

Films of the Anti-Nazi Resistance



OLLI Winter 2024
*Week 5: **Yugoslavia***

Today's Film: Battle of Naretva



Battle of Naretva (Yugoslavia, 1969)

- Director: Veljko Bulajic
- Principle Cast
 - Yul Brenner
 - Sergei Bondarchuk
 - Curt Jurgens
 - Silva Koscina
 - Hardy Kruger
 - Franco Nero
 - Orson Wells

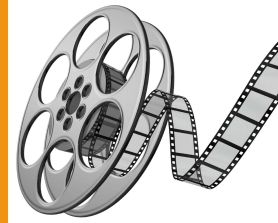
Today's Film: Battle of Naretva



Production

- The most expensive Yugoslav film (in absolute dollars) ever made. \$12 million (\$102 million in 2024 dollars).
- Extras included 10,000 soldiers from the Yugoslav Army playing the various military units.
- Enormous attention to details of uniforms and equipment, including modifying several Soviet T-34/85 tanks to look like German Tiger tanks. Most of the Partisan field artillery shown is made up of authentic captured German weapons.
- The Italian light L-3/35 tankettes shown are very authentic. The Partisans captured a dozen of them in this battle and formed a tank company equipped with them.
- The director insisted on actually blowing up the real bridge across the Naretva Gorge instead of using a model. When they blew the bridge, the smoke from the explosion made the footage unusable., So they rebuilt the bridge and again blew it up, and the smoke still made it unusable. So they used a model.

Today's Film: Battle of Naretva



Reception

- Oscar nominated for Best Foreign Film of 1969. (Russian actor/director Sergei Bondarchuk, who plays the Partisan artillery commander in this film, had won the Foreign Film Oscar the previous year for War and Peace.)
- Praised for its attention to detail and general faithfulness to the historical events, but clearly represents the Yugoslav Government's slant on the events.
- It is now considered one of the finest Yugoslav films ever made.

The Yugoslav Partisan Movement



- Two Major Factions of Anti-German Resistance
- 1. The Partisan Movement
 - Led by Josip Broz “Tito.”
 - Communist in ideology
 - Aimed at a unified Yugoslav State with ethnic-regional self-rule,
 - Reached across ethnic boundaries. Included Serb, Croat, Bosnian (Moslem), Montenegrin, and Jewish fighters. As the mountains and forests of Bosnia and Croatia were the best terrain for Partisan action, most of the recruits came from there early in the fighting.
 - Although the Serbs eventually made up the largest component of the Partisan Army, Tito was a Croat.

The Yugoslav Partisan Movement



• 2. The Chetniks

- Led by Dragoljub "Draža" Mihailović
- Monarchist and Serbian nationalist in ideology. Aimed at a Serbian-ruled monarchical state, with traditional Serbian regions "cleansed" of non-Serbian populations (Croats, Bosnian Moslems, Jews).
- Long-term goals were expulsion of Axis occupying forces, but short-term goals were defeat of the Communist Partisans.
- Draconian German reprisals against Serbian populations in late 1941 (*100 civilians shot for each German soldier killed, 50 shot for each German soldier wounded*) convinced Mihailović to cease attacking the Germans.
- Adopted a policy of "soft" collaboration with the Axis. (*He characterized it as "using the enemy."*)
- Croatian and Moslem civilians killed by Chetniks totaled between 50,000 and 68,000

The Partition of Yugoslavia

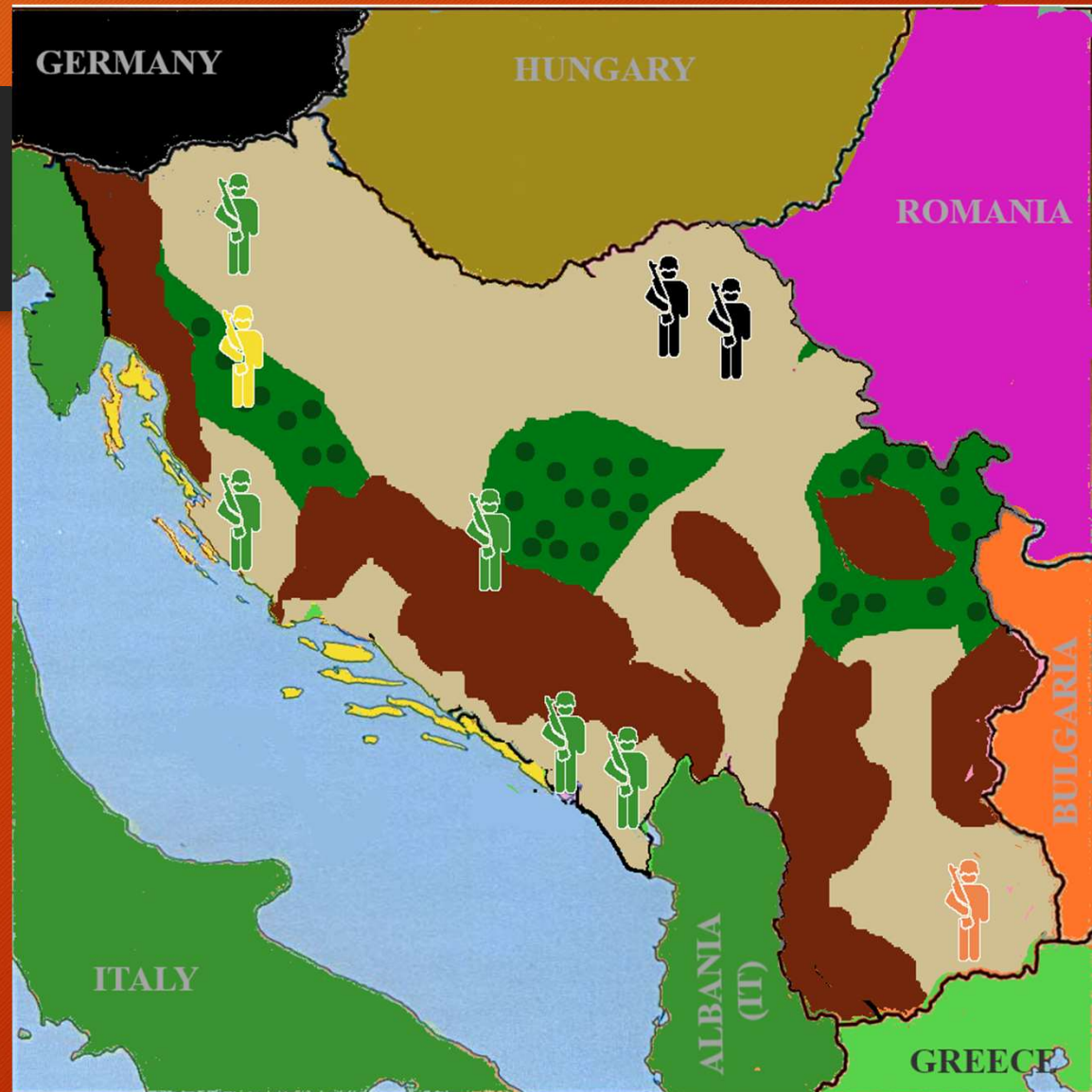


- Yugoslavia divided into several zones of occupation.
 - Croatia: An independent pro-Axis puppet government, partially occupied by Italy
 - Bosnia and Herzegovina: Occupied mostly by Italy and Croatia at first.
 - Montenegro: Occupied by Italy
 - Serbia: Occupied by Germany (A small part occupied by Hungary)
 - Macedonia: Occupied by Bulgaria



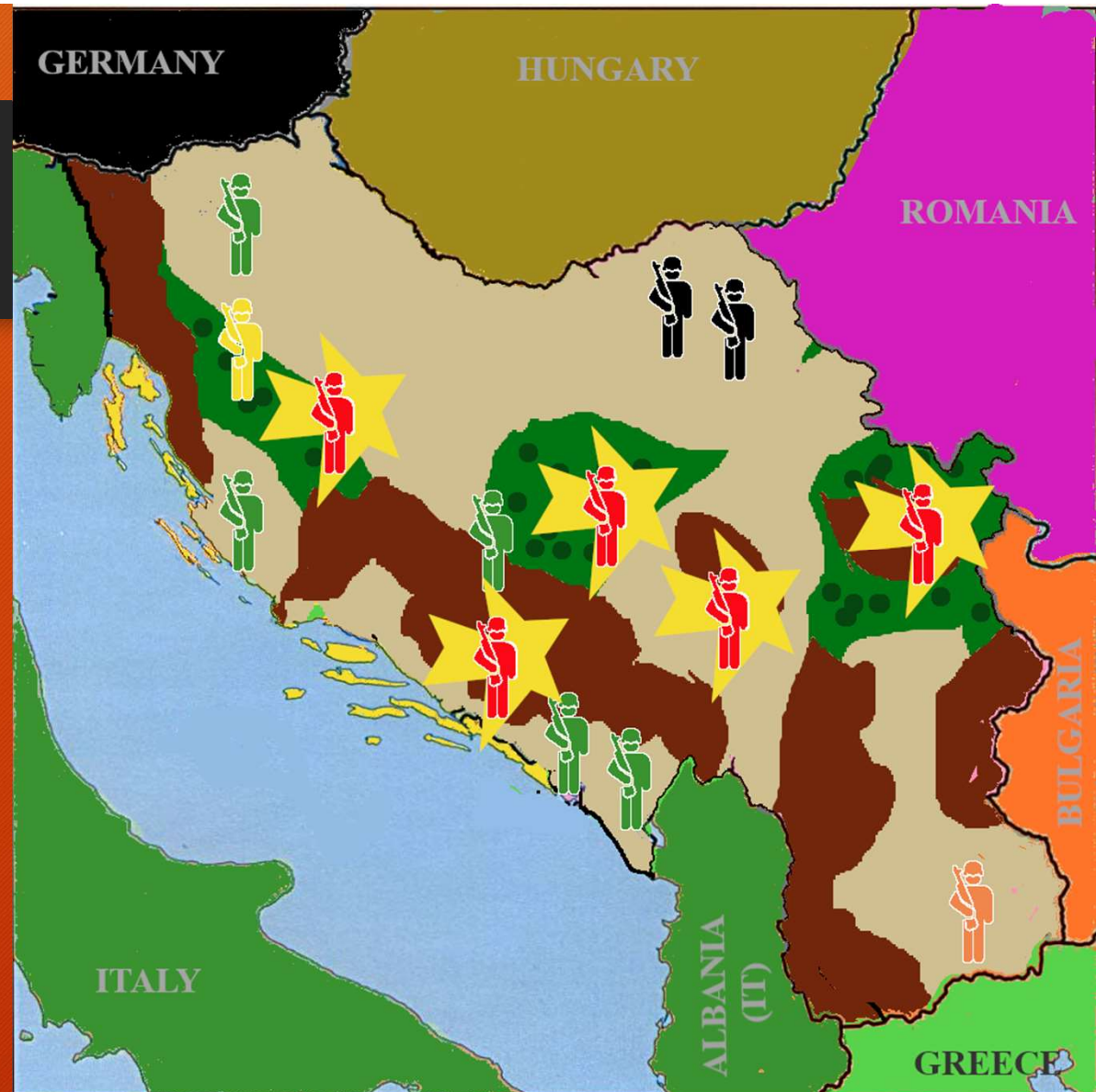
The Terrain of Yugoslavia

- Northern and Eastern Yugoslavia are more open and rolling
- Southern and Western Yugoslavia are more mountainous.
- The best terrain for guerrilla activity is forests and mountains, where light forces can move more easily than more heavily equipped and motorized formations.
- Each garrison icon represents an Axis corps of between 30,000 and 50,000 men.
- Black: German
- Green: Italian
- Yellow: Croatian
- Tan: Bulgarian



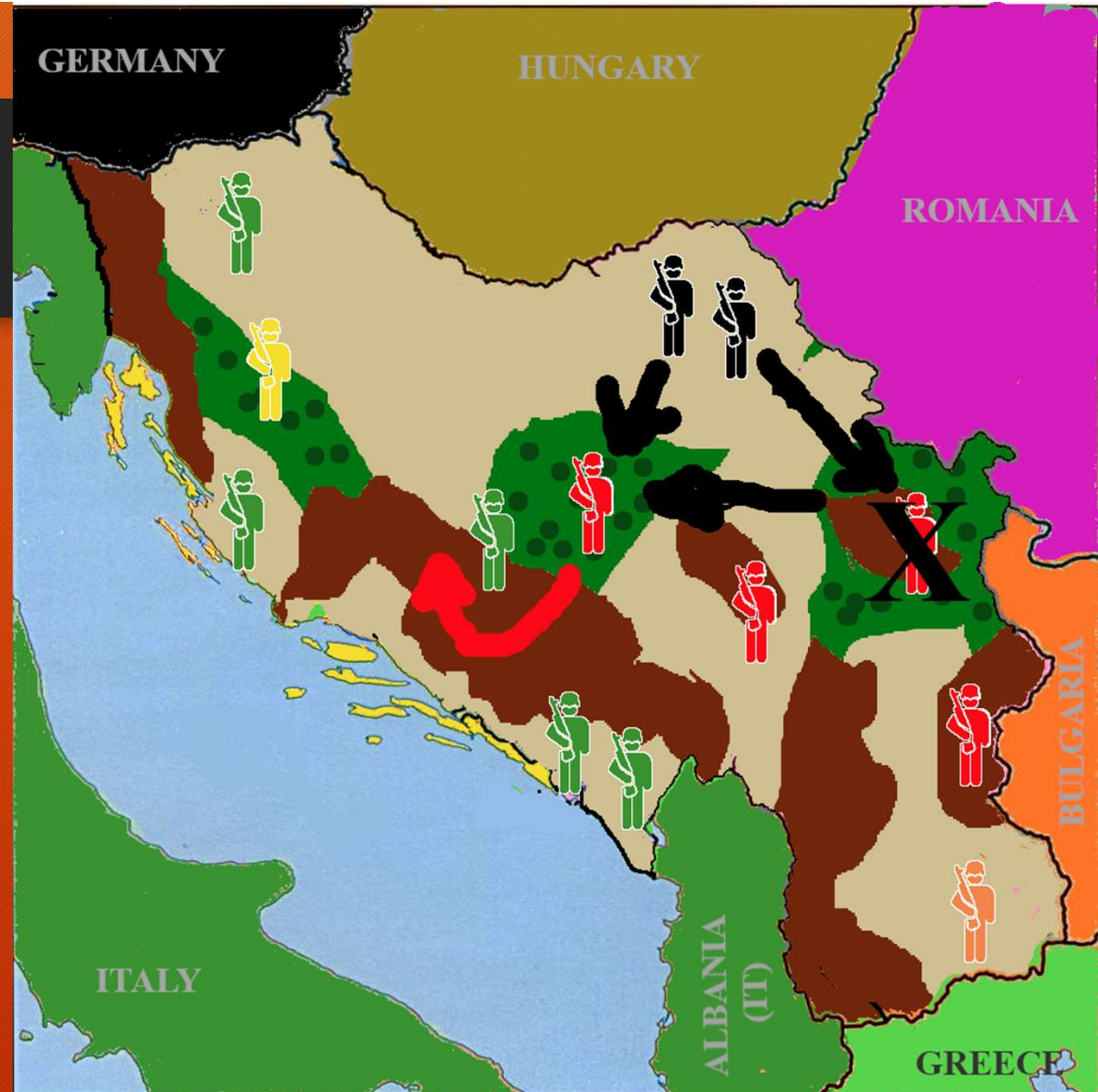
The Partisan Rising July 1941

- The Partisans began organizing in March of 1941 and in July a national rising quickly gained control of much of the Yugoslav countryside.
- The main concentrations were in difficult terrain but the appearance of local bands of armed fighters was very widespread at first.



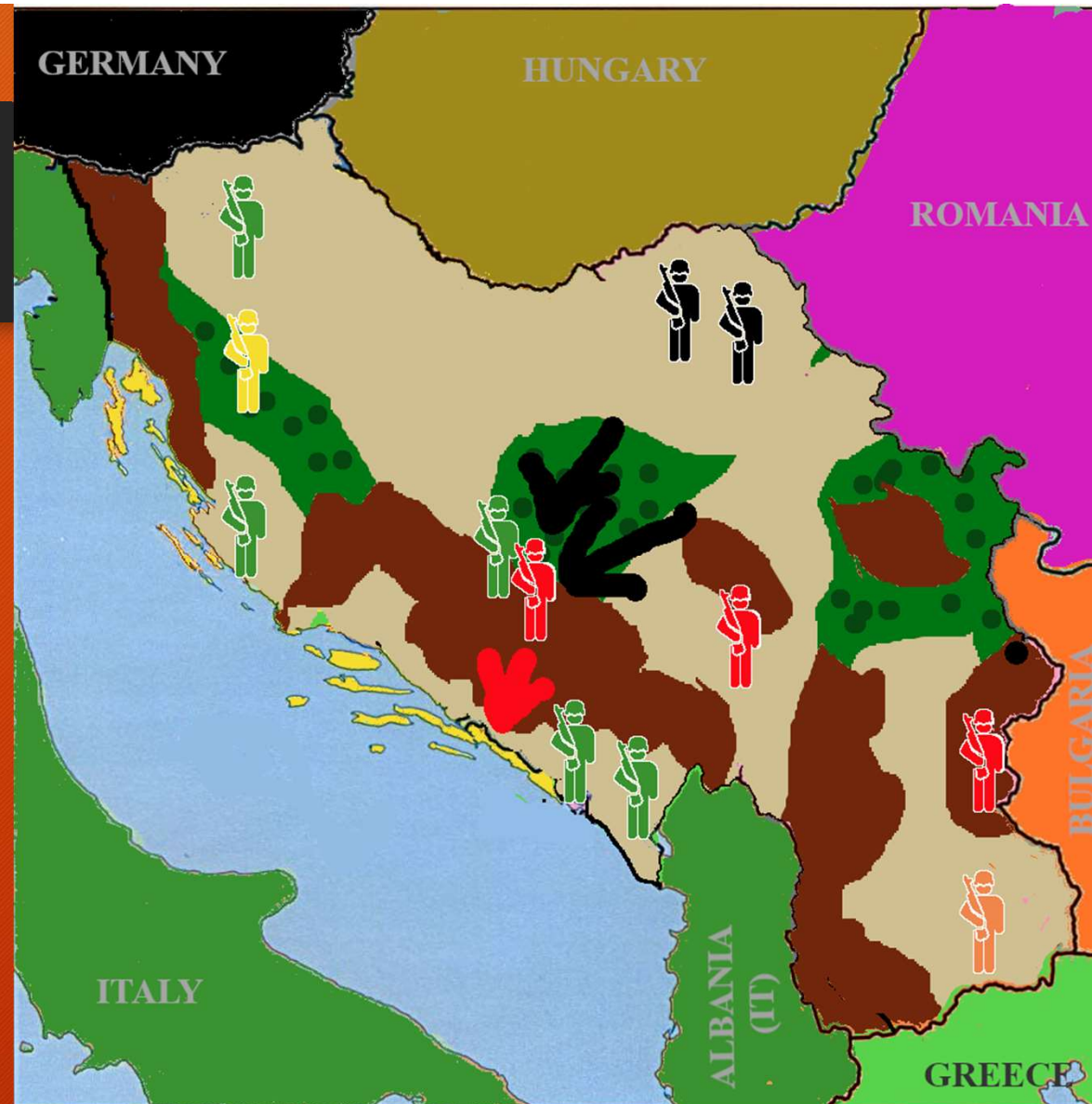
The First Axis Offensive Sept-Nov 1941

- The Germans attacked and overran the “Uzice Republic” in Eastern Serbia, then turned on the main Partisan concentration in central Serbia.
- The Germans massed six divisions with about 80,000 troops against them.
- Tito’s main force at this time had about 20,000 fighters, but poorly armed and still organizing.
- The partisans barely escaped into the mountains of Bosnia, then marched north to the Sarajevo area, but suffered very heavy casualties: 4,000 dead, 4,000 missing, and almost 7,000 wounded.



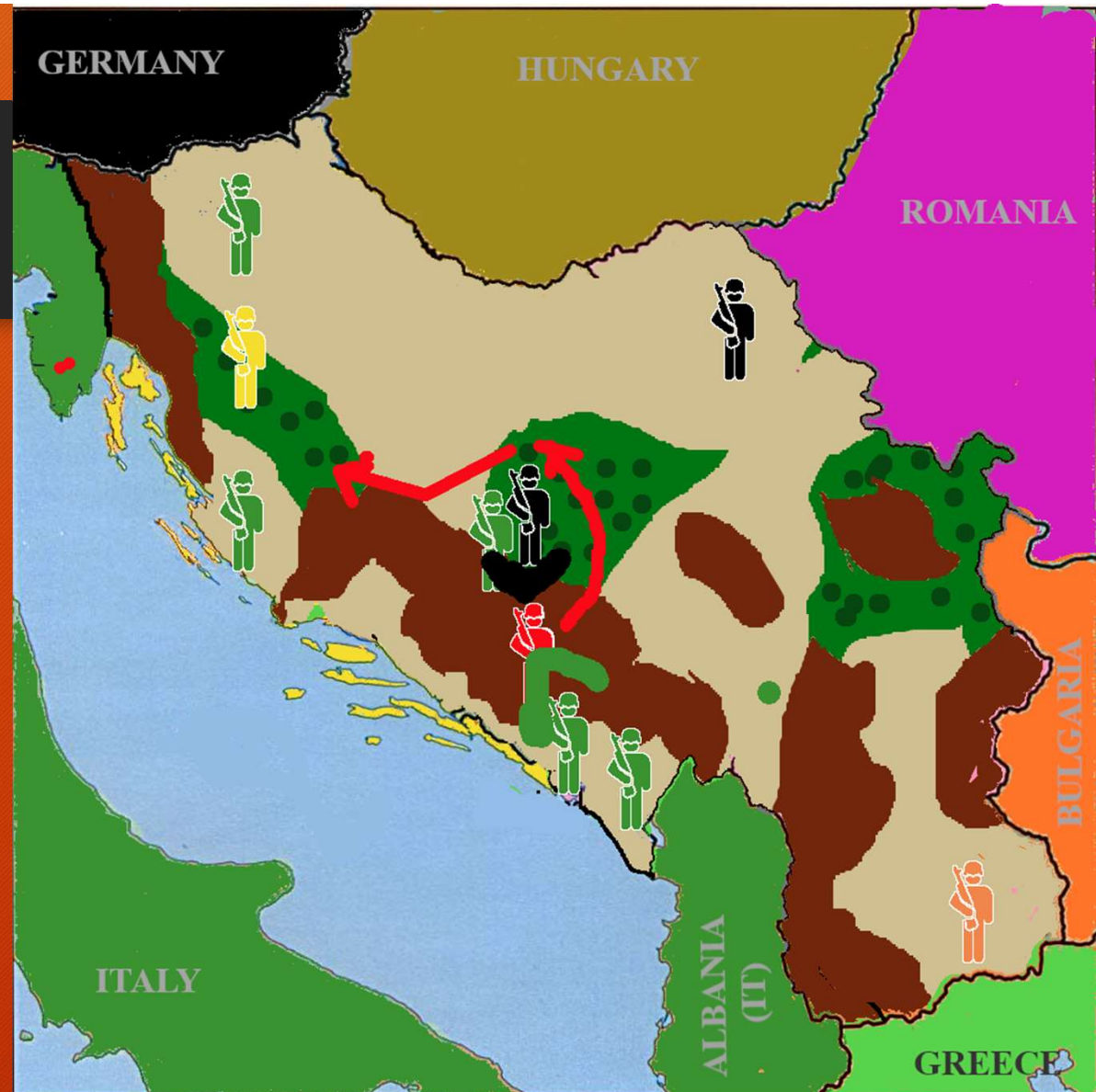
The Second Axis Offensive January 1942

- Although total Partisan strength was about 80,000 at this time, it was widely spread out in many small bands. Tito's main concentration in Eastern Bosnia had about 8,000 fighters in organized units.
- There were also about 20,000 Chetniks in the area, and for the time being they cooperated with their Partisans.
- The Germans Attacked with two reinforced divisions plus about a division worth of Croatian militia, in all 35,000 men.
- The Chetniks let the Germans pass through their positions and either disbanded or retreated into German-occupied eastern Serbia.
- The Partisans took heavy losses (*about 2,000 killed or captured*), but drove through the Croatian irregulars and escaped.



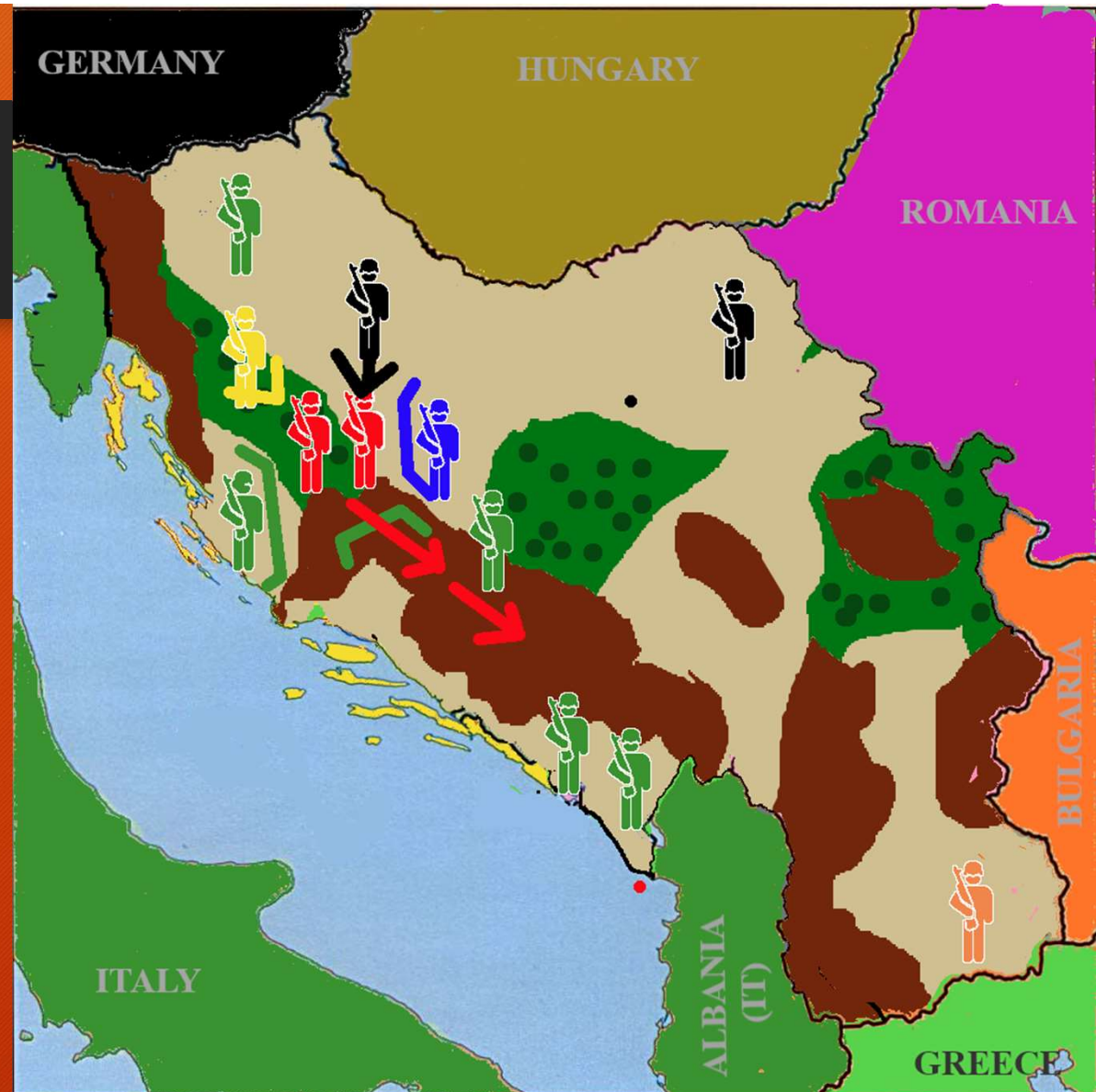
The Third Axis Offensive April May 1942

- Tito's main Partisan combat group was reduced to about 4,000 fighters.
- The Germans planned a concentric attack with one division of Germans, three Italian divisions, and about two divisions worth of Croatian militia, probably about 40,000 men.
- The Partisans were again able to break through a weak spot in the cordon and march north and then west to reach the mountains of eastern Bosnia and link up with other Partisan units forming there.
- Casualties amounted to about 1500 killed, 700 wounded, and 2,500 captured (of which 259 were executed). The low point of the Partisan movement.



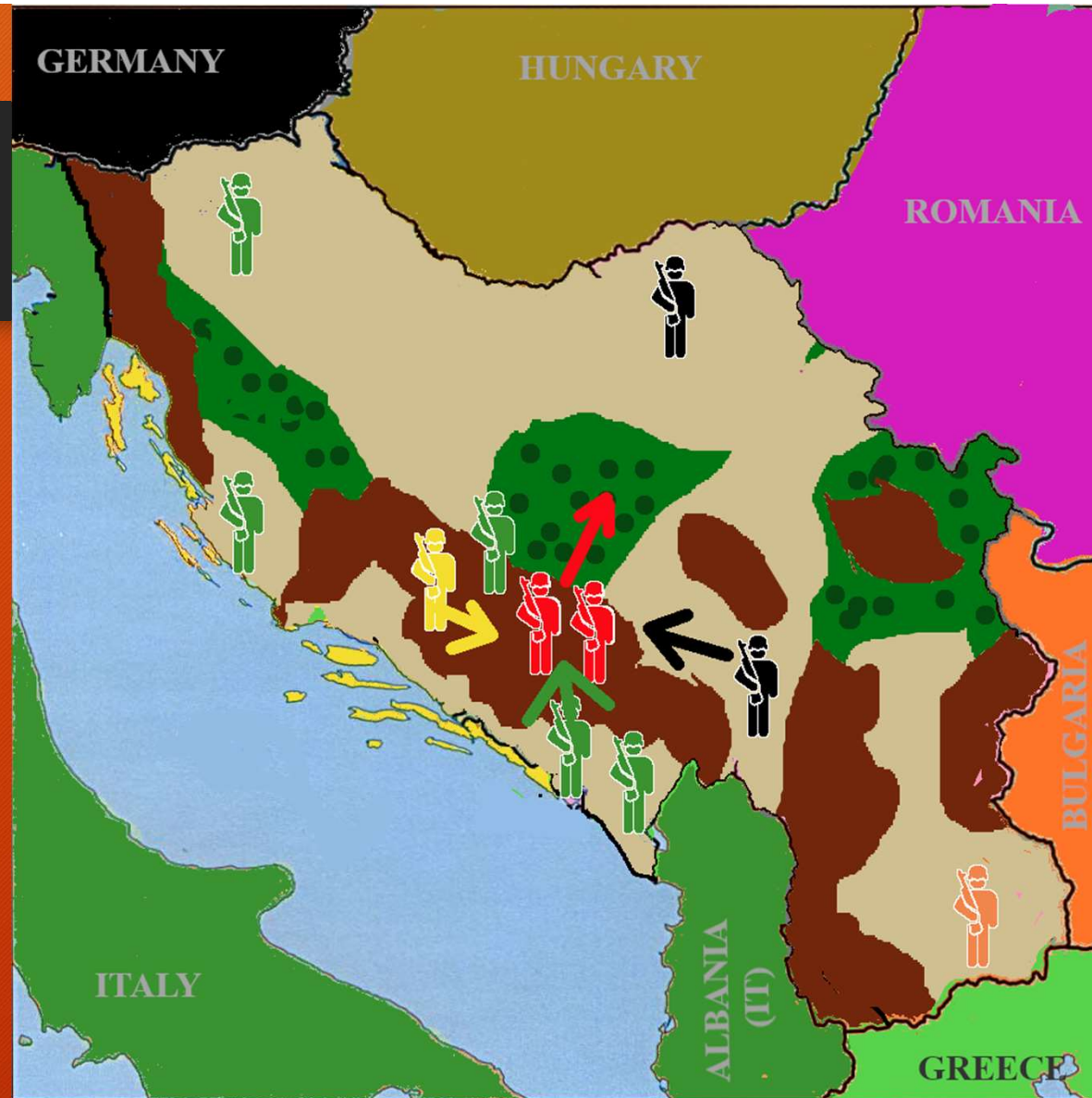
The Fourth Axis Offensive January-March 1943

- *Plan Weiss*, or Battle of Naretva
- Almost a year of recruiting had increased Partisan strength to about 20,000 combatants in three divisions in Tito's main combat grouping. (Total Partisan strength in small groups throughout Yugoslavia at that time was about 130,000 spread throughout the country.)
- The Germans planned a concentric attack with 90,000 German, Italian, and Croatian troops, plus between 10,000 and 15,000 Chetniks, nominally on the other side but cooperating with the Italians to cordon in the Partisans in the southeast.
- The Partisans launched several successful attacks against the the Germans and Croats to delay the offensive, and then broke through the Italians and Chetniks. They escaped southeast, taking their wounded and many civilians with them.
- Casualties amounted to about 10,000 killed, wounded, and missing, and 2,000 captured (of which 600 were executed).



The Fifth Axis Offensive May-June 1943

- Despite the heavy losses suffered at the Battle of Naretva, by May Partisan recruiting (and recovering wounded) had brought their strength back up to 20,000 fighters with the main combat group.
- The Axis massed 125,000 troops for another attempt to surround and destroy Tito's army.
- Again the partisans suffered heavy casualties (between 6,000 and 7,500 killed and wounded), but again managed to cut their way out, this time to the north.



The Later Campaign



- The surrender of Italy to the Allies in September of 1943 removed the bulk of the Axis occupation troops from Yugoslavia. These were partially replaced by more Bulgarians, a larger Croatian Army, and more German units.
- But after the end of 1943, the collapse of the Axis front in the east meant there were no longer the assets to conduct large anti-partisan campaigns.
- The Partisans grew quickly from that point on. At the time of the Italian surrender there were about 200,000 Partisans (probably less than half with the main combat group). By the end of the year the number grew to 330,000, including several tens of thousands of Italian soldiers who joined the Partisans rather than be disarmed and imprisoned by the Germans.
- Once eastern Serbia was secured, partisan recruitment rose and by the end of 1944 there were 650,000 fighters under arms, in 52 combat divisions grouped in four field armies.

The Partisans: Key Numbers



Region	Late 1941	Late 1942	Sept 1943	Late 1943	Late 1944	
Bosnia/Herzegovina	20,000	60,000	89,000	108,000	100,000	
Croatia	7,000	48,000	78,000	122,000	150,000	
Serbia (Kosovo)	5,000	6,000	6,000	7,000	20,000	
Macedonia	1,000	2,000	10,000	7,000	66,000	
Montenegro	22,000	6,000	10,000	24,000	30,000	
Serbia	24,000	9,000	16,000	27,000	244,000	
Slovenia	2,000	8,000	6,000	34,000	38,000	
Total Strength	81,000	135,000	215,000	329,999	648,000	
Killed in action	18,896	24,700	NA	48,478	72,925	164,999
Died of Wounds	3,127	4,194	NA	7,923	7,800	23,044
Wounded	29,300	31,200	NA	61,730	130,000	252,230
Missing	3,800	6,300	NA	5,423	7,800	23,323
Total Casualties	51,996	62,000	NA	118,631	210,725	440,552