

War in the Balkans

On April 6, 1941, the armed forces of Germany, Italy, Hungary, and Bulgaria invaded Yugoslavia, and forcibly dismembered the federation, annexing part of the conquered territory to the victorious neighboring Axis countries, and imposing a vassal Ustashe fascist government on Independent Croatia (which incorporated Bosnia and Herzegovina). A German military occupation force governed Serbia. In early July 1941, a popular uprising against the Nazis occurred in Serbia. Communists led by Josip Broz Tito emerged as the leaders as the revolt spread to all parts of Yugoslavia. Tito created a guerrilla fighting force of 200,000 to 300,000 men known as Partisans, which in 1943 engaged twenty German divisions. Despite the harsh conditions of war, Tito's forces provided every assistance to Jews fleeing the Nazis. The Partisans liberated Belgrade on October 20, 1944.

Above: An April 6, 1944, Waffen-SS field post letter from a Majdanek concentration camp guard to a relative, a non-commissioned officer in a Croatian SS division fighting the Partisans in northern Bosnia, censored by the Waffen-SS camp post. Below: This Partisan field post envelope dates from the period between November 1944 and March 1945 (not the date written later in pencil, which includes a grocery shopping list). It originated in the Northern Adriatic Coast area of Rijeka-Fiume-Trieste, addressed to Josimovic Maksa, a tailor, at Novi Beced, Banat, in Vojvodina, northern Serbia. The round mark is the frank of Military Post 187/LP, the 4th Partisan Army commanded by Lieutenant General Peter Drapsin. The rectangular marking is the same unit's censorship cachet.

