

Croatia

Region of Yugoslavia until spring 1941 and after the end of World War II. Croatia was a puppet state ruled by the fascist *Ustasa* movement but supervised by the Germans during most of war; and since 1991, a separate state.

Germany invaded Yugoslavia in April 1941, and divided the country amongst its allies. The region of Croatia was united with Bosnia and Herzegovina into the Independent State of Croatia, and put under the control of the *Ustasa* movement. Almost immediately, the *Ustasa* embarked upon a campaign to "purge Croatia of foreign elements." This mainly referred to the Eastern Orthodox Serb minority living in Croatia, greatly despised by the Catholic *Ustasa*. More than 500,000 Serbs were murdered in horribly sadistic ways (mostly in the summer of 1941), 250,000 were expelled, and another 200,000 were forced to convert to Catholicism.

Another group of "foreign elements" whom the *Ustasa* wanted to destroy was Croatia's Jewish population, numbering some 37,000. Just days after taking control of the Croatian government, the *Ustasa* began issuing anti-Jewish legislation. Over the next few months, Jews were stripped of their property and jobs, their freedom of movement was restricted, and they were forced to wear the Jewish badge (see also Badge, Jewish).

In June 1941 the Croatians began arresting the Jews en mass and transferring them to camps. A camp called Jasenovac was established in August; from then on, most arrested Jews were sent there or to smaller camps. By the end of 1941, two-thirds of the Jews of Croatia had been sent to Croatian camps. Almost all were murdered upon arrival.

For several months the Germans allowed the Croatians to go about killing their country's Jews without much interference. However, at the beginning of 1942, it seemed that the Croatians might halt their murder spree, so the Nazis felt compelled to step in. During the spring the Croatians agreed to let the Nazis deport the remaining Jews in Croatia to the east. In August 1942 and again in May 1943 thousands of Jews were sent to their deaths at Auschwitz.

In all, some 30,000 of Croatia's Jews died during the Holocaust—80 percent of the country's Jewish population.