

Huge arms cache seized by Slovenes

FROM afar it looks like an ordinary Slovene village — until you spot soldiers ringing the barns and rifle butts poking out of hedges.

The khaki-dressed troops are Slovenes and not Yugoslavs, and in Zaloska Gorica they are guarding the most valuable prize won by the republic's forces in its war with the Yugoslav army.

When the Yugoslav army surrendered control of the camp in Zaloska Gorica eight days ago, the astonished Slovenes stumbled across an Aladdin's cave of munitions. Buried in the woods, the Slovenes found rows of hangars full to the roofs with bombs, grenades, artillery shells, mortars, and shoulder-launch rockets. Since then army trucks seized by the Slovenes in the fighting have rumbled up and down the dirt track leading to the camp.

The vehicles have been busy ferrying away the equipment to hide it in places known only to the leaders of the Slovene Territorial Defence Force. The decision to conceal the cache contradicts a ceasefire agreed between Slovenia and the Yugoslav authorities. But the Slovenes are unabashed at accusations of theft, let alone of bad faith.

The Slovene government claims the war against the occupational forces, as they style the Yugoslav army, cost Slovenia \$2.8bn (£1.7bn) in destroyed roads, railways, communications and lost tourist earnings. "If the army pays reparations to Slovenia then we will return to them their weapons," said Lieutenant Bostjan, one of the commanders in charge of guarding Zaloska Gorica.

But one handicap is that the Slovene army cannot make use of all the artillery. "Some of it is useful and some quite useless," said

From Marcus Tanner
in Zaloska Gorica, Slovenia

Milan Lampret, a munitions specialist in the Slovene government. "We can use the rockets, light ammunition and rocket-propelled grenades. But for some of the munitions we have no weapons." Slovenia can do little, for example, with its tank shells. The Slovenes did not possess any tanks before the fighting started, though they captured and used a couple of them later.

The soldiers guarding the camp are astonished by the ease with which they took Zaloska Gorica. They say that only 28 inexperienced Yugoslav soldiers were left to guard the ammunition dump. "They surrendered without a shot being fired. They were just young kids," said one Slovene soldier. "We cut off their water and electricity and put up barricades to stop army tanks from coming to the rescue."

The surrender of Zaloska Gorica was a classic chapter in the story of the Yugoslav army's incompetent struggle to contain the revolt in Slovenia. "The army had no idea how to occupy Slovenia," said Lt Bostjan.

The campaign waged by the federal army in Slovenia has already led to recriminations in Serbia. Most army officers are Serbs and until recently the army's reputation in Yugoslavia's biggest republic was high. But now leading army figures are demanding to know who lost Slovenia. "The job was unprofessionally carried out," said Stefan Mirkovic, a well-known retired general, in a recent interview. "The Slovenes are not amateurs. They are well-armed and have modern equipment."