

In a Croatian cornfield, villagers and soldiers mourn another death as Yugoslavia's agony goes on



Mourners carry crosses at the funeral in Marijanci, Croatia, of a Croatian National Guard member killed in a clash with Serbian militiamen *Picture: Adam Hinton*

Serb fanatic holds republic to ransom

DAILY TELEGRAPH 13/7/91

By Alec Russell in Mokronog, Slovenia

WITH a whiff of Ruritanian farce, a week after the Yugoslavian ceasefire a fanatical Serb officer has placed mines around a fuel dump in southern Slovenia and is holding the breakaway region to ransom.

Tough-talking 2nd Lieut Dragan Grujevic of the federal army is demanding that the Slovenes end their quest for secession.

He has vowed that if necessary he will blow up himself, 30-odd comrades, and a considerable swathe of Slovenian countryside around Mokronog.

Ten days ago, to prove his commitment, he shot his more conciliatory superior.

"His finger is on the button. He's

determined to end the conflicts in Yugoslavia. He'll do it, you watch," said his gleeful commander yesterday. Safely out of the way in the regional headquarters at Novo Mesto, the Serb colonel has already promoted Grujevic by telephone from sergeant major to officer rank, and has pledged a hatful of decorations and braid.

The Slovenes, who have officially accepted a ceasefire, seem at a loss at how to deal with the siege. In Mokronog (which translates as Wet-foot), no one was keen to comment yesterday. "It's nothing to do with me," said the police chief.

Grujevic, shows no sign of cracking. "I'm very sorry," he said when telephoned yesterday. "I don't speak to the press. Please contact my superior for details."

During his fortnight at the fuel dump, thought to contain up to two million gallons of petrol, Grujevic has made only one statement. When asked about reports of the shooting of his superior, he said: "I shot him three times. I hope he's dead."

Farmers living nearby fled when the siege started. Now they are back and most disconcerted. Mrs Maria Skarija said: "What choice do I have, living as I do on the front line?

Am I scared? I'll tell you I'm scared. But I had to come back. I couldn't stay away for ever, could I?"

A man called Tone, who manages a back-room packaging enterprise a few hundred yards from the dump, was more blunt: "This man will blow us all up."

Last week, in an attempt to minimise the potential damage, firemen were deployed around the perimeter fence. But by yesterday they had long since gone home.

Mr Stane Smolic, the regional police chief, seemed confident the impasse would soon be resolved. He said: "Apparently his men's fam-

ilies are getting rather jumpy. But he won't do anything unless threatened."

However, back in Mokronog, people were not so confident. They were recalling the story of a Serbian hero, Stevan Sindelic. In 1809, he blew up a fort at Nis, killing himself, his 300 soldiers and half an invading Turkish army.

● A Serbian guerrilla leader was killed in a gun battle in Osijek, eastern Croatia, local police said yesterday. Zivko Peulic, 43, died in a shoot-out with militiamen who surrounded his house early on Thursday. A Croatian policeman was also killed and three of his colleagues wounded. — Reuter