

# A debt of gratitude to Yugoslavia

*From Mr David Gwyther*

Sir: Before the name "Yugoslavia" disappears from the map of Europe I should like to pay my tribute to Tito's partisans in the 1939-45 war. It is my honest opinion that without Yugoslavia's resistance against the massive polyglot army that was required to garrison the country during the war, Germany would have been able to intensify its efforts and, after quelling the Greek partisans, would have persuaded Turkey to throw in its lot with the Axis powers.

I have described it as a polyglot army; so it was, as it comprised Croats, Hungarians, Romanians and Bulgarians. In the later stages of the war, Draza Mihailovich's Chetniks also threw in their lot with the Germans. Second-class troops, perhaps, but commanded by staff officers of the Wehrmacht. The Italians and Austrians were also there, of course. The reinforcement of the Axis armies in the Western Desert by these divisions would, I think, have brought a different conclusion to this campaign.

I have holidayed in the coastal regions of Yugoslavia since 1968, and I returned from my latest holiday last Monday. The old partisans, both men and women, are contemporaries in age with myself and no longer have any influence on the guidance of their country's

affairs. Their sons and grandsons are infected with the disease of materialism, while being fed by their demagogic, lightweight politicians with pap on democracy and the market-led economy. Nebulous words capable of any interpretation.

When I visit small Yugoslavian towns and villages and read the names on the war memorials, I realise the tremendous sacrifice of lives that the generation now in their sixties and seventies made. I salute them. To visit a churchyard in Yugoslavia and see the headstones proudly displaying the red star touches a spot in my heart. A future regime will, no doubt, remove them.

My thanks to them all. Historians are already starting to denigrate their efforts, and I should like those still alive to know that there is at least one inhabitant of this country who acknowledges the tremendous debt owing to them and is grateful.

Tito made one big mistake. He knew that a strong Yugoslavia needed a weak Serbia. He should have taken a leaf out of Australia's book and created a new administrative capital outside of Serbia. This might have prevented today's tragedy.

Yours faithfully,  
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