

# Hatred bursts out in Croatia

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From Steve Crawshaw  
in Borovo, Croatia

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members of Croatia's People's Guard dead and three wounded. It is impossible to find anybody with even a hint of optimism for the future. One man said: "The violence is only just beginning." Nobody I spoke to in Borovo dissented.

The town, in the part of eastern Croatia known as Slavonia, is Croat-controlled. Everywhere on official buildings you can see the red and white chequerboard symbol of the Croatian state, so resented by Serbs because they associate it with the fascist *Ustashe* regime which slaughtered tens or possibly hundreds of thousands of Serbs during the Second World War. The chequer-board was restored as the official Croatian symbol after the victory in free elections last year of a nationalist government led by President Franjo Tudjman.

Just down the road from Borovo are areas which, though technically in Croatia,

are controlled by Serbs. This part of Yugoslavia is a bloody ethnic patchwork which no redrawing of borders can ever solve. If Slovenia's independence were to be recognised tomorrow, things there might almost be simple. But in eastern Croatia there can only be bloodshed on a shocking scale. Croats in Borovo declare: "All Serbs are terrorists." Serbs say the same of the *Ustashe* Croats. Indeed, the Serbs argue that the Croat government itself is "terrorist".

The heavy weaponry of the army, which now stands outside Borovo, became part of yesterday's fighting, acting apparently on the Serbs' behalf, not as a peacekeeping force. But the withdrawal of the army would not in itself solve the problem. Its presence merely adds an additional, lethal element to the existing ethnic war.

There is, of course, a fearful symmetry. One old Croat farmer, dressed in dungarees and armed with a Kalashnikov, declared: "I am prepared to give my life for freedom." Serbian graffiti in Vukovar,

just a few miles away, declare: "We want freedom. Down with the *Ustashe*."

That slogan, half whitewashed out by the Croats, can be seen next door to a destroyed pizza bar where two Croatian policemen were shot dead this week. Their blood still stains the pavement outside, amid torn-out photographs from an erotic magazine.

Round the corner are the signs of the inevitable revenge. The walls of a building hang into the road where a dry-cleaner's was blown up. Its owner was blamed for the deaths of the policemen. A book with a picture of Serbia's President, Slobodan Milosevic, smiling on the front cover lies in the rubble.

The area is littered with road blocks. Some of those checking documents — unshaven youths wearing flak jackets over garish tracksuits — are courteous. Some are abrupt. And some just turn their guns on you and yell for you to turn back, as they wave wildly in the air. Yesterday, Croats forbade a journalist's car to go half

a mile from Borovo to the Serbian settlement of Borovo Selo, where a Yugoslav army tank can be seen, standing at the end of the long, straight road. Depending on your point of view, the tanks are the protectors of the Serbs or aggressors towards the Croats, and your point of view now depends on whether you are a Croat or a Serb.

If we had been allowed to go into Borovo Selo we would have heard the same story from Serbs as we heard from the Croats. The deep reserve of hatred is only now beginning to be tapped.

In Borovo and the surrounding area European resolutions are simply meaningless. Things have already gone too far. One young Croat declared yesterday: "Only four months ago, I could not have believed things would get as bad as we have seen here today. I cannot bear to think what might happen next." A woman added, through tears of hatred and anger: "It's impossible now for Serbs and Croats to live in peace."

AUTOMATIC fire rang out again and again among the little one-storey houses and their gardens, lush with hollyhocks and vines. Frightened passers-by — old ladies and mothers carrying young children — darted from one street corner to another, attempting to return to the relative safety of their homes. Yesterday, in the small town of Borovo in eastern Croatia, you could see the beginnings of the true, all-engulfing civil war which now threatens to destroy Yugoslavia.

This is not the first time that Borovo and other places in eastern Croatia have seen violence. In one shoot-out with Serb militants in May a dozen Croatian policemen were killed. There has been sporadic gunfire at night, too, since the declaration of independence by Croatia and Slovenia last week. Yesterday, though, was the first time that shooting continued throughout the day. As yet another burst of gunfire rang out, one Croat mused aloud: "I think the war has finally started."

A clash yesterday afternoon left two