

4-17-2021

Fuer Kaiser und Heimat. Svetozar Borevic, South Slav Habsburg Nationalism, and the First World War

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Für Kaiser und Heimat:

Svetozar Boroević, South Slav Habsburg Nationalism, and the First World War

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
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Date of Approval:
March 30, 2021

Keywords: Serb, Croat, nationality, identity, Austria-Hungary

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DEDICATION

For continually inspiring me to press onward, I dedicate this work to my boys, John Michael and Riley.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the support of a score of individuals over more years than I would care to admit. First and foremost, my thanks go to Kees Boterbloem, Darcie Fontaine, Golfo Alexopoulos, and Scott Perry, whose invaluable feedback was crucial in shaping this work into what it is today. My deepest thanks also goes to Graydon Tunstall, who first suggested Borojević as a topic of study, and guided the early stages of this project. In addition, I would like to thank Leo Nicoll, S.J., emeritus professor at Loyola University New Orleans, who many years ago inspired a keen interest in the Habsburg Monarchy and its successor states.

Also, thanks go to Vannina Wurm, who was an incredible asset in gaining access to and becoming more familiar with the Austrian State Archive in Vienna. I would also like to thank John Schindler, Sabrina Ramet, and Jože Pirjevec, who were very helpful when I reached out to them about various aspects of the work.

My thanks also go to my friends and colleagues at Auburndale High School, especially Tye Bruno, Jennifer Mills, and Aaron Bellwood.

Finally, and by far most of all, words cannot express what I owe to my wife, Amanda, without whose unwavering support I never would have made it this far. Thank you for never allowing me to give up!

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the function of national identity and the degree to which it is a recent development, particularly in the region of the Balkan Peninsula populated by the South Slav (Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian) peoples. The study examines the question of whether in the period prior to 1918, when much of this territory was part of the multinational empire of Austria-Hungary, was it possible for individuals to be entirely loyal to both their national group and to the construct of the multinational state simultaneously.

In order to answer this question, the dissertation surveys the career of Svetozar Boroević von Bojna (1856-1920), a high-ranking officer with the Habsburg Monarchy's armed forces who was of Serb-Croatian ethnicity. The dissertation examines each stage of his career and his commands during the First World War, the Eastern (Carpathian) Front, and the Isonzo Front, as well as his fate following the war, and demonstrates how the issue of nationality and national identity impacted Boroević's relationship with the ruling classes of the Monarchy as well as others of South Slav nationality. A concluding section challenges the prevailing narrative about the success of the nationalization project among the South Slav peoples at the end of the First World War, and concurs with other recent scholarship about national identification among other groups of the Habsburg Monarchy.

INTRODUCTION

*But special praise should be given
To General Boroević, the Commandant
Who so courageously led the troops
And directed them with a secure hand¹*

Taken together, the wars originating in the Balkan Peninsula at the beginning and the end of the twentieth century appeared to signal the ultimate verdict on the viability of the multinational state as a political construct. From a standpoint of assuring peaceful, “modern” development, the ideal state construct, one might understandably argue, is for each individual ethnic group to comprise its own (preferably independent) nation-state. Paradoxically, however, nationalism and the expression of national identity have been regarded as very recent developments; save for outliers such as Philip Gorski, the majority opinion of scholars on the national issue (e.g., historians and sociologists, as demonstrated by the works of Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner among others) places the genesis of nationalism as a driving force in European society to the late eighteenth century at the earliest.² Since that time, according to the conventional

¹ “Den Helden an der Isonzofront,” Anonymous and undated. *Nachlass Boroevic*, v. 17. See the Historiography section of this chapter for a discussion of the use of the materials from Boroević’s *Nachlass* and other archival materials.

² Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006); Philip S. Gorski, “The Mosaic Moment: An Early Modernist Critique of

narrative, the population of Central and Eastern Europe has been drawn inexorably toward identification with one national classification or another, and to press for increased political rights for their ethnic group. But what are we to make of expressions of loyalty to the multinational states these national movements sought to replace, or expressions of nostalgia for the old empires in the years after 1918? Are such sentiments aberrant, or are they in fact closer to the cultural mainstream than many nationalist observers would admit? Notwithstanding the allure for many of separate national states, is it possible to identify with a particular ethnic group and still profess loyalty to a multinational construct (as the people of Scotland did in 2014 when voting down the proposal for independence from the United Kingdom)? Is it even possible in a supposedly nationally charged atmosphere to not associate with a nationality at all? A crucial component of this question concerns the ultimate “arbiter” of national identity. Who decides what national group one “should” be associated with – the individual or the community? As historians and sociologists review the balance sheet of positive and negative outcomes of nationalist movements from the 19th century onward (i.e., the promised cultural development within national states vs. ethnic violence occurring in disputed “national” territory), the question remains to what degree the nationalist program permeated the consciousness of society beyond the bounds of the intelligentsia, in Europe or elsewhere. My dissertation will concern these issues of nationality and national indifference on the individual (or micro) level, specifically as it relates to the South Slav territories of Southeastern Europe.

The career of Svetozar Borojević von Bojna is illustrative of the operation of national identity within the context of the collapse of a multinational state. Borojević (1856-1920) rendered

Modernist Theories of Nationalism,” *American Journal of Sociology* (Vol. 105, No. 5, March 2000), pp. 1428-68.

lifelong service to the army of Austria-Hungary, achieving the Austro-Hungarian army's highest rank (*Feldmarschall*, field marshal – roughly equivalent to a U.S. Army Five Star General) and ultimately the command of the army group fighting on the Isonzo Front during the First World War. By all accounts, Borojević identified proudly with his homeland of Croatia (although sources differ as to whether he identified personally as a Croat or Serb, as will be discussed), yet he remained *kaisertreu* (loyal to the emperor and empire) until the very end of the Austro-Hungarian state. This same loyalty was to prove his undoing in the wake of the collapse of the Dual Monarchy, as his association with the state led, in part, to the decision by the government of the new Yugoslav state to refuse Borojević citizenship in his own home. Though granted refuge by the new “Republic of German Austria,” the highly unstable political and economic climate of the immediate postwar years led to the inability of Borojević to even collect the pension that was his due as a veteran officer of the Austro-Hungarian army, and it was his fate to die in poverty living in Klagenfurt (in Carinthia, southern Austria) in 1920.

The story of Borojević's career and ultimate fate is intimately connected to the rise and resolution of the nationality question in the Balkans during the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century. The period of Borojević's career mirrored perhaps the most intense period of developing national identity throughout the Monarchy, especially in its Balkan provinces, and he unwittingly (and unwillingly) became a figure to be used both by centralizing and nationalizing forces, as this study will outline. In addition, the issues of nationalism and *kaisertreu* sentiment in this region take on a particular poignancy with respect to the legacy of the Habsburg imperial institution known as the Croatian Military Frontier, which directly impacted Borojević's family. The Military Frontier, as the border between the lands of the Habsburg Monarchy and the Ottoman Empire, had a unique constitutional status, and the

inhabitants of the Frontier, or *Grenzer*, enjoyed both special privileges and an identity that set them apart from other subjects of the Habsburg Emperor, and even from their fellow Serbs and Croats living just north of the Frontier in Croatia proper.³ I will examine closely the culture of the *Grenzer* and its role in shaping Borojević in the first chapter of this study.

The character of Svetožar Borojević in many ways breaks the mold of the narrative of national identification. On the one hand, he was tied inextricably to the ostensibly supranational culture of the officer corps of the Habsburg Monarchy, and served his imperial and royal master loyally in multiple postings over a long career. On the other hand, he professed deep loyalty to his homeland in the Croatian lands of the Kingdom of Hungary, leading at least one biographer to identify a fervent ambition on Borojević's part to one day be named as *Ban* (governor) of Croatia.⁴ In a context in which loyalty to the state and loyalty to one's national group are not necessarily one and the same, is it possible to profess true loyalty to both? Increasingly during the opening years of the twentieth century, nationalist leaders such as Tomas Masaryk and Ante Trumbić began to answer that question in the negative. The experience of Borojević, on the other hand, appears to present a counter example.

What serves as the marker of nationality? The answer to this question, of course, varies from case to case; however, generally a common language and cultural institutions are considered the minimum criteria. In the case of the Yugoslav national groups, of course, religion has also served as a form of national distinction, with Serbian and Croatian populations generally being distinguished by their adherence to, respectively, Eastern Orthodoxy or Roman Catholicism. If

³ Gunther Rothenberg, *The Military Border in Croatia, 1740-1881: A Study of an Imperial Institution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

⁴ Eduard Hoffmann, *Feldmarschall Svetožar Borojević von Bojna*, PhD Diss. (University of Vienna, 1985), p. 18.

this is the case, how then are we to account for the fact that multiple works on Borojević and the Isonzo front have been inconsistent in this regard? Some have identified him as a Croat, others as a Croatian Serb.⁵ Borojević himself came from an Orthodox family, which, in view of the currently accepted ethnic demarcation (Orthodox=Serb, Catholic=Croat), would make him Serbian.⁶ However, there is also the question of the different alphabets used; Cyrillic normally used by Serbs, Latin normally used by Croats. While Borojević was almost certainly familiar with Cyrillic, most of his correspondence was written in the Latin alphabet.⁷ What then, is the reason for the discrepancy? This question will be explored in depth in the first chapter of this study.

From 1918 until fairly recently, the study of the construct of the multinational state has focused squarely on the centrifugal forces driving apart the different constituent components of the state.⁸ In recent years, however, a body of literature has appeared to counterbalance this narrative, demonstrating instead expressions of loyalty to the status quo, and examining attempts at nationalizing subject populations that were met with indifference or even outright hostility. This more recent literature calls into question the presumed “inevitability” of the nationalization of the population of Central and Eastern Europe. For example, Jeremy King’s *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans* and Tara Zahra’s *Kidnapped Souls* both examine the efforts of competing Czech and German nationalist organizations to pressure the local population to identify as Czech or German, and the unexpected resistance they encountered from locals who saw no need to

⁵ For example, Rudolf Kiszling, (*Die Kroaten: Der Schicksalsweg eines Südslawenvolkes* (Graz: Hermann Böhlau, 1956) identifies Borojević as Croatian, while Gaetano Cavallaro (*Disaster Ending in Final Victory: The Dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2010) refers to him as “the Serb.”

⁶ Hoffmann, *Feldmarschall*, p. 11.

⁷ For example, Nachlass Borojević, v. 18

⁸ See, for example, Oscar Jaszi, *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1929); Robert Kann, *The Multinational Empire: Nationalism and National Reform in the Habsburg Monarchy, 1848-1918* (New York: Octagon Books, 1950).

identify.⁹ Similar trends have been identified elsewhere in the Monarchy (which will be examined in detail in Chapter 1) although the South Slav provinces have been the subject of comparatively less study in this regard.¹⁰

In conjunction with the reappraisal of the supposed inevitability of the nationalization and the collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy, recent literature has supported the view that the multinational state was not only a useful construct, but a necessary political, cultural and economic arrangement at least into the early years of the twentieth century. King and Zahra, among others, would agree with the sentiment expressed in the Czech author Frantisek Palacky's famous dictum, "Truly, if the Austrian Empire had not already existed for a long time, the interests of Europe and the interests of humanity would demand its speedy creation."¹¹ The Austrian state, in addition to serving as a bulwark against Russian Panslavic expansionism (an outcome feared by many of the Monarchy's Czechs and Poles) also served vital economic functions for Central and Eastern Europe. The state as a whole functioned well as a single economic unit, with more industrialized areas (such as Bohemia) supporting (and being supported by) more agrarian ones (such as eastern Hungary or Galicia). Philip Longworth, in his monograph survey of Eastern Europe, has argued that the consequences of breaking up this unit into separate states were disastrous, contributing to the economic crises in the successor states (and Central Europe as a whole) during the interwar period.¹² This economic angle is especially

⁹ Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002); Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900-1948* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008).

¹⁰ However, Pieter Judson's *Guardians of the Nation: Activists of the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006) does consider the case of the nationalization projects in the Slovene-populated territories of the Monarchy.

¹¹ Kann, *Multinational Empire*, v.2, p. 137.

¹² Philip Longworth, *The Making of Eastern Europe* (London: Macmillan Press 1992), pp. 69-71.

relevant to the study of the multinational state as a construct, as the argument can easily be made that a key reason for the survival of several modern day multinational states (such as the United Kingdom and Canada) lies in the perception that the economic benefits of remaining within the union are sufficient incentive for the population to resist the siren call of national secessionist movements.¹³

My argument in the present study is twofold: First, I posit that national identification within the South Slav territories was a much more fluid category in the years prior to 1914 than it has proven to be since. Further, I argue that, under the construct of the multinational state, multiple national identities were much closer to the norm than nationalist literature, specifically with regard to the South Slav areas, has generally accounted for.

Possessing multiple national identities in some respects is not particularly unusual. In the United States, we might hear someone say “I’m an American of Italian ancestry,” while citizens of the United Kingdom, depending on the circumstance, might feel the need to specify that they are British *and* Scottish. This sort of dynamic, however, has traditionally been much less often observed in the lands of Central and Eastern Europe. Less often observed, but not by any means absent; I will discuss that not only was it not unusual for individuals like Borojević to claim both a national and multinational identity, but also that this was an outcome that was actively encouraged by the state system of the Habsburg Monarchy, even if this was a system that, in the view of Robert Kann and others, proved to be ineffectual in resolving the nationality problem.¹⁴

¹³ For example, Michael Keating, “Stateless Nation-Building: Quebec, Catalonia and Scotland in the Changing State System,” *Nations and Nationalism* (Vol. 3, No. 4, 1997), makes the argument that this economic incentive was a primary reason for the failure of the 1995 Quebec independence referendum.

¹⁴ Kann, *Multinational Empire*, v. 2, pp. 286-298.

Moreover, the literature on nationalism bears out this supposition. For example, Rogers Brubaker, in his 1992 study *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*, identified two distinct types of nationalism: civic nationalism, in which national identification and belonging are primarily demonstrated through adherence to the community (or state) and its institutions, and ethnic nationalism, in which national identity is determined primarily (in some cases exclusively) by ancestry.¹⁵ Although in some societies the two have been mutually exclusive (Brubaker uses the example of ethnic nationalism in Germany) this is not necessarily the case. For example, it is not difficult to witness the operation of both civic and ethnic nationalism in the modern-day United States.

Nor is this concept of dual nationalism unheard of even in the context of Eastern Europe. Around the same time, the government of the Ottoman Empire, following the 1908 Young Turk Revolution, attempted to shore up its hold on its remaining non-Turkish provinces by encouraging the ethic of “civic Ottomanism” among its population. Under this paradigm, all of the subjects of the sultan were encouraged to become equal and participatory citizens in the Ottoman state, while still culturally remaining part of their own national community. In this case, there was to be no contradiction in being an Ottoman Jew or an Ottoman Arab (in effect, a reinforcement of Brubaker’s paradigm).¹⁶ The imperial court in Vienna certainly saw the value in encouraging a similar dynamic, and the present study will examine some of the ways in which this civic nationalism was instilled in the population of the Monarchy. One area in which this

¹⁵ Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

¹⁶ Michelle Campos, *Ottoman Brothers: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Early Twentieth Century Palestine* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011) provides a thorough examination of the concept of civic Ottomanism, demonstrating how it served to at least partially sublimate ethnic tensions between Jewish and Arab populations in the province of Palestine.

supranational project experienced its greatest success is in the culture of the joint Austro-Hungarian army, specifically the officer corps - a world in which Borojević himself was entirely immersed.¹⁷

Even in places where multiple national identities coexist, as in the United States, the open display of such multiple identities can be problematic. As evidence, one need look no further than media reports of certain aspects of the culture wars in contemporary America. Those seeking greater accommodation of their language and culture (such as those of Hispanic or Latino descent) face pushback from those who believe that in order to be a “true American,” one must speak English and more fully assimilate to a larger American culture. Displays of identity outside of these prescribed bounds are regarded by the latter group as “un-American” and suspect. As I will outline later in this study, a similar hostility toward multiculturalism and divided identity began to prevail in the South Slav areas in the opening years of the twentieth century, especially in the years following 1918. It is important to note, however, that prior to the ascendance of this nationalist narrative, such exclusionary national identification was not the norm in Eastern Europe, and it is becoming less of the norm even today, as populations in Central and Eastern Europe, under the aegis of the European Union, begin to further embrace multiculturalism again.

The concept of the nation and the processes of national identification have been the subject of a substantial body of literature produced by historians, sociologists and political scientists.

Among the most poignant for our purposes is Benedict Anderson’s groundbreaking study

¹⁷ István Deák, *Beyond Nationalism: A Social and Political History of the Habsburg Officer Corps, 1848-1918* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) provides a thorough survey of the culture of the officer corps, including an examination of the how the national question figured into officer training and command posts.

Imagined Communities. As its title implies, Anderson views the nation as, essentially, an imagined construct, one that has only as much meaning as its adherents ascribe to it, unsupported by concrete structures.¹⁸ Anderson makes a point especially salient for our purposes, that once the idea of the nation has been created, it becomes “capable of being transplanted, with varying degrees of self-consciousness, to a great variety of social terrains, to merge and be merged with a correspondingly wide variety of political and ideological constellations.”¹⁹ In effect, the nationalist narrative can not only be made to serve multiple functions within society, it can serve as the primary determinant of “who belongs,” sublimating others; this is the process that played out in the South Slav areas after 1918, and then during the late 1980s and 1990s.

Although much of the scholarship comes squarely on the side of the nation being a modern phenomenon, having its origins during the period of the French Revolution at the earliest, there have been a few naysayers. Norman Davies has argued for distinctive “national” cultural institutions that can be identified even during the medieval period.²⁰ Serhii Plokhy, in his study of formation of national identity in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus, argues that the nationalization process began with the Christianization of the Kievan Rus during the tenth century, and was completed by the reign of Peter the Great during the early eighteenth century.²¹

It is Philip Gorski’s dissenting voice on this question, however, which provides the most interesting insight for the South Slav region. Gorski has argued that a form of national identity could be observed as far back as the sixteenth century. As evidence he uses the Dutch revolt against Spanish rule, in which religion played a crucial role in identification, particularly with

¹⁸ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 4.

²⁰ Norman Davies, *Europe: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

²¹ Serhii Plokhy, *The Origins of the Slavic Nations: Premodern Identities in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

regard to “the Other.” In effect, Calvinist Protestantism became the primary determinant of Dutch national identity, distinguishing them from both the foreign Spanish and their fellow Netherlanders who continued to adhere to Catholicism.²² The parallels with the South Slav case are readily apparent; we can see that, at least according to Gorski, the use of religion as the primary marker of ethnicity is not unique to the Serbs and Croats.

Though Gorski presents a valid point on the national issue, in general terms, the expression of national identity as we currently recognize it is a distinctly modern phenomenon. It is true that, particularly in this region, nationalists have grasped upon a heroic past and placed it into service to demonstrate the ancient status of their group (and its attendant claims on territory and loyalties); just one example is the use of the memory of the 1389 Battle of Kosovo in Serbian national discourse.²³ However, these are merely modern appropriations of events that in previous eras carried far less significance. Far from shedding light on historical national identification, such appropriations have served to complicate more recent historiography in the region, as I will discuss shortly in the section on historiography.

Ernest Gellner, in his 1983 study *Nations and Nationalism*, argues that a certain level of cultural development, nearly reaching industrialization, is necessary for the full development of national consciousness. The South Slav case appears to bear out this argument; the major efforts by Serbian and Croatian nationalists had their origins no earlier than the first part of the 19th century; and it was not to be until the beginning of the 20th century that such efforts were to take

²² Gorski, “The Mosaic Moment.”

²³ For the use of the memory of Kosovo by Serbian nationalists and demagogues, see Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change* (New York: Columbia University Press 1999).

root. Moreover, nationalist literature was to be the preserve of a small educated group of middle- and upper-class intelligentsia; the rise of such a class was enabled by the achievement of a level of development in line with Gellner's paradigm.

A key concept to take into account in any examination of the nationality issue in the area of the Habsburg Monarchy and its successor states is that of *Heimat*. This concept conveys a layer of meaning deeper than its literal translation – “homeland.” Throughout the present study, I will closely examine the operation of the concept of *Heimat*, with specific emphasis on the connections between individuals and their communities (both national and physical), and the state's role in determining and enforcing these connections. The question of *Heimat* took on an even greater significance after 1918, as each of the successor states grappled with issues of citizenship for those who found themselves, willingly or not, within their borders. Although *Heimatrecht* (“right of domicile”) was generally limited to citizens of German ethnicity after 1918, a number of non-ethnic Germans (including Boroević) benefited from a clause in the Treaty of Saint-Germain which allowed residence in postwar Austria to refugees from elsewhere in the former Monarchy.²⁴ I will give specific attention to the operation of *Heimat* in the Austrian Republic, as the complexities of the law (especially with regard to non-ethnic Germans) directly impacted Boroević's final years.

The objection can be raised that Boroević's experience as a member of the Austro-Hungarian officer corps places him in the ranks of the elite of Habsburg society, and thus his experience is

²⁴ Edward Timms, “Citizenship and ‘Heimatrecht’ After the Treaty of Saint-Germain,” pp. 158-168 in Richie Robertson and Edward Timms, eds, *The Habsburg Legacy: National Identity in Historical Perspective* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994) examines the concepts of *Heimat* and *Heimatrecht* in the First Austrian Republic.

not as informative of the individual citizen's experience with national identification as one who stood outside such a privileged class. This is a fair point; it is certainly difficult to argue that a peasant farmer in Dalmatia or a merchant in Zagreb would necessarily have had similar views on the national issue. However, the officer corps of the Austro-Hungarian army presents a unique opportunity to examine a culture in which training and ability counted for more than birth with respect to advancement. The officer corps was a remarkably egalitarian institution for its time and place, and represented one of the few avenues by which individuals of common birth could enter the elites of Habsburg society. As I outline later in this study, officers with some years' experience were to be granted a noble title, a benefit of which Borojević himself took advantage.²⁵ It is true that this route of social advancement was not available to just anyone, and even an officer's noble title was usually insufficient to gain access to the highest circles of the aristocracy, but training as an officer, for a great many soldiers, opened doors that would otherwise have been locked and barred to them. I argue that this was certainly the case for Borojević, and he advanced much further within the milieu of the Habsburg Monarchy than he likely would have had he not embarked on a military career. As a result, Borojević's experience can still be instructive of how a substantial segment of the population of the Monarchy responded both the projects of nationalist organizations and the state's attempts to resolve the nationality issue (in the process preserving the Monarchy) themselves.

²⁵ Deak, *Beyond Nationalism*, 158.

Historiography

There is a vast body of literature, in both English and German, regarding the Habsburg Monarchy and its participation in the First World War. In this section I will discuss just the key major sources contributing to the present study. A standard starting point has been *Österreich-Ungarns Letzter Krieg* ("Austria-Hungary's Last War"), a multivolume work produced by members of the Austrian government during the interwar period, serving as the "official" account of the war. Although far from unbiased, this work forms a basis for Austrian historiography of the war and its soldiers. With regard to the nationality question in the Monarchy, Robert Kann's 1950 study *The Multinational Empire* is one of the standards in the field; many authors since have endeavored to expand, confirm, or counter his arguments. Another key resource is the encyclopedic edited collection *Die Habsburgermonarchie* (The Habsburg Monarchy), a multivolume work (at the present writing comprising 10 volumes) published by the Austrian Academy of Sciences, containing expository articles and collections of statistics for virtually all facets of society for the Austro-Hungarian state from 1848 until 1918.

With regards to the South Slav territories, recent historiography has been considerably clouded by the legacy of the wars accompanying the collapse of Yugoslavia during the early 1990s; as a result, many of the historical works on the region during the 1990s were produced not by historians but by journalists who had been involved in reporting on the war zones. Although works by Misha Glenny and Marcus Tanner are well researched and generally solid with regard to recent history, they still fall into the trap of taking some elements of the national narratives espoused by contemporary Serbian and Croatian leaders at face value.²⁶ In a similar

²⁶ Misha Glenny, *The Balkans: Nationalism, War and the Great Powers, 1804-1999* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001); Marcus Tanner, *Croatia: A Nation Forged in War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).

manner, at the same time, Robert Kaplan's book *Balkan Ghosts*, which erroneously ascribed the conflict between Serbs and Croats to "ancient hatreds" spread an idea that influenced not only subsequent historiography of the two peoples but also the response of Western powers (particularly the United States and United Kingdom) to the violence in dissolving Yugoslavia.²⁷ Serious historiography, however, has consistently supported the notion that this idea of "ancient hatreds" is a gross mischaracterization; up until the early twentieth century, relations between Serbs and Croats were generally amicable, and representatives of the two groups often worked in tandem to achieve common goals.²⁸ In fact, the greater part of the animosity between Serbs and Croats that produced such explosive results began later on, mostly as a result of the events of the interwar period and the Second World War. It is only relatively recently (i.e., since the early 2000s) that more works on the region have been produced by dedicated scholars. The work of Sabrina Ramet, among others, serves as a corrective to the 1990s period of observers following the false trail of "ancient hatreds."²⁹

By comparison with the available scholarship on the war, the Habsburg Monarchy, and the South Slav territories, the volume of secondary source material regarding Boroević specifically is fairly thin. Most of the material that has been published in English provides information about Boroević within the context of a larger narrative, such as works on the Habsburg Monarchy and its military (just one example being Istvan Deak's work) or works on specific engagements during the First World War (such as John Schindler's excellent monograph study of the war on

²⁷ Samantha Power, *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books 2013), p. 282.

²⁸ For example, see Charles Jelavich, "The Croatian Problem in the Habsburg Empire in the Nineteenth Century," *Austrian History Yearbook* (Vol. 3, Part 2, 1967), pp. 83-115.

²⁹ Sabrina Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias: State-Building and Legitimation, 1918-2005* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006).

the Isonzo front).³⁰ German language readers are served by two solid biographies of Borojević. The first, Eduard Hoffmann's 1984 study *Feldmarschall Svetozar Borojević von Bojna* is an unpublished doctoral dissertation that examines in great detail how Borojević's command of the army on the Isonzo contributed to the outcome of the individual engagements.³¹ The second, Ernest Bauer's 1985 book *Der Löwe vom Isonzo*, is a well-researched popular press work that provides a wealth of information about Borojević's life; however, its usefulness as a source is limited due to the lack of source citations in the book.³²

Therefore, in order to round out the picture of Borojević, the present study will rely heavily on primary source documents, the majority of which are housed within the Austrian State Archive in Vienna. The voluminous *Nachlässe* (official papers) of Borojević and several who served closely with him provide a wealth of insight into the character of Borojević as a soldier and servant of the state.³³ Borojević wrote very little regarding himself; however, his correspondence provides a window into his views towards the state, his people, and his place within both constructs. The *Nachlass* of Anton Pitreich, Borojević's Chief of Staff, goes into detail regarding Borojević's relationship with the troops under his command, at times shedding light on Borojević and the nationality question. Karl Schneller, the General Staff officer assigned to the Southwest

³⁰ John Schindler, *Isonzo: The Forgotten Sacrifice of the Great War* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001).

³¹ Hoffmann, *Feldmarschall*.

³² Ernest Bauer, *Der Löwe vom Isonzo: Feldmarschall Svetozar Borojevic de Bojna* (Graz: Styria, 1985).

³³ Generally the *Nachlässe* are stored in the Archive in multiple volumes (or folios) of varying length. Borojević's *Nachlass*, for example, comprises more than two dozen volumes, while Anton Pitreich's consists of only four. Rudolf Kiszling's *Nachlass* is among the more extensive, and comprises multiple cartons' worth of folders. The Archive staff will generally only make available a limited number of files to a researcher at a time, so it is helpful to know, when possible, the contents of the file before ordering. The Archive Reading Room has a listing of *Nachlass* and other file contents, including (mostly) the general contents of *Nachlass* volumes; at the present writing, this information has not been made available online.

Front (Italy) displays an intense dislike of Borojević, and Schneller's account (provided in the War Diary included in his *Nachlass*) is often critical of him as a commander. Another interesting viewpoint comes from Rudolf Kiszling, who served in Borojević's army during the war, and in later years wrote a number of historical monographs, including works on the history of Croatia and the other South Slav regions. Perhaps not surprisingly, Kiszling's *Nachlass* is the most squarely focused on the national issue. None of these *Nachlässe* serve to paint a complete picture of Svetozar Borojević (not even his own); however, each provides a vital piece of the puzzle.

In addition to the *Nachlässe*, several other sources from the Austrian State Archive will be utilized. One is the official War Diaries of the 5th Army and the Army Group Isonzo (the larger army group over which Borojević was given command in 1917). Although this document provides little information about Borojević and the national issue per se, it provides a great deal of information about the impact that conditions at the front, and decisions made by Borojević, had on troop morale. The second are the documents known as the *Qualificationsliste* for Borojević. These documents, completed periodically for each officer, provide a snapshot of the officer's career and status at the time of the document. Crucially, the documents contain personal information about the officer, such as family background, education, commendations, performance reviews, and languages spoken (however, ironically, not primary language or ethnicity). The *Qualificationsliste* provide a great resource for dissecting the career of an officer of the Monarchy, though I agree with Istvan Deak's proviso that it is often necessary to "read between the lines" when examining such a source.³⁴ The Archive contains not only the *Qualificationsliste* for Svetozar Borojević, but also those for his father Adam and brother

³⁴ Deak, *Beyond Nationalism*, 21. In his introductory chapter, Deak goes into great detail about the nature and contents of the *Qualificationsliste*, as well as the advantages and difficulties they offer to the researcher.

Nikola, allowing for some pointed personal comparisons and providing additional nuance to the question of how Borojević's heritage as a *Grenzer* influenced his career.

Rounding out my primary source material are a limited number of published primary sources (such as memoirs and official publications of the Austro-Hungarian governments before and during the war) and contemporary newspaper articles. Interactions with Borojević figure prominently in the writings of several individuals who were intimately involved with the war effort, such as the Austro-Hungarian Chief of the General Staff Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf. Moreover, as a celebrity even in his day, there exist many newspaper accounts of Borojević in the Austrian press during the war and in the years afterward. These accounts shed great insight into the cultivation of the image of Borojević during the war, as well as the interactions with his memory following his death.

Finally, a word about sources in South Slav languages (i.e., Serbian, Croatian, and Slovenian). While it would appear that these sources would give a more comprehensive picture of Svetozar Borojević, and several have been consulted and cited in this study, these have not been extensively used for several reasons. Access to primary source material regarding Borojević in these languages (other than what is in his *Nachlass*) is at this time limited. As I discuss in Chapter 5, the secondary source literature on Borojević in Croatian and Slovenian is relatively recent and still emerging. Gaining access to additional primary source material at the Croatian State Archive in Zagreb would present a fertile ground for future research into a possible comprehensive biography of Borojević, as mentioned in the next section. However, the relative paucity of sources of this kind does not represent a major obstacle, as German served as a *lingua franca* to a major degree in the Dual Monarchy, and much of the correspondence of the major players involved in this story was written or translated into German. In addition, a number of

texts in Croatian and Slovenian are included in Borojević's *Nachlass*, occasionally accompanied by German translation.

Outline of the Work

The first chapter of this study will provide the background on the early life and career of Borojević. I will examine the major influences on Borojević's upbringing and career path, in particular the status of the Dual Monarchy during his formative years, the varying political status of the Croatian territories and their relationship with the Vienna and Budapest governments, as well as the institution of the Military Frontier and its considerable influence on Borojević and his immediate ancestors.

The very polyglot nature of the Habsburg Monarchy in the years after the *Ausgleich* of 1867 adds a layer of nuance to the question of how one can possess multiple identities and loyalties. First and foremost, the roles of Emperor of Austria and King of Hungary, though held by the same individual, were distinct, sometimes conflicting, entities; they were not to be used interchangeably. The two offices were kept separate to the point that, within the lands of the Kingdom of Hungary, one could face penalties for referring to the monarch as *Kaiser* (Emperor) rather than *Kiraly* (King).³⁵ Such a condition begs the question, within the ranks of the common army (encompassing both halves of the Dual Monarchy), were soldiers expected to be loyal to the Kaiser or the Kiraly (or both)? Complicating matters further was the constitutional status of the Croatian lands. Most of the territory of Croatia lay within the bounds of the Kingdom of Hungary, with two exceptions: Dalmatia (which was part of the Austrian half of the Monarchy)

³⁵ Geoffrey Wawro, *A Mad Catastrophe: The Outbreak of World War I and the Collapse of the Habsburg Empire* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), p.4.

and the Military Frontier (which until 1881 existed as a separate unit directly under administration of the Emperor and the army). This distinction was crucial; as I have argued in a previous study, after 1867 the governments of Cisleithanian Austria and the Kingdom of Hungary pursued very divergent policies toward their national groups, with results that continued to influence subsequent developments in the successor states after 1918.³⁶ Moreover, Croatian nationalists, recalling that their land had once been a separate kingdom, pressed their own historical claims for the relationship of Hungary and Croatia as the personal union of two distinct polities; in the aftermath of the greater compromise of 1867, a kind of “subdualism” agreement, granting very limited autonomy to Croatia, was reached in 1868. This comprehensive picture, necessary to understand the Austro-Hungarian state and Borojević’s place within it, will be outlined in detail in Chapter 1.

The second and third chapters will recount the experiences of Borojević from the outbreak of war in 1914 and the first several years as commander of the army on the Isonzo Front. His actions during the Carpathian War from the summer of 1914 and the first part of 1915 provide insight into how the national issue informed his command style, identifying trends which were to continue after his assignment to the command of the Fifth Army following the Italian declaration of war on Austria-Hungary. It is during this period that Borojević gained the appellation of the “Lion of the Isonzo,” and narratives about him began to be presented to the Austro-Hungarian public for consumption as a heroic example of the defender of the monarchy.³⁷ One folder in Borojević’s official *Nachlass* (in the Austrian State Archive) contains several dozen postcards

³⁶ Sean Krummerich, “*Nationalitätenrecht: The South Slav Policies of the Habsburg Monarchy*,” unpubl. M.A. Thesis, University of South Florida, 2012.

³⁷ Bauer, *Löwe*, 10.

and photos of him that were disseminated in different parts of the Monarchy.³⁸ I will survey in depth how this image of Borojević came to be cultivated and put to use in the service of the multinational state.

In surveying the conditions and the unfolding campaign on the Isonzo front, I will examine in detail a crucial component of this story, the operation of nationalism on both sides of the conflict on the Austrian littoral territory. The extent to which the action on the Isonzo served as a national conflict cannot be overstated, as both the attackers and defenders viewed the territory as their own; in 1917 the composition of the Austro-Hungarian army on the Isonzo was 60 percent Slavic.³⁹ While troops of Slovene and Croatian nationality were actively fighting to defend territories in which their conationals comprised a solid majority of the population (and other Slavic troops fought in solidarity with them – another significant point I will explore), the Italian war effort was directed at “redeeming” the very same territories, which they claimed as having longstanding historical ties to Italian populations.

The fourth chapter will provide an account of the tumultuous events of 1918, and the critical decisions made by Borojević in the final stages of the war. The shift in the outlook of the defending army during the summer of 1918 (from the unsuccessful Piave offensive) will be followed to the ultimate collapse of the Austro-Hungarian war effort during October of that year. During this period, as the Habsburg Monarchy progressed through what was by now an irreversible course toward its demise, it is worth noting how those who endeavored to preserve the Monarchy, most notably Emperor Karl, as well as those who sought to establish separate national states, such as Ante Trumbić (1864-1938, a Croatian politician who served as one of the

³⁸ *Nachlass Borojevic, Kriegsarchiv Wien*

³⁹ Feliks Bister, “Vorwort,” in *Isonzofront 1915-1917: Die Kultur des Erinnens*, ed. Vincenc Rajsp (Vienna: Slowenisches Wissenschaftsinstitut, 2010), 7-9: 8.

coordinators of the Yugoslav National Committee's exile community from London), each attempted to enlist Borojević's aid and coopt his position in the Monarchy and among his fellow South Slavs (i.e., as the highest ranking South Slav officer in the Austro-Hungarian army and a figure who would be recognizable from press reports to many Serbs, Croats and Slovenes). This study will examine Borojević's relationship with both of these individuals, and his reaction to attempts to place him into service of one of the two narratives (national or supranational). I will also provide close examination of the implications of Borojević's ill-fated attempt to march on Vienna in an effort to save the Habsburg dynasty. The student of the history of the Habsburg Monarchy will immediately see the parallels between Borojević's response to the situation and that of Field Marshall Josef Radetzky and Croatian *Ban* Josip Jelacic amid the turmoil of the 1848 Revolutions, right down to Jelacic's own march on Vienna; the connection was certainly not lost on Borojević. The implications of the Monarchy being rescued a second time by a *kaisertreu* Croatian would have been profound, and open up some interesting counterfactual speculations. I will examine in detail the reasons why what worked in 1848 could not work in 1918.

The fifth chapter will recount the tale of Borojević's fate after the war, and the reasons for the refusal of the new Yugoslav state to accept his services, or even citizenship, in the successor state. I intend to outline detailed comparisons between the ultimate fate of Borojević and those of other Habsburg officers, particularly Gregor Edler von Miscevic and Stjepan Sarkotic, two soldiers who, like Borojević, came from a (Serb-)Croatian *Grenzer* background, and were loyal to the state system of the Dual Monarchy (to distinguish this from the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes). I will provide a brief discussion of the limited attempts to interact with the memory of Borojević in relation to the national issue in the Yugoslav territories. Although in

some respects, Borojević, who was claimed for both Serbs and Croats, represented the exemplar of the “Yugoslav” nationality that the leaders of the post-1918 Yugoslavia attempted, ultimately unsuccessfully, to foster (as a sort of proto-Tito). For reasons I will discuss in this chapter, the interwar Yugoslav government declined to take advantage of such an opportunity, and I have found no evidence of Josip Tito or his successors interacting with the memory of Borojević during the period after 1945. This does not, however, mean that Borojević had disappeared from the historical memory of the population of Yugoslavia and its successor states. Finally, a concluding section will discuss the significance of Borojević’s experience in light of the greater question of national identification. As even a brief overview of his life and career demonstrates, Svetozar Borojević defies the tidy narrative of progression from national indifference to exclusive identification with one’s own ethnic community. The emerging literature on nationalism and national identification in Central and Eastern Europe tends to support the argument that Borojević was not *sui generis* in this regard, but part of what could reasonably be termed a “silent majority” of citizens who either remained indifferent to national identification or professed multiple national loyalties.

Finally, a word about what this study is *not*. It is not a comprehensive biography of Svetozar Borojević. While I believe that such a work would be a worthwhile endeavor, the available source material, for the present at least, does not give a complete enough picture of Borojević to trace the full narrative of his life. It is also not, per se, a study of Borojević’s military career. As a member of the Monarchy’s officer corps and one who spent almost his entire life in uniform, it is true that Borojević’s military experience was inseparable from his character, and thus cannot be ignored. However, Eduard Hoffman’s work examines Borojević’s military engagements in great detail, particularly during the Isonzo campaign, and a work with this focus would be little more than a

translation of Hoffman's work. The present study examines Borojević's command decisions, particularly as they reflect his character and how they interplay with issues of national identity during the war.

During a trip to Vienna while conducting research for this study I had the opportunity to visit Borojević's resting place at the city's Central Cemetery (shown in Fig. 1). Looking at his grave I noticed two interesting things. The first was an inscription on the right-hand corner dedicated to "The Defenders of the Carpathians and the Isonzo." (Fig. 3) The second was a wreath at the foot of the monument, which appeared to have been placed fairly recently, with the words "Croatian Veterans" (in English) written on the ribbon. I came away with the impression that these two features speak volumes about the continuing legacy of Svetozar Borojević with regard to his national identity and his place in the endgame of the state he so loyally served. The image conveyed is of a soldier committed to the welfare of those under his command, and a patriot committed to the protection of his homeland and people. How close this image is to the reality of Borojević's experience is a topic that will encompass the greater part of this study.



Fig. 1 Front view of Boroević's tomb, Vienna Central Cemetery. (Photo taken by author)



Fig. 2, Side view of Borojević's tomb, Vienna Central Cemetery. (Photo taken by author)

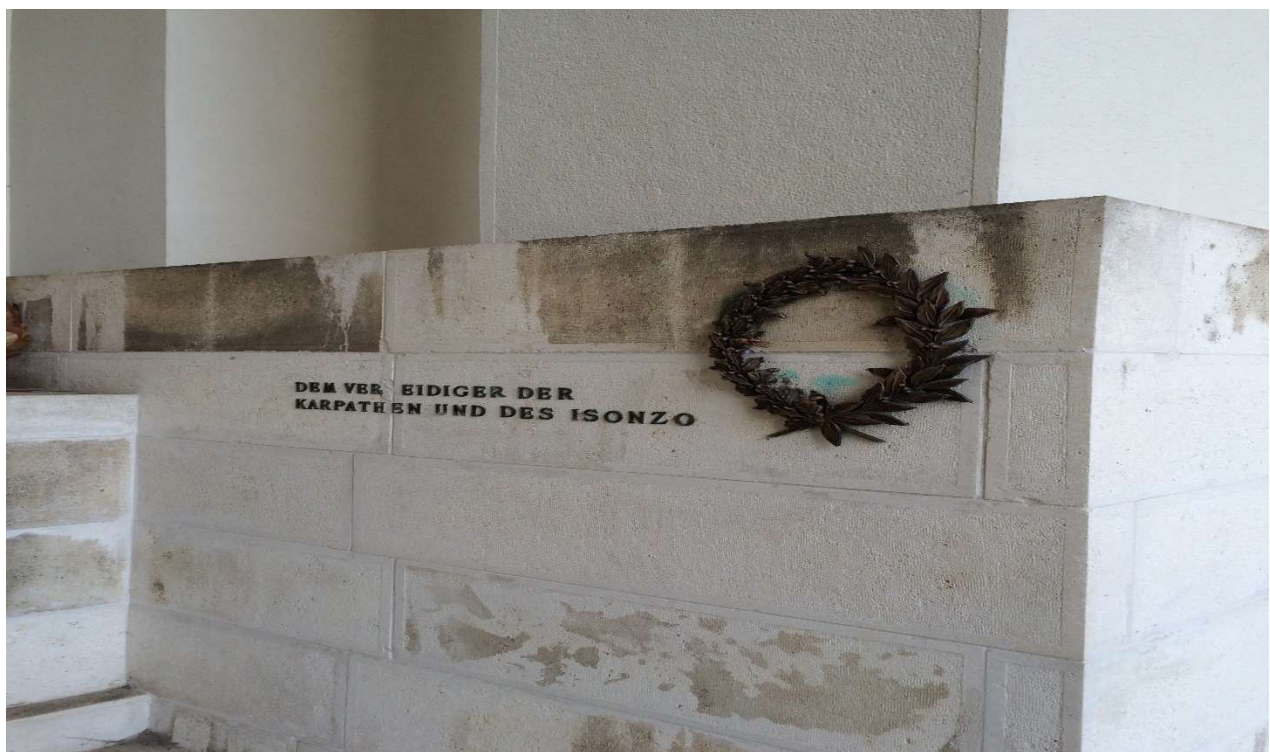


Fig. 3, Side view of Borojević's tomb, Vienna Central Cemetery. (Photo taken by author)

CHAPTER 1

SERVANT OF THE MONARCHY

For a figure who was fated to be a point of national contestation, it is perhaps fitting that even the birthdate of Svetozar Boroević was expressed in national terms. Some sources, official and secondary, give his birthdate as December 1, 1856.⁴⁰ Others give it as December 13, 1856.⁴¹ Paradoxically, both dates are actually correct. The reason for this discrepancy is due to the use of two distinct calendars. According to the Gregorian Calendar, used by Western Europe, the date was December 13. According to the Julian Calendar, in the process of being phased out but still in use in Orthodox Eastern Europe during the nineteenth century, the date was December 1.⁴² An argument can be made that the choice of date is in itself a statement of national of the Catholic monarchy opting for the Gregorian date, while those emphasizing his affiliation as identification, with those placing emphasis on Boroević's role as a Croatian and servant a Croatian Serb and Orthodoxy opting for the Julian one. Boroević himself used the date of December 1.⁴³

⁴⁰ For example, Carl Freiherrn von Bardloff, *Der Militär-Maria Theresien-Orden: Die Auszeichnungen im Weltkrieg 1914-1918* (Vienna: Militärwissenschaftliche Mitteilungen, 1943); *Nachlass Kiszling*

⁴¹ For example, the *Neue Österreichische Biographie, 1815-1918* (Vienna: Wiener Drucke, 1923); Ernest Bauer, *Der Löwe vom Isonzo: Feldmarschall Svetozar Boroevic de Bojna* (Graz: Styria, 1985).

⁴² However, oddly enough, his tomb at Vienna Central Cemetery gives a different birthdate entirely – December 2, 1856 (see Fig. 1).

⁴³ *Qualificatsionsliste Svetozar Boroevic; Nachlass Pitreich*, v. 4.

Sources are much more in agreement in reporting Borojević's birthplace as Umetić, a small town currently located in the Republic of Croatia, about 50 miles from Zagreb and close to the border with Bosnia-Herzegovina.⁴⁴ At the time of his birth in 1856, the town was located in the middle of the Croatian Military Frontier.

Grenzerkind

The legacy of the institution known as the Croatian Military Frontier proved decisive in shaping the upbringing and character of Borojević, as it had for legions of other inhabitants of the region. Established during the wars with the Ottoman Turks during the sixteenth century, this area, encompassing a small strip of land approximately 5,000 square miles, served as a fortified border between the lands of the Habsburg Monarchy and the Ottoman Empire for more than three centuries. The Frontier (German: *die Grenze*) was removed from civil authority, and placed within a sphere of military government directly under the authority of the Kaiser. Within these territories, it was expected that most able-bodied males were to provide military service to the Kaiser, especially with regard to protecting the Monarchy against Turkish incursions. This role as the protectors of the Frontier, the *Grenzers*, fostered within those serving a sense of identity that served to distinguish them from their fellow South Slavs (i.e., in civil Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina). This *Grenzer* identity continued to influence the worldview of their ranks long after the dissolution of the Military Frontier during the last decades of the nineteenth century; a

⁴⁴ Even this, however, has been a matter of some debate, as Dušan Nečak makes reference to observers who have maintained that Borojević was actually born in nearby Mečenčani rather than Umetić. Nečak's research led him to conclude that Umetić was the correct place. See Dušan Nečak, "Nekaj premislekov, dilem in popravkov o življenjepisu feldmaršala Borojevića: junak ali uživac?" *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* (No. 2, 2015), pp. 173-182.

contemporary of Borojević, Gregor Edler von Miscevic, writing shortly before his death in 1937, identified himself primarily as “*ein geborenes Grenzerkind*” (a born child of the Frontier).⁴⁵

In addition to this sense of purpose, the settlers on the Frontier gained a number of tangible rewards in exchange for their service. Each family unit (*zadruga*; Serbo-Croatian term meaning extended family or clan) was granted a small amount of land with a certain degree of autonomy, including the ability to elect their own leaders, the ability to retain a share in booty plundered from enemy forces, and freedom from the manorial obligations which were standard for peasants/farmers in civil Croatia.⁴⁶ However, the greatest privilege granted to the Grenzer, especially from Borojević’s standpoint, was that of toleration for the practice of the Orthodox faith, which was encouraged by the Habsburgs (over the objection of Hungarian and Croatian authorities, who often pressed for maintaining the supremacy of Catholicism in their lands). In exchange for their service, Orthodox communities already inhabiting the Frontier territory, as well as those who settled there during the eighteenth century, were granted the ability to freely practice their religion; concessions went as far as to include the establishment of an Orthodox patriarchate at Karlovci.⁴⁷ It is for this reason that the territory of the Military Frontier had a very large (Serb) Orthodox population, and this population was to continue to be part of Croatian society until the secessionist wars during the first part of the 1990s.

As the nineteenth century progressed, however, the gradual breakdown of Ottoman power and territory made the threat from the Monarchy’s southern neighbor appear increasingly remote. Repeated calls were made for the frontier to be dismantled, and its territory reincorporated into

⁴⁵ *Nachlass Miscevic*

⁴⁶ Gunther Rothenberg, *The Military Border in Croatia, 1740-1881: A Study of an Imperial Institution* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 8.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 12-13.

Croatia proper (and, by extension, returned to the authority of the Kingdom of Hungary). The negotiations for the *Ausgleich* of 1867 included provisions for the gradual dissolution of the Military Frontier.⁴⁸ The final remnants of the Croatian Military Frontier were dismantled in 1881, although by that time the 1878 occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina had already rendered the institution entirely superfluous in terms of territorial defense against the Turks.

Against this background it is little surprise that Svetozar Borojević opted to pursue a military career. His father, Adam Borojević, had been an officer in the *k.u.k. (kaiserliche und königliche)* army, and his brother Nikola likewise entered the officer corps. The elder Borojević had seen action in most of the major deployments of the Monarchy's forces during his career, including the revolts of 1848/49 (during which he served in the counterrevolutionary force led by Croatian Ban Josip Jelacic), the Austro-Prussian War in 1866, and the occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1878.⁴⁹ However, Adam Borojević's career was still tied to the Military Frontier; his final posting before his retirement was to a Frontier infantry regiment.⁵⁰ Nor did he manage to advance in rank as his son did; Adam Borojević's death notice in 1900 gives his rank as *Oberleutnant* (i.e., First Lieutenant).⁵¹ Borojević's mother, Anna Kovarbasic, was the daughter of an officer in a Grenzer regiment. In a biographical account written by Borojević, he notes, likely with a sense of pride, that since the establishment of the Military Frontier in 1529, all able-bodied members of his family had been soldiers.⁵²

The nature of the "frontier," the border between peoples and cultures, was fated to mold and impact Svetozar Borojevic throughout his life. In addition to serving as the frontier between the

⁴⁸ Rothenberg, *Military Border*, 168.

⁴⁹ *Nachlass Kiszling*

⁵⁰ *Fremden-Blatt*, September 23, 1873.

⁵¹ *Neues Wiener Tagblatt*, March 4, 1900.

⁵² *Nachlass Pitreich*, v. 49.

Habsburg and Ottoman realms, the territory was eventually to serve as the site of contestation between Serbian and Croatian national groups. William O'Reilly draws an interesting parallel between the publication of Fredrick Jackson Turner's "frontier thesis" in 1893 and the near simultaneous dissolution of the Military Frontier: while Turner argued that the closing of the American frontier led to an increase in American solidarity and national identity (criticisms of this argument notwithstanding), nothing of the kind occurred with the dissolution of the Military Frontier.⁵³ The relationship between the center (Vienna or Budapest) and the national groups at the periphery became more strained rather than less. In addition, O'Reilly argues that the Military Frontier represented a site of "exoticism" for the rulers of the Monarchy, a site where the individuals in the metropole could perceive the "other" contrasted to themselves.⁵⁴ This perception of the Grenzer as being the "other," someone who is apart from "civilized" society, was fated to haunt Svetozar Boroevic throughout his life, and, as we will see, was to continue to influence memorialization of Boroevic following his death.

In examining the national identification, or lack thereof, among the population in the Military Frontier, it is helpful to look at the example of another "borderland" area. There have been several recent studies examining the relationship between Germans and Poles, and those who at varying times identified as either, or both, depending on political expediencies. Brendan Karch, in his study of the communities of Upper Silesia during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, found that the populations often shifted between the use of German and Polish in language, and were more likely to identify with their local community (e.g., Upper Silesian) than with a national group as a whole, frustrating efforts by both German and Polish national organizations

⁵³ William O'Reilly, "Fredrick Jackson Turner's Frontier Thesis, Orientalism, and the Austrian *Militärgrenze*," *Journal of Austrian-American History* (v.2, No. 1, 2018), p. 1-30.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 29.

to claim them.⁵⁵ Likewise, James Bjork's study of the same region (Upper Silesia) found that Catholic German and Polish populations often worshipped in the same churches, and generally were more inclined to see themselves as having stronger bonds by religion than by nationalism.⁵⁶ This last point is especially intriguing as we consider how religion (i.e., the practice of the Orthodox faith) played a role in distinguishing Svetozar Borojevic and many of his Grenzer contemporaries from the mainstream of society in Zagreb, Budapest, and Vienna, where the religion of the majority was Catholicism.

Little is known about Borojević's early life, although it has been suggested that, despite his family's service to the Monarchy, his childhood was one of relative poverty and humble living.⁵⁷ Borojević began the first of several military schools at the age of ten, and continued until his commission as lieutenant in May 1875. Borojević's military training would have included not only tactics and strategy but also knowledge and skills vital to the service of the polyglot empire. As an officer, Borojević was expected to gain familiarity with the languages of the troops under his command.⁵⁸ Borojević himself ultimately gained knowledge of German, Magyar, French, Russian, and Slovenian, as well as (Serbo-)Croatian.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Brendan Karch, *Nation and Loyalty in a German-Polish Borderland: Upper Silesia, 1848-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

⁵⁶ James E. Bjork, *Neither German nor Pole: Catholicism and National Indifference in a Central European Borderland* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008).

⁵⁷ *Nachlass Kiszling*, v. 143.

⁵⁸ As a rule, officers were required to learn the language of the troops under their command within three years, although this was often not enforced. See Deak, *Beyond Nationalism*.

⁵⁹ *Qualificatsionsliste Borojevic*

The Reich

The political milieu in which young Boroević attended the military academy proved to be volatile on a number of fronts, as questions of the relationship between the state structure of the Habsburg Monarchy and its constituent national groups continued to be worked out. At the time of his birth in 1856, the Monarchy operated under the centralist structure imposed by the court in Vienna following the events of the revolts of 1848 and 1849. For the brief period between 1849 and 1860, for perhaps the only time in its history (notwithstanding the abortive efforts of Joseph II during the 1780s), the Habsburg Monarchy operated as a truly centralized state. Soon, however, events mandated the abandonment of this neo-absolutist structure. First, a new constitution proclaimed in 1860 promised the devolution of powers to regional governments. Only a few years were permitted to this experiment; following the unsuccessful war with Prussia in 1866, Magyar leaders saw an opportunity to extract concessions from Vienna, resulting in the 1867 *Ausgleich* and establishment of the dualist structure that characterized the remainder of the Monarchy's existence.

The importance of the army (or rather, armies) under the dualist system cannot be overstated. After 1867, the Austro-Hungarian armed forces were divided into three main branches. The first was the Common Army for the whole of the Monarchy, the *k.u.k. Armee*. The two remaining branches were the national armies for Cisleithanian Austria (the *k.k. (kaiserlich-königlich) Landwehr*) and the Kingdom of Hungary (the *Honved*). From early on in the Monarchy's existence, the rulers of the Habsburg lands had favored the army, recognizing it as one of the few institutions that served as a unifying force for the whole of the polyglot empire.⁶⁰ Such a view

⁶⁰ Alfred J. Rieber, "Nationalizing Imperial Armies: A Comparative and Transnational Study of Three Empires," in Stefan Berger and Alexei Miller, eds, *Nationalizing Empires* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2015), 593-628.

had been tested in recent memory; in 1848, when much of the Monarchy appeared to be in danger of fragmenting along national lines, the soldiers of the army, regardless of national identification, remained loyal to their state and ruler.⁶¹

The basic structure of the k.u.k. Common Army, particularly the officer corps, had its genesis during the reign of Maria Theresa (1740-1780). Recognizing the need for capable officers in the wake of the monarchy's wars with Prussia, Maria Theresa's reign saw a conscious effort to recruit and train officers from all social classes.⁶² This policy paid quick dividends; by the end of Joseph II's reign in 1790, two-thirds of the officer corps came from commoner background.⁶³ Istvan Deak credits Maria Theresa with the final establishment of an army that was uniquely "Austrian" (i.e., limited to and serving the whole of the Habsburg inheritance) as opposed to "German" (i.e., serving the territories of the Holy Roman Empire), and mandating the display of the *Schwarzgelb* (black & yellow, the Habsburg imperial colors) by her armed forces.⁶⁴ A final legacy of the Theresian age was the establishment of the Military Order of Maria Theresa in 1757. This institution was fated to play a crucial role in the later career of Svetozar Boroević and the final months of his life.

After 1867, most of the Croatian lands fell under the jurisdiction of the Kingdom of Hungary, with the exception of the province of Dalmatia, which remained part of the Austrian half of the Monarchy.⁶⁵ However, the burgeoning Croatian nationalist movement cultivated the historical

⁶¹ Ibid, 609.

⁶² Paula Fichtner, *The Habsburgs: Dynasty, Culture and Politics* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014), p. 131.

⁶³ Ibid, p. 142.

⁶⁴ Deak, *Beyond Nationalism*, 36-37.

⁶⁵ The official name of the Croatian territory, *The Triune Kingdom of Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia*, conveyed the claim of the Croatian polity to the unity of their territory, and Croatian nationalists advocated for the political union of Dalmatia with the rest of Croatia throughout the Dualist period.

memory of the medieval Croatian state, which had existed as a separate kingdom prior to the union of its crown with that of Hungary in the twelfth century. Croatian nationalists likewise demanded a similar *Ausgleich* giving Croatia control of its own government. A partial victory on this count was scored in 1868 with the ratification of the *Nagodba* agreement between Croatia and Hungary, which provided Croatia with some measure of self-government, including a representative assembly (*Sabor*) with some jurisdiction over local matters. Unlike the greater agreement between Vienna and Budapest, the *Nagodba* left most of the real authority for Croatia in the hands of the Hungarian government, including the appointment of post of royal *Ban* (governor) of Croatia. The *Ban*, as a figure appointed by Budapest, was tasked with furthering Magyar interests in Croatia, and electoral laws were to favor the election of *Sabor* deputies friendly to the Budapest government. Like the rest of the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary, Croats found themselves under constant pressure from attempts to Magyarize them, encouraging to identify culturally and linguistically with their more powerful neighbor.

Following his commission, one of Borojević's earliest postings was as battalion adjutant in the occupation force in Bosnia-Herzegovina following the Monarchy's acquisition of the province in 1878. It was this posting that provided the occasion for the only published work written by Borojević. Published in 1890 under the patronage of the k.k. Bosnia Railroad, *Durch Bosnien* (*Through Bosnia*) provides Borojević's thorough account of the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina, its history and people. Although the book reads much like the travelogue it was commissioned as, it betrays some interesting insights into Borojević's views on the national issue.

First, and perhaps most intriguingly, Borojević stresses the initial unity of the Croatian and Serbian peoples.⁶⁶ He goes on to discuss how the Croatian polity attempted to claim Bosnia

⁶⁶ Svetozar Borojevic, *Durch Bosnien: illustrierter Führer auf der k. k. Bosna-Bahn und der*

following the retreat of the Turks after 1683, but also notes that, after the Habsburg occupation in 1878, a small segment of the population was hostile to Austro-Hungarian rule, and conducted a campaign of terror against the rest of the inhabitants.⁶⁷ Borojević argues that, now that the land has been subdued (albeit by force), rule by the monarchy will be better for the people than the prior regime. Borojević argues that the new government will bring the culture of the west to the previously backward province, extolling such wonders as the rail system that had been built during the occupation.⁶⁸ Although undoubtedly pro-Habsburg in outlook, Borojević's account still shows a surprising degree of balance in its descriptions of the native cultures and the differences between the Orthodox, Catholic, and Muslim populations of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Nevertheless, in these pages the reader sees no hint that he supported the concept of separate nation states for these disparate groups, or could envision their existence outside the framework of the Dual Monarchy. The work in itself is fairly conventional in its approach to the national question; it reflects a pro-Habsburg discourse that normal for the Dual Monarchy's governmental and military elite classes.

Serb or Croat?

In considering Borojević's views on the nationality question among the South Slavs, it is vital to examine the response Borojević had with respect to his own sense of national identity. As stated, observers contemporary and since have debated whether he should be considered Croatian or Serbian. Rudolf Kiszling (1882-1976), who served under his command on the

bosnisch-hercegovinischen Staatsbahn Doboj-Siminhan (Vienna: Verlag d. k.k. Bosna-Bahn, 1890), p. 10.

⁶⁷ Ibid, pp. 21, 23.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 95-101.

Isonzo, insisted that, although of Orthodox background, Borojević throughout his life considered himself Croatian.⁶⁹ As we will see in Chapter 5, he identified as such when he addressed the Slovene National Council in November 1918:

Not as a general and not as the last son of my country, but as a patriot, who loves his homeland at least as much as any other Croat, I point out the consequences which will inevitably come. I'm appealing to the patriotism of the National Council to do everything in its power to ensure that the armies do not degenerate into hordes, destroying these new foundations.⁷⁰

My research has not turned up any writings from Borojević himself, with the partial exception of this statement, that address the issue. However, his strong identification with the territory of the Frontier, along with his political aspirations (to be discussed shortly) appear to lend support to Kiszling's supposition. At the least, it sheds light on an interesting facet of national identification in the Balkans - that at this time, the currently accepted ethnic demarcation (Orthodox=Serb, Catholic=Croat) was not as static a category as it was to become. Under this paradigm, it was perfectly acceptable for an Orthodox South Slav to identify as Croatian.

⁶⁹ *Nachlass Kiszling*, v. 143; Rudolf Kiszling, *Die Kroaten: Der Schicksalsweg eines Südslawenvolkes* (Graz: Hermann Böhlau, 1956), p. 124.

⁷⁰ Richard Plaschka, Horst Haselsteiner & Arnold Suppan, *Innere Front: Militärassistentz, Widerstand und Umsturz in der Donaumonarchie 1918* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1974), v. 2, p. 221. See Chapter 5 for a complete discussion of this incident.

Likewise, as Croatian historian Ivo Banac has discovered, there were instances of Catholic South Slavs who identified as Serbian.⁷¹

The larger question of national identification that was to play such a large role in Boroević's final years, was, in fact, barely considered an issue at all for much of his life. Although historiography in the Balkans has suffered from a considerable degree of "retroactive nationalization," more recent works have appeared to correct this imbalance. Among these are John Fine's 2006 study *When Ethnicity Did Not Matter in the Balkans*. Fine, along with Benedict Anderson, argues that ethnicity is an invented category, one that only holds because individuals have consciously accepted the label.⁷² Likewise, Fine argues that references in sources dating from prior to the 19th century that refer to "Serbs" or "Croats" more properly describe residents of the political units of Serbia or Croatia, rather than the ethnic category, and the failure to recognize this distinction has led many scholars to assume national sentiment (in the modern sense) where none had in fact existed.⁷³

As Michael Portmann points out, national identity is just one manifestation of an innate inclination of individuals to associate with a larger collective identity, one that can be identified from antiquity. Collective identity can be based on a number of factors, including local, regional, ethnic, national, cultural, religious, and social class affiliations.⁷⁴ Viewed in this respect,

⁷¹ Ivo Banac, "The Confessional 'Rule' and the Dubrovnik Exception: The Origins of the 'Serb Catholic' Circle in Nineteenth Century Dalmatia," *Slavic Review* (Vol. 42, No. 3, Autumn 1983) 447-474: 448.

⁷² John V.A. Fine, *When Ethnicity Did Not Matter in the Balkans: A Study of Identity in Pre-Nationalist Croatia, Dalmatia and Slavonia in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2006), p. 14.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

⁷⁴ Michael Portmann, "Die Nation als eine Form kollektiver Identität? Kritik und Konsequenzen für eine zeitgemässe Historiographie," in Marija Wakounig, Wolfgang Mueller and Michael Portmann, eds, *Nation, Nationalitäten und Nationalismus im östlichen Europa: Festschrift für Arnold Suppan zum 65. Geburtstag* (Vienna: Lit Verlag, 2010), 33-46: 34-5.

someone like Svetozar Boroević could easily identify himself simultaneously as a Croat, an adherent of Orthodoxy, a soldier, and a subject of the Habsburg monarch. Likewise, the reality was that many citizens of the monarchy simultaneously embraced multiple identities that were later to be seen in some quarters as being contradictory.⁷⁵

This vagueness with respect to the question of national identification was aided by the reluctance of officials in both parts of the Monarchy to assign national status to individuals. Like the *Qualificationsliste*, population censuses for both Cisleithanian Austria and the Kingdom of Hungary did not usually record a person's ethnicity or nationality, instead making note of the primary language used by the respondent. The Austrian legal system, in an 1881 ruling, declared that use of the language and customs of any specific group was not sufficient for the law to consider an individual as belonging to that group; instead the person was to be "considered a member of that national group to which he belongs according to his own declaration."⁷⁶

The question of national identity was eventually to pervade the populations of the Balkans outside of the intelligentsia class. Beginning with the Illyrian movement in the years after 1815, scholars in the South Slav territories devoted increasing effort to exploring the implications of national identification and pride, and began to gradually disseminate this focus to the rest of the population. Through efforts by Ljudevit Gaj and his successors, the South Slav peoples (here, Croats, Serbians, and Slovenes) developed a consciousness of their unique languages and literature that fostered the development of national identity.⁷⁷ This was accompanied by a move

⁷⁵ Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002); Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900-1948* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008).

⁷⁶ Robert Kann, *The Multinational Empire: Nationalism and National Reform in the Habsburg Monarchy* (New York: Octagon Books, 1964), v. 2, p. 310.

⁷⁷ Kann, *Multinational Empire*, v. 1, pp. 245-250.

among the leadership of the three groups to make common cause in establishing an autonomous political entity along the lines achieved by Hungary in 1867 (in other words, the eventually heralded “trialist” solution). However, even by 1914 the permeation of specific South Slav national identities (Croatian or Serbian) was by no means universal among the inhabitants of the region; as I will argue at the end of this study, the failure of many to “pick a side” on the national question likely contributed to the limited success among those seeking to foster the adoption of a “Yugoslav” identity in the years after 1918.

The issue was to take on greater importance with events along the Monarchy’s southern frontier in the opening years of the twentieth century. An independent South Slav state, Serbia, having gained its full independence in 1878 in another consequence of the Russo-Turkish War and the Congress of Berlin, was beginning to expand its territory and influence among the other nationalities of the Balkans. Although it had been largely contained under the Obrenovic dynasty, a palace coup in 1903 brought to the throne a new government under the Karadjordjevic dynasty, which was stridently anti-Habsburg and actively seeking a leadership role among the South Slav peoples. Increasingly after 1903 Serbia used the nationality issue in part to challenge the Monarchy’s claims to both the territory and people of its South Slav provinces, including the Bosnian Crisis of 1908, where Serbia’s protest over the Monarchy’s formal annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina might have led to war but for Russia’s urging Serbia to back down. A number of observers within the Habsburg High Command, Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf chief among them, feared that the day was not long coming that a reckoning with Serbia would be required.

Meanwhile, the state system of the Habsburg Monarchy in many ways attempted to respond to the burgeoning national movements with the fostering of civic nationalism (as described in the

Introduction). Such moves were increasingly important in the second half of the nineteenth century as the dynasty came to terms with the sudden alteration of its own sense of identity brought about by the battlefield verdict of 1866, which resulted in the loss of Austria's claim to leadership of the German states to Prussia and ultimately its exclusion from Bismarck's German Reich. Therefore, a new ideology was needed to justify the Habsburg Monarchy's rule and mission in Central Europe. Celebrations of the two major unifying institutions, the Habsburg dynasty and the armed forces, continued throughout the last years of the nineteenth century and especially the opening years of the twentieth.⁷⁸ Among these are the jubilee (50-year-anniversary) celebrations of the reign of Franz Josef. Although many of the planned activities for the major celebration in 1898 were canceled due to the assassination of Empress Elizabeth, the preparations for the commemoration of the event included the publication of literature glorifying the history of the Habsburg realm and its rulers. The armed forces of the Monarchy played a key role in these festivities. Although there is no evidence that Svetozar Boroević was present in Vienna for the major celebration, he would have been aware of literature disseminated to soldier and citizen recognizing the event, and he would have been presented with the commemorative jubilee medal that was given to each member of the officer corps. A similar celebration was held in 1908 to commemorate the 60th anniversary of Franz Josef's rule.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ It could be argued that adherence to Catholicism served as a third unifying institution, especially in Cisleithanian Austria. However, by the last part of the 19th Century, this point had largely become moot, as the dynasty, the erstwhile guarantors of the monopoly of the Catholic faith in their realm, had long since found it impossible to enforce doctrinal unity when *realpolitik* demanded concessions to Protestant, Orthodox, and Jewish subjects (just one example being the toleration of Orthodox worship in the Military Frontier).

⁷⁹ Daniel Unowsky, "Staging Habsburg Patriotism: Dynastic Loyalty and the 1898 Imperial Jubilee," pp. 141-156 in *Constructing Nationalities in East Central Europe*, ed. by Pieter Judson and Marsha Rosenblitt (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006).

Nor was this limited to major anniversaries; “visibility events” were a common feature of the dynasty. Official visits to the different parts of their realm and personal interactions with their subjects had long been a tool used by the Habsburg monarchs (as well as their spouses and children) to foster loyalty among their people - Franz Ferdinand’s ill-fated motorcade through Sarajevo in 1914 was just one such public relations mission.⁸⁰

Even with these attempts to emphasize the common bonds holding the peoples of the monarchy together, the voices demanding national rights and autonomy continued to grow louder as the nineteenth century drew to a close, and, by the early twentieth century, various reform plans continued to circulate among those close to the imperial court, attempting to find a way to placate these demands and keep the Habsburg inheritance intact. Many South Slavs placed their hope in the trialist idea, creating a separate autonomous Yugoslav entity on par with Cisleithanian Austria and the Kingdom of Hungary, especially when the Heir Presumptive Archduke Franz Ferdinand, appeared to be engaging with Croatian leaders to build a base of support for just such an action upon taking the throne.⁸¹ Subsequent scholarship, however, has revealed that there is little, if any, evidence, that Franz Ferdinand had any intention of implementing a trialist plan, though he often used the threat of doing so as leverage in dealing with Magyar leaders.⁸² Greater prospects lay in various attempts to federalize the monarchy, creating semiautonomous units based on nationality, such as the plan put forward by Aurel Popovici in his 1906 work, *Die Vereinigten Staaten von Gross-Österreich* (The United States of

⁸⁰ Fichtner, *Habsburgs*, 257-9.

⁸¹ Mirjana Gross, “Erzherzog Franz Ferdinand und die kroatische Frage: Ein Beitrag zur groß-österreichischen Politik in Kroatien,” *Österreichische Osthefte* (No. 4, 1966), pp. 277-299.

⁸² Robert Kann, *Erzherzog Franz Ferdinand Studien* (Munich: Oldenbourg 1976), p. 27.

Great Austria).⁸³ However, no real effort was made to implement any of these reform plans until the very end of the war, when the situation for the Monarchy was far beyond saving.

This was the Scylla and Charybdis that Svetozar Boroević found himself attempting to navigate during the course of his career, demands for loyalty to his national group on the one hand, and for loyalty to the state on the other. As it shall become clear, Boroević firmly believed that there was no contradiction in embracing both identities. His negotiation of these obstacles, however, proved to have a tragic outcome.

Following his posting in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Boroević's career continued to advance. Following a brief stint as an instructor at the Theresian Military Academy at Wiener Neustadt, Boroević advanced through the ranks with postings in Budapest, Klagenfurt, Prague, and Zagreb. His personal life continued to develop as well, with his marriage to Leontine von Rosner (who was the daughter of a General Staff officer) in 1899 and the birth of his son Friedrich in 1901.⁸⁴ Along with military promotion, Boroević was awarded honors as well. In 1905 he gained a noble title from the Hungarian crown, allowing him to append the predicate "von Bojna" to his name. In November 1908 he earned the Knight's Cross of the Order of Leopold.

The rapid rise of Boroević through the ranks can be attributed to three factors. The first was Boroević's own skill as an officer and his dedication to his vocation. The second was the fact that he, as an officer of South Slav nationality, represented a group among whom it was increasingly important that the Monarchy maintain a good image. Thus his success also bolstered

⁸³ Aurel Popovici, *Die Vereinigten Staaten von Groß-Österreich: Politische Studien zur Lösung der nationalen Fragen und staatsrechtlichen Krisen in Österreich-Ungarn* (Leipzig: B. Elischer Nachfolger, 1906).

⁸⁴ It was quite common for officers to delay marriage until later in life due to lack of resources, and some never had sufficient means to marry at all. Within this milieu, Boroevic was fortunate to be able to marry at the age of 43. See Deak, *Beyond Nationalism*, 149.

the narrative that, not only would the peoples of the South Slav territories continue to receive favorable treatment, but that the Habsburg Monarchy remained the best framework for their prosperity. Finally, one cannot forget the role his marriage might have played. In marrying someone of German nationality tied to the officer corps, Borojević may have further demonstrated his loyalty to the Monarchy and its mission in the eyes of some in the High Command. Though of proud Croatian heritage, he could also integrate well into a German-ruled system. As we will see toward the end of this study, this appearance of assimilation was to have interesting, and problematic, implications for Borojević and his legacy.

The years prior to the outbreak of war in 1914 saw Borojević stationed in command VII Zagreb *Landwehr* District, which included the 42nd *Honved* (Hungarian army) unit. This latter unit bore two points of pride; first, this unit was constituted entirely of soldiers from the territory of Croatia, and second, it was the unit designated as the official *Domobranstvo* (Home Guard) army for Croatia, based in Zagreb. As a result of stellar performance during maneuvers in 1908 the unit gained the attention of the heir apparent, Franz Ferdinand, who referred to it as “*eine Teufelsdivision*” (a “devil’s division”), a designation it retained up to 1918.⁸⁵ Borojević received a final prewar promotion in 1913, with a promotion to Infantry General and assignment to the 51st Infantry Regiment.

During these formative years one can already detect insights into the mentality that influenced many of his command decisions during his later assignments on the Eastern Front and Isonzo Front. A number of examples of his personal and official correspondence betray the extent to which his Grenzer background and military training shaped his worldview. In a letter to a friend (and fellow Grenzer) Stefan Sarkotic, Borojević states: “If I were able, I would put the whole of

⁸⁵ Bauer, *Löwe*, 21.

humankind into the bonds of discipline, and within this same framework force them to work.”⁸⁶ He goes on to emphasize the necessity of maintaining strict discipline among troops, lamenting that the same is more difficult to implement in society at large. Fortunately, he believes that the mentality of their people (i.e., Croats) has developed to the point where “I can [be] pleasant more often than I need to be unpleasant” with them.⁸⁷ It is likely that this faith in order and discipline was inculcated in Borojević from an early age, certainly in his military training but possibly from upbringing as well; as his father was witness to many of the most tumultuous events of the nineteenth century in the Habsburg realm, it is possible that he, a military man himself, likewise adopted such an outlook to pass onto his sons.

In addition, there are a number of indicators which point to the higher aspirations that Borojević held. A considerable preponderance of evidence points to a desire by Borojević to eventually gain no less an office than that of *Ban* of Croatia. His correspondence provides support to this conclusion.

In a 1908 letter to Alexander Brosch, adjutant to Franz Ferdinand, Borojević displays gratitude at the esteem his position has earned him among his people:

Here I take responsibility for all of my soldiers upon myself, but I wouldn't have it any other way; from the Ban to the Archbishop all the way down to the lowest officials, mayors and chaplains I have had goodwill heaped upon me.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Hoffmann, *Feldmarschall*, 14-15.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Quoted in Hoffmann, *Feldmarschall*, 17.

Likewise, in a 1910 letter to Brosch, seeking promotion to Commandant of the 13th Corps, Borojević relishes in the opportunity the position would afford him to be of service not only to the Crown but to the Croatian people:

With God's help and my good fortune I offer my candidacy for the [command of the] 13th Corps. My existing knowledge of the language, the land and the people recommend me over my predecessors who did not have these connections to the land, while I, who have these connections, which will be invaluable in resolving the major issues His Majesty requires in this assignment. These are hard to purchase, hard to obtain, yet hardest to spare if one is to carry out the requirements of this vital position. This aspect is sadly underestimated! ... Nobility, Gentry, Bureaucrats, Catholic and Serbian [sic] clergy, they all know me and I know them; the land is known to me through numerous travels in all its parts.⁸⁹

These statements, taken together, led Eduard Hoffmann, in his survey of Borojević's career, to conclude that Borojević certainly aspired to higher office within the Croatian lands, up to and including the office of *Ban*.⁹⁰

A final, and most controversial, account lends further support to this aspiration. An intriguing note in Rudolf Kiszling's *Nachlass* remarks on news reports that Borojević's funeral service was presided over by the Catholic bishop of Klagenfurt, a seemingly unusual choice given Borojević's

⁸⁹ Quoted in *ibid*, 16-17.

⁹⁰ Hoffmann, *Feldmarschall*, 17.

identification with the Orthodox Church. Included in this note is speculation that Borojević may have converted to Catholicism at some point in order to better position himself to gain appointment to the position of *Ban*.⁹¹ I have found, however, no evidence that this was the case; more likely explanations for the bishop's presence are the respect due to Borojević as a result of his standing in the former Austro-Hungarian army, as well as the logistical issues associated with involving Orthodox clergy in an almost entirely Catholic region in southern Austria. Let us not also forget that Borojević's wife, who if not a practicing Catholic was from a Catholic background, would have been the one who organized the funeral.

Just how realistic this aspiration to the Banal office was is a matter of some debate. Recall that the position of *Ban* was one appointed by the Hungarian government, and the occupants of the office were expected to serve Budapest's interest in the territory rather than Vienna's, or, indeed, Zagreb's. Of the *Bans* to hold office after 1868, most were ethnic Magyars, and when a conflict between Hungarian and Croatian interests occurred, could be expected to side with the former. For example, during his 20-year reign as *Ban*, Count Karoly Khuen-Hedervary (1849-1918; served as *Ban* 1883-1903) imposed strong magyarization measures on the Croatian people. However, Borojević's stock in Budapest continued to rise during his career, and he became an increasingly public representative of the Croatian people in the armed forces. A search of the *Agramer Zeitung* (Zagreb's German-language daily) turns up numerous mentions of Borojević with increasing frequency during the decade prior to 1914 (a period which coincided with his posting to the unit based in Zagreb). He had the asset of having served under the heir presumptive, Franz Ferdinand (during his posting as General Staff Chief for the 8th Corps), and in this capacity won exposure to the press and the imperial court when his unit participated in

⁹¹ *Nachlass Kiszling*, v. 143.

maneuver exercises in 1899.⁹² Moreover, Boroević cultivated a working relationship with Magyar leader Istvan Tisza (1861-1918), who served on and off as Hungarian prime minister during the years prior to and during the war.⁹³ Although the obstacles to Boroević achieving this goal would still have been formidable, his reputation in both halves of the monarchy had grown by the beginning of the war, and one can speculate that the acclaim and rank he received during the war would have left him in at least as a strong contender for the role of *Ban* after the war, had the Monarchy survived intact.

The beginning of 1914 saw Svetozar Boroević already far advanced in the hierarchy of the officer corps of the k.u.k. armed forces, and signs pointed to continued success and promotion for the enterprising *Grenzer*. He had no way of knowing that the cataclysm that was to begin in July of that year was fated to raise his esteem among his government and his people to its highest level, before destroying it utterly.

⁹² *Österreicher Soldatenfreund*, September 5, 1899.

⁹³ *Nachlass Boroevic*, v. 17.

CHAPTER 2

INTO THE MAELSTROM

The outbreak of war at the end of July 1914 was a watershed moment for the Habsburg Monarchy, above all for its South Slav territories. Although many among the army High Command feared the presence of a “fifth column” of “Serbians” supportive of their conationals in the Serbian kingdom, historiography has shown that the vast majority were, at least in the early stages of the war, loyal to the Habsburg state. In some respects, it is moot what exactly constituted a “Serbian” in the Austro-Hungarian empire in 1914, as the discussion of Borojević’s own understanding of his identity in the previous chapter shows: though Orthodox in terms of his religion, he felt otherwise culturally or ethnically Croatian. Certainly, Serbs and Croats spoke a common language (Serbo-Croatian), which differed only in terms of regional dialect. One can distinguish the Serbian and Croatian languages through their script, the first using Cyrillic, the second Latin script. But many people were not even literate yet in this part of Europe in 1914. Although the loyalty of several of the Monarchy’s other national groups were to be called into question, most notoriously in the case of the Czechs (as this chapter will discuss), the adherence of South-Slav citizens and soldiers to the state was generally to be taken for granted.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Mark Cornwall, *The Undermining of Austria-Hungary: The Battle for Hearts and Minds* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000); Richard Lein, “The Military Conduct of the Austro-Hungarian Czechs in the First World War,” *Historian* (v. 76, no. 3, Fall 2014), pp. 518-549; Geoffrey Wawro, *Mad Catastrophe*.

However, this did not stop the rumors about suspected disloyalty among South Slav citizens and soldiers, which can be viewed as a reflection of a paranoid psychological projection on the part of the German- and Magyar-speakers, who were much more conscious of their national identity. It did not help that the prime enemy was the Serbian nation-state, and that Gavrilo Princip and his comrades identified as nationalists acting (unofficially) on behalf of that state.⁹⁵ During the opening weeks of the war, news media relayed almost daily reports of suspected treachery. In perhaps the most extreme case of rumormongering, a report came that Svetozar Boroević himself had been shot for espionage.⁹⁶

Of course, in reality Boroević was alive and well and preparing to depart with his unit to the Eastern Front. At the outbreak of war Boroević was in command of the VI Corps, attached to the k.u.k. Fourth Army under the command of General Moritz von Auffenberg (1852-1928). The Fourth Army was deployed to Galicia, on the Russian frontier, in August 1914, along with the First and Third Armies. Mobilization began immediately upon the declaration of war, though this process proceeded slowly due to logistical problems in attempting to mobilize on two fronts (against Russia and Serbia) simultaneously. The Fourth Army (along with the First and Third) were in position in Galicia in the middle of the month, with expected reinforcements from the Second Army to arrive from the Balkan front following the anticipated rapid victory over Serbia.

Boroević's unit was marching into another borderland, that of the Kingdom of Galicia. This territory had been part of the larger Polish state that, prior to its dissolution during the eighteenth

⁹⁵ It seems no coincidence that Princip's group was composed of comparatively well-educated young people, who more closely identified with the national project than was the case for many of their half-literate or illiterate contemporaries, for whom religion or region (indeed, village) may have been far more important as identity markers.

⁹⁶ John Schindler, *Fall of the Double Eagle: The Battle for Galicia and the Demise of Austria-Hungary* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 128.

century, had served as a buffer between the rival powers of Russia, Prussia, and Austria. Now, of course, Polish populations existed on sides of three imperial borders, at times intermingled with German and other ethnic groups⁹⁷

Arrival at the Front

Boroević's fixation on troop discipline, as well as his frustration at a perceived lack of discipline among his soldiers, continued to bedevil him as his unit arrived at the front.⁹⁸ Upon their arrival in Galicia, Boroević sent the following message to the senior officers of VI Corps:

I am not impressed with what I have seen so far of the combat and service troops of this corps. There is a lack of serious discipline and order; the men are letting themselves go, and some of the officers too. There is a lack of focus, and concentration is not at the level that will be required in the imminent encounter with the enemy... Therefore it is a duty, and a requirement of wisdom too, without a moment's delay, to bring officers and men to an understanding that the primary and most authoritative condition for success is iron discipline.⁹⁹

In truth, however, the very structure of the polyglot army worked against him. According to Carl von Bardolff (1865-1953) who served as commander of the 29th Infantry Brigade (part of Boroević's VI Corps), his unit's soldiers spoke no fewer than five different languages, and

⁹⁷ As discussed in Chapter 1

⁹⁸ As referenced in Chapter 1

⁹⁹ Quoted in Schindler, *Fall of the Double Eagle*, 182.

observed five different religions; as many of the troops did not understand each other's languages, they often found it easier to communicate in English.¹⁰⁰ In all likelihood, the remainder of the units of the VI Corps were of similar composition, and faced similar communication challenges and potential cultural misunderstandings.¹⁰¹ Borojević's attempts to impose order on a chaotic situation, however, appear to have borne some fruit, and were soon to bear rich dividends for the Habsburg war effort on the eastern front.

The first major engagement on the eastern front took place at Krasnik on August 23-25, 1914, a skirmish fought primarily between the Austro-Hungarian First Army and the Russian Fourth Army. It was the next engagement, the Battle of Komarow (August 26-28), however, where Borojević was fated to achieve his first battlefield success. In this battle, Borojević's VI Corps was deployed as the vanguard of an attack which, according to Fourth Army commander Auffenberg, was intended to encircle the Russian forces and produce an annihilation comparable to that of the ancient Roman defeat at Cannae at the hands of Hannibal's Carthaginian army.¹⁰² However, the battle began inauspiciously for the Austro-Hungarian forces, with the Fourth Army taking heavy casualties. So severe was the routing of the 15th Infantry Division that its commander, Major General Friedrich Wodniansky (Bardolff's immediate commanding officer), responded by taking his own life on the night of August 27.¹⁰³ By the dawn of August 28 it appeared that Auffenberg's plan may have been developing into a "reverse Cannae."

On that day, Borojević reorganized his command, including several units that had taken heavy casualties, such as Wodniansky's 15th Infantry and the 39th Honved, and was able to halt the

¹⁰⁰ Carl von Bardolff, *Soldat im alten Österreich: Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben* (Jena: Eugen Diederichs Verlag, 1938), 190-1.

¹⁰¹ See, for example, the initial order of battle for the VI Corps given in OULK v. 1, p. 76.

¹⁰² *Österreich Ungarns Letzter Krieg*, vol 1, p. 190. Hereinafter referenced as *OULK*

¹⁰³ Schindler, *Double Eagle*, 186.

Russian advance at Komarow. By placing the remnants of the 15th under the temporary command of the rearguard commander Fieldmarshall Lieutenant Edler von Schenk, he was able to make an otherwise obliterated unit again combat-ready.¹⁰⁴

The results of the Battle of Komarow bore immediate dividends for the Austro-Hungarian war effort, and for the Fourth Army especially. Auffenberg was awarded an additional battlefield honor, appending the predicate “von Komarow” to his name, as well as a cash award.¹⁰⁵ It was Borojević, however, who subsequent observers have given the lion’s share of the credit for the victory, hailed as the “victor of Komarow.”¹⁰⁶ Borojević, for his part, was more than happy to accept this credit; in a contemporary letter to a friend he stated how

the Battle for Komarow would have been lost without me. Had the Fourth Army been unable to shift its forces, thanks to my corps, the renewed offensive would have been impossible, and the war would have been lost.¹⁰⁷

Very soon afterward, his role in turning the tide of battle at Komarow resulted in further promotion and accolades for him.

At the same time as the Fourth Army was fighting at Komarow, the k.u.k. Third Army, under the command of Rudolf Brudermann (1851-1941), was attempting to fend off a threat by Russian forces at Lemberg (Lwow/L’viv/Lvov), the capital of Galicia. Facing a force that considerably outnumbered it, the Third Army’s attacks during the last week of August fell into a pattern -

¹⁰⁴ *OULK* v. 1, p. 201

¹⁰⁵ Wawro, *Mad Catastrophe*, 216.

¹⁰⁶ Bauer, *Löwe*, p. 28.

¹⁰⁷ Quoted in Schindler, *Double Eagle*, 207.

“shot to a standstill by Russian defensive fire and then enveloped from the flanks by Russian counterattacks.”¹⁰⁸ Battered by Russian onslaught, the Third Army retreated from Lemberg, surrendering it to the Russians on September 2.

The loss of Lemberg to the Russians proved nearly catastrophic for the Austro-Hungarian war effort, and the High Command took immediate action to prevent troop morale from plummeting. Brudermann was assigned the blame for the loss and was relieved of his command on September 4. Although a memo from the High Command to Franz Joseph’s Military Chancellery might have implied that Brudermann’s removal from service was temporary--“For the duration of General Brudermann’s illness, General Borojević will be entrusted with the command of the Third Army--, this was merely a polite cover for putting the unsuccessful commander out to pasture.¹⁰⁹ Thus ended the career of an officer who had once been considered a favorite of the court.¹¹⁰ In his place, Svetozar Borojević was appointed to the command of the Third Army. In his memoirs, Conrad states that he chose Borojevic for the post because “his great capability was already known to me in peacetime, and he had already proven to be a prudent, strong-willed, and energetic leader through the difficult Battle of Komarow.”¹¹¹ High praise indeed, and ironic as well, considering how the two officers were to be in conflict through most of the time they worked together.

¹⁰⁸ Wawro, *Mad Catastrophe*, 224.

¹⁰⁹ Telegram from AOK dated September 6, 1914, Austrian State Archive Online <http://wk1.staatsarchiv.at/tagebuch/kaiser-franz-josef-i/1914/september/691914/> Accessed May 20, 2018.

¹¹⁰ Wawro, *Mad Catastrophe*, 236. Wawro’s account lays out the case that Brudermann was made the scapegoat for planning failures by Conrad and Archduke Friedrich.

¹¹¹ Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf, *Aus meiner Dienstzeit* (Vienna: Rikola Verlag, 1921-1925), v. 4, p. 636.

In Command of the Third

Once he took command of the Third Army, Borojević gave the following address to the troops:

As the victor of a seven-day murderous battle I have been named commander of the Third Army; I would like to extend to all nationals of the same [here, of the Third Army] my greetings as a soldier and comrade. The services of the brave troops of this army, the stresses and strains, the deprivations, that they have tolerated, the losses they have suffered up to now, are known to me. But those troops which I now lead that have suffered great losses, will suffer still more, but most of all will our opponents! My old soldier's luck has put me in this position. I wish to bring this luck with me to the Third Army; that will certainly help strengthen it. The Third Army, I am certain, will in no case bring shame upon their homeland and in the coming days will achieve our highest goal - the satisfaction of our highest commanders!¹¹²

It is tempting to read a nationalist (or worse yet, supranational) appeal into Borojević's remarks, with references to "nationals" (*Angehörigen*) and homeland (*Heimat*). However, the Third Army at this point was not composed of soldiers of any particular nationality, any more so than the other Habsburg military; it was composed of diverse Landwehr and Honved units from different parts of the Monarchy, including Tyrolean units and Slavic commanders.¹¹³ Therefore it

¹¹² *Nachlass Kiszling*, v. 143/44

¹¹³ See, for example, the initial order of battle for the Third Army given in *OULK* v. 1, pp. 73-75.

would be premature to take this statement as anything but a general appeal to bolster troop morale in the face of the recent reversals.

Upon taking command of the Third Army, Borojević was immediately confronted with a dilemma. Lemberg remained in Russian hands, and the fortress at Przemyśl was under siege. Moreover, as Hungarian Prime Minister Istvan Tisza declared at a war conference in December, the threat to Galicia put the heartland of Hungary under threat not only from Russia but also from Romania, which might now seek to join the war to gain Transylvania.¹¹⁴

Tisza had good reason to be worried: With Lemberg under Russian control and Przemyśl threatened, Habsburg control of Galicia hung on by a thread. If Galicia fell, there would be little to stop a Russian invasion of Hungary by descending from the Carpathian mountain range on to the Hungarian Plain. It is at this moment that Borojević earned the title “Defender of the Carpathians,” that was later to be etched on his memorial marker (Fig. 3). In addition, he was to be referred to as the “Savior of Hungary” and the “Hindenburg of the Carpathians”¹¹⁵

His crucial role as military chief was perhaps most evident at the Battle of Limanowa (December 1-12, 1914). Here Borojević’s Third Army, in coordination with the Fourth Army (which by this time was under the command of Archduke Joseph Ferdinand) was tasked with defending the Cracow region against incursion by the Russian Third Army under Aleksei Brusilov and Radko Dmitriev. Like Komarow, this was to be a hard-fought battle, the results of which were far from a foregone conclusion.

Indeed, at one point on December 9 the impression was that Borojević’s “hesitant” conduct had ruined the impact of the Fourth Army’s offensive and ceded the advantage to Dmitriev’s

¹¹⁴ *OULK*, v.1, pp. 599-600. For their part, the High Command ensured Tisza that Borojević would do his utmost to defend Hungarian territory.

¹¹⁵ Hoffmann, *Feldmarschall*, 23.

army.¹¹⁶ Had Boroewić not been able to turn things around, it is very likely that he would have found himself cashiered at the battle's end, as his predecessor and former CO had been.¹¹⁷

However, the tide of battle did turn, and Boroewić deployed the west wing of the Third Army into an attack on Neu Sandez (Nowy Sacz) that ultimately clinched the victory on December 12.

The results of the Battle of Limanowa were likewise momentous. General Ruzski, commander of the Russian Northwest Front, admitted in a contemporary interview that the Austro-Hungarian response was a “strategic masterpiece” that halted the Russian war effort in Galicia at least temporarily.¹¹⁸ Subsequent observers have agreed, assigning Limanowa as the event primarily responsible for preventing a Russian invasion of Hungary.¹¹⁹

Conrad had grand plans of using Boroewić's army to follow up the victory at Limanowa by having the Third Army continue to pursue the Russians and inflict an even more damaging blow on them; Boroewić was apparently unaware of Conrad's intention but planned the same offensive, one of the relatively rare occasions the two commanders were on the same page.¹²⁰ The planned attack, however, was not to be; reconnaissance revealed that the Russians had already fortified their positions, and weather conditions were not favorable for an assault. Instead, much of the remainder of his tenure on the Carpathian front was tied into the defense of, and then attempts to reclaim, the fort of Przemysl. Although his later actions were to be the subject of intense scrutiny by both contemporary and subsequent observers, his success (or lack thereof) as a commander on the Carpathian front has largely been excused; a recent study of the

¹¹⁶ *OULK*, v.1, p. 801.

¹¹⁷ Already Auffenberg had been removed from command of the Fourth Army as a result of its disastrous performance at the Battle of Rawa, September 2-11, 1914.

¹¹⁸ *OULK*, v.1, p. 812.

¹¹⁹ For example, Bauer, *Löwe*, 50; Wawro, *Mad Catastrophe*, 306.

¹²⁰ *OULK*, v.2, p. 3.

war on the Eastern front opined that Borojević was “too constrained by terrain, weather, and lashing messages from Conrad to display his ability.”¹²¹

For the next nine months Borojević’s valiant (though ultimately unsuccessful) attempts to protect the fort served to enhance his esteem, through three major offensives designed to remove the Russian threat to Przemyśl in December 1914, and January and February 1915.¹²² Although his army suffered setbacks and reverses, Borojević, unlike his predecessor, somehow escaped blame for these losses. On the contrary, he was awarded further battlefield honors: the Order of the Iron Crown (Sept 1914), the Grand Cross of the Order of Leopold (October 1914), and the First Class of Military Merit (May 1915). These differing responses to the performance of the two Third Army Commanders could possibly point to a greater understanding that reversals suffered by Borojević were beyond his control, or that his actions served to prevent further damage. There is, however, something to be said that an idealization of what Borojević represented may have been of influence: the *kaisertreu* South Slav officer, who by his steadfast support for the Habsburg monarchy showed the errant ways of the Serbian (and other nationalist) rogues. This would not have been the first time that Borojević’s experience was to support a national or imperial narrative, and it was far from the last. In the eyes of the High Command, it may have been crucial to maintain Borojević’s image front and center, especially to forestall South Slav citizens gravitating toward Serbia in light of the then poor performance of the Monarchy’s troops on the Balkan front.

¹²¹ Richard Di Nardo, *Turning Points: The Eastern Front in 1915* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2020), 159.

¹²² Graydon A. Tunstall, *Blood on the Snow: The Carpathian Winter War of 1915* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2010), 60.

Nor did the importance of Boroević's position go unnoticed by the Court or the High Command. Notwithstanding his disputes with Conrad (which I will discuss presently) Boroević was greatly valued as an officer, as a January 1915 letter from Archduke Friedrich (titular commander of the Austro-Hungarian army) unintentionally reveals:

Your Excellency,

From different quarters I have heard reports that you have not been getting the necessary goodwill from your subordinate commanders as a result of your treatment of them. Even His k.u.k. Apostolic Majesty was displeased to hear of the measures taken with regard to the 10th Corps.

In recognition of your excellent leadership capabilities, as well as an appreciation of your - in these difficult times certainly valuable - energy, I feel obliged to bring these matters to your Excellency's attention.

Multiple higher command offices in the Third Army are newly occupied, or have commanders whose units have recently been assigned to the Third. It would be highly regrettable if these commanders, who certainly strive with full devotion be most effective in their new posts in the upcoming decisive days, are adversely affected in their service ability by the feeling that they are receiving no good will from your Excellency.

The now five-and-a-half month long campaign has warped our judgment; the enormous physical, mental, and spiritual needs of the gigantic struggle but shaken our ability to resist, made us sensitive. I appeal to your Excellency's soldier's heart, to take into account this fact, because I am convinced that the troops and their commanders will be inspired by a responsive goodwill of their superiors to highest performance in these troubled times.

With the highest approval of his k.u.k. Apostolic Majesty, I choose the form of a letter to your Excellency to relay my opinion in this matter, and I am convinced that you will prevent personal upsets in command areas in the future. In the hope that your Excellency has recovered from the recent Influenza outbreak, I wish for your coming actions strength, endurance and complete success.¹²³

Even if this was a mild reprimand in urging Borojević to treat his subordinates with a bit more circumspection and tact, once again we see that his value to the High Command was such that they were willing to overlook Borojević's shortcomings as a commander. What lessons Borojević may have learned from Archduke Friedrich's admonishment I will examine in the next chapter.

After Limanowa, the remainder of the month of December saw Borojević's Third Army fail to make any significant headway; rather, it found itself on the defensive against Russian attacks. Nor did the holiday season bring any respite; the storied "Christmas truce" of the Western front was not replicated at this time in this part of the Eastern front; the Third Army continued to fight through the new year. In the Official History of the war, the Russians are blamed for refusing to abide by the Pope's call to suspend hostilities for the Christmas season (even though, as Orthodox Christians, Russians were not particularly bound to listen to pronouncements from Rome).¹²⁴

Much of the scholarly literature on the Great War's Eastern Front has already discussed the brutal weather conditions and their effect on the soldiers, so merely a brief recapitulation here will be necessary.¹²⁵ The Austro-Hungarian armies, already poorly provisioned, did not have any

¹²³ *Nachlass Borojević* B/4/16/8-9. See also Hoffmann, *Feldmarschall*, 25-26.

¹²⁴ OULK, v.2, p. 64.

¹²⁵ See, for example, Tunstall, *Blood*, 37-38, 88-89; Di Nardo, *Turning Points*, 54-57

suitable winter clothing or gear, owing to the High Command's refusal to allow for the possibility that the war could last into the winter months.¹²⁶ As a result thousands of soldiers fell victim not to enemy fire but to exposure to the elements. In the words of one eyewitness, Colonel Georg Veith:

The reports from these days are shocking. Everyday hundreds froze to death. The wounded who were unable to drag themselves forward were left behind to die. Entire ranks were reduced to tears in the face of the terrible agony. ... For a full thirty days, not one single man had any shelter. Hardly a battalion on the Habsburg front consisted of 200 men as lines grew thinner and thinner. Battle-weary front-line troops were continuously being wrenched from one position to another to plug a newly formed gap. Medics and those not seriously ill or injured were called into service. A constant state of mass confusion reigned; a tremendous detriment to any military command. Apathy and indifference were gaining a foothold and could not be contained.¹²⁷

Borojević led another relief effort in February 1915; however, again any advantage from this maneuver was to be short lived. By the end of February, the grim realization dawned that the Monarchy did not have the manpower to continue to defend the fort.¹²⁸ In early March the Russian assault began in earnest, and on March 22, 1915, Przemsyl surrendered to Russian troops.

¹²⁶ Tunstall, *Blood*, 3.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, 66.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 154.

The fall of Przemsyl did not relieve any pressure on the Third Army. Skirmishing with Russian forces continued for the remainder of March; the Third Army came under attack by Russian forces the day after the fort surrendered.¹²⁹ The beginning of April set the stage for what has become known as the “Easter Battle,” in which several units of Borojević’s army came under targeted Russian assault. Intense fighting continued during the Easter week, with the most decisive days of fighting being on Good Friday and Holy Saturday (April 2 and 3, 1915). Although the tide of battle remained uncertain at first (with the Second Army being compelled briefly to retreat), Russian forces were ultimately forced to withdraw. The Official History, perhaps indulging in a flair for the dramatic, states that the Easter Battle had results of “world historical importance,” one of which was that the Russians had been “forever denied a gateway into Hungary.”¹³⁰

The Easter Battle also served as the setting for the notorious incident involving Infantry Regiment 28. This unit, composed of 95 percent Czech soldiers, faced off against a numerically superior Russian force on April 3, 1915, and was decimated, with 300 soldiers forced into retreat and 1,000 officers and men taken into Russian captivity.¹³¹ With such a high loss ratio, the accusation soon arose that this regiment had failed to show appropriate battlefield valor, or even that they had willingly defected to the enemy. As a result of these suspicions, Borojević ordered the temporary disbanding of this unit on April 11, 1915.¹³² Although later evidence emerged to exonerate the soldiers of the 28th, including more information about the degree to which the

¹²⁹ Telegram from AOK dated March 24, 1915, Austrian State Archive Online <http://wk1.staatsarchiv.at/tagebuch/kaiser-franz-josef-i/1915/maerz/2331915/> Accessed May 20, 2018.

¹³⁰ *OULK*, v. 2, p. 257.

¹³¹ Richard Lein, “The Military Conduct of the Austro-Hungarian Czechs in the First World War,” *Historian* (v. 76, no. 3, Fall 2014), pp. 518-549, 527.

¹³² *Ibid.*

regiment had been outmatched by their Russian adversary and how valiantly they had fought before being overwhelmed, this incident continued to be cited as evidence to support the “unreliability” of Czech soldiers, especially on the Eastern front. As we will see, however, the 28th was later re-established on the Italian front, where it served with distinction.

Of particular note is Borojević’s at times adversarial relationship with the Chief of Staff, Conrad. During the winter of 1914-1915 the two often crossed swords over tactics. At the beginning of February 1915, Borojević was forced to send reinforcements into battle piecemeal to protect his army, in defiance of a direct order from Conrad to hold his line.¹³³ A week later, with his army suffering considerable losses, Borojević unsuccessfully appealed to Conrad to suspend the offensive until weather conditions improved.¹³⁴ As we will see, this pattern will recur later on the Italian front. One is tempted to wonder whether something more than a mere difference of opinion over tactics guided their animosity. Despite Conrad’s ostensible praise of him as an officer, did Conrad bear Borojević any particular ill will as a result of his not being of Austrian-German ethnicity? Conrad’s biographer, Lawrence Sondhaus, reveals that Conrad had from early in his career formed a firm Social Darwinist worldview, and saw a society in which Austrian Germans were the cultural superiors as the norm/ideal.¹³⁵ Conrad was far from alone in this assertion, for Borojević was fated to encounter others who viewed him through this lens of German superiority, not only throughout his career but even following his death.

Within the harsh conditions of the front, Borojević was repeatedly called upon to keep up the morale of those under his command, often to demonstrate that even those who made sacrifices

¹³³ Tunstall, *Blood*, 91.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, 98.

¹³⁵ Lawrence Sondhaus, *Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf: Architect of the Apocalypse* (Boston: Humanities Press, 2000), 84.

would be acknowledged. As we have already discussed, this could be a tall order for one who had a reputation as a difficult taskmaster; however, some efforts made on Borojević's part document his intent to bolster his army's morale. In a January 22, 1915, field order, Borojević assured his troops that he was well aware of the difficulties that they labored under, and he had complete faith (*vollstes Vertrauen*) in their abilities, closing with the assurance that their army will soon march "shoulder to shoulder" with their German comrades to victory.¹³⁶ Another field order of April 5, 1915, acknowledged the "hero's death" of one Silvo Spiess von Braccioforte, Commander of the 39th Infantry Regiment, awarding him the Order of the Iron Crown and the Knight's Cross of the Order of Leopold.¹³⁷ As the winter wore on, maintaining troop morale became ever more crucial, as troops confronted with the harsh conditions at the front often surrendered to apathy; the Official History alleges that the group most heavily afflicted were soldiers of Slavic nationality, who became increasingly more reluctant to fight their fellow Slavs.¹³⁸ This is, of course, a not wholly unbiased source, and more recent historiography has cast doubt on this assertion.¹³⁹

Despite the hard-fought efforts of Borojević's Third Army, the fortress of Przemsyl was not to be finally recovered and secured until May 1915 with the opening of the Gorlice-Tarnow offensive. By that time, however, Borojević himself was in the process of taking leave of the Eastern Front, having been transferred to a new command, in response to the declaration of war by Italy. It is this new command which was to cement Borojević's reputation as a tenacious and faithful military commander both with his contemporaries and in the eyes of history.

¹³⁶ *Nachlass Borojević*, B/4/18/6

¹³⁷ *Nachlass Borojević*, B/4/18/7

¹³⁸ *OULK*, v. 2, p. 134.

¹³⁹ See, for example, Lein, "Military Conduct Czechs"; Wawro, *Mad Catastrophe*; Schindler, *Double Eagle*.

CHAPTER 3

LION OF THE ISONZO

The Italian declaration of war on the Dual Monarchy of May 23, 1915, was far from unexpected; the event had been anticipated and feared from the outset of the war, from the moment during the July Crisis that the Italian government advised the Ballhausplatz (the Austrian government) that they would not support their nominal allies and instead remain neutral at the outbreak of hostilities.

This Italian neutrality, however, proved to be only a façade; it soon became clear that Italy would cast its lot with the side that could offer it the most. Italy's aspirations were directed to the acquisition of *Italia Irredente*, those territories with large Italian populations or historic ties to Italy that still lay outside the Italian kingdom after 1870, specifically Trentino, Trieste, and Dalmatia - territories controlled by Austria-Hungary. Of course, these were not the only territories the Italians were interested in; some in the Italian government might have liked to recover Corsica, Nice and Savoy, the latter two territories relinquished to France by Piedmont-Sardinia in exchange for French assistance during the wars of Italian Unification. Likewise, they coveted portions of Albania. But the Austrian territories were by far the most appealing, for historic and nationalist reasons.

Aware of this point of contention, the German high command continually pressured their counterparts in the Monarchy to surrender at least some of this territory to Italy in hopes of gaining Italian support or at least continued neutrality. Franz Josef, however, refused to consider

giving up any part of his patrimony, and repeatedly rebuffed this request. As late as March 1915, at a Common Ministerial Council Meeting for the Monarchy, the idea of offering at least Trentino to Italy was discussed – and promptly rejected.¹⁴⁰

The Entente powers, however, were not bound by such considerations, and were more than happy to agree to offer their adversary's lands to Italy to entice them into the war on their side. Under the terms of the secret Treaty of London in January 1915, Italy was set to enter the war against Austria-Hungary (though, significantly, not Germany at first) in exchange for all of the territory it desired in Trentino (South Tyrol), Trieste, and along the Dalmatian coastline.

In doing so, the Italian government entered a maelstrom of nationalist contestation, as much of this territory was inhabited not only (or even mostly) by Italian nationals, but by Germans (South Tyrol) and South Slavs (Trieste and Dalmatia). Indeed, the Istrian peninsula, including Trieste, as well as Dalmatia, was territory also claimed by Serbia, which, after emerging by 1913 from the recent Balkan Wars with enlarged territory and prestige, was positioning herself in a leadership role for the South Slav peoples. This collision course between the two nominal allies was ultimately to lead to problems at the peace settlement at the war's end as well as continued tension between Italy and Yugoslavia during the interwar period.

The Italian move inadvertently provided a propaganda tool for the Habsburg Monarchy, as it allowed them to present the war with Italy to the South Slav population as a war to expel an invader seeking to take over their lands. The location of the main theater of war, the Isonzo River valley in the Slovene lands (Slovene *Soča*), aided this effort.¹⁴¹ Although this location was

¹⁴⁰ Miklós Komjáthy, ed., *Die Protokolle des Gemeinsamen Ministerrates der Österreichisch-Ungarischen Monarchie 1914-1918* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1966), 216.

¹⁴¹ A good contemporary map of the Isonzo Front can be found at <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/blog/rendering-small-service> (Accessed September 20, 2018).

chosen for tactical reasons, allowing for easier troop access than across the more mountainous terrain of the Tyrol (which throughout the war remained a secondary front with Italy, notwithstanding Conrad's support for offensives from the Alps), the location of the Isonzo at the border of an area of national contestation was a major factor in the development of the war on the Italian front. Once again, the borderland was to prove pivotal in shaping Borojević's experience. This time, it was to be the ethnic frontier between the South Slavs (in this case, Slovenes and Croats) and Italians.

The final chapter of Borojević's military career was fated to unfold at this front. Much of the source material for Borojević as both a commander and as a person during his posting to the Isonzo front come from three major sources close to him. Anton Pitreich (1870-1939), Borojević's Chief of Staff, provides perhaps the most balanced picture, at times rendering both approbation and criticism of Borojević's actions. Karl Schneller (1878-1942), who served as liaison between the General Staff and the Command for the Southwest (Italian) Front, displays an intense dislike for Borojević, and his war diaries are at some points tinged with not too thinly veiled contempt for the front commander.¹⁴² A third source is Aurel Le Beau (1866-1922), General Staff Chief for the Fifth Army – and Conrad's brother-in-law – who also showed a tendency to frequently come into conflict with Borojević over tactics and command style.

Most American observers of the war on the Italian front have at best a limited awareness of its unfolding, usually based on Ernest Hemingway's novel *A Farewell to Arms*, his tale of an American expatriate serving alongside the Italian army (based in part on Hemingway's own wartime experience).¹⁴³ The novel at times paints a picture of ineptitude among the Italian

¹⁴² As just one example, Schneller's accounts often refer to Borojević dismissively as "Bosco."

¹⁴³ Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929).

forces; while Hemingway exaggerated this at times, this bumbling reputation was not entirely undeserved. The Italian Chief of the General Staff, Count Luigi Cadorna (1850-1928), had virtually no actual combat experience, and owed his position largely to family connections; his father had been instrumental in the operation that had secured Rome for the Italian government in 1870. And, in general, the experience of the Italian army in the field in the years prior to the war had been one of either limited success (as in the Libyan annexation in 1911), or disaster (as in the 1896 attempt to invade Ethiopia).

In contrast, it appeared that Austria-Hungary had several tactical advantages; it retained control of the terrain for most of the Isonzo campaign, a kind of “home field advantage,” and had, at least initially, numerical superiority over the Italian forces. Moreover, the High Command had more than ample warning to prepare for a coming Italian attack; while the first battles of the Italian campaign were not to take place until the summer of 1915, by the end of April troops were already being sent to the Italian front, weeks before the official declaration of war.¹⁴⁴ Although the Monarchy could have done without another front on which to fight, there was reason to be optimistic, especially as news arrived from the East of the success of the Gorlice-Tarnow Offensive that had started on May 1, 1915 – ironically, Boroević’s former troops enjoyed their greatest success just after he left to take up his command in Italy.¹⁴⁵

Defending the Isonzo

Boroević arrived at the headquarters of the Fifth Army in Laibach (Ljubljana) on May 27, 1915 to assume his new command, and much like his previous postings, immediately began to

¹⁴⁴ Georg Veith, “Die Isonzovertheidigung,” *OULK*, Suppl. Vol. 3, p. 2

¹⁴⁵ Wawro, *Mad Catastrophe*, 370

micromanage the Fifth Army, issuing his first orders to the defenders of the line advising them to choose the best possible position, and ordering that withdrawal from any portion of the front could take place only with his direct authorization.¹⁴⁶ True to form, Borojević also almost immediately experienced friction with his new command staff. In his diary entry of June 5, Pitreich expresses frustration with Borojević for not having visited the front – to be sure, an interesting criticism given Borojević’s penchant for micromanaging his army, one that might speak to a determination to do things his own way, regardless of what opinions his fellow officers may have voiced.¹⁴⁷ One recent history of the Isonzo campaign alleges that this behavior was to be the norm for Borojević’s tenure on the Italian front; that, like Cadorna, he practiced “chateau management” – rarely visiting the front and remaining mostly at headquarters.¹⁴⁸ Following Borojević’s assumption of the command, Le Beau expressed concerns regarding a possible naval attack on Trieste, and the fact that they had no naval officer on staff; I have not found a record of Borojević’s response to this concern.¹⁴⁹ Le Beau may have been worried about something that had already been addressed; the Austro-Hungarian navy under Admiral Haus had made a strong showing in the opening weeks of the war against Italy, and winning an engagement over Italy that was decisive enough to ensure that the Adriatic remained under the Monarchy’s control until late in the war.¹⁵⁰ This seems to suggest that Borojević did not believe that Le Beau’s concern warranted action.

¹⁴⁶ *OULK*, v.2, p. 537.

¹⁴⁷ *Nachlass Pitreich*, B/54, v.2

¹⁴⁸ Without providing a source, though, see John Macdonald and Željko Cimprić, *Caporetto and the Isonzo Campaign: The Italian Front 1915-1918* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2011), 121.

¹⁴⁹ Fritz Rotter-Le Beau, *Feldmarschalleutnant Aurel von le Beau*, unpubl. PhD Diss. (Univ of Vienna, 1959), 94.

¹⁵⁰ *OULK*, v.2, p. 535, Manfred Rauchensteiner, *The First World War and the End of the Habsburg Monarchy, 1914-1918* (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2014), 399-401.

The beginning of summer 1915 marked the start of the first cycle of what became known as the Battles of the Isonzo. The First Battle of the Isonzo opened on June 23, 1915 and, like many that were to follow, was largely indecisive. Other authors have provided comprehensive accounts of the individual Isonzo battles, so there is no need to go into such exacting detail here; I will only examine the general trends and the major turning points in the campaign as they related to Borojević and the postwar fate of the territory.¹⁵¹

The First Battle of the Isonzo set the tone for many of the subsequent engagements on that front. First, it featured fierce, pitched battles over a fairly small expanse of territory. The difficult terrain prevented either side from gaining a clear victory, though it did generally serve to favor the defenders. Second, it ended without a clear gain for either side. Finally, the battle was cast, especially on the Austro-Hungarian side, as a contest over national terrain. As Pitreich wrote in his account of the First Battle: “The brave Croats would not let up and carefully cleaned up the attackers, and bought their success with a loss of 110 dead and 190 wounded, numbers which speak well to the defenders’ tenacity.”¹⁵²

The strategy employed by Borojević, particularly in the early stages of the Isonzo campaign, was primarily a defensive one. Taking advantage of the knowledge that the Fifth Army’s Slovene and Croatian soldiers were fighting with even greater motivation than their non-South Slav colleagues to defend the territory against Italian encroachment, Borojević’s order was to maintain the trench lines at all costs – units were to be kept in forward positions, and forestalling avenues for retreat. This tactic proved effective at holding the Austro-Hungarian line during the

¹⁵¹ Such as Schindler, *Isonzo*; Mark Thompson, *The White War: Life and Death on the Italian Front, 1915-1919* (New York: Basic Books, 2009).

¹⁵² *Nachlass Pitreich*, B/54, v.1.

First Isonzo Battle, but came at a significant human cost.¹⁵³ Official records reported the Monarchy's casualties from the First Battle at 10,000; modern observers believe the true figure was much higher.¹⁵⁴

This defensive strategy sheds additional light on Boroević's personality and command style, indicating a marked tendency toward stubbornness and tenacity. When a tactic had worked in the past, Boroević's first inclination was to repeat it, and was often slow to adapt when it became clear that what had worked before was not successful in the present engagement. In addition, the course of action he decided on was to be the last word, and when a difference of opinion arose between Boroević and senior staff, major conflict was to ensue. We have already seen examples of this mindset during Boroević's time on the Eastern front; this is evident from his command on the Isonzo as well, as I will discuss shortly. Finally, we can see from the extremely high casualty counts that Boroevic as a commander could be considered a "man eater" in the style of other commanders like British Field Marshal Douglas Haig (1861-1928). That Boroevic was able to continue to command loyalty from his largely Slavic troops serves as a testament to both the personal charisma he may have had as well as well as the force of national identification – recall that many were fighting to defend this territory from Italians seeking to occupy it.

Several more battles were fought on the Isonzo front during the summer and autumn of 1915, before the onset of winter brought a halt to campaign operations for the year. The Second, Third, and Fourth Isonzo battles had similar outcomes to the first battle. One noteworthy aspect to the Second Isonzo battle was the re-introduction into combat of the 28th Infantry Regiment, the Czech unit that had been disbanded following suspicions of disloyalty over the disastrous

¹⁵³ Schindler, *Isonzo*, 65

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 59

engagement in the Carpathians. The troops of the 28th were transferred to the Isonzo to meet the urgent need for reinforcements during the battle, and fought valiantly, earning praise from the High Command for “steadfastness” and “withstanding the severest test of discipline”; repeated shows of valor on the part of these troops led Franz Josef to order the full reinstatement of the 28th Infantry Regiment.¹⁵⁵ The 28th had now atoned for the debacle of the Easter Battle of 1915, and continued to serve with distinction on the Italian front. Although this unit had proven its loyalty, the narrative of the unreliability of Slavic units, particularly Czech soldiers, remained ingrained among the High Command. In furthering this myth, the High Command might have unwittingly provided fodder to later nationalist observers, who were to argue that the Dual Monarchy was already doomed from the outbreak of war in 1914 as it was no longer able to count on the loyalty of its national groups.

The Third Battle of the Isonzo (October-November 1915), the Fourth Battle (late November-December 1915), and the Fifth Battle, fought in March 1916, likewise failed to result in any appreciable shift in momentum for either side. The Sixth Battle of the Isonzo, however, was to prove to be a game changer.

The town of Gorizia (German *Görz*, Slovene *Gorica*) lies directly on the linguistic border between Italian and Slovene territory; it is for this reason that today Gorizia is divided between Italy and Slovenia. To shore up Italian claims to the town, it became a prime target for the Italian army during the war, and during the Sixth Battle, Cadorna gave the highest priority to capturing Gorizia.

¹⁵⁵ Schindler, *Isonzo*, 82

Meanwhile, a second, controversial facet entered into the fighting on the Italian-Habsburg front because of Boroević's decision to employ gas warfare against the Italian army, just prior to the Sixth Battle. This decision did not, however, go unchallenged. In the preparations for the battle, in his diary entry of July 1, 1916, Pitreich expresses serious reservations about the use of gas, fearing that the casualties would not be as much as expected, of the danger of gas affecting his own troops, and of the potential of such a move inciting retaliation from the Entente.¹⁵⁶ Indeed, the terrain and the climate of the Isonzo front made the deployment of gas logistically far more difficult than on the Western front (where its use was also not always very effective), a major reason why it had not been used by either side on the Italian front up to this time.¹⁵⁷ In the short term, the use of gas was a success – Italian casualties from the initial gas attack numbered 6,900 –, but over the long term it did greater harm than good to the Austro-Hungarian war effort, as the enraged Italian forces became far less willing to accept surrender of Austro-Hungarian troops without mistreating or killing them (after this time they could only safely surrender in large numbers).¹⁵⁸ In hindsight, it seems that Pitreich's fears were at least in part justified.

Soon after the opening of the major Italian offensive that began the Sixth Battle, the tide of battle began to turn against the Austro-Hungarian side rapidly. On August 6, 1916, the Italian Third Army took control of Mount San Michele, a major tactical position which made continued defense of Gorizia an almost impossible task for the k.u.k forces. Boroević spent all of August 7 and the morning of August 8 throwing everything possible into the effort to retake control of San Michele, desperate to forestall the inevitable Italian capture of Gorizia if the elevated positions

¹⁵⁶ *Nachlass Pitreich*, B/54, v. 2.

¹⁵⁷ Schindler, *Isonzo*, 152.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 153.

were not regained. Only when it became clear that this effort had failed, was the order to retreat to the east bank of the Isonzo (in effect, abandoning Gorizia to the Italians) finally given. By August 9, Austro-Hungarian troops had evacuated the city, and the Italian tricolor flew from its battlements.

The loss of Gorizia was a considerable moral blow to the Monarchy's war effort, on a par with the loss of Lemberg in September 1914. It did not help that this defeat came as the Monarchy was simultaneously contending with the losses incurred on the Eastern front as a result of the Brusilov Offensive during the summer of 1916. In addition, the city of Trieste, another major Italian target, was now exposed, and needed to be protected from attack. The Monarchy's campaign on the Isonzo had been a defensive war since the beginning; after this defeat and the loss of the key town, it became even more so. As Pitreich states in his account, the name "Görz" was to become a "political slogan" among the Austro-Hungarian army, as the recovery of the city was to become one of the goals of the war effort on the Isonzo front over the next year.¹⁵⁹ Ernest Hemingway was later to have his protagonist remark about Gorizia, "...the town had been captured very handsomely but the mountains beyond it could not be taken and I was very glad the Austrians seemed to want to come back to the town some time, if the war should end, because they did not bombard it to destroy it but only a little in a military way."¹⁶⁰ The first part of this statement was not far from the truth; though, of course, the damage done to the town by the conflict was far greater than Hemingway's words indicate.

Although the recovery of Gorizia was now a major aim of the Monarchy's efforts on the Isonzo front, conditions were fated not to allow this for another year, despite a number of

¹⁵⁹ *Nachlass Pitreich*, B/54, v. 2.

¹⁶⁰ Hemingway, *Farewell*, 5.

counteroffensives. During the remainder of 1916, several major engagements took place, including the Seventh Battle of the Isonzo (September 14-18, 1916), the Eighth (October 10-12), and the Ninth (November 1-4). In these battles the Austro-Hungarian war effort failed to make headway, however, though they succeeded in defending the front against an additional Italian advance. The cost of defending the territory proved staggering, as the Monarchy was now incurring significant additional casualties at a point in the war when their armed forces were everywhere coming under severe strain.

The other major offensive action to take place in 1916 on the Italian Front was the so-called Punitive Expedition (*Strafexpedition*) led by Conrad. During this operation, from May 15 until June 10, 1916, Conrad opened up an attack on his favored front, from Tyrol, in an effort to descend from the Alps. The objective was to seize the city of Padua, the major rail point (head/hub) for the Italian armies at the Isonzo front. In Conrad's thinking, the chance to cut off Cadorna's supply lines to the Isonzo outweighed the logistical issues with moving an army across the Alps. Borojević had relatively little involvement with Conrad's offensive, although it did require him to make sacrifices; he was advised that the offensive would require the transfer of four of the Fifth Army's divisions, along with many of its heavy artillery batteries and supporting troops for the effort – a transfer that Borojević ordered under protest.¹⁶¹

The Punitive Expedition steadily advanced deeper into Italian territory, aided by Cadorna's initial belief that the Austro-Hungarian strike from the Tyrol was merely a feint to distract from another planned Isonzo offensive. By the end of May, Conrad's force had advanced fifteen miles, a third of the way toward Padua. At this point, they encountered resistance from Cadorna's reorganized force on the Asiago plateau. By most accounts, the opening of the

¹⁶¹ Schindler, *Isonzo*, 145.

Russian Brusilov Offensive on June 4 heralded the effective end of the Punitive Expedition; however, the logistical issues involved in supplying an army fighting across the Alps – supply lines that were by then breaking down – were already forcing an end to the offensive.¹⁶²

The end of 1916 saw an event with a major impact affecting the Monarchy, and, indeed, Borojević himself, as will be seen. On November 21, 1916, following a reign of nearly 68 years, Emperor Franz Josef died. His successor, the new Kaiser Karl I (1887-1922) proved to be a complex individual. Much has been written of his handling of the final years of the war and his desperate attempts to preserve the multinational state he had inherited. At least initially, the new monarch was, in Pitreich's words, "greeted sympathetically and without prejudice as the bringer of a new course to the old rusted system of government."¹⁶³ Karl's attempt to find a solution to the nationality problem of the Monarchy was one of the factors that made him work closely with Borojević.

Already the new monarch had tied himself to Borojević's image. In a widely circulated photo, the then Heir Presumptive is seen sitting on a hill alongside Borojević, overlooking troop movements. The photo was originally printed on the cover of the April 2, 1916 edition of *Wiener Bilder*, and has been reprinted in multiple works about the war and the Italian Front.¹⁶⁴

A crucial change for the Italian Front took place as a result of Karl's accession to the throne, when in February 1917 the Chief of the General Staff, Conrad, who had often found himself in conflict with the new Kaiser (and, as well, with Borojević), was removed from his post and replaced with Arthur Arz von Straussenburg (1857-1935). Conrad was then reassigned to the

¹⁶² Schindler, *Isonzo*, 144-9.

¹⁶³ *Nachlass Pitreich*, B/54, v. 2.

¹⁶⁴ *Wiener Bilder*, April 2, 1916. The photo has appeared, for example, in Bauer, *Löwe*, and Thompson, *White War*.

command of an army group in South Tyrol, on the Italian Front; for the remainder of his career he was to be effectively on a par with Borojević in the command structure.

Borojević Gains Fame – and Notoriety

One of the curious aspects of Borojević's command on the Isonzo front was the attention it garnered from the press. While there were certainly other examples of laudatory press accounts of commanders on other fronts, the accounts of Borojević seemed to take on a remarkable prominence in newspaper reports, owing to his status as the highest-ranking Croatian officer of the monarchy, commanding an army fighting over "national" terrain. The Grenzer general's fame was becoming known worldwide; the Cuban newspaper *Diario de la Marina* published a glowing profile of him during the spring of 1916.¹⁶⁵

Pitreich reported that on March 9, 1917, the journalist Heinrich Friedjung (1851-1920) visited the front. Pitreich's remarks about Friedjung's interactions with Borojević are brief but telling:

The Army Commander [Borojević] used this opportunity to energetically set himself in a good light as a great commander, but whether Friedjung, as a shrewd judge of character arrived at a different conclusion, is another question entirely. Accompanying Friedjung was Dr. [Friedrich] Funder (1872-1959) of the *Reichspost*, who generally made a good impression.¹⁶⁶

Funder was fated to play a crucial role in reporting Borojević's later story, as we will see.

¹⁶⁵ "De La Guerra Europea," *Diario de la Marina*, May 5, 1916.

¹⁶⁶ Nachlass Pitreich, B/54, v.2.

An illuminating view comes from the journalist Alice Schalek (1874-1956), who covered the Isonzo front for the Viennese paper *Neue Freie Presse*, and filed a number of accounts from the front published in 1916 and 1917. In one of her earliest dispatches from the front, Schalek provided this estimation of Borojević's character:

There is no need for any intermediary. Anyone can come freely to General von Borojević and state what they think. And if you ask if you may write about his army, those eyes, which are still mild, gleam so radiantly that I must now almost smile over my own fear before this moment.

"If you promised," [Borojević said] "not to write anything about the Commander, I would ask you to do so. You have to write about every single soldier. You have to go and see. Whoever goes there and sees them must tell about them. One can't do that often enough! What is happening here on the Isonzo is without precedent in history."¹⁶⁷

Schalek took Borojević's advice; many of her later dispatches are written through the viewpoint of junior officers and enlisted soldiers.¹⁶⁸ Schalek's profile sheds some light on some of the success that Borojević achieved as a commander, despite his tempestuous relationship with his command staff. For despite the abrasive attitude (at times bordering on contempt) that he often assumed when interacting with those in the command structure, he appears to have had a genuine respect and concern for the welfare of the front-line soldiers under his command, notwithstanding his penchant for attack and defensive plans that allowed for extremely high

¹⁶⁷ Alice Schalek, "Bei der Isonzoarmee," *Neue Freie Presse*, April 4, 1916, p. 2.

¹⁶⁸ See for example her reports in the *Neue Freie Presse* editions of July 5, 1916, July 13, 1916, and July 20, 1916.

casualties. The soldiers, for their part, as we will soon see, appear to have reciprocated. As the next chapter will demonstrate, morale was to remain high until quite late in the war, despite the setbacks and lack of progress faced by the soldiers on the Italian Front prior to October 1917. The situation of the Austro-Hungarian forces here compares favorably with that of the Russian army, which was unable to adjust to reverses on the front and turmoil at home, and quickly collapsed following the failure of the June 1917 Kerensky Offensive.

Borojević himself was aware of the need to memorialize the events unfolding around him. In 1916 he approved a proposal for a museum cataloguing the experience of the Monarchy's soldiers on the Isonzo, only expressing concern that all of the nationalities at the front be represented.¹⁶⁹

A curious piece is one that appeared in the *Berliner Tagblatt* on May 20, 1917. Written by a Viennese soldier in the German army, Otto König (1882-1938), this "Soldatenlied vom Isonzo" (*Soldier's Song of the Isonzo*) paints Borojević in a particularly heroic light:

Borojević von Bojna
Is our General
He came from the Carpathians
And into the Isonzo Valley
"There," he said, "I will make a strong stand,
You shall not get to Trieste,"
And as he said it, accurate,

¹⁶⁹ Marko Štepec, "The Heritage of the Soča Front and Collective Memory," Uroš Košir, Matija Črešnar, and Dimitrij Mlekuž, eds., *Rediscovering the Great War: Archaeology and Enduring Legacies on the Soča and Eastern Fronts* (London: Routledge, 2019), 217.

So the Croat kept his word
Yes, yes, Croat,
Who does not shy away from shrapnel or bombs.
And bulletproof,
Yes, bulletproof
He remains to this day.

Boroević von Bojna
Is our General
He commands the seas
Up to the Tolmin Valley.
The Emperor has entrusted him
To skin the little cats
Just like he had done to the Russians
The Iron Croat
Yes, yes, Croat,
Who does not shy away from shrapnel or bombs.
And bulletproof,
Yes, bulletproof
He remains to this day.

Boroević von Bojna
Is our General

He led us into nine battles
And was successful in them all
There was no man in the whole army
Who did not have the utmost regard for him
Even if he otherwise was a good Christian
And himself wasn't even Croatian
Yes, yes, Croat,
Who does not shy away from shrapnel or bombs.
And bulletproof,
Yes, bulletproof
He remains to this day.¹⁷⁰

This poem's celebration of both Borojević's bravery and his ethnicity make it a paean to the mission of the Habsburg Monarchy, a statement that the *kaisertreu* Grenzer soldier was the exemplar to emulate. König was to go on to produce a considerable body of "war poetry" including a book dedicated to the soldiers on the Isonzo front, *Kameraden vom Isonzo* (*Comrades of the Isonzo*).

There is another curious inclusion in Borojević's *Nachlass* that provides a window into the esteem in which he was held by his troops. One volume includes the sheet music to two musical compositions written in honor of Borojević – "*Die Wacht am Isonzo*" ("The Watch on the

¹⁷⁰ Otto König, "Soldatenlied vom Isonzo," *Berliner Tagblatt*, May 20, 1917.

Isonzo”), and the “Boroevic March.”¹⁷¹ These were composed by army staff for performance by the Isonzo Army band. Once again, we can discern a respect for Boroevic on the part of his troops. The composition of the “Boroevic March” in particular serves as an intentional attempt to parallel the famous “Radetzky March,” and, by extension, the accomplishments of Field Marshall Joseph Radetzky (1766-1858), the hero of the Italian wars of 1848-1849. If there had been any intention for these musical tributes to Boroevic to permeate wider society in the way that the Radetzky March did, however, it was certainly unsuccessful. While the Radetzky March continued in regular use for decades following its composition, and is still performed today, there is no evidence that either of the two pieces composed in tribute to Boroevic were ever performed outside of the Isonzo front. This is not the only occasion on which a kind of parallel can be drawn between Boroevic and the “Radetzky March,” as I will discuss in Chapter 5.

Boroević may have enjoyed the respect and at times admiration of the front-line troops; however, much like during his time on the Eastern Front, he continued to have a tempestuous relationship with those he worked most closely with, including the staff officers and his immediate superiors and subordinates. Matters came to a head during the summer of 1915, not long after the conclusion of the Second Isonzo Battle. In August of that year, a dispute between Boroević and Alfred Krauss (1862-1938), the General Staff Chief for the Southwest Front, came perilously close to costing Boroević his command. A disagreement over fortification construction escalated into a personal conflict between two abrasive personalities, with each in turn blaming the other for the lack of progress against the enemy on the Isonzo Front. Commenting on this affair, Schneller opined, “Bosco must go! And it is he of all people, this

¹⁷¹ *Nachlass Boroevic*, v. 15

army spoiler, who is being kept on!”¹⁷² The dispute escalated to the point where Borojević tendered a resignation of his commission. The dispute was finally resolved by the intervention of the official supreme commander of the Habsburg forces, Archduke Friedrich (1856-1936), who refused to accept Borojević’s resignation and effectively ordered Krauss and Borojević to respect each other’s prerogatives. The commander of the Italian Front, Archduke Eugen (1863-1954), added a further note chiding Borojević:

I therefore demand of Your Excellency that, in future, you suppress the inadmissible sensitivity, which is only detrimental to our great purpose, for which we all wish to do our utmost, together with the irritability that springs from it, in order to implement my plans with all your excellent strength, and in so doing, to adapt yourself to this absolutely necessary hierarchical relationship.¹⁷³

As we have seen, this was not the first time a member of the ruling family found it necessary to criticize Borojević's interpersonal skills, as they affected his command style negatively.

“The Son of a Croatian Mother”

Finally, it is illuminating to note the reputation that Borojević was building as a figure among his fellow South Slavs. Two letters found in Borojević’s *Nachlass* demonstrate the extent to which, even early in his command in the Isonzo, he was seen as a national figure. First, a letter from the Ljubljana City Council of August 6, 1915, granting Borojević honorary citizenship of

¹⁷² *Nachlass Schneller*, v. 1 (KTB 17.8.1915)

¹⁷³ Rauchensteiner, *First World War*, 407.

the city, in appreciation of his efforts to protect Slovene lands from the “hereditary enemy.”¹⁷⁴ Likewise, an August 8, 1915 letter from the City Manager of Zagreb offers Borojević congratulations on his success on engagements on the front, and wishes that he continues to serve as the instrument of retribution on the former ally who had since become an enemy threatening their lands. The letter expresses pride that Borojević is “the son of a Croatian mother,” and assures him that “the entire citizenry of Zagreb receive this occasion with sincerest congratulations,” – ironic statements considering the fate that was to befall Borojević a few years later.¹⁷⁵

In addition to these plaudits, on February 1, 1916, Borojević was given a distinction that must have provided him with a great deal of satisfaction, when he was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Zagreb (which, at the time, was known as the Franz Josef University). To be sure, this honor was likely awarded to Borojević due to his military achievements at the front, rather than his accomplishments in representing the Croatian people; Archduke Eugen was awarded the same honor by the University on January 30.¹⁷⁶ This event, however, still appears to be more nationally charged than it would seem at first glance. Pitreich reported in his account of the presentation that he perceived a marked anti-Magyar sentiment among the delegation presenting the honor.¹⁷⁷ In addition, the individual tasked with presenting Borojević with the degree, university rector Franjo Barac, according to one account, took this occasion to attempt to

¹⁷⁴ *Nachlass Borojevic*, v. 17

¹⁷⁵ *Nachlass Borojević*, v. 17.

¹⁷⁶ “Počasni doktori Sveučilišta u Zagrebu 1913. – 2013” / Honorary Doctors of the University of Zagreb 1913-2013, p. 19, available at:

http://www.unizg.hr/fileadmin/rektorat/O_Sveucilistu/Jucer_danas_sutra/Povijest/Pocasni_doktori_1913-2013.pdf, accessed September 20, 2018.

¹⁷⁷ *Nachlass Pitreich*, v. 2. See also Hoffmann, *Feldmarschall*, 103.

get Borojević to definitively “pick a side” in the South Slav question, as we will see in the next chapter.

More Plaudits, and Caporetto

After the Ninth Isonzo Battle, the onset of winter brought an end to the campaign season until the next spring. During 1917, Borojević’s command underwent several changes. First, in May of 1917, his Fifth Army was renamed the Isonzo Army. Then, in August, the Isonzo Army was upgraded to form Army Group Borojević (*Heeresgruppe Borojević*). This formation consisted of the First Isonzo Army, commanded by General Wenzel von Wurm, and the Second Isonzo Army, commanded by Johann Ritter von Henriquez, and Borojević himself became Army Group Commander. A further reorganization was to follow, probably reflecting the lack of progress at the front: in January 1918 the order came to convert the Second Isonzo Army into the Sixth Army, commanded by Archduke Joseph.

The summer of 1917 was to bring another distinction for Borojević, as on June 2, the new Kaiser Karl I awarded Borojević with the Knight’s Cross of the Military Order of Maria Theresa, the highest military honor in the Monarchy’s armed forces.¹⁷⁸ For the purposes of the award, Karl and his wife Zita traveled themselves to the front. During this trip, Emperor and Empress not only participated in honoring Borojević but also visited with troops in the field and those convalescing at the local military hospital.¹⁷⁹ This visit by the reigning couple to the front illustrates two themes we have encountered before. First, this was yet another visibility event, in

¹⁷⁸ Due to a clerical error, although Karl awarded the Knight’s Cross, the Order of Maria Theresa itself only recognized Borojević as having received the Commander’s Cross, a lower rank. The Order officially awarded Borojević the Knight’s Cross posthumously in 1931: See Bauer, *Löwe*, 156-7.

¹⁷⁹ Bauer, *Löwe*, 135-6.

which the monarchs attempted to build solidarity with the people. Second, Karl's offering the award in person demonstrates how valued Borojević was by the Monarchy, not merely as a commander, but as a representative of the Croatian people. Karl continued to cultivate this connection, and maintained an active role in the conduct of the war on the Isonzo front.

The first two engagements of 1917, the Tenth Battle (May 12-June 8) and the Eleventh Battle (August 18-September 12) both ended in a stalemate. The next battle, however, was another game changer, one that can be viewed as a reversal of the Sixth Battle the previous year.

This Twelfth Battle of the Isonzo, better known as the Battle of Caporetto, amounted to the greatest victory by the Habsburg armies on the Italian front, and Fritz Rotter-Le Beau (Aurel's grandson) regarded it as one of the most perfect and successful operations of the entire war.¹⁸⁰ As a number of observers have noted, key to the success of Caporetto was the involvement of the German High Command in its planning and execution.¹⁸¹ Pitreich, for one, seems to have welcomed this development. In his diary entry for September 25, 1917, he expresses his weariness with the tension between Borojević and Le Beau, and his hope that the Germans will simply take command of the offensive and work out the particulars for themselves.¹⁸² In effect, to an extent Pitreich got his wish – for although, going into the planning of the offensive, Borojević had high hopes that he and his army group would play the leading role, tactical and logistical considerations dictated that the German 14th Army was to be the main wing of the force leading the attack; Borojević's Isonzo Army was to play a supportive role in cutting off the Italian retreat at the Tagliamento River.¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ Rotter-Le Beau, *Aurel von Le Beau*, 124.

¹⁸¹ Such as Schindler, *Isonzo*; Thompson, *White War*; and Mario Morselli, *Caporetto, 1917: Victory or Defeat?* (London: F. Cass, 2001).

¹⁸² *Nachlass Pitreich*, B/54, v. 2.

¹⁸³ Hoffmann, *Feldmarschall*, 219-28.

The opening phase of the Battle of Caporetto was an astonishing success for the combined Austro-Hungarian war effort, even if this triumph was considerably helped by Italian unpreparedness and refusal to heed warning signs. So convinced was Cadorna that another offensive would not occur before 1918 that he disregarded warnings from defecting Habsburg soldiers, and on the morning of October 24 refused to consider the initial shelling as anything other than a feint.¹⁸⁴

Within short order, the allied German-Austro-Hungarian force succeeded in recovering Gorizia and advanced to occupy Italian territory well south of their original position, ending at the Piave River. The victory was a huge morale boost for the forces of the Habsburg Monarchy and a devastating blow for the Italian war effort. Cadorna was relieved of his post on November 8, and replaced as Chief of Staff by Armando Diaz (1861-1928).¹⁸⁵

Virtually all accounts give the major share of the credit for the success of the offensive to the role played by the German commanders, particularly 14th Army commander Otto von Below (1857-1944), while appraisals of Boroević's leadership during the campaign vary. Schindler does not say much about Boroević's performance during the campaign, but highlights his role in planning the effort.¹⁸⁶ Morselli, on the other hand, argues that Boroević was precisely the wrong commander for the roles assigned to him at Caporetto, and that the failure of his armies to hold the line at the Tagliamento facilitated the retreat of the Italian 3rd Army.¹⁸⁷ It should be noted, however, that the Official History maintains that communications and logistical issues led to Boroević's army being issued incomplete and contradictory orders by the Southwest Front

¹⁸⁴ Thompson, *White War*, 298-9.

¹⁸⁵ Schindler, *Isonzo*, 261

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 244-6.

¹⁸⁷ Morselli, *Caporetto, 1917*, 125.

Command.¹⁸⁸ Krauss, in his memoir, is likewise critical of Borojević's performance during the campaign, particularly his coordination with the German forces – perhaps not surprising given the bad blood between the two officers!¹⁸⁹

However, although von Below and the German forces certainly deserve the major credit for the success of the Caporetto campaign, it cannot be ignored that Borojević's army stood firm, and fulfilled its expected role during the battle. Indeed, Borojević's army held its own against a retreating Italian force that, though demoralized, still proved to be a more effective fighting force than expected.¹⁹⁰ Weather hindered Borojević's army's efforts to inflict a decisive defeat on the Italians, with torrential rains and flooding hindering the movement of Borojević's troops.¹⁹¹ Borojević, for his part, felt confident enough about his troops' performance on the Tagliamento that he wanted to continue to pursue the Italian forces beyond the river, a position for which he appeared to receive some support from Archduke Eugen.¹⁹² Ultimately, it seems fair to argue that although Borojević was not the hero of Caporetto, he certainly did not hinder its success to the extent that detractors such as Morselli have charged.

When the offensive was finally halted at the beginning of December 1917, the German and Austro-Hungarian forces had moved the front considerably further south, and were now within striking distance of Venice. Had the offensive continued to take the city, the blow would very likely have been enough to force Italy to seek armistice terms. The question should be asked why the advantage was not pressed; certainly, the German forces at least were strong enough to

¹⁸⁸ *OULK*, v. 6, pp. 578-9. Of course, this can also be viewed as an attempt to shift the blame away from the army's own failures.

¹⁸⁹ Alfred Krauss, *Die Ursachen Unserer Niederlage: Erinnerungen und Urteile aus dem Weltkrieg* (Munich: J.F. Lehmanns, 1921), 232-3.

¹⁹⁰ *OULK*, v. 6, p. 599.

¹⁹¹ Hoffmann, *Feldmarschall*, 231.

¹⁹² Hoffmann, *Feldmarschall*, 238.

continue the advance at that point, and subsequent observers, such as Morselli, have criticized them for failing to seize that opportunity.¹⁹³ It may have been the case, however, that had Italy been forced to surrender at that point (i.e., the end of 1917), the Monarchy would have left the war as well, as its only other antagonist, Russia, was also seeking terms. With Italy removed from the war (and Serbia by then occupied as well), Austria-Hungary would have had little if anything to gain from continuing the war effort, effectively giving Kaiser Karl the pretext he was seeking to remove his forces from the front as well.

At this point, however, it was still necessary for Germany to have the Monarchy stand with it as an active participant in the war, if only to force diversion of Entente troops from the Western front to Italy. The imminent arrival of American troops on the Western front underscored the need to keep as many soldiers fighting on Germany's side as possible. For these reasons it was not in Germany's best interest for Italy to be knocked out of the war at that time, hence the (in effect, German) decision to halt the offensive short of conquering Venice.

Regardless of this missed opportunity, the combined German-Austro-Hungarian force had made a huge advance on the Italian front. In addition to recovering Gorizia and atoning for the loss of the Sixth Battle the previous year, the armies had stabilized the front and dealt their enemy a humiliating blow. For the moment, Svetozar Boroević, the Lion of the Isonzo, could rest on his laurels. The signs, at least initially, pointed to 1918 being a good year for the Monarchy's war effort.

¹⁹³ Morselli, *Caporetto, 1917*, 124.



Fig. 4, The Ballhausplatz, Vienna. (Photo taken by author)

CHAPTER 4

FROM VICTORY TO CATASTROPHE

At the beginning of 1918, the Habsburg Monarchy's borders appeared to be more secure than at any other time during the war. The victory at Caporetto had secured and expanded the frontier against Italy. Serbia remained for the moment under occupation, as the Entente was bottled up at Salonika. The Eastern front was finally safe as the Bolshevik takeover in Russia had led to the opening of negotiations that soon bore fruit in the Brest-Litovsk treaty.

Within a few months, however, this apparent position of strength proved to be a façade. In April 1918, the exposure to the world of the Sixtus Affair, a shorthand name for Kaiser Karl's attempt to approach the Entente to conclude a separate peace, proved a major embarrassment for the Monarchy, and the fallout from this incident led to the complete capitulation of Karl and his government to German leadership in the final half year of the war. Witnessing this development, the Entente (and their American ally) concluded that the Habsburg Monarchy was now lost to a German-dominated *Mitteleuropa*, and after this point, Entente war aims increasingly declined to seek to preserve the Habsburg state intact in any postwar settlement. While previously US President Woodrow Wilson and British Prime Minister David Lloyd George had advocated the preservation of the Monarchy with greater autonomy for the non-German and non-Magyar ethnic groups within the Habsburg Empire, following the Sixtus Affair, this was no longer the case. From this point onward, the U.S. and the Entente were to more closely engage with, and provide greater support to, the Czechoslovak National Committee and the Yugoslav Committee, bodies

that had as a final goal the dismemberment of the Habsburg Monarchy and establishment of independent “national” states.

Even amidst the shifting tides of the international scene, however, Borojević may still have been basking in the plaudits of an honor he had received earlier that year. On February 1, 1918, he was given a promotion to Field Marshall, the highest rank in the command structure of the Austro-Hungarian armed forces. As the first (and, in the event, only) individual of South Slav ethnicity to hold this rank, the symbolism was not lost on observers. In his diary entry on the event, Pitreich notes

The “first Field Marshall of the Croats,” the Army Group Commander [Borojević], is beside himself immediately now enjoying the full extent of his new dignity, and the rapid procurement of the emblems of the office is now his greatest concern; so it has been decided to assign to him a dedicated Marshall’s command staff.¹⁹⁴

Pitreich’s comment is telling about Borojević’s character and perceptions. In the first place, it continues a theme that we have seen before, the degree to which Borojević took pride in himself and his career, at times to the point of vanity. Pitreich’s pithy remarks about Borojević needing extra command staff and being obsessed with regalia makes one wonder whether he believed that Borojević were truly deserving of the position, or if he saw it being awarded because his ethnicity, especially considering the “first Field Marshall of the Croats” statement. In Pitreich’s

¹⁹⁴ *Nachlass Pitreich B/54 v.2*

portrayal, Borojević comes off as a kind of caricature, insisting on wearing an overly garish uniform.

The Piave Offensive

It was against this backdrop, that Borojević's army was to find itself sorely tested, and pushed to its limits in the early summer of 1918. Although the Italian front had been relatively stable since the victory at Caporetto the previous fall, now a new offensive was needed to relieve pressure on the Western front. By this time, it had become increasingly clear that the German spring offensive, also referred to as Operation Michael, or the *Kaiserschlacht*, on the Western front had stalled, and the arrival of American units was beginning to make an impact on the Entente war effort. In this threatening scenario, knocking Italy out of the war, if such an outcome was still possible, now acquired an urgent strategic appeal.

In addition, there was a further reason for the Monarchy's soldiers to push a renewed drive into Italian territory during the summer of 1918, owing to the critical shortages in the provisioning of the Austro-Hungarian armed forces. The Isonzo Army provisioning reports relate how during the first half of 1918 food supplies for the troops became dangerously low, and soldiers were forced to subsist on rations that were a fraction of what would normally have been considered necessary. While in wartime a daily portion of around 3,200 calories was considered necessary for the average soldier, during the second quarter of 1918 (March-June), the Austro-Hungarian troops were barely half of that amount (about 1,812 for the Isonzo Army, 1,914 for the 6th Army).¹⁹⁵ Borojević was hardly exaggerating when he laid out the problem in a February 17, 1918, telegram to General Staff Chief Arz:

¹⁹⁵ *Verpflegslage der H.G. FM von Borojevic in Zeitraum vom 1. Jänner bis 15. Juni 1918*, p. 5.

Provisioning for the Isonzo Army and 6th Army is extremely critical, and cannot be postponed, as there are signs of alarming lapses of discipline and exhaustion as a result of the now four-week starvation period... If the armies are destroyed as a result of starvation, the hinterland will certainly starve to death, so the answer to this question cannot be twofold.¹⁹⁶

As no help was immediately forthcoming from the High Command (as the Monarchy was having extreme difficulty feeding both its soldiers and its civilian population), Borojević's troops would have to take advantage of another expedient to alleviate its supply problems: the hungry soldiers were authorized to seize booty, including foodstuffs, from conquered Italian territory.¹⁹⁷

Concern over the desperate condition of their army prompted the High Command to push for another offensive on the Italian Front in the summer of 1918. The German Empire pressed High Command to begin the offensive in June, as they were planning an attack on the western front for one final thrust within the series of offensives that constituted the *Kaiserschlacht*, and sought to ensure that Entente troops would be tied down in Italy.¹⁹⁸ This "starvation offensive," intended to relieve the supply issues on their troops, would come with its own logistical problems, and had unintended consequences for the Monarchy's war effort. It is noteworthy at this stage that, while Borojević had come up with a plan for an offensive on April 25, 1918, by June he was opposed to

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, 17.

¹⁹⁷ Rauchensteiner, *First World War*. 919.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, 917.

an offensive taking place at all, having come to the conclusion that the war was no longer winnable and wanting to preserve the integrity of his army group.¹⁹⁹

The Piave Offensive, the last military operation undertaken under the banner of the Habsburg Monarchy, opened on June 15, 1918. Borojević's goal with this offensive was to secure both banks of the Brenta River and remove the Italians from the Piave shores/plain as quickly as possible.²⁰⁰ Very early on in the offensive it became clear that Borojević's army would have to bear the brunt of the fighting, despite the fact that both Borojević's and Conrad's Army Groups were sent into the battle on equal ranking.²⁰¹

Although morale for troops of all nationalities was high going into the early hours of the offensive, Habsburg forces quickly met with heavy Italian pushback, with Conrad's Army Group facing particularly fierce resistance.²⁰² Borojević's Isonzo Army fared only marginally better – the crossing of the Piave incurred heavy casualties inflicted by the 3rd Italian Army.²⁰³ Finally, with losses mounting, a general withdrawal order was given for Habsburg forces to evacuate to the east bank of the Piave on June 21, an action that was finally completed by June 23.²⁰⁴

The Piave Offensive had stalled. The Habsburg war machine had finally, after almost exactly four years of fighting, run out of gas. Although it had not yet become apparent, the loss of the war for the Monarchy was now inevitable, and Borojević's army, as well as the others in the field, were merely running out the clock.

¹⁹⁹ Rauchensteiner, *First World War*. 913; Thompson, *White War*, p. 341.

²⁰⁰ Nachlass Pitreich, B/54. v. 1.

²⁰¹ This unworkable arrangement was enacted to assuage the egos of Conrad and Borojević, who each insisted that their armies be placed in the lead of the offensive. See Rauchensteiner, *First World War*, 918.

²⁰² Schinder, *Isonzo*, 283.

²⁰³ *Ibid*, 284.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 285-6.

The failure of the Piave Offensive was an embarrassment for Boroević; for Conrad, finally, it meant the end of his career. Conrad's biographer Lawrence Sondhaus argues that Kaiser Karl was of the opinion that either Boroević or Conrad had to be made the scapegoat for the loss. In order to salvage what was left of the honor of the Monarchy's armed forces, one of the two generals had to take the blame; the choice naturally fell on Conrad, as firing Boroević would have meant risking the antagonism of the South Slavs, an outcome which would not have been acceptable as Karl still needed maintain their loyalty at this critical junction.²⁰⁵ Therefore, Conrad was relieved of his command and sent into retirement effective July 15, 1918.

National and Multinational Loyalties

In the aftermath of the Piave offensive, Boroević found himself an unwitting pawn in a propaganda campaign waged by the Yugoslav National Committee. In mid-July, copies of an "open letter" to Boroević written by Ante Trumbić (who was soon to play a pivotal role in the founding of the postwar Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes) were dropped over Habsburg lines by Italian aircraft. The letter, dated June 23, 1918, reads, in part:

Herr General:

I feel compelled, for the development of the whole of humanity in this great and critical moment to write a few lines to you.

You are today the only one under the Austrian generals whom in the general judgment of all the allies from a military standpoint is highly esteemed. Into your hands today

²⁰⁵ Sondhaus, *Conrad*, 210.

have been placed soldiers who are the sons of our people, and on the ground are facing brutal military assault. Where are you leading these good and honorable people? For what are you allowing the blood of our people to be spilled? I cannot believe that you, such an incredibly talented and capable man, would not know that our people, fighting in the Austrian army, are dying for German interests.

...

General, you fall into the same error as Ban Jelačić, who rescued Vienna so that his own people, who he so dearly loved, could be given over to absolutism. This very moment is more critical than that of the year 1848; today decides the fate of our entire people. Thousands and thousands of its sons pin their hopes on that great democratic idea and today fight shoulder to shoulder with their brothers in the Serbian army on the Salonika Front. In America, troops are being raised among our sons as well, and in a short time our flags will also fly on the local fronts. Is this not proof that our free people have no fellowship with the Germans, whether in the form of Austria or in that of a *Mittleuropa*? They will be their own masters in their own house. This sovereign command I obey and I serve, and I recognize no other sovereign over the will and interests of my people. The whole people feel confident and know that the victory of the Entente will mean the liberation and unification of the triune people in the future State of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. This will simultaneously be the victory of democracy and progress over the dark Middle Ages with its heavy-handed rule.

General, you have become well-known among our people due to the fight against the Italians – now is the time to call for a struggle for those greater ideas for which our allies are fighting. They drive our people into slavery; they use your position to

completely wipe out our more severely tested people; and instead of being a savior to your own people, you are driving it to destruction. But Italy is not isolated; it is supported by the heart and strength of all of its allies and by all of the subjugated peoples of Austria-Hungary. The young Italian army is facing off against one of the oldest armies in Europe, but will also defeat it. Italy, in terms of its rebirth, is prepared to take its worthy place in the circle of great democratic states, which its glorious past and the uplifting power of its people has made possible for the future for the subjugated peoples of Austria-Hungary at historic Campidoglio, to express their views and aspirations for the future before the whole world. The decisions made at Campidoglio have permeated all of Italy. Therefore, on the part of our subjugation, the present war is accompanied by a tension, hope, and the most complete conviction on the part of our people that victory will be on the side of Italy, and that new moral interests, as well as freedom, will take the place of conservative absolutism.

General! History will not judge you favorably; it examines the actions of the individual and the totality of struggles, and does so ruthlessly. You have taken the path which could lead to your name replacing that of Vuk Brankovic in new folk songs. Would that not be a dreadful verdict for you?

Rome, June 23, 1918

Dr. Ante Trumbić

President of the South Slav Committee in London²⁰⁶

²⁰⁶ *Nachlass Pitreich*, B/54. v. 3

The equation of Borojević with Vuk Branković, the Serbian nobleman who supposedly betrayed Prince Lazar at the Battle of Kosovo in 1389, no doubt stung the proud *Grenzer*. As will soon become apparent, Borojević would much rather have seen himself in the mold of Josip Jelačić (1801-1859), the Croatian governor, who, during the 1848 revolutions, sided with the Habsburg dynasty over the Magyars of the Hungarian government that ruled Croatia, and is to a large extent credited with helping to protect Habsburg rule during the crisis.

Trumbić's letter provides an interesting contrast between the dangers of German influence and what he regards as the benefits of following the Italian example. Trumbić holds up Italy as a worthy example of a modern democratic state, ignoring inconvenient aspects such as Italy's own issues with parliamentary government (Italian governments in the years prior to 1914 had been notoriously unstable), and its claims on Habsburg lands coveted by South Slavs.²⁰⁷ In addition, Trumbić makes reference to Campidoglio (or the Capitoline Hill, one of the Seven Hills of Rome), which was the seat of government during Roman times, and which Trumbić appears here to be using as a shorthand for the Italian government, drawing a perhaps ironic parallel to Italy and its Roman past, forgetting that modern Italy's attempts to emulate its Roman legacy might also have problematic implications for the Balkans.

According to another account, however, this had not been the first time that Borojević had been subjected to an attempt to be drawn into the machinations of Trumbić and the Yugoslav Committee. The Croatian sculptor Ivan Meštrović (1883-1962), who was active in the Yugoslav movement during the war, gave the following account in his memoir, *Uspomene na Političke*

²⁰⁷ Thompson, *White War*, 8-16.

Ljude I Događje (“Reminiscences of Political People and Events”), of an encounter that occurred earlier in 1917:

We wanted to shape events to stop our people from continuing to fight the war on the Italian front. We enlisted the aid of Franjo Barać. He was a good friend of Svetozar Borojević, Commander of the Austro-Hungarian army on the Italian front. Barać was a faculty member of the University; he had been the one who had selected Borojević as a senior doctor at the University, and Barać invited him to receive his honorary degree. There was no safer way of dealing with Borojević than through this relationship.

At the end of the degree award ceremony, Barać managed to tell Borojević that he needed to talk with him secretly about an important matter. Borojević spent the night and the following day at his home. Barać conveyed to Borojević the greetings of the Yugoslav National Committee, he pointed out that representatives of Committee in Zagreb had been watching Borojević’s seeming attempts to mirror Jelačić’s career, and warned of the dangers for the Croatian people of repeating Jelačić’s accomplishments. Barać warned Borojević that if the Croats were fighting for the emperor, that after the war that everything would be the same as before. In addition, the representatives of the Committee are convinced that the war will be lost and that the Croats do not need to save Austria either. Borojević said that

“They will be encouraged by the Yugoslav Committee in London. They are the people in the Committee and think best; I just do not believe the Central Powers will lose the war, and even less that the English and the French will decide to completely liquidate the Habsburg monarchy. Even if this is to be done, we are fighting for ours here, because what

would life be for us, were the Italians to take Istria, Dalmatia and Gorica and bring an end to our most beautiful parts of our life on the sea.”

Barać had told him that this was the message of the Committee, that he, with Borojević, would have to move to larger units to the Italian side and thus contribute to the federal victory. Borojević frowned at this and said,

“And my oath of loyalty to the Emperor?”

“And did the emperors not err in their oaths to us?”

“Perhaps you might have a point about that, but let me think about it.”

In the morning, he said verbatim:

“Tell the Yugoslav Committee that ... I am prepared to provide my help on the following two conditions: first, that the Committee and the Serbian government should come to the Allies, to deny the London Pact and recognize our ethnographic boundaries; and when I speak in support of the Committee’s goals to hundreds of thousands of people, make it clear that we are not seen as captives, but as equal partners, and that we can immediately count on being treated as brothers in any struggle against the Germans.”

The committee could not, of course, agree to any of Borojević’s terms, but only suggest that our people surrender, and trust that in the end everything will be worked out. Borojević’s condition of denying the London Pact was obviously opposed by the Italians, claiming that would kill the morale of their troops, if they were to give up the areas they were promised as a reward for entering the war. Trumbić, of course, would not be able to consider any of Borojević’s conditions, so everything remained business as usual.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁸ Ivan Meštrović, *Uspomene na Političke Ljude I Događje* (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 1969), 86-87.

Assuming that Meštrović's account is to be believed, it does not necessarily serve as evidence that Borojević's *kaisertreu* ethos might have wavered in this case. While he seems to hear his friend out, he offers continual objection to a number of the points of the Committee's argument, and his final response might be viewed as a way of shutting down the conversation by attaching conditions for his assistance that he was well aware the Committee was incapable of fulfilling. Borojević's actions before and after this incident hint toward his belief that the Habsburg Monarchy remained the best framework for national development for his people, and the proud Grenzer remained held by his oath of loyalty to the emperor. Borojević was not to earnestly engage with the Yugoslav Committee until after the Monarchy's effective authority in the South Slav lands had ceased. Trumbić and the Yugoslav Committee, however, still attempted to coopt him, as is evident from the June 1918 letter.

Borojević might have had good reason to fret over the implications of Trumbić's letter, as it was one of several ways in which he was unwittingly dragged into the South Slav secession movement during the summer of 1918. Commenting on press accounts appearing later that summer that linked Borojević to Croatian secession, Pitreich states the following:

The Croatian *Landtag* also saw itself compelled to raise the matter in its turn; there, of course, the person of the Field Marshall was severely affected by the national issue. This led the Field Marshall to finally fend for himself there by, on July 21, accompanied by the *Ban* Dr. Mihailović, making the following address:

"I gather from the journals that in the *Sabor* there was read a document written by a completely unknown individual, which contains the indication that I had worked on a

collusion between the army and the Greater Serbian efforts. I ask Your Excellency in the *Sabor* to publicly explain that I pronounce my full contempt for the inventor of this brainless assertion and his supporters.”

At the same time, in this matter the Field Marshall addressed to the Military Chancellery of His Majesty the following message:

“I gather from the journals that at the meeting of the Croatian Landtag of July 18 the *Ban* had read a document written by a completely unknown individual, which contains allegations that the former *Ban* Baron Rauch, the present Vice Ban Dr. Krisković, and I worked on a collusion between the army and Greater Serbian efforts. I have asked the *Ban* to explain publicly in the Landtag that I am giving my fullest contempt to the inventor of this brainless assertion and his supporters. Reporting this, my fear is for those who are naïve enough to receive communications from politicians of this caliber.”²⁰⁹

My research has not turned up any additional accounts of this issue (such as the text of the document in question, or any other press accounts); however, this brief anecdote illustrates Borojević’s genuine concern that his loyalty to the Habsburg Monarchy was being called into question, as demonstrated by the steps he took to assure both the *Sabor* and the crown of his loyalty to the Monarchy and his hasty disavowal of the document. While we cannot be conclusively certain, given what we know about Borojević’s disposition and career, it is highly unlikely that he was involved in any genuine efforts to separate the South Slav lands from the

²⁰⁹ *Nachlass Pitreich*, B/54, v. 1.

Monarchy (the story related by Meštrović notwithstanding); this was likely another effort similar to Trumbić's (perhaps even also at the behest of the Yugoslav Committee) to attempt to coopt Borojević's identity to serve their national agenda.

The Unraveling

The remainder of the summer of 1918 continued to be the story of privation for the Isonzo Army. However, despite the reversals, according to Pitreich, discipline and morale in the army remained relatively high, and showed no immediate signs of breakdown.²¹⁰ The account provided by LeBeau's grandson concurs with this assessment: "The catastrophic state on the home front could not yet break the fighting spirit of the troops at the front; demoralization had not yet penetrated the front line and remained for the most part at this stage limited."²¹¹

The month of September 1918, however, was to bring tragedy both for the Monarchy and for Borojević personally. The month saw the Salonika breakthrough, the unraveling of the war effort on the South-Eastern front, and the beginning of the end of the war for Austria-Hungary. A further tragedy was to strike Borojević very hard personally. On September 28, his 17-year-old son Friedrich, still in military training, had been out late into the night with a group of fellow cadets and the party was making its way back to the barracks during a heavy storm. While crossing an old bridge, Friedrich fell through a hole and, despite being a good swimmer, was carried away by the raging river. His body was not recovered until early November.²¹² An

²¹⁰ *Nachlass Pitreich*, B/54, v. 1.

²¹¹ Rotter-Le Beau, *Aurel le Beau*, 139.

²¹² Friedrich's fellow cadets, in part believing that he would turn up safely and in part fearing that they would be held responsible for what had happened to him, initially told their superiors that he had simply become separated from them after they left the coffeehouse, and that they did not know where he went. It was several days before they came forward with the truth, thus hampering the search. See Hoffmann, *Feldmarschall*, 296-7.

October 7 letter to the head of the Kaiser's Military Chancellery, Egon Zeidler-Daublebsky von Sterneck (1870-1919), provides a rare window into his emotional state:

... You can imagine how hard this blow has hit me. I am trusting that the loving God already knows why it had to be this way. I am now one worry poorer, and can devote all of my mind and aspirations from this time on completely to the interests of His Majesty. I would not have bothered you with this sad personal affair were there not already signs that the affair has become known and the danger that an account of the incident will become known to His Majesty in distorted form. Therefore I am telling you the truth, along with a request to do what may be necessary to advocate for me and for my poor son...²¹³

At the very moment that Borojević was grieving the loss of his son, he was also tasked with having to come to terms with the collapse of the structure of the very institutions upon which he had based his identity.

September was traumatic for the Monarchy; October was to deal the death blow. The account given by Le Beau's grandson maintained that the October 4 German/Austro-Hungarian appeal to President Wilson for peace terms (on the basis of the Fourteen Points) was made with the knowledge that the Italians were planning a new offensive, and the Monarchy wanted to end the war before the attack came, fearing that the outcome of an Italian victory would be devastating for morale.²¹⁴ The publication of the October 16 Manifesto by Karl, promising the federalization

²¹³ Quoted in Hoffmann, *Feldmarschall*, 298.

²¹⁴ Rotter-Le Beau, *Aurel le Beau*, 139.

of the Austrian half of the Monarchy, was far too little and far too late a measure to salvage the situation; in Pitreich's words, it did nothing but ensure that "the old Habsburg Monarchy expired in hopeless agony."²¹⁵ The Entente, which might have welcomed such a move a year earlier, ignored this belated half-measure, as did the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav Committees, who were already in the process of working with representatives in Prague, Zagreb, and Belgrade to form separate independent states. Hungary, viewing the Manifesto as a violation of the terms of the *Ausgleich*, effectively declared independence itself. At the front, news of the Manifesto caused the first major breakdowns of morale. On October 22, Magyar soldiers began to abandon the front and march home toward Hungary; the next day two Croatian regiments of the 42nd Honved, the same division whose valor had been praised by Franz Ferdinand, mutinied and refused to enter the fighting line.²¹⁶

Within days, Italy moved to deliver the strike that set into motion the final battle of Svetozar Boroević's career, and the Monarchy's existence. Early on October 24, the Italian army began its offensive in what was to become known as the Battle of Vittorio Veneto. The date, the anniversary of the beginning of the Caporetto campaign, was chosen intentionally. The Monarchy might not have been prepared to fight this last battle, but they were not caught by surprise. Reports from the Isonzo Army to the Southwest Front Command on October 24 noted the increase in Italian movements between the Brenta and Piave; although statements from Italian deserters indicated that the attack was to begin on October 28, they had also received intelligence that the attack would begin on the 24th.²¹⁷

²¹⁵ *Nachlass Pitreich*, B/54, v.1

²¹⁶ Schindler, *Isonzo*, 299.

²¹⁷ *Nachlass Schneller*, v. 2 (KTB 23.10.1918)

Although the Italian forces now enjoyed considerable numerical superiority over the Habsburg armies, the troops of the Monarchy fought with great vigor in the initial hours of the assault, regardless of ethnicity; this situation changed later in the day when an order arrived from Budapest directing that all Hungarian units (both Honved and Hungarian troops in the Common Army) evacuate the front in preparation to defend Hungary's southern frontier.²¹⁸ From this point onward, troop strength and the will to continue the fight declined rapidly. With the Habsburg forces dwindling and Vienna attempting in vain to secure armistice terms that would save the Dual Monarchy, fighting on the Isonzo continued for the remainder of October. The Italian forces continued to occupy the territory that had been contested since 1915, even those parts that were also being claimed by the newly independent Yugoslav territories; in Gorizia, an Italian national council and a Slovene national council each claimed rule of the city, agreeing only on a shared hostility to the Austro-Hungarian troops still in the field.²¹⁹ Finally, on October 31, the Lion of the Isonzo, Svetozar Boroević, abandoned his headquarters at Udine ahead of the advancing Italian forces, and marched his army toward Carinthia.²²⁰

During the battle itself, the final strands holding the Habsburg Monarchy together came undone, and the days following Boroević's departure from Udine was to complete the dissolution. On October 30, the South Slav territories severed their relationship with the monarchy, forming a short-lived State of Croats, Serbs and Slovenes that was soon to be joined to Serbia to create the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The Czechoslovak National Committee proclaimed the independence of the state of Czechoslovakia. Finally, on November 3, with the Armistice of Villa Giusti, Habsburg forces formally surrendered at the Italian front,

²¹⁸ Rauchensteiner, *First World War*, 999.

²¹⁹ Bauer, *Löwe*, 125.

²²⁰ Schindler, *Isonzo*, 305.

and its territories, to Italy. All that remained of Kaiser Karl's inheritance was his German-Austrian territory, and even that was to be gone within days.

Kaisertreu to the End

In the aftermath of the final battle, Borojević struggled to keep what remained of his army together, and bring it home. In the interim, he had received word of events that had transpired in the capital, and had already had a response in mind as to how to react to these events. Friedrich Funder, the *Reichspost* correspondent who reported on Borojević at the front, related in his memoir of a conversation between Borojević and Dr. Adam Heftler (1871-1970), the Prince Bishop of Klagenfurt, regarding the reason for his melancholy in November 1918. According to this account, Borojević stated:

Twice I telegraphed His Majesty requesting him to receive me, and twice he had the same telegram sent back in reply: he would take the first opportunity at a more opportune moment to thank me for my services. But I did not send these telegrams because I wanted thanks. Now that everything is over and it's too late to do anything I can tell you what I wanted. I wanted to occupy Vienna and to restore freedom of action for the Emperor. But I could do this only on the Emperor's direct orders and not on my own initiative. I am not an Austrian, I was born in Croatia, which today belongs to Yugoslavia. The Austrian Imperial Field Marshal with the power to act on his own responsibility no longer exists. Only the express command of the Emperor himself could have authorized me to take this step. I had everything in readiness. Troops who were not one hundred per cent reliable had been sent off by rail. I had posted reliable troops at the most important railway

stations as far as Wiener Neustadt. In twenty-four hours after the receipt of the command Vienna could have been occupied – and now it's too late!²²¹

The telegrams Borojević refers to are included in Pitreich's *Nachlass*.²²² Here, in this account, we see what Borojević viewed as his last, best hope to save the Monarchy and make his mark on history. His intention was to mirror the actions of another famous Croatian, Josip Jelačić, whose bold actions had helped to save the Habsburg Monarchy from the turmoil that it had faced in 1848. He had already sensed that he could be the one to take bold action if the situation on the home front deteriorated. Earlier that summer, writing to his friend Franz von Bolgar about a meeting with the Kaiser, Borojević remarked, "the questions that threaten our lives are, in my opinion, only to be solved by a strong, gifted, independent personality; this convinces the Crown that it is more important to them to find useful guides than provable exponents."²²³

What were these momentous actions that Borojević sought to recreate? At first glance, one might see that some parallels that could be drawn with the situation that existed during the fall of 1918 and the crisis the Austrian Empire faced in 1848 and 1849, in which at times it seemed the state's very survival was in question, particularly when the Hungarian government declared independence in early 1849. It was at this point where Josip Jelačić, while advocating for the Croatian people, also made it clear that he was a loyal servant of the Habsburg dynasty.²²⁴

²²¹ Friedrich Funder, *From Empire to Republic: An Austrian Editor Reviews Momentous Years* (New York: Albert Unger Publishing, 1963), 183-4.

²²² *Nachlass Pitreich*, B/54, v. 3.

²²³ *Nachlass Kiszling*, v. 143.

²²⁴ There has been relatively little scholarship devoted to Jelačić. The only English language biography produced about him is over a century old: M. Hartley, *The Man Who Saved Austria: The Life and Times of Baron Jellacic* (London: Mills & Boon, 1912). The most reliable and accessible biography (for those who read German) is Walter Goerlitz, *Jelačić: Symbol für Kroatien* (Vienna: Amalthea, 1992). As can be expected, works in Croatian are comparatively

Jelačić was selected by the Croatian *Sabor* to the office of Ban in March of 1848, over the objections of the ruling Hungarian authorities, with whom he immediately came into conflict over the longstanding Magyarization policies pursued in Croatia along with other lands of the Crown of St. Stephen. By May of 1848, Jelačić was appealing directly to the court in Vienna:

I can say that I stand, hurt almost to death, before the Eternal Imperial-Royal Majesty, a man who faithfully and honestly serves Austria and its illustrious dynasty... Should all others have their freedom, and only we Croats and Slavonians then be exposed to the arbitrariness of a Magyarizing ministry?²²⁵

As the events of 1848 continued to unfold, and Hungary under Lajos Kossuth moved further in its demands for greater autonomy, and then independence, Jelačić was forced to choose a side, one that was necessarily to place him at odds with the government in Budapest that was his nominal overlord, but was increasingly pursuing policies counter to those in the interest of his people. By July of 1848, Jelačić declared to the Saxon ambassador Count Vitzthum, “So long as this head remains on my shoulders, I will not allow Hungary to magyarize us.”²²⁶

Throughout the remainder of 1848 and 1849 Jelačić worked not only to advocate for Croatia but also for the dynasty. He faced also the uphill battle of serving a state that, until December 1848 when Ferdinand I abdicated in favor of Franz Josef, lacked a competent monarch. As a

more numerous: e.g., Anđelk Mijatović, *Ban Jelačić* (Zagreb: Mladost, 1990); Kristina Milković, *Josip Jelačić u Prvoj banskoj pukovniji: (1841-1848): prilozi za povijest političke ideologije Josipa Jelačića* (Zagreb: Plejada, 2014), Pavao Maček, *Plemeniti rodovi Jelačića: I. Rod Jelačića od Prigorja, Pušče, Buzina i Pretkovca (Krapine), II. Rod Jelačića od Biševića* (Zagreb: Društvo za povjesnicu Zagrebačke nadbiskupije “Tkalčić”, 2010).

²²⁵ Quoted in Goerlitz, *Jelačić*, 89.

²²⁶ Quoted in *ibid.*, 104.

result, he often had to act without any clear direction from the crown, as occurred in October 1848, when he brought troops to Vienna to quell revolution and protect the imperial family – the very same action Borojević attempted to replicate in 1918. Following the Hungarian declaration of independence Jelačić continued to fight the Magyar forces in service to the Emperor, until the revolt was finally ended in mid-1849.

Although Jelačić is remembered for his actions to protect the interests of the Croatian people and for his loyalty to the Habsburg dynasty during the crises of 1848 and 1849, there is a postscript to the story that Borojević would have just as soon forgotten, the precise one that Trumbić pointed out in his letter. Jelačić remained Ban until his death in 1859, but he was forced after 1849 to implement the policies of a reactionary government in Vienna. It opted not only to punish rebellious Hungary with the loss of what remained of its regional autonomy to a centralized government, but also to subject this same treatment to the provinces that had been loyal to the dynasty, including Croatia. In addition, the Magyarization policies of years past were replaced with Germanization policies, which Jelačić was pressured to implement. Despite this less than favorable outcome, the role that Jelačić played in the resolution of the existential crisis of 1848, as well as the generally favorable role that Jelačić still held in Croatian memory (demonstrated by the statue in Zagreb's Jelačić Square) ensured that the Ban's actions provided a blueprint for Borojević to attempt to follow in 1918.

But 1918 was not 1848. In 1848, though the situation was dire, time and momentum were still on the side of the regime. Although, with the exception of the Magyars, a few self-proclaimed leaders of the empire's national groups wished for greater autonomy, they remained steadfastly loyal to the dynasty throughout the conflict. By October 1918, conditions had deteriorated to the point where nothing was really salvageable. Karl may well have known or suspected what

Borojević's intention was, and sent his response as a diplomatic "thanks, but no thanks." Funder believed this was the case, as he states that Karl, knowing that the situation was beyond saving, saw no reason to attempt to try to use force in a vain attempt to hold it together.²²⁷ For his part Borojević, as much as he sought to emulate Jelačić, fell short in one key respect; when push came to shove, unlike his predecessor, the Field Marshall would not take action without, or contrary to, an express order from his monarch.

As the pieces of the empire had collapsed, in Vienna Karl had surrendered to the inevitable. On November 11, 1918, he issued a proclamation releasing his officers from their oaths of loyalty to him, and relinquished his participation in the Austrian government. A corresponding proclamation for Hungary followed on November 13. While this statement has widely been construed as an abdication, Karl deliberately avoided a formal abdication to in order to leave open the possibility of an eventual restoration (as he attempted in Hungary in 1921). Karl and his family were ultimately exiled from postwar Austria.

With his last bold gambit failed, Borojević had nothing more to do than to bring what remained of his army back into Austrian territory, where they then dispersed. Upon the completion of this action, his career officially came to an end, along with the state system to which it was so inextricably tied. And yet, as pondered his next move, he reasoned, at 61 years old, he still had something of value to bring to the table. Therefore, he approached the government of the newly forming Yugoslav state and offered them his services. The new Yugoslav state, would, after all, have need of experienced military talent. At that very moment the young state was engaged in a struggle against the Italian government over claims to

²²⁷ Funder, *Empire to Republic*, 184.

territories in Dalmatia and Istria. Should it become necessary to resort to military action to defend South Slav rights to these territories against Italian encroachment, certainly the leaders in Belgrade and Zagreb would want to take advantage of what Borojević could provide them!

In such a frame of mind, Borojević made his appeal to the governments in Zagreb and Belgrade, likely confident that it would be accepted. Little did he realize that the year 1918 was not yet finished with turning his life upside down.



Fig. 5, Schönbrunn Palace, the location where Karl issued his October Manifesto and the November 11, 1918 resignation from the government of Austria. (Photo taken by author)

CHAPTER 5

THE SOLDIER WITHOUT A COUNTRY

When Svetozar Borojević sent his petition offering his military expertise to the newly forming Yugoslav government, he was confident that it would be accepted. He had even sent two officers to Zagreb to prepare for his arrival home.²²⁸ He was likely shocked and dismayed, then, when the response he received declined his services. Moreover, Borojević was refused citizenship within the borders of the new state, or to even return to his home as his place of residence. To add further hardship, Borojević's luggage, containing many of his personal effects, had been detained and ultimately confiscated by the Slovene National Council *en route* from the front, and, as we will see, Borojević was never able to persuade the Yugoslav government to return it.²²⁹

What was the Yugoslav government's reasoning behind the banishment? Borojević biographer Eduard Hoffmann traces much of the resentment felt by the National Councils toward Borojević to an incident that occurred in early November 1918, as the remnants of the Isonzo Army were making their way back from the front. Initially, the Slovene National Council in Ljubljana was not permitting the army to pass through its territory on its way back into the German Austrian lands, prompting a heated exchange between Borojević (along with his 1st Isonzo Army commander Wenzel von Wurm [1859-1921]), and the members of the National Council.

²²⁸ Hoffmann, *Feldmarschall*, 327.

²²⁹ *Ibid*, 324.

Although the army was subsequently permitted access, it caused some bad blood between Borojević and the Slovenian leadership, and was a crucial moment according to Hoffmann.²³⁰

In the chaos surrounding the collapse of Habsburg authority in the South Slav territories, the Slovene and Croatian National Councils briefly served as the governing authorities for the region. These bodies, which had during the war worked for independence for their national groups in tandem with Trumbić's Yugoslav Committee²³¹, declared the independence of their provinces with the intention of unifying them with the Serbia to create a united South Slav federation. Several of the leaders of the National Councils, such as Anton Korosec (1872-1940), were to go on to serve, if briefly, in the Yugoslav government.

Borojević's confrontation with the National Council was the occasion for one of the most strident expressions of his identity to come out of his last years. He pleaded with the representatives:

Not as a general and not as the last son of my country, but as a patriot, who loves his homeland at least as much as any other Croat, I point out the consequences which will inevitably come. I'm appealing to the patriotism of the National Council to do everything in its power to ensure that the armies do not degenerate into hordes, destroying these new foundations.²³²

²³⁰ Hoffmann, *Feldmarschall*, 318-327.

²³¹ See Chapter 4.

²³² Richard Plaschka, Horst Haselsteiner & Arnold Suppan, *Innere Front: Militärassistentz, Widerstand und Umsturz in der Donaumonarchie 1918* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1974), v. 2, p. 221.

In Borojević's statement we can detect a concern for the welfare of both the soldiers under his command as well as the state of his country that is sincere, even if on some level it may also be intermingled with a desire to protect his own legacy. The term he uses, "homeland" (German *Heimat*) may be a little vague in its meaning, though here Borojević can be almost certainly understood to mean the Croatian territories, under whatever government now exerted its authority there.

It should be noted, however, that other observers mitigate or downplay the impact of this incident; some, such as Bauer, believe that it was of little consequence and had been mostly forgotten by the time the decision had been made to exclude Borojević.²³³ These scholars' argument has the force of logic. When the decision was made to banish Borojević, the Yugoslav government might instead have been considering the general pattern of his career. Could an officer who had spent his entire career defending the Dual Monarchy now serve another master as loyally? Many among the South Slav national councils did not believe so, particularly for a prominent figure such as Borojević. Indeed, the current version of the Croatian Biographical Lexicon states that Borojević was turned away from the Yugoslav state out of suspicion that his loyalties were still with the Habsburg dynasty and the Austro-Hungarian empire.²³⁴ On some level this suggests their belief that Borojević's profession of his loyalty to the Croatian people, given in the quote above, was insincere, that he was, essentially, telling them what they wanted to hear. Given the general pattern of Borojević's life and career, however, this is highly unlikely. Rather, it was the case that Borojević maintained both complete loyalty to his people as well as to the construct of the Habsburg Monarchy (at least, until the latter no longer existed). The account

²³³ Bauer, *Löwe*, 128.

²³⁴ *Hrvatski biografski leksikon* (Zagreb: Miroslav Krleža Lexicographical Institute, 1989), v. 2, pp. 168-169.

provided in the next paragraph provides further support for this view. The final tragedy was that Borojević's fate was decided by nationalist leaders of the new Yugoslavia, for whom such dual loyalty simply was not possible.

Another possible factor to consider is whether the Yugoslav government suspected Borojević of any authoritarian aspirations. Already recent memory had provided the example of the attempted coup against the Russian Provisional Government by General Lavr Kornilov in September 1917, and the interwar period was soon to see the establishment of effective military dictatorships in several other eastern European states: Horthy in Hungary, Antonescu in Romania, Pilsudski in Poland. Although no evidence has yet surfaced indicating that Yugoslav leaders had specific fears about Borojević following this authoritarian mold, it is possible the thought of a former high-ranking South Slav officer of the Dual Monarchy, who still had some degree of name recognition and popularity at that time, seeking more than just a job with the new government might have occurred to them. For Borojević, however, there is no evidence that he would ever have been interested in seizing power for himself, though if some of his correspondence regarding military discipline were known to the Yugoslav government, such as his letter to Sarkotić, it might have fueled any suspicions.²³⁵

An account given by Prince Alois Schönburg-Hartenstein (1858-1944), former commander of the Sixth Army, sheds some light on Borojević's emotional state at this point:

²³⁵ See Chapter 1

During a solitary walk in the woods I met Borojević and his wife. He kept his proud attitude and told me what he was thinking of doing: “The Croatian nation has produced only one Field Marshall, which I am. They have banished me.”²³⁶

Even now, Borojević took pride in the accomplishments of his military career; however, the rejection by his people stung him bitterly, and in this brief statement we can see that it took some toll on his self-esteem.

What are we to make of the draconian attitude that the Yugoslav government took toward Borojević? It is perhaps illuminating to compare Borojević’s experience to those of two other South Slav officers within the Monarchy, Gregor Edler von Miscević and Stefan Sarkotić. Like Borojević, Miscević and Sarkotić were Serbo-Croatian by ethnicity (and would today be considered Serbian as a result of their Orthodox faith) and came from similar *Grenzer* backgrounds. Both men, like Borojević, ended their lives not in the South Slav lands but in German Austria.

Miscević (1854-1937) came from an Orthodox family in a village of the town of Novska, close to the modern Bosnian border. Miscević entered the military academy at an early age and ultimately entered the officer corps, seeing a career trajectory somewhat similar to Borojević, though he did not rise through the ranks as quickly. In 1908 he married a German woman and had three daughters. The outbreak of war in 1914 saw him assigned to the Sixth Corps of the Fourth Army, under Borojević’s command. At the end of the monarchy in 1918 he had reached the rank of Lt. Field Marshall. As for Miscević’s fate after the war, his memoir indicates that he

²³⁶ *Österreich im Jahre 1918: Berichte und Dokumente*, ed. Rudolf Neck (Vienna: Verlag für Geschichte und Politik, 1968), 124.

and his family *voluntarily* took up residence in Vienna after the war, where he spent the remainder of his life (Miscević writes about having chosen Austrian citizenship and discharging his community responsibilities in Novska).²³⁷ For Miscević, this may have been an easy decision to make due to his marriage, though one wonders if he would have been permitted to return to Yugoslavia had he wished.

Another relevant experience comes to us through the lens of the experience of Stefan Sarkotić (1858-1939). Like Borojević and Miscević, Sarkotić was from a Grenzer family, of Orthodox religion and Serbo-Croatian ethnicity, born in the town of Sinać.²³⁸ He also entered the military academy at an early age and joined the officer corps. Following postings throughout the monarchy, he ultimately succeeded Borojević as commander of the 42nd Honved Army in Zagreb, the position he found himself in at the outbreak of war in 1914. It was at this point (December 1914) that the Austro-German Oskar Potiorek's failed campaign against Serbia led to the latter's removal from office as Governor of Bosnia-Herzegovina, after which the office was conferred upon Sarkotić, in a move that was undoubtedly somewhat politically inspired (having an ethnic German replaced by a southern Slav Grenzer). This role suited him as, although he was of a similar Grenzer mentality, Sarkotić was more politically engaged than Borojević, and his name was even floated as a possible successor as Chief of the General Staff following Conrad's removal in 1917.²³⁹ From his position as governor, however, Sarkotić did have some input into the national issue; in 1915 he sent a report to Emperor Franz Josef urging the union of the five

²³⁷ *Nachlass Miscevic*, pp. 1-11.

²³⁸ As was the case with Borojević, Sarkotić's religion has prompted many contemporary and subsequent sources to identify him as Serbian; however, like Borojević, his self-identification was a matter of some debate.

²³⁹ Ernest Bauer, *Der Letzte Paladin des Reiches: Generaloberst Stefan Freiherr Sarkotic von Lovcen* (Graz: Verlag Styria, 1988), 9.

“historic” Croatian territories (Croatia, Slavonia, Dalmatia, Bosnia, Herzegovina) into a single autonomous entity – essentially, a form of the “trialist” solution. Sarkotić continued to pursue this idea with Franz Josef’s successor.²⁴⁰ Sarkotić continued as Governor until the end of the Monarchy in 1918.

However, as Sarkotić was residing within the boundaries of the new Yugoslav state, he was soon imprisoned by officials of the Yugoslav government as a potential enemy of the state for his visible connection to the previous regime, as well as having previously voiced objections to Serbian leadership of the new state (which in some respects seems evident from his blueprint for the trialist territory, having left out Serbia). Upon his release from prison, Sarkotić, like Borojević, was banished from Yugoslavia, and forced to take up residence in the Austrian state. He settled in Vienna and spent the remainder of his life there, writing in support of émigré Croatian separatist movements.

The Yugoslav government’s treatment of both Borojević and Sarkotić sheds light on another possible motivation for their exclusion. The Serbian leaders in Belgrade had reason to distrust the two men not only due to their standing in the Monarchy’s officer corps, and their continued loyalty to that construct to the very end, but also because they both were Orthodox believers who appeared to identify more closely with Croatia than with Serbia. In the eyes of Belgrade, they had already violated the expected norm (common though not quite universal by the early decades of the twentieth century) that Orthodox South Slavs were to identify as Serbs and align with Serbian national interests. Belgrade’s disdain for the two Grenzer officers stemmed from a sense that they were seen as traitors and a fear that they could serve as focal points for Croatian

²⁴⁰ Kiszling, *Kroaten*, 109.

opposition to the new state, which was already forming as a result of the work of politicians such as Stjepan Radić. As we have seen, in the case of Sarkotić, this fear had some justification.

Boroević, Miscević, and Sarkotić, in taking up residence in postwar Austria, found themselves in a continued state of uneasiness with regard to their nationality and citizenship within the new state, being now among the many “displaced people” of the interwar period. Under the Treaty of St. Germain, while ethnic Germans and German speakers from throughout the lands of the former Dual Monarchy could obtain citizenship within the new Austrian republic, those of other nationalities were largely left in a state of legal limbo. Key to the interwar concept of citizenship in Austria was the principle of *Heimatrecht*, the right of domicile. According to some interpretations of Austrian citizenship law, *Heimatrecht*, and Austrian citizenship, was allowed to those who had “completely adapted to Austrian conditions in one’s family and civic life.”²⁴¹ Certainly Miscević would have met this criterion, and the argument could be made that Boroević and Sarkotić, by virtue of their service in the officer corps, would be afforded the same privilege. In the event, it was this very association that was to tip the scales toward inclusion in postwar Austria for the South Slav officers; Rudolf Kiszling makes a telling comment by noting that Sarkotić “belonged among the best representatives of western, German-rooted Croatian culture.”²⁴² As we will soon see, similar comments were also made regarding Boroević. In a sense, Sarkotic (as well as Boroević and Miscevic) “passed” because he behaved in a more “civilized” (read, “more German-like”) fashion, that distinguished him from the (in the eyes of some German nationalists, whose rhetoric acquired an increasingly extremist tone after 1918) “boorish” manners of most South Slavs. Though the South Slav officers were ultimately

²⁴¹ Timms, “Citizenship,” 161.

²⁴² *Nachlass Kiszling*, v. 143.

granted legal residence in postwar Austria, their fate was to live apart from the population, never truly fitting in. Certainly Boroević felt this sense of alienation, as seen by his statement to Dr. Hefter.²⁴³

How justified was this sense of alienation that Boroević felt? After all, he had made a career in a polyglot empire, one that had shaped and accommodated not only Karl Lueger and Adolf Hitler, but also Sigmund Freud and Karl Kraus. However, within this milieu, he would still have detected the sense of Austro-German cultural superiority to which he had earlier been exposed by the likes of Conrad and Schneller, when his sense of devotion and striving to get ahead would have impelled him to overlook it. Now, with his career gone, and left in a state comprised almost entirely of ethnic German populations, he could no longer pretend that being an “outsider” did not impact him.

An intriguing parallel to Boroević’s case can be drawn from literature, in the form of Joseph Roth’s 1932 novel *Radetzky March*. The story follows several generations of the Trotta family, a family of Slovene origin (fittingly, for our purposes), whose patriarch, an officer in the Kaiser’s service, is granted a title of high nobility and becomes a recipient of the highest favor for having saved the Emperor’s life on the battlefield at the Battle of Solferino (1859). This individual, having embraced his new title, actively discourages his son (for whom he has arranged the pursuit of a career as a district official) from having any connection to their family or ethnic roots. Finally, the grandson, Carl Joseph, seeks a career as a cavalry officer, which encompasses a range of experiences representative of the officer corps of the Monarchy until he meets his end during an engagement on the Eastern Front at the outset of the First World War. Carl Joseph’s

²⁴³ See Chapter 4.

grieving father dies on the same day as Franz Joseph, and mourners at his funeral remark that the two could not have survived each other, and neither could survive old Austria.²⁴⁴

Several elements of Roth's narrative have parallels to Borojević's case. While Borojević might not necessarily have seen himself in the character of the first Baron von Trotta, who felt the need to downplay his own Slovene heritage, disassociate himself from his family, and embrace a more "imperial" national identity, he was to have this fate thrust upon him, by both contemporaries and some of those memorializing him. Some of the stubbornness of Baron von Trotta's personality, however, would hit closer to home for Borojević (again, whether he would have been cognizant of this or not is another matter). In one instance, Baron von Trotta so heavily objects to an account in a history book which states that he was a cavalry officer, rather than the infantry officer that he was, that he demands that the entire account of his deed be removed from the textbook, rather than for the single factual inaccuracy to be printed.²⁴⁵ It is not difficult to imagine someone such as Borojević insisting on such a minor point of honor. In a similar manner, Carl Joseph, like Borojević, remains *kaisertreu* to the end, though he, and his family, ultimately pays a dear price, when no Kaiser remained to whom he could be loyal.

While Borojević was adjusting to the transition of his forced retirement, the lands that his army had contested along the Isonzo front learned their fate. Most of the Istrian peninsula (an area with a mostly Slovene population), including the prized city of Trieste, was awarded to Italy in the peace settlement. Italy was, however, initially denied its desired gains of Fiume (Rijeka) and the Dalmatian coastline. The former was to be annexed as a result of the nationalist

²⁴⁴ Joseph Roth, *The Radetzky March* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press: 1974), 319.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 10.

expedition led by Gabriele d'Annunzio in 1919; the latter occupied during the Second World War. Istria, save for Trieste, was to be turned over to Yugoslavia after 1945.

A Loyal Croatian

From his retirement, Borojević made some further attempts to engage with the Yugoslav government, and to gain at least some kind of reversal of the verdict that had been passed against him at the end of the war. While these efforts were fruitless, they warrant mention for two reasons; first, they represent a final attempt by Borojević to claim for himself an identity as a loyal member of the Croatian people, and second, they are noteworthy due to the intermediary Borojević chose – his former adjutant, fellow Croat Slavko Kvaternik (1878-1947). In a letter to Kvaternik in early 1919, Borojević asks him to keep him informed of events in Croatia, and asks for his help in publishing a work presenting “his side of the story” and his conduct during the war.²⁴⁶ In a January 11, 1920 letter to Kvaternik, Borojević's requests become more explicit, at points painfully so:

I still do not believe in the good intentions of the Belgrade government. As time goes on, I'm more convinced. Good intentions quickly fade. The public forgets me. Other events are occurring. While some remember me in the right way, I will probably be buried, and then I do not need more. But since you are again traveling to Ljubljana to talk about the confiscated items, please also confer with Zerjav, Jeglič, and of course the secretary of the commission; say the following on my behalf that neither Beć nor

²⁴⁶ Milan Pojic, *Vojakovoda Svetozar Borojevic: 1856-1920* (Zagreb: Croatian State Archive, 2006), 28.

Belgrade will reply to my pension requests; my savings bonds have been blocked in Hungary and I can't get any interest because I am Yugoslav; my wife is ill and I live in a miserable house. I do not require charity, just what I am owed. I'm appealing to them not to turn me away in anger but to help me before it's too late. Tell them that, and with the best of my will – I cannot live anymore!²⁴⁷

Borojević's reference to the "Belgrade government" here is a telling slip. Recall that the pre-1914 Serbian government had been based in Belgrade, and many of its leaders (King Peter, Nikola Pašić) were directing this new Yugoslav government. It is a strong hint that these individuals are who Borojević holds responsible for his exclusion from the Yugoslav lands and his subsequent misfortune. Although the hopelessness of his situation came through in letters like these (another example of which appears again shortly), Borojević was capable of a kind of guarded optimism. A letter to Kvaternik of April 23, 1920 (exactly a month before Borojević's death), discusses Borojević's intention to appeal to be able to return to Croatia, and some hope of finding a sympathetic ear to his plea, though knowing the odds were against him.²⁴⁸ Through all of Borojević's correspondence, he would have had no way of knowing that, within a few years, his protégé Slavko Kvaternik was fated to be one of the founders of the Ustaše Party, the Croatian fascist movement that was to take control of Croatia during the Second World War and carry out a genocidal campaign against the Serbian population living in the area occupied by the short-lived (and Nazi-supported) Independent State of Croatia; this massacre claimed the lives of

²⁴⁷ Ibid, 29.

²⁴⁸ Ibid, 29.

tens of thousands of Serbs and negatively impacted relations between Serbs and Croats for decades afterward.

The remaining months of Borojević's life were spent in poverty, with the former Field Marshall and his wife occupying sparse quarters in Klagenfurt, Carinthia, in southern Austria. Here, one last time, a border area was to play a role, if tangential, in Borojević's life. The choice of Carinthia as a place for Borojević to live might have been largely dictated by economic factors, but its location in the south of the new Austrian state, close to the border with the Slovene area of the Yugoslav state, may well have been part of the equation. Had Borojević followed the example set by Miscević and Sarkotić and settled in Vienna, he might have gained additional support from the Austrian government. Instead, his settling in Klagenfurt speaks to a desire to be close to the South Slav territories to facilitate a return in the event that the political winds should enable it to happen. This borderland influence, however, was to differ from the others in one crucial respect; this time, he lived as a South Slav in territory that was almost entirely populated by ethnic Germans.

Financial woes were to occupy much of Borojević's attention during these last months. He and his wife were supported only by a small pension provided by the Order of Maria Theresa. On February 5, 1920, he wrote the following to his friend, Franz von Bolgar (1851-1923):

Today I come with a request, the fulfilment of which has become a major life question for me. It is well known to you that my return home is not allowed, because I would not follow certain leaders' orders. I could have broken my oath to fulfill the wishes of these people; I of course did not. Ljubljana has seized my private luggage on the train and it disappeared totally, so that I was left almost naked there after demobilization. My

request for the handing over of my pension has so far from Vienna and elsewhere gotten no response. My savings, placed in Hungarian war bonds, as well as the deposits of my wife in Austrian pensions carry no brighter interest; these have both been blocked. So I'm left totally penniless and living well over a year by incurring debt, which I of course can't continue. My request is now that you should sell off those assets of mine you can get access to provide me with my deposit. You should sell it regardless if I suffer a great loss. I can't accept that someone such as you would forget me despite of all the newspaper lies, that I should starve before you help me.²⁴⁹

I have not been able to determine what it was that Borojević asked Bolgar to sell, or if the request proved to aid Borojević's financial situation. On May 23, 1920, Borojević suffered a stroke following a morning swimming exercise, which quickly proved fatal. While I am unaware of records that would give a more precise picture of Borojević's physical condition in his last days (i.e., surviving medical records) it is not unreasonable to speculate that the last several years of his life were likely marked by declining health due to several factors. The stresses of the war had taken a considerable toll on him, particularly the last year; not only had he had to contend with the planning, execution and fallout of unsuccessful engagements, but it is likely that he shared at to at least some extent with the privations that the soldiers at the front experienced during those last months. In addition, the considerable trauma he faced during the fall of 1918 – the loss of his son, the collapse of the Monarchy and his place within it, the rejection by his own people – left a deep gash on his psyche, which could well have sapped his will to continue,

²⁴⁹ *Neue Freie Presse*, January 27, 1929, p. 5

especially knowing that, at 63, his chances for further martial glory were likely over. Finally, the greatly reduced financial circumstances he found himself in after the war increased his anxiety and likely contributed to his failing health. These factors may have been at play on that morning when his normal exercise routine ended in tragedy.

Borojević was provisionally buried in Klagenfurt, though his remains were within months moved to Vienna's Central Cemetery and interred in a tomb in the New Arcades, paid for by the former Kaiser Karl (himself still in exile and unable to pay his respects in person). In this tomb were also interred the remains of Borojević's son Friedrich, as well as his wife Leontine upon her passing in 1963. The interment site is in a place of honor, located next to the stately cemetery Church of St. Charles Borromeo,²⁵⁰ and just in front of the tomb stands the courtyard reserved for the burials of the leaders of postwar Austria, including Karl Renner (1870-1950), the great Social Democratic theoretician who before 1914 had tried with Otto Bauer to find a viable solution to the nationality problem in Austria-Hungary, and later played a leading role in establishing both the First and Second Austrian republics.²⁵¹

Borojević and Memory

An unsigned eulogy in Borojević's *Nachlass* (the author only identifies himself as having been a soldier on the Isonzo who had served as a valet to Borojević), lionizes the fallen hero and rages against his fate:

²⁵⁰ The church has an alternate name, the Karl Lueger-Kirche, named for the early twentieth-century antisemitic mayor of Vienna (1844-1910). In more recent years this problematic appellation has been largely phased out.

²⁵¹ Renner outlined his views in his works *Staat und Nation: Zur österreichischen Nationalitätenfrage* (Vienna: Dietl, 1899); *Der Kampf der oesterreichischen Nationen um den Staat* (Vienna: F. Deuticke, 1902). Bauer's work is presented in *Die Nationalitätenfrage und die Sozialdemokratie* (Vienna: I. Brand, 1907)

The whole force of this tragedy, and the vile ingratitude that was directed at you, brought you low prematurely. That is fate!

History has yet to speak the last word about this tragedy, about what you and we have fought for and suffered with you, about the legacy of your command. With a raised hand and a clear conscience, soldiers can look forward to the verdict of history.²⁵²

Borojević's obituary in the Viennese paper *Neue Freie Presse* opined that "often his name would be spoken in tones full of admiration and fanatical confidence, and then in a sense of rejection, which would increase to passionate hatred."²⁵³ In a sense, this sentiment encapsulates elements of not only the last years of Borojević's life, but also the limited efforts since his death to interact with his memory. The same obituary, for example, while lauding his accomplishments, makes note of the rumor at the outbreak of the war that implicated Borojević in a plot to betray the Monarchy to Serbia.²⁵⁴

Almost a decade later, in 1929, the same paper was to revisit the subject of Borojević, on the occasion of the publication of Archduke Josef's memoir. In this case, the paper published extracts from a series of letters from Borojević to his friend Franz von Bolgar. The portrait it paints of Borojević is a generally positive one; it lauds him as a "hero," though at times he comes off as petty or self-justifying – one of the letters details Borojević's writing to Archduke Eugen to

²⁵² *Nachlass Borojevic*, v. 15. One is tempted to speculate that the author could have been Slavko Kvaternik, though the evidence here is inconclusive.

²⁵³ *Neue Freie Presse*, May 26, 1920, p. 4.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*; See above, Chapter 2.

resign his commission during the summer of 1915 (as a result of the conflict with Krauss), though curiously, no details are here included as to why.²⁵⁵

Likewise, his memory was to become a source of contestation among veterans of the Austro-Hungarian armed forces and their successors. A biographical account of the members of the Order of Maria Theresa published in 1943 has a telling entry on Svetozar Boroević. This work states that, following the end of the Monarchy and the establishment of the Yugoslav state, Boroević *chose* to live in Klagenfurt; without providing any discussion of his banishment from the South Slav territories, it is implied that his choice was a free one, as in the case of Miscević.²⁵⁶ It is perhaps significant that this account belongs to the Second World War period, a time when the author might have had a particular agenda in emphasizing Boroević's service to the Monarchy and downplaying his South Slav nationality. By contrast, there is the account from an early edition of the *Neue Österreichische Biographie* (New Austrian Biography), published in 1923. The entry on Boroević, written by Edmund Glaise-Horstenau (1882-1946), who was the general editor of the Official History of the war, does discuss Boroević's exile from the Yugoslav state and the circumstances surrounding it, and in general devotes more discussion to the issue of his nationality than in the Order of Maria Theresa entry. However, even with this entry, Glaise-Horstenau makes it a point to discuss Boroević's excellent command of the German language.²⁵⁷ In effect, Boroević is being adopted as an honorary ethnic German, thus deserving of citizenship and other rights from the Austrian state. As with the citizenship issue discussed earlier, the ethnic and racial issue enters into the discussion – Boroević is worthy of

²⁵⁵ "Die Tragödie des Feldmarschalls Boroevic" *Neue Freie Presse*, January 27, 1929, p. 4-5.

²⁵⁶ Bardolff, Carl Freiherr von, ed., *Der Militär-Maria Theresien-Orden: Die Auszeichnungen im Weltkrieg 1914-1918* (Vienna: Verlag Militärwissenschaftliche Mitteilungen, 1943), 31.

²⁵⁷ Edmund Glaise-Horstenau, "Svetozar Boroevic von Bojna," *Neue Österreichische Biographie, 1815-1918* (Vienna: Wiener Drucke, 1923), 109-115.

being remembered because in his service to the Monarchy he transcended his ethnic origins and acculturated himself to the norms of the Austrian Germans who were the rulers of the former state and the guardians of its legacy.

But how did Borojević's memory fare during the years after 1945? In one sense it would seem that the figure of Borojević, with his dual Serb-Croatian identity, would make an ideal candidate to be put into the service of Josip Broz Tito's program of "brotherhood and unity" in an attempt to create a closer union among the ethnic groups among whom he attempted to create a shared "Yugoslav" affiliation. During Tito's rule, however, Borojević's memory does not figure at all; one prominent historian of the Balkans, Jože Pirjevec, reasons that Borojević was generally forgotten during this era simply because the memory of the Second World War so completely overshadowed that of the First.²⁵⁸ The argument can also be made that, in addition, the figure of Borojević proved problematic to fit into a Communist narrative, given his high rank within the officer corps of the Habsburg Monarchy and the fact that he had been awarded a noble title.

Svetozar Borojević's hometown of Umetić and the region surrounding it was fated to continue to be a site of national contestation through the remainder of the twentieth century. As a region of the Croatian Yugoslav republic that was populated by Serbs, it was drawn into the chaos of the wars accompanying the collapse of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. When Croatia declared its independence in 1992, much of the region encompassing the old Military Frontier was occupied by Serb separatist forces, leading to the establishment of the Republic of Serb Krajina, protected by Slobodan Milosević's Yugoslav army. War in this territory continued until 1995. As a result of the war and its aftermath, the majority of the prewar Serb population fled the country. Today,

²⁵⁸ Author's communication with Jože Pirjevec, July 28, 2018.

(as of a 2011 census) the border county of Sisak-Moslavina has a population of 172,439 – almost entirely Croatian; the small town of Umetić has a population of 73.²⁵⁹

Oddly, it is only in more recent years that the memory of Svetozar Borojević has come to be called upon again. While some scholarship has occurred in Croatia in the years since the 1990s, it is in neighboring Slovenia where both memorialization to Borojević and the publication of biographical works about him have been more numerous, likely owing to the physical connection of the Slovene lands to the fighting on the Isonzo (Soča) front a century ago.²⁶⁰ It is in Slovenia also where the most visible actions have been taken to honor Borojević. For example, in May 2009, the Ljubljana city council voted to restore Borojević's honorary citizenship of the city, which had been stripped from him during the events leading to his exile from the Yugoslav territories.²⁶¹ Most recently, the city of Nova Gorica (i.e., the part of Gorizia on the Slovene side of the border) dedicated a monument to the memory of Svetozar Borojević in December 2016.²⁶² It is likely that more such events will occur to commemorate the end of the war and the anniversary of Borojević's death. Quite possibly, those involved in any forthcoming

²⁵⁹ 2011 Census, Croatian Bureau of Statistics. https://www.dzs.hr/default_e.htm. Accessed July 27, 2018

²⁶⁰ There have been several quality works in Croatia in recent years; however, these have been largely produced by or with the support of official or semi-official channels, i.e., the Croatian State Archive. These include Milan Pojic, *Vojskovoda Svetozar Borojevic: 1856-1920* (Zagreb: Croatian State Archive, 2006); Drago Roksandic, *Svetozar Borojevic od Bojne: Lav ili Lisica sa Soce?* (Zagreb: Vijeće srpske nacionalne manjine grada Zagreba, 2006). Slovene scholarship is represented by works such as Dusan Necak & Bozo Repe, *O feldmaršalu Svetozarju Borojevicu de Bojni* (Ljubljana: Filozofske Fakultete, 2010); Janez Svajncer, "General Borojevic in Slovenci" *Vojnozgodovinski zbornik*, Vol. 8. (2002), pp. 24-59.

²⁶¹ Necak & Repe, *O feldmaršalu*, 116.

²⁶² "Odkritje parkovnega spomenika generalu Svetozarju Borojeviću pl. Bojni," <https://www.nova-gorica.si/objave/2016120711484467/> City of Nova Gorica Website. Accessed July 28, 2018.

retrospectives on Borojević's legacy might evaluate his character in terms similar to those with which Rudolf Kiszling concluded his biographical sketch:

Borojević certainly had something of a problematic nature. He was great in ability and great in ambition. His life was rich in struggle and rich in successes in peace as well as in war. The course of his life – before it was abruptly halted – moved to progressively greater heights, but also led him across many gaps, but take all these together – here was such a man!²⁶³

²⁶³ *Nachlass Kiszling*, v. 143

CONCLUSION

There is a widely disseminated narrative associated with the collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy during the final days of the First World War, one that involves the oppressed national groups finally breaking free of rule from Vienna and Budapest, forging their own destiny. This is the narrative of Tomas Masaryk and the Czechoslovak National Committee, of Ante Trumbić and his colleagues on the Yugoslav Committee. In many ways, it is this narrative that has predominated historiography of the region to the present day, as many contemporary historians of the Balkans, such as Ivo Banac, emphasize the degree to which many South Slavs had given up on the Dual Monarchy by the end of the war.²⁶⁴

However, as the present study has illustrated, this narrative does not tell the whole story. Even among the most vocal advocates for independence there could be found voices of compromise; Masaryk himself did not entirely abandon the possibility of the Czechs remaining within a restructured Monarchy until around 1914, just before the outbreak of the war.²⁶⁵ As other studies have noted, national affiliation was a much more fluid concept among the ethnic groups of the Habsburg Monarchy even during the years immediately prior to the war, and the agenda advanced by nationalist groups often found little resonance beyond the bourgeois

²⁶⁴ For example, see Ivo Banac, "'Emperor Karl Has Become a Comitadji': The Croatian Disturbances of Autumn 1918," *The Slavonic and East European Review*, v. 70, No. 2 (Apr. 1992), pp. 284-305.

²⁶⁵ Robert Kann, *Multinational Empire*, v. 1, p. 209

intelligentsia.²⁶⁶ In this context, the most useful paradigm is that of Miroslav Hroch, who postulated three stages of national development: Phase A (scholarly interest), Phase B (patriotic agitation), and Phase C (a “mass national movement”).²⁶⁷ By this paradigm, the South Slavs by 1918 were still within Phase B, and had not reached the stage where national feeling could be stirred among most of the population.

From the benefit of hindsight, the inevitability of the triumph of nationalism and the demise of the multinational state might appear obvious; however, this outcome was far from a foregone conclusion, and it is not difficult to imagine a postwar settlement that would have preserved the Habsburg Monarchy largely intact, as the Entente would have supported until very late in the war. Even in the event, the national project was to prove a hard sell for many within the former monarchy, especially to those, who were to be relegated to non-dominant roles within the postwar states, such as the Slovaks or Slovenes. As events unfolded, neither Yugoslavia nor Czechoslovakia truly fulfilled the national project; in both cases replicating some of the faults of the previous Habsburg Monarchy. Within Yugoslavia one ethnic group dominated the rest; while Czechoslovakia, in theory intended as an equal partnership, led to domination of Czech over Slovak throughout its existence. In addition, the presence of national minorities (German, Ukrainian, etc.) were a problem throughout Eastern Europe that none of the successor states to the Monarchy were able to adequately deal with. It is small wonder that many in the South Slav lands resisted pressure to “pick a side” or continued to feel loyalty to the monarch of the Habsburg dynasty. While it may have been the case that many individual Serbs, Croats, Czechs,

²⁶⁶ For example, King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans*; Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls*; Pieter Judson, *Guardians of the Nation*; Fine, *When Ethnicity Did Not Matter*.

²⁶⁷ Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

and others, welcomed the chance to develop their states outside the monarchy, Svetozar Borojević was far from an outlier in maintaining both *kaisertreu* devotion and pride in his Croatian heritage.

Indeed, subsequent developments in the South Slav lands as well as in Europe as a whole have proven his point. While many South Slavs might have been indifferent to the national program prior to 1918, nationalism and national identity came to be galvanized after 1918, in support of, or in opposition to the Serbian-dominated “Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes,” ultimately to be renamed Yugoslavia. However, it was only with the events surrounding the Second World War, and the actions of the Croatian fascist Ustase party and the reaction to these atrocities pushed the South Slav peoples into Hroch’s Phase C of national development. Although after 1945 Josip Broz Tito made considerable effort to subsume national tensions under the banner of Communist “brotherhood and unity,” these efforts largely unraveled following his death in 1980. During the 1980s and early 1990s nationalist leaders, including Slobodan Milosevic and Franjo Tudjman, succeeded in mobilizing national sentiment, often by invoking still-fresh memories of wartime national-inspired violence, and directed it at a program of aggrandizement at the expense of the national “other.” This was to spell the end of the Yugoslav experiment.²⁶⁸

Recent decades, however, have seen outcomes that might have left Svetozar Borojević at least on some level gratified had he lived to witness them. Although the Yugoslav project failed, there has been remarkable progress toward greater unity under the framework of the European Union. Most of the former Habsburg Monarchy is currently part of the EU, including Slovenia and

²⁶⁸ See Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984); Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias*.

Croatia, and the other former Yugoslav states are in the process of becoming members. Already the EU serves many of the economic functions that the Monarchy once did in Central Europe, and in time, might encourage citizens to see themselves as part of a greater whole. Although recent years have seen the rise of Euroskepticism and far-right movements that have attempted to draw individual member states away from the EU (e.g., Brexit in the UK, the Freedom Party of Austria, etc.), the EU has remained strong and will likely weather such crises.

Although there have been many bumps in the road, European states may now be arriving at the point in history where there is no conflict between maintaining loyalty to one's national unit and adherence in a multinational federation. For proof of this sentiment, one might look no further than the outcome of the 2014 Scottish independence referendum, in which the electorate decided that the economic benefits of remaining within the United Kingdom outweighed the emotional appeal of the restoration of an independent Scottish state.²⁶⁹

Finally, the border area where the *Grenzer* Field Marshal Boroević earned his greatest acclaim now shows an encouraging sign of a future where it is no longer a border area at all. Near Mount Kolovrat, along the current border between Italy and Slovenia in what was once the Isonzo Front, recent years have seen the construction of the Kolovrat Outdoor Museum and the Walk of Peace, a collaborative effort by both national governments to overcome their respective national divisions and, in effect, make the current international border “invisible.”²⁷⁰ Although

²⁶⁹ Though, to be sure, those same economic benefits may be negated (and the independence question revisited) depending on the final outcome of the implementation of Brexit, a move that voters in Scotland largely opposed.

²⁷⁰ Miha Kozorog, “On the Border: Perspectives on Memory Landscapes Between Slovenia and Italy,” Uroš Košir, Matija Črešnar, and Dimitrij Mlekuž, eds, *Rediscovering the Great War: Archaeology and Enduring Legacies on the Soča and Eastern Fronts* (London: Routledge, 2019), 63.

one may view the prospects for the complete success of this goal with some skepticism, this is an encouraging development given the complicated history of the region.

It is tempting to think that Svetozar Borojević might have found himself more at home had he come of age in an earlier epoch of the history of the Habsburg Monarchy, say that of the generation of his father, or of Jelacic and Radetzky, in which the national groups seeking to pull away from the Monarchy were much more easily controlled. Borojević's primary role, however, was that of a soldier, and through that lens he was crafted for his wartime experience. Here he fought valiantly to protect the Monarchy; first against Russian invasion, then from encroachment on South Slav lands by Italian forces, and finally in a futile effort to preserve the Kaiser's throne. Austria-Hungary had other commanders in the field, some just as capable or even more so than Borojević; Borojević should be remembered today not only for his military accomplishments but above all for what he represents – the struggle, and choices, faced by many members of national groups in the South Slav territories in those days of Autumn 1918.

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