

*Bojan Balkovec, Božidar Flajšman**

Occupation Borders in Dolenjska 1941–1945**

Dolenjska is a region that was not only cut off from other Slovene regions during the war, but was also divided between two occupiers, namely Germany and Italy. The bulk of the occupation borders ran along historical, provincial or similar old borders.¹ The border between Germany and Italy is an exception in this regard, as the delimitation line in Dolenjska was a completely new one. The Germans occupied the territory to the north of the river Sava. At first glance, Sava lends itself to being a natural border between Štajerska and Dolenjska. This holds true in the geographical sense.² However, things take a different turn when military interests or those associated with transport, security, etc. move to the forefront – these are important during a war, when a territory is under occupation, and, subsequently, when it is administered. The river Sava could serve as a suitable delimitation line between Germany and Italy if it were not for the importance of the area along it in terms of the economy and transport. The main communication route between Germany and the Balkans runs along this river. Settlements situated along it boasted important coal mines, and coal was a strategic raw material at the time. In terms of its dimensions, Sava would be large enough to serve as a natural barrier to protect the border from foreigners. However, another geographical aspect is important. It runs through a narrow valley that is difficult to guard. Consequently, the Germans

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1 For more details about the delimitation see Repe, Diplomatsko razkosanje.

2 On natural borders in the geographical sense see e.g. Kitamura Shuhei & Lagerlöf, Nils-Petter, Natural borders. Retrieved from: https://editorialexpress.com/cgi-bin/conference/download.cgi?db_name=EEAMannheim2015&paper_id=1057 (Accessed on 3 January 2020).

connected economic and military-strategic interests and decided to outline the border to the south of the river. In Dolenjska, i.e. the area to the east of Ljubljana and the south of the river Sava, the delimitation line between Germany and Italy ran along a line that was situated between 10 and 15 km to the south of the river. It ran mostly on elevations that were used by Germans to control the territory to the south of the boundary line. A nice case of a strategically placed post is in the proximity of Bučka, where watchtowers allow not only for the direct control of the border, but also for a clear view of the interior of the neighbouring state. From watchtowers near Bučka, the Germans had a good view of Šentjernejsko Polje as far as the Gorjanci hill range, i.e. at least 7 km as the crow flies.³ The German-Italian border was outlined in the Directive for the Partition of Yugoslavia, which was prepared by Hitler on 3 and 12 April 1941.⁴

During the attack on Yugoslavia, the German troops advanced more rapidly than the troops of their allies. An important reason behind this was the Italian Army's unfounded fear of the Yugoslav Army. On 25 May 1941, General Robotti published a detailed description of the three-stage attack of Yugoslavia.⁵ Robotti wrote in his report that from 6 to 11 April they monitored and patrolled the terrain on the other side of the border. They took more decisive action after 9 April, when rumours about the disintegration of the Yugoslav Army spread. The demarcation line between the German and Italian troops ran from Grintovec, past Litija and Novo mesto, both of which were located in the German-occupied zone, past Vinica and Slunj and further towards the south-east. In Gorenjska, the demarcation line was corrected to the benefit of the Germans a few days later; in Dolenjska, it remained in place up to the beginning of June 1941. The Italian troops gradually occupied Suha Krajina, the southern part of Dolenjska, and Bela krajina.

During their attack on Slovenia, the German troops also occupied a territory that was set to become part of Italy after the division. The German troops thus arrived in Novo mesto, and the city was under their occupation for a few days. The aforementioned demarcation line was in force up to early June 1941. Roughly speaking, this line ran from Litija above Trebnje, between Hmeljnik and Mirna Peč and around Novo mesto. Novo mesto was occupied by the Italians. To the east of Novo mesto, the temporary demarcation ran along Mačkovec, crossing the river Krka in the direction of the bridge across the Bajer (Šajser) stream on the road from Novo mesto to Šentjernej. From this bridge the demarcation line ran towards the Gorjanci hill range.

In some places, the advancing German troops were greeted by the locals. Maypoles were erected and German flags hung out. In other places, the population refused to hang

3 Silvo Vene, *Strogo zastražena meja*. <https://youtu.be/uYoe-6wrSLw>

4 Repe, *Diplomatsko razkosanje*, 170 and footnote 11 on the same page.

5 Mikuž, *Pregled zgodovine*, Vol. I, 38 and pp.

out flags in acts of defiance of the German authority.⁶ The Italian troops that came after Germans to some of these areas demanded to be greeted in the same way. Maypoles were erected in honour of the Germans at Dolenja Straža. When the Germans left, the Italians demanded that maypoles be installed for them as well. The locals refused to do so, and also removed the “German” maypole.⁷

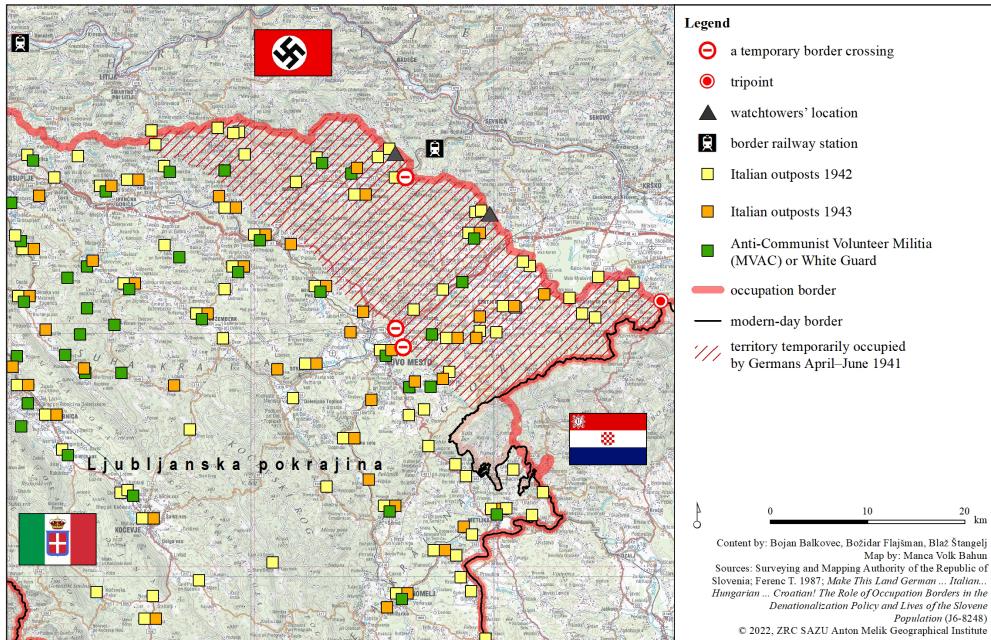


Fig. 1: The occupation border in Dolenjska. The hatched area indicates the territory that was from April to June 1941 temporarily occupied by the German Army.

There are at least two reasons why people were more favourably disposed towards the Germans than towards the Italians. Their aversion to the latter stemmed mostly from their experience on the Italian front during World War I. On top of that, the local population was aware of the violence inflicted on the Slovenes in Primorska (the territory which became part of Italy after the Rapallo treaty in 1920) by the Italians. And with regard to the Germans, one cannot ignore the powerful Nazi propaganda of the 1930s. Germany was depicted as a well-structured state, and its economy was more successful than that of Italy. Last but not least, many Slovenes worked in Germany and were familiar with the situation there.⁸

6 Topografija Gorenja Straža folder I, file cover 1, p. 2. Topografija Gornje and Dolnje Kamenje folder I, file cover 4, p. 1. Topografija Gornje in Dolnje Karteljevo folder I, file cover 4, p. 2.

7 Topografija Dolenja Straža folder I, file cover 2, p. 1.

8 Mikuž, *Pregled zgodovine NOB*, Vol. I, 58 and ss. Cf. the interview with Alojzom Stipaničem, Vinceremo, videt čemo, 3:17–3:52, https://youtu.be/dmSKMLqAF_s

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idejo so ga zasledovali žandarji zato se je leta 1930 umaknil v Zagreb. Od časa do časa naprej so bili sestanki v gostilni Medic v Straži katera je vedil Udešan Dušan iz Novega mesta. Govoril oziroma vasi so se pogovarjali v delavskih težazah, ker so delavci iz Žage stavkali. Navzoči so bili tudi Treven Karel in Šali Franc /Kafner/ iz Vavte vasi Darovec Luka in Darovec Franc iz Straže ter delavci, ki niso slutili, kdo jih vodi v njihovem mišljenju.

Leta 1941. so tudi v Straži zbirali podpise za Nemce z velikansko propagando. Občina je dala svoj žig in to je marsikoga povedlo v zmoto. Zalestno pri vsem tem je bilo to, da so zbirali podpise napredni, razgledani ljudje, kot Treven Karel in Strumbelj Martin in nosila ključaste križe na rokavu. V Straži je zbiral podpise Medic Ivan odbornik občine Prečna. To mazurje je trajalo tri dni predno so se ljudje, ovedli, da je sovražnik eden in drugi. Mlajši niso postavili pa tudi zastav ne obesili. Italijani so prišli iz Žužemberka skozi Stražo proti Dol. Toplicam in od tam na neko te prehod vojske je trajel od 7. ure zjutraj 9. aprila 1941. do 12. aprila. Ta dan so Italijani napravili iz Straže močno artiljerijsko postojanko z kolonelom na čelu z njim so prišli tudi karabineri in gozdna milica. Nastanili so se po hišah Straža - Vavta vas. Štab se je vselil v hišo Zupenčič Jožeta št. 47. Gozdna milica B Vintar Jožeta mesarju in karabineri v hišo Venturinič Angela Jo, lesnega trgovca. Leta 1941. je šla skozi Stražo neka elitna italijanska vojska. Govorilo se je da za njo pride nemška vojska takrat je vsa vas razobesili nemške zastave / torej se je vas res pripravljala na sprejem Nemcev/. Ko vojske ni bilo so zastave bnele. Le na eni hiši ni včas zastava na hiši Darovec Jožeta. V Straži se je utrdil artiljerijski bataljon s 16 topi in 800 možni. Gozdni miliciarjev je bilo 6 do 8 mož v ravno toliko karabinjerjev. V jesenje leta 1941. so pričeli graditi lesene barake z betonsko podlago na njivah / v grediču / na zahodu Straže. Barak so zgradili 11 do srede poletja 1942. gradili so pa že naprej. Žečetja leta 1942. so barake in Straža /en del/ zavarovali z bodečo žlico v vasi od transformatorja pri Krki proti poslopju Darovec Franca tako, da je stanovanjska hiša ostala izven ograde, gospodarska poslopja pa v ogradi poleg so zgradili bunker zidan iz kamenja. Potem naprej proti cerkvi z bunkarjem na vrtu Darovec Marije. Tu so se obrnili pod hribom nazaj proti barakom do cesta Straža - Gor. Polje, kjer so zgradili zapet bunker in namestili zapornico preko ceste. Pod cesto so bile barake, ki so bile do Krke obzidane z 1 in pol metra visokim kamnitim zidom. Pri Krki je bil bunker napolnjen z municijo. V istem času so zgradili bunker na cesti ob mostu Straža - Vavta vas v Vavti vasi cesto pa pregradili z zapornico. Istočasno je izšel razglas, da mora biti od 7 uri zvečer popolnoma zatemnjitev in nihče zapuščati stanovanja. Bunkerje pa so opremili s strojniscami.

Iz Straže so delali pohode do 6 km oddaljene kraje /Luknja, Dol. Toplice Soteska, Volače, Praproč/ in druga sela/. Do konca marca 1942. ni bilo nobenih žrtev. Prve žrtve so bile 28. marca 1942., ko so iz pohoda na Brezovo reber in Frato ujeli dva partizana Patriča iz Novega mesta in še snega od Sentje meja. Pripeljali so jih v Stražo in jih za barakami mučena ustrelili. Straža ni imela borb, ker je bila zelo močno utrjena. Le Italijani so na svojih pohodih v skolico artiljeri osamljene ljudi ter jih pripeljivali v Stražo. 17. aprila 1942. je ŽŠ Franc oposoril Darovec Franc /tudi podeficer/, da se sliši, da bojo, drugi dan Italijani odpeljali vse jugoslov. ofmicerje in podeficerje. Darovec se je za nekaj dni takoj umaknil prako Krke na osvobojeno ozemlje. ŽŠ Franc pa so drugi dan edinega odpeljali iz Straže in ga internirali. Potem niso do meseca junija 1942. Italijani nikogar ne

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Fig. 2: In places, signatures were collected in support of the integration into Germany.

Italians had no say in the division of Slovenia. Consequently, they made a quick decision to formalize the situation at hand. As early as 3 May 1941 an order was issued to integrate the Italian-occupied territory into the Kingdom of Italy.⁹ The territory that was temporarily on the other side of the demarcation line became part of Italy as well. The territory to the north and east of the aforementioned line was on the German side. The hatched area on the map on page 59 indicates this territory, and it can be seen that it was quite extensive, growing in size from the west to east and moving increasingly southwards from the demarcation line. The demarcation line between the Italian and German Armies was in force up to early June 1941.

At the beginning of June, the Germans relocated their troops across the new German-Italian state border. The Italians thus possessed the majority of Dolenjska, all part from its northern outskirts. On the right bank of the river Sava the state border between Germany and Italy ran between 10 and 15 kilometres to the south of the river. This corridor was somewhat wider in the eastern part of Dolenjska and in Lower Posavje. From the west to the east, the German-Italian border moved away from the river Sava, shifting southwards, reaching the river Krka to the west of Kostanjevica. It followed the course of the river Krka for a few kilometres and then made a turn towards the south. To the east of Gadova peč it reached the tripoint of Germany, Italy and the Independent State of Croatia.

Still, the delimitation in Dolenjska did not conclude at this point, and the border saw two additional changes taking place up to the autumn of 1941, the first one being near Krmelj, where the border between Germany and Italy was corrected. The German-Italian delimitation commission working on location from 13 September onwards made only a few small corrections.¹⁰ One of these happened due to the mine at Krmelj. Marjan Zaman from Hinjce maintained that, originally, the border was outlined in a manner that would see Krmelj be part of Germany. However, through an act of persuasion performed by the Italian owner of the mine Venčeslav Jakil Krmelj came under Italian authority. Consequently, the border ran immediately above Krmelj, i.e. between Hinjce and Krmelj, to the east of Tržišče, Zgornje Vodale, Telče, Pečica and to the west of Bučka.¹¹

The concrete foundations of a German watchtower are still preserved in their entirety in Hinjce. The Germans dug a bunker and trenches next to it. Marjan Zaman's farm stood nearby, immediately beneath the watchtower. He was a child at the time and was, just like others living next to the border, deported and their homes demolished. Marjan's family was expelled and taken to Germany.¹² Today a memorial commemo-

9 Mikuž, *Pregled zgodovine NOB*, Vol. I, 60. For more details about the legal perspective of the integration see Ferenc, *Fašisti brez krinke*, 32 and 33.

10 KS Tržišče v NOB, 11.

11 An interview with Marjan Zaman and Rafael Rafko Blažič, Tržišče, Hinjce, 24 October 2018. https://youtu.be/JM8lf_7ZGeY

12 Marjan Zaman, Opazovalnica številka 4, <https://youtu.be/OHzsbcZY4X4>

rating World War II expellees produced by Rudi Stopar stands in the location of the former occupation border, marked by barbed wire fitted to the wall and pavement.



Fig. 3: Marjan Zaman and Rafael Rafko Blažič standing next to concrete foundations of a German watchtower in Hinjce above Krmelj. Marjan Zaman's restored farm, which was demolished by the Germans because it stood in the border corridor, is visible in the background.

A similar story was recounted by Nada Štih in the nearby village of Goveji Dol.¹³ She and her family were expelled and sent to Germany in November 1941. The occupation border and a watchtower, whose concrete foundations are still preserved, were set up immediately next to their homestead. Nada's son Anton recalls that after the end of the war German helmets were used to scoop liquid manure.¹⁴

Ivica Žnidaršič from Bučka said:

“We were racially examined on 3 November 1941 and then expelled, as were all inhabitants of Bučka. We were forced to go, soldiers carrying weapons took us to Reichenburg/Brestanica and then to German camps.”¹⁵

13 An interview with Nada Štih, Goveji Dol, 24 October 2018. The recording is kept in the project's archive.

14 Anton Štih, Čelade so uporabljali za zajemanje gnojnice, <https://youtu.be/lp1kRYnDwM>

15 Ivica Žnidaršič, Rasno so nas pregledali, nato so nas izgnali, <https://youtu.be/0Tr0myLaEsA>

Our interviewees were children during the war. Children were also subject to terror faced by deported families.¹⁶

The Independent State of Croatia (NDH), a quisling formation, was the fourth occupier partaking in the division of Slovene territory. Germany and the NDH signed an agreement about the border on 13 May 1941.¹⁷ In line with this, the Municipality of Hum in Croatian Zagorje became part of Germany. Clearly, Croats lobbied intensively and managed to facilitate a change to the border. The fact that a manor house stood in the proximity of Hum, where Antun Mihanović wrote the Croatian national anthem *Lijepa naša*, was an important Croatian argument. The minutes of the talks held by the Croatian Foreign Minister Mladen Lorković, General August Marić, who helmed the Croatian Commission for the Delimitation of the NDH and of the Third Reich, Siegfried Kasche, the German Ambassador in Zagreb, and Kurt von Kamphoefner, the main German delimitation negotiator, reveal that they agreed to change the border in Dolenjska. Along with the sentimental Croatian reason noted above, an important role was played by the firm German position that the future motorway from Maribor to Zagreb must also run on German territory in sections situated on the left, i.e. Croatian, bank of the river Sotla. The Germans offered land owned by the Archdiocese of Zagreb in the proximity of Mokrice Castle as compensation. However, by August the German position had softened, when Hitler is thought to have said that the Germans do not wish to take parts of Croatian territory, meaning the left bank of the river Sotla.¹⁸

The final agreement stipulated that the villages of Bregansko Selo (Slovenska Vas), Nova Vas, Obrežje, Jesenice, Rajec and the slightly more remote village of Čedem become part of the NDH. A regulation was introduced, and the first five villages were integrated into the newly established administrative Municipality of Bregana. Established by the NDH, this municipality consisted of the aforementioned Slovene villages and a few villages from the Municipality of Samobor. The village of Čedem was not mentioned in this regulation. This may be due to its small size because it consists of merely a few houses. Naturally, the newly integrated Slovene villages became subject to the Ustashe judicial system, and became part of the Samobor court district. The Croatian State Archives and the State Archives in Zagreb keep a few fonds of the Samobor district – however, these contain no materials relating to Slovene settlements that were integrated into the NDH, or merely an odd mention.

For the villages that were integrated into the municipality of Bregana, the ecclesiastical and educational matters had to be regulated as well. The ecclesiastical question was important because the post of the parish priest in Velika Dolina was vacant.

16 Ljudmila Gramc, Izgnali so nas v Šlezijo, <https://youtu.be/fAoIwC9LMVs>

17 Medunarodni ugovori 1941, undated, 95.

18 Barić, General August Marić, 362 and 363.

Janez Gnjezda was the parish priest in Velika Dolina. Soon after the occupation, the Germans began with the resettlement of the locals, and Gnjezda decided to join them in Rottesluh, Germany. He soon returned, however, because he had matters to attend to in the Velika Dolina parish. There he was informed about suspicious dealings and advised to return to Germany, where he died in late 1944 as a result of an accident.¹⁹ We can only make indirect assumptions about how much time Gnjezda spent in his former parish after his return from Germany. The State Archives in Zagreb keeps scans of the register books of the Samobor parish. The entry about a baptism that took place on 19 September 1941 contains a note stating that baptism was performed by Janez Gnjezda, the parish priest in Velika Dolina.²⁰

The documents kept in the archives of the Archbishopsric of Zagreb attest for the villages listed above that formal religious care was transferred to the parish priest in Samobor. On 14 September 1941 Franjo Salis-Seewis, Vicar General of the Archbishopsric of Zagreb sent a memorandum to the parish priest in Samobor, Juraj Kocjančić, informing him that Slovene villages were allocated to his parish.²¹ The Vicar General from Zagreb wrote about the transfer of jurisdiction to the ordinariate in Ljubljana. In a memorandum dated 16 September, he wrote that the villages of Nova Vas and Bregansko Selo, which were formerly part of the Velika Dolina parish, were part of the Independent State of Croatia." He maintained that these villages were the closest to the Samobor parish, and that its parish priest was tasked with the spiritual care in them. Additionally, he addressed a request to the Bishopric of Ljubljana to grant the necessary jurisdiction for the parish priest in Samobor or any other priest entrusted with this work.²² The official memorandum of the Archbishopsric of Zagreb is kept in the Archives of the Archbishopsric of Ljubljana. A draft of the Bishopric of Ljubljana's reply to Zagreb's request is kept in the preserved materials of the Velika Dolina parish. Dated 26 September 1941, the bishopric wrote a memorandum containing the authorization to transfer the jurisdiction for the afore-mentioned villages to the Archbishopsric in Zagreb.²³

19 *Palme mučeništva*, 165. The book does not provide information about where Gnjezda obtained the information about the suspicion or who advised him to leave.

20 HDA, Matične knjige Samobor, DVD 387 (ZM-34C/1213) R 1934–1942, P 1921–1942.

21 The Archdiocesan Archive Zagreb, document no. 15693/1941

22 The memorandum is part of document 15693/1941. This is a manuscript, and based on the handwriting seen in other documents we can conclude that it was written by the Vicar General himself. This document was not signed and is probably a first draft.

23 A draft of a letter, NŠAL 10, The Bishopric Archive Ljubljana – parishes, Velika Dolina, no. 3565/1941.

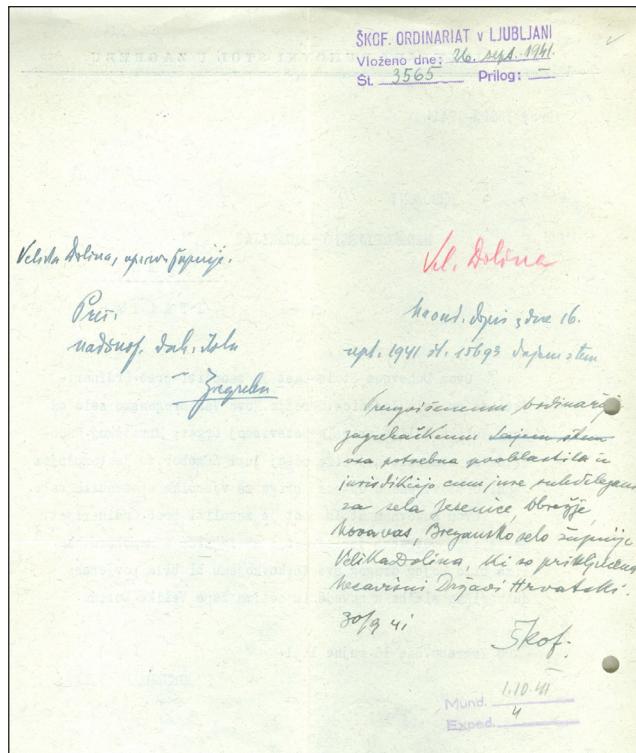


Fig. 4: A draft of the Archbishopric of Ljubljana's reply to the Archbishopric Zagreb containing permission for jurisdiction.

The Samobor parish priest, Juraj Kocijančić, paid a visit to these villages on Sunday, 21 September 1941. He wrote about this visit in a memorandum that was sent to the episcopal see in Zagreb two days later. Along with Kocijančić, these were also visited by a member of the Municipality of Samobor, a commissioner for the villages. Kocijančić greeted the parishioners in the Chapel of St Margaret at Jesence and informed them about the changes. He encouraged them to form a committee that would assist him in his work. He wrote that this committee would help him manage the chapel's property, assist him in all matters relating to religious life, including performing mass in the chapel and giving sacraments, particularly baptism. In the further course of his letter, Kocijančić mentioned that on that same day mass in the Chapel of St Magdalene was performed by the Franciscan Vladimir — whose last name is not mentioned — from the monastery in Samobor, who was a Slovene from the monastery in Brežice.²⁴ In his letter,

24 The Germans closed the Franciscan monastery in Brežice in April 1941 and demolished a part of the Monastery and the Church of Anthony of Padua. Subsequently, a German *gymnasium* stood in its location. Marija Čipić Rehar, Franciškani v kolesju političnih sistemov v 20. stoletju, in *Kronika I*, 2019, 123.

Kocijančić pointed out that appropriate books and lists ought to be obtained to resume writing register books. The problem was that some of the related documents were seized and taken away by the Germans. Kocijančić promised the villagers that “the Franciscan” – by which he probably meant to the aforementioned Vladimir – would perform mass every Sunday and on feast days in the Chapel of St Magdalene if they provided transport and food for him. He could also baptize newborns if their parents wished so.

The final part of Kocijančić’s report is interesting as well. He wrote that, initially, mass would be preformed in Slovene and in line with the Slovene book of rituals. Later on, decisions would be based on the instructions given by the authorities. He mentioned the authorities’ plans to establish a school. His final sentence is noteworthy from the point of view of greater-Croatian politics, to which the Roman-Catholic Church succumbed. “I believe that is necessary that some other Croatian priest goes to Jesenice in place of the Franciscan Vladimir, so that they get used to the Croatian language.” Finally, he informed the ordinariate in Zagreb that the number of believers totalled around 800.²⁵

Kocijančić mentioned the Franciscan Vladimir from Brežice, but the Franciscan’s supposed origin is not correct here. Marija Čipić Rehar provided the names of Slovene Franciscans and their respective origins in her paper,²⁶ and showed there was no Vladimir in the monastery in Brežice. Kocijančić must thus have been ill-informed and believed that all Slovene Franciscans in Samobor came from Brežice. Čipić Rehar listed all Franciscans from Brežice that were taken to Bregana and expelled to Croatia by Germans, and these were accommodated in the Samobor monastery. A Vladimir Bobek from S. Trojica in Slovenske Gorice was one of these Slovene Franciscans. Originally, Bobek was taken to Melje and from there to Croatia. Marija Čipić Rehar maintained that Franciscans from the surroundings of Maribor were expelled to Slavonska Požega and, subsequently, to different monasteries, one of which was that in Samobor. Bobek must have stayed in the Samobor monastery. This is attested by the register books of the Samobor parish. The entries about who performed the rite contain the name Vladimir Bobek and a remark that he was a Franciscan in Samobor. On 19 May 1942 Vladimir Bobek led the funeral of Helena Zobarič from Nova Vas, who had died of some disease two days before. His name is seen on the same page in the register book of deaths, and on 28 May he buried Ivan Štampek, an infant from Nova Vas.²⁷

The main reason for a priest to arrive in the villages considered here was to conduct funerals. This is attested by entries in the register books of deaths of the Samobor parish, which contain Slovene villagers’ records of deaths. Naturally, the register also

25 The Archdiocesan Archive Zagreb, document no. 15693/1941.

26 Marija Čipić Rehar, Frančiškani v kolesju političnih sistemov v 20. stoletju, in: *Kronika* I, 2019, 124.

27 HDA, Matične knjige Samobor, DVD 388 (ZM-34C/1215) U 1928-1942, P 1921-1942, M05817087.

indicates the cause of death, including fatal accidents on the occupation border. Entries in registers provide only the basic data on the deceased. Another aspect of the deaths that occurred on occupation borders is provided by the relatives of the deceased. Alojz Godec told us about the death of his 16-year-old brother Branko in the very spot where he was killed by a mine. Branko was taking livestock to pasture along the border, and accidentally set off a mine.²⁸

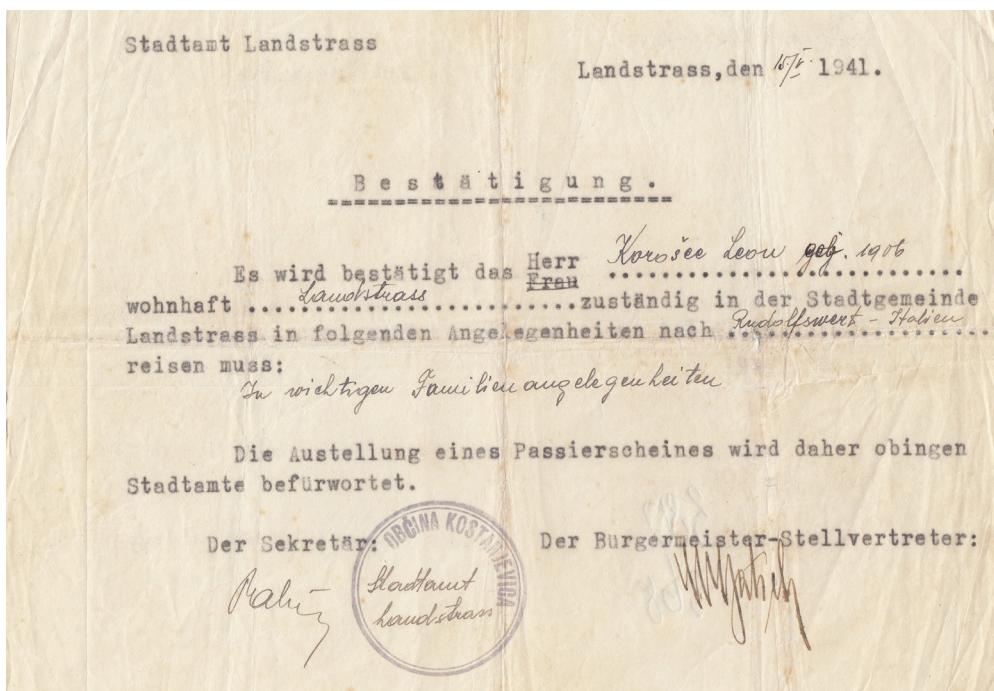
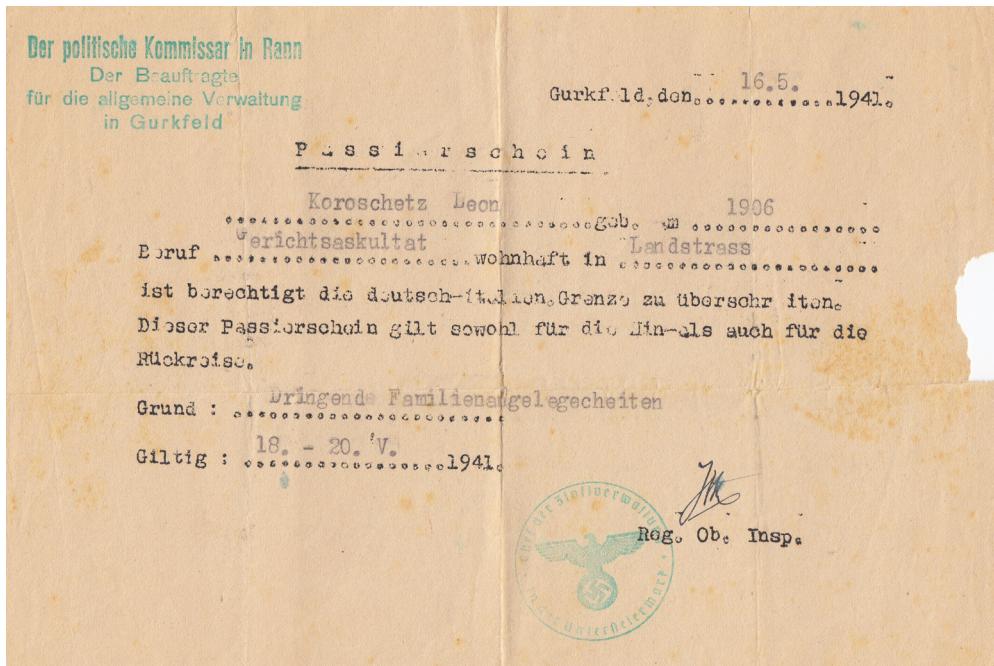


Fig. 5: Alojz Godec standing next to the monument commemorating the victims of World War II in Slovenska Vas. The last name in the right-hand column is that of his brother Branko.

Franc Gajski's story is even more harrowing. People could become victims of mines planted along the border for wanting to provide for their families. Franc Gajski (senior), his pregnant wife and their friend transported vineyard stakes across the occupation border in a remote spot, along the stream Ponikovski Potok. Gajski sent his wife to fetch water from the stream to quench their thirst. In the meantime, his friend stepped on a mine that killed him instantly. Franc Gajski was severely wounded, his wife returned quickly and he died in her arms. His wife was seven months pregnant at the time, and gave birth to our interlocutor a month and a half after his father's death.²⁹

28 Alojz Godec, Brata je ubila nemška obmejna mina. https://youtu.be/KQJUM_S7FqY

29 Franc Gajski, Rodil sem se po očetovi tragični smrti. https://youtu.be/_ULqMVEtglek



Figs. 6a and 6b: Leon Korošec's application and border pass for his trip from Kostanjevica to Novo mesto in May 1941.

Children from the villages that became part of the NDH attended school in Lug. Along with the Slovene villages, the school district consisted also of a few Croatian ones, in which the lessons were held in Croatian. The introduction of occupation borders caused much distress to the population. The occupying troops controlled the border and disrupted transport. The border control was introduced immediately, i.e. in April 1941, in the period of the temporary delimitation, and was in force up to June, with the area shown on the map on page 59. Two documents about the judiciary official Leon Korošec from May 1941 are kept in the Dolenjska Museum Novo mesto. At the time, Kostanjevica was still under the German administration and Korošec had to obtain a permit for his trips to Novo mesto. This was because Novo mesto was in Italy, and Korošec would cross the border at Cikava to get from Kostanjevica to there. A letter was sent from the Municipality of Kostanjevica to Krško about the required travel permit on 15 May 1941. The permit was issued in Krško on the following day, and was valid for travelling in both directions, i.e. also for the return from Novo mesto to Kostanjevica.³⁰ Later on, border passes were also needed for movement within the Province of Ljubljana. Their validity varied between a few days and a few months.

Border crossings were built after the final establishment of the border between Germany and Italy. They stood on roads leading from Novo mesto to Brežice and northwards, towards the river Sava. The border intersected the railway tracks between Sevnica and Trebnje. The border between Germany and Italy was almost impassable and highly dangerous due to mines and bombs. Farmers did not work their land on the other side of the border because of the scarce border crossings. Eyewitnesses remember that partisans crossed this border, deactivated mines and used them themselves.³¹ The system of watchtowers had a dual function, it was used to guard the border and to control the neighbouring territory.

State borders were not the only obstacle for the movement of locals. In the Italian-occupied part of Dolenjska, the Italians fortified significant spots due to their strategic importance. Naturally, this is done by every occupying army, and along with fortifications typical elements thereof include the construction of bunkers and fortification of individual buildings, and the Italians erected barbed wire around parts of or, in some cases, entire settlements. The Italian practice of surrounding parts of settlements in this way was not reserved exclusively for Ljubljana. This city, which was encircled with barbed wire, is merely the most famous and largest one that suffered this fate during World War II. The Italians surrounded settlements with barbed wire in their wish to cut them off from their surroundings, and in doing so they sought to prevent the resistance movement from connecting the countryside with the cities, and thus some functions

30 The Dolenjska Museum Novo mesto, Personal documents, folder Leon Korošec.

31 Jože Jankovič, Dotik z mejo je bil smrtonosen. <https://youtu.be/ciAlgV6LlsQ>

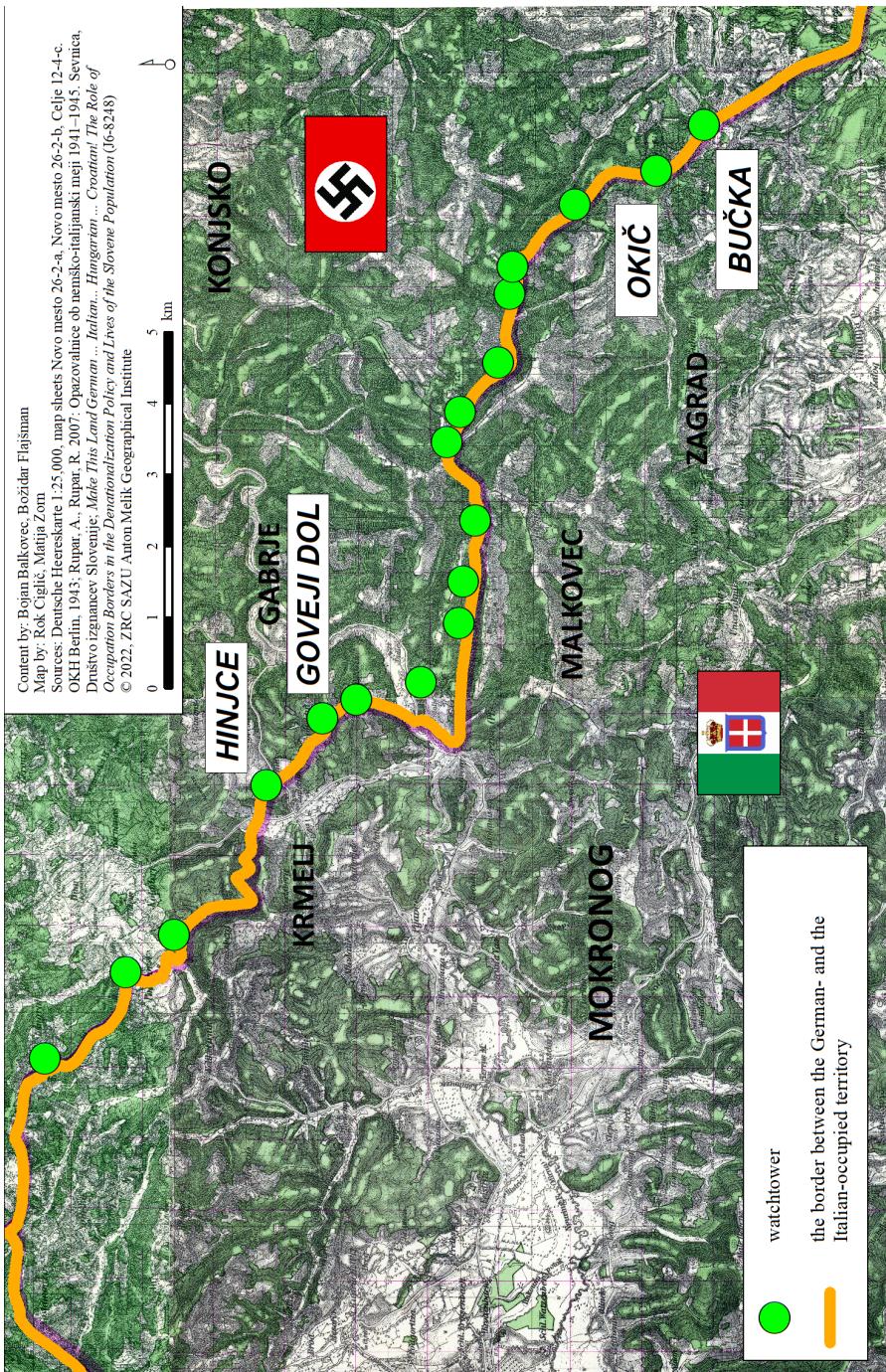


Fig. 7: A section of the German-Italian border between Krmelj and Bučka with the locations of German watchtowers

Atlas okolja



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Fig. 8: The location of bunkers on the Škerlj estate in Novo mesto. Two structures standing along the road to Bela krajina were removed during the reconstruction of the house and of the auxiliary building. The remnants of the left-hand bunker are still identifiable in the meadow.

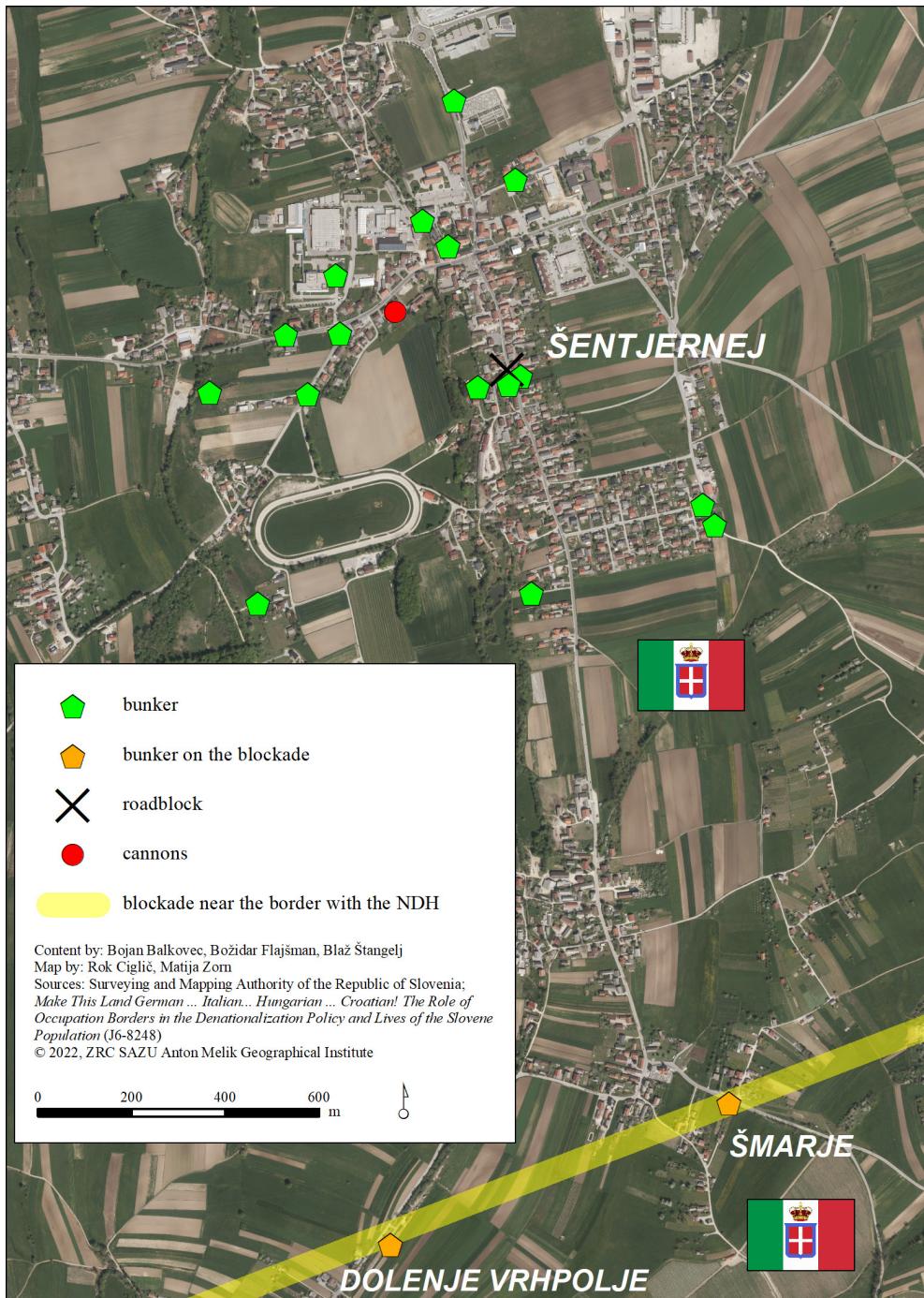


Fig. 9: A map depicting Šentjernej surrounded by wire and fortifications produced on the basis of a sketch kept in the Pleterje Carthusian Monastery.

of the resistance movement operated only within urban areas. However, a blockade of this kind hindered the lives of the entire population. To people living outside such cities and going to work there to factories, offices, etc. this posed a big problem. Farmers were faced with difficulties as well, as they could not bring their produce to the market in order to sell what could be sold in the wartime economy. Novo mesto could be reached via specifically designated locations, with bunkers and roadblocks standing on its arterial roads. Borut Škerlj's house, standing along modern-day Belokranjska cesta in Novo mesto, was vacated for the Italians and bunkers were installed around it. The remnants of one bunker are preserved and two bunkers were removed by the owners.³²

As already mentioned, Šentjernej was also surrounded with barbed wire as well. The occupying Italian troops encircled the town with two rings of barbed wire and bunkers. The first ring encompassed the town centre and the second one ran on the fringes. An artillery battery that fired upon partisan units in the Gorjanci hill range stayed in the town centre.³³ The town was decorated with Italian flags and portraits of Mussolini, as seen visible in the photograph *Dan mlačve* (Thrashing Day) that is kept in the Dolenjska Museum in Novo mesto.³⁴ The Italian defence line in the direction of the Gorjanci hill range ran in the proximity of Šentjernej, and consisted of bunkers, barbed wire and trenches.

According to Janez Kuhelj's testimony, the residential part of Šentjernej, which was almost entirely demolished in the period when the photograph was taken, stood to the right of the bunker. After the war, an unnamed inhabitant built a house, using the demolished bunker for building materials.³⁵

On 22 May 1944, nine months after Italy's capitulation, partisans provided a detailed description of the post in Šentjernej in the intelligence centre of the 15th Division. They said, *inter alia*, that there were between 180 and 200 members of the White Guard in the outpost and that they were heavily fortified with 21 large and 38 small bunkers.³⁶ The White Guard Battalion had a post in Dolenja Brezovica near Šentjernej from 15 October 1942 to 8 September 1943. We can read on the commemorative plaque fitted to the post's façade that 177 people, one of whom was the poet Ivan Rob, were tortured there, and 39 people were killed.

At the present, barbed wire fencing is installed on Slovenia's border with Croatia, in order to prevent unauthorized crossings by migrants. At first glance, the mode of guarding the border between Germany and the NDH with barbed wire is comparable to the use of such wire today. However, to repeat the words of Ljudmila Gramc, the Germans were the enemy; Slovenes and Croats are not, but we are separated by barbed wire.³⁷

32 Borut Škerlj, Trije bunkerji. <https://youtu.be/hoY5OPwzY6s>

33 Janez Kuhelj and Tone Kovačič, Topovi v Šentjerneju, <https://youtu.be/MvfOjgxks2U>

34 The Dolenjska Museum Novo mesto.

35 Janez Kuhelj, Iz ostankov bunkerja si je gradil hišo, <https://youtu.be/8uHhwsVYjoA>

36 ARS, SI AS 1859 VII. Korpus, te. 7, p. e 165.

37 Ljudmila Gramc, Mimo vasi so napravili mejo. <https://youtu.be/hZBKotxKgZA>



Fig. 10: An Italian bunker in Šmarje, which was photographed by Father Hugo Rožnik soon after the war.

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Nada Štih, the recording is kept in the project's archive.

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Fig. 1, The Archive of the project Make This Land German ... Italian ... Hungarian ... Croatian! The Role of Occupation Borders in the Denationalization Policy and Lives of the Slovene Population, map produced by Manca Volk Bahun, information on it by Bojan Balkovec, Božidar Flajšman, Blaž Štangelj.

Fig. 2, Topografija Gorenja Straža folder I, file cover 1, p. 2. A copy of the typescript is kept in the Dolenjska Museum Novo mesto.

Fig. 3, The Archive of the project Make This Land German ... Italian ... Hungarian ... Croatian! The Role of Occupation Borders in the Denationalization Policy and Lives of the Slovene Population, photographed by Božidar Flajšman.

Fig. 4, The Archdiocesan Archive Zagreb, document no. 15693/1941

Fig. 5, The Archive of the project Make This Land German ... Italian ... Hungarian ... Croatian! The Role of Occupation Borders in the Denationalization Policy and Lives of the Slovene Population, photographed by Božidar Flajšman.

Figs. 6a and 6b, The Dolenjska Museum Novo mesto, Personal documents, folder Leon Korošec

Fig. 7, The Archive of the project Make This Land German ... Italian ... Hungarian ... Croatian! The Role of Occupation Borders in the Denationalization Policy and Lives of the Slovene Population, map produced by Rok Ciglič, information on it by Bojan Balkovec, Božidar Flajšman.

Fig. 8, A detail displaying the location of remnants http://gis.arso.gov.si/atlasokolja/profile.aspx?id=Atlas_Okolja_AXL@Arso

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Fig. 10, The Archive of the Pleterje Carthusian Monastery.

Summary

Bojan Balkovec, Božidar Flajšman

Occupation borders in Lower Carniola 1941-1945

When Slovenia was divided among four occupiers, Dolenjska suffered the most. Other provinces mostly remained undivided and part of the territory of the same occupier. Dolenjska, however, was divided among the Germans, Italians and the Independent State of Croatia. The border was drawn by the Germans and moved 10 to 15 kilometres south of the Sava River for military, economic and transport reasons. By June 1941, the Germans also occupied territory across the demarcation line, which can be seen on the map at the beginning of the chapter. Borders were immediately established and moved to new national borders in June.

Residents needed passes to cross the border. These were necessary immediately, even during the temporary military administration that lasted until June 1941. Residents of the Ljubljana region, which included Dolenjska, also needed permits for traveling within the province territory. As part of the Ljubljana region, Dolenjska was annexed to the Kingdom of Italy on May 3, 1941, by the King's decree. According to international agreements, the Germans left some villages in the east of Dolenjska and south of Brežice to the Independent State of Croatia. Such villages were incorporated in the newly established municipality of Bregana in September 1941, which included several Croatian villages. Church life was greatly affected in these villages. The Germans evicted the priests shortly after the occupation, as worship was banned in Germany. The villages that were annexed to the Independent State of Croatia had to regulate the manner of conducting masses and keeping the registers. Masses were occasional, and registers were kept in the parish of Sabobor, which was annexed to the villages. Shortly after the German occupation of parts of Dolenjska, the local population was gradually deported. Part of the territory between the Sava River and the state border was intended for *Lebensraum*. Some of the German settlers came from the territory around Kočevje, where they had lived for centuries, but the region was annexed to Italy during the war. In addition to those who lived near Kočevje, Germans from elsewhere were also settled there. The border was a major obstacle for the locals. It cut them off from their work, and, in the case of farmers, from their land. These lands thus remained mostly uncultivated, since crossing the border was restricted, in addition to the difficulties faced when transferring goods from one country to another.

As well as the new borders, the erection of various military facilities in the area was also a hindrance for locals. The Italians surrounded Novo mesto and Šentjernej with barbed wire. In many other places individual houses were cordoned off with barbed wire, fortified and equipped with bunkers, while the residents were simply evicted.