

Medak Pocket – Serbian Interpretation



Picture 21: Map of Great Serbia - from the book "Hrvatska i Veliko Ratište" Adm. Davor Domazet-Lošo

The Croatian Army's main staff commander General Bobetko's book "Sve moje bitke" is a key to understanding the military aspect of the Medak Pocket Operation from the Croatian side. While the Serb point of view is discussed in the book "Knin je pao u Beogradu"⁴¹⁸ written by Krajina Serb Army Major General Milisav Sekulić.⁴¹⁹ In the analysis of the plan and assessment of the so-called Krajina Army, General Sekulić points out all the nonsense which the military planners and leaderships were taking into account. "There was an absurd expectation that the Croatian Army, together with the Croatian Defence Council, military forces in Germany, Italy, Hungary and other countries would attack the RSK". The military command of the Krajina Serb Army had entangled itself into a fictitious "what if" analysis. They had constantly relied on the Republika Srpska and Yugoslav armies for help and did not develop a military force. General Sekulić had realistically assessed that "Croatia (even in 1993) had on its part, chosen a military option, because it judged that without it, it could not return the RSK (Republika Srpska Krajina) into its constitution. In order to make such an option viable, Croatia had made its priority to build its military force. Such an option had been grossly underestimated by the Serbian side."⁴²⁰ As the economic and political situation in the RSK became more difficult, the morale dissipation of the RSK and its army continued. "Since March 1993, the RSK army units dissatisfaction grew; especially within the soldiers ranks. The burden was becoming heavier, and the injustices done more visible."⁴²¹ Soldiers were dissatisfied: "because of the military and civilian government's inactivity to fight the black market and crime; deserters that walked the streets of Knin and were black marketers themselves. They demanded they be supplied with adequate garments."⁴²² The situation was like this immediately prior to the "attack on the Medak Pocket and Divoselo". For the commander of the Lika corps, Colonel Milan Šuput such an attack was not a surprise. There was much intelligence, reconnaissance and other military data that recorded the regrouping and concentration of Croatian forces on Velebit and the possibility of endangering and cutting the Medak Pocket from the position of Velebit. The assessment of the Serbian Krajina Army was quite the opposite from the operations development. Instead of the Croatian Army and police engaging in cutting the "Pocket" from Velebit towards the north, (the Visočica-Čitluk-Ornice line, mentioned in some Serbian Krajina Army documents⁴²³), the Croatian attack spearheaded towards Velebit. The Serbian Army command had detailed information from Divoselo. Colonel Šuput learned that such an action was possible on August 15th 1993 from a letter that "citizens and fighters in Divoselo had sent him. Divoselo had been exposed to grave Ustaša provocations since the beginning of the war, it had been fiercely shelled

and the Croatian commando incursions were regular. One third of Divoselo was under Ustaša control; therefore 20 citizens had already been killed."⁴²⁴ The letter stated that Divoselo was defended by 20 villagers deployed along the 20 kilometre line. "They asked Colonel Šuput to send a military commission, in order to verify what the situation in the area was." The important data in that letter was the statement that "from 400 pre-war households, only fifteen now remain."⁴²⁵ The majority of villagers had already left Divoselo before the Medak Operation started. General Sekulić analyzed the situation in the Croatian and the Serb armies, including all the stages of the Medak Pocket Operation and the consequences it had for the so-called Srpska Krajina Army and the RSK itself.

The Croatian Army Deployment and Objectives

By the end of August and the beginning of September, the tensions were especially visible, the regrouping and armed confrontations happened on the Kapela mountain region. UNPROFOR and the Serb Krajina Army forecast a fierce Croatian attack on that area. UNPROFOR warned Croatia of its fears that some major incidents were possible in the Ogulin and Plaški areas. On the Dalmatian area of operation, especially north of Zadar and Biograd, artillery duels had become more regular and incidents like the one on September 7th 1993 in Mirlovića Polje occurred. As mentioned in confiscated Serb documents – the Serbian Krajina Army noticed the Croatian preparations on the Velebit Mountains. Sekulić stated the following about the Medak Pocket Operation: "The forces main impact was done by the 9th mobile guard brigade, special police and Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Croatia forces. The attack was spearheaded along the Oranice-Lički Čitluk and Medak-Lički Čitluk-Počitelj; along the Kruškovača-trigonal point t.p. 616-Lički Čitluk lines. The frontline of their attack stretched from Divoselo to Medak. The Lika corps units were unprepared⁴²⁶ but not surprised by it, as it was already mentioned in the letter from the "Divoselo villagers." According to seized Srpska Krajina Army documents, a planned Serbian attack on Croat forces had to take place on the same day, before the actual Croatian attack on Divoselo, Počitelj and Čitluk started. General Sekulić concluded: "UNPROFOR was put before an accomplished fact, the step by step wiping off of the RSK from the face of the earth. It was more than obvious that the JNA did not react to that provocation, making its reputation in the eyes of the RSK even more negative."⁴²⁷

The Military Action's Development

The day before the operation started, on September 8th, Serbian Krajina Army HQ notified its sub-commanding units about: the Croatian Army's intense activity in Dalmatia (in the area where the Serbian Krajina Army 7th Dalmatian corps was deployed); and about Croatian attacks on the Serb 70th infantry brigade positions (Plaški-Ogulin area). On the Velebit Mountains, reconnaissance patrols clashed and the Serb reconnaissance commando unit forcefully assaulted Visočica.⁴²⁸ "The Croatian Army attack was enforced by an artillery barrage on Teslingrad, Ljubovo, Kozjan, Gračac, Udbina, Vrhovina and Korenica. The 9th brigade forces (the Serb Gračac brigade) were to lose Čitluk first. Then a part of that brigade was cut-off in Divoselo. In an attempt to break through from the encirclement in Divoselo, the tank company commander, Lt. Col. Mirko Savić, was killed."⁴²⁹ The Serb Krajina Army HQ reported that at 05:50, the Croatian artillery attack started. (Still more data about when the actual attacks began). The HQ reported that at 9:30, Croatian forces attacked the positions of the 50th and 70th 15 corps brigades, as well as the cities of Gračac, Udbina, Korenica and Vrhovine. The Serb 9th mobile brigade HQ reported on "the fiercest battle yet in Divoselo and Čitluk. Croats had taken Čitluk and surrounded the Serb unit and a 120mm mortar platoon in Divoselo where the battle was still in progress."⁴³⁰ The Serb military command had assessed that the Croatian Army's advance had been stopped on the Visoko Brdo-Ivančevići-Sitnik-Boleđi line. That assessment was made after the planned Croatian action had already been completed. At about 16:00 hours, part of the surrounded Serb forces tried to break through the encirclement using the Mali Kraj-Kruškovača-Bukova Glava direction.

After a few hours from the start of the attack, the main Serb Army HQ reacted. They ordered the Corps commanders to assume full troop battle readiness and prepare to "engage the targets along the line of contact and the depth of the enemy's territory. The Lika corps command was ordered to re-group their forces, stabilize the defence line, and secure the left flank from the Velebit Mountains side. The report from Čitluk said that 30 children and the elderly were evacuated and safely moved to Udbina."⁴³¹

The Lika Corps Battle Deployment

- 9th Gračac brigade;
- 18th brigade was at its initial positions;

- 50th brigade did not leave its positions at all;
- 70th brigade (parts) were deployed on the Kapela heights;
- The Lapac brigade was on its positions.

The Croatian Army provocation, on the part of the quoted brigades (Lika corps HQ), was “wrongly assessed.” The Lika corps command “had not linked that attack with the Croatian Army and police special unit activities in the Velebit Mountain area. They had not evaluated the force of the 2nd battalion of the 9th (Gračac) brigade properly, had enforced the defence with the Lapac brigade and the police unit, and not attacked the Croat forces instead, had misjudged how critical the situation was, and had expected reinforcements to come to Lika – all of this led to defeat. More care was given to defend what was not under attack, then to what was “a burning issue.” The deblockade of the 2nd battalion in Divoselo was not attempted. Reinforcements waited for the deblockade to start.”⁴³² “The Srpska Krajina Army main staff HQ discussed the R-65 division deployment (on September 10th 1993 – author’s note) in order to retaliate for the mass bombardment of cities and other populated places in the RSK territory. Without any success, they tried to bring a reinforcement battalion from Vukovar. They refused to come and openly defied the Serb Krajina Army main staff HQ decision. That day the action to deploy volunteers from the SR Yugoslavia started again.”⁴³³ The Serb Krajina Army command made an assessment that the Croatian Army had unsuccessfully continued its offensive on Medak while the Croatian Army was actually digging foxholes and its artillery had been keeping Serb forces at a distance. The Serb Army command made a further misjudgement about the Croatian Army widening its front towards Maslenica, Zemunik, trying to take the Sveti Rok-Medak-Gospić communication line and trying to capture Teslingrad. The Serb army HQ pointed out the necessary securing of the Velebit Mountains. There was no manpower. Assistance from the Serb 11th corps (from Vukovar) was requested in vain. Reconnaissance missions at Divoselo were done. The options for pulling out the encircled Serbs and a counteroffensive were considered.⁴³⁴

“On September 11th one part of the 9th (Gračac) brigade, counterattacked and reached the Memedovo Brdo-River Lika-Vitasi line. This counterattack enabled 60 encircled combatants to pull out.

On September 12th the Serbs were still of the opinion that the Croatian Army would extend its front into the RSK. So the Serb Army executed artillery attacks on many targets in the depth of Croatia’s territory (in accordance with a “real threat strategy”).

On September 13th the mobilization of the Lapac brigade was in motion. The Croatian positions on the Sitnik-Uzelci-Lički Čitluk line were attacked in order to free the encircled Serb forces in Divoselo.

On September 14th the discipline started to crumble (they were leaving the front positions – authour’s note) within the Lapac mobilized brigade, but the corps command and main staff HQ would not react to that.”⁴³⁵

The commander of the Srpska Krajina Army main staff HQ: “keeping in mind the special importance of the Velebit Mountains,” orders the Lika corps commander to “form a mountaineering group which would execute military actions in order to master the Velebit Mountain ridges.” On the very same day UNPROFOR asked for permission to enter the Divoselo-Čitluk area. The Serbian Krajina Army main staff HQ commander immediately ordered that “from 12:00 to 19:30 hours, UNPROFOR forces should be allowed to pass through the occupied territories. UNPROFOR’s entrance into Divoselo marks the sanctioning of the occupation of Divoselo and Čitluk. With UNPROFOR present on September 16th the Croatian Army started destroying houses in villages reclaimed in Lika. On the demarcation line there was already a French battalion watching how the houses were pulled down and looted. UNPROFOR’s presence will, among other things, stop our forces from engaging the enemy in the occupied area.”⁴³⁶

In his overview of the Operation, General Sekulić does not mention Croatian forces engaging UNPROFOR. He only stated the passive and tacit UN forces permission given to Croats to do whatever they wished. His position in the Serbian Krajina Army’s main staff HQ allowed him access to all reports. Why has he forgotten them and not mentioned such data? Others have used this information. The Prime Minister of the so-called RSK, Bjugović; foreign press, especially Serb press used it to further accuse Croatia and its armed forces. Sekulić does not sympathize with Croats. He is a fervent Serb nationalist and does not spare Croatia when mentioning it’s presumed guilt. But why the silence about the Croatian – Canadian battle? He would not be so quiet if it had really happened. Why does he not mention the battle? Probably because he considers it to be one of those unimportant, small-scale firefights, which were frequent, and happened every night along the frontline between the Croatian and Serbian side. In his book “Knin je pao u Beogradu” he does not mention any Canadian – Croatian battle, but he does speak of Serbian defeat, panic, fear, and Serb soldiers desertions. “During the Medak Pocket fighting, the Lapac brigade had left its positions and returned to Donji Lapac... the Lika corps commander would issue an order to prevent desertions... three platoon commanders

and one battalion commander were relieved of their duties. Three soldiers were punished with two to six month long prison sentences.⁴³⁷

Conclusions About the Croatian Army's Attack and the Medak Pocket Occupation



Picture 22: Area of operation - "Medak Pocket"

From the events in the Medak Pocket, General Sekulić concludes that "long-term consequences, unquestionable and disastrous repercussions followed: the Serb Krajina Army had been surprised, and had lost the Divoselo, Čitluk and Počitelj villages. The Croatian Army's action had all the characteristics of genocide. The villages taken were burned in accordance with "scorched earth" tactics. The Croats handed over 71 corpses, among them 28 civilians (10 were women). Among those listed as missing were

14 civilians (4 of which were women). UNPROFOR did not do a thing to prevent the attack on the Medak Pocket and the consequent genocide over the civilians. Only General Jean Cot would defend his own honour, by accusing the Croatian Army of genocide."⁴³⁸ "The poor effects of RSK's defence were due to no coordinated action between the Serb Krajina Army, Army of the Republika Srpska and Yugoslav Army. In the end, no one had taken responsibility for that defeat and tragedy. The commanders of the 9th brigade and the Lika corps, the Serbian Krajina Army's main staff HQ all kept their duties..."⁴³⁹ In an operation analysis,, General Sekulić confirms his basic thesis that the Medak Pocket fell in 1993, as Knin did in 1995, because of the disbelief by RSK politicians, military officers and the population, that other Serbian armies would come to their aid. He also points out the RSK's irresponsibility, the lack of morale and lack of perspective. "The RSK's top officials did not seem to grasp the situation's core. The Serb Krajina Army was more able to face Croatia at the very moment of its formation, than in any later period. As time progressed, the ability of the Srpska Krajina Army had weakened, and that of the Croatian Army became greater."⁴⁴⁰

The "RSK" government, the representatives of the Serbian Army HQ and the presidents of the Serb municipalities met in Plitvice on October 2nd 1993 in order to discuss the losses at Divoselo. The commission was formed with the task of analyzing all the facts linked to that significant RSK defeat.⁴⁴¹ Already on September 18th 1993, (pending the Serb Krajina Army commanders' order given on September 16th), the following report was made which confirms that "the brigade battalion and lower commands and combatants had already been informed about the organization, strength and possible variation of enemy build-up and its targets. All levels of the command received combat documentation, orders and general line documents."⁴⁴² The Serb Krajina Army denied the thesis about a "sudden attack", about Serb forces being unprepared, about weak Serb forces and lack of armour." On the contrary – three Serb combat groups had been formed that had been ordered to continue the forceful reconnaissance missions and the provocation of Croatian forces. That was proven by the fact that "on the day the attack was carried out, the brigade commandant had ordered the forceful recon and combat missions towards the Velebit Mountains to take Bukova Glava (t.p. 671) and Jelovac." The actual order for battle readiness had been issued at 08:00 hours on September 9th 1993. In order for the Serb forces to deploy on the Velebit Mountains, the mine line (114 mines) had been removed in the Čitluk brigade's area of responsibility. In the village of Medak,, one battle group of the 3rd mobile brigade had been given orders to engage in the forceful reconnaissance... therefore the maxi-

mum alert and readiness for the battle had been ordered." The order was issued on September 3rd 1993." The Croatian Army and police had been subject to sudden attacks.

Is the claim of the small number of Serb defence forces in that area valid? "During the attack the 2nd mobile brigade and its reinforcements list 541 combatants. At the perimeter there were 500 combatants (in the annex of the Serb commission report... "to prevent surprises, the Divoselo defence line had been strengthened. In comparison with the previous period, Divoselo had the greatest number of soldiers."⁴⁴³ The defence region had been solidly fortified, and the anti-armour and anti-aircraft defence had been well organized."⁴⁴⁴

What was the reason for the Serb defeat? The commission concluded that it was caused by the "inadequate commanding skills of the battalion commander, Reserve 1st Class Captain Dušan Preradović, and the Čitluk unit commander Branko Krajnović, and the evacuation of the Čitluk unit soldiers' families and their possessions."⁴⁴⁵ "Army conscripts of the 2nd mobile brigade had lived in their houses and worked their fields which had kept them away from their defence duties and their combat positions."⁴⁴⁶ The commission assessed that "in combat activity, according to the available data, 60 individuals were killed, eight were captured and an unknown number were listed as missing."⁴⁴⁷ One should note the commission's objectivity. It's members professionally analyzed many elements, they reproached the Serbian Krajina Army's lack of professional commanding officers, it's paramilitary organization, desertions, the territorial military organization and the troops unsteady morale. The commission's report is not written in ideological/nationalistic terms. It does not use terms like genocide, ustaša and criminal characterizations when depicting the Croatian Army and police. It speaks only of "destroying and burning the infrastructure of the Divoselo, Čitluk and parts of the village of Počitelj. It refers to the favourable situation and the Croatian choice of attacking, targets, time and manoeuvres. By spearheading the attack, the Croatian forces secured a favourable balance of forces, strong artillery backup, securing a tactical advantage and realized the planned objective of the attack. The attack was carried out by professional units."⁴⁴⁸ On October 15th the RSK parliament would also form a parliamentary commission that reported on the September 8th (sic) 1993 events in the Divoselo, Čitluk and Počitelj area. That commission would find the reasons for the development of events as: "inadequate command, senior officers leaving the front, not enough discipline, alcoholism. It reproached the 9th brigade command for not allowing 1000 combatants to assist in helping the soldiers and civilians caught in the encirclement. It confirmed the minefield in the Brine-Kruškovača region was cleared and that mortars were

turned towards the Velebit Mountains, to protect the Ornice-Poljari area (to backup the forceful recon – author's remark). Therefore the defence on that line was weakened."⁴⁴⁹ The conclusion of the parliamentary commission was the request to relieve duties of all the key figures in the RSK – its president, the main staff HQ commander, the commanders of the corps and brigades. The blow the Croatian Army and police action caused was much stronger. It had shaken the already weak RSK structure, which the international community and UNPROFOR tried to protect and preserve.

Other Serb analysts, especially journalists, would analyze the Medak Pocket and all those concerned with it. "This month Serb forces were taken by surprise in the so-called Medak Pocket in Lika. The Croatian Army wiped off 11 Serb villages and hamlets, more than 100 Serb soldiers and civilians were killed. An indecisive counteraction and resolute protests tried to cover up the defeat. Top RSK officials tried to find an alibi in the behaviour of UNPROFOR. They never came to the area or to Knin. (Goran Hadžić and Mile Paspalji). UNPROFOR arrived only after evil had already taken place. Or they ran away (i.e. at Maslenica) leaving the combatants to fight. A day after the Croatian aggression struck Medak General Cot did not look worried. A couple of days later when he visited the burned villages, he said he could not find any traces of life." On September 25th 1993, this is how Banja Luka's TV program "Serb Krajina Chronicle" summarized Serb public opinion concerning the action that took place two weeks before. Apart from "the surprise and the shock", "indecisive actions and decisive protests/press releases", were used by Serbs during the war only when they were defeated in the battlefield. The accusations had started. Krajina politicians were accused of being afraid to face their people. UNPROFOR was accused of "running away" (as in Maslenica), or "did not show up at all, letting the combatants fight"! The Serb side linked the Medak Pocket events with World War II: like "a continuation of the Croatian criminal policy that had happened during that time." "During the advance, the Croatian Army had looted, burned, destroyed houses, killed and massacred soldiers and policemen. From the city of Gospić death was sown like it had been during the 1941 – 1945 fascist tyranny. The current war was the continuation of World War II and the result of a Croatian violation of history."⁴⁵⁰ "Divoselo was again a crime scene like in 1941, when only 907 Serbs were killed in Divoselo."⁴⁵¹ "Today, when the outnumbered and surprised Serb side relied on UNPROFOR's protection - the aggressor was able to quickly overrun the region."⁴⁵² "The defence lines were in disarray and the civilian population was left to the mercy of the Ustaša." Proof of this complete disarray is shown by the "postponed date of the so-called RSK Parliament session. A complete

report of the events in the surrounding Gračac villages on September 9th had not yet been completed. It was necessary to establish how the defence was before the Croatian aggression, the consequences of it, as well as the number of victims and material losses.⁴⁵³ The Serb military organization sometimes fell apart. The panicked flee from Medak, the armed scuffles (the evening of September 9th in Medak), desertions on the defence lines, the disintegrating Lapac brigade, was followed by punishment of those guilty for the defeat. Serb politicians blamed for treason were arrested – like the arrest of David Rastović, the vice-president, and Rade Čubrilo, member of the Serb Democratic Party's main board. They were allegedly linked to the "Croatian aggression" on Divoselo.⁴⁵⁴ To the international media, a message was sent about the Croatian Army and police's new "aggression" on the Serb state of RSK as proof that co-existence with the Croats was impossible, and how the RSK had been established to protect the Serbs from Croatian abuse.⁴⁵⁵ The Serbian Krajina Army threats followed. After that they attacked along the entire frontline and behind it – cities along the Croatian coast and strong economic and communication centres like Sisak, Karlovac, Kutina and Ogulin were shelled or rocketed. The reinforcements from Krajina, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and SR Yugoslavia were quickly summoned. The Serbs were afraid of the continuous Croatian Army and police advancement towards Medak and Gračac. They feared Croats taking the Ljubovo pass which would allow them to descend to Udbina and the Krajina Serbs airbase. This would result in a threat against Korenica and eventually the large city of Knin. Special pressure was exerted on the UN. Threats were made that the war would spread to all the UNPA zones, the Serbs would retaliate for Croatian "aggression" and would therefore undermine the entire peace plan. UNPROFOR had soon accepted the Serb interpretation of the Republic of Croatia as the "aggressor" on the RSK, "a state of equal status." The UN and the international community were seriously worried because of the worsening of the military situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Now the threat of all-out war was spreading to the entire territory of the new states – the republics of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The aggressor – Croatia – should therefore be stopped and punished.

On the basis of situation reports sent from the field to Zagreb and New York, and after learning a lesson at Maslenica, the UN Security Council and its Secretary General started exerting pressure on the Croatian political and military leadership to withdraw its forces from the three liberated villages surrounding areas. During the first day of the Operation, the UNPROFOR commander, General Cot, conveyed the Serb protests and his cease-fire propositions to the Croatian side. This was done on

September 9th at 09:00, 11:00, 12:00, 13:00, 15:00 and 17:00 hours. The next day, Cot sent his special emissary to the Srpska Krajina Army's main staff HQ chief, General Novaković. A journalist with the daily newspaper "Borba" wrote an article in the September 11th/12th issue entitled: "Spaljen Čitluk i Divoselo." In it he writes: "The commander of the Serb Krajina Army, via an UNPROFOR emissary, sent an ultimatum to Croatia: "By 13:00 hours, if UNPROFOR does not enter Divoselo, the Serb Krajina Army will start shelling military targets in the Republic of Croatia." On September 13th, Belgrade TV reported on "the newest aggression on the RSK which lasted for a fifth successive day." Đorđe Bjeđović, the Krajina government's Prime Minister sent a letter to the UN Secretary General." In the same TV program UN forces were accused of "an UNPROFOR platoon in the area of aggression that did nothing to protect the Serbian people, but instead ran further into the RSK territory." The accusations could not be proven. UNPROFOR's sources, the Croatian side, or foreign press reports did not report this. The Canadians did not run away, they stayed on their positions where they had arrived the day before – on September 8th in Medak. The reporter continues: "because of this, negotiations via UNPROFOR were frozen, and the UNPROFOR representatives were forbidden to move into the war zone." "The RSK main staff HQ stated that in the Lika area fierce attacks by the Croatian forces continued, although President Tuđman ordered a ceasefire. The Croatian forces regrouped and brought reinforcements. According to updated reports, one Serb soldier and one woman were killed. The Serb forces managed to stop the Croatian Army and establish the defence line on the Lika battlefield."⁴⁵⁶ There were no reports or access to the lost territory. A retreat occurred and troops ran away. This kind of reporting could have been war propaganda – to make the number of victims smaller and the enemy's larger. The data about one soldier and one woman being killed served such a function. On September 12th and 13th the Serb side still kept the military option open, believing that by launching a counterattack it would defeat the Croatian Army and regain its lost positions. The data about "own losses" was not published, because it could further damage the soldiers' morale. "Serb propaganda had been telling us about one killed and five wounded until 52 corpses were handed over."⁴⁵⁷ It is unusual that on September 9th and 10th, the Serbs did not know about the numbers yet killed. The Canadians reported on those killed in front of Medak upon advancing in front of Serb lines.⁴⁵⁸ The Canadian witness accounts speak about "people being killed there." The situation changed when UNPROFOR entered the area between the Croatian and Serb forces. Suddenly the Serb interpretation of the Medak Pocket events changed. The handing over of 52 Serb soldiers and civilian bod-

ies marked that turning point. Suddenly the fabrication about the Croatian – Canadian battle appeared, the UN protection forces were engaged, “on whom each attack was punishable.” This became more for Croatian guilt to be established. Not only had they been guilty of crimes committed over the Serbs, but they dared to attack the UN as well. They should be punished – they should be charged with war crimes and genocide. Their state should be taken away.⁴⁵⁹ Serb actions could be justified and finally their desire to form an independent Serb state within the state of Croatia could be realized.

This study does not question the existence of crimes committed in the Medak Pocket. It tries to reveal manipulations of those crimes for political gains. At the ICTY in the Hague, the accused Slobodan Milošević, while cross-examining a protected Croatian witness asked him: how come all Croatian war crimes are so well evidenced, witnesses called and cross-examined, material sent to the Hague, while Serb crimes are not even documented? Interesting question? Were the Croats not able to hide their “ill deeds”? By posing such a question, Milošević suggests Serb crimes did not exist in the measures they are attributed to the Serbs. And the Croats, because of evidence were far greater villains than the Serbs. If a realistic assessment does exist (i.e. one by the CIA’s) in which 90 percent of all crimes in former Yugoslavia were committed by the Serb Army or Serb paramilitary. The latest discoveries reveal the subsequent continuation of hiding the bodies of war victims, in which the JNA, the Yugoslav Army, police and state government took part. We learn more about the tacit understanding of UN forces, who knew about these facts but did not intervene. Rare are the anonymous tips when Serbs themselves would reveal the locations of mass graves in which Croats, Bosnians or Albanians were buried. Serb officials continued to hide these mass graves at places where they liquidated and buried their adversaries after World War II ended. The system of co-ordinated state politics in hiding is opposed by sporadicism, non-systematical, accidental, individualism, anarchy, crimes committed out of blind revenge or hatred, own endangered life, and fright for the biological existence of one’s own nation, and not one individual. I’m not excluding the pathology, sadism or enjoyment in the suffering of others, but in percentage, equal is the number of such cases bordering the human normality in all societies and in all armies, therefore in the Croatian or in the Serbian army. There is a big imbalance of those systematic crimes committed by groups or individuals on the Serb side, and such committed by all the other sides. What is indicative is the systematicism in which the Serb side deals with this dark side of the war. It is best illustrated by “Veritas” organization, initiated and led by an ex judge Savo Štrbac, who was in 1991 the JNA Knin corps military prosecutor.

In so-called RSK he was the head of the Office for killed and disappeared persons. After his parastate crumbled, he left for Belgrade, and with the SR Yugoslavia's official full backing he founded the NGO, gathering all the data about the Serb victims of wars in former Yugoslavia. This, primarily humanitarian work, was often misused for political purposes, even for the crimes cover-ups. Savo Štrbac has after only ten days passed since the Medak Pocket operation was undertaken, gathered documents and materials; he made a film⁴⁶⁰ and has shown it to the Belgrade foreign press. Without any serious investigation or any proof, he has immediately accused Croatia for crimes and genocide. Only after the victims' bodies were handed over (on September 18th on the Šajnerica pass in Otočac) did the Serb side spoke of a forceful, battle-ready entrance of the UNPROFOR into the area – "the UNPROFOR members, after engaging in a direct battle entered that area."⁴⁶¹ That new meaning given to the firefights and scuffles when UNPROFOR has been taking over the area has more and more backed the credibility of the general accusation about the Croatian and Croatia's guilt and their inborn genocide behavior. The Serbs have "forgotten" their previous accusations of the UNPROFOR's "running off from the battlefield" and their "leaving the Serbs at Croatian army's mercy." Now Serbs and UNPROFOR have taken the same side, and together they blamed the Croatians for everything that has happened in the Medak Pocket, even for that that didn't happen at all – as the Croatian battle waged against UNPROFOR. "Croatian army hasn't fulfilled its promise of its forces to withdraw from Počitelj, Čitluk and Divoselo, and for UNPROFOR to be deployed in (those) named areas. The Croatian army has thus defied the UNSC demand and continued their battle operations⁴⁶². "Members of the CANBAT have today started entering villages Počitelj, Čitluk and Divoselo. UNPROFOR's CANBAT commander has said that his soldiers have been subjected to the sniper fire for 90 minutes while taking their positions. When they have put up the UN flag the fire became more intense. Unofficial sources report that yesterday the UNPROFOR members, when entering those villages, had three of their soldiers wounded."⁴⁶³ The Serb journalists use and misuse the unconfirmed informations in order to make the tensions against the Croats mount. The news about Croatian shooting at the UN flag, about three wounded Canadian soldiers, should have suggested that the Croats attacked "blue helmets" on purpose, and did not refrain from anything (not even from attacking the UN). The news wasn't true of course, it could have referred on the wounded in the minefield only, but it was accepted as newsworthy by the foreign press and international community's members. "The report from Knin states that in the village of Medak, area some ten kilometers from the occupied villages, since yesterday

the strong UNPROFOR forces have been deployed, and are ready to, after the Croatian forces withdraw, enter Čitluk... Apart from not retreating yet, the Croat forces on the Lika battlefield do not respect the agreed ceasefire, they, Croatian forces opened a fierce artillery and infantry fire on RSK's civilians and soldiers. The Serbian army command has protested to UNPROFOR and its Sector South."⁴⁶⁴ The so-called RSK's Prime Minister Đorđe Bjeđović too on September 16th 1993 states that "...Croatian forces have engaged UNPROFOR", forgetting to mention that the Serb forces were "intermingled" with the Canadians and sometimes only 50 meters away from them, and behind Canadians back opened fire on Croats in order for Croats to think they are fighting two armies – the Serb one and the Canadian – French one. For TV Banja Luka on September 21st 1993 a member of CANBAT has confirmed during an interview that "two companies, 250 soldiers of the Canadian and French battalion in the Medak Pocket area have been the target of the Croatian fierce fire from infantry armor and were forced to fire back. The peace force has made an ultimatum to the Croatian forces to withdraw to the lines agreed in the Withdrawal Agreement signed on September 15th, which they did, but only in the late hours of that day. Today (September 21st) at 15:30 the Croatian forces have shelled Gračac... 15 grenades of a great destructive force fell..."⁴⁶⁵ TV Beograd reports that UNPROFOR commander General Cot has visited the area of the Medak Pocket. "He confirmed that the area is under UNPROFOR control, but didn't find any signs of life in couple of villages he passed by... the destruction was complete, done on purpose and systematical... the majority of it was done when UNPROFOR was still deploying." The Zagreb Voice of America's correspondent pointed out that "the Croatian forces have planned to kill Serb civilians in the vicinity of Gospić."⁴⁶⁶ Đorđe Bjeđović knows for sure that "52 persons were massacred, most of them were civilians, 12 persons were exchanged via UNPROFOR, 8 have been taken prisoner and transferred to Rijeka, and 12, from mixed marriages, paid the price of their freedom by satanizing the Serbs in the media, while 22 persons are still missing." "UN has confirmed that it was investigating the massacre of the civilians in the vicinity of Gospić."⁴⁶⁷ "The UNPROFOR members are controlling recently burned villages Čitluk and Divošelo under the Velebit Mountains, and have found three more victims of the Croatian aggression. In Gračac on the way is the process of identification of the victims, and one more victim has been identified. Thus the number of victims of the Croatian aggression has risen to 72. This fact confirms the fears that the number of killed is not final yet. That is to say, a fate of 25 missing citizens and 8 soldiers from Divošelo, Počitelj, Čitluk and Donji Lapac is yet unknown."⁴⁶⁸ In that moment, for the polit-

sure for committing war crimes, RSK would gain the greater political endorsement of great powers (Russia, France, and Great Britain) and in the UN Security Council would manage to legalize their parastate. However, that didn't happen.

"Veritas" will, in its "Bulletins" from 1993 on, each year on the anniversary of the "aggression, tragedy, crime, massacre" publish new informations – the number of killed and the witnesses' reports on the Medak Pocket operation. "In the international press centre the brochure has been presented under the name "The bloody Lika's September of 1993", and the documentary film will be shown about the crimes committed during the last three attacks on "Krajina"... those documents will be handed over to the UN Security Council in hope that they would become official UN documents."⁴⁷⁰ "The aggression under the name "scorched earth" has resulted with almost a hundred massacred and burned victims and a multitude of disappeared and imprisoned Serbs. This was a bloody invasion – without wounded taken."⁴⁷¹ The journalist Marjanović doesn't speak the whole truth there, there were many wounded Serb soldiers, because the Canadians saw them leaving Medak, there were many ambulances taking them out of Medak.⁴⁷² The Croatian sources also speak of a great number of doctors coming from Banja Luka into Gračac and Knin, and of wounded being treated in the Republika Srpska and SR Yugoslavia hospitals.

The so-called Krajina has indicted those responsible at its courts for the crimes in the Medak Pocket. The local court in Knin, on demand of its District Attorney, has conducted an inquiry of the crimes committed in the Medak Pocket, involving 43 persons. "Among them are the staff General, Janko Bobetko, Croatian army main staff HQ commander; Major General Tomislav Merčep, police special forces commander; Mirko Norac, second in command of the 9th guard brigade "Vukovi Like"; Agim Krasnići, Colonel, the HQ's commander of the same brigade; Josip Krmpotić, Lieutenant, commander of the commando unit of the 9th guard brigade; Johannes Tilder, second in command of the same company. After the inquiry, the DA's office has indicted all these mentioned persons because of the committed crimes against the humanity, international law violations, and the genocide, war crimes over civilian population and war crimes of killing wounded and ill people."⁴⁷³ In the document coded YU/SC-780-92/DOC-4/SI-177 some incriminations are quoted: "Čitluk, Gospić, September 11th 1993... at about 12:30 to 15:30 the perpetrators (Croatian soldiers) have during the Medak Pocket operation hidden on the Čitluk graveyard. They ambushed unarmed Serb civilians hiding in the Debela Glava woods, from where they have been driven out by Croatian Ministry of Interior special police... after they came out of the woods they were shot

at by infantry weapons... over 30 unarmed civilians were either killed or wounded. Johan Tilder has commanded all wounded to be killed... Čitluk, September 11th: From Krajinović house the fire was opened...three elderly women were killed; the fourth person (a man) who surrendered (put his hands above his head) was gagged, tortured and finally killed... Čitluk, September 9th to September 13th: An elderly woman was killed. Čitluk, September 10th: A family was killed – parents and two children."⁴⁷⁴ In September 2000 the "Veritas" bulletin reprinted Canadian journalist David Pugliese's "Ottawa Citizen" story. "A couple of days earlier in Medak, (before September 9th), General Cot had met with Lt. Col. Calvin and informed him that a force of 2500 Croatian soldiers and tanks had built-up in an area about 35 kilometres around the Medak Pocket. An estimated 525 shells fell where the Canadian observers were situated at Medak. At noon on September 15th UNPROFOR started deploying between the Serb and Croat frontlines. The Serbs had been watching UNPROFOR move, but did nothing. The Croats opened fire." Captain Wayne Eyre and Ian Hunt witness: "On September 17th Canadians moved forward. There was no shooting but there was a tense build-up between the Croats and the Canadians."⁴⁷⁵ The key evidence on which "Veritas" bases its proof was attained by then prisoner, member of the recce commando group of the 9th guard brigade, Dutchman Johannes Tilder. He was a "mercenary" and one of the "dogs of war" fighting in Lika. There were many contradictions linked to Tilder – his role as a double agent, his capture, his confession and finally his death. According to an anonymous witness working with one of the Croatian security services, the Serb Colonel Šoša (sp?), who negotiated the exchange of prisoners with the Croats after Tilder's capture, stated that Tilder would not come out alive, because "he worked for several intelligence services – the Dutch, the British, the German and the Croatian." The circumstances of Tilder's death were also unclear. According to one version, a bomb was thrown into his cell, according to another; he was killed when trying to escape from the car transporting him from one prison to another. Tilder's witnessing, full of gruesome details, could have been extracted by force and afterwards he might have been liquidated. His witnessing is immensely documented and used as evidence at the ICTY: "Tilder had received his second-in-command post (sic) of the 9th brigade "Vukovi" during the summer of 1993. His task was to probe and secure a pass through the minefields. He stated that UNPROFOR had been giving reports and information to the Croatian Army." On the basis of Tilder's witnessing, journalists Vela Ilibašić and Rob Siebelink wrote: "The bloodshed at Medak was the reconstruction of ethnic cleansing." Josip Krmpotić, the recce unit commander (not unit but a platoon) on the evening of

September 8th summoned a meeting where he conveyed the command of Medak be attacked. "We were to commence with the Action at 23:00 and not at 06:00 hours (on September 9th). We had to be on the bridge near Rogiči. At that moment artillery started firing on the Serb positions, which was a sign that we could start with our attack. The special police started hunting civilians who were hiding on Debela Glava. They tried to run away, towards Rajiči, Rajčevići and Čitluk. We were at the well at the Raičevići cemetery."⁴⁷⁶ The data Savo Štrbac and "Veritas" provide about the killed and missing Serbs served to first initiate the inquiries and later indict the Croats. Books, bulletins, and co-operation with the ICTY which considers "Veritas" to be a valuable source,⁴⁷⁷ have become a key factor in proving the Croatian and Muslim crimes with long-term political consequences. Savo Štrbac does not hesitate to, in the case of General Gotovina, say this openly. The indictment of General Gotovina points a finger at the Republic of Croatia for being responsible for ethnic cleansing. Štrbac calls the beginning of the end of the Croatian state due to its criminal activities. The "RSK" will be born again.⁴⁷⁸ "Veritas" helped to initiate the ICTY's wider interest in the Medak case. The work of Hague investigators began under the code name "Congress" in June 1997. They visited Yugoslavia three times in 1998. They heard depositions from 27 witnesses – inhabitants of Čitluk, Počitelj and Divoselo, who had survived the Medak Pocket hell. The investigators took documents from the "Veritas" archives. Savo Štrbac claims a few dozen "international witnesses, members of units directly participating in the Action" were interrogated and gave witness reports.⁴⁷⁹ UNPROFOR gave the first such report on the Medak Pocket Operation to the UN Security Council on October 7th 1993. In December 1994, the UN expert commission finished its report on Medak Pocket. In May 2000, 11 bodies were found in a septic hole in Gospić. The missing from the Medak Pocket were identified.

The Yugoslav crisis chronology September/October 1993: "Balkan repository project – Yugoslav crisis 1993"⁴⁸⁰

September 9th 1993 – The army of the Republic of Croatia attacked the territory of the RSK and took (by force) the Serb villages of Divoselo, Čitluk and Počitelj in the vicinity of Gospić. The Serb side answered by opening fire on the suburbs of Sisak, Karlovac and Duga Resa.

September 10th – Thorvald Stoltenberg, co-president of the International Conference on the former Yugoslavia asked Franjo Tuđman, the President of Croatia to order his forces to stop attacking the territory populated by Serbs and to withdraw from villages they have captured in Lika.

September 12th – Franjo Tuđman the President of the Republic of Croatia ordered his military forces to stop firing in

order to enable a ceasefire with the local Serb forces in the Krajina.

September 14th – In an extra(ordinary) statement, the government of the SR Yugoslavia “most sharply condemns the latest aggression of Croatia on the Republic of Srpska Krajina... the government of SR Yugoslavia hopes that the Croatian side will realize that it is also in its interest to stop with the aggressive attacks... and to search for solutions with the RSK within the Geneva negotiations.” The UN Security Council accepted the presidential statement in which “we express the deepest concern for the renewed military confrontations in Croatia. We ask both sides to immediately agree to the UNPROFOR proposal for an immediate ceasefire to be reached. The Council also requires that the Croatian Government withdraw its military forces to their September 9th positions, before the undertaken offensive.”

The ceasefire was agreed upon under the control of the UN, because the Croatian side agreed to withdraw from the villages it occupied on September 9th and 10th.

President Tuđman in his speech delivered on September 28th in the UN General Assembly, asked that special Croatian demands be included into the new UN Resolution text, dealing with the UNPROFOR mandate extension: “The Serb forces demilitarization, the Croatian jurisdiction in the “pink zones” in Krajina should be established, the lifting of sanctions imposed on SR Yugoslavia should be linked to the new peace plan for Croatia. If within 48 hours the UNPROFOR mandate is not implemented according to those demands, the Republic of Croatia will ask the UN to stop all operations on its territory.”

October 5th – The UN Security Council establishes the 871 Resolution.

October 7th – After it was revealed that 70 civilians were killed and 48 disappeared, the UN asked the Croatian government to explain the Serb civilian massacre by the Croatian Army in the Medak Pocket area on September 9th. The UN report on the “intentional killing of Serb civilians” was published in Geneva and Zagreb, and sent to Tadeusz Mazowiecki, the special UN human rights commission correspondent. Franjo Tuđman ordered an inquiry to start in connection with the UN report.

October 8th – Žarko Domjan, the deputy Croatian Parliament speaker said that the “Croats had to overcome a psychological barrier and agree to Serb autonomy in Croatia, which was the precondition for Croatian sovereignty to be reinstated on the occupied territories.”

October 12th – Tadeusz Mazowiecki confirmed that Croat forces systematically and deliberately destroyed houses, livestock and other property and killed 67 civilians, while retreating from the Medak Pocket in Krajina. Mazowiecki asked the Croatian

Government to resume a detailed inquiry. In his response, deputy PM (and Republic of Croatia Foreign Minister) Mate Granić, said that the victims in Divoselo, Počitelj and Čitluk had been killed during the battle, they were armed, wore military uniforms and fought against the Croatian Army forces.

November 2nd – Secret negotiations between the RSK and the Republic of Croatia delegates are held in the Vicinity of Oslo, Norway. The main issues discussed were a ceasefire and end of hostilities, the re-establishing of communication and economic ties between the Krajina and Croatia.

November 17th – The first ICTY session in the Hague.

November 18th – Thorvald Stoltenberg reports to the UN Security Council on the situation in the former Yugoslavia and the possibility of ending the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He concludes that UN efforts are providing results but that peace, its primary goal, has not yet been achieved. Stoltenberg declares: "There is no longer any sense to speak of a (Serbian) aggression,⁴⁸¹ since it is a civil war not including the elements of interference from the neighbouring states of Serbia and Croatia."Thorvald Stoltenberg's declaration is applicable to the situation in the Republic of Croatia-Republika Hrvatska Hrvatska.

End of part 1