Milanovac said that Mihailović had given orders not to kill captured German soldiers. Abwehrstelle Belgrad to Bevoll. Kdr. Gen. in Serbien, “Verbleib de’r aus Gornji Milanovac . . . Kompanie,” 30 October 1941, T-501, roll 250, frame 976; Gen. Kdo. XVIII A.K./Ic “Mihailovic,” 8 October 1941, T-314, roll 1457, frame 353.}

In spite of this, the German occupation authorities took Mihailović’s collaboration with the Communists very seriously, and, when Nedić’s “armed force” of about twenty thousand men proved incapable of suppressing the revolt, they decided to bring more German troops into Serbia. In early September an infantry regiment arrived from Greece, and soon thereafter O.K.W. agreed to move an entire division from France to Serbia.\footnote{Franz Halder, Kriegstagebuch, arranged by Hans-Adolf Jakobsen, vol. 3 (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1964), entry for 12 September 1941.} When General Böhme came to Belgrade to assume command of all German occupation forces in Serbia, he had four entire divisions (the 704th, 714th, 717th, and 342d) plus parts of the 718th division and the 125th infantry regiment.\footnote{Marjanović, Ustanak i Narodnooslobodilački Pokret, p. 218.}

The Germans were not only better prepared to deal with the situation in western Serbia, but for a variety of reasons they attributed the success of the revolt largely to the Serb officers rather than the Communist leaders. Their mistrust of all Serb military formations, whether formally collaborationist or not, was bolstered throughout September by information that the subordinates of both Pećanac and Mihailović were breaking ranks to take part in the anti-Axis struggle. By the middle of the month General Novaković’s transmitter in the Šumadija was broadcasting violently anti-German appeals,\footnote{Gen. Kdo. XVIII A.K./Ic to AOK 12, “Aktenvermerk: Geheim Sender Šumadija,” 21 September 1941, T-314, roll 1457, frame 659.} while, in the whole area where the Drina and Sava rivers join, Captain Račić was operating against the Germans in conjunction with Partisan bands.\footnote{Bevoll. Kdr. Gen. in Serbien/Ic, “Lage in Raume Sabac,” 24 September 1941, T-314, roll 1457, frame 616.} Pećanac, whose personal loyalty
to the occupation regime was beyond doubt, seemed to be losing all control of his formations. In the Kopaonik region, for example, a previous follower of Pećanac, Lieutenant Colonel Masan Djurović, broke off all ties with the legal Chetniks, began seizing gendarme stations, and clashed repeatedly with nearby armed bands of Albanian Muslims.69

These and similar incidents compelled the Germans to conclude that Pećanac had outlived his usefulness. Pećanac himself wrote to Nedić in early October that the winter months would probably see more defections to the anti-Axis camp and expressed deep regret that Mihailović had been foolish enough to “ally himself” with the Communists.70 A short while later, the Germans decided to attach the still reliable Chetniks of Pećanac to Nedić’s gendarme forces and to stop supplying the rest with weapons.71

As far as Belgrade was concerned, it made little difference whether Mihailović’s subordinates were collaborating with the Partisans against or in compliance with directives from Ravna Gora. In a thoroughly chaotic situation, in which some officers seemed to be switching sides quickly and attempting various deals with other armed bands, the Germans, who never had much reason to place confidence in the Serb military in the first place, simply resolved the whole problem by assuming the worst regarding the aims of the Ravna Gora Chetniks. As October wore on, instead of thinking that the Chetnik officers had joined the revolt only partially and rather reluctantly, they began to assume that the Ravna Gora headquarters had engineered the alliance and that Mihailović was actually the leading figure behind the whole rebellion.

In short time, the gap between what the Germans in Belgrade discerned to be the size, scope, and strategy of the officers’ movement and the actual confused and disorganized state of the Chetnik organization had widened. Intelligence reports began claiming that Mihailović’s bands included Communists72 and that they were growing rapidly as a result of an influx of officers and men formerly allied to Pećanac.73 Open Com-


munist appeals for collaboration with the Chetniks only served to confirm the reports of captured rebels that Mihailović had formed an alliance with the Partisans and was definitely hostile to the Germans, although, for the time being, he had ordered his followers to attack only weak occupation units. After the first week of October, reports and orders from the highest German authorities in Belgrade stressed that the Chetnik organization was expanding “in all directions” and that, even if they at times behaved cautiously, their ultimate aim was to liberate the land from the occupation order.74

Because of the contacts between Ravna Gora and the agents of Nedić and Pećanac, the occupation administration had far more information on the Chetniks than on the Partisans, though it was not always accurate. This, combined with the fact that the Germans were as yet unfamiliar with Communist-led guerrilla movements, led them to underestimate the strength, autonomy, and relative significance of the Partisan movement and to concentrate on Mihailović, overestimating his influence over the whole anti-Axis front and the numerical and organizational strength of the officers’ bands. By the end of October reports were stressing that the Chetniks had made common cause with the Communists and were identifying armed detachments loyal to Mihailović throughout former Yugoslavia, as well as in western Serbia.75

Just as the Germans were convincing themselves that Mihailović was firmly committed to an aggressive alliance with the Communists against the occupation order, the ever-strained collaboration between Chetniks and Partisans finally broke down. Evidence of conflicts between the two groups, of a number of which even the Germans were aware, had appeared throughout October. Disputes had broken out over the selection of political leaders in the liberated villages, and at Požega there was shooting between Chetniks and Partisans.76

These, however, were merely symptoms of broader divisions over strategy and postwar goals. Mihailović’s meeting with Tito at Struganik had produced only a very cautious and partial sort of military cooperation on the part of the officers. Moreover, Mihailović and his closest


advisers had agreed to join the revolt, albeit halfheartedly, mainly to
preserve the position of their own movement in the rebel camp, not be­
cause they were willing to risk everything on an immediate struggle with
the German occupation.

In a broader sense, the more the revolt in Serbia succeeded, the more
the Mihailović group had to lose. Continued rebel activity forced the
Germans to stiffen their policies toward the puppet civil administration
and the various gendarme and “legalized” armed formations upon whom
the Chetniks depended at least partially for information, protection, and
future allies. Even more important, the victims of the Serb revolt in the
fall of 1941 were for the most part the gendarmes of the Nedić adminis­
tration, many of whom were sympathetic to the Ravna Gora officers,
rather than the small German garrisons.\textsuperscript{77}

German troop reinforcements and adoption of a policy of mass re­
prisals only confirmed Mihailović’s belief that the Partisans’ excessive
zeal would ruin the whole national movement and bring additional
suffering to the civilian population. In early October, for instance,
perhaps as many as seven thousand civilians were shot at Kragujevac,
where there had been no armed attacks on German personnel; at nearby
Kraljevo the number of victims was about seventeen hundred, and, in
other villages the shootings followed mass burnings of the peasants’
homes.\textsuperscript{78} These actions created more recruits for the most extreme ele­
ments within the resistance, usually the Partisans. Finally, the stronger
the Partisans became, the better able they were to deal with the officers
on an equal footing, to reject the Ravna Gora strategy, and to gain
recognition in the Allied camp as the leaders of Yugoslav resistance.

By October of 1941 the Serb officers at Ravna Gora were confronted
with a dilemma. On the one hand, they wanted to preserve their orga­
nization as an independent resistance group with Allied backing, ready
to act effectively upon an amphibious operation in the Balkans or a
German withdrawal. On the other hand, they found themselves firmly
opposed to a resistance movement which was rapidly passing out of their
control, which favored immediate action, which tended to benefit from
the enemy’s recourse to mass reprisals and the ensuing radicalization
of the masses, and which preferred outside support from the Soviet Union
rather than the western Allies.\textsuperscript{79}

\textsuperscript{77} See, for example, Pantelić, in \textit{Knjiga o Draži}, 1: 162.
\textsuperscript{78} Jozo Tomasevich, “Yugoslavia during the Second World War,” in \textit{Contemporary
Yugoslavia}, ed. Wayne Vucinich (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press,
\textit{T-120}, roll 1178, frame 470307.
\textsuperscript{79} This last point has been obscured by the British recognition of the Partisans in
1943 and the difficult relations between Tito and the Russians during the war. It
is certainly worth mentioning, though, that even so pro-Partisan a writer as F. W. D.
The Partisans were also aware that the officers had reached an impasse. Tito decided to force Mihailović’s hand and on 20 October sent him a letter which called for continued joint operations against Nedić and the Germans. This proposal led to a second and final meeting between the Chetnik and Partisan heads at the village of Brajići on 26 October. The talks produced little more than an exchange of mutual recriminations, as each demanded that his movement assume a dominating position in the resistance.

Tito insisted on close collaboration against the Germans and proposed a comprehensive ten-point program, which included (1) joint operations against Nedić and the Germans; (2) common provisioning of Chetniks and Partisans; (3) the equal division of captured equipment; (4) joint commands in liberated areas; (5) organization of provisional administrations in the liberated areas, popularly elected by all who supported the national liberation struggle; (6) creation of Chetnik-Partisan commissions to settle all disputes; (7) renunciation of forced mobilization; (8) an all-out struggle against traitors and spies with the aid of joint military tribunals; (9) common action against “collaborationist” Chetnik groups; and (10) a mutual commitment not to give identification papers to potential enemies.

Mihailović immediately rejected points 1, 2, 5, and 7, making evident his firm opposition to the whole Partisan military strategy and political reorganization. Although further negotiations did produce a limited agreement (regarding the establishment of united commands in the liberated areas and the sharing of arms produced in the Partisan-held Užice arms factory), Tito’s demands at Brajići forced a total break between the two resistance movements. Mihailović, who had demanded that he be recognized as the sole leader of all the rebel forces, decided suddenly to eliminate the Communists.

The Chetnik officers, who would accept nothing less than complete domination of the Yugoslav anti-Axis front, had to regard Tito’s program as an unacceptable ultimatum. Also, they recognized that the continued success of the revolt would strengthen the Partisan movement enormously and that if the Communists were to be stopped they had to...

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Deakin points out (Embattled Mountain, p. 135) that when the first British intelligence mission passed through Partisan headquarters at Užice on or about 25 October 1941 they got the impression “that Tito was hoping, and would prefer, that any Allied support to his movement would be coming from the Russians.”

For a Partisan assessment of the Chetniks’ plans, see the letter of 16 October 1941 from the Provincial Committee of the Y.C.P. in Serbia to the Krugujevac District Committee, in Zbornik, vol. 1, bk. 2, no. 49.

Marjanović, Ustanak i Narodnooslobodilački Pokret, p. 315.


Ibid.
be stopped quickly. Furthermore, there is good reason to believe that Mihailović was encouraged to act decisively by the Yugoslav émigré government and by his understanding of Allied policies regarding the resistance.

 Shortly before the meeting at Brajici, the British established their first direct contact with the Ravna Gora movement. Captain William Hudson and two Yugoslav officers arrived at Chetnik headquarters and, after landing on the Montenegrin coast on 20 September, made their way slowly through the revolt-torn area. They arrived first at Partisan-held Užice and reached Mihailović’s headquarters in western Serbia the day before the Brajici talks. According to Deakin’s recent account, the two Yugoslav officers, Majors Zaharije Ostojić and Mirko Lalatović, had instructions from War Minister General Bogoljub Ilić, which Hudson knew nothing about, to confine their contacts and reports to armed groups loyal to the exiled royal government and led by officers of the dissolved Yugoslav army.

 Hudson’s directives from Special Operations Executive (S.O.E.) headquarters in Cairo were apparently rather vague, but clearly the purpose of the Ostojić-Lalatović mission was to do everything they could to restrain the revolt, to keep the resistance in the hands of the monarchist officers, and to create the impression in London that rebel activities were the exclusive work of the Mihailović Chetniks. On 13 October the two officers sent a message to Malta, probably over Hudson’s wireless set from Montenegro, reporting that “instructions have been delivered to our group which is operating in Montenegro not to cooperate with those leaders of Chetnik odreds who do not recognize the Yugoslav government...[and that] it has equally been so settled that Colonel Mihailovic is receiving orders to refrain from sabotage except against railway tracks, locomotives, etc., where explosives are not needed, so that the population will not be too exposed to reprisals.”

 When Hudson arrived at Mihailović’s headquarters on 25 October after passing briefly through Užice, the colonel quickly criticized him for “having been with the Communist rabble” and threatened to break off relations if he visited Tito’s headquarters again. The significance of the arrival of the joint British-Yugoslav mission, though, lies in the fact that it gave the officers confidence that they had the backing of the émigré Yugoslav and perhaps even the British government, and that they could force their resistance plans on the Communist leaders. Mihailović was given a message from the Yugoslav High Command which stated that

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“a rebellion would not be tolerated, that the struggle should be waged for Yugoslavia, and not become a struggle of the Communists for the Soviet Union.”

At the same time, he received assurance from Ostojić and Lalatović that the Chetniks had the official support of the royal Yugoslav government.

Given England’s sponsorship of the royal government of King Peter II, Mihailović was justified in thinking that, at least for the time being, he had the virtual support of the British. According to Hudson’s own report: “The British promise of support had the effect of worsening Chetnik-Partisan relations. When I first arrived at Ravna Gora and Užice at the end of October, 1941, Mihailović already knew by telegram that he would get British support. He felt rightly that no one outside the country knew about the Partisans or that he alone was not responsible for the revolt.” Although the evidence does not show that Hudson’s mission alone created the split between the Chetniks and the Partisans, it does appear probable that the mission encouraged Mihailović to think that the time was ripe for drastic action against the Communists.

Mihailović certainly had reason to believe that his resistance strategy was more in line with the British S.O.E.’s overall guidelines for underground activity in occupied Europe than was the Communist plan. British intelligence agents had been active in Yugoslavia since mid-1940, certainly had something to do with the Simović putsch of 27 March 1941, and, more important, had developed links with Yugoslav figures who were “exclusively Serb, nationalist and conservative in politics.”

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99 Deakin, Embattled Mountain, p. 137.
101 The whole question is still a matter of historical dispute. Marjanović implies that the chronological proximity of Hudson’s arrival at Ravna Gora and the subsequent Chetnik attack on Užice could not have been a mere coincidence but admits that the answer must be sought in the documents of the British Special Operations Executive. “Velika Britanija i Narodnooslobodilački Pokret u Jugoslaviji, 1941–1945” (Great Britain and the national liberation movement in Yugoslavia, 1941–1945), Jugoslovenski Istorijski Časopis 2 (1963): 37–38. Deakin, on the other hand, wrote in the same journal that Hudson’s mission probably had no effect on the break between Mihailović and Tito. “Britanija i Jugoslavija, 1941–1945” (Britain and Yugoslavia, 1941–1945). Ibid., p. 46. More recently, though, he seems to suggest in The Embattled Mountain that the joint British-Yugoslav mission did have something to do with the outbreak of Chetnik-Partisan hostilities, but that the instigators were the emigré Yugoslav generals and majors Ostojić and Lalatović rather than Hudson or the S.O.E. headquarters.
103 Deakin, Embattled Mountain, p. 124.
Moreover, at least as late as the close of the summer, S.O.E. headquarters with the British Middle East Command favored a resistance action which paralleled Mihailović's own thinking. S.O.E. director Hugh Dalton had directed in a report of August that "the guerrilla and sabotage bands now active in Yugoslavia should show sufficient active resistance to cause constant embarrassment to the occupying forces . . . but they should keep their main organization underground and avoid any attempt at large-scale risings or ambitious military operations which could only result at present in severe repression." 91

In October 1941 the British military and government knew practically nothing about the Partisan movement, but from mid-August on they had information on Mihailović. 95 Their intelligence missions were staffed with royalist officers, and Churchill took a sudden interest in the Yugoslav resistance as a result of information passed on by General Simović. At this stage in the war, the British saw resistance and underground movements as sources of information, possible instruments of sabotage, and potential auxiliary forces to harass the enemy's rear in the event of an Allied landing. The émigré governments in London preferred that the resistance remain underground and prepare for the rapid and efficient seizure of power at the end of the occupation. In any event, all the objectives of the British and the exiled governments demanded that the resistance organizations be controlled from outside. 96 At Brajići, then, where Mihailović rejected flatly the entire Communist program of immediate revolt and political reconstruction, he did not act alone.

Immediately after his meeting with Tito on 26 October Mihailović decided to attack the Partisan headquarters at Užice. According to statements made by Chetnik officers who were captured in early November, preparations for the assault began on 27 October. 97 German sources also demonstrate clearly that he made the decision no later than the day after the Brajići meeting and delayed action only because he lacked sufficient guns and munitions, 98 for which he turned to the Germans.

On the morning of 28 October, two Chetnik liaison officers in Bel-
grade, Colonel Pantić and Captain Mitrović, presented themselves to Minister-President Nedić and declared that Mihailović was prepared to offer his services in the anti-Partisan struggle. That afternoon, the two officers, both dressed in civilian clothes, visited the home of Captain Josef Matl of the Armed Forces Liaison Office, where Pantić stated again that he had been empowered by Mihailović to offer his Chetnik troops to the Germans and Nedić “to purge the Serbian area once and for all of the Communist bands.” Mihailović, said Pantić, was willing to carry out the action in conjunction with armed bands loyal to Nedić; the Chetniks “recognized that the country was defeated and that the Germans possess the rights of occupation.” Alluding to the Partisans’ “relative superiority in arms,” Pantić asked that the Germans place at Mihailović’s disposal “about 5,000 rifles and 375 machine-guns.”

Matl relayed the Chetnik offer at once to the German commanding general in Serbia and met with the two Chetnik officers again the next day. He transmitted General Böhme’s reply that the Germans would continue negotiations only if Mihailović came to Belgrade, and he offered the colonel complete security for the trip to and from the capital. Both sides then agreed that he would meet Mihailović at Lajkovac for the trip to Belgrade on the afternoon of 3 November.

When Matl came to Lajkovac on the appointed day, Mihailović failed to appear; Pantić and Mitrović arrived from Chetnik headquarters the next morning and informed Matl that Mihailović was not able to come because his units were presently engaged in a bitter struggle with the Partisans in the area around Užice. In view of recent events, Pantić reported, Mihailović could not come to Belgrade before 9 November. In order to convince Matl of the good faith of these proposals, Pantić brought a personal letter from Mihailović to General Böhme, dated 3 November, which explained his reasons for postponing the meeting and asked that the German authorities not order any military operations in the rebel “sphere” in western Serbia during the course of the Chetnik-Partisan fighting.


Mihailović, in fact, overestimated both his own military strength and his ability to make deals with the Germans. Events later showed that the officers, feeling that the moment was opportune, had elected an aggressive strategy without the means to carry it out and without seriously considering the Partisans' capacity for resisting it. On 1 and 2 November Partisan units in the Užice area attacked the Chetniks around Požega and seized the city. When Tito rejected an ultimatum that he withdraw from the city, the officers decided to attack the Partisans in nearby Čačak. Chetnik operations against Čačak and Užice on 7 and 8 November failed, and Mihailović lost about a thousand men and considerable amounts of equipment.

By the second week of November the officers' bands were in a desperate situation. Chetnik agents were even spreading reports that the main units were out of munitions and were fleeing south of Valjevo. On 9 November Mihailović ordered his representatives in eastern Bosnia to bring their detachments to Serbia. More important, he turned again to the Germans, but this time as a suppliant rather than a negotiator. He told the Germans that he did not have time to come to Belgrade but preferred a place closer to the front in western Serbia. The Germans agreed, and created a special task force, composed of Matl, Lieutenant-Colonel Kogard, and Dr. Kiessel of the Serbian commander's Administrative Staff, to carry out the negotiations. The meeting between the Germans and Mihailović took place on the evening of 11 November at a hotel opposite the railroad station at Divči (east of Valjero) and lasted about an hour and a half.

The Chetnik-German negotiations proved fruitless. General Böhme had no intention of arriving at any sort of an accommodation with the

104 Marjanović, Ustanak i Narodnooslobodilački Pokret, p. 343.
107 Marjanović, Ustanak i Narodnooslobodilački Pokret, p. 352.
officers; he permitted the meeting only in order to deliver an ultimatum to Mihailović. Speaking for the German side, Kogard read a statement which flatly rejected the Chetnik offer of late October, denied that Mihailović could be trusted "as an ally," and accused the officers of having consistently refused to cooperate with Nedić and of having made an "intimate military alliance" with the Partisans in September. Concluding the German argument, Kogard stated that Böhme would discuss with Mihailović only the officers' immediate and unconditional capitulation.

Mihailović had already tried unsuccessfully to negotiate with the Germans for guns through his agent at Belgrade; he had also attempted to obtain from General Böhme a free hand in western Serbia against the Partisans. Now he came to Divci for the sole purpose of obtaining munitions for his battered units as soon as possible. Using every argument imaginable to allay German mistrust, he insisted that he was "neither the representative of London nor of any other government," explained his actions as efforts to "reduce and thwart [the Communist] terror," and denied that he had ever made "a serious agreement" with the Partisan leaders. According to Kiessel's account of the meeting, Mihailović repeated his request for immediate supply of munitions at least five times. The session consisted exclusively of an exchange of accusations and demands.

The German command in Serbia had, in fact, already made a firm decision on how to handle the Chetniks, and, on 11 November the day of Mihailović's meeting at Divci, instructions were issued to all units to carry on "no negotiations with the Chetniks . . . especially the Mihailović people," but to demand only "unconditional surrender, i.e., that they turn over their arms and enter German custody."110

Efforts to overcome German mistrust on the part of Mihailović and his liaison officers had no success. Their contacts with Nedić from late October on only bolstered German suspicions that they were trying to play off the Serbian minister-president against the occupation authorities. Also, Mihailović's appeals for guns and munitions and Pantić's claim that Mihailović had no intention of using arms against the Germans and that he would be willing to make an armistice as soon as the Communists were defeated seemed like desperate pleas rather than serious offers and only served to expose the hopelessness of the Chetniks' situation.111 By mid-November the German command in Serbia was well
aware that the Chetniks were getting the worst of the fight with the Partisans. The officers, in their view, could not be trusted, had little to offer, and were willing to bargain only when forced by military necessity.

Since the arrival of the British mission in late October, the Chetnik officers had in fact been playing a double game with London and the Germans in their unsuccessful efforts to seize control of the Yugoslav resistance quickly. After two weeks of civil war in western Serbia, the Germans refused to provide Mihailović with help, and Hudson even sent a message to Cairo suggesting that Mihailović be told that “full British help will not be forthcoming unless an attempt is made to incorporate all anti-fascist elements under his command.” This union, of course, was to be brought about by negotiation, in which Hudson would play a personal role, rather than by force of arms.

For understandable reasons the officers preferred dealing with the Partisans without British aid or political intervention, and they therefore sought military support from Belgrade. To the Germans they proposed a preventive war against the Communists and a true with the occupation order. To the British they explained, through a telegram from Mihailović to Simović, that the “Communists have attacked us and forced us at the same time to be obliged to fight against the Germans, Communists, Ustaši, and other factions.” Appealing now for British support, Mihailović pointed out that “many fighters who are now with the Communists will soon come over to the Chetniks as soon as the latter receive the promised aid from the British.” If supplies did not come immediately, “civil war would last long and in the meantime nothing would be undertaken against the Germans.”  

A combination of German military operations in western Serbia and British diplomacy probably saved the Chetniks from disaster. In mid-November German raids on rebel strongholds compelled Tito to postpone action against the officers. Also, on 16 November London informed Hudson that because “His Majesty’s government now consider fight should be Yugoslavs for Yugoslavia, and not revolt led by Communists for Russia,” they would ask the “Soviet government to urge Communist elements to rally Mihailović, collaborating with him against Germans, putting themselves necessarily at disposal of Mihailović as national leader.” Two days later a Chetnik delegation entered Čačak to begin negotiations with the Partisans, and on 20 November an agreement was signed which called for an end to the civil war.  

112 Simović to Eden, 13 November 1941, cited in Deakin, Embattled Mountain, p. 140.

113 Ibid.

114 Marjanović, Ustanak i Narodnooslobodilački Pokret, p. 370. The text of the armistice may be found in Zbornik, vol. 1, bk. 1, no. 85.
This was only a truce, however, and not a serious pledge to cooperate. When the officers’ delegates failed to get the Communists to agree that all armed formations be placed under Mihailović’s command, Hudson reported to Cairo on 21 November that “Mihailović . . . has all qualifications except strength” because “the Partisans are stronger and he must first liquidate them with British arms before turning seriously to the Germans.” In the meantime, as Simović radioed to Mihailović on the same day, the Chetnik leaders “must endeavor to smooth over disagreements [with the Partisans] and avoid any kind of retaliation.”

Without any substantial aid from the British, beaten badly by the Partisans, and exposed to raids by German troops now in Čačak and Užice, Mihailović had to concentrate on preserving what he could of his organization rather than settling accounts with Tito. At a meeting with the remaining unit leaders at Ravna Gora on 30 November the officers decided to go underground by attaching their troops to Nedić’s legalized formations in order to carry on the war against the Serbian Partisans under official protection. They could thus avoid being captured by the Germans and continue fighting the Communist resistance without directly compromising Mihailović’s position with the Allies.

What is more significant is that this transformation took place upon the initiative of the unit leaders: although Mihailović sanctioned it, he probably did not control it. This decision was only the beginning of a process whereby the Chetniks in Serbia ceased to be a fairly compact and autonomous resistance group and gradually became attached to collaborationist, “legalized” leaders, where they functioned as police detachments with at least some loyalty to the puppet regime in Belgrade as well as to Mihailović. Mihailović was losing control of some of his officers and had

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115 Deakin, Embattled Mountain, p. 141.
116 Ibid., p. 142.
117 Marjanović, Ustanak i Narodnooslobodilački Pokret, p. 388.
118 The Germans were well aware of the strong sympathy several of Nedić’s gendarme and “loyal” Chetnik units had for the Chetniks but, for the time being, took only formal measures to prevent their merger. They had warned Nedić in late November that, in the coming winter months, there was a great danger that hard-pressed rebel groups would try to dissolve themselves by joining the Nedić gendarme or Pećanac Chetnik formations. Militärbefehlshaber Serbien/Verwaltungsstab to Nedić, “Bekämpfung der Kommunistischen Banden,” 26 November 1941, T-314, roll 1457, frames 1065–66.
virtually no effective fighting force left under his immediate command. Toward the end of 1941 his remaining bands were repeatedly forced to give up operations against the Partisans because they lacked munitions, and, in several instances, they dispersed into the hills. On 7 and 8 December units of the German 342d division attacked Ravna Gora, captured about four hundred Chetniks, and drove the remainder of the Mihailović movement underground for most of the winter.

The Chetnik officers, having failed to remove the Partisans quickly in November, were now almost necessarily committed to a long struggle against Tito before they could resume their own resistance plans. Their military reverses, though, become more understandable when one recognizes that, unlike the Partisans, their primary and original objectives included just about everything but fighting. The Communist leaders, although they suffered even more serious defeats in Serbia, did succeed in compelling the British to demand open resistance on the part of all rebel groups if they were to qualify for material support. Without the efforts of the Partisans, London probably would have asked for no more resistance than it did of any other underground organization in occupied Europe. As a result of the revolt in Serbia, Captain Hudson found himself telling Mihailović in November that “if both sides turned against the Germans . . . immediate aid would be at his disposal, and we could help to establish him as unconditional commander-in-chief.”

At this point, the demands of the British government and the image created by the Yugoslav émigré government propaganda had little relationship to what the officers would or could attempt. With virtually no effective fighting units or equipment, with his organization in Serbia dispersed and routed, and with only rudimentary contacts with non-Communist resistance groups in other parts of former Yugoslavia, Mihailović was expected to turn against the Germans. Accordingly, he was promoted to the rank of brigadier general and proclaimed commander of the “Yugoslav Army in the Homeland” on 7 December 1941 by King Peter II.

122 Marjanović, Ustanak i Narodnooslobodilački Pokret, p. 389.
123 Hudson cable of 21 November 1941, cited in Deakin, Embattled Mountain, p. 142.
124 Plenča, Medjunarodni Odnosi Jugoslavije u Toku Drugog Svjetskog Rata, p. 85.