

Defiant volunteers guard gains on border

By Robert Tilley in Kranjska Gora

THE LAST territorial defence unit in this remote north-western corner of Slovenia set off with bravado yesterday morning to set up an ambush above a key border town, in expectation of an advance by Serbian-dominated federal forces.

Eight hours later, the 25 men trooped back home to await the next emergency in Yugoslavia's war of nerves.

They had been mobilised in a defiant reaction to the latest ultimatums from Belgrade and had gone 12 miles to the vital frontier railhead of Jesenice to take up positions on the forested slopes.

Jesenice is on the main line snaking through the 10,000 ft Karawanken mountains to Austria and Germany. It also sits astride the main road from Ljubljana to important border crossings.

Running parallel to the railway is the autobahn between Slovenia and Austria, a five-mile tunnel through the mountains.

Kranjska Gora, a pretty summer and winter mountain resort, mustered 90 men for the defence force. Sixty-five were assigned early on to help guard Ljubljana airport.

Those mobilised yesterday were flushed with their success against federal forces at two border posts. Both were taken with only a warning shot or two being fired, their enemies having been starved into surrender over four days.

Two tanks, some anti-aircraft guns and a small fleet of military vehicles were captured. The arms were being readied yesterday for use in defence if a final peace agreement cannot be reached.

The Slovenian troops manned the post yesterday, its Customs sheds,

restaurant and duty-free shop heavily scarred by the fighting. The shop shelves are empty, plundered by departing federal troops.

The men expect to see action again before they return to their homes and civilian life.

"Things have gone too far now", said the commander. "There is no way we are going to hand back the border crossings to the federal forces. If they want them they will have to come and take them, one by one."

And if that happens, the two border crossings on mountain passes high above Kranjska Gora will be among the most difficult to capture.