

Croatian-Slavonian Military Troops on European (Balkan) Battlefields During World War I

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ABSTRACT

During the Balkan wars in the Ottoman Empire, military and civilian preparations for the upcoming World War in the south of the Austro-Hungarian Empire have started. To be more precise, areas of Croatia, Slavonia and Osijek were already in the war mindset. Croatia was very interested in the events inside the Balkans, because the Austro-Hungarian empire has long expressed the Balkans Foreign Policy "Drang nach Osten" (drive to the east) as its strategic plan. At the same time, Serbia also wanted their expansion to the west and north. Peaceful border areas to the north of the Balkan war zones of Slavonia and Osijek already deployed Austro-Hungarian troops. In addition, all the other preparations for war were already in motion such as converting regular hospitals into war hospitals, creating shelters for refugees, and starting to live in the war state of mind that will start in a few months. People in the area also realized that this will be the war of the "final" showdown between Austro-Hungarian empire and Serbia and Montenegro. The daily press in Slavonia in Osijek has alternating sympathy and disapproval throughout the wars in the Balkan areas. In the First Balkan War, they sympathise small Balkan states of the Ottoman Empire, and in the Second Balkan War, they sympathise ally Bulgaria, and also to some extent the Ottoman Empire. There are also interesting views from the Serbian minorities living in Slavonia and Osijek from 1912. to 1915. War psychosis gripped Osijek and Slavonia, especially when the assassination event happened in Sarajevo. At that time, Austro-Hungarian troops, as well as Croatian previously deployed to the Drina and Sava rivers at the border of Serbia, were awaiting the start of the First World War.

Keywords: *Balkan Wars, Ottoman Empire, Austro-Hungarian Empire, Croatian-Slavonian Military Troops*

Introduction

Of the eastern part of Croatia known as Slavonia which lies on the outskirts of the Balkans, little is known of the eastern part of Croatia, known as Slavonia, in the First World War. The fate of the Slavonian soldiers in the Austro-Hungarian army was also minimally researched and has not been published as a comprehensively systematized work. There are, however, several articles on the subject of the First World War in which Slavonia is peripherally mentioned in the economic, political, or cultural studies, and some references are to be found in archival sources and historical literature.¹ Pavić described the Croatian military forces in the First World War, especially the Zagreb 13th Unit, and within that description he mentioned Slavonian military troops.² Bauer described the Croatian units in the First World War and their heroism,

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¹ Found at the National Archives in Osijek (further: DAO) and the Croatian State Archives in Zagreb (further: HDA) periodicals, and the Museum of Slavonia in Osijek.

² Slavko Pavić, *Hrvatska ratna i vojna poviest*, Zagreb, 1943. (and reprinted edition)

but never specifically emphasized Slavonian military troops.³ Krizman described the political and party relations, where he described the peripheral social turmoil and military units.⁴ Horvat described the world events of the First World War.⁵ Sršan chronographically described significant events between 1914 and 1918 in Osijek, mentioning shortages of food, but says nothing about military troops.⁶ "Narodna obrana" (1914. called „Hrvatska obrana”), „Die Drau”, „Obzor” and „Jug” were used in the study of the Balkan wars, and immediately before and after. There are also other professional and scholarly works that focus on First World War, Balkan (Serbian), and the eastern (Russian) battlefields,⁷ in which the Balkan wars were an introduction to the First World War.

The Balkan War's effects in Slavonia before the beginning of World War I

Slavonia, as soldiers on the battlefield, experienced the first war days in a startling way:

It was the end of June 1914, when Hungarian pilot Simony called citizens of Osijek to come and see his production show "Flying in the air!" and Osijek citizenry responded in unusual numbers. Osijek locals arrived early afternoon on the large field in Vinkovci road and sat on a green lawn. . . Osijek citizens soaked in the hot summer afternoon sun and enjoyed ice cream, lemonade, beer, wine, and soda. The nice atmosphere was interrupted with the sound of engines, and then at that moment Hungarian Simony flew fast and "reached for the sky" . . . With that, the afternoon attraction found its end. Unfortunately it was not a happy ending, because on their way back to the city, the messengers shouted the news of a murder of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand!⁸

Osijek's "Narodna obrana" predicted in early 1914 the gloomy outcome of future times in the Balkans, primarily describing relations between Greece and Turkey, and possibly far-reaching consequences for all nations of the Balkans.⁹

Osijek's "Die Drau" extensively brought news of the assassination in Sarajevo¹⁰ and how the news was experienced in the Balkans, Slavonia, and Osijek.¹¹ Suspicions about relations have begun to surface in Serbian senate tolerance at the Osijek city council and county councils.¹² City governments, irritated by the assassination, changed the names of many streets. For example, the street name Jovan Jovanovic got a new street name—Franz Ferdinand.¹³

The most prominent people in Slavonia condemned the killing of the Archduke.¹⁴ The Party of Rights and the Peasant Party took the assassination as great

³ Ernest Bauer, *Sjaj i tragika hrvatskog oružja*, Zagreb, 1991.

⁴ Bogdan Krizman, *Hrvatska u prvom svjetskom ratu - Hrvatsko-srpski politički odnosi*, Zagreb, 1989.

⁵ Josip Horvat, *Prvi svjetski rat, panorama zbivanja 1914-1918.*, Zagreb, 1967.

⁶ Stjepan Sršan, *Osječki ljetopisi 1686.-1945.*, Osijek, 1993.

⁷ Antonella Astorri e Patrizia Salvatori, *Storia illustrata Prima Guerra Mondiale*, Firenze, 1999.

⁸ Osijek u prvom svjetskom ratu, *Hrvatski list* (further: HL), Osijek, (nedjelja), 6. XII. 1914.

⁹ Oblaci nad Balkanom, *Narodna obrana* (further: NO), br. 135., 17. VI. 1914., str. 1.

¹⁰ Das attentat in Sarajevo, *Die Drau* (further: DD), nr. 145., 29. 06. 1914.

¹¹ Die Trauer in Osijek (Tuga u Osijeku, Sadness in Osijek), DD., nr. 149., 03. 07. 1914.

¹² Zagrebačka "Hrvatska" o osječkim prilikama, NO., br. 158., 14. VII. 1914., str. 3.

¹³ DAO, fond: Zapisnik grad. zast., br.-, 11. II. 1914.

¹⁴ Diner kod divizionara, NO, br. 67., 23. III. 1914., str. 2.

advantage and denounced the policy of the ruling Croatian-Serbian coalition.¹⁵ In Osijek, on that day in the streets at midnight, townspeople sang hymns, played military music, and cheered the king, the army, and the Croatian homeland songs were sung. That was followed by the instructions on the legal basis of Article LXVIII from 1912 that citizens must carry out the duties of war by giving their movable and immovable property in the service of the army.¹⁶

For non-compliant citizens martial law was also introduced¹⁷ and orders were issued on official business of public institutions, establishments and military conscription. Prices were raised substantially, especially for food, and permits were introduced for the movement of citizens.¹⁸ Some magazines were banned, and to foster morale in the army, many officers were promoted.¹⁹

As the war was imminent, there were also various “actions for the collection and contribution to the Red Cross to help families of reservists called *ustasha* that were called for battle.”²⁰

Finally the mobilization order arrived from Vienna,²¹ and in the Osijek city square recruits for home defense gave oaths before the officers, before they headed to the front lines.²² In Slavonia, the rail traffic was very restricted for civilian use, because it was used for supplying military troops at the front.²³

Slavonia wartime events of 1914

From the very beginning of the war, the Slavonia 78th Infantry Regiment took part on the front lines in Serbia and Galicia (Russia), mainly as a part of 6th Austro-Hungarian army, and the 28th walking Slavonia unit called HGR in the fighting within Serbia and Bukovina as part of the fifth Austro-Hungarian army. At the same time, parts of Slavonia’s 12th cavalry and 38th field-artillery regiment participated in the other Austro-Hungarian units on all fronts, especially in Ukraine.

The attack on Serbia was easily understood: “At first it looked like an easy campaign, but our Croatian troops 13th corps fought significantly. Participants of this fight will remember those shiny attacks of our regiments, the 16th, 53rd, 78th (Osijek) and 79th. These battles were not frowned upon or concluded as losses. Our best officers and soldiers died there in heavy machine fights.”²⁴

¹⁵ Manifest frankovaca i seljaka, NO, br. 150., 11. VII. 1914., str. 6.

¹⁶ Ratna podavanja, NO, br. 170., 27. VII. 1914., str. 3.

¹⁷ Proglašenje prijekog suda, NO, br. 171., 28. VII. 1914., str. 3.

¹⁸ Naše novinstvo i ratno stanje, NO, br. 171., 30. VII. 1914., str. 2. (Magazines were suspended in Osijek “Volksreich” as a socialist newspaper, “Svjetlost” in Vinkovci like a leaf so progressives “Hrvatski Branik” in Mitrovica as Radical Party’s newspaper, “Pravo Naroda” in Sid as a socialist newspaper, and some Serbian newspapers)

¹⁹ Pukovnik Soppe - brigadir, NO, br. 172., 29. VII. 1914., str. 4.

²⁰ Rat sa Srbijom, NO, br. 175., 3. VIII. 1914., str. 1.

²¹ (redakciji “Die Drau”), DD, nr. 168., 26. 07. 1914., str. 1. i 2.

²² Svečano polaganje prisege domobranaca, NO, br. 176., 4. VIII. 1914., str. 1.

Odbor za sabiranje priloga za Crveni krst i za porodice zaostale iza vojnika u boju, NO, br. 177., 5. VIII. 1914., str. 1-2.

²³ Obustava, odnosno ograničenje civilnoga prometa na državnim željeznicama, NO, br. 178., 6. VIII. 1914., str. 1.

²⁴ Slavko Pavičić, *Hrvatska ratna i vojna poviesti i Prvi svjetski rat*, Zagreb, 1943., str. 278.

The fighting in Serbia resulted in a multitude of dead and badly wounded, mostly from the core Battalion 28th Defense Regiment.²⁵ Slavonian 78th and 28th regiments retreated to Srijem around Ruma, while the river remained only predecessor to guard the border with Bosnia. The same regiments were part of the 13th Croatian Unit that in February 1915 was sent to fight in Bukovina and Galicia, in the second Austro-Hungarian army, while other parts remained assigned to the Serbian battlefield. When the second Austro-Hungarian Army arrived on the north battlefield, they were fiercely thrown into a fight for Lavov.²⁶ Despite major defeats, the military and news reports mentioned about successful operations of the Austro-Hungarian army at Belgrade and the River Drina near Bijeljina, where Home Guard and Slavonian troops also participated in large numbers.²⁷ There were constant news reports of casualties from the front, which were dispatched in Slavonia (Osijek) hospitals.²⁸ At the news of the victory on the eastern front generals of Auffenberg celebrated the event with fireworks in Osijek and Vukovar.

Wounded fighters arrived from the battlefield in increasing numbers, and charitable boards were established to take care for and nurse them.²⁹ At the same time massive numbers of soldiers were coming and going to the front lines and passed through the towns.³⁰

At the request of the administration of the royal barracks, the 28th Home Guard Infantry Regiment³¹ border patrols were assigned to combat cholera and other diseases.³²

Obligations of peasants to soldiers were expanded in the villages of Slavonia, especially the obligation to supply food, because the number of casualties from the front were increasing.³³

The newspaper reported on the war in Serbia and Ukraine, and the Slavonian troops, in the now-permanent section: "Our home battalion in the war".³⁴ In Slavonia volunteer units were sending soldiers to the front lines in an organized fashion.³⁵ Dr. Milin Brezinščak was appointed as the royal government's commissioner of Virovitica County and the royal city of Osijek. He urged the "gracious ladies of Osijek and

²⁵ S. Pavičić, *Hrvatska ratna i vojna poviesti i Prvi svjetski rat*, Zagreb, 1943., str. 290.

²⁶ S. Pavičić, *Hrvatska ratna i vojna poviesti i Prvi svjetski rat*, Zagreb, 1943., str. 354.

²⁷ Ratne operacije Austro-Ugarske, NO, br. 183., 11. VIII. 1914., str. 1.

²⁸ Otprema ranjenih u bolnicu, NO, br. 183., 11. VIII. 1914., str. 2.

... Hospital ... preparations were responsible Count Marko Pejačević and Mayor Anthony Pinterović. Ive Mažuran, *Od turskog do suvremenog Osijeka*, Zavod za znanstveni rad HAZU, Osijek, 1996., str. 215.

²⁹ DAO, fond: Zapisnik gradskog zastupstva, br. 337., 4. IX. 1914.

In Osijek, delivered two school buildings at the disposal of the army in the rent.

³⁰ DAO, fond: Zapisnik gradskog zastupstva, br. 335., 7. VII. 1914.

³¹ DAO, fond: Zapisnik gradskog zastupstva, br. 368., 4. IX. 1914.

³² DAO, fond: Zapisnik gradskog zastupstva, 14. XII. 1914.

³³ Bolnica Urania-Kina, NO, br. 202., 29. VIII. 1904., str. 3.

³⁴ Unser Hausregiment im Kriege, DD, 206., 12. 09. 1914., str. 1.

Patriotske manifestacije u Slatini, NO, br. 207., 2. IX. 1914., str. 2. (...The procession stopped in front of the house of Mr. Francis Zbierczchowskog where she sang the Royal Anthem and the Croatian and the same again at the house of Mr. V. Potočnjak ...)

³⁵ Dobrovoljačke čete u Bosni, NO, br. 214., 10. IX. 1914., str. 1. (... "Südslavische Zeitung" reports from Sarajevo that Catholics and Muslims educated volunteer legion that will fight against the Serbs and Montenegrins ...)

Virovitica county” to sew a cover cap for the head (Schneehauben), forearms (Pulswärmer), feet (Fusslappen), and abdominal packs (Bauchwärmer) for soldiers on the front lines.³⁶ The commander of the 28th Infantry Regiment of Osijek reported to the mayor of Osijek that military units “fought victoriously on the 16th, 17th, 18th and 21 August, succeeding in spite of the difficulties to beat the enemy on the River Drina.”³⁷ In Osijek, in addition to the nurse's troops there was an order issued to establish new cycling troop that would be sent to the front lines.³⁸

Due to the success of the Slavonian troops, especially 78th and 28 Regiment, they were labeled as the “Devil's Division.”³⁹ War correspondent Roda-Roda (Alexander Rosenfeld, a native from Zdenci in Slavonia), wrote a passage in *Neu Freie Presse*, according to one story-telling officers about how Slavonians fought as part of “Devil's Division” in Serbia and Ukraine.

Slavonia wartime events of 1915

The largest number of troops of 78th Infantry Regiment and the 28th Home Guard Infantry Regiment were assigned to the Serbian battlefield until 1915. However, after 1915 most troops transferred from the Serbian front lines to Galicia. From that time all Serbian prisoners would be delivered to Slavonia.⁴⁰

The toughest Galician battlefield losses of 78th and 28 Regiment had been in fights at Gorlice in 1915. New battles were also fought in Bessarabia which stopped the Russian General Brusilov offensive. The first military operations of the 78th Infantry Regiment were at Stanislaus⁴¹ and appeared to be disastrous.⁴² From 1915, the 28th Regiment, stationed mainly in Bukovina, had a disastrous losses from Russian military attacks and was decimated during the attack on the valley: “28trh Regiment young heroes, mostly from east Slavonia and Srijem, soaked the pastures around Tartarus with blood.”⁴³ Furthermore, “in the fighting around Tartarus, Malawi and Nadvorne, that soldiers and officers of 28th Defense Regiment perished in the flower of life.”⁴⁴ In order to maintain the morale of the soldiers, medals were frequently given in 1915. The medals were regularly received by soldiers of 78th Infantry Regiment and the 12th Calvary Regiment,⁴⁵ who were in the 7th Osijek Infantry Division.

A civil guard was established in Osijek to maintain public peace and order.⁴⁶ Because of desertions by garrisons there were also “arrests” made of disloyal soldiers.⁴⁷

³⁶ Za zimsku opremu vojnicima I, Hrvatska obrana (further: HO), br. 220, str. 16. IX. 1914., str. 3.

³⁷ Junaštvo naših domobranaca, HO, br. 223., 19. IX. 1914., str. 3.

³⁸ Dobrovoljačke koturaške čete, HO, br. 226., 23. IX. 1914., str. 2.

³⁹ Bojno remek-djelo, HO, br. 229., 26. IX. 1914., str. 1.

⁴⁰ Serbische Kriegsgefangene im Osijek, DD, nr. 206 a, 13. 09. 1914., str. 2.

⁴¹ Sedamdesetosmaši kod Stanislavova, HO, br. 78., 7. IV. 1915., str. 2.

⁴² Verluste des Osijeker Hausregiments, nr. 78., DD, nr. 156., 10. 07. 1915., str. 7.

⁴³ Verluste des Osijeker Hausregiments, nr. 78., DD, nr. 156., 10. 07. 1915., str. 423.

⁴⁴ Verluste des Osijeker Hausregiments, nr. 78., DD, nr. 156., 10. 07. 1915., str. 439.

⁴⁵ Odlikovanja, HO, br. 15., 21. I. 1915., str. 2.

⁴⁶ Einer Bürgergarde in Osijek, DD, nr. 208., 15. 09. 1914., str. 3.

⁴⁷ Veshaftung von Osijek im Osijeker Bezirke, DD, nr. 210., 17. 09. 1914., str. 3.

Slavonian cities introduced improvised approach for the procurement of large quantities of flour, meat, potatoes and Petrol, and for the same purpose new bank loans were approved.⁴⁸ Aprovisionation in Osijek was very well established and resolved. Other cities, such as Tuzla, followed the same direction in order to gain experience in the decision of aprovision.⁴⁹

The Royal Croatian government sent a memo on 13th of January 1915 saying that it could no longer pay for costs of 15 provisional municipal guards,⁵⁰ despite city struggling in frequent thefts due to shortages and famine, while the courts-martial are constantly imposing judgment and sentence.⁵¹

At that time in spite of everything, Slavonia and Osijek were one of the calmer places of the monarchy, and if it is to believe the correspondent of "Our Unity" in Vienna, Emperor Franz Joseph mentioned regularly Slavonians as his "Most faithful Croats".⁵²

New troubles for Slavonian troops were created when Italians cancelled the Triple Alliance and joined the Entente.⁵³ Part of the Slavonian Regiment transferred to the new Italian front, and in March 1915 for the war effort locally, new mobilization was made of 43- and 50-year-olds.⁵⁴ A large number of Russian prisoners were brought to Slavonia in 1915, who were assigned to physical labor, especially in agriculture.⁵⁵ In Djakovo at the estates of the bishop there were approximately 1200 Russian prisoners working.⁵⁶

Slavonian soldiers who were wounded badly and lost some of the limbs returned home permanently, and the newspapers could not find enough words of encouragement.⁵⁷ There were often shortages of flour⁵⁸ and milk,⁵⁹ which caused great distress in the diet of the population. The arrests were frequent, especially in the verbal assaults and evidence against the army in which careless Serbian citizens were mostly accused.⁶⁰

Slavonia wartime events of 1916

Public safety in the city was under threat and "the city captain ordered a police raid against military deserters, card players, drunks and thieves..."⁶¹ There was limited

⁴⁸ Aprovizacija grada, HO, br. 31., 9. II. 1915., str. 2.

⁴⁹ Izaslanstvo grada Zuzle u Osijeku, HO, br. 56., 10. III. 1914., str. 3.

⁵⁰ DAO, fond: Zapisnik gradskog zastupstva, br. 4., 11. II. 1915., str. 2.

⁵¹ Preslušavanje provalnika Ivana Račana, HO, br. 38., 17. II. 1915., str. 3.

⁵² Kralj o Hrvatima, HO, br. 44., 24. II. 1915., str. 2.

⁵³ Otkaz trojnog sporazuma, HO, br. 115., 20. V. 1915., str. 1.

⁵⁴ Enthebung der; 43 = bis 50 = jährigen Landsturmmänner, DD, nr. 199., 31. 08. 1915., str. 4.

⁵⁵ Ruski zarobljenici u Hrvatskoj, HO, br. 176., 27. VII. 1915., str. 2. (...allocated for Croatia 10,000 prisoners of war for economic activities...)

⁵⁶ Ruski zarobljenici na dobru Djakovačkog vlastelinstva, Jutarnji list, Zagreb, 7. VIII. 1915., i HO, br. 187., 7. VIII. 1915., str. 3.

⁵⁷ I vratišese u domovinu iz smrtnog boja, HO, br. 180., 31. VII. 1915., str. 4.

⁵⁸ Nestašica brašna u Osijeku, HO, br. 282., 30. XI. 1915., str. 2-3.

⁵⁹ Zašto nema mlijeka?, HO, br. 285., 3. XII. 1915., str. 3.

⁶⁰ Brbljavi brico, HO, br. 223., 21. IX. 1915., str. 2. (...Gjoko Nikolic, boogiemän Gaboš said that every fool who serve in the military for 18 Kreuzers and sang the song: "Fruska Gora Serbian must be" ...)

⁶¹ Racije u gradu Osijeku, HO, br. 23., 29. I. 1916., str. 4.

movement of citizens traveling outside the city.⁶² There were more increasing applications from Osijek citizens „for the forgiveness of the military service”,⁶³ as the army has been calling up high school graduates to mobilize. In Slavonia, there was an increasing number of poor, which the City Council could not help enough.⁶⁴ Returnees, sick soldiers from the front lines had been brought in the city, and the patients were placed in a number of hospitals around the city.⁶⁵

Austro-Hungarian prisoners from the eastern front lines, from Slavonia, were placed in camps in Siberia, in the place called Citi (Camps: Reads, Berezovka, Trockovsk, Ur),⁶⁶ and there was also about 25,000 Austro-Hungarian troops that was left captured in Serbia.⁶⁷

Slavonia wartime events of 1917

At this time there were increasing amount of complaints written in 1917 about the negative effects of war and its severe consequences. That fact was brought up by the “The Copenhagen Society of war exploration” with the statement that by now already 4.6 million human lives has been lost and every day around 6,332 additional people die.⁶⁸

Avoiding military obligations were more frequent, and in order to facilitate the stay of troops on the front lines, more military barracks were built near the front lines. Due to a shortage of weapons and ammunition, Osijek City Council issued a call to surrender all items that could be used in war. Almost all items were listed which later on will be melted down and used for making artillery weapons.⁶⁹ Military setbacks on the front lines resulted in increasing numbers of war orphans and problem of their relocation, especially from Herzegovina to Slavonia. According to one report, by Christmas 1917 there was about 4,000 war orphans placed around Slavonia.⁷⁰ Military prisoners from Russia were arranged to work in private sectors and in villages. The military also warned all the owners to keep prisoners on record for tax purposes, and if they don't do so, the prisoners would be taken away from them. But it is a military area that employers are constantly warned to avoid taxes do not report the prisoners and if they still do, prisoners of war, they will be confiscated.⁷¹ New government appointees were tough on Slavonian peasants and citizens, because in the fall of 1917 most Slavonian regiment troops were transferred to the Italian front from the eastern front, especially at positions around the river Piave near Venice.⁷²

⁶² Putne iskaznice, HO, br. 234., 14. VI. 1916., str. 4.

⁶³ Podnašanje molba za oprost od vojničke službe, HO, br.-, 22. VI. 1916., str. 4.

⁶⁴ Za gradske siromahe i ubogare, HO, br. 150., 6. VII. 1916., str. 4.

⁶⁵ Ubio vojnika, da obrani čast svoje sestre, HL, br. 85., 18. VIII. 1916., str. 4. (...Courtroom ... health department honored the recorder with a military hospital in Bršadin ...)

⁶⁶ Položaj naših ratnih zarobljenika u Sibiriji, HO, br. 150., 7. VII. 1916., str. 2.

⁶⁷ Zarobljenici u Srbiji, HO, br. 24., 30. I. 1916., str. 3.

⁶⁸ Ogromni gubici u svjetskom ratu, HO, br. 12., 17. I. 1917., str. 4.

⁶⁹ Poziv za predaju u ratne svrhe upotrebljenih predmeta, HO, posebni broj prilog 22137 / 20., 31. XII. 1917., str. 7-8.

⁷⁰ Hercegovačka djeca u Hrvatskoj, Obzor, br. 337., 11. XII. 1917., str. 3.

⁷¹ Prijava zarobljenika, HO, br. 290., 20. XII. 1917., str. 3.

⁷² Ernest Bauer, Sjaj i tragika hrvatskog oružja, Zagreb, 1991., str. 126-127.

End the Slavonia wartime events during 1918

In the early March of 1918 frequent theft, desertion and low morale ruled the lands. Because of the unrest Osijek introduces a city curfew. The City council also tried to stop companies from trying to raise prices and transportation ticket sales, as it was done by the Osijek horse tram.⁷³ “Because Osijek was full of foreigners and new citizens were constantly arriving from surrounding villages, there were no more apartments left to rent. Studies suggest that since foreigners were usually buying homes, general public believed many families will soon live on the street.”⁷⁴ Slavonian soldiers were slowly returning home, and “many prisoners returning from the eastern front lines came to Budapest by the thousands. There were also many Croats among them. All were dressed in Russian military outfits, and some also had Cossack hats. When they were asked where they come from, many yelled: “from Russia - from Siberia -Asia.”⁷⁵ In late March of 1918 Hungarian troops also arrived in Osijek from the eastern front lines. The Osijek mayor asked them if it is true that they arrived in Osijek for a requisition. The Hungarian colonel said they have come to rest and recover from the constant warfare on the eastern front lines.⁷⁶ A new law was introduced for military court concerning desertion in 1918 (law was declared on March 9th 1918 and regulated by Article 183) and any such act will be sentenced to death.⁷⁷ There were specific rigorous procedures to those soldiers who were captured on the front lines and were returning home. They were treated by the ministry as major traitors in the war. For those “major traitors” local authorities took responsibility for all criminal proceedings and punishment.

Despite having set peace with Russia, their prisoners in Slavonia were not released because locals said that: “The Hague Convention does not require prisoners of war to be released when peace is agreed upon - they are only required to be sent home as soon as possible.⁷⁸ Until then, prisoners of war must work with their current employer, while the county commission for prisoners decides otherwise.”⁷⁹

Finally, on 19th of October 1918, the National Council of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs (SHS)⁸⁰ issued a “Declaration” which called for the unification of the entire nation of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs in the new, unique and fully sovereign state. The sovereign state adopted the Ordinance as “National Council of the SHS.⁸¹ On the same day the city council was not clear about SHS, but they continued to deal with the problems of strengthening army barracks in Osijek and the problems of Spanish fever, which was “shaking” Osijek pretty badly in the past month.⁸² The next day newspaper published “Explanations of the National Council and Wilson's response.” Next day Croatian flags were hanged around Osijek.⁸³ Russian prisoners by the order of the

⁷³ Iz gradskog poreznog ureda. Redarstvena ura, HO, br. 2., 3. I. 1918., str. 2-3.

⁷⁴ Nove brige za gradsko poglavarstvo, HO, br. 3., 4. I. 1918., str. 3.

⁷⁵ Vračaju se zarobljenici, HO, br. 51., 2. III. 1918., str. 5.

⁷⁶ Mađžarske čete u Osijeku, HO, br. 73., 29. III. 1918., str. 2.

⁷⁷ Prijeki sud, HO, br. 86., 16. IV. 1918., str. 2.

⁷⁸ Postupak sa veleizdajnicima, kad se vrate iz zarobljeništva, HO, br. 104., 7. V. 1918., str. 2.

⁷⁹ Novi propisi za ruske zarobljenike, HO, br. 89., 18. IV. 1918., str. 2

⁸⁰ Gradske vijesti, HO, br. 239., 21. X. 1918., str. 4.

⁸¹ Objava Narodnog vijeća Slovenaca, Hrvata i Srba, HO, br. 239., 21. X. 1918., str. 1-2.

⁸² Gradske vijesti, HO, br. 239., 21. X. 1918., str. 4.

⁸³ Svečana sjednica gradskog zastupstva u Osijeku, HO, br. 282., 4. XII. 1918., str. 2-3.

military command in Pressburg (Bratislava) 7th of October 1918 (No. 100 434) were sent home from Osijek on 30th of October.⁸⁴

Since law and order in and around Osijek area was marked by frequent lootings and killings, and the police were powerless to prevent such acts,⁸⁵ the Judiciary Committee set up a new court in Osijek. Peace was seriously threatened in the city at that time. Since the new court was formed in November, one could see armed members of the “National Guard” with red signs, while other armed men wore white ribbons with inscriptions of National Guard.⁸⁶ The Grand Prefect in an agreement with the National council and the royal command of Serbian troops in Osijek ordered: “Everyone has 24 hours to surrender their weapons to the nearest county board.” According to that same provision later on “Red” and “White” guard was dissolved in Osijek as well.⁸⁷ Slavonian soldiers from the former 78th and 28 Regiment, who went through Serbian, eastern and Italian fronts, were disarmed. On one occasion, when the mayor gave a speech he said, “that they are now the popular army” and that they must obey the National Council as their supreme authority.⁸⁸

The 3rd of December 1918 marked the first solemn session of the Assembly of Osijek in which the city mayor along with the prefect noted that the city of Osijek and Virovitica County had joined a new country called the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Otprema ruskih zarobljenika “Donkozakom”, Jug, br. 185., 17. X. 1918., str. 3.

⁸⁵ Položaj u Našicama, Jug, br. 206., 7. XI. 1918., str. 3.

⁸⁶ Gradske vijesti, HO, br. 254., 5. XI. 1918., str. 4.

⁸⁷ Raspust narodnih gardi, HO, br. 266., 17. XI. 1918., str. 4. i Raspuštanje narodnih straža, Jug, br. 216., 17. XI. 1918., str. 4.

⁸⁸ Doček 28. domobranske pukovnije, HO, br. 270., 22. XI. 1918., str. 1.

⁸⁹ Svečana sjednica gradskog zastupstva u Osijeku, HO, br. 282., 4. XII. 1918., str. 2-3.

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