

**STRATEGY
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PROJECT**

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**THE MYSTERY OF THE SLOVENIAN MILITARY
SUCCESS IN 1991**

BY

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ABSTRACT

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TITLE: The Mystery of the Slovenian Military Success in 1991

FORMAT: Strategy Research Project

DATE: 15 April 1999 PAGES: 33 CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

This document focuses on the historical experiences of the Slovenian struggle for independence. The paper provides an historical overview and elementary reasons for the disintegration of Yugoslavia. The main part describes previously unknown events before independence, Slovenian political and military preparations and Yugoslav attempts to stabilize the circumstances. The essay briefly describes the short, ten-day period of war, Slovenian and Yugoslav military actions, strategic decisions and the primary reasons for the Yugoslav's military defeat.

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1. INTRODUCTION

June 1991. Generals in the Yugoslav General Staff joked about Slovenian “Johns” who never were or would be soldiers. They also referenced Operation Desert Storm and said that if Americans needed several weeks to defeat Iraq, the Yugoslav National Army (YNA) would need only a few hours to defeat Slovenia.¹ That test came quickly, when on June 25, 1991, the Republic of Slovenia declared its independence. That night the Yugoslav Army tried to quash Slovenia’s existence by force. The statement that it would take only a few hours to defeat the Slovenian forces quickly changed, and, after ten days of war, the “big” YNA was completely defeated. Three months later, it shamefully left Slovenia. Why the strong YNA suffered overwhelming defeat in such a short period of time at the hands of a supposedly weak, badly armed Slovene military and police forces has long remained a mystery for YNA generals. But this successful victory was not a mystery for the Slovenian forces and people, which prepared for this victory for more than one year.

This paper will explain the reasons behind Slovenia’s victory. It begins by outlining a brief Slovenian history and the main political and economic reasons for the disintegration of Yugoslavia. The next section describes the Slovenian political and military preparations for independence. Under these circumstances, Slovenia built its own forces – the Territorial Defence (TD). This section also outlines YNA preparations for military intervention. In the second part, the document describes the short war period, stressing YNA and Slovenian military strategy.

2. A BRIEF HISTORY

The Slav ethnos prevailed in the region of present-day Slovenia and in some bordering countries until the end of the 6th century. Through the centuries, especially from the period of the Reformation to the beginning of 19th century, the concept of a Slovene nation formed from this Slav ethnos. Over time, the Slovene people developed a distinctive language and culture. In 1918, after living for more than 1000 years under Frankish kings and the Habsburg Monarchy, the Slovene leadership decided on total separation from Vienna and joined a new State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs (later renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia on January 6, 1929). In 1945, Tito brought Yugoslavia under the Communist administered state system. During both the monarchy and Tito's dictatorship, development in Slovenia proceeded according to laws passed by the central government in Belgrade, which, in large measure, benefited the majority Serbian population. Today, Slovenia is a member of the UN and its organizations.² It has been admitted to the Council of Europe and other important European organizations; it is an active participant in NATO's Partnership for Peace program; and it has signed an Association Agreement with the European Union

3. THE REASONS OF DISINTEGRATING OF YUGOSLAVIA

With the death of the historical leaders of the revolution and socialist development (Tito, Kardelj, and Bakaric)³ who had controlled the political situation in Yugoslavia through the instruments of party policies, the primary unifying factor was lost. In the first half of the 1980, interethnic conflict between Serbs and Albanians first erupted in Kosovo. In the middle of the 1980's this led to Serb nationalist reaction against the 1974 Yugoslav constitution, which provided considerable autonomy and

decentralized government. Nationalist Serbs opposed the constitution's confederative scheme and proposed the greater centralization of the state in political, economic, and, even, cultural fields.⁴ This led to Yugoslavia, for the most part, being divided internally into an eastern centralist bloc and a western autonomist bloc.

The first serious crisis in the former Yugoslavia occurred in 1986 when the Serbian Academy of Art and Sciences openly promoted the nationalist Greater Serbia program and its principle of "all Serbs in one state." In their seventy-four page Memorandum, the nationalists demanded that ethnic Serbs be given more rights, and that Yugoslavia should become a unitary state vice remaining a federal state. This heralded increasing pressure on the federal units where ethnic Serbs lived alongside majority non-Serbian populations.⁵

At the same time, it became more and more obvious that the processes of democratization and liberalization from Communist ideological schemes were proceeding much faster in the western part of Yugoslavia than in the east. Serbian nationalists harshly criticized the first Slovene democratic ideas.⁶ This became increasingly apparent after Tito's death, when Yugoslavia had neither an appropriate successor to the dictator's throne nor a single individual who possessed sufficient personal authority to control the federal units. The resulting collective Presidency of Yugoslavia was just a bad actor playing a tragic part, and slowly lost its ability to govern. At the same time, Serbs were looking for a new, strong leader. Their first leader, Petar Stambolic lost a fractional fight to a little known and very cunning manager, Slobodan Milosevic. In 1987, Milosevic became the leader of the Serbian Communist Party. Two years later he would become President of the Collective Presidency of Serbia.

In spring 1988, Milosevic used his increasing influence to put pressure on the Slovenes. This was in response to Slovene demands for the introduction of political pluralism, democracy, a market economy, and independence for Slovenia within an eventual Yugoslav confederation.⁷ The tension increased after the Slovene Government and opposition parties condemned Serb policies and police violence in Kosovo and called for peaceful coexistence in that autonomous province of Serbia.⁸ In spite of severe pressure and threats from Belgrade, the Slovenian Parliament amended the Slovene Constitution and reclaimed the sovereign national rights it had ceded at the founding of the Yugoslav Federation.⁹

In 1989, Milosevic invented a new way to achieve his goals. He sought to replace autonomy-oriented republic governments with adherents of centralism and his personal allies. In a piecemeal fashion he took control of all republic level agencies, to include control over a number of newly reorganized Federal Yugoslav agencies. The result was a pervasive and interlocking system of state agencies responsive only to Slobodan Milosevic's authority.¹⁰ This power gave him his "wings". He began with pan-Yugoslav demonstrations. These demonstrations, which he called a "meeting of truth," were organized everywhere in Yugoslavia except in Slovenia and big Croatian cities. The demonstrations were planned and orchestrated very carefully and they all had the same scenario. Milosevic's appearance was always the last. Between various speakers and cultural appearances, they served free refreshments and food. Leaders always received a payment, and transportation was also paid. In November, Milosevic planned a demonstration in the Slovene capitol, Ljubljana, however Slovene police forces stopped Serb demonstrators at the Slovenian border.

Beyond political considerations, another main reason for the disintegration of Yugoslavia was economic. Slovenia produced approximately two and half times higher GDP and national income than the Yugoslav average. At beginning of 1980, with only 8.3% of the population of Yugoslavia, Slovenia produced up to 18% of the Yugoslav GDP and up to 25% of Yugoslavia's total exports. But most of that hard earned money was transferred to the less developed regions of Yugoslavia, and wasted by politicians who were not accountable to the donors. Economic conditions were further worsened by systemic and structural weaknesses in the workers self-management system, manifested largely through rising inflation. From 1980 – 1990, inflation climbed from 30 to 1356 percent-true hyperinflation. At the same time, economic growth and employment stagnated.¹¹ A wave of strikes in Yugoslavia, beginning in 1986 and lasting through 1990, dramatized the impact of falling living standards and exposed the harsh reality behind the fine words: "worker self management."

4. POLITICAL PREPATION

In spring 1987, a group of intellectuals associated with the magazine "New Review" published articles outlining a Slovene national program. They demanded the introduction of political pluralism, democracy, a market economy, and independence for Slovenia. Everywhere in Yugoslavia such views encountered strong opposition and condemnation. After brief opposition, however, the new liberal and predominantly social democratic leadership of the Slovene Communist Party decided to drop their resistance.¹²

The democratic elections for the Slovene Parliament in April 1990 brought a 55% victory for the coalition of newly formed opposition parties. The new government prepared a platform of Slovene national and governmental independence and resolved to

settle relationships with the Yugoslav union in a peaceful and democratic way. However, neither the central government, the Federal Presidency nor the Federal Assembly were prepared to talk with Slovenia.

This lack of progress resulted in Slovenia considering international political and legal ways to declare its independence. In a plebiscite in December 1990, where 89% of eligible voters participated, 90% voted for a free and independent Slovenia. The plebiscite turnout was proof that, in addition to the votes of the Slovene majority, many members of other Yugoslav nationalities living in Slovenia contributed to such an overwhelming positive outcome.¹³

In early January 1991, after the outcome of the Slovene plebiscite had been announced, the Republic of Serbia illegally gained access to the Yugoslav monetary system and misappropriated almost the total planned monetary issue of the Yugoslav federation set aside for the year 1991.¹⁴ For this reason, the Yugoslav federal Government virtually was compelled to ask for an additional loan from the EU. At the same time, the political pressure from within Yugoslavia increased. The decline and fall of federal institutions complemented the rise of Serbian power. The Federal Presidency virtually ceased to function as such when Serbia gained control over half of the votes. Within the collective presidency, Milosevic and his allies accused Slovenia and Croatia of separatism and attempting to destroy Yugoslavia. In fact, Yugoslavia had already been destroyed.

In the days immediately before declaring independence, Slovenia had no support from the international community. U.S. Secretary of State James Baker met in Belgrade with Slovenia's President Milan Kucan. Baker told Kucan frankly that neither the United

States nor any other country would recognize the international sovereignty of Slovenia. Baker reaffirmed this conclusion in a public statement on television, and during discussions with Federal Prime Minister Ante Markovic. In the same public statement, Markovic announced that the Socialistic Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) would undertake a limited military intervention in case Slovenia seceded. The European Community also gave its final and emphatic "NO", when on 25 June, they decided not to recognize the declarations of independence of the Republics of Slovenia and Croatia. Reinforcing this resolution, they approved an additional loan to the SFRY.¹⁵

5. MILITARY PREPARATION

Under the SFRY, the armed forces followed a defensive doctrine. The YNA, composed of professional officers, NCO's and soldiers, as well as conscripts and reservists, played the major role in defending the country. Territorial Defence (TD) units, filled in the gaps between the YNA units, stayed in their territory, and organized and carried out partisan actions. Under Slovenian law, a third para-military organization, National Defence (ND) forces existed. These forces existed mostly on a paper, were not organized around rigid rules or formations, and would be established in case of war. Nevertheless, the Slovenian TD and ND worked closely to prepare units for their missions.¹⁶

5.1. Disarmament of the Slovenian TD

The General Staff of the YNA (GS YNA) was concerned about the readiness of Slovenian TD troops that might fight against the YNA. For this reason, it gradually removed Slovenian officers from key positions and replaced them with active duty Yugoslav officers, or with Slovene officers who favored the YNA; an action intended to

weaken the Slovenian TD. In January 1990, the GS YNA also ordered the Slovenian TD to provide data concerning the development of the TD in the near term. This included information concerning the construction of facilities for storing TD arms and equipment, which were located outside of YNA facilities.¹⁷ In this way, General Headquarter Army Forces of Socialistic Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (GHQ AF SFRY) obtained key data about Slovene controlled armaments.¹⁸

On May 15, 1990, the same day that Slovenia installed its first multiparty and democratic government, Borisav Jovic (the Serb's representative) became President of Collective Presidency of SFRY. He immediately issued an order that all weapons, ammunitions and explosives outside of YNA facilities must be surrendered for safekeeping in YNA facilities within five days. The small arms distributed to active duty TD officers would be appropriated and handed in with the other arms and ammunition.¹⁹ The release of weapons and ammunitions for training would be carried out only with approval of HQ, Slovenian TD.

While these military initiatives were occurring, the political situation was very chaotic. The newly established government at republic and community level had not taken over their full competencies. In most cases, new people composed the new government. Numerous municipalities did not yet have the new authorities constituted when the YNA began confiscating weapons. The officers in TD Regional and Community staffs also were under great personal pressure. On the one hand, they had orders coming from a higher command post that they were to immediately surrender their weapons, while, on the other, they knew that such behavior was counter to the interests of Slovenia which they were bound to defend to the best of their ability.

Under such conditions, the Presidency of the Republic of Slovenia sent a confidential telegram to the municipalities on May 19, 1990, which halted the further surrender of weapons. Slovenes retained the majority of weapons in 12 (of the 63) municipal headquarters of the TD and part of the weapons and ammunition of the special TD brigade. Slovenian TD, therefore, retained only approximately 25% its original weapons and ammunition. But this amount concerned the Yugoslav-Serbian Government and the YNA.

Without doubt, the generals of the YNA, with the help of collaborators, had selected an opportune moment for their action. Namely, they acted on the day when Slovenia constituted its the new Executive council, and at a time when many municipalities had not yet elected their new leadership.

That having been said, the confiscation of weapons also had a good side. This action showed the "strength" of individual personnel in the TD. People with prominent titles and high ranks failed the exam, and those who replaced the lack of weapons with knowledge and personal bravery surfaced. These individuals later passed many more serious exams, and dealt decisive blows to the aggression of the YNA attackers.²⁰

5.2. Maneuvering Structure of the National Defence – MSND

The situation for both the YNA and Slovenian Armed forces was very confusing. The YNA generals were more or less satisfied with their action in Slovenia, as it had mainly been success. At the same time, the YNA disarmed all other Yugoslav TD units except Serbian and Montenegrin formations, whose weapons and ammunition stayed under TD control in their own storage facilities.

Facing these hurdles, Slovene political and military (TD) leaders decided to do something to improve security conditions and to prepare Slovenian forces for possible conflict. The only legal basis was in our speciality – National Defence (ND) forces. The YNA hierarchy had quietly sneered at this Slovenian peculiarity for a long time. Because of their ancient weapons and the age of its members, those Slovenians wearing ND insignia truly did not arouse any respect. But this legal foundation was being coordinated in secret operations called MSND.

From a strategic point of view, the MSND was a temporary organization. The basic purpose for forming the MSND was the protection of the emerging Slovenian state, which was most threatened by the YNA. At the same time, the MSND was also a means whereby the Republic bodies and the Presidency of the Republic actually led and commanded the TD of Slovenia.²¹ At the Republic level, the whole operation was coordinated by very few people, led by the defence and interior ministers. The President of the Slovenian Presidency, the Prime Minister, and the President of Parliament also were aware of the organization and its operation. Gradually, other important members of government and TD structure became acquainted with their MSND tasks and missions.

Strict security measures were introduced for all aspects of MSND. All documents and messages were carried personally or directly passed on by word of mouth. This security measure was very important because the YNA intelligence had increased its activity. Also, most of the HQ Republic Staff of TD, as well as some commanders and members of the Regional Staffs of the TD, were active duty officers of YNA.

The basic war plan of the ND was simple, short and logical. In the case of armed intervention by the YNA, the task of the ND was to defend key structures and, at the

same time, carry out rapid attacks on YNA ammunition dumps and military equipment to procure arms and equipment that would permit calling up the remainder of TD units. Detailed plans for seizing individual ammunition and weapons dumps, as well as for other facilities, were made.

The shock and assault troops were formed and based on regions. The formation of units was adapted to the weapons and equipment at our disposal. The highly confidential mobilization documents were adapted to call up these new formations. Clandestine operations, carried out mostly at night by members of the ND and Special Police units, redistributed weapons and ammunition from regions that had been able to keep their weapons to areas and municipalities that did not have the necessary equipment. Countless secret weapons and military equipment storage sites were created.²² At the same time, TD members in a variety of ways, "stole" their own weapons from storage sites in the YNA complexes. Frequently, dangerous episodes occurred, especially when weapons left the barracks over fences at night. If they noticed it, the commanders of the army ammunition storage sites usually hushed up the loss of weapons to their superiors, thereby attempting to avoid responsibility. In this way, within one year Slovenes succeeded in returning to the TD a good 5000 pieces of various infantry weapons.²³

6. GROWTH OF THE SLOVENIAN TERRITORIAL DEFENCE

On 28 September 1990 the Slovenian Assembly accepted and announced amendments 96 and 97 to the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia. With these amendments, control of the TD structures was transferred of the Republic Presidency. In the case of an external attack, however Slovenia still respected the unity of the joint armed forces of the SFRY. Belgrade reacted very sharply to this decision. In a long

public message, the SFRY leadership accused Slovenia of violating federal regulations and destroying the unity of the armed forces. But not once did they mention that, under the Serbian Constitution, the President of Serbia is the supreme commander of all the armed forces in the Serbian state (including the YNA), not only in the peace, but also in war!²⁴

Immediately after amendments were accepted, Milan Kucan, President of the Slovenian Presidency, appointed a new commander of the TD. The sitting commander did not want to relinquish duties, however. To forestall this takeover the old commander ordered YNA military police to occupy and “additionally protect” the headquarters building. This act disturbed many people, who started demonstrating outside the building.

But the occupied building slowly became a large and unpleasant problem for the YNA. The Slovene Government cut electricity and water to the building. After six months, when the YNA saw that they guarded an unimportant, empty object, they quietly left the block. Before this, however, they completely robbed it. They even took out the electric switches from the walls and in some places even the electric wires. In the meantime, at a new location near Ljubljana in October 1990, the newly named commander, Colonel Janez Slapar, established the new command and continued reorganizing the TD. The main part of ND structure was disbanded and transferred the TD structure.

The main problem in defending Slovenia was still the poorly equipped TD, especially in terms of arms, and other military equipment. The Government bought some arms and equipment in foreign countries. Careful planning ensured that every consignment got across the border. These purchases did not significantly improve the

preparedness of the units of TD, but the moral of units rapidly increased. The officers, NCO's and soldiers saw the real possibility of being able to defend successfully against an eventual YNA attack.

On 19 April 1991, the Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia passed the last necessary act for independence in the defence field – the law on military service. This law established the right and obligation of the Slovenian people through the TD to establish its own military system. By the end of April, the TD opened the first two Slovenian military barracks, where conscripts started their seven-month long military training.

At this point, Belgrade regarded the situation in Slovenia very seriously. As a result, pressure for observing the federal legislation concerning military service continued. On 23 May 1991, the YNA precipitated an incident, which gave it an excuse to attack one of the Slovenian military training centers. A special unit of the YNA, with armored personnel carriers and tanks, surrounded the barracks. The commander demanded that the recruits be handed over to YNA. The pressure of military action continued for several hours, and, eventually, the negotiations moved from the barracks to Maribor city's assembly house. Soon after the start of negotiations, a YNA special military police unit stormed into the building, and, in a lightning operation, kidnapped the Commander of Regional Staff of the TD and his assistant.

The YNA actions enraged the Slovene public. The Slovenian government cut off electricity and telephones for to YNA barracks in Slovenia. The YNA commanders were completely lost. The water pumps were not working, water was slowly dripping out of the refrigerators, and the electric cookers were totally useless. Tensions mounted. More

and more planes and helicopters of the YAF flew over Slovenia. Eventually, the conscripts and the training center became less important and on 26 May 1991, the YNA finally relented, releasing both Slovenian officers who returned to their barracks.

7. THE YNA PREPARATION

By this time, the YNA was not under effective control of the Collective Presidency of SFRY. In 1990, the generals of HQ YNA were present at Presidency meetings. But, after the meetings they usually sat together with Slobodan Milosevic and President of Collective Presidency Borisav Jovic in Milosevic's office.²⁵ In May 1991, Stipe Mesic, a Croat became the President of Collective Presidency and the President of YNA high command. Not only YNA generals, but also the Serb and Montenegrin representatives boycotted his meetings.

Slovenian political elites knew that there was no ideal solution for problems with the YNA, except if the army was prepared to make a deal. But the HQ YNA avoided meeting our representatives. In April 1991, they finally accepted our delegation. The YNA leaders were not prepared to discuss anything but Slovenia's compliance with the federal laws. The commandant of the YNA HQ demanded that:

- Slovenia fulfill its federal army duties according to the regulations of the SFRY. (The YNA threatened to enforce these provisions.)
- Exchange the current Commander of the Republic HQ of the TD with an active duty YNA Slovenian general.
- The weapons of the TD remain in the storage sites of the YNA, although they would be available temporarily for military exercises.

- All active officers of the YNA that had been removed from the TD would be reinstated.
- Unconditionally and immediately, Slovenia must pay its debts to the army.²⁶

Despite these stark demands, the meeting was very helpful for Slovenia. The last illusions of hope that we could have a civil talk with the YNA faded away.

The YNA had, in practice, prepared for war by May 1991. It tried with all means at its disposal to raise the readiness of its units in Slovenia. It had reinforced, in particular, its border, armored and special operations units. The officers, NCOs and soldiers of units in Slovenia were composed mainly of Serbs and Montenegrins. The YNA also began withdrawing all reserve weapons, ammunition, rockets and other important military equipment from Slovenia. YNA pilots also took ten training aircraft, which comprised the aircraft squadron of TD.

The YNA used the GHQ military exercise "BEDEM" (bulwark) to disguise their preparations for war. In this exercise, the enemy was NATO armed forces and allied countries, but the opponent also included anti-Yugoslav oriented Slovenian and Croatian parties. Beyond this tactical exercise, which was carried out at the company level, the most important result was YNA political and moral preparation. The political administration of the Federal Secretariat for People's Defence and YNA intelligence prepared highly confidential reports about the situation in Europe and, especially, Slovenia and Croatia. Estimates indicated that in Western Europe, first of all in Germany, the Fourth Reich was gradually growing. The reports were intended to convince the YNA officer corps that Slovenia and Croatia, with great support of Germany, were preparing attacks against Yugoslavia, to include assassination of members of the army.²⁷ By such

methods, they sought to arouse the animosity of the officers towards the local authorities and to prepare them for the planned intervention against both republics.

Even before independence, we knew that the Slovenia would be attacked. We also had assessed what we believed would be the outline of the YNA plan:

- Establish and restore Yugoslav authority in Slovenia.
- Change the principal political and TD leaders.
- Control the state border.
- Take over international border crossings by federal police forces.
- Take over of custom services and customs facilities by federal customs officers.

The “D” day was June 26, the day after the declaration of Slovenian independence, when Slovenia would be trying to consolidate its power. On this day, the YNA leadership expected some confusion and incoherence. But this conclusion was the first of many YNA mistakes. Slovenia was well organized for the transition to power and controlled all federal duties and facilities on June 25, immediately after the parliamentary decisions were adopted.

8. WAR

For many Slovenes, the night following the ceremonies proclaiming the independence of the Republic of Slovenia was the longest of their lives. The reason was not celebration, but the very violent attack of the YNA. We knew that this fight would have historic consequences for the Slovene people. For more than a thousand years, our dream was to have our own state. We knew that our future was in our hands, alone. We did not expect foreign military help. But that was enough to realize our dream. The will

of people was strong and our resoluteness was never better. As one old Slovene proverb says: “Every man is his own happiness blacksmith.” We were ready!

8.1. The YNA Strategy

On the basis of the decisions of Federal Executive Council of June 26, the YNA operation initially proceeded unobstructed. According to this act, entitled “Direct implementation of federal regulations on the crossing of state borders in the territory of the Republic Slovenia”, the federal government ordered federal police and army units to take control of Slovenian borders, using force, if necessary. This was the formal green light for the YNA to start its long-expected action. Looking at the battle map, the operation seemed ridiculously simple, almost too easy for this big and “well” trained army. The YNA did not respect the small Slovenian, poorly armed TD forces. But they forgot a key element – the Slovenian people.

The attack followed the previously tested “BEDEM” plan. At the beginning of the military action, the YNA had about 22,300 troops located in barracks in Slovenia. Additionally, the action included two armored brigades from the Varazdin and Karlovac barracks in Croatia. In Belgrade, they also called up a special brigade. All together, about 32,000 YNA troops were involved with all their heavy technology and with the assured support of the entire Yugoslav air force based in Slovenia or just next to it. There were more than 4000 professional officers and NCOs of the YNA. The soldiers were conscripts. They used 275 tanks, 82 armored vehicles, 100 self-propelled howitzers, 24 helicopters, and organic heavy weapons.²⁸

The YNA strategic plan was expected. The objective in first phase was for the main forces to take control of all border crossings, the international airport, and other

important infrastructure centers. In the second phase (the same day) the objective was to transfer control of the border crossings to a special brigade of the Federal Secretariat for Internal Affairs which was flown in from Belgrade. YNA operational reserves stayed in their barracks and were prepared to support, if that became necessary. The YNA leadership cross-attached armored and motorized infantry units. The operational units were composed of two motorized companies or a battalion with one or two tank companies. Depending on the size of border crossing, they further split these forces and occupied all international and local border-crossing points. They used similar tactics to occupy the national airport and other important infrastructure centers.

In the first contact between our Defense Minister and a YNA general, who was evidently chosen to communicate with Slovene military leaders, the general burst into loud guffaws and very arrogantly said:” How are you Mr. Minister? There is nothing to discuss. Perhaps later, with someone else. At last we are on the move. In two hours you will be finished!”²⁹ The YNA was so convinced of its power, that the units went into action with only two to three days of food and water. Only the commanders and the officers had been briefed on the plan. The soldiers did not know where they should go or what was their assigned task. So great was their confusion that when they arrived at the border they took positions in the direction of foreign countries. After a while, their commanders turned them around.

8.2. The Slovenian Strategy

The Slovenian defense forces started fighting with 16,000 TD troops. Just 400 officers and NCOs were on active duty, the rest were reserve officers, NCOs and soldiers. The police forces contributed 10,000 officers, 6000 on active duty and 4000 reserve. A

great deal of the positions (road blockades, supply, medical treatment) were manned by 20,000 unarmed national defence members and 100,000 civil defence members. Except for light anti-tank weapons, 60 and 82mm mortars, 30 anti-aircraft launcher SA-7 Grail, and 20mm AA Guns, they did not have any heavy weapons.³⁰

The Slovenian defence forces' objectives were very simple: initially, blockade all roads towards the borders and other important objectives and obstruct the penetration of YNA forces. In the second phase, the intent was to seal off the attackers, cut their lines of communication from behind, surround them, cut off their supplies, prevent the arrival of reinforcements, and, eventually, destroy them.

The initial operations were very difficult. Most of the TD members were common civilians only a few days earlier. The time since they had been drafted was so short that many had not even gotten used to wearing uniforms, let alone to the feeling of being in a real war situation. But when they saw the first consequence of YNA attack, the first burning tank or wounded soldier, they quickly became proper soldiers.

8.3. Chronology of Events

The YNA military attack started at 0115 hours on June 27, 1991, when the mechanized light anti-aircraft battery from Croatia, crossed the Slovene border. The YNA units in Slovenian barracks left their barracks between 0200 and 0400. Almost all YNA units reached their goals that day. The Slovenian road blockade did not succeed. The damage done by YNA breakthrough was enormous. Only one YNA column, coming from Croatia, was stopped. During the same day, the YNA's second phase started, and the helicopters carrying the Federal Police took off for the border posts. Both sides suffered their first casualties. By the end of first day of war, the Slovenian defenders had

lost their initial fear, and soon performed like a well-oiled machine. They threw a ring around the military barracks, stopped the remaining columns, and sealed off YNA units on the border. The YNA was going mad and called for the air support. With missiles and bombs it attacked Slovenian forces, the international airport and the main television and radio transmitters. Civilian targets were hit indiscriminately. TD and police units gradually established a balance of power and began energetic attacks. As a result, the first YNA soldiers began defecting and seven of the border posts held out against YNA assaults. A TD unit seized a large army depot, and the captured armaments immediately were dispersed to units.

The commanding officers of the YNA forces faced increasing difficulties from hour to hour. Almost all soldiers of Slovenian, Croatian and Albanian nationality had already defected. There was strife among the officers. Despite strict disciplinary measures and shots at the backs of the fleeing soldiers, discipline broke down rapidly. By the fifth day of military action, the commander of the 5th Army District in Zagreb, which was responsible for Slovenia and most of Croatia, was replaced. After each passing hour the Slovenian forces controlled more territory. The stocks of infantry and artillery weapons also were growing. Some regions faced difficulties accommodating large numbers of prisoners of war. Many simply were given civilian clothes and money for the train ticket home.³¹

Morale also plunged on the Serbian home front. Reacting to the list of prisoners and casualties which, according to international conventions, Slovenia had sent to the Serbian Red Cross, Serbian mothers and wives broke into the Parliament. They demanded the truth, and that the Serbian soldiers be withdrawn from Slovenia. The

public media informed the people of Serbia that the YNA suffered only a few casualties and had lost no prisoners, but the reality was much different.

After ten days of war, many YNA general's mistakes, and Slovenian forces in control 99% of its territory, the YNA finally accepted an armistice. The commander of YNA General Staff finally made his long awaited TV appearance. Although he was still intimidating, he nevertheless reached the sober conclusion that forcing the YNA into Slovenia was senseless. He announced that new proposals would be forwarded to the Presidency of the SFRY.³²

9. CONCLUSION

Slovenia made smart political decisions that respected the valid constitution and laws. The vigorous will and decisiveness of its people brought success in this fight for independence. As a result, the Slovene people realized their thousand-year dream while avoiding completely the catastrophic instability that has plagued the other Yugoslav republics. The Slovenes also had good luck because only a few ethnic Serbs lived in Slovenia. Additionally, because YNA lines of communication ran across Croatia, where at this time Croatia had formed a strong police force. Finally, the European Community officially recognized Slovenia on January 15, 1992. Many other countries quickly followed. On May 22, 1992, Slovenia became a permanent member of the United Nations. After that Slovenes knew their way ahead!

Underestimating their adversary and overestimating their own power was the YNA's fatal mistake. The generals, convinced of quick success, forgot elementary military rules. The YNA operational reserve stayed blockaded in their barracks, and the

strategic reserve was not been called up. Even the air force and helicopter attacks did not bring expected results.

Belgrade was not prepared for total war in Slovenia. Nor were they prepared when the situation in Croatia became unstable too. Under these circumstances, the Yugoslav Presidency decided to retreat from Slovenia. This resolution came as surprise to both sides, even to the EC monitors. But Belgrade knew why. They did not want to lose the next Yugoslav Republic – Croatia (with a large ethnic Serb population), which the YNA had left until too late for effective resistance.

Yugoslavia decayed not because Slovenia left this Balkan chaos but because the communist system in this country did not work. Unfortunately, some people in Serbia still today do not believe that. And the price for not believing is very high. Living together with so many different nationalities and religions is possible in democratic systems, where a diversity of people share the same rights and obligations. In Yugoslavia, where the words democracy and equality existed only on a paper, where there was so much hatred from Second World War, and where certain people or nations were privileged, peace could not be sustained.

Word count: 5990

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Janez Jansa, The Making of the Slovenian State 1988 – 1992 (Ljubljana, Zalozba Mladinska Knjiga, 1994), 93.
- ² For example the association agreement with EU and WEU, OSCE, PfP, World Trade Organization,...
- ³ Josip Broz-Tito, Croat, revolutionary and president of the SFRY from 1945 to 1980; Edvard Kardelj, Slovene, the main ideologue of Communist and later the Workers and Social Self-Management programs; Vladimir Bakaric, Croat, close Tito's collaborator and politician in Central Communist Parties.
- ⁴ Dr. Janko Prunk, A Brief History of Slovenia (Ljubljana, Zalozba Grad, 1996), 117.
- ⁵ Laura Silber and Allan Little Yugoslavia, Death of a Nation (New York, Penguin Group, 1997).
- ⁶ Dimitrij Rupel, "Slovenia's Shift from the Balkans to Central Europe," in Independent Slovenia, ed. by Jill Benderly and Evan Kraft (London, Macmillan Press LTD, 1997), 187.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 119.
- ⁸ Author's thought.
- ⁹ Before, the right of individual nations to self-determination and secession was written only in the Yugoslav Constitution.
- ¹⁰ Bojan Suligoj, Slobodan Milosevic (Carlisle, AWC, Course 1 – Strategic Leadership, 1998).
- ¹¹ Benderly and Kraft, Independent Slovenia, 204.
- ¹² Dr. Janko Prunk, A Brief History of Slovenia (Ljubljana, Zalozba Grad, 1996), 119.
- ¹³ Ethnic groups: Slovene 91%, Croat 3%, Serb 2%, Muslim 1%, Italian and Hungarian minority 1%, other 2%.
- ¹⁴ Prunk, A Brief History of Slovenia, 126.
- ¹⁵ Janez Jansa, The Making of the Slovenian State 1988 – 1992 (Ljubljana, Zalozba Mladinska Knjiga, 1994), 94.
- ¹⁶ Slovenian Parliament, Law of Defence, 1983 (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, no. 35/83).
- ¹⁷ Approximately 50% arms and military equipment of Slovenian TD were stored inside facilities and under indirect control of YNA, other was under direct control of TD.
- ¹⁸ Ivan Hocevar, Order No.SZ 16/4-90 on 24.01.1990 (HQ TD of the Republic of Slovenia).
- ¹⁹ Ivan Gorenjak, Order No.SZ- on 15.05.1990 (Regional HQ of TD West Stajerska).
- ²⁰ Jansa, The Making of the Slovenian State 1988 – 1992, 47.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 50.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 55.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 62.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 73.
- ²⁵ Author's thought based on MOD intelligence reports in 1990.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 67.
- ²⁷ Prunk, A Brief History of Slovenia, 126.
- ²⁸ Jansa, The Making of the Slovenian State 1988 – 1992, 61 and Janez J. Svajncer, Vojna in Vojaska Zgodovina Slovencev (Ljubljana, 1992), 214.
- ²⁹ Jansa, The Making of the Slovenian State 1988 – 1992, 160.
- ³⁰ Janez J. Svajncer, Vojna in Vojaska Zgodovina Slovencev (Ljubljana, 1992), 214.
- ³¹ Jansa, The Making of the Slovenian State 1988 – 1992, 178.
- ³² These proposals were never public announced.

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ABBREVIATION

GHQ AF SFRY – General Headquarter Army Forces of Socialistic Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

GS YNA – General Staff of Yugoslav National Army

YAF – Yugoslav Air Forces

YNA – Yugoslav National Army

MSND – Maneuvering Structure of the National Defence

ND – National Defence

RSTD – Republic Staff of Territorial Defence

SFRY – Socialistic Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

TD – Territorial Defence