

SLAVKO N. BJELAJAC

Colonel Slavko Nikola Bjelacac was born in Bosnia in 1905. He spent his entire life as the quintessential military man. His illustrious career spanned over fifty years of service and dedication to two countries. He held many important posts in the Yugoslav Army and Government before his capture by the Germans. After his subsequent escape, he resurfaced as a resistance commander defending his homeland. After the war, he emigrated from his temporary home in Cairo to the United States where he worked for various government military agencies as an expert on unconventional warfare and counterinsurgency. Bjelacac's contribution to his newly adopted country was nothing less than outstanding. Prior to 1971 he published several books and generated over 150 articles on unconventional and psychological warfare and counterinsurgency. The US military policy makers and planners extensively referred to this body of work as did the academic community.

Bjelacac's military education helped him develop a solid intellectual architecture for a successful military career. He was a graduate of the Yugoslav Military Academy, the Ecole Superieure de Guerre, and the General Staff College. As an artilleryman, he specialized in mountain warfare. After graduating he rose in the Royal Yugoslav Army ranks to attain the position of Chief of Staff of a Division where he led troops for three years. Over the following two years he served as instructor and battery commander in Artillery Officers School, and for three years as a professor of Strategic Geography at the Military Academy. Simultaneously, he was a member of the Board of the Academy and of the Ecole Superieure de Guerre (Belgrade) and a member of the Ministry of War Selection Board for Promotion to Captain.

As a General Staff Officer at General Headquarters Bjelacac spent four years in war planning, organization and logistics. He then worked an additional year as the Assistant to Deputy Minister of War, concerned with the broad aspects of strategy during the critical period preceding World War II. Following the Yugoslav Coup d'état on March 27th, 1941 and into the war against the Germans and the Italians, Colonel Bjelajac became Chief of the Military Cabinet of Prime Minister Simovich.

Bjelajec is the author of several Yugoslav books, including subjects such as the Military Geography of Germany, a Military Dictionary in Yugoslav-German and German-Yugoslav, and the Geo-strategic Studies of the Mediterranean area, Eastern Europe, and the Balkans, -- two of them accepted by the Yugoslav Ministry of War as text books. His articles were published in various pre-World War II Yugoslavia newspapers, periodicals and military magazines.

For special accomplishments in mountain and ski sports, Bjelacac received several awards including a membership in the Central Staff and Board of the Yugoslav Mountain and Ski Federation. He was 'President of Ski Club Slavia and leader of the Yugoslav ski team for International Competitions held in Garmish Partenkirchen in Germany and in Cortina d'Ampezzo, in Italy. For accomplishments in mountain warfare, he was awarded the White Eagle.

After the collapse of Yugoslav's formal resistance, Bjelacac was among those who sought to continue the struggle. After aiding Peter II leave the country with the Royal Yugoslav Government's ministers he was captured in late April 1941 and sent to several prisoner of war camps, at first in Germany and then in Italy. With the aid of the local underground, he escaped from the Italian POW Camp in Fiume in May of 1942.

Once free, Bjelaca resumed his resistance activities in an extensive area of the Western mountains of Yugoslavia and along the Adriatic Coast where he commanded a force of some 9,000 nationalist guerrillas and an underground of 15,000. He immediately placed his forces under the overall command of guerilla leader General Draža Mihailovich. Besides his normal military functions of conducting guerilla and underground campaigns, he organized a local economy and government to support his operations. During this period, he had to deal with the problems of insurgency and counterinsurgency, and of civil war, besides the guerilla operations against the enemy forces of occupation.

Bjelacac aided the US and Allied war effort in his command area by collecting and sending strategic intelligence. His guerrilla forces and underground, escape and evasion nets, saved a number of the US. Air crews downed by the Germans and their satellites. More than 550 U. S Air Force personnel were saved by the nationalist troops in Yugoslavia and safely exfiltrated to Italy where they joined their squadrons. The information collected by the Bjelajac' intelligence nets in the Balkans was forwarded by him, through his underground channels, to the US and Allied agents, and headquarters in Cairo.

Cut off from his forces while attempting to secure the surrender of Italian stocks of munitions in Sushak and Fiume, Bjelacac was ordered by General Mihailovich to cross the Adriatic Sea to join the Allied front, and convince the Allies that a debarkation into the Balkans would have far reaching military and political results.

From late 1943 to the end of the war he served in the Royal Yugoslav Headquarters in Cairo as Undersecretary in the Ministry of War, under the Premier of Yugoslav Government. During this period, Bjelacac was well known to U.S. officers of the Joint Intelligence Collection Agency Middle East (JUCAME) and to other U.S. organizations and agencies with whom he cooperated. He came to the United States in 1948 and on arrival was invited to join the Department of Defense.

Bjelacac was employed by the Department of the Army and other U.S. agencies as consultant on unconventional and psychological warfare and on conventional military matters pertaining to Communist Bloc countries, Europe, Mediterranean area and Middle East. He was a planner for unconventional and psychological warfare, and for subversive, escape and evasion and stay-behind operations for over five years; and a member of the faculty of Georgetown University, teaching Serbo-Croatian, for four years

After receiving his US citizenship in 1954, Bjelacac was appointed to the General Staff of the U. S. Army as an intelligence and special warfare specialist. Later he was appointed the Senior Civilian Advisor to the Director of Special Operation and in 1965 Special Assistant to the Director of International and Civil Affairs, General Staff of the U. S. Army. In 1960 by the direction of the President of the United States Colonel Bjelajac was appointed a reserve commissioned officer of the United States Army with the grade of colonel. A grade and honor which had never been bestowed on any other new American.

As a writer and lecture Colonel Bjelajec produced over 150 unclassified and classified studies on psychological operations, unconventional warfare, counterinsurgency, subversion and on the related subjects. His many papers and articles were printed in Military Review, ARMY (magazine), ORBIS, World Affairs, the Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences, and in other papers, magazines and books. He was a lecturer at by almost every military service school and Academy in the United States.

Colonel Bjelajac's professional accomplishments in geography and strategic geography brought him membership in the Association of American Geographers and the recognition of the title of Professional Geographer. The World Directory of Geographers, published by the International Geographers Union, lists him as Geographer and Military Geographer. The American Men of Science (a biological directory of the Social and Behavioral Sciences) lists him as a scientist.

Colonel Bjelajac was an artist. He had several one-man shows in this area and his works have been selected and exhibited in numerous galleries including Corcoran Art Gallery, Smithsonian, Carnegie International Center, New York and Birmingham Museum.

For bravery in battlefield behind enemy lines, Bjelajec was awarded the highest Royal Yugoslav award and made Chevalier of the Karadjordje Star with Swords. For special services, the Polish pre-war Government awarded him the Polonia Restituta.

Colonel Bjelacac died in the province of Malaga Spain in 1984. He told friends and family that he wanted to spend his last years behind the mountains and in front of sea.

