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MARSHAL JOSIP BROZ TITO OF YUGOSLAVIA

The majestic barren mountain peak stood like a medieval tower against the flawless azure sky. A solitary eagle soared high above the high mountain peak, unable to take rest in the trees of the lush forests below. The hellish confrontation on the slopes of the mountain was threatening to engulf the entire mountain range in a fiery inferno of fire and thunderous explosions. On the blood drenched mountain slopes, the enraged Yugoslavian soldiers were desperately and savagely charging at the Nazi invaders, in impossible attempts to break through the multiple waves of Hitler's soldiers who advanced in endless waves. In the paradoxically blue Bosnian summer sky, there suddenly appeared a death squadron, comprised of the birds of steel of Hitler's Luftwaffe air force. With horrifying wailing of their sirens, which chilled the blood of the Partisans and fascists alike, the airplanes instantly descended into gravity-defying dives, dropping their thunderous death loads on the embattled and surrounded Yugoslavian National Liberation "Partisan" armies, lead by Supreme Commander, Marshal Josip Broz Tito. The whole forest was consumed by the explosions as the endless storm of hellish fire surrounded the half-crazed Balkan warriors, who fought in a state of berserk, refusing to surrender. The Third Yugoslav Partisan Division of the Yugoslav National Liberation Army, were led into their final charge by their legendary divisional commander, Sava Kovacevic. As he led his warriors into the suicidal and heroic final charge, with his legendary battle cry "Charge, my heroes, we must pass" Sava Kovacevic fell, his head blown apart by a fascist bullet. On June 12, 1943, Supreme Commander, Marshal Josip Broz Tito, together with his last few thousand remaining, indomitable warriors, the free and unconquered Yugoslavs, made his decisive historic stand

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against the ravaging hordes of Hitler's Third Reich, at the Battle of the Sutjeska River.ⁱ (Maclean, 74)

Marshal Tito, born Josip Broz on May 7, 1892 in the Croatian village of Kumrovec, in the picturesque Zagorje region, was the founding father and creator of the second Yugoslavia. The years of his poverty-stricken childhood and youth eventually gave way to the turbulent years of the Great War, which sent the young Josip Broz to the Eastern Front, as part of the Austro-Hungarian army. After being taken prisoner by the Russians, Josip Broz spent eight years in Russia. As the 1917 October Revolution swept aside the Czarist regime, Josip Broz joined the Red Army and fought in the Russian Civil War against the Russian royalists. This experience, together with his distinguished participation in the Spanish Civil War in 1936, ensured the later success of his military leadership of the Yugoslavian anti-fascist liberation war, waged by the Yugoslavian "Partisans" against the Nazi war machine and domestic quislings, fascists and cut-throats.

On the eve of the Second World War, Josip Broz Tito became the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. The party was a member of the Comintern, an international communist organization formed by the Kremlin, with the intention of advocating Marxist world revolution. The Yugoslav Communist Party took directives from Moscow, and developed a very hardliner, communist approach to transformation of society into a socialist economy. January of 1939 saw Josip Broz "assume charge of the Yugoslav Communist party,"ⁱⁱⁱ (Maclean, 37) working to "put an end to fractional disputes, by giving the party strong, united leadership."ⁱⁱⁱ (37-38) The events of the year were alarming; intelligence reports showed that there was a strong indication of an imminent large scale military confrontation in Europe and elsewhere, between

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the fascist axis and the fragmented and disunited free-market nations of liberal democracy. The official Kremlin line was a strong desire to avoid direct confrontation with Hitler's Germany, and to continue uniting the world communist parties into obedient servants of the Soviet ideology. Josip Broz Tito was expected to carry these goals out without question. He did so initially; at the Fifth Party Congress held in Zagreb in late autumn of 1940, the theme was that of "neutrality." With the conclusion of the 1939 Soviet-German Pact of Non-Aggression, the era of Popular Front against Fascism was over. For communists, this was not a war of Democracy against Fascism, but the Second Imperialist War, waged by rival groups of imperialist powers.^{iv} (Maclean, 42). The neutrality could not, however, be maintained. The Yugoslav royal government gave in to Hitler's enormous pressure and joined the Axis Tripartite Pact of Germany, Italy, and Japan on March 25, 1941.^v (42) Neither the Nazis nor the royal government could have predicted the act of heroic defiance of the Yugoslav people on March 27. On that day, upon learning of the news of their country's descent into Nazi slavery, the people of Belgrade and other Yugoslav cities violently demonstrated against the alliance with Germany. "Better war than the pact! Better the grave, than a slave!" the crowds shouted in utter defiance, which stunned and enraged Adolf Hitler.^{vi} (42) The royal government was overthrown by a military coup, and a provisional government was put in its place. Upon hearing the news of the Yugoslav people's defiance, Hitler gave orders for "Operation Punishment", which was the code name for the destruction of Yugoslavia.^{vii} (Maclean, 44) Without a declaration of war, German air force bombed the capital Belgrade on April 6, 1941, at 5 a.m. By April 17, the country was overrun by occupation forces. The High Command capitulated, and Yugoslavia formally ceased to exist.^{viii} (44)

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Yugoslavia was erased and its place was taken up by a large, pro-Nazi Croatian state, headed by the Ustase, an anti-Yugoslav, extreme Croatian nationalist-fascist movement, headed by Dr. Ante Pavelic.^{ix} (44) The ensuing slaughter of hundreds of thousands of Serbs prompted “the rising of the Serb peasantry of NDH (Independent State of Croatia) in self defence in the summer of 1941”^x (Pavlowitch, 314) A much diminished, separate Serbia was created, administered by direct German occupation.^{xi} (Maclean, 44) Yugoslavia's remaining territories were distributed among Germany, Italy, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Albania.^{xii} (44) The Yugoslavian National Liberation Army, better known as the Partisans, was established by Tito and his associates after the capitulation of the Yugoslav Royal Army on April 17, 1941. For the following two months, Tito made the "final preparations for an armed uprising, gathering arms, and preparing for guerrilla diversions."^{xiii} (Maclean, 46) The first Partisan uprising occurred in the Serbian town of Valjevo, on June 5, 1941. When Hitler launched "Operation Barbarossa" against the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, Tito and his Partisan leadership decided that it was time to escalate the guerrilla uprising into a full-scale Partisan war.^{xiv} (46). Tito’s Politburo sent delegates to Slovenia, Montenegro, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Macedonia, with the task of creating a nucleus of rebellion. These uprisings were generally successful, and although tasked with the impossible prospect of fighting a numerically superior enemy without adequate weaponry, the newly recruited partisans eagerly confronted the German and Italian occupation forces. Their first weapons consisted of farm equipment and light hunting weapons. For any further armament, they depended on what they could capture from the enemy. The Partisans turned their attention upon the Italians, who were tasked with pacifying the rebellious areas, “a task made harder by the Germans’ own brutal policies.”^{xv} (Pavlowitch, 315) For every

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wounded German soldier, fifty civilians were to be executed; furthermore, for every German soldier killed, one hundred civilians were to be summarily executed. This horrific campaign of terror had the opposite effect of the one intended; the people saw in Tito and his Partisans the only beacon of hope and survival, flocking to Partisan ranks en masse. It should be noted that a large portion of the Partisan fighters were not followers of Marxism, despite the fact that the army was officially a communist-revolutionary liberation army. The Partisans' fanatical loyalty to the idea of national liberation was genuine and instinctive, whether they were communist or not. This fanaticism originated in the instinctive and powerful national pride, which was shared unanimously by all peoples of Yugoslavia. Their love of freedom is unprecedented, and throughout history, they have fought for it like almost no other people on earth. In the period between Yugoslavia's April 1941 demolition and her liberation in May 1945, Tito and his Yugoslav National Liberation Army withstood seven large enemy offensives, each time emerging victorious and stronger. The fifth offensive was the most bloody and barbaric; at the Battle of Sutjeska, which took place between May 15 and June 15, 1943, one hundred and twenty-seven thousand fascist soldiers encircled less than twenty thousand of Tito's Yugoslavian Partisans. In the appalling bloodbath and terrifying military confrontation, nine thousand Partisans died; however, they defied all odds and broke through the Nazi encirclement, winning a decisive victory against a numerically superior enemy. It was in the inferno of Sutjeska that new Yugoslavia was truly born. In the central Bosnian city of Jajce, on November 29, 1943, at the historical second meeting of the Anti-Fascist Council of National Liberation of Yugoslavia, known as AVNOJ, socialist Yugoslavia was officially proclaimed. The British, American, and Soviet governments alike recognized Tito's Partisans as the only genuine anti-fascist resistance

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army in occupied Yugoslavia, thereby giving Tito and his Communist Party of Yugoslavia the historical chance to complete the Marxist revolution, overthrow the old monarchy, and turn Yugoslavia into a socialist republic. When Germany capitulated on May 9, 1945, Tito and his communists were unprecedented masters of Yugoslavia. They had overwhelming support of the civilian populace, due to the fact that their heroic four year struggle liberated all of Yugoslavia's numerous nationalities from the yoke of the Nazi New World Order.

For the first two post-war years, Yugoslavia remained Soviet Union's most faithful communist ally. According to Yugoslav revolutionary and one of Tito's closest associates, Milovan Djilas "': For the Yugoslavs, Moscow was not only a political and spiritual centre, but the realization of an abstract ideal – the classless society...''^{xvi} (Djilas, 11) When the Soviet Union expelled Yugoslavia from the communist bloc in 1948, the entire world was shocked. The Soviets had simply underestimated Yugoslavia's wartime struggle. Without significant allied help, the Yugoslav people had liberated themselves from the fascist menace and the bloodlust of their domestic traitors and fifth- columnists. Receiving no help from the U.S.S.R. until the very end of the war, the Yugoslavs became accustomed to relying on their own abilities and their own resourcefulness. There should have been no shock to Stalin's U.S.S.R. that Yugoslavia refused to be subordinate to Kremlin's command. Stalin's insistence that Yugoslavia cease its independent-minded foreign and domestic policies was met with fierce resistance from Tito and his party. When a series of diplomatic exchanges between Moscow and Belgrade resulted in open ideological confrontation, Yugoslavia was expelled from the Eastern Bloc, blockaded economically, and threatened with invasion. Stalin threatened endlessly "': I will shake my little finger and there will be no more Tito.''^{xvii} (Maclean, 94) The year of 1948 was perhaps the most

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difficult of Tito's long reign; however, his determined rejection of Soviet dominance of his homeland became legendary in the minds of his critics and admirers alike. He was hailed in the western world as the daring rebel who had defied the terrifying power of the Red Kremlin. He was adored by the regular Soviet people, as the first man to dare and question to authority and righteousness of the Soviet Empire. Marshal Tito became a heroic figure to the people of the Soviet satellite countries in Eastern Europe, who saw in him a beacon of hope for their own liberation from the Soviet yoke. Skilful diplomatic manoeuvring of Tito's government, his party's unanimous solidarity, and perhaps most importantly, his absolute support from the vast masses of the Yugoslav nationalities and the Yugoslav People's Army, enabled him to take such a determined and independent position towards Moscow. With this legendary and heroic act of defiance, Yugoslavia embarked on an independent path to socialism and self-assertion, which ensured forty-five years of peace and stability, the longest such period in the history of the Balkan Peninsula.

Marshal Josip Broz Tito, the Father of Yugoslavia, who was born to a poor Croatian peasant family at the end of the 19th century, rose to become the most heroic and glorious figure in modern Balkan history. A fierce and indomitable guerrilla leader, an unconquered freedom-fighter, and champion of human dignity and economic miracles are just some of the numerous characteristics that forever glorify his name. A benevolent and righteous man, he skilfully balanced humane compassion with ruthless determination, and never faltered in the face of hardship. In the most trying and difficult times of Yugoslav history, throughout the Yugoslav National Liberation War and the confrontation with Stalin's imperialism, Marshal Josip Broz Tito stood tall and unwavering, a majestic mountain peak against a flawless azure sky,

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indomitable and free. According to his personal friend and wartime comrade, Fitzroy Maclean “: At his best in a crisis, Tito gave during these critical months the impression of a man supremely sure of himself, as calm, resolute, and resilient as he had ever been.”^{xviii} (Maclean, 94) Hitler’s notorious SS Commander, Heinrich Himmler remarked of Tito in 1943 “: I wish we had a dozen Titos in Germany, leaders with such determination and such good nerves that even though they were forever encircled they would never give in.”^{xix} (Maclean, 81) Marshal Josip Broz Tito, the Father of Yugoslavia, the embodiment of all that is rugged, indomitable, and heroic, a Balkan “Hajduk” freedom-fighter, stands as an eternally inspirational figure in the history of former Yugoslavia, bringing hope and encouragement to a region of Europe, so desperately in need of heroes in contemporary times. In the groundbreaking biography of Marshal Tito, his wartime comrade, Fitzroy Maclean, offered his unique description of Josip Broz Tito: “...For Tito was a rebel. And a rebel, in an age of mass production and power blocs and monolithic systems of government, is a healthy phenomenon. Nor is it really surprising that Tito should have been a rebel. He was a Yugoslav, and Yugoslavs are natural rebels, stubborn, proud, and irrepressible, ready to die, or to kill, for an idea.”^{xx} (Maclean 118) “A typical South Slav, if ever there was one, his fame will be celebrated by future generations of South Slavs, the fame of his virtues and his vices alike.”^{xxi} (Maclean, 123) It is thus conclusively without a doubt that the glorious name of Josip Broz Tito shall forever be hailed by future generations of Balkan peoples, as they continue their struggle towards their distant yet eternal dream of unity, peace, and freedom.

ⁱ Maclean, Fitzroy. *Josip Broz Tito: A Pictorial Biography*. London: MacMillan, 1980.

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