

Dragan Sotirović

A Serbian officer of the Home Army

Summary

The doctoral dissertation shows the war biography of major Dragan Sotirović aka “Draža” (1913-1987) based on available archive materials, the memories of event participants as well as historical studies.

Dragan Sotirović was a Yugoslav Army commissioned officer and fought against the Germans in the defence war in April 1941, and then in Dragoljub Mihailović’s Chetnik forces that were formed in the Ravna Gora region. He was Mihailović’s adjutant and then Chief of Staff of Chetnik units in Šumadia. In 1943 he became a prisoner of a German POW camp in Rawa Ruska, Poland. After a daring escape that took place during convoy he joined the Home Army (the AK) in which he became an actual commander of 14th Jazlowiec Uhlan Regiment in the Lwow District of the Home Army. After that he commanded a company in the Warta Group of the AK in Rzeszów area. He was awarded *Virtuti Militari* for his organization and military credits and promoted to the rank of Major. On Communists’ seizing power he helped his soldiers threatened with repressions in their evacuation to the West to Polish Armed Forces in the West.

Chapter I, *Serbia. Mihajlović’s Chetniks versus Tito’s Guerillas*, shows general historical background of Serbia during the years of WWII since German attack on Yugoslavia, through guerilla war which was continued both by the forces loyal to the government on exile commanded by Mihajlović and Moscow subordinate Tito’s forces. Both forces fighting against the Germans remained in conflict to each other which led them to enter some tactical short term alliances with the Germans. At times the two groups were hostile to each other more than to the occupants.

Chapter II, *From Serbian Land to Poland*, presents Dragan Sotirović’s participation in events in Serbia in the years 1941-1942. Experiences gathered at that time shaped “Draža’s” opinion of WWII conflict – it was a deadly fight of democracy of independent states with totalitarianism represented by the Nazi and the Communists. Subsequent subchapters: *The Beginning of the Way*, *First Meeting with Dragoljub Mihajlović*, *Šumadija and Kraguljevac*, *In the Hands of Gestapo*, present Sotirović’s fate, begging with childhood, school years, then military education, an army officer career in commanding and action through the first days and months of war in which Yugoslavia was pulled, to one the most important chapters in “Draža’s” life – his participation in the Ravna Gora Chetnik movement at the side of Mihajlović, commanding of military operations, conspiratorial operations, tragedy of Kraguljevac and arrest by the Germans. The last subchapter: *Bosnian Golgotha*, touches on the events in which Sotirović did not take part because he was in Poland at that time. However, he was very much interested in them and later was writing about them enclosing a report by J. Milković to his memoir book *Europe on Auction*.

Chapter III, *Poland and Serbia – Historical and Cultural Background of Dragan Sotirović’s Fate*, tries to find parallels between the history of both countries referring it to the life and activity of Serbian officer of the Home Army whose historical consciousness was one of the most important motifs of his actions. This chapter combines two parts of Sotirović’s life: Serbian and Polish.

Chapter IV, *14th Jazlowiec Uhlan Regiment of AK*, recounts of Sotirović’s career of a commander in Poland in the Lwow District of the Home Army when he was the head of the 14 Jazlowiec Uhlan Regiment of AK following the traditions of the famous Cavalry unit whose beginnings date back to WWI and Poland’s regaining independence. Its historical background can also be found in this chapter. The subsequent subchapters: *“Draža” the Head*

of Reconstructed 14th Regiment, Szolomyja, Battle of Lwow, The New Occupation, In the Light of Documents, Arrest and Escape, all show subsequent stages of this unit's history: beginning with its formation whose task was entrusted to Sotirović, through the protection of Polish people from the attacks of Ukrainians, fights with the UPA (Ukrainian Insurgent Army), to Operation Tempest and liberation of Lwow from German occupation together with a Soviet unit, the betrayal of the eastern ally, arrest of Lwow AK commanders including "Draža" and finally his yet another escape from captivity, this time from the Soviet one.

Chapter V, "*Warta*" Group, with subchapters: *The Negotiator, Further Fight – the Agony of Resistance Movement in Poland, Leaving the Forest, "Draža" in the Eyes of "Executioner"*, shows by the example of Rzeszów area the languishing of resistance movement in Poland deprived of Allies' political support. That is, the same situation Chetniks in Serbia found themselves in. "Warta" Group was supposed to be a base for a possible siege of Lwow if again like in 1919 it would be necessary to defend it from the Ukrainians. However, the Yalta decisions taking Lwow away from the Poles put an end to that plan and to prolonging guerilla resistance without any chance of a positive military result made it useless which soldiers realized well enough.

Chapter VI, *Murnau – People of "Draža"*, analyses the figure of Sotirović paying special attention to his activity as an officer, a commander who not only demands dedication from his soldiers but also himself is dedicated to them and worries about their safety and fate also after military actions ended and in the circumstances in which they are still in danger coming from the new authorities. "Draža" made a great effort to evacuate his subordinates to Murnau. A former German POW camp for officers after the liberation located there became an asylum for Polish troops coming from different parts of Europe.

Chapter VII, *Europe on Auction. Europe in the Eyes of "Draža" and "Draža" in his own Eyes*, analyses, interprets and evaluates the most important written work left by Sotirović being at the same time one of the most important documents and sources for the author of this dissertation. It constitutes a combination of a biography and a historical book. Sotirović expresses his political opinions and forms his own assessment of the situation of Europe due to WWII. This assessment is highly critical to the Western Allies, who disappointed and betrayed their loyal allies including Poles and Serbs and fulfilled all Stalin's demands. The end of this chapter refers to romantic idea of the fight "for our freedom and yours" and shows "Draža", and also his other contemporaries who implemented this idea fighting in WWII for the Polish cause.

Chapter VIII, *Memorandum*, contains a discussion of Dragan Sotirović's spiritual last will which he left written in Polish. This document has not yet been analysed in Polish historiography. Luckily, it was preserved and can be found in the resources of the Institute of National Remembrance.

Dragan Sotirović's biography a hero of two nations is an excellent illustration of the thesis that not only Poles were fighting for the freedom of other nations. Also, the representatives of other nations were fighting for the freedom of Poland showing attachment to the tradition of political romanticism indicated in the ethos of the fight "for our freedom and yours".