

# Slovenes keep wary eye on reluctant army

IN THE small village of Ligojna, Damian, a veterinary surgeon in more normal times, waited yesterday with half a dozen colleagues in the Slovene territorial forces, in case the army tried to move out of its barracks in the nearby town of Vrhnika. Empty beer bottles and Kalashnikovs lie on the farm cart beside them, together with a saucepan containing the remains of their lunch. Cows can be heard in the barn, not quite drowned out by the sounds of Madonna on the cassette player.

The atmosphere could not, by Yugoslav standards, be described as tense. But, here at least, the agreement struck on Sunday night — for all Yugoslav and Slovene forces to return home or to barracks by midnight on Monday — has not yet had an effect. Nor have all the barricades come down, as the agreement reached at Brioni required. Some barricades have indeed been removed. On the edge of Vrhnika, where the air force bombed a roadblock to clear a way for Yugoslav tanks, the burnt-out remains of half-a-dozen buses and trucks were yesterday finally pulled to one side.

But two trucks blocking the entrance to Ligojna remain in place, in case the tanks stationed nearby come rumbling up the road. Some tank traps remain. Other "dragons' teeth" have been

From Steve Crawshaw  
in Vrhnika, Slovenia

removed, and now decorate the verges at frequent intervals along the main roads.

But much distrust remains. In Vrhnika, an old man stands on guard duty. Asked about the Brioni agreement, he insists that he does not wish to return home. "We don't believe anybody. The army are attackers." The Slovene Information Minister, Jelko Kacin, argued yesterday that the Brioni deadline marked only the beginning of a process, not a date by which the process should be complete. Equally, it is clear that the Slovenes are wary of what the army might still do. Theoretically, the Slovene parliament could reject the terms of the agreement, when it meets today.

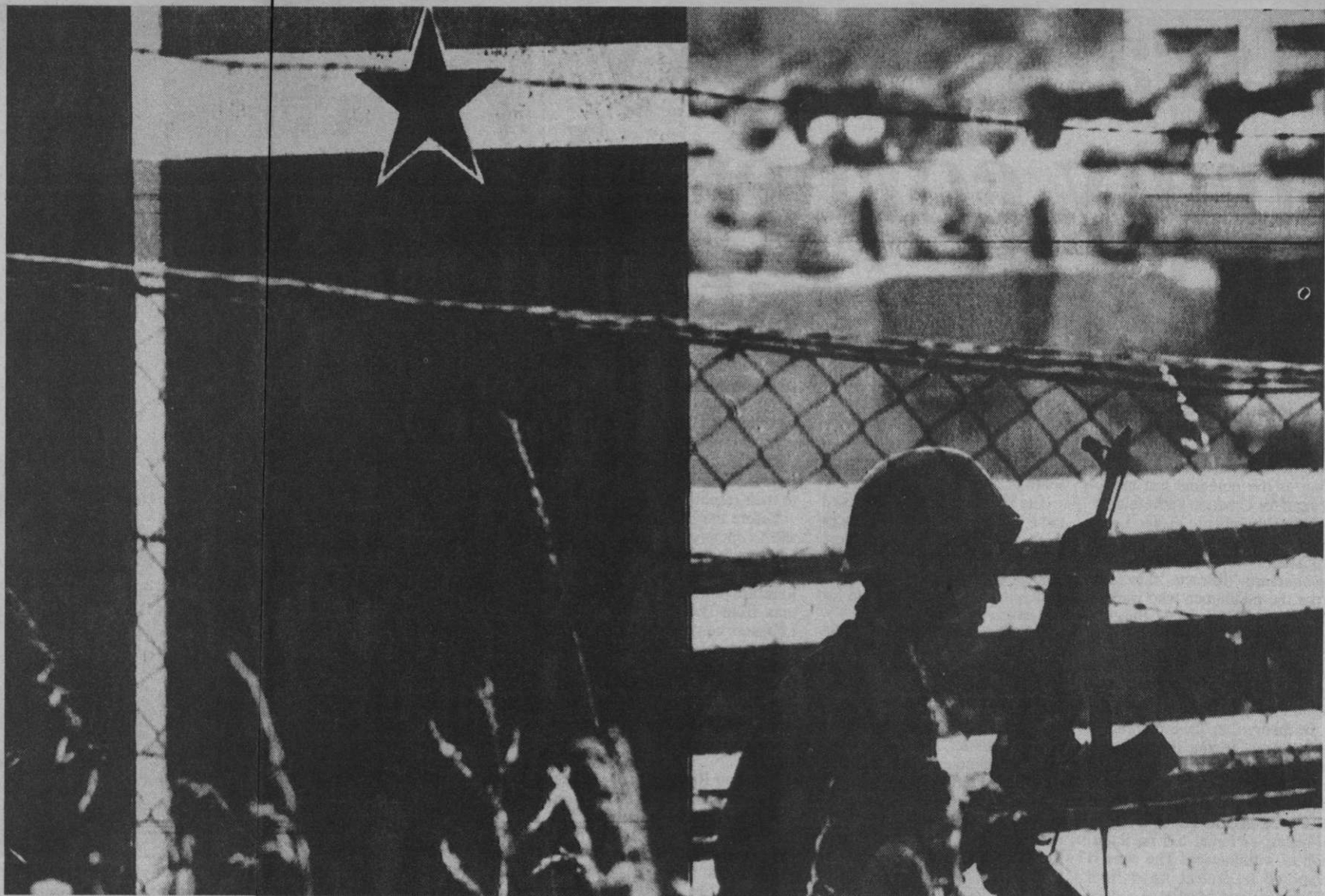
If the army attacks, it will not be because of bullishness on the part of the conscripts. At the barracks in Vrhnika, young soldiers stand drinking fizzy drinks in the sun, as they line up to use the single telephone. Asked if they are glad that the recent fighting is over, reactions could hardly be more heartfelt. "Delighted," said one, a reaction which his comrades appeared to share.

Ivo Jagarinec, the commanding officer, is also pleased that the

shooting has stopped. And does he think that the Brioni agreement will hold? "I hope it's all at an end. But it depends on the politicians." Just round the corner, several dozen tanks stand waiting, next door to a landing spot where the army claims that the Slovenes fired on a helicopter with Red Cross markings. The Slovenes deny the accusation, but claim that the army has used Red Cross helicopters for bringing reinforcements into the barracks.

For the moment, Slovenia seems unlikely to explode into violence again. The army perhaps got more than it reckoned for, not least since few of its federal conscripts had any motivation to fight. The Slovene territorial fighters complain that they have, in any case, shown restraint. In Ligojna, Damian argued: "I've not shot once. But six or seven times in the last week, they shot at me."

Whatever happens next, negotiations on possible independence will be tortuous. None the less, Slovenia has returned almost to tranquillity. In neighbouring Croatia, however, where ethnic violence continues daily, there are still Serb-Croat clashes which will be difficult to suppress, let alone to solve. The call-up of Serbian reservists has continued in recent days, effectively providing Serbia with an army of its own.



A soldier from the Yugoslav federal army stands sentry at Vrhnika barracks. Conscripts here expressed delight that fighting had ended

Photograph: David Rose