

Army high command 'in confusion'

THE INDEPENDENT 1/7/91

LESS than a week after its tanks and jets attacked Slovenia, the Yugoslav army is showing signs of breaking up. While the army has easily enough fire power to crush Slovenian and Croatian resistance, strains are appearing in the form of political disagreements among the officer corps and defections among the multinational rank and file.

Slovenian officials say that their territorial defence forces have captured 500 Yugoslav prisoners of war, including 65 officers, since fighting broke out last Thursday, and that another 250 Yugoslav soldiers have deserted.

Although the army disputes these figures, it has clearly not had

things all its own way in Slovenia. Last Friday Colonel Drago Brencic, the Yugoslav officer in charge of defending Slovenian air space, announced his resignation.

Colonel Brencic, a Slovene, said: "The attacks on civilian buildings, the use of British-made cluster bombs and the destruction of Slovenian property, as well as the ruthless attacks on civilian cargo and personal vehicles . . . on open roads, are dishonourable and barbaric acts."

Over the weekend a Belgrade newspaper, *Vecernje Novosti*, reported that the commander of the Yugoslav air force, General Anton Tus, had resigned just before the shooting started on

Thursday. He was due to retire in September and appeared to have left early in order not to be associated with the military repression.

A further sign of confusion at the top came on Saturday when a member of the Yugoslav high command, General Marko Negovanovic, appeared on television and warned Slovenia to stop fighting or face "decisive military action". To carry full authority, such a dramatic statement should have come from the Defence Minister, General Veljko Kadijevic, and indeed for an hour before the broadcast Yugoslav television had said the minister would address the country. Yet the broadcast was made by one of his junior staff.

From Tony Barber in Belgrade

Western military experts detect a split between officers who want to limit the army's role to securing Yugoslavia's frontiers and then let the politicians reach a settlement, and hardline commanders, mostly Serbs, who see the crisis as a final chance to crush Slovenia and Croatia. Some officers at regional level appear to be operating independently of central control.

"The line of command in the army isn't holding. The army cannot control the officers of lower rank," Lojze Peterle, Slovenia's Prime Minister, said.

Ante Markovic, the federal Prime Minister, has made clear that the army used much more force in Slovenia than he expected.

Zivko Pregl, the deputy federal Information Minister, said: "The army made a move for which it received no authorisation from anyone."

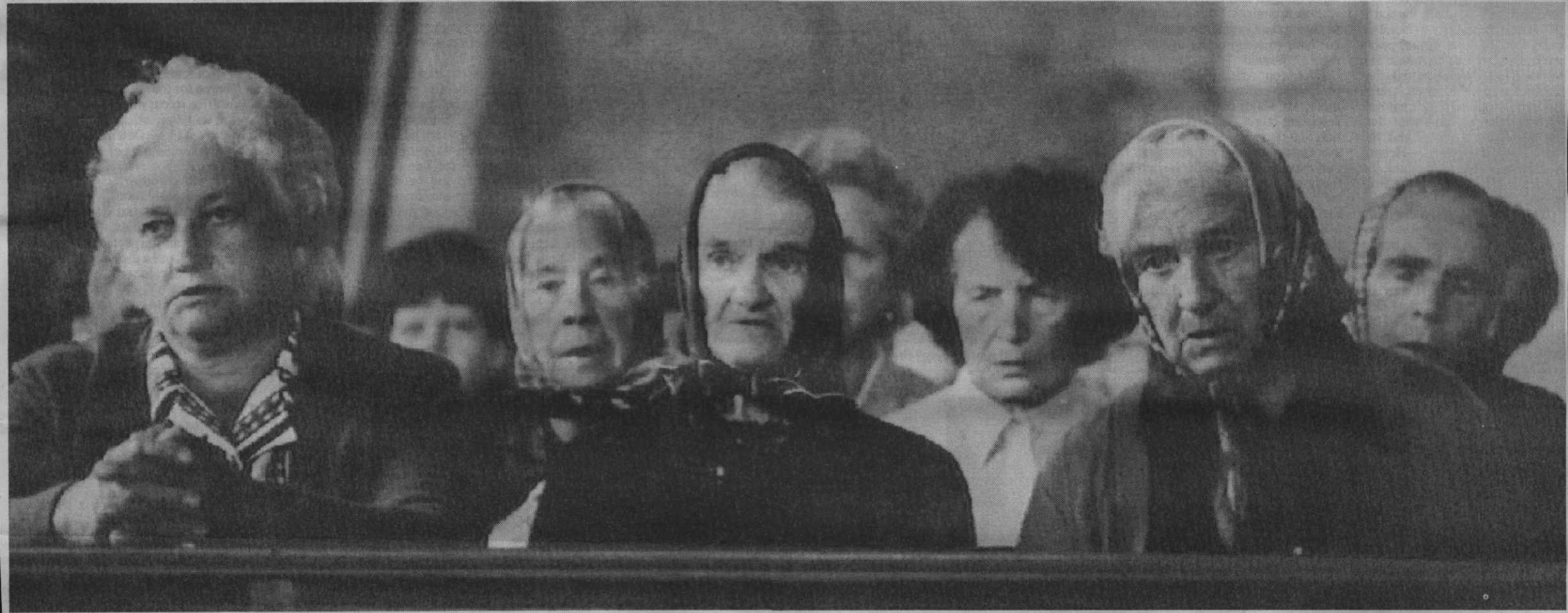
Part of the problem is that the armed forces come under the constitutional authority of the collective state presidency, but this eight-member body has been paralysed since mid-May because Serbia refused to let a Croat take over as its head. This has increased the scope for independent army initiatives.

One especially powerful commander is General Blagoje Adzic, the chief of staff. A Serb from Bosnia, he saw his entire family killed by Croatian fascists in the Second World War. Stipe Mesic, the Croat who should have become head of state in May, has vowed to dismiss him instantly if he ever takes up his post. The fear of a political purge in the high command is one factor behind the determination of some Serbian generals to launch a devastating strike against Croatia.

The level of morale among ordinary soldiers and conscripts is a matter of conjecture, but it seems likely that those of Albanian and Macedonian nationality, not to

mention Croats and Slovenes, are far from enthusiastic about fighting for a vision of Yugoslavia in which only Serbs still seem to believe. Equipment breakdowns and shortages of fuel and spare parts have probably not helped.

The original *raison d'être* of the Yugoslav army after 1945 was to protect the country's independence against external threats. Now it is caught up in a civil conflict which is rapidly pulling it apart. *Vjesnik*, Croatia's leading newspaper said: "The army campaign in Slovenia and Croatia, under the pretext of protecting Yugoslavia's integrity, is the beginning of the end of the Yugoslav People's Army as it is."



Members of a rural community 20 miles outside Ljubljana pack their church to pray for peace. In the capital, a handful of old people defied the curfew to attend Mass in the cathedral Photograph: David Rose