Mihailović's next chance to contain or destroy the Communists came in early 1943, but this time he had to coordinate his strategy with the Italians, the Ustaši, and, above all, the Germans. The Germans had taken over command of military operations in Croatia and were expecting an Allied amphibious operation along the Aegean or Adriatic coasts. They were determined to carry through a grand anti-rebel action in order to secure their rear in the Balkans. After a short combined German-Ustaši drive in December 1942 succeeded only in pushing the Partisans out of part of western Bosnia,¹ it became clear that massive Italian support for a large, encircling operation was needed to crush the Tito movement completely. In the second half of December, the Germans announced to the Italians their plans for a vast operation in Independent Croatia and, without asking for Comando Supremo's approval, turned over all military responsibilities for the Balkans to the head of the South-East High Command, General Löhr.²

² Comando Supremo, “Argomenti militari speciali trattati nei colloqui presso il Quartiere Generale germanico nei giorni 18, 19 dicembre 1942,” 19 December 1942,
The greater the supposed Allied threat to the Balkans, the more determined the Germans were to dispose of Mihailović as well as Tito. In early January General Löhr demanded that the Italians redeploy their own units to occupy the areas then patrolled by the Serb militia units and to prepare for the eventual disarmament of the Chetniks. The Italians were being asked to reverse their policy of concentrating their forces along the Adriatic coast and risk a confrontation with Mihailović. Neither Ciano nor Roatta thought much of the German plan, and, although Cavallero grudgingly agreed to it, the Italian command in Yugoslavia immediately began to sabotage it.

On 11 January Roatta issued final instructions for Operation Weiss but made no mention of Cavallero’s promises to stop all arms deliveries to the anti-Partisan formations. He gave the confusing orders to “keep the M.V.A.C. [Voluntary Anti-Communist Militia] formations in the dark about the operations” but to employ them in at least one sector against Tito. The initial directive was flexible enough to permit the use of “trustworthy individual [Chetniks]” to act as guides for the advancing Italians.

The Italians, then, were not willing to open hostilities against Mihailović but, on the eve of Weiss, had no plans for large-scale collaboration with him either. The Serb officers, on the other hand, had made no long-standing agreements with Roatta’s headquarters for participation in Weiss but hurried into the operation at the last minute. At the beginning of the year one of Mihailović’s top officers, Major Baćović, brought about two thousand Herzegovinian troops into an area recently evacuated by the Italians near Knin and Gracač, while the former Belgrade journalist Milan Šantić opened talks with local Croat officials for a combined anti-Partisan action in western Bosnia. Mihailović had apparently not empowered Šantić to negotiate with the Italians or the Germans. As for their talks with the Croats, the Chetnik emissaries stated openly that their organization was the continuation of the Yugoslav royal army and demanded the right to settle accounts with certain local Ustaši who had been heavily involved in the Serb massacres. Only at the end of the first


week of January did Chetnik headquarters realize that their anti-Partisan project had been saved by the Italians, who were arming various volunteer detachments for Weiss.

Mihailović’s chief of staff, Major Ostojić, reported on 9 January not only that the Herzegovinians under Baćović were receiving arms and supplies from the Italians but that Djurišić’s Montenegrins were getting the necessary support for a march to the north. By the middle of the month the Chetnik formations were building up rapidly throughout the Italian occupation zone. In addition to a few thousand troops around Knin, Partisan sources identified another concentration, ranging from twelve hundred to fourteen hundred and mostly “newcomers from Herzegovina,” near Gracač. In Montenegro Stanišić hastily called on his subordinates at Nikšić, Danilovgrad, Podgorica, and Cetinje on 11 January to organize meetings in connection with the awaited march into Bosnia.

Contrary to the Cavallero-Löhr agreements of early January, the Italians not only avoided a break with Mihailović but gave the Chetniks even greater amounts of arms. On 15 January Cavallero gave official sanction to what his generals in Yugoslavia had been doing for over a week when he approved the “temporary use” of the Montenegrin “volunteer units” on the condition that they operate on Croatian territory only for the duration of the anti-Partisan campaign. Roatta, who was mainly interested in using Chetniks instead of Italians to fight Tito, seized the opportunity and offered the Montenegrin officers more support than ever before. Stanišić, in fact, soon had about four thousand troops ready for the campaign and got Pirzio-Biroli’s permission to use Italian-controlled trains to move them north to Herzegovina. At Mihailović’s headquarters at Kolašin in southern Montenegro, the way now seemed clear for the Herzegovinians under Baćović and the Montenegrins under Stanišić and Djurišić to play a major role in the operations against Tito.

7 Ostojić to Mihailović and Ostojić to Djurišić, 9 January 1943, in Comando 2. Armata, “Appunti per colloqui dell’ Ecc. con i capi cetnici,” 8 March 1943, T-821, roll 31, frame 371. By this time both the Italians and Germans had succeeded in intercepting the Chetniks’ radio messages. These messages appear in both the Second Army and German intelligence reports. Some of them were captured by the Partisans in the form of typed messages and later included in the publication of documents relating to Mihailović’s trial in 1946. In addition, Vladimir Dedijer’s diary contains a considerable number of these valuable Chetnik communications.

8 Supplementary report of deputy chief of staff of National Liberation Army to supreme commander (Tito), 13 January 1942, Zbornik, vol. 2, bk. 7, no. 115.

9 Stanišić to the commanders of the towns Nikšić, Danilovgrad, Podgorica, and Cetinje, 11 January 1943, Dokumenti o Isdajstvu Draže Mihailovića, no. 56.


11 Supersloda Operazioni to Governatorato Montenegro, 15 January 1943, T-821, roll 298, frame 211.

12 Jevdjević to Mihailović, 22 January 1943, and Mihailović to Ostojić, 18 January
Not only did the Italians authorize the moving of large Chetnik formations into the zone of operations on Croatian territory but they also appeared to be allowing Mihailović to act as coordinator, if not commander, of the anti-Partisan units. Jevdjević informed him of Italian plans as soon as he learned of them from Second Army headquarters, and Mihailović was therefore confident that the Montenegrins could move unimpeded as far north as the south Dinaric area. He did not hesitate to establish direct ties with the group of Herzegovinians in the Knin sector. In order to coordinate the tactics of the Montenegrin units with Italian strategy, a delegate from General Djukanović’s staff at Cetinje was rushed to Split in an Italian plane on 19 January, the eve of Weiss.13

These preparations, however, were made at the last minute, and the officers’ formations, without any experience in large-scale combined operations, were barely ready for the tasks the Italians had assigned to them. Djurrišić’s formations depended completely on Italian arms and transportation; on 18 January, only two days before Weiss began, they still had not left Montenegro.11 According to Ostojić, the unit leaders had to ask the Italians for maps of the zone of operations before they left,15 and, with such a late start, there was little hope of their arriving at this assigned sector, the area north of Prozor, before the end of January.16

When Operation Weiss began on 20 January, both the Italians and the Chetnik leaders were still trying to position the anti-Partisan units in such a way as to contribute to Tito’s defeat while avoiding political or military retaliation from Pavelić and the Germans. On the surface of things, it appeared that Mihailovic’s formations were a secondary, auxiliary contingent in a coalition whose superiority over the Partisans was overwhelming. Tito’s main units had, after all, established effective control only in certain parts of western Bosnia and numbered perhaps twenty thousand to twenty-five thousand men.17 General Lohr had at his

17 Ivan Lola-Ribar, Uspomene iz Narodno-Oslobodilački Borbe (Recollections from the national liberation war) (Belgrade: Vojno Delo, 1961), p. 76; Jovan Marjanović and Pero Morača, Naš Oslobodilački Rat i Narodna Revolucija (1941–1945) (Our war of liberation and the national revolution, 1941–1945) (Belgrade: Izdavačko Preduzeće,
disposal five German divisions, four of which were active, three Italian divisions of the Fifth Army Corp, and the 369th Croat division. On the first day of the operation, which had as its ultimate goal the pacification of the entire area from south of Zagreb to the Montenegrin border, about sixty-five thousand troops began pushing toward the Partisan concentration from four directions.

Partisan strategy—and the Partisans had little choice in the matter—was to provide just enough resistance along the northern sector of the ring to permit the main body of troops to retreat south and force a breakthrough against the Italians and Chetniks. The Italian command, never enthusiastic about wasting troops in anti-rebel operations, tended to hold back, and Roatta encouraged the Chetniks to bear the brunt of the fighting, guessing that such a policy would further widen the gulf between Tito and Mihailović. Therefore, the Herzegovinian and Montenegrin officers’ formations played a significant military role in Operation Weiss and had to give way to increasing Italian supervision and control.

In spite of all of Mihailović’s efforts to assume command, through Major Ostojić, of the participating anti-Partisan detachments, the officers quickly discovered that they were being forced to act as Roatta’s auxiliary army. The Knin group was soon placed under the orders of General Gianuzzi of the “Bergamo” division, and the Montenegrins gathering slowly around Prozor were in turn placed under the command of the Sixth Army Corps. Stanišić’s troops, who were supposed to gather at Prozor for operations toward Tomislavgrad and Ravno, received orders to avoid “excesses” against the local Croats and Muslims and were also warned to “avoid . . . making contact with German or Croatian troops.” Most important of all, however, the Chetnik leaders had staked everything on Italian willingness to move about four thousand Montenegrin troops north to western Bosnia. Before Weiss was a week old, Roatta reneged on his promises, probably under German pressure,

20 Supersloda Operazioni to Comando Supremo, 12 January 1943, Zbornik, vol. 4, bk. 9, no. 217.
23 Italian and German documents are not clear on this. On 13 February Colonel Bailey, then in Montenegro, cabled the British that “recent arrangements made between the Chetniks and the Italians for transportation of Chetniks both from Nikšić...
and halted all movement of the anti-Partisan units. Without the prospect of a full-scale Chetnik buildup near Prozor, the Baćović group around Knin was isolated; the Italians recognized this and decided to limit the use of the Herzegovinians to small operations and to have them withdrawn immediately after Weiss to nearby Tenin.

Before the Baćović group could extract itself by seeking Italian protection, Tito directed his field commanders to concentrate on the Herzegovinians; by the end of January the Partisans had taken almost all the Chetnik strongpoints near Knin and had dealt the anti-Partisan formations a severe moral blow. To the Italians, Baćović’s Chetniks appeared poorly disciplined and inadequately led; to Tito, Mihailović’s troops were surprisingly easy prey, and the path seemed clear for operations against the small Montenegrin group near Prozor. In the meantime, Baćović’s Herzegovinians had suffered about two hundred dead, were described by the Italians as “tired, dirty, and shoeless,” and were totally at Roatta’s mercy for additional supplies.

At Chetnik headquarters in Montenegro, the officers were bitter over the failure of the Italians to support the northern expedition, but, with both Partisans and Germans pushing south toward Herzegovina, they had little choice but to continue collaborating with Roatta’s staff. Mihailović, for example, blamed the whole thing on the “perversity” of Roatta and Prizio-Biroli but cautioned Jevdjević to maintain “the present policy toward the Italians” and “to stay calm . . . even after the Montenegrins leave the zone [of operations in Croatia].”
By early February the strains and tensions at Mihailović’s headquarters and among his closest subordinates were unbearable. In addition to their shock at the early defeats at the hands of the Partisans and their total lack of confidence in Italian support, the officers began to see the growing likelihood of German penetration into Herzegovina and Montenegro. Major Ostojić, in particular, began to warn that a confrontation with German troops was likely and, in order to counter that possibility, advocated a tougher policy toward the Italians.

The immediate issue was guns and munitions, but the real question was whether or not Mihailović could afford to continue collaborating with the Italians. As for arms and supplies, the officers were unanimous in their conviction that any ruse to squeeze more support out of the Italians would be successful. Ostojić directed Bačović’s chief of staff on 5 February, for instance, to “blackmail” the Italians for enough supplies to put the approximately four thousand Herzegovinians back in action; Chetniks in the zone north of Foća received instructions to “force” the nearby Italian garrison to supply them with arms by claiming that three thousand Partisans were concentrating in the area. Ostojić proposed destroying the railway line between Sarajevo and Mostar—“making it look like a Communist attack”—to induce the Italians to speed up arms deliveries for the Montenegrins, and Mihailović recommended sabotage operations against the lines from Sarajevo to Brod and Višegrad as well as against an electric power plant north of Split, “all of which [were to be] . . . camouflaged as Communist actions.”

Going even further, Ostojić began to suggest an open break with the Italians—by disarming them—and for a while there was a serious division over strategy between Mihailović and his chief of staff. By late January Ostojić had worked out a hasty plan to create a front against the Germans running south of Sarajevo and north of Mostar which they could hold, as he argued to Mihailović, with the aid of “Italian war booty.” Shortly thereafter he instructed Jevdjević to “find out if the

35 For example, Ostojić to Ivanisević, 5 February 1943, in Comando 2. Armata, “Appunti per colloquio dell’ Ecc. con i capi cetnici.” 8 March 1943, T-821, roll 31, frame 374.
36 Ibid.
37 Ostojić to [?] [late February], 1943, in Comando 2. Armata, “Appunti per colloquio dell’ Ecc. con i capi cetnici,” 8 March 1943, T-821, roll 31 frames 374–75.
38 Ibid.
The Chetnik Movement

Italians will fight if we present them with an ultimatum.” Mihailović, however, still gave priority to defeating Tito and warned his chief of staff at least twice in early February that they could not then afford to risk drastic actions against the Italians. In the middle of Operation Weiss the officers wavered between strategies of resistance and collaboration.

The dilemma over strategy arose from the fact that Mihailović’s units were becoming more deeply involved in a collaborationist struggle against the Partisans and more exposed to German hostility. Chetnik excesses against the civilian Croat population between Mostar and Prozor and the threat that the officers would somehow send more troops into Bosnia served as ammunition for typical German complaints. This time, however, the Germans were more determined about the whole matter. Lüters once again gave strict orders to Pavelić’s headquarters to avoid making any more treaties with Bosnian Chetniks, South-East High Command gathered evidence on Mihailović’s collaboration with the Italians, and on 31 January O.K.W. asked Comando Supremo for a definitive statement of Rome’s policies on the Chetnik question.

During the first half of February, Comando Supremo, now headed by the anti-German General Ambrosio, broke decisively with the entire German strategy of relentless pursuit of Balkan guerrillas and thereby gave the Chetnik officers one more chance. Roatta refused to discuss disarming Mihailović’s followers, and Ambrosio insisted that, if the anti-Chetnik action was to be carried out, it be done “with circumspection, not in haste”; he later warned the new Second Army commander, General Robotti, that under no circumstances should German troops enter Herzegovina. At Belgrade on 8 February, Robotti rejected flatly a joint action which was to begin on 15 February, agreed to help carry out the disarmament of the Chetniks only “at a most propitious moment,”

43 KTB/OKW, vol. 3, entry for 31 January 1943.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid., entry for 7 February 1943.
and denied vigorously that Italian-sponsored formations were responsible for recent outrages against Muslim civilians.\textsuperscript{48}

Throughout these negotiations both Italian and Germans proposed courses of action on the Chetnik question based on considerations which had nothing to do with the military strength of Mihailović’s organization. Rome’s major concerns were opposing any German penetration of the Italian zone and avoiding all costly military operations, whether directed against Tito or Mihailović. The Germans saw the whole problem as a function of an expected Allied operation in the Balkans. Therefore, no matter how weak Mihailović was, an Allied landing would revive the Chetniks, giving the officers a clear advantage over Tito, or what was worse, would bring Tito and Mihailović together. On 16 February Hitler wrote Mussolini that an Allied invasion of the Balkans would unite “the Communists, Mihailović Partisans and all the other comitagjes” against the Axis “according to an Anglo-Saxon project.”\textsuperscript{49}

Despite Hitler’s suspicions, Operation Weiss resembled more and more a civil war between Chetniks and Partisans, and the prospect of an Allied Balkan landing almost certainly made Mihailović and Tito give priority to eliminating each other. Moreover, in February the Partisans were clearly gaining the upper hand. In the early part of the month, an effort by Baćović and Djujić to go over to the counteroffensive in the Bos Grahovo sector of western Bosnia failed because of German opposition;\textsuperscript{50} soon after, when the Italians decided to pull back, the Herzegovinian units had to withdraw with them.\textsuperscript{51} By this time the Chetniks had failed in their attempt to use the western Bosnian operation as a springboard for recapturing the former stronghold at Drvar and uniting the Dinaric and western Bosnian formations.\textsuperscript{52}

The important thing about these military operations is that the Chetniks, because they lacked supplies, had to avoid the Germans, and depended on Italian support; they lost all freedom of action and were

\textsuperscript{48} Note of commander of Italian Second Army on Belgrade talks of 8 February 1943, Zbornik, vol. 4, bk. 10, no. 197.
\textsuperscript{50} Tito to Supreme Staff of Croatian National Liberation Detachments, 10 February 1943, Zbornik, vol. 2, bk. 8, no. 29; Comando XVIII. Corpo d’Armata to Comando Settare Dinara, “N. 2242 del 10 febbraio 1943,” 10 February 1943, T-821, roll 298, frame 350.
\textsuperscript{51} Comando XVIII. Corpo d’Armata to Supersloda Operazioni, “N. 2674 del 17 febbraio 1943,” 17 February 1943, T-821, roll 298, frame 347; operation report of deputy chief of Supreme Staff of National Liberation Army to Tito, 18 February 1943, Zbornik, vol. 2, bk. 8, no. 51.
\textsuperscript{52} Pop Djujić admitted this shortly after. Staff of Dinaric Chetnik division to commander of “Petar Kočić” brigade, 17 April 1943, Dokumenti o Ispadaju Draže Mihailovića, no. 146.
functioning as auxiliary units attached to the Second Army. On numerous occasions the anti-Partisan formations had to attack and retreat alongside Italian units, and in the Prozor sector, where the officers had hoped to concentrate about four thousand Montenegrins, the buildup was never fulfilled and Tito destroyed both the small Chetnik contingent and a good part of the “Murge” division. The Partisans’ capture of Prozor in mid-February gave Tito’s followers a badly needed supply of Italian arms and opened the way for an assault on Mihailović’s bastion in Herzegovina.

At this phase of Weiss the officers recognized that the only way to stop Tito was to concentrate additional units in Herzegovina and thereby expose themselves even more to a future German action. Both Ostojić and Mihailović decided to take this chance; the chief of staff drew up plans for the creation of a Chetnik “front” along the Neretva and ventured as far north as Nevesinje, Herzegovina, to take personal command over the operation. Mihailović hastened to get Djurišić’s 2,500 men north toward Kalinovik in order to bolster Colonel Stanišić.

Ostojić’s plan, which was to keep all their troops south of the Neretva River so as to avoid being isolated by the advancing Partisans or the Germans, reflected an understandable caution but was opposed by both the unit leaders and the Italians. When Jevdjević agreed to an Italian order to send the formations across the river to the north bank, Mihailović’s chief of staff called it a “scandal” and threatened to have Jevdjević removed. Nor was resistance to Ostojić’s strategy confined to civilians like Jevdjević. Bajo Stanišić reported to Mihailović on 18 February that all the Chetnik leaders in Herzegovina were opposed to Ostojić and supported the Italians’ offensive strategy. Other evidence also suggests

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54 Ostojić to Captain Nikić, 4 February 1943, cited by Dedijer, Dnevnik, 2:122; Tito to staff of First Bosnian National Liberation Shock Corps, 16 February 1943, Zbornik, vol. 2, bk. 8, no. 44.

55 Ostojić to Captain Nikić, 16 February 1943, Dokumenti o Izdajstvu Draže Mihailovića, no. 293.

56 Ostojić to Major Pantić, 16 February 1943, ibid., no., 269 Sudjenje Članovima Političkog i Vojnog Rukovodstva Organizacije Draže Mihailovića (The sentence against the members of the political and military organization of Draže Mihailović) (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1945), p. 277.


58 Ostojić to Jevdjević, 17 February 1943, Dokumenti o Izdajstvu Draže Mihailovića, no. 299; Dedijer, Dnevnik, vol. 2, p. 132.

59 Stanišić to Mihailović, 18 February 1943, cited by Živko Topalović, Pokreti
that several unit commanders thought the Italians were better informed on the military situation and favored Robotti's plan.\(^{60}\)

At Chetnik headquarters in Nevesinje Ostojić asked whether the "[Chetnik] High Command or the Italians are giving orders" and issued a directive threatening death to anyone who carried out an order given by Jevdjević.\(^{61}\) Ostojić found himself in a tug of war with the Italians over the tactical deployment of the Chetnik formations, lacked adequate information on their exact strength and location,\(^{62}\) and was forced by the turn of military events to rely even more heavily on Second Army support. When Partisan units approached the Neretva, Jevdjević reported that the troops were beginning to waver,\(^{63}\) and Ostojić had little choice but to suggest more Italian air cover for an operation around Jablanica and to urge Major Pantić to request heavy artillery support in the same sector.\(^{64}\)

Toward the end of February the efforts of the Chetnik officers to exercise effective control over the anti-Partisan contingents were straining relations with the Italians to the limit. The Italians were dissatisfied by the slow movement of Montenegrs north to the critical bauxite mining area around Mostar\(^{65}\) and were bitter when a group of about seven hundred Muslim anti-Partisans, led by the Serb Chetnik Lukachević, disbanded at the first sign of fighting.\(^{66}\) To the north, in western Bosnia, when the Chetnik intermediaries tried to talk the Italians into arranging for the return of Bačović's battered group to Herzegovina, they were turned down because the Germans were too close.\(^{67}\) Bačović's chief of staff, Captain Ivanisević, even threatened to break off relations with the Italians, but to no avail.

As events were progressing, the officers had relatively little leverage with the Italians because they needed the continued support of Second Army headquarters more than the Italians needed the Chetniks. In the Mostar

\(^{60}\) See, for example, the testimony of Perović in Sudjenje Članovima Političkog i Vojnog Rukovodstva Organizacije Draže Mihailoviće, pp. 266-67.

\(^{61}\) Ostojić to all unit leaders, 17 February 1943, Dokumenti o Izdajstvu Draže Mihailoviće, no. 300.

\(^{62}\) For instance, Ostojić to Jevdjević, 20 February, and Ostojić to Radulović, 23 February 1943, ibid., nos. 313, 336.

\(^{63}\) Dedijer, Dnevnik, vol. 2, p. 132.

\(^{64}\) Ostojić to Jevdjević, 19 and 20 February 1943, ibid., pp. 133–34.

\(^{65}\) Command of Italian Sixth Army Corps to command of Second Army, 18 February 1943, Zbornik, vol. 4, bk. 10, no. 234.

\(^{66}\) Ostojić to Jevdjević, 23 February 1943, Dokumenti o Izdajstvu Draže Mihailoviće, no. 332; Comando 2. Armata a Stato Maggiore R. Esercito/Ufficio Operazioni, "Collaborazione con elementi mussulmani," 8 May 1943, T-821, roll 288, frame 249.

sector of Herzegovina, the Sixth Army Corps kept goading the Chetniks
to commence offensive actions, and on 25 February General Amico
issued an ultimatum threatening to break off collaboration if the anti-
Partisan units did not seize the right bank of the Neretva immediately.\textsuperscript{68}
Ostojić, who was still complaining that he did not know “the strength
and whereabouts of our people in Herzegovina,” \textsuperscript{69} tried to bluff the
Italians by ordering a small group of Montenegrins to cross the river and
return immediately.\textsuperscript{70} Mihailović’s chief of staff then changed his mind
and supported a plan for a major offensive action to the north of the
Neretva.

It made relatively little difference that Ostojić was suddenly support-
ing the offensive strategy of Jevdjević, Stanišić, and the Italians, for the
Chetnik leaders, in this as in so many other instances, were making plans
which went far beyond what the rank and file were able or willing to do.
The Chetnik attack, launched on 27 February with the purpose of cut-
ting off the Partisans’ retreat from Jablanica to Prozor, failed to deal Tito
a decisive blow.\textsuperscript{71} Almost immediately the civilian spokesmen and Osto-
jić’s headquarters, who were not well acquainted with the realities of the
military situation, harshly criticized the unit leaders, especially Stanišić.
On the day of the attack Jevdjević was complaining about the “slow prog-
ress” of Major Radulović’s troops \textsuperscript{72} and later referred to Stanišić’s re-
cently mobilized Montenegrins as “talkers rather than fighters.” \textsuperscript{73}
Ostojić, although recently at odds with Jevdjević, now accepted entirely his
assessment of the situation and sent Stanišić a harshly worded reprimand
which denounced “the complete incompetence of [Stanišić’s] command
personnel.” \textsuperscript{74}

Ostojić and Jevdjević overreacted in a sense because, with Operation
Weiss over a month old, the Partisans, although far from annihilated,
were in serious trouble. By the end of February they had failed to cross
the Neretva, could not move east because of resistance provided by
Djurisić’s group,\textsuperscript{75} and had strained their resources in men and arms to

\textsuperscript{68} Ostojić to Major Radulović, 23 February 1943, cited by Topalović, \textit{Pokreti Narodnog
Otpora}, p. 69.

\textsuperscript{69} Ostojić to Radulović, 25 February 1943, \textit{Dokumenti o Izdajstvu Draže Mihailovića,
no. 941}.

\textsuperscript{70} Major Radulović to Stanišić, 25 February 1943, \textit{ibid.}, no. 61.

\textsuperscript{71} Ostojić to Stanišić, 28 February 1943, Dedijer, \textit{Dnevnik}, 2:143.

\textsuperscript{72} Jevdjević to Ostojić, 27 February 1943, \textit{ibid.}, p. 142.

\textsuperscript{73} Jevdjević to Ostojić, 28 February 1943, \textit{ibid.}

\textsuperscript{74} Ostojić to Stanišić, 28 February 1943, \textit{Dokumenti o Izdajstvu Draže Mihailovića,

\textsuperscript{75} Staff of Third National Liberation Division to Supreme Staff, 27 February 1943,
\textit{Zbornik}, vol. 4, bk. 10, no. 166; Order No. 18 of command of Montenegrin and
Herzegovinian detachments, 25 February 1943, cited by Louis Adamić, \textit{My Native Land
the limit. German reports a week earlier had counted over 6,500 enemy dead and more than 2,000 captured; new recruits were being mobilized along the way, but the shortage of arms was catastrophic. In some large units almost half the members were retreating without guns. The officers were aware of this and could not understand how their troops could fail to deal quickly with such a weakened opponent. For obvious political reasons, Chetnik headquarters needed to defeat Tito as quickly as possible. Just as clear was the reason for Mihailović's plan to stop the Partisans as far north as possible.

When all these calculations failed, the Chetniks had to face the almost inevitable prospect of renewed fighting with the Partisans, a German penetration into Herzegovina and perhaps Montenegro, and increasingly difficult relations with the British. Mihailović saw no alternative in the near future to continued collaboration with the Italians and even admitted this to the new head of the British mission, Colonel Bailey, on 28 February. Bitterly and indiscreetly, he told Bailey that the Chetniks' enemies were, first of all, Tito, the Ustaši, the Muslims, and the Croats, and second, the Germans and Italians. The British, he claimed, were pursuing their "state-strategic interests" in the Balkans, and the Italians were a better source of support.

Sharp words like these, which were symptomatic of the frantic mood at Mihailović's headquarters, only confirmed what the British already knew and hastened the Chetniks' fall from favor with Churchill's government. Short of an almost immediate Balkan landing, however, there was little the British could do to extricate Mihailović from the military predicament of Operation Weiss. Over the short term, the Chetniks' fate depended far more on their ability to deal with the Axis Powers, especially the Germans. By the end of February, the officers had to contend with mounting pressure from Zagreb and Berlin and followed the anti-Partisan operations in Herzegovina with one eye on the Germans.

At the close of the first phase of Weiss, the German command in Croatia, frustrated by their inability to defeat Tito and prevent an ap-
Apparently large Chetnik concentration in Herzegovina, made a firm decision to take matters into their own hands. They sensed their own helplessness to cope successfully with Partisan and guerrilla groups, but they tended to exaggerate the threat posed by Mihailović and the Serb nationalist armed formations. As far as Hitler was concerned, Mihailović was a potentially menacing guerrilla leader ready to link his activities with an Allied Balkan landing. To the German command in Zagreb, more aware of the weaknesses of the Chetnik organization, Mihailović's troops and the armed bands under his moral leadership were gathering in excess numbers near the Mostar bauxite mines, spreading anti-Axis propaganda among the Bosnian Serbs, and in some instances even creating "friction" with German units.

Among the German military in Yugoslavia, anxiety focused not so much on Mihailović's military potential but on the apparent anarchy among the Serb formations and the Italians' unwillingness to restrain them. Nonetheless, in Berlin the preference was for drastic action. Göring was concerned enough over the security of the bauxite mining operations to propose to Lohr that they throw together any available units to occupy the Mostar area "without regard for the Italo-German demarcation line." On the same day, Ribbentrop told Alfieri, in assessing Roatta's pro-Chetnik policies, that the Italians had been "trying to drive out Satan with Beelzebub"; Hitler informed Lohr that German troops were to occupy the bauxite mines "at least temporarily" and, if necessary, without previously securing Comando Supremo's approval.

The longer Weiss dragged on, the more anti-Partisan units the Italians permitted to gather in Herzegovina and, consequently, the more Berlin shifted its concern from Tito to Mihailović. At the end of February, the Germans had decided on a policy of force, with or without the cooperation of the Italians; political solutions, such as negotiating with Chetnik spokesmen or the Italians, were no more than temporary expedients or formalities. Neither the accords between Jevdjević and Zagreb which recognized the Neretva as a line of demarcation between German and

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63 Ibid., entry for 21 February 1943.
Chetnik troops nor the military talks in Rome of 25–28 February, which produced no agreement at all, changed Hitler’s mind. In early March, when Comando Supremo rejected several German requests to withdraw the Chetniks operating around Mostar, O.K.W. ordered Lühr to send in German troops to disarm and capture them, forcibly if necessary.\textsuperscript{87} Robotti was informed shortly after that the S.S. “Prinz Eugen” division would attack immediately toward Mostar and the bauxite mining region.\textsuperscript{88}

Mihailović had fairly accurate information all along, through Jevdjević’s ties with the Italians, about German plans regarding the Chetniks in Herzegovina.\textsuperscript{89} In spite of this knowledge, the formations in Herzegovina continued to behave in an anarchic way and to defy the approaching Germans. The major and immediate cause of this behavior was the presence of about six thousand Chetniks in the vicinity of the Mostar bauxite mines.\textsuperscript{90} Reports indicated that the Chetniks there were spreading anti-Croat propaganda and stirring up their troops with rumors that German units had clashed with anti-Partisan groups near Konjić; in the bauxite mining district, the small German garrison considered its position hopeless and the miners began to flee.\textsuperscript{91} Elsewhere Chetnik groups used their temporary advantage to deliver ultimatums to small Ustaši garrisons.

The evidence suggests that the civilian intermediaries, like Jevdjević, and the officers at Ostojić’s and Mihailović’s headquarters, attempted to restrain this anti-Croat and anti-Axis behavior\textsuperscript{92} but that the rank and file was simply out of control. Regardless of who was really responsi-


\textsuperscript{87} \textit{KTB/OKW}, vol. 3, entries for 3 and 5 March 1943.

\textsuperscript{88} Robotti to command of Sixth Army Corps, 7 March 1943, \textit{Zbornik}, vol. 4, bk. 2, no. 197.


\textsuperscript{92} See, for instance, Jevdjević to Ostojić, 24 February 1943, \textit{Dokumenti o Izdajstvu Draže Mihailovića}, no. 387.
ble for the ostensible Chetnik “takeover” in Herzegovina, by early March both Ostojić and Mihailović recognized that a German raid was highly probable. With Tito’s main forces still trapped north of the Neretva, Ostojić returned to his earlier defensive strategy and urged keeping all the Chetnik troops south of the river. Determined not to “let the Italians lead us by the nose,” Ostojić even fell back on his old scheme of disarming local Second Army units, to be accomplished “in twenty-four hours without firing a shot,” in order to meet the Germans on more equal terms. Mihailović now saw things more or less the same way and pointed out that their field commanders had “to keep their eyes on the Germans so that they do not attack us from the rear.”

Toward the end of the first week of March, the Chetnik unit leaders in Herzegovina, in part because they sensed that the Partisans were on the verge of collapse and in part because they were now more frightened by the impending German raid on Mostar, were concentrating on preserving their forces for the moment and preparing for an eventual general revolt against the Axis. Mihailović gave orders not to concentrate excessively on the fight against Tito and told Jevdjević and Baćović not to worry about an immediate encounter with the Italians; Ostojić went so far as to give instructions to a Chetnik officer in western Bosnia for “the moral and military preparation of the Army and people for the coming struggle against the occupation.”

At precisely this moment, when the officers attached to Mihailović’s staff and in the field were shifting their attention from the Partisan to the Germans, Tito dealt a decisive blow. The hard-pressed Partisan units, slowed down by their own wounded and encircled on all sides, had little choice but to attempt a breakthrough toward Montenegro before they were overwhelmed by the Germans. On the night of 6 March the

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53 Ostojić to Mihailović, 3 March 1943, in Oberkommando/I Abt./Operationsbüro der Streitkräfte im Ostrauen to Oberkommando der Streitkräfte Slowenien-Dalmatien, “Abgehörte Funksprüche der Mihailović-Bewegung,” 20 March 1943, T-821, roll 356, frame 115. This is a German translation of an Italian interception.


55 For example, Stanislić to Mihailović, 5 March 1943, Dokumenti o Izdajstvu Draže Mihailovića, no. 65.

56 Staff of Konjic group (Lukačević) to column commanders, 5 March 1943. Dedijer, Dnevnik, 2:200.


main Partisan concentration, numbering about four thousand to five thousand troops and believed by Chetnik officers to be weakened beyond repair,\(^9\) began to force their way across the Neretva near Jablanica.\(^{100}\) The officers' troops were taken totally by surprise. Lukačević, for example, who spent the previous week trying to keep out of the way of the approaching Germans, reported that "a very small Communist group succeeded in crossing the Neretva at Jablanica by spreading panic among the garrison troops and creating so much confusion that some units began to shoot at each other." \(^{101}\)

More important, what began as a local breakthrough quickly turned into a rout of the Chetniks on the southern bank of the river.\(^{102}\) By the middle of March, the entire main Partisan force had crossed the Neretva, and Tito had pulled himself temporarily out of the encircling ring and was now more convinced than ever that he could handle Mihailović militarily. After the initial encounters with the Montenegrin formations, the Second Proletarian Division reported that Mihailović's "army is of rather poor quality and that the Chetniks, as special military formations, cannot provide any strong resistance unless they are aided directly by the troops of the occupation forces." \(^{103}\)

As evidence accumulated that the Chetniks were poorly equipped and did not enjoy the unswerving loyalty of many of their recently mobilized troops, the Partisans quickly elected a strategy of a full-scale anti-Mihailović offensive in Montenegro. Peko Dapčević's Second Proletarian Division issued instructions calling for actions directed almost exclusively against the Chetniks;\(^{104}\) they soon captured a Chetnik propaganda team and discovered the whereabouts and strength of Mihailović's headquarters near Kolašin in southern Montenegro.\(^{105}\)

While the Chetnik troops in Herzegovina were being thrown back by Partisan pressure, the officers and civilian leaders at first barely understood the gravity of the situation and appear to have been more concerned about a showdown with the Germans. Jevđević, as usual tried to inter-
vene with the Germans at Sarajevo: he denied any complicity with Chetnik activities in the Mostar area and promised that the Herzegovinian formations would never oppose German troops.\textsuperscript{106} By this time, however, the issue was beyond negotiation, and on 11 March Mussolini finally gave approval to the S.S. "Prinz Eugen" division's temporary occupation of the bauxite mining area.\textsuperscript{107} When the Chetnik leaders discovered that German troops were occupying Mostar they flew into a panic\textsuperscript{108} but had no realistic prospects of resistance. The day before the Germans were scheduled to arrive Ostojić, who had been suggesting possible countermeasures since the beginning of the year, had to ask Mihailović for instructions on how to deal with the situation.\textsuperscript{109}

By the end of the third week of March, when the second phase of Weiss had ended, the officers had failed to hold the Neretva "front" against either Tito or the Germans. Mihailović was far more concerned with the threat posed by German troops in the Mostar area, although the latter made no attempt to disarm or attack nearby Chetnik formations. At this point the fighting in Herzegovina was almost exclusively between the Chetniks and the Partisans. The Italians were as usual unenthusiastic about carrying through the anti-rebel action, and the Germans were frustrated with the apparently meager results of Weiss and unwilling to push any further south before resting their units.\textsuperscript{110}

Tito used this pause in military operation by the occupation powers to break up and destroy the Chetniks in Herzegovina and Montenegro. Initial operations were directed against Major Ostojić's headquarters at Nevesinje; Stanišić's Montenegrins were not up to the task of protecting the city, and Ostojić had to call on both Djurišić and Bačović to move their men there immediately.\textsuperscript{111} The Chetnik leaders were badly divided on questions of strategy and had lost all faith in their troops. Jevđjević went so far as to propose to the Italians that they request "temporary" aid from the Germans to salvage the situation at Nevesinje.\textsuperscript{112} He was


\textsuperscript{107} KTB/OKW, vol. 3, bk. I, entry for 11 March 1943.


\textsuperscript{109} Ostojić to Mihailović, 13 March 1943, in Oberkommando/1 Abt./Operationsbüro der Streitkräfte im Ostraum to Oberkommando 2. Arme, "Abgehörte Funkspriiche der Mihailović-Bewegung," 21 March 1943, T-821, roll 356, frame 127.

\textsuperscript{110} See, for example, the German rejection of an Italian request for an attack on the Partisan rear around Nevesinje. Gen. d. Inf. Liütens to 718. Inf. Div., "22.3.43," 22 March 1943, T-315, roll 2271, frame 1142.

\textsuperscript{111} Ostojić to Stanišić, 18 March 1943, Dokumenti o Isdajstvu Draže Mihailovića, no. 281.

\textsuperscript{112} Command of Sixth Army Corps to command of Second Army, "N. 4214 of March 20, 1943," 20 March 1943, Zbornik, vol. 4, bk. 11. no. 254.
opposed by Mihailović, who insisted that the Chetniks would be better off dying in battle against the Partisans than being slaughtered by the Ustaši and the Germans. Major Bačović's units, who finally succeeded in making their way to Herzegovina after three months of fighting as far north as the Knin sector, had simply exhausted themselves and, according to General Djukanović, “lost so many men [near Nevesinje] that they had to retreat.” Jevđjević conceded to Mihailović that Nevesinje was lost and that Bačović’s troops were “very tired and want to get out of the fight.”

What took place in Herzegovina in March and April of 1943 was more than just a series of military reverses: it was a major crisis of morale and the failure of a whole strategy for the officers. At the end of March and the beginning of April, when the Partisans succeeded in seizing virtually every Chetnik stronghold in Herzegovina, Tito was suddenly in a position to turn the tables on Mihailović and attempt the total annihilation of the Chetniks before the expected Allied landing. Partisan directives now called for a concentration of all available forces against Mihailović in Herzegovina; the same instructions to the few remaining groups in western Bosnia ordered “defensive” tactics against the Ustaši so they could use nearly all their strength against the Chetniks there. Partisan strategy followed the same general guidelines throughout western Yugoslavia. In April, Tito informed Ranković that “the situation in Montenegro is clearly better than we thought,” and revealed that he was working out a “strategic plan” for the exclusive purpose of dealing “a decisive blow against the Montenegrin Chetniks.”

Here the Partisans not only tended to avoid the Italians but had specific instructions to avoid “launching aggressive operations against the Chetniks of [the Montenegrin federalist leader] Krsto Popović, and to throw all their weight against the pro-Mihailović Chetniks.

After his efforts to wage a full-scale, Partisan-dominated war of resistance and to force a break with the monarchist officers at the end of 1941, Tito’s decision to exploit a temporarily favorable situation to

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113 Mihailović to Stanišić, 1 April 1943, in Oberkommando/I Abt./Operationsbüro der Streitkräfte im Ostrau, “Abgehörte Funksprüche der Četniks,” 9 April 1943, T-821, roll 356, frame 150.
114 Head of Supreme National Command, 27 March 1943, Dokumenti o Izdajstvu Draže Mihailovića, no. 75.
115 Tito to Second Proletarian Division, 23 March 1943, Zbornik, vol. 2, bk. 8, no. 193; Tito to First Proletarian Division, 24 March 1943, ibid., no. 197; Tito to staff of National Liberation Army in Croatia, 4 April 1943, ibid., bk. 9, no. 14.
116 Tito to First Bosnian National Liberation Shock Corps, 30 March 1943, ibid., bk. 8, no. 216.
117 Tito to Ranković, April (†), 1943, ibid., bk. 9, no. 45.
118 Political Commissar of Third Shock Division to Provincial Committee of C.P.Y. in Montenegro, Kotor, and the Sandžak, 20 April 1943, ibid., vol. 3, bk. 5, no. 4.
eliminate Mihailović was his most daring move. The Partisan leaders recognized that the Chetnik troops were the weak link in the haphazardly thrown together anti-Partisan coalition and that Mihailović was blocking their way out of the German zone of operations and into Montenegro and the Sandžak. Moreover, Tito must have realized that the Germans, although still determined to rid their Balkan rear of all guerrilla groups, would look with some favor on a Partisan campaign against Mihailović. Finally, if the Chetniks wanted to see Tito eliminated before an Allied amphibious operation in the Balkans, the Partisans also wanted to deal Mihailović a decisive blow before such an Allied action revived the Chetniks. It is important to bear in mind that at this time both the Partisans and Germans expected that an Allied landing would work mainly to the advantage of Mihailović.119

Both Tito and the Germans were in a rather desperate situation and shared, at least temporarily, a common interest in a Chetnik defeat. Tito attempted to exploit this by offering the Germans a temporary armistice. The negotiations were carried out by the intermediary Hans Ott, a German formerly engaged in Croatian coal and bauxite mining operations whom the Partisans had captured near Livno the previous summer. Ott had been active in German-Partisan negotiations for the exchange of prisoners120 and had good ties with Partisan headquarters. General Lohr, for example, had enough confidence in Ott to recommend using him in December 1942 “for the purpose of gathering information”; Kasche reported in the spring that Ott’s activities had provided the Germans with a “view of the internal and military structure of the Partisan [movement] . . . which we could not have gotten any other way.” 121

Sometime in mid-March, or shortly after Tito’s breakthrough into Herzegovina, Partisan negotiators suddenly suggested to Ott the possi-

119 Berlin, of course, was very worried about this. German documents dating from December 1942 demonstrate that the German military authorities in the Balkans were deeply suspicious of the Montenegrin Chetniks because of a plan attributed to Mihailović to seize the whole province from the Italians in conjunction with an Allied action along the Adriatic. Third National Liberation Shock Division to Supreme Staff, 11 December 1942, *ibid.*, vol. 4, bk. 8, no. 171. As for the Partisans, Deakin mentions (*Embattled Mountain*, p. 62) that they were terribly concerned, well into the summer, that the British and Americans would invade the Balkans before recognizing Tito and breaking with Mihailović.


bility of a temporary arrangement whereby they would call off hostilities against the Axis occupation troops in return for a “free hand” to settle accounts with Mihailović. In order to convince the Germans of the sincerity of his proposals, Tito accelerated the talks by sending two personal delegates to Zagreb. The key Partisan negotiator, who called himself Doctor Petrović, turned out to be Vladko Velebit, a leading Croatian Communist and Tito’s source of communications with Moscow during the first year of the war.

Velebit repeated the proposals and quickly convinced Kasche that the Germans had something to gain by making an arrangement with Tito. As far as the Germans were concerned, a Partisan drive into Montenegro and the Sandžak could not be stopped immediately, and Tito’s evident desire to finish off the Chetniks quickly was consistent with one of the basic goals of Weiss. Realizing that they could expect little support for such a project from the Foreign Office, Glaise tried to enlist Himmler’s cooperation by bringing up the matter with the Secret Service. According to Kasche, “General Glaise Horstenu would welcome any means to bring to an end the Partisans’ resistance, [even including] a political solution.” The rest of the German military, the Croats, and the Italians saw the problem in much the same way. Lorkovic, the foreign minister, favored any solution which would call a halt to Partisan activities in Croatia; Casertano was firmly behind the project, and General Lüters, although claiming he was neutral “in any political question,” raised no objections.

Each side, then, was negotiating from what it believed was a weak position. The Germans saw the proposal as a convenient way to accomp-

123 Velebit was the son of an Austrian officer and became a Communist, like several others, during his student days at Belgrade University. Until early 1942 his wireless at Zagreb was Tito’s only means of contact with Moscow. In April of that year, Velebit, who had even joined the Catholic Church to protect himself, left the capital and joined Partisan headquarters at Foča. At the end of 1943 he flew to Cairo with Maclean and Deakin for talks with the British. Deakin mentions (Embattled Mountain, p. 61) that Velebit was “reticent about the past.” During most of 1944 he served as Tito’s principal liaison officer with the British in Italy and was present at the Tito-Churchill meeting at Naples in August. In 1952 he was appointed Yugoslav ambassador to England.
125 Hoettl, Secret Front, p. 170. Hoettl (Hagen) was a senior officer in Branch VI (South) of the Secret Service.
lish at least one of the goals of Weiss. The Partisans’ predicament, and this cannot be emphasized too strongly, was very serious. In spite of the recent victories of the Partisans against Mihailović, Tito had absorbed losses which must have approached half of his main force, and he must have feared that the gains of 1942 in Croatia, especially in western Bosnia, had been permanently lost. Moreover, the Partisan leaders, like the Germans, not only recognized that Mihailović was weak militarily but feared that the expected Allied Balkan landing would give the officers effective British backing and revive the Chetniks. The British still maintained liaison officers only with Mihailović and were advocating that the Partisans and Chetniks join forces, a course of action which neither Tito nor Mihailović would support. Interestingly enough, the Germans noticed that Tito’s radio transmissions had taken an increasingly anti-British line since early 1943. Furthermore, the Partisans’ hard-pressed troops were still getting no appreciable support from Moscow, either diplomatic or in the form of supplies, in spite of Tito’s urgent appeals since January.

What is significant about Tito’s efforts to arrive at an understanding with the Germans is that the community of aims between the Partisans and Germans was very accidental and inevitably short-lived and that Tito was asking for temporary freedom of action against Mihailović rather than the sort of ongoing collaboration which the Chetniks developed with the Italians. Tito’s tactics were very similar to Mihailović’s in Serbia in November of 1941, and, although the situation had changed drastically, they produced the same results. In the middle of April General Lütters issued orders for operations in May directed against both the Partisans and the Chetniks; shortly thereafter, Ribbentrop conveyed strict orders to Kasche to abandon the talks with Tito.

Militarily, the overriding difference between the two Yugoslav guerrilla groups was that, while Tito was certainly very interested in some toleration from the Germans, Mihailović’s movement had developed in

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129 See, for instance, the message from Tito to Moscow of 31 January in Maclean, Disputed Barricades, pp. 206: “I must once again ask you if it is really quite impossible to send us some sort of help. . . . Typhus has now begun to rage here. . . . Do your utmost to help us.” The negative reply came on 11 February. Kasche observed that “the absence of any Russian help has damaged [the Partisans'] trust in Russia.” It is possible, of course, that Velebit made disparaging statements about the Russians in order to convince the Germans in Zagreb that Tito was acting independently. It is also possible, and the evidence here is more solid, that the Yugoslav Partisans’ bitterness toward the Russians was entirely sincere. Stalin, it should be added, had even expressed disapproval of Tito’s negotiations with the Germans for the exchange of prisoners.
such a way that it could not act effectively without considerable support from the Italians. When the Partisans overran Herzegovina in March and April, the officers were shocked and angered at the fact that Robotti’s Second Army not only failed to offer substantial aid but appeared to be deserting the Chetniks altogether. Immediately after the Partisans took Nevesinje (23 March) the Sixth Army Corps pulled its troops out of nearby Gačko and forced the anti-Partisan units to retreat with them. Weakened by the Italians’ quick withdrawal, Stanišić’s recently mobilized Montenegrins failed, according to one Partisan report, to “put up any resistance and fled in panic back to their homes.” By the time Tito’s Third Shock Division entered Gačko, their intelligence reports were speaking confidently of a “deepening moral crisis in the Chetnik movement.”

When the Partisans began to push ahead toward Bileća in early April, Stanišić’s troops had lost all hope of Italian support. Efforts of Jevdjević, Major Radulović, and Baćović to get some help for Stanišić from the Italian Sixth Army Corps failed. General Robotti’s command posts not only refused to provide arms but left the Chetniks in the lurch again by quickly evacuating Bileća and Stolac.

In the Kalinovik-Foča area, the eastern sector of the zone of operations, Djurišić’s efforts to use his Montenegrins to prevent a Partisan breakthrough toward Serbia and the Sandžak were stalled by wavering Italian cooperation. Djurišić’s units, numbering something over 2,000 men, were badly mauled in mid-March near Kalinovik and had to fall back toward the Drina River. At the end of the month, he had an assortment of about 4,500 Bosnians and Montenegrins at Foča, the Partisan stronghold of early 1942, but was in such desperate need of supplies that he ordered his followers at nearby Kolašin to attack an Italian garrison at Plevlje if they refused to turn over machine guns and ammunition immediately.

At Foča some of the Chetniks pulled back behind the river; the
Italians announced that they were abandoning most of the Sandžak and withdrew the bulk of their troops from Foča itself. By mid-April Djurišić’s strength had dropped to less than 3,000, and the Chetniks spent the rest of the month fighting a seesaw battle with the Partisans along the Drina around Foča. At best, though, this was a holding action and, of course, had no effect on the officers’ loss of their bastion in Herzegovina.

In Montenegro, which was rapidly becoming their last zone of influence, the Chetniks had as yet suffered no major military reverses but were nonetheless in serious trouble. In areas bordering on Montenegro and populated primarily by Muslims, the officers faced, as a result of their own actions, overwhelming civilian hostility. In the heavily Albanian Muslim region just north of Kosovo Polje, a virtual religious war had been going on for almost two years between the Albanians and the Montenegrin Serbs. In the largely Muslim Sandžak, immediately east of Montenegro, Djurišić’s outrages during 1942 made the area a fertile recruiting ground for Germans and Partisans later in the war.

The Chetnik officers had also forfeited their credit among the Montenegrin Serbs. Montenegro was exhausted from the bloody civil war in 1941, and the officers’ detachments in this part of Yugoslavia had identified themselves with a collaborationist line more openly than anywhere else. The best units had already been used up in Stanišić’s and Djurišić’s campaigns to the north, and additional mobilization was virtually out of the question. In April, for instance, when General Džukanović ordered about a thousand recently mobilized peasants moved in trucks to Nikšić, at the last minute the recruits refused to leave. This incident reflected not only a general war-weariness but a noticeable lack of willingness among many of the detachments to fight except near their own villages. The Chetniks throughout the western half of Yugoslavia behaved like a collection of uncoordinated village self-defense units in spite of all the efforts of the officers and politicians to impose ambitious and mobile strategies upon them. In late April, for example, Stanišić admitted that the predominantly Herzegovinian “Foča” Brigade objected to plans which called for their continuing military operations in Montenegro and demanded to return to their native province instead.

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110 Tito to staff of First Proletarian Division, 8 April 1943, *ibid.*, vol. 2, bk. 9, no. 28.
113 Command of Sixth Army Corps to command of Second Army, 19 April 1943, *Zbornik*, vol. 3, bk. 5, no. 149.
114 Stanišić to [?], 28 April 1943, in Oberkommando/I Abt./Operationsbüro der
The growing disintegration of the Chetnik rank and file, then, was evident throughout former Yugoslavia. In Herzegovina, where Mihailović had been forced to stake everything, there was a full-scale revolt from below. Native detachments refused to fight for the officers in Montenegro, Baćović's troops were exhausted, and Jevdjević began to report a growing sense of despair among the Herzegovinian anti-Partisan Serbs. Trying to revive their morale by purging the less dedicated elements, Jevdjević called on all the unit leaders to assemble at Mostar to determine who was able to launch another operation against Partisan-occupied Nevesinje. At the same time he issued leaflets denouncing the troops for their cowardly behavior in the recent fighting. Mihailović, on the other hand, could do little more than order Baćović to spread the rumor that five thousand Chetniks were coming from Serbia to reinforce the Herzegovinians.

At this point the Chetnik leaders had already overmobilized the civilian population and could no longer count on sizeable reinforcements. Mihailović's instructions to the officers in western Serbia to send troops immediately through the Sandžak produced meager results. The mobilization, carried out mostly in the villages of northwestern Serbia, was completed with such haste and cruelty that several men who refused to go were murdered on the spot; in early May two Serb Chetniks, Keserović and Gordić, arrived in Montenegro with a combined strength of perhaps twelve hundred troops. At the same time, Chetnik efforts at Mostar, Herzegovina, to replace losses with new recruits got nowhere. When they ordered the forced mobilization of all local Serbs between ages sixteen and sixty, General Robotti intervened to stop them. Moreover, Jevdjević lacked the money to purchase provisions for the troops they still had.
Mihailović and his officer subordinates had concentrated about twenty thousand of their best troops in Herzegovina, made their grand military effort, collaborationist in practice but also anti-Axis in long-range intent, and failed. Henceforth, mobilization procedures were generally unsuccessful, and units simply broke up, either because the men wanted to return home or to join the Partisans. Detachments which did hold together oftentimes could not be coaxed to leave the area around their own villages. This overall trend was evident in the former Chetnik strongholds, Herzegovina and Montenegro, and in Serbia, where there was as yet no significant Partisan revival. In Bosnia, where about ten thousand Serbs were organized in a number of territorial units and Mihailović never succeeded in establishing his authority, the same trends were even more evident. Around Sarajevo a whole brigade attempted to desert and return home. In western Bosnia, where Pop Djujić was the major leader, the men refused to engage in mobile operations and, according to one Italian assessment, were good for little else but plunder.

In most instances, the breakup was due to war-weariness. Some of the Chetnik troops, however, deserted and joined the Partisans. In Herzegovina, there was clearly a crisis of morale in which the officers could not cope with either the war-weary or the radicalized. Tito, after all, in spite of his shifting tactics, was fighting what appeared to be a relentless war against the Axis occupation and the Quislings; Mihailović, although his long-haul goals were anti-Axis and his relations with his Italian patrons were never good, was engaging in collaboration which everyone could
see. Moreover, some the Herzegovinian and Montenegrin troops were actually Partisans of 1941 who joined the officers in 1942 to save their own lives. There was something of a "floating" resistance, then, which passed from one leadership to the next but whose sympathies were always solidly anti-Axis. By the middle of 1943, this hard-core resistance passed almost entirely out of the officers' hands and into Tito's ranks.