WITNESS TO JASENOVAC'S HELL

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Editor's Introduction

Bringing this book to an American audience began in May of 2000. During my first visit to Bosnia, a young man told me about a World War II concentration camp, the third most effective in Europe, and mentioned the word *Jasenovac*. I struggled to repeat it. What he said didn't ring a bell. I knew about the Nazi concentration camps in Germany and Poland but had never heard about a camp in the former Yugoslavia. As he promised, he picked me up the next morning and drove me to the Jasenovac Memorial Complex at Gradina. He described horrific crimes, committed against Serbs, Jews, and Gypsies. He said his high school class had visited the complex and learned about the camp and about the methods of torture and mass murder applied there.

I had been interested in the dynamics prior to the 1990's war, but I remember wondering then, not why they had fought but how they had managed to live together in peace for forty-five years. I asked whether the different groups had been uncomfortable when the class learned about the crimes of one faction or another. "Not a problem," he said and explained that they only learned the crimes were committed by the Ustasha. There was never an ethic or religious attachment made, and in the society created under Tito, they weren't allowed even to identify each other in terms of ethnicity with something like, "He is Croat, or she is Serb, or he is Muslim." Brotherhood and Unity was the slogan and somehow people managed to make it a reality, even intermarrying in Bosnia at a rate of 30 percent.

During my next two visits, I focused again on the events and relationships of the last war and filed any information on the World War II history for a separate chapter in a book on Bosnia. I was told the survivors of the concentration camp didn't want to talk about it—that their tragedy was their tragedy. Children of survivors, it seemed, wanted to protect their parents from intrusive questions, from the pain that recollections of the past would bring. Many of the grandchildren didn't know themselves the details of their grandparents experiences in World War II, and until shortly before the last war, many of them didn't know which ethnic category would soon characterize them. Families simply didn't talk about terrible things. There was a deliberate effort to protect children from the pain of knowing.

During my last six-week visit, everything seemed to open up. Three people were key in making that happen. First, Dejan Mirić, a young man I knew from previous visits, took me to visit his grandfather's grave and told me about the "great escape" from Jasenovac. His grandfather had been a teenage prisoner in Jasenovac and had given the signal, a whistle, to one of four groups that would break down the doors and fight to reach freedom. Dejan's grandfather had been one of six survivors of a family of forty-two.

no copy machine within miles, and wondering how I could ever know its contents. I asked Desanka about the possibility of copying the book. She spoke to Mr. Ivanović, and he agreed to entrust the book to her.

On the evening before I left, I received a message that I was to pick up something from Vuka's secretary. In a large gift bag from the Women of Gradiska were traditional handmade gifts, a book from Desanka (Dragoje Lukić's *They Were Only Children*), and the copied and spiral bound *Witness to Jasenovac's Hell.*

Back in America, I began working on my own book and wanted to know the rest of Ivanović's story. Alex sat in the recliner and read the book aloud as I sat at the computer and typed her words. At times, the process of translating became charades with Alex gesturing or standing up and moving around the room and asking, "What is this?" She knew instantly if the word I offered was correct. At times, she emailed her father to ask him to research words that had historical significance. At other times, she would fall silent as she read ahead, eager to know what would happen next, and I would just as eagerly plead with her, "Tell me. Tell me. What's happening?" And at times, it was necessary to call Mr. Ivanović to ask for clarification. Usually, things that were unclear were related to ethnicity. Since he wrote at a time when "Brotherhood and Unity" was the order (literally) of the day, he avoided characterizing, for instance, people or villages by ethnicity unless the characterization was related to the cooperation of some Croats and Muslims with Partisans, an important part of the post-war reconciliation. (Only once did he directly identify someone in the camp by ethnicity: He identified his last master in the barbershop as Jewish when he told the man's story and the story of their last night together before the escape.)

About halfway through the translation of the book, I decided that the book should be published, if only as a gift to Mr. Ivanović. Through Desanka, I learned that the author was thrilled with the prospect of publishing his book in English and would go to a lawyer to have the required permission paper drawn up. By the end of the book, however, I decided publication of the book represented, rather than my gift to Ivanović, Ivanović's gift to America. After Alex went back to Bosnia, I began editing the rough translation, and emailing people around the country to translate words and provide additional historical context. I also passed the manuscript around to friends, I suppose, to confirm my enthusiasm about the book. The feedback I received from all is represented in the words of Jim Swann, a Spanish professor who returned the manuscript in two days with the comment, "A hell of a story—one that needs to be told."

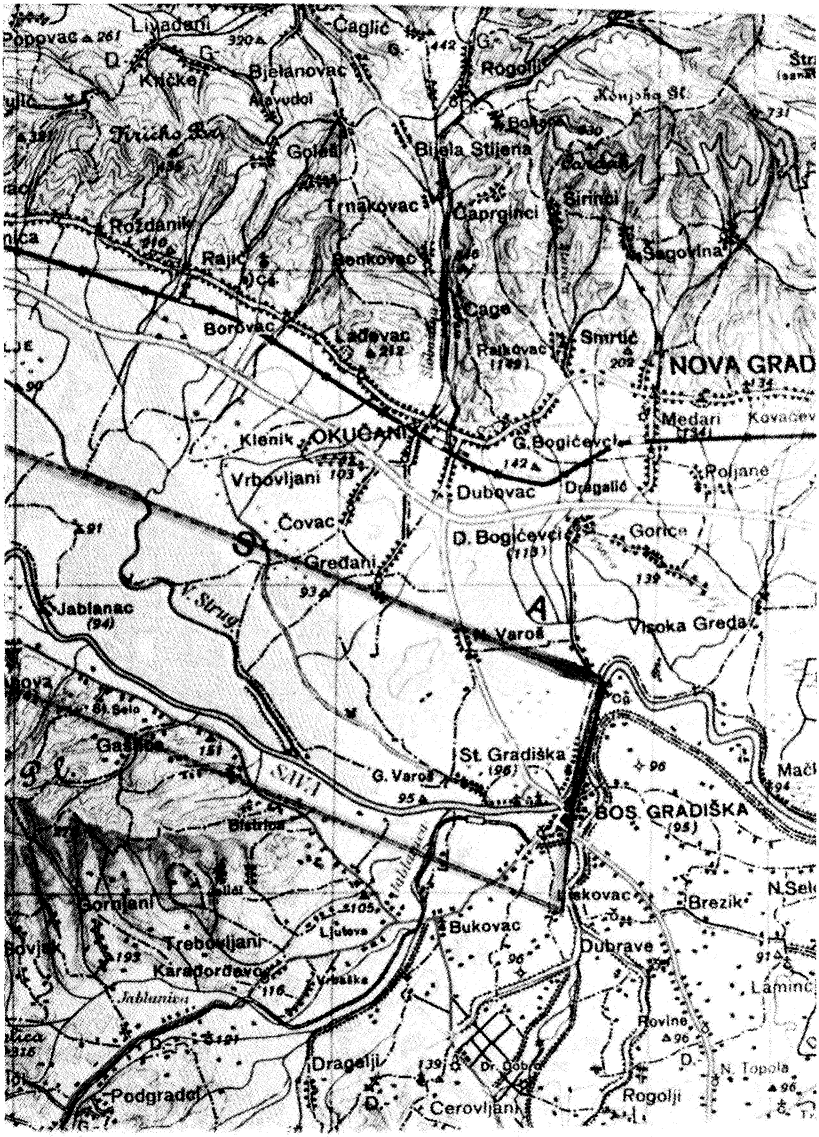
He had often talked about his experiences in the camp and had praised until he died the Croat man who had saved his life three times and, finally, had paid for that with his own life. Dejan and his parents Boško and Mira were invaluable to my research, arranging an interview with another survivor of the great escape and providing not only information about World War II history but also about the 1990's pre- and post-war culture in Bosnia.

Secondly, Zoran Lazić, the station commander of the local police department, was determined to help me cut through the obstacles and meet people who probably would not have talked to me if not for his referrals. He and his wonderful wife Nada worked very hard to arrange meetings with survivors, including Nada's mother, who had been taken from the camp at Stara Gradiska to work in Germany when she was fourteen years old and returned to learn that her father, two siblings, and one-third of her neighbors were dead. The Lazićs' teenaged daughter Aleksandra (Alex) translated for her grandmother. She had never been told about the horrors her grandmother had witnessed and was shocked by her grandmother's story. But that would not be the last time young Alex was shocked by the history of her people's suffering. We managed to get a visa for Alex to come to America for the summer to enhance her English skills. We came back with many stories in books and on video. In America, Alex learned the depth of her people's tragedy.

Thirdly, parliament member Desanka Radjević arranged interviews with survivors, including Ilija Ivanović. I had met Desanka during my second visit to Bosnia. She had told me then that her father had been taken to Germany to work during World War II and returned to find that his entire family had been killed along with more than half the people in his village. He married a woman who also had lost her family, and Desanka was born. In a society where extended families are very close, Desanka has none—no aunts and uncles or cousins. She was eager to help me document the tragedy that had befallen her people.

Four days before I left, Desanka and her friend Vuka took me to a village at the foot of Kozara Mountain to meet Ilija Ivanovic. A local reporter met us there to video the interview also. He would ask questions, and I would video the interview and have it interpreted later. As Mr. Ivanović talked, I understood little of his story, but in his face I saw the sweetness, the honesty, and even a still-boyish pride when he told of how he had once saved his life by tricking the Ustasha. I also saw the power of his story in Desanka's and Vuka's tears. And when an elderly woman reminded Mr. Ivanović that the Ustasha had boiled people in kettles, he told her, "No, Milka, I can only tell what I saw with my own eyes. I am responsible for every word I say."

After the interview, Mr. Ivanović commented that other stories were in his book and that he was sorry he didn't have a copy to give me. He had only one copy that was very important to him. I looked at the little book—guessing that he would not part with it for a moment, knowing there was



Kozara Mountain is below the box indicating the camp area. Three hundred villages surround the mountain. Prosara is a smaller mountain to the left of Kozara.

The Sava River is the dividing line between what is now Croatia (top) and Bosnia (bottom). Five concentration camps under Jasenovac reached from Krapalj to Stara Gradiska, an area of 131 square miles. Others of the 24 concentration camps in Croatia were at times also under the command of Jasenovac. (Bulajić; Croatian State Commission)

Pronunciation Key and Conversions

Jasenovac is pronounced Yă´-sen-o-văts. *Jasen* means "birch"; *Jasenovac* means "birch woods" or "birch forest."

The spelling is phonetic. Words are written exactly as they are pronounced; every letter is pronounced. The letters B, D, F, G, H, K, L, M, N, O, P, R, S (*s*un), T, V, and Z are pronounced as in English. There is no Q or W. Below are special letters and vowels:

A as in ***a***sk (short *a* sound)
C as in ***tz***ar
Č as in ***ch***urch
Ć as in fu***t***ure
Dž as in ***j***ust
Đ as in ***j***azz
E as in ***e***gg
I as in f***ee***t
J as in ***y***es
LJ as in mi***lli***on
NJ as in o***ni***on
Š as in hus***h***
U as in c***oo***l
Ž as in trea***s***ure

1 centimeter	0.1550 inch	1 inch	2.54 centimeters
1 meter	39.37 inches		
1 kilometer	0.624 mile	1 mile	1.609 kilometers
1 hectare	2.47 acres	1 acre	0.4047 hectare
1 gram	0.03527 ounce	1 ounce	28.35 grams
1 kilogram	2.2046 pounds	1 pound	0.4536 kilogram
1 liter (liquid)	1.0567 quarts	1 quart	0.9463 liters

Historical Note

The royal government of the Yugoslavs, hoping to save Yugoslavia from the ravages of World War I, signed a pact with Hitler and Mussolini on March 25, 1941, but within two days, "a group of Serbian nationalists seized power in Belgrade, abolished the regency, and announced that Yugoslavia was siding with the Western democracies. Churchill declared from London that the Yugoslavs had recovered their 'soul'" (Cornwell 248). The Serbs said, "No," to Hitler, but the Croats said, "Yes."

By April 10th, Hitler's troops were welcomed with great enthusiasm in Zagreb, the capital of the new Independent State of Croatia. The way had been prepared for the Nazis by the Ustashas, who were led by Dr. Ante Pavelić and trained (beginning in 1934) in Italy in camps provided by Mussolini where they planned to provoke a rebellion as a reason to exterminate Serbs. With help from Germany and Italy, Ustashas took control not only of Croatia proper and its Croat majority but also of Krajina and Bosnia and Herzegovina, regions that were historically, for many centuries, majority Serb, and almost evenly mixed Slavonia.* With the collapse of fascist Italy, Ustashas also gained some control of Dalmatia.

The new state had as its primary goal to rid its newly acquired territory of Orthodox Christian Serbs, Jews, and Gypsies. To that end, Ustashas began imprisoning Jews and prominent Serbs (including women and children) in mid-April, 1941, in the first camp in Koprivnica (Dalmatia). In mid-August, 1941, when Dalmatia was taken over by Italy, prisoners of the Ustashas were moved to the camp at Jasenovac, across the Sava River from Kozara Mountain.

The killing of villagers in the new Croatia also began in mid-April, 1941, and the farmers from the 300 villages around Kozara Mountain soon banded together in an uprising against Independent Croatia and elected Dr. Mladen Stojanovic as their leader. Kozara soon became a Partisan stronghold. Thousands fled to the area for the protection of the Partisans. But in the spring of 1942, German and Croatian troops began a series of offensives on Kozara.

Ivanović begins his story with the first offensive on Kozara.

* The Slavic population in the regions shared the same culture and language—the Serbian language. The only thing that distinguished them was religion: Croats were Catholic; Serbs were Orthodox Christian, except for a minority whose ancestors had been converted to Islam during the Turkish occupation and who were referred to as Muslims.

Slaughtered Dreams

Our life was a colorful, cheerful dream
Until Jasenovac, where we reached the last bloody day.

From our bones, green grass is growing.
Come children, to see where our dreams live.

To my peers in Jasenovac who didn't reach freedom.
The Author

The Offensive

Year 1942

The spring is at its end. The air is full of the fragrance of linden blooms. The peasants' work of farming is in full swing. Mostly women and children are in the fields. Adult men are mainly in Partisan armies in positions at Potkozrje. They are guarding our small country, our free territory.

The spring sun is hot. Humid air, dead silence, and anticipation are stressing the village and the people. Suddenly, an airplane appears. People call it a "stork." It drops a bomb somewhere behind the ruins of the old town of Marin-Dvor. Field workers run away and hide in nearby bushes. The stork is a frequent visitor to our sky. It throws bombs on Kozara Mountain, shooting everything alive, even the shepherds with their animals.

After the airplane left, maidens went back to the fields and continued with their work. A little bit later, a young girl from the valley of the Bukovica River appeared. She was wet, even above her waist.

"Why are you wet?" others asked her.

"I was hiding by the bank," she explained. "I peeked through the bushes and saw the airplane. 'Well, when I can see him, he can see me,' I was thinking, so I went in deeper water. I saw him again. 'Well, you aren't going to see me,' I told him. I went under the bank and sat in the water. That's why I'm wet."

Girls of Kozara Mountain doing the traditional kolo dance.

The girls laughed, and one said, "You can ask Ante Pavelić to buy a skirt for you."*

"Shut up! Screw Ante!" the wet girl answered angrily.

From somewhere came Janja Babić, who was known for her colorful comments, and she commented about the attack from the air.

"Did you see that Pavelić buzzard? It came and pooped on Gig. It farted above Resanovci and went away. What can he do to us?"

Janja looked at the wet girl. "And what happened with you, Sister? Why are you wet? Did you pee in your panties from the fear—? Oh, God, forgive me."

* Ante Pavelić was the Fuehrer of the Independent State of Croatia that occupied, with the Germans, Bosnia and other areas of the former Yugoslavia in World War II.

The girls broke up laughing. "It was hot, so she went in the Bukovica to cool off," another girl answered.

"Well, my Sister, how would you like to be against German bunkers like our eagles are?" Aunt Janja scolded her and left.

At Drageljska Glavica and Petnaesti Kilometers, toward Bosanska Gradiska, the shooting started—that is, our shooting. You could hear only short, rare, rifle bursts from machine guns. They were saving the bullets. After that, we heard long rifle bursts.

The girls talked. "Do you hear those bastard Ustashas.* They are not saving bullets. Germans gave them bullets. Oh, if we had enough weapons and bullets to arm the old and young, Independent Croatia would fall down very soon."

"Do you know who the best fighters are?" Asked a young blonde girl.

"Who?"

"Soldiers from Knežpolje," she said and continued: "It is said that they are rolling stacks of wood in front of them, hiding behind them when Ustashas and Germans attack them."

"And how do they protect the sides?" A cheerful young girl interrupted her and harassed her.

"At the sides? Are you crazy? Enemies are always running from Kozara to the valley." She found a good answer and continued. "Their leader is Boško Šiljegiović. It is said that he is handsome, beautiful as a girl, educated, and very brave.

Another girl asked, "What about Petar Mećava? It is said that a bullet doesn't want him. Others are dying, but he is riding on a white horse and brushing off Germans as Banović Strahilja brushed off the Turks."†

* Ustasha: Independent State of Croatia government forces.

† Serbian hero who fought Turkish invaders at the Battle of Kosovo (1389).

Lepa Radić was seventeen when she was captured during a fascist offensive on Podgrmec and stood defiantly under the German gallows as a Partisan.

That's how maidens were imagining as they were hoeing the corn—talking about events, adding to each one what they would like to be true and making legends. In the evening, they stopped working and went home, and on the way home, started singing:

In the middle of Kozara hard plate,
Partisans started to fight.
Mladen started that fight,[†]
And people's wishes came true.

The next day at dawn, again heavy fire was heard in the direction of Dragelji and Petnaesti Kilometer. And behind Kozara, there toward Prijedor, you could hear cannon explosions. And the area of Dubića was boiling hot.[‡] The bastards made a circle around Kozara and attacked from all sides. Our people are fighting bravely. On a village road, horses and buggies appear, a whole line. *What is it?* We children, reach the buggy first and see that they are injured people who are being driven to the Partisans' hospital in the village of Jablanica. The injured are Stojan Knežević and Draže Ivanović. We don't know the others. There are nine of them. Draže is in bad shape. *Will he survive? If we had medicine, and if Mladen Stojanović was alive, maybe he would save him, but in this way . . . . Mladen was killed by Chetniks, degenerated ones.*

"Offensive! Offensive!" They were yelling and hurrying on all sides. Couriers were passing through often. Some of them were on foot. Some of them were riding horses. More and more injured people. More dead, too. From our village Bukovica, Milan Sredojević and Slobodan Ivanović were killed. Both of them were very young. Not so long ago, a

[†] Mladen Stojanovic: medical doctor elected leader of the peasant uprising against the Ustasha; killed by Chetniks, rivals of Partisans and loyalists to the King.

[‡] Dubica: Town where killing of Orthodox Christian civilians started in April, 1941; location of an Ustasha headquarters.

Partisan youth group was organized. Mirko Panić and Bozo Knežević were in the group. They were very proud because they had become Partisans. We who were still too young to fight were in awe of them and jealous.

Again, buggies with injured. Heavy fighting was everywhere. Bad news came one after another. Airplanes were flying above, bombarding, shooting every day and throwing leaflets with invitations to surrender. All capable men and women were going to Kozara. They were looking for weapons to go to fight, but there were no weapons. Many of them were waiting behind the line of defense to take a weapon from someone who was killed, or even without weapons, they were going toward the enemy to try to grab a coveted weapon. Nothing was so expensive as a gun. For the gun, they sacrificed everything—usually life.

People from the areas of Prijedor and Dubica were saying that Germans and Ustashas were attacking and coming into villages where they were doing beastly things. Villages were deserted, but Kozara is alive.

In the Refuge

Someone said the Ustasha—somewhere in the Dubica area—took a whole family of seven members, tied them with chains around a hay stack and burned them.* That's how all of them were burned.

"No. I can't believe it," said an older woman. "How is it possible that a man can do that even if he is German or Ustasha? They have children, too."

"It's possible. It's possible," said another.

"Did you forget how in Draksenić they took women, children, and old people, put them in a church and burned all of them?"

"Yes. Yes. I heard," said another one.

"And what about the thing that happened last autumn?" she continues. "They took people from a funeral in Miloševo Brdo and other folks from Sovjak and Jablanica, declared them bandits, and executed them—around 170 people. Do you remember the pregnant woman who was slaughtered on the table in front of her house?"

"Well, even a beast wouldn't do that."

All agreed.

"And you see the same beasts are throwing leaflets promising us nothing will happen to us—just to surrender to them."

"They are lying. No surrender. We have to fight to the end. It is better to be killed with honor than go to the slaughterer's hands."

"That's right." All agreed.

* Historians Dr. Milan Bulajić (*Balkan Auschwitz*), Dragoje Lukić (*They Were Only Children*), Simo Brdar (*Black Ribbon*), and others document the atrocities at Dubica and other villages, beginning in April, 1941.

Ante Pavelić, Fuehrer of the Independent State of Croatia, with Hitler in one of four meetings during the war. Germans sent to Pavelić's state tried to distance themselves from the "cleansing" of the Ustasha and stop the killing, at least, of the able-bodied who could be sent to Germany to work.*

Italian journalist Curzio Malaparte visited Pavelić in Zagreb and wrote in *Kaputt,* p. 322 (1946):

"While he talked," wrote Malaparte, "I kept looking at a wicker basket placed to the right of the Poglavnik on his desk. The lid was raised and in the basket was a variety of seafood, or so it seemed."

"Oysters from Dalmatia?" I inquired.

"Ante Pavelic raised the lid of the basket and showing me the seafood that looked like a mass of sticky, gelatinous oysters, he said with a tired, kindly smile: 'A gift from my loyal Ustashi! Forty pounds of human eyes!'" (qtd. in Edmond Paris' *Genocide in Satellite Croatia*, 1961, p. 130)

* An April 30, 1941, memo stated, "The so-called actions of cleansing carried out by the Croatian Army and by the Protective Units should be prevented with the force of German troops. If the Government of Croatia has some reasons for these cleansing actions, then the permission should be given by the German General headquarters." Pavelić received permission, directly from Hitler, to exterminate Serbs as well as Jews, but another memo reflects the continued distance between Germans and the happenings at Jasenovac, stating, "the presence of 10 German soldiers stationed in Jasenovac is necessary only to provide the interest of the Third Reich." (qtd. in Bulajić, *Balkan Auschwitz*)

"And what will we do about the defenseless?" asked a mother with a child in her arms.

Silence. No answers, no solutions—.

After a long, unpleasant pause, an older man who was a soldier in World War I said, "My people, we are not alone. In western Krajina, our soldiers are winning in one town after another.* Drvar is free, and Bosanski Petrovac, and people from Lika and Kordun are together, and they are fighting together with Krajina. They are coming here to help us. England is fighting and big Russia is with us.

Serbs aren't the only ones who are fighting. You see, all of you know Miro Jurišić. He is a Croat, and he was among the first people who went to the Partisans. Josip Mažar Šoša, Osman Karabegović, and Skender Kulenović are with us too.† Besides Serbs, there are many Croats and Muslims who are fighting against this Ustasha country. All honorable people are with us. That Ustasha state has to fall down when the people are against it."

"Hey, we would easily handle the ISC [Independent State of Croatia] if there were no Germans and Italians," said an old man with big black mustache.

"They are helping them. I wish their seed would die off," said another.

The old man continued, "It's true that Germans are well armed. They robbed half of Europe. But the Austro-Hungarian Empire was also big and strong, and it fell down because the people weren't with them. That's how Germany will fall down, too.

* Krajina: One of nine administrative districts of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. The area had been almost exclusively Serb since the 14th century when Serbs from further south were invited to come there to defend the Austro-Hungarian Empire from the Ottoman Turks. In 1941, the Germans and its puppet state of Croatia took control of the area, but faced fierce resistance from Serb Partisans.

† Šoša is Croat, and Karabegović and Kulenović are Muslim names. Muslims generally cooperated with the Ustasha in attacking villages and taking Serb land. Fundamentalist Muslims, led by Hitler's friend Mufti Haf Amin el Husseini, participated in horrific crimes.

"Who will stay alive to see that?"

"Someone will. We are not all going to die." As the old man finished his speech, even he didn't believe it.

But even in this hard situation, there was always someone who would support us and cheer us and make us laugh with different imagined and real comic events. There were some cases in which people, in their fear, tried to commit suicide. That's why one unsuccessful try happened. Ljubo Vujić borrowed a tow sack with a rope from a woman and tied the rope to a tree above the small Bukovica River to hang himself. The rope broke, and he fell into the water. Poets were singing about it. I remember only these lines:

Listen, my dear Brothers.
It so happened that tow sack was rotten.
We heard something flopping,
That's our Ljubo swirling and paddling.

During the first few days of the rebellion in 1941, while we were still weakly organized, at the news that Ustashas were doing killings in the night, each family was running away individually. So, often it happened that we spent sleepless nights hiding in bushes or hedges or trudging through the almost ripe wheat fields, destroying the crop. In the morning, the stories from the night before were told.

"Where did you spend last night?" Asked a man of his neighbor.

"Don't ask. We barely have our heads. All night we were running."

"From whom?"

"From Ustashas. Who else?"

"We barely saved ourselves, too. We were chased too."

"We hid in the woods by Markan's wheat, then we saw that it's not a real good place, and so we went down the path by the stream. Fortunately, we heard them coming in time, so we ran away."

"Well, we met Ustashas on the same path and ran away."

In the refuge: People in the Kozara area gathered together to have safety in numbers after villagers were attacked in their homes. Thousands from other areas also fled from their homes to the area of Kozara for the protection of the Partisans.

"Wait. Wait, neighbor. Tell me where you were."

"At the same path, just by the stream."

"Well, that was us last night, running away from each other," both concluded.

"What was happening on your side? I was thinking a whole army was running," the first neighbor laughed.

"Well, you stepped on Markan's wheat. We need to assess the damage to his wheat," the second neighbor retorted.

That's how many families ran through the dark night, met each other, and then ran away from each other. The next day they would conclude that Ustashas weren't in the village after all.

But when the killings started in nearby villages, people left their homes and gathered together. There were many people in the refuge—a real crowd. Each family took with them a wagon, mostly pulled by bulls, with necessary things. They took all their animals with them—cows, sheep, pigs. All that mixed together and made a real mess.

Someone was looking for a lost cow, someone for a lost child.

"Milan, Milan, Son, where are you?" a middle-aged woman was yelling and looking through the refuge.

"Have you seen my cow, Elsie? She has one horn missing," another woman was yelling.

"Screw your cow!" said someone from the crowd. "You are worried about a cow, and we are trying to find a place for our heads."

Captured by Croatian Soldiers

News had just arrived that our soldiers went through the enemy's circle and were going toward Grmeč. They said a few civilian people also went through with them. Panic.

"And we? What about us?"

"The circle is shut again. On the road from Dubica to Prijedor, there are tanks after tanks. You can't go there," said a man who came back from that area and disappeared somewhere in the forest.

The number of refugees was becoming smaller. Some of the families were going back to their homes. Some of them were running deeper into the forest. They were looking for protection. From my village, Bukovica, most of the families went back to their homes.

"We are going home. God will decide our fate," said old Marko Knežević.

We didn't go far. As soon as we came out of the forest, Croatian *domobrani* soldiers made a circle around us.*

Silence—. Even small children didn't cry—I guess it was surprise at that cemetery silence, fear, or something else. Who could know? The soldiers took us to the road and turned us toward Bosanska Gradiska. They were herding us on the road, making us hurry, but they didn't hit us. In a village of Vrbaška on Petnaest Kilometers, they gave us to Ustashas and Germans.† Still, we were all together. Families were mainly complete, except those whose members were with Partisans or had been killed. And a lot of them had been killed.

* The word *domobrani* in the original refers to the "Croatian Home Guard," regular Croatian soldiers, not members of the elite Ustasha.

† Petnaest Kilometers (fifteen kilometers) is a crossroad.

Ustashas immediately separated all the men who had any wound, even if it was just a simple cut from a knife. It was enough that someone's finger was wrapped. He was separated as a Partisan. Also separated were people who had any piece of soldier's clothes or torn civilian clothes. They were looking for traces of blood or holes from bullets. They were also looking at hats for traces of the star.* They put suspects in a separate line.

They separated Stojan Knežević, who actually had been injured with Partisans and, because he hadn't recovered completely, stayed with the civilians. That's how he was captured. But when the Ustashas were not paying attention, Stojan ran away. They were shooting at him and ran after him, but they couldn't catch him.

The Ustashas herded us to Bosanska Gradiska. People [Croats] on one side and the other were looking at us.

Croatian soldiers herding captives to concentration camps.

* The Partisan symbol was a red star, worn on hats.

Boys from villages around Kozara Mountain waiting at one of the entrances to the camp at Stara Gradiska in July, 1942. (Lukić)

In their eyes, we could see compassion, confusion, hate, surprise, and who knows what else. Some of them were yelling, "You want your state, Communist bandits, don't you? Where is your Stalin now?"

There were some individuals who were spitting on us, and the robbing and grabbing began.

"Oh, Mama! That woman took my cow," yelled a whining voice—a boy my age, Lazo Panić. Lazo's mother Kosa ran to take back the cow, but Ustashas shoved her with a gun. Ustashas were just winking, probably to their relatives, and someone in the line stayed without cow, horse, or more valuable things from a wagon. Anyone who protested was hit.

They herded us across the Sava River into Stara Gradiska.* There was a prison with tall walls, towers, and guard cabins full of Ustashas. They were herding us past the entrance into the camp. Men from age fifteen to sixty were separated and herded into the prison. The Ustashas were rough now. They were swearing, threatening, and hitting. They didn't allow men to say farewell to their families.

Croatian nurse Diana Budisavljević (seated; left) headed a group of about 100 nurses and doctors who risked their lives to help the children. When she visited Stara Gradiska, she registered children after their mothers were killed or sent to Germany to work. Her correspondence shows both her attempts to document children and the resistance to such documentation by the Ustasha "in order to prevent them from returning to the Orthodox religion some time later" (qtd. In Bulajić). Her group managed to register 12,000 children. Her files, photos, and diary have been invaluable to researchers in tracing the fate of lost children, although many of her files were confiscated. Even after the war, Budisavljević was harassed instead of honored and finally had to leave Zagreb. (Bulajić; Lukić)

* In Stara Gradiska, a prison had been made from an old Austro-Hungarian fortress. In 1941, the prison was turned into a concentration camp where mainly women and children were kept and killed.

From Stara Gradiska to Jablanac

In the dismembered colony, now only children, women, and old people were left. The thinned out line was passing through the village of Uskoci. Each family was poorer, usually by a father or brother or a few brothers. Fortunately, the weather was nice. It wasn't raining. Innocent children, small heads, were peeking from behind ladders or chairs of bull- or horse-drawn wagons, and they didn't understand why their fathers were taken away.

"Mama, when will Daddy come?"

"He'll come, my Son. He will come."

The mother was comforting him and hiding her eyes that were full of tears.

The child continued, "And why were they hitting that man?"

"Hush, Son. Here. Take an apple." The mothers found ways to stop children's questions which they couldn't—didn't know—or mustn't answer.

Small children with their ragged necessities rode in wagons full of stuff. We older children had the task of herding cows and, whenever it was possible, letting them eat grass by the road. It was hard because hungry animals were pulling us to the side, and Ustashas didn't allow that.

The day was sunny and quite warm. The thing that bothered us most was thirst. We had enough food. We took that from our homes. Peasant people along the way gave us water when the Ustashas permitted us to take it.

Soon after that, we came to the forest. We were walking on the left bank of the Sava River upstream. The path of the wagons was curving through a hundred-year-old oak forest. *Now, it's better.* The shade protected us from the hot sun.

Captives from Kozara (July 6, 1942)

We stopped by the Strug River, a left tributary of the Sava. There we spent a few hours. They let us swim in the river. We children were anticipating that. We cooled off, ate, and after that, we were ordered to move on. No one knew where they were herding us. We walked a long time, and in the evening, they stopped us at a place where we would spend the night. There were many Ustashas around us. For the first time, we saw Ustashas in black uniforms.

The torn families gathered around wagons. Everyone was preparing for rest and sleeping. Black Ustashas were walking

around and watching young women and maidens. The young girls were hiding in wagons, pretending to be ill and dressed as old people. The Ustashas took Milka from the neighbor's wagon. After some time, Milka came back in tears with a torn skirt and blouse. Her mother went to her—crying, beating herself in the chest, pulling her hair, and quietly cursing the Ustashas with, "I hope your mother disowns you! I wish a snake would eat your eyes. I wish God would make you ill but won't let you die. I hope you bury your children. I hope your seed dies off."

Milka was sobbing quietly.

That night many maidens and women were raped. One woman never came back. What happened to her, we have never heard.

Whispering, sobbing, and words of compassion could be heard until late in the night, but it was easier at dawn. The day was coming. *They will leave us alone*, the women seemed to be thinking.

"Get up. Screw your Partisan mother! Move!" the Ustashas were yelling.

People were preparing to leave. The awakened children were crying, and mothers were comforting them. The line moved further toward the west by the Sava. About noon, we came to the village of Jablanac.

Dr. Mladen Stojanović became the hero of the villagers who elected him their commander in 1941 on the first day of the uprising against the Nazi and Ustasha occupiers. Soon, the Croat Josip Broz Tito, with support from Russia, organized the mostly Serb forces as Partisans. But toward the end of the war, Tito made a deal to accept the Ustasha officers who wanted to switch sides and let them keep their rank.

At Jablanac

The village Jablanac is situated on the left side of the Sava River halfway from Stara Gradiska to Jasenovac. Opposite of the village Jablanac on the right bank of the Sava River under the mountain Prosara, the village of Orahova is situated. Jablanac is a typical valley village in the area of Posavina. It's not big. There is a line of houses by the road with all the public buildings such as a post office and a small church in the center. Around there, the valley was full of water that looked like small lakes. The marshes were rich with fish that we children caught during our stay there, and that's what we ate because the food we had brought from home was depleted.

Many families who had come earlier were situated in deserted peasants' houses. In those houses, there was no place for us, so we stayed in the field by our wagons with animals we were still keeping and caring for. We made shelters above our wagons, and animals were grazing on the valley grass.

The Ustashas were situated in one house in the village, and that was something like the police station. We were free to walk around the valley and forests. We could escape individually from here, but to where? We couldn't go across the Sava and into Slavonia. We didn't know what to expect in Slavonia. Except for this, we were not aware of anything. We had to protect all the valuables that we were driving, carrying, or herding. Where could we go without anything? No one thought about how many people could be killed. All that was prohibiting us from taking any action. We were separated from places where we were born. We were at someone else's place, an unknown area that was completely unsafe.

"In the house where our friend Marko Panić's family was placed," Aunt Trivuna Ivanović said, "all the walls are bloody. There are bloody hand prints on the walls at many places. In

some places, even the ceiling is splattered with blood. Some slaughtering must have happened there. They are afraid to fall asleep, and when dreams come, they say they have nightmares. They want to leave the house and come here on the field. Other people say that in other houses, there are tracks of blood."

"Hush, dear Sister," said Aunt Mileva Ivanović. "At least they have roofs above their heads. What will we do if rains start? I am afraid too, and I have nightmares. Last night I dreamed about the deceased Draže. I dreamed that he came for me to go with him. 'Let's go, Let's go.' And it was foggy, and the dark was thicker and thicker. And suddenly, we were by his grave. He was going in there and calling me to go with him. I started going in, and at that moment, I woke up."

"It's not a good dream."

"I know it's not. I'm sure I will die, but the children will survive because in my dream, they didn't come with me," said Aunt Mileva as she patted her daughter who had come to her and said, "Mama, I'm hungry."

"I'll find you something," Mother responded and went to the wagon.

The food saved from the homes was almost gone. The famine started. The first who were hungry were older people, on purpose, to save the food for children. They didn't have flour anymore. They had corn, but they didn't have a place to grind it. Food was jealously protected. Some families didn't have even corn, so they were asking others to loan them a few kilograms. It was a hard time. How can flour be made from a kernel of corn—? People were trying to find ways to do that. They were cutting stakes of wood from the forest and making small bowls in which to grind. That's how they made the flour. From every direction, you could hear echoes from hitting the wooden dishes, and these echoes were mixed with the croaking of frogs, and together they made a strange, sad melody.

Tap, Tap, Croak, Croak,
There is no freedom for us.[*]

My school friend made these lines, and he was happy because he became a poet. He repeated them several times. Older women nodded with worried heads and concluded, "This is not going well."

Famine made the people kill their animals. First, they killed the ones that were smaller and less valuable, and after a few days, when famine became bigger, they were forced to kill bigger animals. Of course, Ustashas controlled all that and took the best meat. The rest of the meat, they gave to the people, but it wasn't enough. Folks were quarreling, offending each other, and threatening. Famine was ruining the unity of the group and families. A fight for existence had begun. Mothers were trying to feed the small children first with the food that was left. There was some unwritten rule—the oldest was fed the smallest amount and last.

Bojo Panić, a boy who was twelve, was swearing in public at the Ustasha, not mincing words. His mother was trying to calm him down, hushing him, pleading with him, but he wouldn't stop. He started reciting a Partisan song:

On the smooth field of Petrovac,
People were wailing from calamity.
They were hungry for bread, thirsty for water,
Yearning for justice and freedom.

Powerless to hush him, Mother Stanka started cursing him.

"Son, Bojo, I'm cursing the milk I nursed you with. Do you want us all to die?"

But Bojo didn't stop and continued loudly:

[*] The rhythm and rhyme is lost in the translation.

Uncle Stalin is smoking his pipe.
He's just waiting for winter.

Somehow, other women hushed him. We boys, his peers, were shocked by his bravery, but also we admired him and quietly approved of his act. In the afternoon, Ustashas were looking for him. Obviously, someone reported him. Fortunately, he had already escaped into the forest. They didn't find him. We never discovered the one who had reported him.

Often we would go to the bank of the Sava River and walk there. There were some boys from the village of Jablanac. They were our peers, probably from the Ustashas' families. Often they would confront us, mocking us and calling us bandits and pointing to our heads and saying there were stars on our hats.

Seizing Children from Parents

In the village, the news came that some commission of the Red Cross had come there. They said they will take the children. Where? How? Why? No one knew, and no one believed it. The Ustashas commanded that all children younger than twelve come to their station.

Many went obediently. Some didn't. We who were a little bit older went there out of curiosity. And really, in addition to Ustashas, there were some civilian people in white coats. They were putting children's names on a list and putting on their necks some cards with personal information written on them.. Immediately, children were separated from their mothers. Now many mothers realized the seriousness of the situation. They hadn't believed they would take even nursing babies, but they did. They had thought it would be something like just an inventory. But that they were taking babies who were still nursing—they couldn't even imagine that. Unfortunately, reality was darker than their worst nightmare. Hearts were squeezed; breaths were stopped. Sobbing and lamenting were mixed with wailing. Children squealed.

The civilians in white coats were confused, too. Only about ten Ustashas were determined and acting roughly and soullessly.

Mothers were going to Ustashas, trying to take their children, but they were roughly hit with rifle butts. Some of them were falling on their knees and pleading. Some of them fainted.

There were many women who were trying to take their children, and some of them succeeded and were running to their tents. Others, encouraged by the success of other women, didn't pay attention to the hitting and were trying again. Ustashas commanded:

"Load guns."

They shot in the air. More soldiers came, and they made us leave, herding us with bayonets.

Wailing, calling, last messages, and instructions of mothers to kidnapped children: Milane, Drago, Marko, Jovo, Stano, Roso, Ljeposava, Milice Stanko. . . .

"Be careful! Take care, Maro, of little Ranka! Don't separate from him."

"Božo, Son, don't forget your mother. Remember your name and that you are from Podgradci."

Two mothers who are to be separated from their children (Lukic).

From about ten horse-drawn wagons in which children were thrown as pumpkins, you could hear crying, screaming, calling for help, and often you heard:

"Don't leave me, Mother."

And mothers were powerless, even those who were the bravest. They had to stop in front of bayonets. Wagons started

leaving. You could hear crying in the Sava Valley. Kozara [Mountain] is paying a tax in blood.*

The next day, they took children from twelve to fifteen years and only boys. They were looking for us at houses, tents, wagons, fields, and marshes, where we were catching fish, or on the bank of the Sava. From all sides, they were herding boys into the center of the small village where the Ustasha crews were. There were a lot of us—about 200. Again—crying, sobbing, kissing, messages, and last instructions from families who were staying there.

Older children were entrusted with the care of younger siblings when mothers were separated from them.

* Allusion to "tax in blood" exacted from Serbs by Turkish occupiers in the days of the Ottoman Empire. Periodically, boys, usually younger than ten years, would be taken from their parents and sent to Constantinople to be indoctrinated into becoming Islamic fighters called *janissaries*, who would be sent back as ruthless fighters against their Orthodox Christian people. In 1942, several hundred Serb boys were dressed in paper Ustasha uniforms in Stara Gradiska. Many were sent to the "re-education" camp in Jastrobarsko, established July 12, 1942, where the children were to be converted to Catholicism and trained as soldiers. (Lukić)

They put us in a line, two-by-two, and commanded, "Move!" A line of boys started leaving, followed by ten to fifteen Ustashas. They were telling us that in Jasenovac we would get big dinners—that we would get candies and chocolates. They said we would get new clothes and new shoes. We would learn the jobs we would like to learn. They were telling us everything, and we naively believed them. Maybe they were afraid that someone would try to escape because there were a lot of us, and if we ran into the forest through which we had been in recent times, they wouldn't be able to catch us. But we were naive, peasant boys who had never been so far from the villages where we were born. And where would we go alone, separated from our parents? No. We were not thinking about escaping. We were even happy that we were going to Jasenovac because we were expecting the good dinner they promised us. We were hungry.

We came to the village of Mlaka.* There were many of our peasant people, many women and children and some old men. After a short stop, our peers who had been separated from their families in Mlaka joined us. Now the number of us was double, about 400. That was the last time I saw Aunt Smeuna Sredojević. She kissed me and gave me an apple (I don't know where she got that) and in tears said hello to me. Even today, after all these years, in front of my eyes is floating that nice face of a woman in a white scarf with red edges which people called *bošča*. From the time I can remember, each time I met her, she would give me something—walnuts, apples, eggs, a cookie. There was always something in her pockets for me.

Many people we knew were in Mlaka. All of them were our people from under Kozara Mountain from Podgradci, Jablanica, Sovjak, Miloševo, Brdo, Grbavci, Trebovljani, and other villages. People we knew would come to us and ask about their families. Sometimes, someone knew something

* The Serb population of villages in the area of Jasenovac had been eliminated. The villages were then used as holding centers, from which people were regularly sent to Jasenovac, a camp that Ustasha Gen. Prpić reported could hold "an unlimited number of prisoners." (Lukić)

about the family, but most of the time, they didn't know anything.

"Move! Move!"

Our herders were yelling, and the line started to move again on the peasants' road, across valleys and through forests. Soon we came to the village of Košutarica [Croat village]. Residents of the village were watching us strangely, with curiosity, and shaking their heads. I guess they were wondering what we children did to offend the Ustashas. Some peasant boy was saying curse words to us, but soon he went back to his yard after older people scolded him.

We went through Košutarica, and in the evening we came closer to Jasenovac. We could see high wooden guard towers. As we came closer, we saw the barbed-wire fence around the camp. We passed by Ustasha guards who were in yellow uniforms, and we went into the camp through an open gate . . .

The sun was going down . . .

They put us in lines in front of the building with "Command of Collection Camp Jasenovac" written on it. We were expecting the promised dinner, but we didn't get anything. The night was falling as they herded us inside the camp. We saw some people who looked really poor. They looked skinny and elongated. Their eyes were sunken into their skulls. Their ears were transparent. They were bruised and pale. Their hair was shaved. They looked like ghosts. Some of them had chains on their legs.

Left: Branded Jewish child on the way to Jasenovac. Right: The child's scream was silenced on the rail tracks in Jasenovac. Below: Ustashas killed 3,964 Gypsy children in the Jasenovac camps in 1942. (Lukic)

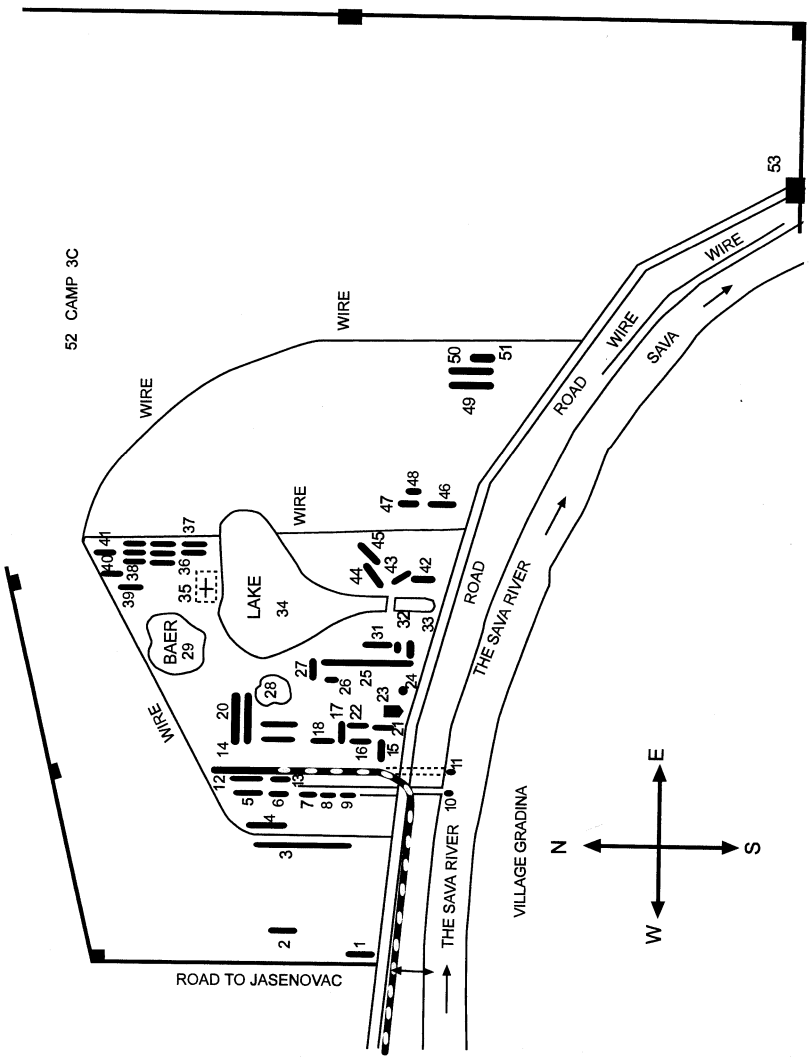
The First Days in the Camp

They herded us in front of a long, unfinished building and situated all of us inside. We filled all the rooms and attic. Most of us were in the attic. We were crowded together like sardines. There was no space to lie down. We were tired, hungry, scared, and disappointed. We sat down and fell asleep. They woke us early in the morning and herded us out.

The weather was nice. The sun was warm, and we felt good. We were looking at the surroundings. Behind the building where we spent the night was an outdoor toilet that was a ten-meter-long and about two-meter-wide hole, across which were wooden boards at each one-half meter. We put our feet on these boards while we were using the toilet. On three sides there were wooden board walls.

East from the toilet was barbed wire, which was the boundary of the camp. Behind that was the Ustashas guard tower. Next to the entrance of the outdoor toilet on the north side was Camp III C, divided with barbed wire. On the south side, there were wooden buildings, maybe ten of them, and between them was free space. North of us was the kitchen.

Behind the kitchen was clear space, and after that was barbed wire and guard towers from which Ustashas were watching us from the barrels of machine guns that were pointed to the inside of the camp. Behind us on the west side, were many storage buildings—bigger and smaller. Between them, there was a high brick chimney, and near to that one was a shorter brick chimney. Thick smoke was coming from both of them. We were sitting—hungry, very hungry. Since yesterday when we left Jablanac, we hadn't eaten anything, and we didn't have anything to take from there. Confusion and hunger were tearing at us.



Jasenovac Camp No. 3: Barbed wire enclosed about 250 acres, and the total area of the camp was more than 500 acres. Camp 3-C is the area between the coiled barbed wire and the outer wall. (Adapted from a map published in *Jasenovac: Photographic History*. Part of the diagram in the upper left corner is cropped to keep an enlarged drawing of the camp to scale.)

Legend

1. Guard tower (entrance)
2. Refinery
3. Main storehouse
4. Warehouse and workshops
5. Shed for bricks
6. Lancara (Ironware factory)
7. Camp administration
8. Paketarnica (Post office)
9. Zvonara (Belfry)
10. Freey on the Sava
11. Granik on the Sava
12. Shed for bricks
13. Ciglana (Brick factory)
14. Workshop sheds (Tunnel)
15. Guard tower
16. Officers' housing
17. Carpenter shop
18. Kitchen/Officers' housing
19. Two sheds for bricks
20. Two sheds for bricks
21. Sawmill
22. Shed
23. Electric power plant
24. Lime-kiln
25. Farm
26. Coal pit
27. Woodwork and baker
28. Clay pit
29. Baer (quarry)
30. Webbing shop
31. Stable
32. Supervisor's office
33. Corporals' offices
34. Big lake with bridge
35. Cemetery for prisoners
36. Hospital
37. Ambulance
38. Six prisoners' barracks
39. Auxiliary kitchen
40. Kitchen
41. Manufacturing barrack and housing
42. Stable
43. Kitchen
44. Dairy and butcher
45. Women's camp bldg.
46. New butchers' shop
47. Ice works
48. Pigsty
49. Ustasha workshops
50. Women's camp bldg.
51. Kitchen
52. Camp 3-C
53. East exit/guard tower

From the kitchen, they brought a big kettle and put it on the ground, and two Ustashas commanded us to stand in line. We made a long line and went to the first camp meal. Each of us got a bowl and spoon. And a cook poured some soup in which were some kernels that were similar to rice. We heard that they are calling that *geršl*. It was unseasoned and tasteless. Many couldn't eat it. We didn't get any bread. They were treating us more and more roughly. There was nothing good. We realized we were in hell, and it would be hard to get out, but we still didn't lose hope. The hunger was the worst. We only talked about food.

They herded some prisoners past us. They looked awful. There were many people we knew, our people from Kozara. There was someone's father, older brother, uncle or neighbor. My cousin Miloš Ivanović and uncle Mile Ninković were there. We were talking with our eyes. We, the boys, could speak, but they couldn't say even a word. They must have experienced something horrible, so no one was uttering a word. They herded them to Camp III-C where the living conditions were the worst.

For lunch we got corn meal *polenta* [mush]. It was runny but salty and better than the *geršl*. Other prisoners got a small piece of bread, but we didn't. There were some sick boys. Some had diarrhea and had to go to the toilet every second. We spent all day sitting there, and after dinner, which was a portion of cabbage soup, again they took us back to the same building to sleep. That building was called the Turnover Building. We were full of fleas and lice, and a whole cloud of bugs around us didn't let us sleep. The attic was tight, suffocating, and dirty. The smell from the mud where we used the toilet was the worst. Someone was getting up all the time, and while he was going to the toilet, he was stepping on friends who were sleeping. The worst was for those who were the closest to the toilet. All through the night, there was no peace. In the morning, we got soup for breakfast. It was warm, salty water in which there were a few traces of slop. I remembered the slop that my mother made for cows and pigs.

How much better that slop was than this soup! Eh, if I could have my mother's slop—, I was thinking.

"Those who have finished four classes of elementary school step out," an Ustasha was saying and pointing to the place for those boys.

We separated. About one hundred of us were in the group of the "educated," and the rest of the group was the majority. Between the buildings, they put a table and two chairs. Two civilians and one Ustasha were sitting there inventorying us and deciding who would go to which work. I was coming close to the "commission," and I heard the Ustasha's dictation:

"Lazar Panić. He was a blacksmith. Chain building.

"Milan Šinik. Locksmith. Chain building.

"Radojica Pejić. Locksmith. Chain building.

"Jovan Gligić. Wheelright. Farm building.*

"Radovan Popović. Clock repairer. Turnover group.

It was my turn. The Ustasha looked at me and said, "Write this one for the barber." That's how they divided us and inventoried our personal information.

In the group of tradesmen, there was some whispering and dilemmas.

"We who were separated for tradesmen will stay here for three years because that's how long the training lasts," said Lazo Panić. "And these boys will go back to their homes. I'll tell them I haven't finished a fourth class, that I finished just three. I'll go and ask him to liberate me from training."

That's what he did, he and a few more boys. And we were surprised that they made his wish come true. Lazo went back satisfied and joined another group, but he didn't know, like we also didn't know, that marking out of the list of tradesmen was marking out of the list of living people, or at least of the list of those who would live a little bit longer.

In the building of that Turnover group, there was a bathroom and laundry. During the day, we all went to the

* The word *ekonomi* translates to "farm" or "agriculture," although it also has a more comprehensive meaning as in the English *economy*.

bathroom, and while we were taking a shower, our clothes were put in a steam kettle. That's how lice was destroyed, but the bugs were still in the attic and they sucked our blood during the night.

We "tradesmen" were scheduled on jobs, and the group of boys who stayed was separated in two parts, and they took them somewhere. We didn't know what happened to them. Naively, we believed that they were back home, and we were sad because we stayed to work. There were 100 of us on different jobs. About 300 boys—our cousins, neighbors, and school friends—disappeared from camp. Where they were herded, no one could say. We were sad. Except hunger, the uncertainty about our friends tormented us the most.

There was also the itch. We had scabies and mange, and we got lice again. When we went back to the attic of the Turnover Building where we spent nights, we were just trying to kill lice. Bugs were biting us, sucking our blood, and then got in our clothes and blankets, and lice were also going under our scabs and making their homes there. We helped each other take off the scabs that were drier and kill the lice under them. Someone reported mange, and one sunny day, we didn't go to our jobs. They took us to the field behind the kitchen, and there barbers shaved our heads and camp medics gave us some medicine that had the smell of sulfur. We put it all over our bodies. They took our clothes to the laundry, and we stayed completely naked. We barely recognized each other because we had that yellow medicine on us, and we were shaved and naked. Even our mothers couldn't recognize us. We were just like creatures. Everything attacked us—lice, bugs, mange, and most of all, famine. The therapy was repeated for three days, and after that, we went to take a shower and again our clothes were steamed. That's how we got rid of the mange, and again, we went to our work.

The Escape of Jevto Ivanović

A boy who was 13, son of a Partisan who was killed, strong and muscular and always active and quick to quarrel—that's how Jevto Ivanović came to Jasenovac, together with other boys. In school, he hadn't stood out from other kids in learning, but in camp, he showed extreme intelligence—more than any boy I knew there. While we were going to camp, he understood everything better than we did. As soon as he saw barbed wire and the Ustashas' wooden guard towers, he said, "Do you see this wire and guards? They will capture us like sheep in a pen, torture, and kill us. Woe to us."

That's what Jevto was saying, and we didn't want to believe his words. It was better to believe those things we wanted to happen, and that was to get dinner.

"Dinner. What dinner? What candies? You are crazy! Who will give you that?" Jevto said.

And, really, he was right. Everything he said came true completely. For us, it was strange that he could understand this and how he could see those things that would happen. After a few days in the camp—and in this short time, and we discovered many ugly things—Jevto made the decision to run away. He gathered a few cousins and told them what he was planning to do. We told him not to do that yet—that we should first learn a little bit more about the surroundings and then try to escape. He didn't think so. He was stubborn. We did all this talking in the outdoor toilet by Camp III C. Because no one agreed to go with him, he prayed to God, kissed us, cried, and left. When he didn't come back to camp, we concluded that he had succeeded. Naively, we thought that if he didn't succeed, they would bring him back to the camp. Fortunately, his escape really succeeded. Three years later, in 1945, after I

survived Jasenovac's hell, Jevto told me everything about his escape. He was probably the only one who was saved in this way. This is Jevto's story:

"When I told you goodbye in the toilet, I went out the same way they brought us into the camp. It was noon—about 12 or 1 o'clock. I came to the gate, which was open, and simply went out. In the guard stand, Ustashas were sitting and eating. I saw them from the corner of my eye. Probably, they were confident that none of the prisoners were brave enough to come to the gate with the aim to run away. A fraction of a second when the attention of the guards was weak—a second, that was enough for me to go to the road unnoticed. A second of life or death came to my life. Luck decided. I went down the road, downstream to the Sava. On the road there were new barricades—Ustashas' guard stands. I was going toward them and thinking about what to say to them if they saw me and stopped me, but that day was the day of my life. I passed them unnoticed and, freely, I came close to the village of Košutarica, from where I, together with other boys, was herded two or three days before. Incredible luck and coincidence saved me that day. I went out of the camp like there were no guards. When I was trying to convince you to come with me and you didn't accept—honestly, I was upset because I had to go alone, and I was angry with you. But now, I'm sure that no one would have come out if someone else had come with me. I came out just accidentally. I had that crazy luck. If there had been more of us, surely we would have been noticed, and the end would have been tragic.

Guard towers on the road to Jasenovac.

I was going down the road wondering if I would find my family at Jablanac. My mother, younger sisters, and brothers had been there. My mom had hidden them when they were taking the children. I had to warn them about danger—them and others. I had to warn them to run away whenever they could—just don't go to Jasenovac.

Suddenly, there were new dangers. I met two girls who were being herded by one Ustasha. From a distance, I recognized them. One of them was Kosana Čirić from Podgradci. *What to do? I'm done,* I was thinking. *Now, when we meet each other, they will ask me, 'What are you doing here, Jevto?' That's how they will uncover me, and Ustashas will take me with the girls back to Jasenovac.*

"In that moment, behind me, I heard the echo of horses and the sound of wagon wheels on the road. I turned around and saw a peasant man driving a wagon behind me. In the wagon, there was a big kettle that was on its side with the bottom turned forward. I ran after him, jumped in his wagon, and hid in the kettle. I was lucky that the man didn't notice anything. He continued with the same speed, went by the Ustashas and girls that I knew, and after about ten minutes, he came to Košutarica.

When he slowed down and started turning into his yard, I jumped out of the wagon and continued on my way toward the village of Mlaka. In about one hour, I came to Mlaka. There I found women with a few children they had succeeded in hiding when Ustashas were taking children, and there were also some weak old men with long beards. The few people that I knew, I warned about the dangers that awaited them in Jasenovac and suggested that they run away, but they didn't take me seriously.

"I went toward Jablanac where my family was. I was going down the road wondering if they were still there. *Am I going to find them? Do they have food? I am hungry.* On the road, I saw a plum tree with a lot of fruit. They weren't ripe yet, but they were good. I filled my pockets and was eating

while I was walking. Suddenly, I was shocked by sharp, hard shouts: 'Stop!'

"I stopped, and behind a bush I saw two Ustashas with guns. 'Give me your permit,' one Ustasha told me.

"'I don't have it. I didn't know I needed to have that.'

"'What? You didn't know. Screw your Partisan mother! I will teach you for all time.' Then he pulled my hair and pulled my nose and ears. He slapped me a few times and yanked me up every time I fell down, and then he kicked me in my butt with his foot, yelling, 'Go away. Next time you will be shorter by a head if you go without a permit.'

"I ran to get as far away from them as possible, happy because I had crossed another obstacle. I came to Jablanac and found my family, but instead of happiness, my mother was scolding me, 'Why did you run away, my unlucky Son?' She asked. 'What are we going to do now? If they catch you, others could be killed.'

"'If you don't run away, you will be killed. I'm not going to Jasenovac alive. I'm not going back in hell,' I answered.

"The next morning, my cousin Zora agreed to go with me. We said goodbye to our families and ran through the forest unnoticed toward the village of Gređani. Residents of Gređani accepted us very well. I worked as a buggy driver for a peasant man and stayed about one month. After that, I went to Bosnia, and after many obstacles that, luckily, I crossed over, I came to my home. From nine members of the family, I was the only one. After the war was over, I found a younger brother Mirko in Slavonia and sisters Gospava, Jelka, and Savka. My father was killed with Partisans, and my mother, youngest brother, and sister Radosava were killed in Jasenovac."

The Killing of Children in Jasenovac

In Autumn of 1942, when we had already forgotten about our peers who weren't in the group of tradesmen, surprisingly, some of them appeared in camp again. There were about 150 of them. They were situated in a building that had only a roof. That's how it was made. The roof was only a little above the ground, and inside there was a little bit of hay. It was about 40 meters long and about 8 meters wide.

The next day, we went to visit them and discovered that they had been in villages in the area around Kozara where they, under the Ustashas' guard, were harvesting crops, picking fruit, and working other jobs. There I found my cousin Branko Zmijanjac from Miloševo Brdo. He was lying in the hay, and he was ill. He had a fever, and he was really thirsty. I brought him some water. When he cooled off a little, he told me that they had been in the villages of Bistrica, Gašnica, and Međeđa.

"Could you run away?" I asked him.

"Yes," he answered. "But everything is deserted. There are no people. Houses, if they are not burned, are overgrown. Chickens, pigs, dogs, and cats got wild, so Ustashas were shooting them with guns. Many cornfields were unharvested."

"Well, my Branko, you should have run away. Here the food is very scarce, and they are killing people everyday. It would be better to stay with wild pigs. At least you would be free, and you would have a better chance of surviving this evil. And where are the other boys?" I asked him.

"I don't know. They weren't with us."

"Then I guess it is true what is said."

"What?"

"That they are killed," I told him.

"What do you mean killed? Why?" He asked.

"I don't know why."

I told him that they were killing everyone—especially Jews, Serbs, and Gypsies.

I left Branko not even thinking that would be the last time I would see him and the other boys from his group. But the hope that the other group of boys was alive had been extinguished. They had been seen one evening in a field, completely naked, jumping to get warm because nights were getting colder. It was the last day of their short lives.

The next day, when I was on my way to the shop in the Brickyard, I stopped by the building to see Branko and the other boys. As I was coming closer, I felt some strange apprehension. There were no voices from inside. The quiet suggested death.

Is it possible that they are still sleeping? I wondered. With fear, I peeked inside, and I saw an empty building. Hay was scattered all around, and there were pieces of children's clothing and a colorful peasant bag. There were no more boys. There was no Branko.

At the Sisak children's camp, a subcamp under the Jasenovac command.

My eyes were full of tears. My throat was tight. I knew they were not among the living anymore.

I walked toward the Brickyard wondering, *Will anyone survive this hell? Will the world ever know what happened here?*

During the day, I heard from prisoners that my peers, last evening around 9 o'clock, were driven to Gradina.*

Desanka Djuričić is written on the back of the photograph. Her fate is unknown. (Lukić) (A gray box has been added to the photograph.)

* Gradina, or Lower Gradina (2,200 acres), is across the Sava River from the Jasenovac camps. The area of mass graves is now referred to as the "Field of Silence," a name that is said to refer both to the silence of the dead and the silence of the visitor.

Many of the murdered children were buried as "nameless," but Dragoje Lukić, after 40 years of work, has documented 19,432 names to date. The Ustasha also documented their killing with photographs and reports. Dr. Nikola Nikolić, because he was a doctor and the Ustasha wanted to show the international commission they had a hospital, received special treatment in the months he was at Jasenovac in 1942. He wrote books and reports about what he witnessed there. In one, he wrote:

German people would amass Serbs from Kozara and give them to these degenerates of our people (Ustasha) for liquidation. Then a huge mass of these people arrived in Jasenovac. Later Ustashas said there were 66,000 people from Kozara. We were watching them when they were coming from Košturica in groups of 200 people. And they were driven across to Gradina. They were liquidated until 11:00 at night. They were peasant people and women with children that Germans gave Ustasha for liquidation because these people weren't able to work in Germany.

Except objects and six buildings that made the central part of Camp Jasenovac Campus Three, they made also one big roof the prisoners called Number Seven. In that space, in the summer of 1942, they drove around 2,800 and 3,500 children, mostly from Kozara and that number doesn't count the number of children who were in massive lines with their mothers and went directly to Gradina. In the end of August, that number had become smaller, around 700, and almost all of them were situated in "sedmica" [under roof] in the worst possible conditions. From this group, the first group of children was liquidated on the bank, and the rest of the live skeletons were liquidated in Gradina.

Gradina

The village of Gradina is situated on the right bank of the Sava River at the junction of the Una and Sava rivers on the Bosnian side. Residents were mainly Serbs that the Ustashas during 1941 forced to move, changed their religion, or liquidated them. In 1942, it was completely deserted. So Ustashas made there the biggest tomb of Yugoslavia. At the area of Gradina and Draksenić, they formed a farm. The ground was tended by prisoners.

In the camp of Jasenovac, which was divided into working groups, there was a group called the Farm Group. Prisoners from this group were driven by raft every day in the spring, summer, and autumn to Gradina. Sometimes they were even driving the majority of prisoners from other groups to finish agriculture work on time, mostly in autumn, in the time of harvesting corn. That's how we know something about things that happened in Gradina.

In Gradina, one group of Gypsies was always digging huge graves that Ustashas were filling with murdered bodies.[†] That's how it was told in the camp. Prisoners themselves were making chains that Ustashas were putting on them. Prisoners themselves were sharpening the knives Ustashas were killing them with, and they were making the mallets they were killed with. And Ustashas were openly threatening, "You will get a mallet on your head. It's a pity to spend a bullet on you. It costs fifteen *kunas*.[*] While prisoners were working agriculture

[†] Ustashas confessed that 40,000 Gypsies cleansed from Croatia were taken in groups to Gradina, made to dig graves, and then executed with mallets. One group was kept as gravediggers and executioners until they were killed at the beginning of 1945.

[*] The *kuna* was used by Independent Croatia in 1941-45 and reissued by the new Croatia in 1992. The dollar/*kuna* ratio is about 1 to 4.

jobs in Gradina, they often found sunken places in the field that were 10-15 meters long and about 4 meters wide. Those were graves of innocent people.

Horrified screams at the end of day
Were tearing the light
And making dark,
And slaughtered victims were falling dully
And filling with their bodies the dug pit.

Diggers of graves had a lot of work, and when they became weak, they finished in the pit. Then the Ustashas immediately took a new group of people that were given the tasks of digging and covering up massive graves, and then they finished like the group before them.

In Gradina, every piece of ground is soaked with blood. There are graves after graves.

Young victims at Gradina. (Lukić)

Choosing for Death

In autumn when there were fewer jobs to do—especially seasonal agriculture jobs—they cut the number of worker-prisoners in the camp. The surplus working power was simply liquidated. In the spring when there were more jobs to do, it was easy to take the number of workers needed because the number of new slaves was increasing constantly.

That's how the camp authorities concluded there were too many boys at trades, so they decided to cut down this number. They commanded all of us to come and stand in line in front of the Carpenter Building that was close to the command center of the camp. At the gathering place was the leader of our group, prisoner Salem Resulović,[†] who had been a student in a school for teachers before he came to the camp. He had the really thankless job of taking us to the butchers. We stood in line. A few Ustashas came, and one lieutenant came.

When I left the barber shop, my master, Milan Bosanac from Grubišno Polje near Daruvar, advised me that when answering Ustashas questions, I need to be decisive and loud. I took his advice.

We were in two lines. We were waiting. The Ustasha lieutenant came to the line from the right side. *Silence!* I could hear only my heart beating like it wanted to run away from my chest. It beat faster and faster. I breathed heavily. The choosing started.

"What's your name?" asked the lieutenant of the first boy

"Radomir Bjelovuk."

[†] Muslim name. Muslims who were openly anti-fascist or communist were imprisoned in Jasenovac. Arthur Hoffman, a German intelligence officer wrote, "The Muslim is sure to side with the Croat." This is indeed what happened. (Ross) Yet many of the 750,000 Muslims resisted fascism.

"Where do you work?"

"In the Chain Building."

"Which trade do you learn?"

"Locksmith."

"Stay in this line," said the Ustasha and continued asking the same questions of the next boy. He separated him in the other place. That's how two groups were formed. We knew that one group wouldn't survive until dawn. *But which one?*

Milovan Šinik from Gornji Podgradci, my school friend, used a moment when the Ustashas weren't looking in his direction and joined the other group. I guess he was thinking that our group had been chosen for killing. An Ustasha noticed him and said, "Well, you were here. Okay, stay there. You have chosen."

What has he chosen? I was wondering. The choosing was finished fast, and afterward, the Ustashas turned to my group and yelled, "Go away to your shops!" We spread around camp, each running to his shop, happy because that evening we would stay among the living.

I was thinking about Milovan and wondering why he went to the other group and whether, if he hadn't gone there, our group would have been taken to Gradina. Maybe the Ustasha lieutenant decided at the moment when Milovan was trying to find salvation. Anyway, they didn't really care which group would be sent to death. The important thing was that the number of boys was cut down because winter was coming and they needed less manpower.

We spent a night without peace. The fear consumed my being. Talking in our sleep, jumping, groaning, and screaming loudly in our dreams was usual, and all this was double on that night. We were happy because we stayed alive, and at the same time, we were sad because we lost so many friends. Uncertain fortune and absolute sadness were melted into one strange feeling that was more grief. Sadness for our friends was genuine and the luck was precarious because we stayed among the living at that moment, but tomorrow the Ustashas could continue their bloody rampage. We were just as sheep in

a pen that the butcher was killing when he wanted. That one stayed alive in the evening didn't mean he would stay alive in the morning. And he who stayed alive in the morning wasn't sure that he would achieve the next night. That was Jasenovac. Black, bloody Jasenovac—human slaughtering place.

A new day came. From the attic of the Turnover Group Building where our sleeping room was and the living quarters of groups of children, each of us went to shops. During the day there was news that too many boys stayed alive, and there would be a *nastup*[*] again at the same place. The news came from the camp commander's office where one prisoner was working, a prisoner who had "earned" the Ustashas' trust. (That young man later was hung in public. He was a communist. They discovered him.)

After lunch, the leader of our group, Salem Resulović, gathered us and told us that Ustashas commanded him to take fourteen boys in front of the command building—boys who would go to take care of animals in some village. Salem knew it was a lie, and we knew that, too. But anyway, there was a thread of hope, and we started believing in the thing that we would like to happen. Salem had a hard time. He had to decide who would go, and he couldn't begin doing that. It was like it was harder for him than for us—like he would go instead of us if he could. For a long time, he was standing in front of us and saying that the ones who go there—it will be better for them. He was trying to lie to himself, to make the thing easier. In the end, he had to separate the wanted boys. He knew that for us and for himself, there was no help and that innocent victims wouldn't save anyone else. Anyway, all of us in the camp were designated for death. We just didn't know when and who would be killed next.

With his eyes full of tears, Salem separated fourteen of us boys and took us in front of the command office. We stayed in

[*] *Nastup*: a line formation of prisoners in the camp. Since the word here has a particular meaning that differs from the customary definitions (which include *appearance*) the author provided a footnote.

two lines, and we were waiting in front of the building. Ustashas were walking up and down, up and down. *The night is coming. What will happen with us? Maybe we are really going to a village. Maybe someone really does need us.*

Everyone was silent—dead from the fear and uncertainty. *Is this our last evening?* I couldn't get rid of the black suspicions. *They will kill us tonight at the* granik,* I could hear some inside voice say, and then, like from the fog, I could see my loved ones. I could see everything clearly—my village and the people. But my mother's face was the clearest, like she was there in front of me.

The Ustasha officer's sharp command woke me from the dream and took me back to reality, "Go away. Go back to camp."

Why they didn't kill us that evening, I have never discovered. Maybe the butchers were tired from killing, and maybe it wasn't worth driving only fourteen boys, so they gave up. Maybe they were not going to dirty their hands for such a small number. Going back, the most cheerful was Salem. The heavy load was lifted. "We survived, my Dears," he said.

"But until when, my Salem?" asked a small, dark boy who was from Trebovljani near Bosanska Gradiska.

* The *granik* was a dock for loading and unloading boats and barges on the Sava River. Prisoners were killed there with mallets or knives and dumped directly into the Sava River—so many bodies that at times the bodies made a dam in the river and left a stench that survivors who lived along the other side of the river still remember. (Croatian State Commission; interviews)

Attempts to Escape

When, after only a few days of incarceration in camp, Jevto Ivanović escaped, three of us—Milan Šinik, Radojica Pejić and I—decided to try to escape.* As boys, we naively went to the camp's exit gate and joined a group of prisoners who were going to the village of Mlaka to mow the fields. We were hoping it would be the way to go out of the camp, and then in some good opportunity, we would run away. But Ustashas counted those they needed and took the rest of us back to the camp. We saw that we wouldn't succeed in that way, so we changed the plan for escape.

The next day at the same time, we went on the road by the Farm Building and went toward the village of Košutarica. A part of the road went through the camp, but on both sides there were strong Ustasha guards who were continuously following each move of the prisoners from high wooden guard towers. We didn't try to hide from that eye because we were thinking we would be cunning and just walk out. When we were in front of the towers, Ustashas stopped us and asked us, "Where are you going?"

We tried to say that we were from Košutarica and that we were in the village of Jasenovac to visit our cousins and that now we were going back home. We imagined other names, but it didn't help us.† We even pleaded and cried, but Ustashas were saying, "Give us a permit."

"We don't have it. We forgot to take it."

* Milan Šinik and Radojica Pejić were later killed.

† Košutarica was a Croat village. The names the boys "imagined" were Croat names because the Croats in the area were not imprisoned unless they were actively anti-fascist.

"Go back. Go back to camp to the same place you came from," Ustashas yelled at us.

We felt that if we continued our talking to Ustashas, it would be dangerous, so we went back disappointed. But we didn't give up our goal. We made a new attempt.

The next day, we went on the road and then on the bank of the Sava River and tried to sneak by the towers. We succeeded, and we went downstream about 100 meters. And then our hearts froze because of a terrible scream, "Stop." We stopped and turned around. We saw a few Ustashas pointing guns at us. We didn't have anywhere to go. In front of us at a distance of 100 meters was another bunker with an Ustasha crew. On the right was the Sava River, deep and big, and we were weak. And Ustashas were on the other side of the Sava. On the left side was the camp wire.

Seconds were passing. We were standing frozen. Our thoughts were storming through our heads. *On the left, we can't go anywhere. It's wire. If we go forward, those Ustashas in the bunkers will kill us. If we jump in the Sava, it will be death from water or Ustashas' bullets. If we go back, maybe they won't kill us.* We went back.

They hit us with gun butts, and each of us got a few hits. We were falling down, hearing their curse words. They called us Partisans. After the beating, they put us in a line, and three Ustashas with guns pointed in our backs made us go in front of the camp Command. What "heroism." Three Ustashas were herding three boys who were 13 years old. They knew that we didn't have a place to go, but they were parading with us. They had to show how good they were doing their duties in front of officers. They gave us to the Ustasha Lieutenant Dragan Bonza and told him we were trying to escape. Dragan beat us about 20 minutes. He slapped us, pulled our hair and ears, and the worst was when he took our Adam's apple with two fingers and squeezed very hard. He choked us, and when he saw that we were losing consciousness, he would stop a little bit and then do it again. As he was beating us, he was saying, "You want to escape, do you? Well, I'll show you.

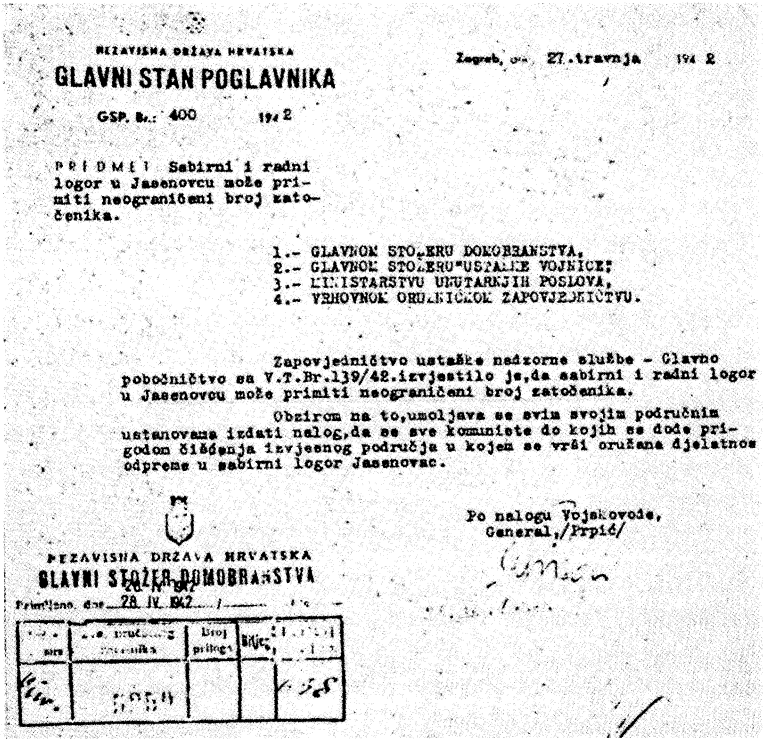
Where would you like to go, to Kozara? Kozara has become a grave for Partisans. I went across Kozara. You will never go there again."

After beating us, he commanded us to wait for him until the night, and he left. We waited for some time, and then we ran away into the camp, not trying to escape again.

From about 400 boys who were herded into the camp in July, 1942, only 54 of us remained. The rest of them had disappeared. The camp was divided into working groups. Each group had a group leader-prisoner who had the duty of leading and organizing production. Usually, they were engineers or technicians. The Ustasha overseers were usually lieutenants. These overseers caused the prisoners to tremble with fear.

From the rest of the surviving boys, I remember that in the Chain Factory, those who were working were Živko Gigović, Rajko Stojaković, Milan Šinik, Drago Bjelovuk, and Desimir Bajić, and at the Brickyard was Živko Adžićija. Rade and Dušan Šuvak were electricians in the so-called Tunnel, Radovan Popović was in the Turnover Group, and Jovan Gligić was in the Farm Building. In the chemical shop with Ante Bakotić was Levi Samuel (Mile), and in the mechanical shop was Dušan Prelić and Milutin Mirić. Besides these, I know these survived that autumn: Radomir Vidović, Dušan Prpoš, Ostoja Stojaković, Stetozar Čikić, Ostoja Mijić, and Ostoja Popović Bojadžija.*

* Of these boys, eight survived until April 22, 1945. Prelić escaped separately; Gigović, Stojaković, Popović, Adžić, Mijić, Mirić, and Čikić were in the great escaped in 1945. Popović died in the escape, and Čikić died before he reached home. Gigović died in 1982, and Mirić, one of six members of a family of 42 to survive the war, died in 1997.



NEZAVISNA DRŽAVA HRVATSKA
GLAVNI STAN POGLAVNIKA

GSP. Br.: 400 1942

Zagreb, dne 27. travnja 1942

PREDMET: Sabirni i radni logor u Jasenovcu može primiti neograničeni broj zatočenika.

1.- GLAVNOM STOŽERU DOMOBRANSTVA,
2.- GLAVNOM STOŽERU USTAŠKE VOJNICE,
3.- MINISTARSTVU UNUTARNJIH POSLOVA,
4.- VRHOVNOM ORUŽNIČKOM ZAPOVJEDNIŠTVU.

Zapovjedništvo ustaške nadzorne službe - Glavno pobočništvo sa V.T.Br.139/42.izvjestilo je,da sabirni i radni logor u Jasenovcu može primiti neograničeni broj zatočenika.

Obzirom na to,umoljava se svim svojim područnim ustanovama izdati nalog,da se sve komunisteo do kojih se dođe prigodom čišćenja izvjesnog područja u kojem se vrši oružana djelatnost odpreme u sabirni logor Jasenovac.

Po nalogu Vojskovođe,
General,/Prpić/

NEZAVISNA DRŽAVA HRVATSKA
GLAVNI STOŽER DOMOBRANSTVA
Primljeno dne 28. IV. 1942.

Memo from Pavelić's office, written by Gen. Prpić:

Independent State of Croatia
Main Headquarters of Poglavnik [Fuehrer]
[numbers]
Subject: Concentration and working camp of Jasenovac
can accept an unlimited number of detainees.

1. To main Command of Domobrani [Ustasha Home Guard]
2. To main Command of Ustasha Forces
3. To Ministry of Interior
4. To Top Command of Military Forces

The Command of the Ustasha Watch Guard on V.T. No. 139/[19]42 document has issued information that the concentration and labor camp of Jasenovac can accept an unlimited number of prisoners.

Having the above in mind we plead to all local institutions to issue an order that all households we get to during cleansing of certain territory in which there is a military activity can be sent to the concentration camp of Jasenovac.

By command of Military Leader
General Prpić
[signature]

[Stamp]

The Brickyard

After I spent a few days in the central barbershop, they sent me to the Brickyard. The barbershop in the Brickyard was in the same room with the locksmith. The room was 5 meters long and 3.5 meters wide with two doors and one window. One door opened to a big room where there were machines for producing brick and clay shingles, and the other door opened to a machine hall, the so-called Little Factory with a steam engine that was running machines for production and for lighting the camp.

Under the window was the locksmith's desk with two vices and a lot of tools. Next to the desk was a cabinet with the rest of the locksmith's tools. Opposite the window and desk at an angle next to the Small Factory there was a mirror, small hanging shelves, and a chair with movable parts that was used as a barber's chair. There was one small table and a simple bench next to the wall. That was the furniture in the barbershop.

In the corner by the locksmith's desk, on a small chair, there was a water can, and that was the piece of furniture that was shared by the barbers and locksmiths. The wall toward the Little Factory didn't exist, but they made an iron and glass fence. Through these windows, we could see the people who were lighting the fire and their leader—how they were black from the soot from doing their jobs. The doors to the production factory were in use, but one could use even this entrance to the Little Factory. But from the production hall, there were more exits to the Tunnel, toward a stove for baking bricks, then toward the *baer*[*] and the storage buildings and open storage for the drying tiles.

[*] Clay quarry.

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After I spent a few days in the central barbershop, they sent me to the Brickyard. The barbershop in the Brickyard was in the same room with the locksmith. The room was 5 meters long and 3.5 meters wide with two doors and one window. One door opened to a big room where there were machines for producing brick and clay shingles, and the other door opened to a machine hall, the so-called Little Factory with a steam engine that was running machines for production and for lighting the camp.

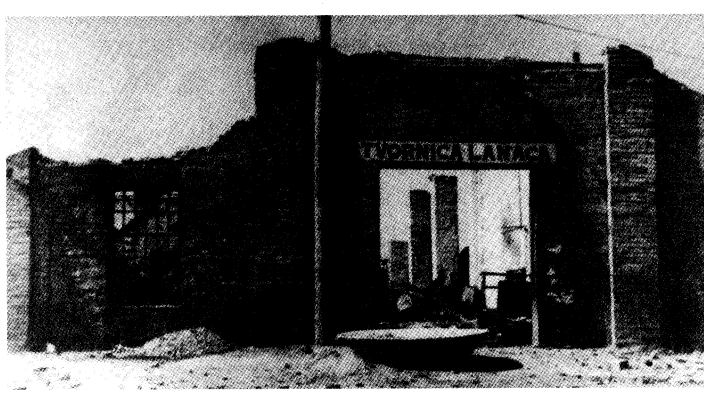
Under the window was the locksmith's desk with two vices and a lot of tools. Next to the desk was a cabinet with the rest of the locksmith's tools. Opposite the window and desk at an angle next to the Small Factory there was a mirror, small hanging shelves, and a chair with movable parts that was used as a barber's chair. There was one small table and a simple bench next to the wall. That was the furniture in the barbershop.

In the corner by the locksmith's desk, on a small chair, there was a water can, and that was the piece of furniture that was shared by the barbers and locksmiths. The wall toward the Little Factory didn't exist, but they made an iron and glass fence. Through these windows, we could see the people who were lighting the fire and their leader—how they were black from the soot from doing their jobs. The doors to the production factory were in use, but one could use even this entrance to the Little Factory. But from the production hall, there were more exits to the Tunnel, toward a stove for baking bricks, then toward the *baer*[*] and the storage buildings and open storage for the drying tiles.

[*] Clay quarry.

A small railroad passed through the hall, and prisoners pushed small carts with bricks and tiles that weren't yet baked to the storage building to dry there. All day, every day, we worked 11 hours, and we could hear the sound of tiles going to the railroads and the vibration of machines that were mixing clay and making bricks and tiles. Storage buildings for drying unbaked tile were continued into the producing hall. They were about 50 meters long and about 8 meters wide. They were connected to each other so the tile didn't get wet when it was transported in the rain.

The railroad passed through the middle of the hall, and free space between the storage buildings was used for drying bricks that were put in stacks. There was a roof above the stacks. About 20 meters from the producing hall, parallel with the Tunnel in which the carts came to load the finished product, there was a stove for baking brick and tiles. In the continuation of the tunnel, a little bit left, there was a carpentry shop, and the chain building was near the command center of camp. Next to the small factory, opposite the barbershop and locksmith shop, there was a chemical shop where Ante Bakotić, organizer of the escape from Jasenovac, and Petrović Savo from Osijeka worked. With them at their trade was my friend Levi Samuel (Mile). There at the Brickyard was the place where I lived and worked, where I spent about 1,000 days.



Ruins of the Chain Factory. (Lukić 35)

The Baer

Clay for bricks and tiles was dug from the *baer*. (That's what they called the big hole that was made during years of digging clay.) Prisoners the Ustashas thought were more dangerous because of their politics worked in the *baer*. Usually, people who worked there were there because of punishment, while the work in other groups was like a privilege. Conditions for work were incredibly hard and inhumane. Men worked all day digging wet clay and loading it in special carts that a special engine with iron chains pulled into the producing hall. They had to work in all weather conditions—muddy, wet. Skinny and with chains on their legs, they looked like phantoms. The Ustashas had whips in their hands all of the time. They were watching these poor people and were whipping them for any reason.

Worse than overseers, Ustashas who were punished were sent to guard the *baer*. They were real beasts and would stop at nothing. In order to prove that they were dedicated to the Ustashas' politics, they tortured prisoners in countless and merciless ways. They were always trying to make prisoners' lives more miserable.

Boards were placed in the hole, across which wheelbarrows full of clay were pulled. Ustasha guards would put mud and water on these boards so people would fall down in the mud. Then the guards would hit them with shovels and then hit them to prevent them from coming out of the mud. But when a man somehow managed to stand up, the guards would push him back, laughing at him sarcastically and sadistically enjoying his attempts to save his life.

The Ustasha overseer would smile, satisfied, watching the show. And after some time, he would give the command to leave him alone. Muddy, wet, and exhausted, the man had to

continue his work until the evening when the problem was how to clean himself and get dry. The chains on his legs made that especially hard. The problem was then how to take off his pants and underwear to wash them, dry them, and then wear them again. The man would take off pants like this: He would pull his pants down to the chains that were at the ankles. Then slowly, he worked one leg of the pants through the shackle. He pulled like that, trying to put it through until he was able to get his foot out of the pant leg. And then he took that side of the pants through the shackle, and now the leg was naked. When he finished one leg, the process was repeated with the other, and that's how they took off pants and underwear. While they were putting on the clothes, the process was turned upside down. Prisoners who were in chains learned how to put on and take off their clothes, and, curiously, they could do it very fast.

The punished Ustashas were real monsters in the camp, especially in the *baer*. They got special food. They even had a special building where they lived. We ran away from them, avoiding them like the devil runs from the cross. Without any reason, they tortured prisoners, exhausting them and killing them in the end. Their appearance was different from prisoners because they were well fed, and they wore the obligatory Ustasha hats with the "U" symbol. From their ranks, they made some agitators that they put among prisoners, trying to discover communists.

Fear of Spys

Because new prisoners came to the camp every day, it was hard to discover the Ustasha spies. So everyone was careful around new prisoners. In a fight for existence, no one believed anyone. Trust and friendship were made really hard, but once you made it, it was unbreakable. My master told me,

"Son, don't tell anyone who you are, where you come from, and why you are in camp. Don't mention Partisans and communists. It can cost you your head. Be careful, even with those who have chains on their legs. Ustashas can have that. Especially, be careful of those prisoners who are not skinny. A fat prisoner is not a real prisoner. Usually, he is a provoker. Ustashas are feeding him secretly. That's why he didn't lose his weight. Here, walls have eyes and ears. If you don't know how to talk smartly, then smartly be quiet."

Fear of spies, not without reason, was like that. We were closed-mouth around any prisoner who looked just a little bit physically normal. It often happened that during the night the Ustashas took some prisoner who was talking freely about the war. It was enough just to mention Partisans or Russians and night would swallow him.

Fear was driving the camp—fear of overseers, fear of punished Ustashas, fear of spies. We were afraid of even our shadows. Prisoners hated spies more than the worst criminal slaughterers because the criminal is known. You can see him. A man can hide from him, avoid him, or run away. But spies are changed into prisoners, and it's hard to recognize them. They are with us. The spy came in secretly like some hard, incurable illness. They were spies and prisoners who stumbled ethically, and in a desire to save their skins, they betrayed their fellow-sufferers. They were the hardest to discover, and when

they were discovered they were ostracized. No one would talk to them, and often they would have an "accident" and die.

(Above) Serb boys to be converted to Catholicism and made into Luburić's version of "janissaries," the term for the Serb children stolen by the Turks, converted to Islam, and sent back to fight their Serb families. (Lukić 85) (Below) Serb boys from Kozara at the Jastrebarsko "re-education" center, training to be Ustashas. (Kozara) "A good Ustashi," [Pavelić] told his men, "is he who can use his knife to cut a child from the womb of its mother." (Bailey 87)

At the Trade

In the shop where I was working, three more prisoners were working: Milan Bosanac, my master from Grubišno Polje near Daruvar; Stjepan Mlinarić, who was also from Daruvar, and Herman Štain [Stein] from Zagreb. Stjepan and Herman were locksmiths, and they worked on fixing machines and tools in the Brickyard.

Master told me which jobs I needed to do, and those were cleaning the shop, throwing away the trash, bringing the water and other things. He gave me an old straight razor and a stone on which to sharpen it. He showed me how to do that and asked me to do it all the time. When a customer—a prisoner—came, I would put soap on him, and Master would shave him. All the time, I had to watch how my master was doing his job. That's what he wanted me to do, and he was really stubborn in his quest to teach me how to work as soon as possible.

I understood the job quite fast, and in a few months, I started shaving people. When there were no customers, I worked with Stjepan and Herman. That's how I learned two trades—barber and locksmith. My job wasn't hard. I was always dry and under the roof, and I was surrounded by three prisoners who each gave me a parent's love and attention. I was especially close to Stjepan, who was like a father to me. I would sometimes get angry with Master Milan because of his perfectionism and determination really to teach me the barber's trade. He was authoritarian, and I was stubborn. I couldn't understand why, in that evil, he wasn't more tolerant toward me. I sometimes even fainted from hunger, and he wouldn't let me go to the baker where I could plead for a piece of bread. I complained to Stjepan, who comforted me:

"He's not a bad man. He doesn't wish you evil. He wants to teach you, and when you learn how to do the barber job,

you will be more needed in the camp, and with that you will have a better chance of surviving."

"He hates me," I said.

"No. Why should he hate you? He loves you. He is just hiding that."

Not too long afterward, Master got a parcel. I was thinking that he wouldn't give us anything, but he divided almost everything with us. He told me especially, "Take some. You are still young. At least eat a little now. Who knows what we can expect tomorrow."

From that time, it was easier to stand his perfectionism. I understood that he was my friend.

Compared to the work in the *baer* and at the bank of the Sava River, the work there was good, and if not for the hunger and fear of liquidation, it would have been tolerable. But Ustashas were there to make our lives worse. Every day, the Ustasha overseer at the Brickyard, Rajko Metlaš, made my life worse. He told me that he stepped across Kozara and that Kozara had become a grave of Partisans. He kept asking me where my father was and if he was Partisan or something. He was "teaching" me how to meet customers and said, "When a customer comes, you have to say, "Good afternoon. How are you? What do you want? Hair cut? Shave? Moustache trim? Here you are." He told me to repeat these things a few times, and then he left.

To whom do I say "How are you?" I was thinking. *Hungry, exhausted, and completely stripped-of-their-rights men who come to the barber shop, not because of the shave or hair cut but to take a short rest?* When the overseer left, a prisoner came through the door. I was quiet. Behind the prisoner, the overseer Rajko was coming back in.

"Why didn't you do like I told you?" he asked me.

"Sir, this man is shaved and his hair is cut. That's why I didn't ask," I tried to excuse myself. He didn't accept my excuse. He pulled my hair and banged my head against the wall and yelled, "You have to ask each man what he wants,

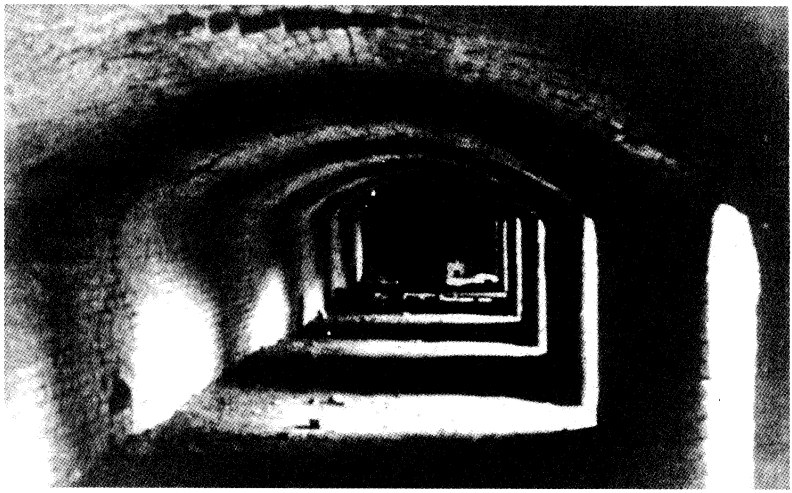
Bosnian hard-head. Remember that in your head, or I will break your head against the wall."

He came everyday and did the same thing for several days. He was persistent, and I, again, was stubborn. My forehead was blue from bruises, but still I didn't greet customers like Rajko told me except when he was there. Fortunately, that autumn of 1942, he disappeared somewhere and the torment stopped.

I learned basic barber's skills quite fast, so I became Master's right-hand man. And with the locksmiths, I was making cigarette lighters that we traded for cigarettes. Cigarettes were like money in camp. You could get almost everything for them. For one cigarette you could get a cube of sugar, and for five cigarettes you could get 100 grams of bread.* (That was the bread that prisoners were given daily.) For ten cigarettes you could get used pants or a shirt, and for 20 cigarettes you would get a winter coat. Everything had its value expressed in cigarettes. In the free time from 6 to 9 o'clock in the evening and during Sundays, prisoners sometimes came in the shop and played a card game called *anjc*.† The main organizer of playing cards was Stjepan. While they were playing cards, I was watching them and was like a servant to them. I would bring them water and light the fire, and I was the guard. For my services, I would get a cigarette from the one who was winning the game. That's how I was a passive player who couldn't lose. I got just a little bit—my winnings were small but safe. Sometimes my winnings were 10 or even more cigarettes, and it was an important bonus to my diet. I traded everything for bread because smokers would even give up a little bit of bread to get a cigarette.

* One hundred grams equals about four ounces.

† *Anjc* is the phonetic spelling of the German word *eins*, which means "one."



The Tunnel (above) in the Jasenovac Brickyard where those chosen to burn in the stove (below), called "Pičili's Furnace" by the prisoners, waited for death. (Lukić 192-193) The stove was mainly used to burn bodies of women and children; however, Egon Berger testified that he had heard the shrieks of live victims, and another witness overheard Ustashas brag about burning live victims. (Croatian State Commission 78-79).

Cutting the Hair of Ustasha Soldiers

One time, I think it was the winter of 1943, they picked Master Milan and me to shave and cut the hair of Ustashas—the whole *satnija.*[*] Ustasha guards took us to the building next to the women's camp where the *satnija* was temporarily situated. We took the tools and other equipment that we needed and began working. We were shaving all of them and trimming their hair. I was putting soap, rinsing them, putting on lotion, and combing their hair, and Master was shaving them and trimming their hair. It lasted until the evening because there were more than 100. We had lunch together with the Ustashas. They gave us our main meal, a soldier's meal, so we could eat as much as we wanted. I hadn't eaten so much since I was taken from my home. Most of the Ustashas went to take a rest after lunch, so we didn't have such a long line, and we could take a little rest, too.

I was walking through a quite big room, looking at the surroundings through the windows and thinking about freedom. Suddenly, I noticed two hand bombs on the window. *Hand grenade* is what they called them. Their body is in the shape of a cylinder, as a can, with wooden handles that were about 20 centimeters. I knew these were bombs because I had seen Partisans with them. Master was shaving an Ustasha who was turned in the opposite direction of the window where the bombs were. I was looking at them curiously, and then I went closer to them and was touching them with my hands. I got an idea—to steal them. *Maybe they forgot they were there. They have a lot of them, so maybe they won't notice,* I was thinking. *But where can I hide them, and how can I take them into the*

[*] *Satnija* identified a unit of Ustasha troops. Many new words were created by the Ustasha to differentiate their language from the Serbian language.

camp? I mustn't do that. If they catch me, they will execute me. Maybe I could wrap them in the shaving cloth I put on customers and put that in the tools. Maybe they won't search me. And if Master sees, what will he say?

A lot of things were in my head—many reasons for and against. But I couldn't separate from the bombs—like a child with a really coveted toy. I was acting like I was looking through the window, but actually, I was staring at the bombs. I think Master read me, and he called me and gave me the task to sharpen the straight razor. When he finished shaving and the Ustasha went out, we were alone. Master asked me, "What's wrong with you, Son? Are you crazy? Why are you nosing around those bombs on the windows? Maybe they left them on purpose to test us. Don't put your head in a bag.* Both of us could be killed. I didn't answer anything. I was quiet, wondering how he knew my thoughts.

Again, a lot of Ustashas came for shaves and haircuts. We were tired. *How many more of them?* I was thinking. *When will they stop coming?*

My attention was turned to a quarrel between two Ustashas. One was big, huge, and the other one was average. The big one slapped the smaller one, and the smaller one didn't slap him back. He shrank back—he surrendered. When the big Ustasha went out of the room, the others started talking about how to get him. I guess the big one attacked his colleagues often. Soon the big one came back. As soon as he made just a few steps, we heard the comment, "Now."

On that sign, eight Ustashas jumped on him and put him down, holding his legs, arms, and head, and one of them sat on his chest and took out a knife, telling him, "You have hit us enough. Now we are going to slaughter you."

The big one was pleading with them and giving them promises that he wouldn't attack them any more. Obviously, he knew who he was talking to. As a reminder, they cut off a

* Expression that means "Keep your head on your shoulders, and don't risk so much."

little bit of skin on his neck and then left him. Master stopped the bleeding, and that was the end of the show.

While the Ustashas had been settling accounts among them, I was frozen from fear. I believe Master was, too. I was thinking, *When they are fighting among themselves and want to slaughter each other, what are we to them? They will kill us when we finish the job.*

We could always be killed by some drunk Ustasha, and for that, he wouldn't be responsible to anyone. We were convicts on death row who were living as long as we were needed by Ustasha leaders for some jobs, and when this need stopped, we knew what would happen. They never kept an abundance of manpower.

In the evening, we finished our job and went toward the men's camp. Everything finished well. We even got a few pieces of bread that the Ustashas didn't eat at lunch. At the entrance to the men's camp, guards searched us, found the bread, and took it. We were satisfied and went through the gate and to the shop. In the evening when we went to bed, I thought about the bombs for a long time. *If I had taken them, they would have found them, and now I wouldn't be among the living.*

Above: Building destroyed by the Ustashas on the night of April 21, 1945, before they fled from the camp. (Nikolić) Below: Workers on the "dam of death." (Lukić)

The Dam of Death

The concentration camp of Jasenovac was in an area where floods were common events when the Sava River rose, so the area was protected with dams. These dams were small and in just some places, so the Ustashas made the decision to build a new dam that would protect bigger sections of land. That's how the building of the dam started on the east side of camp. The prisoners called it the "dam of death." All day, exhausted and hungry prisoners were digging the ground, loading it into wheelbarrows, and with their last strength, pushing them to the dam. Almost all of them were barefoot and in rags that were hanging on their skinny bodies—live skeletons.

Skeletons walking,
Chains clanging,
Legs captured in chains,
Slaves are building a dam of death.
Beaten with whips, they are working and working.
Slaves are tripping, the skin holding the bones,
And Ustashas' whips are burning naked backs.
"I mustn't fall down," a skeleton whispers to himself.
"I wouldn't get up from this mud."

Every day the hard job with little food was exhausting prisoners to the extreme that many of them were falling down from exhaustion and famine, and they couldn't get up. First, Ustashas would try to make one get up with whips, and when they saw that the poor man couldn't stand up, an Ustasha would order the rest of them to put dirt on him and bury him. That's how live people were buried and built into the dam. Even the Ustashas were worried about someone seeing human parts sticking out of the dam. They paid attention to make sure

buried prisoners were hidden from view. But often it would happen that human parts were peeking from the dam—human parts like a human hand or arm or leg.

Each slave on the dam knew that he mustn't fall down, or he would be buried alive. And that's why, in a fight for existence, he was sucking the last atom of strength to stay on his legs.

Even here they were using the already tried way of torturing from the *baer*. They were making boards wet so they were muddy and slippery, and that's how more miserable people would fall down into the mud and never stand up again. They weren't satisfied with just killing prisoners. They were trying to torture them as much as possible, so they wouldn't die immediately but gradually. That's how they were acting at the dam of death. That dam was designed more for slaughtering than for protecting from floods. No one will ever know how many patriots left their bones in that dam.*

* "Maks Luburić, organizer and commander of all Ustasha camps of genocide, said that 'the ISC policy is to execute all Serbs without mercy.' Ljubo Miloš testified at his war crimes trial, "Our objective was total liquidation of Serbs within the ISC, followed by liquidation of Jews and Gypsies and of all others who opposed the Ustasha State." (qtd. in Bulajić)

Postcards of My Hope

After a few months in the camp, we got postcards, which we could send to our families just to tell them we were alive. On them was written that the card was a prize for a good job and obedience, and that it gave a right to get parcels. We could write only 20 words, and the same thing for the other part of the card that was for the reply—they couldn't write over this limit of words. For a long time, we thought about how to say as much as possible with 20 words that would be clear to the person who would get the card.

I sent the first postcard to my mother, hoping that she was at home, but I didn't get a reply. When I got another postcard, I sent it to my sister Mara, who was married and in the next village. I didn't get a reply, so next I sent one to Aunt Stajka Zmijanjac in Miloševo Brdo. *What is wrong?* I was thinking. *There is no one alive?* I was afraid that everyone was killed. In the evening when I lay down, for a long time I thought about my family. Those imaginings went from the darkest suspicions to the lightest and the dearest things. Dark suspicions were coming.

Sometimes I saw ashes instead of the home where I was born. *My house is burned, and there is only powder and ashes left. Everything is overgrown in grass. There is no one alive. Domestic animals are half-wild, wandering through ashes and unharvested fields of corn. Dogs in packs are chasing chickens, hunting them and eating them, and in the night they are barking and suddenly howling like they are crying above the graves of their owners. They express their sadness with long, night howling that echos spookily through the deserted villages of Podkozarje. Everything is deserted. Villages are*

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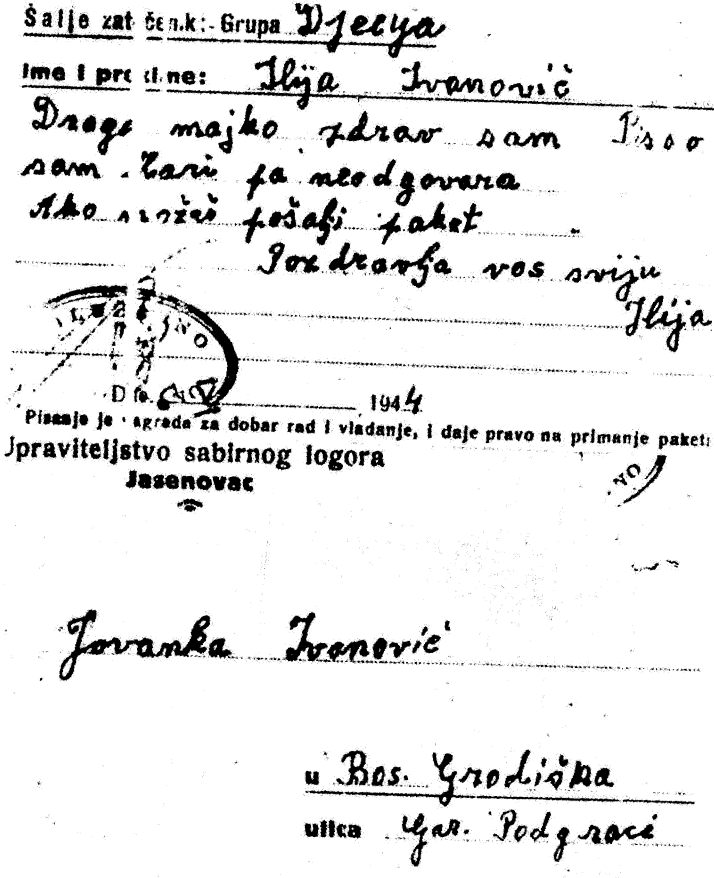

Šalje zat čenik: Grupa Djecija
Ime i pre ime: Ilija Ivanović
Drage majko zdrav sam Pisao
sam Mari fa nedgovara
Ako možeš pošafi paket
Pozdrafa vos svoju
Ilija
D [illegible] 1944
Pisanje je nagrada za dobar rad i vladanje, i daje pravo na primanje paketa
Upraviteljstvo sabirnog logora
Jasenovac
Jovanka Ivanović
u Bos. Gradišku
ulica Gar. Podgrace

(The card identifies the prisoner as from the "Children's Group" and notes at the bottom that the privilege of writing the card is a "prize for good work and behaving, and it gives a right to get a parcel.")

Ilija wrote to his mother Jovanka Ivanović:

Dear Mother,
I am healthy. I wrote Mara, and she didn't answer. If you can, send me a parcel.
I am saying hello to everyone.
Ilija

dead. You can't see drifting smoke from the chimneys on the houses that haven't been burned. There is no one to light the fire. There is no one from my family. They are killed.

Like through ethereal fog, I could see a big grave, and in it human bodies were thrown in disarray—women and children. Among them I saw my mother, father, brothers, and sisters. *They are killed,* I was thinking.

No. They are not. It's impossible. They are alive. I tried to avoid dark suspicions, and in front of my eyes, brighter and nicer pictures were coming:

I could see the home where I was born, surrounded with fruit trees, behind the Bukovica stream where our mill was grinding. I could hear the sound of water and the mill wheel turning around and the whistling from the little water splashes. My mother was going down the stairs that was leading her to the mill. She was calling my brother, who was in the water catching fish.

"Nikola, get out of the water. You need to herd the animals to the pasture." Zorka was hoeing the beans in the garden. Koviljka and Seka were tending the flower garden, and my dad was making handles for hoes. Šarov, the dog, was cheerfully wagging his tail. Sometimes he came out of his small house and called us with his "Arf, arf." Everything was nice and cheerful, just like before the war. *But I'm not with them.* I began to cry. I wished I could cry aloud. It would be easier for me. *Why are they not answering my letters?* I wondered and immediately found an excuse. *For sure, they lost my letter somewhere in the post or on the road. It is a war.* After a long imagining, I fell asleep on the improvised pillow that was wet from tears.

The coming of a new day took me back to reality. The fourth postcard, again, I sent to my mother, and finally, I got the long-awaited answer. I was so happy to get the postcard. It was easy to read—only twenty words, together with the address, but twenty precious words, words that were coming from my mother, written by my sister's hand—words from freedom. It was the first news from the area of my birth. I

discovered that all of them were all right, and that Jevko came home, but in the end, they asked about my father, whether I knew something about him. He was not at home, and he was not here. I remembered that he had soldier's pants under civilian pants when we were caught in Kozara. I don't know why he didn't throw them away, because it was very dangerous for him. Anyone who had anything from a soldier's uniform on him was considered a guy from the rebels.

For sure, they discovered him, I concluded. With that, everything was clear. *They killed him.*

Carrying my postcard, I ran to the building of the Turnover Group, and I couldn't keep from crying. I was crying loudly, so prisoners came out of the shops and asked me what happened. I told them, "My father is gone." And I continued to the Brickyard where Stjepan and Master Milan comforted me with the words, "Don't cry, Son. Your father is probably herded to Germany to work. He will be back. You will see."

A few days later, I got the first parcel. I was so happy.

My Brave Mother

When they separated me from my family in Jablanac, my mother and my younger brother Nikola and sisters Koviljka and Ranka (Seka) stayed a while in Jablanac, and then all of them were herded toward Jasenovac. With them in Jablanac was my father and older sister Zorka, who escaped from Jablanac with Jevto Ivanović to Gređani. My father was kept in Jasenovac, and there we lost his track.

My mother had succeeded in protecting—hiding—children, and in that way no one took them. And that's how in transport with other people, she was herded to the village of Jasenovac through the train station and then herded into a train that was meant for transporting animals. They traveled a few days in the boxcars that were closed, and they had no food and water. Then they came to Slavonska Požega. There they were spread around villages where they worked for Slavonia's [Croat] peasant people. In most cases, the peasant people didn't pay them. They worked only for food. Because my mother had three weak children four, seven, and nine years, she went to work every day, and in that time, the three of them were waiting for her to bring a hidden piece of bread that she succeeded somehow in hiding in her breast or that was given to her by peasant people. Some folks were compassionate, and they invited the children into their yard during the day. Some of them also fed them. They slept in animal stalls and hay.

In the evenings when mother came back, they ran to meet her, anticipating sharing whatever food she had. One family took Koviljka because she could do some work. She was nine. But Nikola and Seka, no one wanted. One evening when my mother came back a little later from her work, she met one Slavonian from the neighborhood who scolded her. "Snašo

[informal address to woman], "Do you want the only boy you have to be ruined?"

"How do you mean *ruin*?" mother asked him.

"Do you know where he is?" the Slavonian continued.

"I don't know. He stayed in the yard. Tell me, what happened to him?" mother asked impatiently.

"I was going across that field," the Slavonian continued, "and I saw a whole pack of dogs around a stack of hay. They were barking and barking at a dug hole in the hay. I pushed them away and peeked inside the hole. I saw your Nikola crouched in the hole. He was sobbing quietly. I took him from the hole and took him to neighbor Stevo. Go to him. I think he has a temperature. He's burning with fever."

Mother said "Thank you" and went to Nikola. He was ill.

In that village, Big Londžica, mother stayed with the children about one month, and in that time, she found a family that was willing to care for the children temporarily. My mother was working for the peasant people for a crust of bread. Sometimes, someone gave her a little bit of money. On Sundays and other holidays when she was not working, she

Women being taken to work in fields after their children were taken.

was trying to collect money so she could go on a trip to find me. The mayor of the village helped her get permission and she went searching. She went to Zagreb, Sisak, and Jastrebarsko. In Sisak, she found her sister's four-year-old son Vlado Popović from Donji Podgradaci, and she took him with her. Fortunately, she didn't come to Jasenovac to look for me. *And if she had come?* . . .

When she came back to Big Londžica, she discovered that many people were going to Bosnia. That's how, after some time, when she earned and begged enough money for the trip, she left Slavonia with the four children.

She walked from village to village with rags on her back and with children on her skirt. That's how she reached the bridge that crosses the Sava, connecting Stara Gradiska and Bosanska Gradiska. A Croatian *domobrani* lieutenant secretly drove them across the Sava in a truck. That's how they got back to Bosnia and happily went home to Podgradaci on foot.

On June 12, 1942, 2,500 women were deported from the Stara Gradiska camp to work in Germany, leaving their children behind in barbed wire.

Mother and children from Knezpolje cross a field in January of 1944. The woman carries a baby, a few pots, and a quilt on her back. (Kozara; Bailey)

The Intoxicating Smell of the Bread from the Bakery

The camp bakery and grinding mill were in a long building, maybe 50-60 meters long. One end of the building was next to the road by the Sava River. The other end was almost at the *baer*. Behind this building was a so-called Small Lake and a wagon-making shop and other buildings of agriculture. And in front of a pile of neatly stacked boards was material for the carpenters' shop and saw mill.

The brothers Franjo and Drago from Novi Gradiska worked in the bakery.* There were more prisoners in the bakery, but I didn't know them. Besides prisoners and, of course, the Ustasha overseer, each working group of the bakery also had an expert who was a civilian-freeman who came to the camp to work. These civilians, probably to be distinguished from prisoners, had to wear Ustasha hats. In the bakery, was a civilian whose name was Bobec. It was said that he was Slovenian. He was short, fat, and always shaved and neatly dressed with clean shoes and a soulful face that radiated goodness. He was completely opposite the ugly Ustashas—a humane man. He was helpful to prisoners whenever he got the chance. The Ustasha overseer was Luka Čop. He was rough, strutting, of average height, and his look was hateful.

That intoxicating smell of bread was spreading around the camp and making us crazy with hunger, so we were dazed with the smell and forgetting the dangers that were lurking around us. We went to the bakery and back for just a little crumb or crust that had fallen on the floor. I think that

* Franjo and Drago were Croats, probably imprisoned because they were anti-fascists, or communists.

prisoners who were working in the bakery would make "mistakes" on purpose—broken bread, a little bit burned—in order to give it to those who were brave enough to come into the bakery. We boys who had opportunities to go to the bakery during the time when we were working had more chance to get a crust of bread than adult prisoners. Pulled by the smell of bread, I discovered the bakery, and one day after staring long and hard, I got enough courage to go in there.

I'm going in there no matter what happens, I said to myself. *I guess they won't kill me.* I couldn't stand the hunger anymore. Desire for bread was stronger than fear of Ustasha overseers. I took my hat off and went in. The first thing I saw were prisoners who were taking baked bread from the oven with wooden shovels. They were skilled at that and immediately put the bread in big baskets. Two prisoners were carrying the baskets into a smaller room. One of the prisoners gave me a sign with his eyes to come in there. I went in there and said "Good afternoon" and immediately added, "Can I get a little bit of bread, please?"

There were Franjo and Drago, prisoners, and Bobec, freeman. I was afraid in front of Bobec. He had the Ustasha hat on his head. But in a mild voice, he called me to come closer and said, "Son, don't be afraid. There are no Ustashas here. He noticed that I was looking at the hat on his head. He continued, "I have to wear this hat. I was ordered to. I am not Ustasha." Then he took a big piece of bread and gave it to me. It was almost a half-kilo, and that was a portion for five days for one prisoner. It was a big—for the conditions, incredibly big—winning. I told them, "Thank you," and started to leave, but Bobec stopped me.

"Wait a little bit," he said. "Don't carry the bread like that. Hide it under your hat so other people won't see. And next time when you come here, make a pocket. Here." He showed me an inside part of my coat. "Tear the lining, and that's where you will hide what we give you. And remember one more thing. Never come into the bakery when overseer Luka is here. That's an evil man. He could kill you. Whenever you

come, hide between those piles of boards and wait until I appear at the window. If there are no Ustashas in here, I will give you a sign with nodding, so you can come in. But if Luka is in here, I will shake my head. Then run. And now you can go."

I told them, "Thank you" and went to the exit door, and Bobec shouted, "Get out, you Partisan bandit!" I was surprised with the change, but I understood. He was afraid of spies.

The next day I went to the front of the bakery. I found a hiding place between the piles of boards from where I could see the window and Bobec when he appeared there. The important thing was that he noticed me, too, so he could give me a sign. Anxiously, I awaited the appearance of that dear face. Even the Ustasha hat on his head didn't bother me anymore. I didn't even notice.

I saw Bobec walking behind the window. I started coming out of the hiding place, and he could see me, but then he went somewhere inside. Obviously, he didn't notice me. I was waiting, but my stomach was growling, and the smell of bread was making me dazed and making my mouth water.

I don't see that terrible Ustasha Luka Čop. Probably he is not in there, I concluded and started toward the bakery. But after two or three steps, I stopped and went back to the protected place.

I will wait a little bit. Bobec will appear. He will see me and give me a sign to come in, I whispered to myself. Bobec did not appear. I stood there a long time—almost an hour.

Master Milan will scold me. He told me to come back quickly, I was thinking, but I did not move from the place—like I was chained to the boards I was leaning on. I didn't take my eyes from the window of the bakery. Suddenly, an unpleasant surprise—. At the door of the bakery, Luka Čop appeared—the terrible Ustasha who was arrogantly walking back and forth. I went back to my protection. I would rather have seen the most dangerous beast or poison snake than him. I hated him from the bottom of my soul. As much as I loved Bobec, I hated Luka.

I went back to the barbershop—disappointed and hungry, more hungry than I was before. Now, it was even harder. I was dazed. Fortunately, Master didn't scold me. He just said, "It was a little bit too much, Son. You should have come back quicker."

In another try the next day, Bobec appeared at the window, nodded to me—that meant there was no overseer, and I went in. I got a piece of bread, put it in the prepared pocket in the lining of my coat, said, "Thank you," and went out. Again, Bobec saw me off with "yelling."

From three to four visits, one ended in my favor. Sometimes it happened that there was no Bobec or Luka, so Franjo would give me bread. One time, I was wandering around outside the bakery, waiting for Bobec to appear, but he didn't, and the overseer didn't either. So I thought that only prisoners were in there, and I went in. When I went through the entrance door and went into the room where the shelves with the bread were, I saw Bobec, Franjo, and overseer Luka standing in there. Then I wanted to go back, but it was too late. I greeted them and asked for a little bit of bread. Bobec and Franjo were silent, but Luka took a piece of bread, grabbed my head, and pushed the bread into my mouth, yelling, "Here! Here's bread! Eat! Screw your Partisan mother!"

He's going to choke me with the bread, I thought. Fortunately, he stopped pushing the bread into my mouth, but he grabbed my hair and almost lifted me off the floor, walking me by the full shelves and saying,

"Smell! Screw your bandit mother. Smell!"

Then he slapped me and kicked my butt and threw me out, threatening, "If you come in here one more time, you won't go out alive!"

I knew that he was telling the truth, so I never ever went into the bakery again unless Bobec or Franjo or Drago gave me a sign.

The Destiny of Miro Jurišić

I first heard about Miro from Gorni Podgradci in August of 1941. Even if we were from the same place, I didn't know him because he wasn't my peer. He was an adult and married to Bogdan Bjelovuk. I remembered his name from listening to the talk of my father and other neighbors under a big walnut tree by the mill. It was a time full of many events that people from our neighborhood in Bukovica couldn't understand—crimes of Ustashas, chasing, torturing, killing, to drive out Serb families to Serbia.* And capturing hostages was in full swing.

Whispered news was coming that up there on Kozara Mountain there were some soldiers who were fighting against the Ustashas. Hunted young men were running away toward Kozara Mountain and bringing the news that Dr. Mladen

* The Ustasha plan was announced early and well known: "Slavko Kvaternik explained [in a radio program on the day of the formation of the Independent State of Croatia, April 10, 1941] how a pure Croatia would be built—by forcing one third of the Serbs to leave Croatia, one third to convert to Catholicism, and one third to be exterminated. Soon Ustasha bands initiated a bloody orgy of mass murders of Serbs unfortunate enough not to have converted or left Croatia on time. The enormity of such criminal behavior shocked even the conscience of German commanders, but Pavelić had Hitler's personal support for such actions which resulted in the loss of lives of hundreds of thousands of Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina." (*Worldmark Encyclopedia of Nations: Europe*. 1995, p. 91, entry: Croatia. Also see *Hitler's Pope*, John Cornwell, Penguin, 1999.)

[I]n April 1941 [s]eparatist Croats of the fascist terrorist organization "Ustasha" set up in Zagreb an Independent Croat regime with Dr. Ante Pavelić as fuehrer, or "Poglavnik," and with Marshal Slavko Kvaternik as minister of war. The new state, organized on strictly fascist and authoritarian lines, excelled quickly by the special ruthlessness and cruelty with which it persecuted, and partly exterminated the large Serb minority and the small Jewish population . . . ." (*Encyclopedia Britannica*: *1943 Book of the Year*, p. 215, entry: Croatia)

Stojanović was the leader of the rebellion. Young men, unmarried, and those who didn't have children were leaving and going to the forests. And when we learned that Miro Jurišić, a Croat, went to Kozara, that made a big echo like the thunder from a bright sky. Except the news that Russia was at war, the biggest sensation was Miro's going into Kozara. I remember my father's words: "Eh-h, folks. Now, I don't really understand anything. Why we Serbs are going to fight is clear, but why is Miro Jurišić when he is Croat and this is a Croatian country now?"

Neighbors and cousins were shaking their heads, but they didn't know how to solve the puzzle. A new word had appeared—*Partisan*, so they kept asking why they were calling the rebels "Partisans." Neither my father nor neighbors knew that Miro was a communist.

Miro's journey was famous, but tragic, and he was brought to the Jasenovac slaughtering place together with his devoted Bogdan. As the commissary of a group of troops, he was shot in the fourth and captured in fifth offensive. German's captured the group and gave them to the Ustashas, who drove them to Jasenovac.

As an "old" prisoner, I was allowed to get a parcel from home, and it contained a few kilos of flour. At that time, Ustashas permitted us to exchange flour for bread in the bakery. The bakers knew me and sent me to the mill to find Miro, who would give them flour, and they would give me bread.

I didn't know who Miro was. I found him and told him that Franjo and Drago sent me. Both of us were really surprised when we discovered that we were from the same place. Miro knew my father very well and knew my mother and sisters, too. We became good friends. Whenever he could, he gave me a little bit of flour to take to Franjo, and then Franjo would give me some bread. Unfortunately, that didn't last long. Soon Ustashas put Miro in solitary confinement, tortured him, and in the end, hung him. It happened a few days before the exchange of captured Partisans for German officers.

Terrible Torturing

In camp, everything was known about how Ustashas were torturing prisoners, especially captured Partisans and communists. Ustashas didn't make an effort to hide it. The crazy sadists enjoyed our suffering, and they were trying to scare us and to kill us psychically. They were threatening, "We will put you in solitary among lice! We will let them suck your criminal blood gradually, and it is better then to put you under a soldering iron or with a rat." We knew what these threats meant.

They were closing prisoners into solitary rooms that were full of lice. Food and water was drastically reduced. The prisoners were given only one meal per day—a bowl of soup, more salty than it should be, on purpose, so the need for water would be more. And they gave almost no water. Lice were multiplying and were sucking the blood of the miserable man whose life was gradually extinguished. When they noticed that a prisoner was close to the end, they would take him back to the camp where friends would clean him, and pick the lice off, and feed him with food from their own mouths. When the poor man had recovered a little bit in 20 days and came back to life, Ustasha would take him again to solitary and repeat the process a few times until he died.

During the period I spent at the camp, I saw many temporarily liberated prisoners from solitary. All of us were skinny, but they—it was awful to see—were just as skeletons that were walking. Their clothing was white from thousands of lice.

"Putting under the soldering iron" meant burning a man's chest. That was another method of torturing that didn't last as long but was more painful. When they were publicly hanging

a group of communist, we saw their burned chests and scabs that reminded us of the bark on old oak trees.

The worst was torturing with rats. They would tightly bind a prisoner's legs and arms with a board they put across his chest and legs and tie him on the table for torturing. Then they would remove the clothes from his stomach and on his naked body put a rat that was covered with a big iron pan. They would press that kettle with a heavier piece of iron so the rat couldn't turn the pan over, and then they would warm that kettle with a soldering iron. In order to save himself, the rat would claw through the poor man's belly and go into the inside of his stomach. The prisoners said nothing was worse than this way of slaughtering. Cutting off noses, ears, eyes, and stabbing nails under the fingernails and toenails were easier to stand than the rat on the naked belly.*

Every day I went to get water at a pump that was about fifty meters from the solitary cages. One time I saw three Ustashas who were slaughtering a prisoner in this way: The Ustasha who was standing in front put a bayonet on the ground, turning the tip up. Another Ustasha was forcing the prisoner gradually down into a squatting position over the bayonet. The prisoner saw the bayonet as he was ordered to squat down, so he was squatting just partly, trying to stay clear of the bayonet. The other two Ustashas grabbed his shoulders and shoved him down on the bayonet. The horrible scream of the dying man stopped my breath. I grabbed the can of water and left that place.

* Types of torture are documented in the work of the Croat medical doctor Nikola Nikolić, who recorded incidents when at the camp and published his first book about Jasenovac in 1948. Testimonies of survivors, confessions of war criminals, and the explicit policy of torturing while killing are documented also in other works. (See Editor's Sources.)

Salem Has Run Away

In the summer of 1942 when we boys from Kozara were herded to the camp, a group called the "children's group" was formed. Like other working groups, the group had a leader who was a prisoner. Our leader was Mitar Trifunović, nicknamed Učo. He had an obligation to take care of us boys, "tradesmen," and when we were not working in shops, he was giving us "lectures." He had a book from which he read articles that praised Germans and Ustashas. When there were no Ustashas close to us, he would stop reading and talk to us about heroes from epic songs about our people.

Mitar told us all people were equal and that we didn't need to be separated because of religion. Often he repeated, "This evil will pass. Nicer days will come—days of freedom and brotherhood, days of love among people."[‡] We loved him. Mitar was with us only a short time, maybe two months, and then came Salem Resulović as a group leader. We didn't know what happened to Mitar Učo.[†]

Salem was our group leader until he ran away, and it happened in the summer of 1943. That year, quite often, we

[‡] Mitar "Učo" Trifunović (pictured on page 102) was teaching the ideas that was a part of the Partisan movement and later became the foundation of Tito's communism, the idea of "brotherhood and unity" that held Yugoslavia together for 45 years.

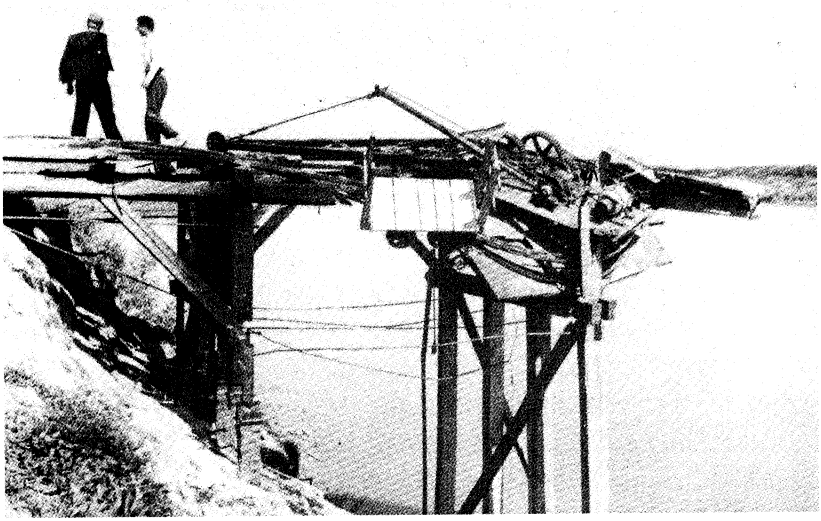
[†] Croat Dr. Nikola Nikolić, who worked in the camp, recorded the story of Mitar Trifunović's conversations with Ljubo Miloš and his death by Miloš' knife after Russians repelled the Germans near Moscow. During the last one, Trifunović was asked by Miloš how he knew that Russia would defeat Germans at Moscow. His answer included, "Germans will never win the war because their war is always immoral, offensive, inhuman. . . ." After another question, Miloš shook with anger at Trifunović's answer and attacked him with his knife. The next morning, prisoners were made to carry Trifunović's dismembered body from Miloš' office.

were led to the forest near the village of Košutarica to scratch moss from the oak trees. When we filled the bags with moss, we went back to the camp. We discovered that they used the moss when they were making boats. They put it between boards so water couldn't come into the boat. Usually ten boys went with Salem as a group leader and three or four Ustashas who followed us. When we came to the forest, Ustashas marked the boundaries of movement and commanded us not to go more than 50 meters from the place, threatening they would kill all of us if someone ran away or tried running away. Then they sat in a shade with Salem, and from time to time, one of them would come to see what we were doing.

We were naive, afraid, and loyal and were scratching the moss from the tree trunks and filling the sacks, not trying to run away. Honestly speaking, all of us except Salem could have run away. The forest was thick, and at the distance of 50 meters, tree trunks were hiding us, so we could have gone far away from their field of vision completely unnoticed and caught the so-desired freedom. I thought about running away and talked to my friend Dušan Prpoš about it, but we didn't have enough courage to do it. We didn't know which way to go. We were completely disoriented and scared that Ustashas would kill the other boys because of us, and uncertainty about success made us hesitate. So, in a daze, we were going back to the camp. Even today, while I am writing these lines, I can't understand why we didn't run away—maybe because we were just kids. But what we didn't do, Salem did.

Salem was a "friend" with the guards. He knew them quite well, and he tricked them. I discovered how he did it later from him after the war. While we were picking moss, Salem, from talking with Ustashas, concluded that they were really greedy and interested in gold things, so he concocted a story about a big pot of gold. He told them that across the Sava River in Bosnia in the house of some rich Jewish man, he found a pot of gold coins and hid it. They believed him, and they made an agreement that one Ustasha would go with him to get the gold. Salem and the Ustasha took off their clothes

and swam across the Sava. Salem was swimming with full power and came out of the water first. When the Ustasha got out of the water, Salem wasn't there. He was lost in hedge fences and fields of corn that hid him from the sight of the Ustasha. The Ustasha quickly understood that he had been tricked but was powerless to do anything because he didn't have a weapon. He started calling his colleagues to help him, yelling, "Salem has run away!" They started shooting toward the Bosnian bank, but after searching the bank, the Ustasha gave up and swam back to the left bank of the Sava. While Salem was hurriedly going toward Prosara and Kozara into freedom, the Ustashas were taking out their anger on us. They beat us all the way back to Jasenovac.



The *Granik* on the Sava River where men, women, and children were killed with mallets or knives and dumped in the water. (Nikolić)

Left: Mitar "Učo" Trifunović. Right: Ljubo Miloš, one of the commanders of the Jasenovac camp and killer of "Učo Trifunović. Miloš, a particularly sadistic killer, was tried for war crimes in 1948. (Nikolić; Bulajić) Many Ustashas and Catholic priests who were later charged with war crimes had already been smuggled to South America via the infamous "Rat Line." (Ross; A&E)

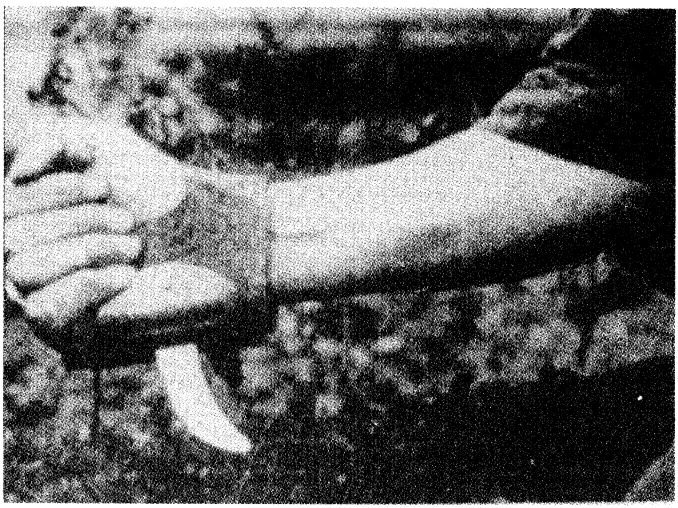
Death because of a Head of Cabbage

Behind the camp kitchen was a big triangular field that prisoners plowed and planted in cabbage. The field of cabbage was separated with only three barbed wires, so you could easily go through the fence. So hungry prisoners, even against warnings like "Entrance Strictly Forbidden," were stealing the cabbage. It was really dangerous, but famine was stronger than fear, and many succeeded in getting a head of cabbage unnoticed and eating it. On the edge of the field, the cabbage was thinner. It was disappearing during the day, because during the night, prisoners weren't allowed to come out of the buildings. We ran out of soap for shaving in the barbershop, so Master sent me to the central barber shop to get some. When I was coming back, I was going down the path that passed by the field of cabbage.

I saw a prisoner go through the barbed wire, enter the field, take a head of cabbage, and go back out. While he was walking back out, he was stripping the cabbage leaves and greedily eating them. I walked slower, hoping that he would come close to me and give me a few leaves, but at the same moment, I was startled by a loud command, "Stop! I'll shoot!" I saw an Ustasha running from the kitchen where he had been waiting to ambush, and he was carrying a gun in his hand.

The poor man with the cabbage was standing frozen, and I continued a little faster toward the Brickyard, following the scene with my eyes and wondering what would happen. As the Ustasha was going toward the man, he put his gun into its holster and said sarcastically, "You want cabbage, don't you? I have been watching you a long time. This will be the last thing you will eat." The poor prisoner was trying to make excuses, telling the Ustasha that it was his first time and that he would never ever do it again. But his pleas were for

nothing. The Ustasha took his dagger, put the prisoner down on the ground, and slaughtered him. There was one scream and then the gurgling, twitching of the slaughtered, and everything calmed down. The head of cabbage was too expensive.



Knife designed for mass slaughter. "It is a curved knife, 12 cm long, its blade on the concave side. It is fixed to a curved oval plate, which again is fixed to a thick leather bracelet. The bracelet has a hole into which the thumb is put while fingers are left free. On its other side the bracelet is fastened with leather straps. I had long pondered on the fact that the blade was on the concave side. Finally, I reached the conclusion that on hitting a victim in the neck, the slaughterer pulled the knife toward himself, thereby cutting all the tissue. At the knife bottom, close to the copper plate, the procer's name was engraved: 'Gräviso'" (Dr. Nikola Nikolić, qtd. from *Jasenovacački Logor* in *Balkan Auschwitz*, Dr. Milan Bulajić, 2000)

"In the concentration camp at Jasenovac, on the night of August 29, 1942, orders were issued for executions. Bets were made as to who could liquidate the largest number of inmates. Peter Brzica cut the throats of 1,360 prisoners with a specially sharp butcher's knife. Having been proclaimed the prize-winner of the competition, he was elected King of the Cut-throats. A gold watch, a silver service, and a roasted suckling pig and wine were his other rewards." (Avro Manhattan, *The Vatican's Holocaust*, 1986, p. 48. During World War II, Manhattan operated a radio station called Radio Freedom, broadcasting to occupied Europe.)

Harvesting the Corn

In the autumn of 1943, Ustashas were herding prisoners to harvest corn in the village of Draksenić near Bosanska Dubica.* The village was next to Gradina, and the west side of the village was on the Una River. It was deserted because people who managed to escape the Ustashas' slaughters ran away to villages under Kozara. Ustashas formed the farm here. The soil was tended by the prisoners from Jasenovac. When the corn was ripe, they drove us every day in big boats down the Sava and Una Rivers to the village of Draksenić. There, under the strong guards, we picked the corn all day.

I remember floating down the Una. The day was bright and cloudless, and the blue sky reflected in the clear water of the Una River. Willows were along the bank, and boats were tied somewhere on the left bank. (The right bank was deserted.) In one boat, some carefree boy was sitting, holding a stick with a fishing line on it. *He is fishing. He is free. He doesn't have a guard behind him. He can even swim if he wants*, I was thinking. *Will I ever be free? Will I catch fish in the Bukovica River near where I was born? Will I be without guards and able to walk freely across the fields under the Ogorelica hill?* I was wondering while the boat was floating down the Una. I didn't see the fisher-boy again, but oh, oh, how I was jealous of his happiness.

* On "Little Christmas," Jan. 14, 1942, Ustashas went from Jasenovac to the village of Draksenić, where mostly women, children, and elderly people were unprotected. Ustashas killed 350 people in the village, 160 inside the Orthodox church in particularly gruesome ways. Details of the scene were reported by soldiers from Krajina, who were first to arrive on the scene. They found in the pile of bodies two women and a child, unconscious but alive. The survivors' stories are in Simo Brdar's *Black Ribbon* and Dragoje Lukić's *They Were Only Children*.

Above our heads, two pigeons flew across. I followed them with my eyes a long time. They were flying toward Kozara. *Eh, if I had wings,* I was thinking, *I would easily fly away*. I kept imagining, *Up there on Kozara is freedom.*

There were many Partisans, more than before the offensive.[†] I remembered a performance that Partisans gave before the offensive in the community center in Gornji Podgradci and part of the song they were singing on the stage:

Jovo, Ivo, and Mujo—Partisans.[*]
We are fighting together, all of us—Partisans.

Without success, I tried to remember all the words of the song, but in my mind, all the time, the same words were wandering, *Jovo, Ivo, and Mujo—Partisans.*

The boat stopped on the right bank of the Una. A few Ustashas were on the bank. From somewhere, about ten more were coming. Ustashas were behind us, getting us off the boat, yelling "Faster, faster!" Those on the bank put us in lines and counted us, divided us into groups of fifteen prisoners, and immediately herded us toward the cornfields. We were picking the corn and carrying it in baskets and sacks out of the field to a clear space by the village road from where other prisoners from the farm group were driving the corn in horse-drawn wagons to the boat. We picked one field, then they herded us to another one, but when we got there, the field was empty. The Ustashas were swearing, "Screw their bandit mothers!" Someone had harvested the corn the night before. We went by a lot of fields that were completely harvested. As we were coming closer to the road from Bosanska Dubica to the village of Orahova, more and more fields were empty. The Ustashas were angry, swearing, torturing us as if we were guilty because last night the youth of Kozara took some corn. As I

[†] The "offensive" is the attack on Kozara by German and Ustasha forces in June, 1942.

[*] Jovo is a Serb name; Ivo is a Croat name; and Mujo is a Muslim name.

worked, I was thinking, *Here, last night, were Partisans. I wish I could hide somewhere and wait until night. Maybe they will come again.*

All day I was picking a suitable place in the hedge fence where I could hide, but nothing seemed to provide enough protection. In the evening, they gathered us and put us back into the boat, and then we floated down the Una to the camp again. The next day, everything was repeated, except I think there were more people on the boat. The Ustashas were trying to speed up the harvesting of the corn. *Who will be faster? The youth of Kozara during the night or we slaves of Jasenovac during the day? Whose harvest will this be?*

Young people and children carrying harvested corn to the Partisans.

We were working. They were hurrying us from field to field. Again we were coming to big fields that were completely empty. I was wondering how to take an ear of corn and carry it into the camp. *In my pocket? I can't put it there.*

They would easily find it, and it would cost me my life. An older prisoner advised me how to do it.

"Which underwear do you have?" he asked.

"Long underwear," I answered, surprised at the question.

"Here, take these two pieces of string and tie the legs under the knees and put the kernels in your underwear—but not too much to be noticed."

I did that and put almost a kilo in each leg. But when we were going back to the boat, the string on my right leg broke, and kernels were going everywhere. I was scared. *If they find that they will kill me and throw me into the Una,* I was thinking in my head. Fortunately, a lot of us were so tightly packed in the small space that the Ustashas didn't notice anything. When we came to the camp, I gave the smuggled corn to Stjepan. He boiled it at the *bukina*,* and we all ate it.

In 1945, after the escape from the camp, I came home and discovered that together with the youth who were picking the corn were my sisters Mara and Zorka. We were all picking the corn in Draksenić. They were working during the night, and I was working during the day. They worked for Partisans, and I for the Ustashas. Often they made jokes with me, telling me that I was like a "traitor" because I was helping the enemy.

* Hole on the upper side of the stove where bricks and tiles were baked. The hole was for loading coal into the stove.

News about the Capitulation of Italy

One day in September of 1943, while we were eating in a field in the village of Draksenić, the Ustashas started shooting from machine guns and automatic guns. Bullets were whizzing on all sides. All prisoners, just like someone commanded them, stopped eating the just-made *polenta.*[*] *Silence.* We were scared. *What is happening?* I was wondering. *Maybe Partisans attacked. Maybe they will liberate us.*

The Ustashas around us were shooting, but in the air, and yelling "Yea, Italy capitulated! Dalmatia is ours!"[†] They were

[*] Corn meal mush.

[†] Dalmatia is the area on the Adriatic coast next to Bosnia and Herzegovina that had been one of the administrative districts of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenians prior to World War II. The population was mixed Slav and Italian, but many Orthodox Serbs had been converted to Catholicism or, at least, had Catholic names. Ante Pavelić, in dealing with Mussolini since the mid-1930's, had agreed not to interfere with Italian control of Dalmatia and had helped occupy the area by eliminating much of the Serb population.

Ruth Mitchell, sister of American General Bill Mitchell, who was in Dubrovnik (Dalmatia) when Yugoslavia fell to the Nazi-Ustasha occupation, wrote, "For now I began to get news from Croatia that told of slowly rising tide of murders, of unrepeatable atrocities, of massacres of defenseless Serbs by beserk-mad Croatians and by Moslems in Bosnian Croatia. In the little back parlors of trusty men, the tales were whispered. I could not believe a quarter of them. Unfortunately, I was soon to know that they were a weak understatement of the truth. Men were to arrive in Dubrovnik itself, hung with strings of Serbian tongues and with bowls of Serbian eyes for sale." (Mitchell 148)

When Italy surrendered to the Allies, Independent Croatia assumed control. After the war, Italy had to surrender its colonies, and Dalmatia went back to Yugoslavia. However, the victorious Tito, a Croat, reduced the number of administrative districts (now Republics) and drew the map for Croatia to include the Adriatic coastline except for one 12-mile stretch that was in the Croat area of Herzegovina. Prior to the war in the 1990's, it hadn't mattered that Dalmatia was under Croatian administration.

happy, and I didn't understand anything. In the evening, when we went back to the camp, I told Stjepan what happened, and he waved his hand and said, "They are fools. Their allies are falling down, and they are happy. Soon, it will be for them the same as for the Italians."

Besides the jobs we worked as tradesmen at different shops, we boys were often taken to do some other jobs, depending on the need. That's why we were taken to the village of Jasenovac to some basement where we worked grinding corn. The work wasn't hard, and we also had opportunities to take the corn into the camp, and we were doing that quite often. We were hiding kernels of corn in the lining of our coats, pockets, legs, and sleeves—a little bit everywhere. We developed a whole system of smuggling, but everything depended on the Ustashas who were following us. Some of them were very rough, and if just one of them was like that, we knew we mustn't take even one kernel of corn.

One time when we were going back, they searched us in the basement, and they found some kernels. They took a branch from a linden tree (special because it is flexible and won't break) and hit us with the branch on the naked buttocks. We had to take our pants and underwear down and bend over a wooden bench, and then they gave each boy 25 lashes with the branch. They took us, bruised and bloody, back to the camp. Even after we got the lashes, we hid the corn again. It was hard to stand the famine, and the boiled corn was so sweet. We were completely aware of risks—get the lashes or succeed.

Going back to the camp in the evening, we went through the village of Jasenovac, and on the way we met some civilians, older women and children. Everyone was staring at us curiously, especially the children. Probably they didn't understand how we skinny, peasant boys could be so dangerous to the Independent State of Croatia.

At the window of a small house, a middle-aged woman with a black scarf on her head appeared with bread in her

arms. We ran to the window. Our followers didn't react. In a second, a whole bucket of skinny hands were reaching for our good woman. She was breaking the bread and sharing it, and we were pushing each other, tripping, and falling down then pushing each other farther from the window in a fight over a piece of bread. Quickly, there was no bread left in the woman's hands, and in a moment, she went back to the house and brought another whole loaf of bread. She shared it with us, and our hands still stayed, reaching toward her.

"Dear children, there is no more," the woman told us compassionately. The Ustashas yelled, and we went back to the line.

Every time afterward, when we were going back from grinding the corn, the woman was waiting for us at an open door, holding bread in her hands. Of course, everything depended on the Ustashas who were herding us. Sometimes, instead of bread, we got lashes, and our good woman would go back in her house, trying to avoid the curses and threats of the angry Ustashas.

(Left) Three notorious commanders of Camp Jasenovac: Stipe Prpić, Friar Miroslav Filipović-Majstorović (called Friar Satan by prisoners) and Jerko Maričić. (Below) A smiling Ustasha chopping off a man's head with an axe. (Paris)

Under the Locksmith's Bench

Sometimes in camp, Ustashas commanded us to line up for a general *nastup*, actually to rank all prisoners. The *nastup* was at the place between the prisoner's kitchen and buildings, usually in the autumn when they had to cut down the number of prisoners or when they lost in a fight with Partisans and wanted to punish us. And every time Maks Luburić came to the camp, we had to have a *nastup*.*

"In *nastup*!" the Ustashas were yelling, and the rivers of prisoners were coming to the designated place. Never did all prisoners come back from the *nastup*. Every time, we were cut by 300 to 500 people. They had a system of choosing that we couldn't understand. We knew only that they kept prisoners they needed for work and these were experts—engineers and tradesmen. A good tradesman had a better chance to live. When they were choosing the prisoners, Ustashas would say they needed a number of workers who would go to another place to work. Each prisoner, when it was his turn, had to say his name, his nationality, where he worked, and what his job was. They were especially looking for Jews, Serbs, and Gypsies. We saw that they mostly took prisoners without trades or who were physically weaker. Everyone knew that the separated were going to die, and that's why waiting in line was agonizing and intolerable.

*Vjekoslav "Maks" Luburic was the authority over camps in the Jasenovac system. Before he went to Italy with Ante Pavelić to train as an Ustasha killer, he had been arrested several times as a common criminal. (Croatian 59) Luburic's sister Nada is the wife of Dinko Šakić, who was tried in 1999 for crimes committed at Jasenovac. Witnesses to Nada's cruelty at the Stara Gradiska camp called for indictments against her, also. (CNN/Time "No Harm Done?" Bernard Shaw; Christianne Amonpour, 7/11/1999).

I was in *nastup* a few times, and each time death went around me, but each time I went back to the barber shop in the Brickyard completely broken and petrified with fear. During the night in my dreams, I would jump from the floor, scream, cry, and try to run away. So Stjepan, Herman, and Master Milan had a hard time waking me up to calm down. To save me from more pain, they decided that in the future they would hide me so I would avoid the *nastup*. It was a risky decision, dangerous to life—theirs and mine. In the event they discovered me, there was only one punishment—death. But death was lurking in the *nastup*, too. Death was an every day thing in Jasenovac, so it was worth a try.

Not long afterward, there was again chaos in the camp. Again Ustashas were yelling "In *nastup!*" Stjepan and Herman quickly started taking the scrap iron from under the locksmith's bench, and when they finished they told me, "Hide in there, Son." I hid under the bench in the corner next to the wall, and they put pieces of iron, of tin, and tools on me and completely hid me.

I was covered with heavy locksmith's bench and metal, and I couldn't get out alone. I was thinking, *What if none of them comes back from the* nastup? Almost like they heard my thoughts and knew what I was afraid of, they said these words of comfort, "Don't say anything to anyone until one of us comes back. I hope all of us won't die."

I heard doors opening and steps that were walking away. I was alone. I was afraid. My heart was beating so loudly that I was thinking someone could hear it even outside of the shop. Going into the *nastup* is awful, but staying alone and helpless wasn't good either. *How long will this hell last?*

For a long time, I was curled up, lying in the corner and listening to each sound. Finally, I heard prisoners under the window of the shop. The doors opened, and Stjepan said to me, "Everything is okay. Don't be afraid. Now, we will get you out of that den.

They took the iron away, and I, completely sweaty, came out. Until the escape from camp, at each *nastup* afterward, I was hiding under the redeeming locksmith bench.*

* Prisoners took risks to save children. The war crimes commission reports the following:

Throughout 1942, Camp 3-C was full of children who were brought to Jasenovac together with their parents.

Upon liquidations, many of the children went astray and lost their parents, and the prisoners adopted those children. Many a prisoner thus hid an orphan without a mother and a father in his barrack, feeding him with food he had deprived himself of. The prisoners who were sent packages with food from home, gave everything they had got to the children.

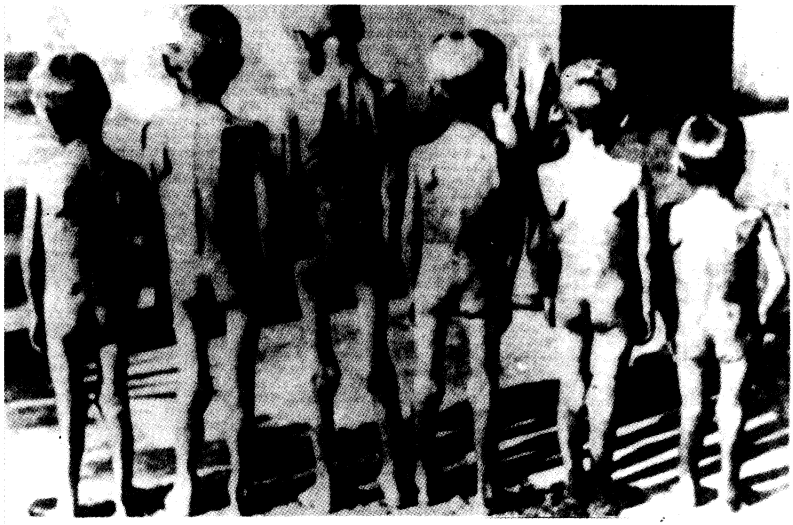
At the end of summer 1942, Luburic noticed that a large number of children was kept in the attics of the workshops and prisoners' barracks. Therefore, he ordered the Ustashas to search the whole camp and collect the children.

Thus, it was found out that there was over 400 children, boys and girls, from 4 to 14 years of age in the camp. Luburic had a council with his "officers" and had all the children registered and accommodated in separate rooms, which the prisoners regarded as a miracle. He found several teachers among the prisoners and trusted them with teaching the children how to read, write and sing.

Thus, the little "orphanage" became the only joy of the prisoners. Their rejoicing did not last long. Ivica Matkovic, Kapetanovic and Ivan Sliskovic were not satisfied with the results in the children's education. It seemed to them that the education was not conducted in the Ustasha spirit as much as it should have been, and besides, they found out that the majority of children were of Serb or Jewish origin.

When Luburic came to Jasenovac, they reported the matter to him, so he ordered that all the children, who had already presented a burden to [the] supplying budget, should be killed.

The Ustashas took groups of 60-80 children to Gradina, where they were slaughtered and buried by the Gypsies. (Section D. Individual Mass Crimes, Article XIV, Croatian State Commission.)



Captives from the Stara Gradiska camp. (Lukić) One such captive was Borislav Prpoš, an artist who still lives in Bosnia. He saw his mother, sister, and six-year-old brother killed on the way to the camp. His brother was killed in such a horrific way that he still cannot discuss it. When he reached the Stara Gradiska camp, he became blind. A Croat worker in the camp hid him under a viaduct, fed him pieces of bread, and finally smuggled him to a family who cared for him until he regained his sight and could safely go home. (Prpoš)

A Prisoner in Ustasha Uniform

Behind the storage building of the Brickyard and Chain Factory, in a space about 100 meters long and 30 to 40 meters wide was an iron scrap yard. Everything there was in disorder—church bells that they took from destroyed Orthodox churches, tin signs where the names of family companies were written—and at the end of that scrap yard by the barbed wire toward the village of Jasenovac was a mechanic shop where an apprentice was working—Dušan Prelić from Miloševo Brdo near Bosanska Gradiska.

Dušan spent almost three years in that shop, together with a few great mechanic masters who were also prisoners. They were fixing motorcycles and motorcycles with trailers. The clever peasant boy Dušan learned quickly and soon started doing the more complex jobs of repairing the motorcycles. Of course, after the repairs, someone had to test the motorcycles, so that's how Dušan learned to drive. He became a real master in his trade. His abilities were not only respected by his prisoner masters but also by Ustashas. That was crucial to his existence in the camp because he was liberated from going to the *nastup*.

In addition to the other soldiers in Jasenovac was an Ustasha motorcycling group that was called the *Brzi Sklop*.* These Ustashas used motorcycles with trailers they had imitated from the Germans, and they were armed with automatic weapons and machine guns. It was an elite Ustasha group. They had everything except a good mechanic that would always be with them. While the *Brzi Sklop* was in Jasenovac, they didn't have any problems with the fixing of

* Translates to "Fast Group" and was a mechanized force based at Jasenovac so as to avoid air attacks (Malić).

motorcycles because they could always find a good mechanic among the prisoners.—that is until the spring of 1945. Ustashas began running away in front of the groups of Yugoslavian armies that were going to the Srem front, so Ustashas were going to the west.* The Ustasha *Brzi Sklop* needed a good mechanic who could be with them all the time. Older prisoners weren't convenient because of the possibility they would run away, so they chose Dušan as the youngest and most suitable person to fill the need. They took him from the camp, gave him an Ustasha uniform, a motorcycle with a trailer, and one Ustasha to be with him all the time, and they all went toward the west.

All of this happened about ten days before our escape from the camp. Of course, we boys didn't know then what had happened to Dušan. We thought they had liquidated him like the others. After liberation, when I saw Dušan for the first time, he told me how he got rid of the Ustashas.

"When they took me from the camp," Dušan said, "I was thinking I would fix just a few motorcycles, and they would bring me back. But they took me to the group, and the officer called me and told me they had decided they would accept me because I didn't cause any trouble. So as a prize, they were liberating me and accepting me as Ustasha. The officer asked me if I agreed with that or if I wanted to go back to the camp. 'By the way,' he said, 'the camp will be destroyed and prisoners liquidated.' I didn't have a choice. I agreed, hoping that somehow I would manage to escape to freedom, but it wasn't easy because someone watched me all the time. They didn't let me go anywhere alone.

* "Srem (Sirmia) is a flatlands area in the north of Serbia (part of today's Vojvodina province). Rather than hit the Germans in the mountains and river valleys in early 1945, Tito decided to launch an attack across open ground in Srem—with horrifying results. Facing German tanks and machine-gun positions with little more than rifles, the Partisans suffered thousands of casualties. Only when the Soviet tanks showed up did the German front collapse and their pullout from the Balkans continue. By this time, the Ustasha military was largely in retreat, and the Partisans were advancing through 'Croatian' territory." (Malić)

"I had all the needed tools for motorcycles, and I fixed any break quite fast. I was trying to show them with my work and my behavior that I was happy, satisfied, and grateful that they took me out of the camp. I had to get their trust and remove every suspicion so their safe-guarding wouldn't be so tight, and I could somehow find the opportunity to run away. The biggest problem for which I couldn't find a solution was the Ustasha uniform on me. When I did run away and come to Partisans, how would I prove that I am not Ustasha? What these beasts did to me—. They didn't kill me, but they gave me a uniform that could cost me my life. For days we were retreating toward Zagreb, and thoughts about escape didn't leave me. Every time we stopped for a little while, I immediately started working on the motorcycles—lubricating them, checking the brakes and other things. In general a mess and fearing for their own skins, the Ustashas were following my behavior less and less, so sometimes I went a little bit further from them, "testing" how a machine was working. I did that quite often, telling them that the motorcycle wasn't working very good, so I had to test it. We would stop somewhere for one or two days at a time and wait until we got the command to go. Then the Ustasha officer would tell us where we could move or how far we could go from the place where we were situated.

"'There on that hill where the road is, there is a wooden bridge across the stream. We have our guards there. We can't go across the bridge. There are bandits.' he said once.

"I decided to run away. I was thinking, *now or never*. I was wandering around the motorcycles while others were lying in the shade. It was a nice, sunny spring day. I started a motorcycle and drove toward the forbidden area. I was coming close to the wooden bridge when I saw two guards. When I was about 50 meters away, they said, 'Stop! Are you crazy? You can't go here.'

"I slowed down like I was going to stop and came real close to them, and at a distance of about 10 meters from them, I pushed the accelerator pedal, put it in gear, and went

between them. When they realized what was happening and started shooting, I was already behind a curve in the road, and small hills and forests protected me. I knew they wouldn't chase me because they didn't have time for that. They were running away.

"After I went quite a distance from the place, I slowed down, tied a white handkerchief on the barrel of the automatic rifle, took off the Ustashas hat, and slowly, very slowly, went forward. At every moment, I was expecting that I would come to a Partisan ambush. That's how I was slowing driving down the road for a long time—maybe 5 to 10 kilometers. And then I met the Partisans.

"Behind the bushes, on the curb of the road, I heard a strong command, 'Stop! Raise your hands. Throw the gun down.'

"I stopped, threw down the gun, and raised my hands. Two Partisans came to me, and a third was lying by a machine gun. One was preparing a bayonet, saying 'Screw your Ustasha mother!' and wanting to slaughter me. Another was yelling at him, 'Stop! What's wrong with you? He's surrounded!'

"I was desperately trying to save myself, explaining that I'm not Ustasha, that I am a prisoner from Jasenovac.

"'Prisoner! Screw your Ustasha mother! Since when are prisoners wearing Ustasha uniforms and carrying weapons?'

"I continued explaining that they took me, and I had to wear the Ustasha uniform because they needed me to fix motorcycles.

"'You're lying!'

"I shut up, thinking about the irony of my destiny. I spent three years as a prisoner in camp Jasenovac dreaming about freedom and Partisans, and now my people were going to kill me. It would be better that Ustashas liquidated me than that my people killed me. In my fear, I couldn't find the right words that could prove to the Partisans that I really wasn't Ustasha. They were still quarrelling.

"'Let me kill him.' I heard the words of the aggressive Partisan. 'Ustashas slaughtered my whole family and burned my house.'

"'Stop. Why the hurry?' another was saying. 'If he proves to be an Ustasha, we will shoot him. We have time. Even the Commander would not forgive him.'

"'I want to make the decision for him.'

"'Well, no,' the third partisan said and commanded that one of them take me to the Commander.

"'I will take him,' the Partisan who wanted to kill me volunteered.

"'No. You will shoot him and say he tried to run away,' said the third Partisan, and he told the one who protected me to take me to the troop commander.

"This one ordered me to put the Ustasha hat on my head, and he sat in the trailer of the motorcycle. He pointed the gun at me and said, 'Drive.'

"I started slowly, and with his instructions, we quickly came to the village and to the house where the commander of the troops was. My follower left me with the commander and told him that I had surrendered and that I was saying that I wasn't Ustasha but a prisoner from Jasenovac. The commander looked at me suspiciously and asked, 'You say that you are a prisoner from Jasenovac?'

"'Yes,' I answered.

"He asked me a few more questions—who I was, where I came from, and how I got to Jasenovac. After that he said, 'Okay, sit on that bench.' I sat down, and he went out for a moment, came back, and sat at his table reading some papers. He didn't pay attention to me—just like I didn't exist. Time was passing, and he didn't ask me anything. Uncertainty was killing me, but I was more peaceful because no one was threatening me. Just from time to time, visitors who came in looked at me hatefully. It was normal that the uniform and symbols that I was wearing were causing that. For almost an hour—maybe more, I was sitting there.

"Finally, the courier came and said to the Commander, 'Those friends are here.'

"'Tell them to come in,' he answered.

"A group of Partisans—five of them—appeared at the door. I immediately recognized three. They had been prisoners, and they had worked in the Chain Factory. They recognized me, regardless of the Ustasha symbols that were 'decorating' me. They came and hugged me, saying, 'Dušan, Brother, are you alive? Where did you get that Ustasha uniform? How did you save yourself?'

"The commander was watching all this calmly and letting us talk a little bit. Then he stood up, came to me, and said, 'Take that shit off of you. Put the star on, and go into the troops.'

"In that moment, no one in the whole world was happier than I was. I became a Partisan. I was lucky that in my troop were ex-prisoners who escaped from the camp on April 22. If they hadn't been there, who knows what would have happened to me, how I would have proven that I was not Ustasha? The Partisan who wanted to kill me when I was surrounded was all the time apologizing, 'Oh, Brother, forgive me! I would have killed you if my friends had let me, and I would have made a huge mistake.'

"I told him that it wasn't his fault, that I understood him. They slaughtered my family, too. We became good friends."

Allies' Airplanes above Jasenovac

We heard a noise that was becoming louder and louder, almost like the earth was shaking and the sky was rumbling. Unused to these sounds, all prisoners that were allowed to leave their working place ran out to see what was happening. The noise was coming from Kozara and Prosara, and it was becoming stronger and stronger and causing more and more anxiety. Above the tops of Prosara Mountain, out of the blue sky, came a lot of vague dots and then a whole swarm. As the light dots came closer, they became bigger and got another shape. It was then clear where that noise came from.

Silence in camp. Everything stopped, and Ustashas on the guard towers were staring at the sky just as we were. Some of the prisoners said loudly, "Airplanes! There are hundreds of them!"

"They are airplanes, but whose?" asked another prisoner.

"I guess you are not thinking that they are German. Their airplanes are in ruins," said a third prisoner.

Soon everything was clear because we heard German anti-aircraft cannons from the hill by Novska. We heard explosives, anti-aircraft projectiles that were scattering close to the airplanes and making small black clouds. Surprised and excited by the appearance of Allied airplanes, we were quietly watching their great flights. They were flying in groups of bombers, and around them, some small airplanes were flying at high speed.

"They are escorts. They are taking care of the bombers," someone said.

I was occupied with counting. I was doing that all the time. That day I counted 365 big and 32 small airplanes. I remember very well.

Soon they were going back. I was staring at them from camp, in awe of them, and imagining myself as a pilot, flying and shooting at bad men. I was jealous of unknown crews and cursing my destiny. *Why am I in this cage? If I were a bird, I would be flying. Bird?!*

I remembered how, before the war, I caught a small bird, put her in a quickly made cage, and gave her everything to eat. But it didn't work. My bird didn't want to eat anything. The next day my father wanted to liberate her, and I was crying and angry with him. *Now I know why my bird didn't want to eat. Never, ever, will I capture a bird into a cage. I will leave all of them to fly freely, far away, high to the sun,* I thought.

More and more often, in flocks as birds, airplanes were flying across Jasenovac, filling our hearts with happiness and prompting predictions that the tyranny would soon fall.

"These are messengers of freedom," prisoners were saying. Airplanes were flying. Days were passing, and we were hoping. Some small, fast airplanes with stars appeared. They bombarded the bridge across the Sava River, near Jasenovac's train station, and they were shooting at the railroad. It was whispered in camp that these were Partisans. They were flying low. Usually, only two or four of them appeared suddenly, and after the attack, they were gone from sight. These were surprise, flash attacks. In front of which the powerless Ustashas were running to the camp, hoping that they wouldn't bomb the camp. They were mixing with us, and shaking from fear. I was happy because I saw them frightened.

"It was easy for them to be brave above our powerlessness," Stjepan Mlinarić said, and he added, "Here will be shitty underwear. These slaughterers are big cowards."

And really, bombs were falling everywhere except on the camp. One time a bomb fell and exploded in the River Sava near the entrance gate. A few Ustashas and two prisoners were killed, and a lot of fish were on the bank. Unfortunately, the Ustashas didn't allow us to collect the fish. Maybe it was a mistake or maybe not, but one bomb fell by the stove for baking bricks and caused a fire. The roof construction above

the stove caught fire, and because the wooden storage buildings were very close, almost at the stove, there was a danger the fire would spread all around the whole Brickyard and further to the Chain Factory and carpentry shop. As soon as the planes left, there was a big mess, and Ustashas were yelling and forcing us to put out the fire. We were bringing the water in cans from the *baer* and from the Small Lake.*

There were also some prisoners from the neighboring groups helping. In that mess was my school friend Milan Šinik from Gornji Podgradaci. He was bringing cans of water from the *baer*, giving it to the next prisoner, and then going back. I was working the same job, so I was close to him. When we passed the stacks of boards, Milan tried to hide. We were hungry and tired, so probably he wanted to avoid further torturing. But an Ustasha noticed him, hit him with a whip, and commanded him to continue the work. After about fifteen minutes, Milan tried to hide again. An Ustasha saw him and yelled, "Come here!" Milan went.

"Open your mouth," the Ustasha commanded him, taking his gun from his holster. Milan opened his mouth, and the Ustasha put the barrel in his mouth and fired.

Why wasn't my peer more careful? He knew how dangerous it was, but anyway, almost publicly, he was running away from the work. Maybe he did it on purpose to be killed. Maybe he was fed up with torture and hunger and decided to stop. Some people hanged themselves, and he, maybe, decided to finish like that.

We put out the fire, and one more scar was in my soul. On that scar is etched the name of my peer Milan Šinik.

*Allies bombed on March 30-31, 1945, according to the Croatian State Commission. The Commission reports of the aftermath, "The Ustashas drove the prisoners with clubs and revolver bullets to extinguish the fire, take various things out of workshops and thus risk their lives. Witnesses Stojan Lapcevic, Jakob Danon and Sabetaj Kamhi say that Ustasha officers Ante Zrinusic and Stanko Zovko killed several prisoners on the occasion, while Marko Mihaljevic and Marko Perkovic beat and killed every prisoner they ran across." (94)

The roof construction on the brick stove was burned completely. The stove and chimney stayed. Prisoners quickly repaired the stove and continued the work. They were baking the bricks and roof tiles again. In the hole where they loaded the coal, we could boil food if we had any. Usually we were boiling the potato skins, which I would secretly bring from the garbage of the officers' kitchen. Those days, I was taken to grind corn in the village of Jasenovac, so I smuggled kernels of corn and came to boil it. It was a nice sunny day. The sky was blue and cloudless. I choose the hole near the chimney so no one would notice me, and I put in the small pan with the kernels to boil it.

I was watching the tops of Kozara and Prosara mountains and dreaming about freedom. In the distance, above the rounded tops of Prosara, I noticed two flashing dots, and almost at the same time, I heard the familiar sound of airplane engines.

Yes. No doubt. They are Partisan airplanes, I concluded, and I was eagerly watching the crafts. I had a great view. The whole camp and the village of Jasenovac were in my palm. Airplanes were acting like they weren't coming to Jasenovac. They were flying low above the forest. I thought they were going to Bosanska or Croatian Dubica. But the crafts suddenly changed their direction and turned to the camp and immediately dropped bombs. I could see clearly.

They will fall at Gradina. There must be some Ustashas troops there, I was thinking. The bombs fell at an angle and came closer and closer to the camp. Seconds were passing, and bombs were coming right at the command building—a direct shot to the building where the Ustasha command was. It made it into ruin.

Good shot! Great shot! How did they know where they needed to shoot? Good going!

Hidden behind the big chimney of the Brickyard, I was watching Ustashas who were running and taking the dead from the ruins. To stay there longer was a little bit dangerous, so I took the pan with the half-cooked corn and went back to

the barbershop. In the command building with Pičili, who was commander of the camp at that time, was my cousin Savo Ivanović. Savo was herded to Jasenovac in the summer of 1944. He was three years younger than I was, and in 1942 when they took the children to Jablanac, he was taken with small children who were up to twelve years old. He had been in some village by the town of Petrinja with a family that adopted him, but after one attack of Partisans on the Ustasha crew in that village, they accused him of being a Partisan spy and giving information, so they arrested him. To be in the command building was really dangerous because, even for the smallest mistake, they were killing, and you were all the time near the hand of Ustasha slaughters. But he got better food, so in a way it was a privilege.

From the moment when bombs fell down on the command building of camp, I was thinking about Savo. *What happened with him? Was he out of the building, or in there? If he was in there, he couldn't stay alive.* I asked Master to let me go around and see what happened to my cousin.

"Go," he told me, "but be careful. Ustashas are furious now."

I discovered that prisoners who were killed were in front of the hospital, so I went there, shaking with apprehension. There was a small chance that he was alive. I came to the front of the hospital, and I saw four or five dead prisoners on the grass, lined up next to each other. I easily recognized Savo. He was the smallest one among them.

The First Proletarian Krajina Brigade, formed of Serb farmers at the foot of Kozara, had 1,186 fighters who fought 393 battles. Prior to the increased American intervention on behalf of the Bosnian Muslims and Croats, the National Committee of American Airmen Rescued by General Mahailovich ran the following ad:

"During World War II over 500 American airmen were shot down in German-occupied Yugoslavia and saved by the Yugoslav people. They are calling upon President Clinton to reconsider bombing Bosnia because of their deep concern for the safety of the very people who saved their lives.

Although their air evacuation was the largest rescue of American lives from behind enemy lines in our nation's history, it has been kept secret all these years because it was not politically correct to offend the post-war communist government of Yugoslavia or certain ethnic groups in this country and in Yugoslavia.

The 72-year-old President of this group, Major Richard L. Felman USAF (RED), in his appeal to President Clinton stated: "It would be the cruelest of ironies and break our hearts to see our fellow Americans go charging into Bosnia with the guns blazing to kill the very Serbian people who saved our lives while at the same time helping some of the people who were shooting at us and turning us over to the Germans."

Over the years our deep desire to express our gratitude has been supported by the 8 million members of the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars and the Air Force Association but denied because of State Department opposition. We respectfully ask, Mr. President: Where is America's sense of honor, decency and gratitude to those on foreign soil who save American lives? Do we return their sacrifice and kindness by killing them?"

We believe the American people and the 535 members of congress should have all the facts before any action is taken." (*The Washington Times*, June 9, 1994; A8)

Terrible Nights

"Man-beast!" That's what prisoners called the commander of camp, Ustasha soldier Pičili. And he really was a beast. Originally from Italy, he was short and had a small black moustache that looked like Hitler's (I guess he wanted to be like him) and a sharp look. He especially liked to go around camp to catch some prisoner who wasn't at his working place. Then he would torture him, and in most cases, shoot him. A few bodyguards were always with him.

When he came out of the command building where his office was, one word was whispered around the camp—Pičili. Each prisoner knew what that meant, so he ran to his working place and worked faster. Pičili had a custom. When he would catch someone who wasn't working or at his working place, he would talk a little bit with him and then send him to work. Everything looked normal, moreover, kind, friendly, but when the prisoner started leaving the place, then Pičili would take his gun and shoot him in his back. When he killed him, he would calmly go on with his hunt for people.

One time I wasn't at my working place in the barbershop. I was in the storage building for drying tiles with one of my friends, a Slavonian Partisan to whom I was often reciting Partisan songs. He was unloading railroad carts of fresh tiles and putting them on the shelves and saying, "Come on my little Bosnian, recite me a song: 'Uncle Stalin is smoking his pipe, just waiting for the winter to come' . . .' What are the next words?"

Suddenly I heard the sound of tires at the small railroad, and a prisoner in a railroad cart came and yelled excitedly, "Pičili!" Instead of staying there and unloading the tile (that way I wouldn't be suspicious), I ran toward the barbershop as soon as possible. Running to the end of the storage building, I turned at a 90-degree angle toward my working place, and at

that moment, I crashed into someone. I fell down and—shocked—looked up at Pičili, who was standing above me. I didn't have enough courage to stand up, and with a petrified look, I was expecting the movement of his hands toward the gun. He commanded me to get up, asked me where I worked, and commanded me to go to my working place. I went, but I was thinking that I'm not walking on the earth. I was expecting that a bullet would come through my head. I was thinking, *I'm flying in the air*, and I had to make ten steps to go around the corner of the building—ten long steps. *If I could just get to the wall to have protection—. I'm going—*. I was expecting the bullet. Finally, I reached the protection and, breathing deeply, I thought, *I survived again.*

Somehow we succeeded in getting rid of the lice and bugs. From time to time they infested clothes and covers, but somehow we got rid of them again. However, bedbugs were real bad pests. As soon as we turned off the lights, they came from hiding places and attacked us in flocks. They didn't stay on the body of a man or on his clothes. Only during the night, they came from the broken boards and sucked our blood. It was really hard to destroy them, especially in a wooden building like ours. One week, we who were sleeping in shops decided to destroy the bedbugs on the bedding that we were taking every evening into the shops—just a part of the bugs because they were living mainly in broken walls and wooden ceilings. But anyway, it was worth a little bit to cut down their number. We put hot water on the boards where we were sleeping. A lot of them were in the cracks, and the boards were red from them.

Stjepan Mlinarić, who was always ready to make funny jokes, was killing the bedbugs with a small board and commented, "It's a pity that they sting. Otherwise, we could use them for a meal and in that way take our blood back."

During the winter of 1944-45, Ustashas were going every night to buildings and other rooms where prisoners were

sleeping, waking people from their beds, taking them, and killing them. You never knew who would be alive at the dawn. Terrible nights were passing by, and fewer and fewer people were with us. Usually, they came in groups of three—the bloodthirstiest. They came into the rooms where we were sleeping, turned on the light, and asked us to uncover our heads. Then the selection would start. They didn't ask anyone anything. They were just looking and simply taking some of the prisoners with the words, "Get up. We like you." A man, completely petrified, would get up silently words and go with them.

These were terrifying nights. It was horrible listening to the sound of the Ustashas' shoes under our window. Every sound around our building would freeze our hearts and stop our breathing. Systemically, they were destroying us—physically and psychically.

One night, from our room, they took Herman Stein. After a few days, from the neighboring chemical shop, they took Levi Samuel (Mile).* He was born the same year I was born. His wailing was more than awful to hear. It was tearing the creepy camp silence. Excuses that he was only a child and that it wasn't his fault for anything didn't help him. His begging was to no avail. They took him to his death.

* At different times, Ustashas focused on Jews. Witness statements and confessions to the Commission include, "For three days Ustasha supervisors were collecting sick, weak and old Jews from the barracks, thus picking some 800 Jews working in Jasenovac on November 17, 18 and 19, 1942. First they closed them in a special collective chamber, and then they transported them over the Sava to Gradina on one night. Here, they had to dig their own graves, to be killed and buried by Gypsies (82). At the end of December 1942, night, the Ustashas [went] to all the barracks, took the Jews from their beds and drove them out of the barracks in bitter cold" (85), beating them with clubs. Many died then of the beatings, and others died later; "They killed a large group of Jewish women with children in Gradina, who had arrived from the women's camp in Djakovo" [in 1942] (81).

I was thinking they were taking all children and would come to take me at any moment. Stjepan Mlinarič and Antun Dalpont comforted me. Both of them were from Daruvar.

Ustashas pose as they prepare to use a saw to cut off the head of Branko Jungić from a village at the foot of Kozara. The saw that was used is kept in a museum.

The Hanging of Communists

In the autumn of 1944, Ustashas hung 21 communists who were members of a party cell in the camp.

In nastup!
In nastup!
It is thundering from all sides.
From Ustashas yelling,
Jasenovac is screaming.

Toward the gathering place
Lines are going.
On many legs, chains are deadfully clattering.
Gallows are ready, ropes are dangling,
nooses are opened. Silence.

The line of proud communists is coming.
They are moving slowly. Heavy chains are clattering.
Their breasts are like oak bark—
Burned with soldering irons,
Screaming from pain.

Killers are ready.
Ljubo Miloš shouted,
"These men wanted to make a rebellion!"

First the communist were tortured terribly in solitary and then brought as live skeletons to be hung. All prisoners were in a semi-circle line around the gallows, the gallows that were specially made for this occasion. We were waiting for the convicted men, but we didn't know what was going on and who would be hung. But we were sure that the gallows were

not made for nothing. From the commander's building between the *baer* and Small Lake, appeared a line of convicted with Ustashas who were following them. They were moving real slowly. They were so tortured that they could barely lift their legs, on which chains were clattering. They came. Twenty live skeletons were standing in front of the small stage that was made for the occasion, and they were waiting for death.

Ustashas started reading the charges and the judgments against them. They were accusing them of preparing an armed rebellion of prisoners, of preparing weapons for that rebellion, and of being in touch with Partisans, etc.

The hanging began. By the chair where a prisoner was standing with a noose around his neck, an Ustasha was waiting for the order to pull the chair. They allowed a last word to prisoners, and the prisoners were talking strangely—their speech was loud. It's true that everyone's wasn't. Some of them didn't say even a word. We were surprised and wondered from where they got the power to talk. One young man—it was said that he was a secretary of the Partisan cell—was talking a long time. In general, this is what he said:

"My friend prisoners. Today we are going to be killed because we tried to reach freedom. These bloodthirsty people took us in front of you to scare you. Don't be afraid of that. Organize yourselves and be ready. Don't wait for release from them because they are giving only death. Maybe a lot of you will pass as we did, but don't be discouraged. Finally, you will succeed. You *have* to succeed."

After that, the prisoner yelled, "Hang me, degenerated Croat people!"

The chair was pulled, the noose tightened around his neck, but the smile on his face stayed—a smile that gave us power and encouraged us on to victory. His words were retold in whispers around the camp of death. The Ustashas took him from the gallows first. Even after he was dead, he bothered them.

Uncle Dragoje

At the end of autumn of 1944, they were herding columns of captured people, mostly women and children, to camp and immediately driving them to Gradina where they were killing them. They separated only stronger men and herded them to camp to work. That's how we discovered where they were coming from. They were mostly Serbs from Slavonian villages or from Banija and Kordun. The Ustashas kept trying to destroy the Serbian nation, even though it was clear they were losing the war.*

One afternoon, Antun Dalpont came in the barbershop and told me that some man wanted to see me.

"And where is he?" I asked him.

"He's here, in front of the door."

I went out and saw a tall man and, not even looking at his face, I asked him, "What do you need?" Gently, he took my head, turned it toward him, and, looking me straight in my eyes, asked me, "Don't you recognize me?"

Then I recognized the tall, strong man who was herded to camp a few days ago. He had discovered from someone that I was there and searched for me. It was my uncle Dragoje

* Herman Naubacher, Hitler's personal assistant for Balkan affairs and South-East Europe, notes, "The Orthodox recipe of Ante Pavelić, Ustashi leader and Croatian Fuehrer, reminds one of the religious wars in the bloodiest aspects: one-third must become Catholic, one-third must leave the country and one-third must die. The last item was executed. When the leading men of the Ustashi movement are stating that they have slaughtered one million Serbs (including infants, children, women and aged) this in my opinion is a self-appraising exaggeration. According to the reports that have reached me, my estimate is that the number of those defenseless slaughtered is some three-quarter of a million. (Herman Naubacher, *Sonderauftrag Sudosten 1940-1945. Bericht eines fliegenden Diplomate*, Gottengen, 1956, p. 31.)

Ninković from Gornji Podradaci. He took me in his arms, and we kissed each other. His eyes were full of tears.

"Uncle, what are you doing here?" I asked him.

"They herded us four days ago from the village of Gornji Rajići. My Mara was there with the children at her sister's. I had been in Germany working since 1942. I came to see my children, and you see where I ended up. Ustashas made a circle around the village and all of us Orthodox people were herded here. They took Mara and the children across the Sava with a raft and they turned me in here. Only the oldest daughter Zora stayed in the house, hidden behind the doors. Do you know where they took my wife and children?"

"I don't know, Uncle," I lied. Even though I was almost sure they were not among the living anymore, I didn't have enough courage to tell him the truth. *It is better that he doesn't know and hopes that they are still alive,* I was thinking.

Uncle came quite often, whenever he could. Almost every day, he asked me if I could get beans somewhere. He really wanted that. I couldn't make his wish come true, because I was in the same situation—hungry and desirous of everything. At that time, Ustashas were making lists of names of prisoners during the day, and in the evening they would come to take them to the *granik.* They took them to the ship dock where, instead of loading goods into ships, they were killing people and throwing the bodies into the Sava River. The reason for getting on the list was usually almost nothing—a small break during work, going to the restroom, talking with other prisoners, and similar things.

One afternoon, my uncle appeared at the door of the barbershop and asked my master to let me go out. At that time, my master was Altarac Moric from Zagreb because Milan Bosanac had been taken to work in Jablanac, from where he never returned. After Master approved me to go out, my Uncle took me to the storage building where they were drying the tile and told me that he was on the list. He knew what that meant. He was blue in the face, and he was talking with a shaky voice, but he was determined to try to save himself with an

escape. He asked me to somehow take from the locksmith shop scissors or pliers for cutting tin. I went back into the shop and took scissors and gave them to Uncle, warning him, "Uncle, here take the scissors, but if they catch you, don't tell my name."

"Don't worry," he said and hugged me tightly. We kissed each other, started crying, and then we separated.

I didn't see him anymore. The next day, one of my peers, Živko Gigović from Trebovljana, told me that at dusk he saw my uncle. Two Ustashas were herding him toward the gate, and his hands were tied. I was apprehensive for a few days, expecting they would come to get me. I was afraid Uncle, under terrible torturing, told them my name and where he got the scissors. But he went to his death and didn't betray me.

The pan held under the throat of the victim is to collect blood, according to Dr. Nikola Nikolić, for drinking. His caption for this photo is, "The Ustasha animals will drink the blood of their murdered victim." (Nikolić) The World War II Ustasha song "We Ustasha do not drink wine; we drink blood of Serbs from Knin" (Mi Ustase ne pijemo vina / nego krvi Srbina iz Knina.) was also heard by Serbs during the recent war. Knin is the largest town in Krajina and was the capital of the Republic of Serbian Krajina. On August 2, 1995, Croat troops (with American support) started operation *Oluja*, or "Storm," by heavily shelling the town of Knin. Those elderly Serbs who did not or could not leave were simply killed. They were people who survived the horror of Ustasha atrocities of World War II. (Makara)

Richard Holbrooke, in *To End a War*, cites Croatian President Tudjman's goals for the 1990's war: "first, to regain eastern Slavonia; second, to create an ethnically pure Croatia; and third, to maintain maximum influence, if not control, over the Croat portion of Bosnia" (170).

Overseer Vinko

After Rajko, as overseer of the Brickyard, came Ustasha Vinko. (I don't remember his surname.) He was from Benkovac, and he was completely opposite of Rajko—full of understanding for prisoners. He was trying to make a connection with us, talking about how he wanted to demobilize and how he wrote a letter of request to Zagreb and that he was hoping for a positive answer. We didn't believe him. Herman Stein warned us to be careful with those friendly, smiling Ustashas. "They can be really dangerous. They are wolves in lambs' skin," he told us.

The time was passing, and Vinko was the same—friendly, greeting prisoners, he would walk through the Brickyard a few times, and then he would leave. He had never tortured anyone.

One morning, as usual, I was working in the barbershop when Vinko opened the door, said "Hello," and called me to come out with him. He herded me into the storage behind the chemical shop, and I was scared, expecting the end. I was thinking that someone told him that I was reciting Partisan songs, so he was taking me to that Slavonian Partisan to meet him because we were going in that direction. When we were deep into the storage building Vinko stopped, turned around, put his hand into his pockets, took out a small, wrapped object and said, "Here, take this boy. Hide somewhere and eat it, but don't tell anyone a word about it. Otherwise, I will be without my head." I went to a hiding place, took the paper off, and found two pieces of bread with marmalade. In a second, I simply swallowed the present.

Somehow, it wasn't clear to me.

"How is it possible that an Ustasha overseer is giving me bread? I asked Master in confidence.

He warned me, "Don't tell Vinko anything about Partisans and communists, because maybe he wants to bribe you and through you to find out something about others."

Vinko continued bringing me bread sometimes, but he didn't ask me anything. I was expecting that he would ask some favor for this, and I was afraid of the possibility that he would ask me something, but nothing happened. Time passed, and prisoners, even though Vinko's behavior was correct, didn't trust him. The warning was too strong, and the space between them was too deep.

One day, Vinko didn't come on his job. The second day passed, and again he didn't come. We were thinking that he had traveled somewhere or that he got another job. After about ten days, it was whispered (everything was known) that a few Ustashas would be executed. And really, after a few days, they took three Ustashas with tied hands to the field at Camp III C, and in front of the lined up Ustasha soldiers, they were executed. One of the executed was Vinko.

That's what I did. In the evening, I came and took the paper, hid it in my pocket and went into the storage. I hid myself well and took the paper from my pocket. The disappointment was huge. I didn't understand anything. It was written, for me, in some un-understandable language. I decided to ask Ante Bakotić what it said. He was a chemical engineer. I was hoping that he, as an educated man, for sure knew in which language it was written and what was said. Ante was really satisfied when I gave him the leaflet and said, "Excellent, Son! Here, take a cube of sugar, and don't tell anyone a word about this."

"Alright, Ante," I told him. "But you have to tell me what is written there."

"I will. I will."

The night passed, and a new day came. I asked Ante what was written on the leaflet.

"It doesn't matter. It is better that you don't know."

For a long time, I couldn't forgive him because he didn't trust me. I have never discovered the content of the leaflet.

Ante Bakotić, leader of the great escape on April 22, 1945. Čedo Huber writes that many of the men were too exhausted to run when they escaped the bounds of the camp. He notes that he saw Bakobić "going down the road slowly with walking only. His lungs were expanding like a blacksmith's anvil. I called him to come down with me and to walk on the bank at that angle. But he just raised his arm. It didn't come down. A bullet hit him, and he fell in the Sava."

A Parcel from Gredani

Late in autumn of 1942, I got the first postcard from my mother and after that a parcel from time to time. I got other parcels during 1943, but then everything stopped. *What happened to my family? Why are they not sending me anything?* I was thinking.

News came to the camp about harder and harder fighting all around Yugoslavia. We discovered that Partisans were controlling a big part of the territory, that Germans and Ustashas were controlling only main roads and bigger towns, and that almost all of Bosnia—Kordun, Banja Luka, and Lika—was free. It was said that our red army was going forward to the west and was liberating captured people. Hitler was losing the war.

Who knows? Maybe my family is killed. I was scared and drew that conclusion. *If my mother is alive, she would find some possible way to send me something, but for sure maybe they are on liberated territory,* I would reassure myself. *That's why they can't send me anything. Why would the Ustasha post office work for a Partisan family?*

A lot of time passed, and there was no news from my family. It was 1944. It was autumn. Swallows were moving to the south—whole flocks, and in the opposite direction toward the north and northwest, flocks of bombers were flying almost every day. There was some strange connection between the swallows and the airplanes. When swallows are leaving, they are messengers, saying that winter is coming, and airplanes, with their coming, were saying that freedom is coming. Freedom was close. You could feel that from many things. The problem was how to achieve it, how to be strong until the end, how to avoid the *nastups* of death, how to get food and not die from starvation.

Other prisoners were getting parcels more rarely, too. By the places from which parcels were coming easily, we guessed which areas were under Ustasha control, and in that way we guessed where Partisans were. I completely stopped thinking about any parcel because, from almost the whole of Bosnia, no one got anything. That's why it really surprised me and made me happy to get the parcel. The surprise was even bigger because the parcel was from Gređani, a village in Slavonia by Okučani, and Mara Kljajić sent it to me. I had never been in Gređani, and I didn't know the name of the sender. Without success, I tried to find out who Mara Kljajić was and why she was sending me a parcel. I couldn't solve the problem.

Maybe it was a mistake, I was thinking. *Maybe there is another prisoner with the same name and surname.* But the address was completely right, and there was no other boy with my name. I opened the parcel, and there I found a loaf of bread, a few apples, about 20 cubes of sugar, and boiled beans mixed with pieces of bacon, mashed and made in the shape of a loaf. Never (I think in my life—never before or after the camp) have I eaten something that was more delicious than those beans. From Gređani, I got a few more parcels, then that source dried up. At the end of the war, I discovered that Mara Kljajić had a son in the Partisans who spent some time in Podgradci and met my family. They made an agreement that his mother would send parcels to me.

Burning the Bodies

Historical Note: As Allied forces moved toward Berlin in early April, 1945, the Partisan National Liberation Army started a major offensive against the German and Ustasha forces. As Ustashas at Jasenovac prepared to flee, "Maks" Luburic ordered that all prisoners be killed and that the camp be destroyed in the end. Prisoners were brought in railcars from other camps to be killed, and clean-up work started at the mass graves. According to the Croatian State Commission report, teams of prisoners were made to dig up mass graves, and other prisoners made "huge pyres. They would put coke at the bottom of the pyre, throw corpses and skeletons on it, spill oil over it and set it on fire. Thus, pyres were blazing for three weeks, while the prisoners watched all that." (94-95)

Slowly but surely, the end of the war was coming closer. It was clear to everyone—to Ustashas and to prisoners. It was clear, too, that Germany was losing and the Ustasha with them. Only the biggest fanatics were still believing in Hitler's victory and a change in favor of fascism, often secretly mentioning some powerful weapon—*fau-anjc* and *fau-cvaj*—that would, they were saying, put Stalin and Churchill on their knees.* Jasenovac's slaughterers in the autumn of 1944 and spring of 1945 were taking groups of prisoners to Gradina where they were working on digging massive graves and burning bodies. They were working for days at a time.

* *Fau-anjc* and *fau-cvaj* refer to the unmanned rockets (V-1 and V-2) the Germans were developing to bomb, first, London, and then Moscow. The letter *V* in German is pronounced "fau" and stands for *Vergeltungswaffe*, or "revenge weapon." *Anjc* is phonetic Serbian spelling for the German *eins*, or "one," and *cvaj* is the phonetic spelling for the German *zwei*, or "two." The rockets were used by the Reich against Britain late in the war but never against Russia. (Malić)

Systematically, they were destroying the tracks from their four-year-long evil. From Gradina, smoke was coming into the camp, sometimes stronger, sometimes weaker, depending on the direction of the wind.

When there was no fog, we could clearly see thick clouds of smoke. I watched that smoke, and I knew that it was from burned bodies. I followed the smoke's movement and changing shape from the influence of the wind. There were different shapes made from the smoke. Some of them were awful; some of them were pleasant. In my thoughts, I went back to 1942 when Ustashas were herding people from Kozara into the camp. Most of the herded people were not alive anymore. Among the killed people were my cousin with his whole family and many neighbors and school friends.

Maybe they are burning them right now. Maybe the parts of these small black clouds are made from the body of my father or some cousins, I was imaging.

Is there life after death, and where is it? Is it upstairs in the sky? The preacher told us there is heaven and hell. Did my father achieve heaven? He was a good man. For sure he is in heaven. Ustashas were burning bodies, but they can't burn the souls. That's what we learned in religion classes.

Oh-h, thick smoke.
What are you from?
Whose bones are up there?

Oh-h, Justice. Where are you?
Quietly, silently, the clouds
Of smoke are talking.

In the smoke that was dispersed by the wind, I was looking for my loved ones faces. In a moment, I thought I saw the face of my father, but it quickly disappeared. I saw the face of my grandfather Jovo Ninković with a stick and leather bag. He was smiling. He was always cheerful.

No, No. People can't be destroyed. Ustashas are spending gasoline for burning the bodies for nothing.

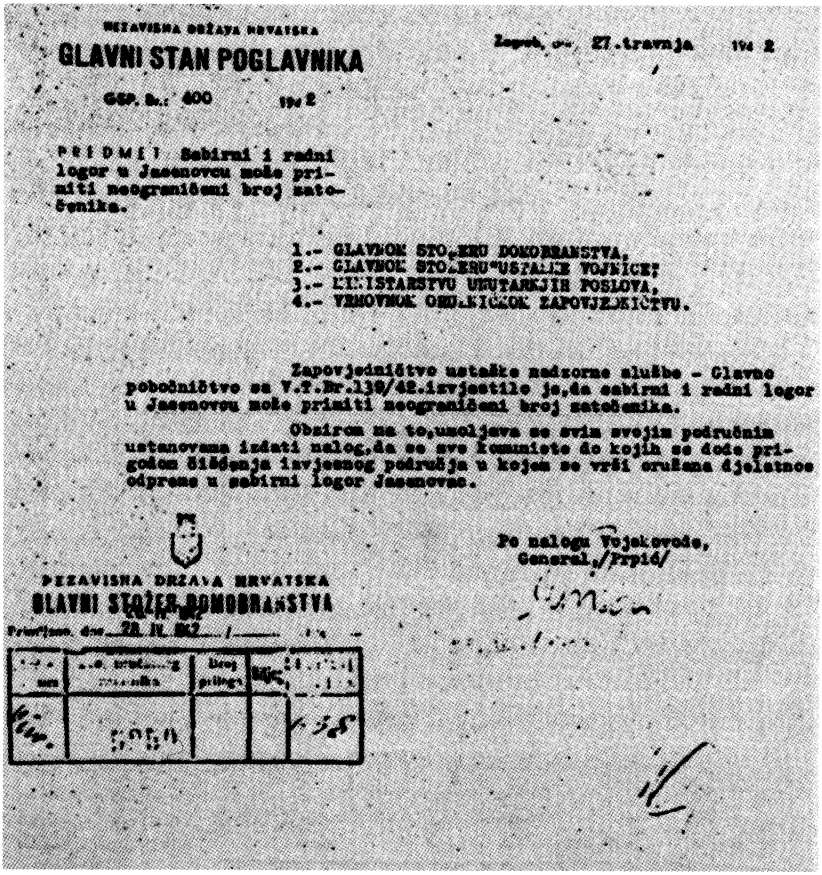
My dead grandfather was smiling from the cloud like he was saying, "It's all in vain. You are making the effort for nothing, Murderers. Everything is known and seen. You didn't destroy us. You are afraid of us even when we are dead."

In that moment, from Kozara, I heard short bursts from a machine gun that sounded like a confirmation of Grandfather's words—that they were telling the Ustashas, "There are still a lot of us. Kozara is full of angry avengers."

The sound of machine guns stopped my imagining, and I started to wonder whether the Ustashas would succeed in destroying the tracks of their crimes. *Will anyone go alive from this hell and with live words be a witness of things that happened here? Or will we living prisoners, in time, go into ether and fly about Gradina?*

No. Someone must stay alive. The truth must come out. The world has to know everything about Jasenovac.

(Nikolić)



NEZAVISNA DRŽAVA HRVATSKA

GLAVNI STAN POGLAVNIKA

Zagreb, dne 27. travnja 1942

Gšp. Br.: 400 1942

PRIDMET: Sabirni i radni logor u Jasenovcu moše primiti neograničeni broj zatočenika.

1.- GLAVNOM STOŽERU DOMOBRANSTVA,
2.- GLAVNOM STOŽERU "USTAŠKE VOJNICE",
3.- MINISTARSTVU UNUTARNJIH POSLOVA,
4.- VRHOVNOM ORUŽNIČKOM ZAPOVJEDNIŠTVU.

Zapovjedništvo ustaške nadzorne službe - Glavno pobočništvo sa V.T.Br.130/42.izvještilo je,da sabirni i radni logor u Jasenovcu moše primiti neograničeni broj zatočenika.

Obzirom na to,umoljava se svim svojim područnim ustanovama izdati nalog,da se sve komuniste do kojih se dođe prigodom ŠIŠenja izvjesnog područja u kojem se vrši oružana djelatnost odprema u sabirni logor Jasenovac.

Po nalogu Vojskovođe,
General,/Prpić/

NEZAVISNA DRŽAVA HRVATSKA
GLAVNI STOŽER DOMOBRANSTVA

Primljeno dne 28. IV. 42

Translation from Edmond Paris' *Genocide in Satellite Croatia*, 1961, page 310:

COMMEMORATION

For the leader of the Independent State of Croatia, the Poglavnik, Dr. Ante pavelic, will be held Sunday, January 24, 1960 in the Salon Colegio "San Jose," Colle Azcuenga 158, at 10.30 o'clock, Buenos Aires.

Every Croat is invited to attend this commemoration. Long live Croatia! *Death to the Serbs, to the Jews, and to the communists!*

Federation of the Croatian Organizations
in Argentine Republic
Salta 1241, Buenos Aires

The Last Day in the Camp of Death

April 21, 1945. The Ustashas were herding women to Gradina to kill them.* The women were singing. There were a few hundred of them. In the men's camp—silence. Everyone was anxious. Uncertainty was killing their nerves. Suicides, hangings, became usual.† The Ustashas were anxious, too. They were running from place to place—back and forth—in some awful hurry. We were asking what would happen. Everyone was thinking, dreaming, about liberation, hoping and then losing hope. That's how our thoughts were changing—light and then dark. Dušan Prpoš, from Sovjak near Bosanska Gradiska, and I were planning where to hide.

There were different suggestions. One of the possibilities was to hide in the stoves that had been used for baking bricks. We gave up that idea because we were afraid they would burn us there. Dušan always carried some old rope around his waist, and he kept saying he was going to hang himself. He didn't want to let them slaughter him. He would stop his torturers and kill himself. In some moments, he was completely losing hope for liberation. I tried to encourage him and stop him from doing what he wanted to do. I had hidden hope, and I believed in a miracle. Even if I didn't see any sensible exit, anyway, I was hoping—.

* "On 21 April 1945, in the female section of the camp, there remained some 760 women and girls who worked at the farm, in kitchen facilities and in dairies. On April 21, a long procession of these women was going to death singing, saying hello and goodbye to their comrades and shouting to them: 'You are staying, we are going to death.' On that day, all these women were killed and either thrown to the Sava or cremated at pyre." (Croatian State Commission 95-96)

† According to the Commission report, about 100 men hanged themselves in their shops before everyone was taken to a single building.

I watched the sun that was coming from behind the clouds. *Am I going to see the sun come up again? Are they going to kill me? Why? I didn't do anything. I didn't do any evil to anyone. I am a child. Maybe they won't kill me—.*

And then, like from the fog, came the scene I had seen a year before when Ustashas were herding a group of women, children, and old people. Someone said they were from Kordun. I watched that poor line: Around them were Ustashas who were hurrying them and hitting them with gun butts. They were herding them toward the raft that carried people to Gradina. I knew they were going to death. One woman was carrying a child in her arms. She was asking an Ustasha to allow her to sit down and nurse her baby. Roughly, he was pushing her back into the line. She separated without permission and sat down by the road and started nursing her baby. The Ustasha noticed her. He came back and hit her with the gun butt in her back. The baby fell out of her arms. The Ustasha took the baby, threw it into the air, took his bayonet and waited for the baby to fall down on it. The mother lost consciousness.

Optimism was fading. Dark apprehensions were coming. *If they killed a baby that was just a few months old, they will kill me too. There is no salvation. Does God exist?* I was wondering. When I was going to elementary school, the [Orthodox] priest talked convincingly about God as Powerful, doing just good things and stopping evil. *So why doesn't he stop this evil? Why doesn't he save innocent people? No. There is no God. Well, maybe I'm wrong. Maybe there is a God. Maybe he is going to save us. But no, there is not. If he existed, he wouldn't let Ustashas slaughter thousands of innocent children from Kozara.* That's how my thoughts about God were changing.

Dušan untied the rope around his waist and asked me if it was strong enough, if it wouldn't break, if it could stand his weight.

"Leave that, Dušan. Throw the rope away," I told him.

"No," he answered. "They are not going to slaughter me."

The song of the last group of women prisoners was weaker and weaker. Already, they were driven across the Sava to Gradina. The two of us were still trying to solve the problem of where to hide. Any idea had weak sides. Our planning stopped, interruped by the command of the group leader to take the most necessary personal things and be ready for a move.

It's over, I was thinking. *It's the end. There was no way—. The sky is high, and the earth is hard.* My master Altarac Moric and I were in the barber shop in the Brickyard, packing the tools.

"Maybe we will need that," said Master. We took one blanket and went out.

"In *nastup*, faster, faster," we heard the Ustashas yelling on all sides. We were standing in the line. They were herding us toward the gate. *If they herd us toward the village, there is hope. If we go right to the raft, it's over.*

They herded us to the left, down the Sava on the road toward the east entrance to the camp where women had been kept. We relaxed a little bit. You could see that in each of us, there was a little bit of hope. *Maybe we are going somewhere to work.* The Ustashas were rough. They were swearing, yelling, threatening, but they didn't hit us with gun butts, so that gave us hope that we were going somewhere to work. Maybe they still needed us.

All prisoners were out. There were a lot of us. The line was long. *What is this? Moving of camp? Where?*

I didn't see Dušan. *What happened to him?* Živko Gigović and Radovan Popović from Trebovljana were in the line close to me. I looked across the Sava toward the Prosara Mountain. The tops of Kozara were blue. There behind Prosara was the village of Podgradci. My mother, sisters, and brother were there. *How far it is? I would be there fast, maybe in five or six hours walking.* But obstacles were blocking me. *Will I ever see my family again? Where are they herding us?* Dark thoughts again: *Maybe they are herding us into the forests by the village of Košutarica. There they are going to liquidate us.*

In my imaginings, I see a helpless line of prisoners with their hands tied. They are moving toward a huge dug grave. There, slaughterers are doing their awful jobs. The line is coming closer and is separating into two lines at the edge of a grave where one line, two Ustashas are slaughtering, and the other line, two Ustashas are hitting them with mallets. Ustasha officers are controlling the work. I'm petrified. My legs, just like they are lead, are hardly moving. The line is shorter and shorter. It is becoming like a river which disappears into the earth in an aquifer. I'm closer and closer to the hole. I hear screams and dull hits with mallets. There's no exit. I'm completely out of myself. In my mind, the terror is continuing.

Suddenly a picture of my short life appears—the house where I was born, the Bukovica stream, the mill, valleys, fields, small forests, the winding path on which I walked to elementary school. There are my mother, sisters, and brother. But I don't see my father. *He was killed.* Everything, everything is here. Everything merges into one short movie. I'm saying goodbye to everyone and everything. My family is crying. They are sobbing. I don't. There are no tears. My eyes are dried out.

"We are going to the tailor building in the women's camp," said Master Altarac and took me back to reality. We were turning from the road by the Sava. They were herding us into the building of the former tailor factory where, until yesterday, the women's camp was. The building was huge. It had a first floor, upstairs, and one more floor. They put all of us in there. There were about a thousand people, maybe more.* They shut the doors. They put guards at all exits, even though we were in the camp area.

Around the building was a field. Windows on the east side looked into the wall and the bunkers on it. At each 50 meters on the wall was a bunker with an Ustasha crew and machine gun that was pointed toward us. Prisoners built this wall. It

* According to the Croatian State Commission report, there were approximately 1,060 men left. Lukić has the number at 1,073.

was high—about 4 meters. They had to make the fence for themselves, and now that wall, together with gun barrels, was our big obstacle to freedom. Even our field of vision was shorter. Toward the west, by the Sava, through the windows, we could see the camp where we had been working. There was Farm, Brickyard, Saw Mill, Chain Factory, Carpenter—places where we worked until yesterday, where we were sick, hungry, and dying. On the south side was the Sava, separated with barbed wire which was braided into a few lines. It was said that during the night, they put electricity in it. To the north was a wall and bunkers, and behind that a railroad that went from Novska through Jasenovac to Sunja. We were completely circled. The Ustashas planned everything, especially the geographical positions. They used natural and artificial obstacles to make opportunity for escape at a minimal level. Actually, escaping from camp was very, very rare. And more rare were successful escapes. Successful escapes were achieved at the time when prisoners went out of the camp to work.

Master and I put the blanket on the floor of the first floor and sat down. Most of the prisoners did the same. But some of them were aimlessly walking in the building, going to other floors and coming back to the first floor. After a short break, I walked around, too, up and down, and I didn't really know what I was looking for. *The night is coming. Are we going to survive?* Dinner, the little bit of *polenta*, we didn't get. I guess they marked us off the list. *Probably the slaughterers were tired from killing women that day, so probably we were on their bloody schedule tomorrow.*

Anxiety in the building was present all through the night. Our breath stopped when, from time to time, the Ustashas were opening the doors and coming in there with a list of names that they were taking. They were choosing the strongest ones. Maybe they were suspicious, apprehensive, or they had a spy among us. I don't know. But I know that that night swallowed a lot of good and respectable prisoners. Their aim

was to destroy our heads in the beginning, to extinguish every thought about escape.

For a long time, I was awake and quietly speaking with my master. He was a man who was about fifty. Barber was his vocation, and Jewish was his nationality. Because he was Jewish, he ended up in the camp. Before coming to Jasenovac, he worked and lived in Zagreb. Even today, I remember his address that he mentioned quite often, Paromlinska 70, Zagreb. He sent letters to this address a few times, but he didn't get any answers from anywhere. In the camp, he had a brother who was younger and a barber, too. But he was working in the central barbershop. In the winter of 1944-45, prisoners found him on the way between Small Lake and the *baer*. He was lying in a pool of blood with his throat cut. The prisoners recognized him, and they told my master. Master went there, and soon he came back. For a long time he was quiet, and then he said, "You see. Now I am completely alone."

We knew what he was thinking. He told us everything with that. He knew there was no one alive from his family in Zagreb.

We were awake until late in the night. I fell asleep first, tired from all the events of that day, but I didn't dream. I had a continuation of the nightmare. I dreamed I was in a line for liquidation in Gradina. On my legs are chains, and my arms are tied with wire. I am moving, groaning. I am trying to get rid of the binding, but it's not going. In front of me, I see bloody slaughterers above a huge pit. The line grows shorter and shorter. Suddenly, a miracle—. I'm freeing my hands and running from the line. I'm hiding in a hedge fence. I am hardly, very hardly moving. The chains on my legs are bothering me. Finally, the chains drop off. I'm running. I'm leaving the hell and coming to my home place at the hill of Ogorelica. Clearly (in my dream), I see the house where I was born, so, happily, I am going toward it—.

"Son, Son, wake up," Master called me and shook me with his hand. I was sorry my dream, my happiness, was interrupted. I didn't reach my home.

"Son, you are sweating. What did you dream?"

I told him, and then he said to me, "Oh, dreams—illusive dreams."

The dawn was coming. We heard explosions from the village of Jasenovac. When the dawn came, we saw what had happened. The working camp from where they took us yesterday was in ruins. The Ustashas destroyed everything to hide their evil crimes. In the autumn of 1944 and spring of 1945, they were uncovering massive graves and burning bones of victims. And now, they were making a last effort to destroy the tracks of the beastly acts they had done. It was clear they were retreating, and that's why they were destroying. Everything. *The only thing that is left is this big building and the prisoners in it.* We, the last prisoners of the camp, had to be liquidated before the final retreat.

It was dawn. In the building, there was mumbling. From place to place, there were groups of people who were trying to make some agreement. *I'm hungry.* I was wandering around, and I came to one bigger group of people and went into the center, thinking that someone was eating something there. In the center of the group was Ante Bakotić, a man I knew before from the chemical shop in the Brickyard. He patted my head and said, "Son, we are not eating anything here. This is not for you. When we start leaving, you run after us."

It wasn't clear to me what Ante was thinking, so I went back. Someone hanged himself in the toilet, prisoners said. I ran there. I felt a cold chill. Since last night, I hadn't seen Dušan, my friend. I was thinking the worst, and really, when I came to the toilet, Dušan was hanging on the long-prepared rope that he tied to the tank of the toilet.

He had been afraid the rope wouldn't be strong enough for his weight. Unfortunately, it was. A lot of people were in front of the toilet. No one even tried to put him on the floor. There was no purpose. There were tears in eyes and on cheeks. I felt

guilty. I shouldn't have left him alone. Maybe I could have influenced him not to do that, but now it's over. The lifeless boy's body didn't feel anything any more. The psychological traumas were stronger than he. He didn't make it. He had raised his hand to himself an hour or two before destiny's events.

I came back to Master and told him sadly what had happened. He answered me, "Hush. Don't be sad. Maybe he did the right thing."

I watched through the window. It was raining really hard. It was thundering and flashing lightning, just like the sky had opened and wanted to swallow us. Master was lying on the blanket. Ante Bakolić, with a bigger group of people, was going toward the exit doors . . . .

Silence! Silence before the storm—.

Suddenly, it thundered, but now, the thunder was in the exit hall of our building. Yelling people merged with the sky's thundering.

I ran to see what was happening there. In the hall was about a hundred people who were trying to break through the exit doors with the pressure of their bodies. Fists were raised. In some hands, there was a piece of brick, and in one, an axe, probably found somewhere on the top floor. I heard shouting, "Yeah. Let's go, friends. Freedom or death!"

The door gave up. It crashed down. People went out, running like lava from the building. They stepped over the first Ustasha guard. *Hell.* From bunkers all around, the Ustashas opened fire. Glass on the windows was breaking. Bullets were whizzing above our heads. It was still raining. I came back for a second to Master. (He was a good man. I loved him) I said to him, "Run away. Let's run away."

"No, Son," he answered me.

I screamed again, "Run away!"

"No, Son. Oh, what are you doing? Now everyone will be killed."

"We will be killed, anyway. Let's run away."

"No, Son."

"Master, I listened to you until now, but from now on, not anymore. I'm going. Goodbye." And I ran toward the exit. My Master's last words that came to my ears through thundering and whizzing bullets were "Goodbye, Son. Good luck. Don't forget—."

What not to forget, I didn't hear.

I was out of the building. From all bunkers and all weapons, the fire was pointed at us. A lot of killed and injured people were around the building, and further down, the road was covered with bodies. The Ustashas fire was heavy. For a moment, I turned to see the building from which I had come. From all exits, people were running out and jumping through the windows of the first floor. Many of them fell down immediately, shot with fire from the bunkers.

I ran toward the exit where prisoners were trying to open the gate. To the left, on the road inside of the camp, prisoner Mile Ristić was shooting from a machine gun. Next to him was laying a dead Ustasha. Now Ustashas had to be careful. While I was running, I kept telling myself, *They don't want me. They don't want me.* I was reassuring myself. I was hoping. I was going to the gate. There were a lot of dead and injured, and I was jumping across them and stepping on the bodies. *I'm on the road.* On the right side was the Sava, deep and cold. It was full of prisoners, head after head.

I was running and thinking, *If I jump into the Sava, I can drown. Injured prisoners can pull me down with them.* And I could see space for swimming was limited. *No. I'm not going into the water.* I decided to run into the forest. *That's where I have to go.* The forest was about one kilometer away, and in front of me was a field—clear, blank space. *If I make it to the forest, I'm safe,* I was still repeating, *They don't want me.* A buckle on my shoe broke, and I was barefoot now. While I was running, I took off the other shoe because it was bothering me. Bullets were singing that song, and it was raining and raining.

It is good that it is raining, I was thinking. *Maybe Ustashas will quit chasing in this weather.* I was on the field.

From bunkers all around, Ustashas were trying to cut our paths, but their execution line was too thin. There were a small number of them, and we were more, even though a lot of us had been killed.

In front of the group of prisoners who were running, Ustashas were on the road and scattered in front of the stampeding prisoners. One braver Ustasha stayed on the road where prisoners were running in order to stop them. The group was running toward him. He killed the first, then the second, but he didn't kill anymore. He got his deserved punishment. The stampeding prisoners trampled him. I had the feeling that they didn't even pause. The Ustasha's courage was too expensive.

Exhausted, hungry, and until this morning, powerless prisoners changed into lions that were pulling apart and tearing asunder with their bare hands. We came to the forest. There were maybe fifteen of us when we went deep in the forest, and someone shouted, "Stop! Stop, people, to see where we will go." We stopped and gathered. We kissed each other. *We are free.* The rain was tapering off and stopping. It was cloudy, and it was hard to orientate. We could still hear echoes from shooting in Jasenovac. People, now ex-prisoners, as they called us there, were suggesting where to go. I was silent and waiting. *A short dilemma.* There was no outstanding opinion. They were pointing where to go. All ways were included, but no one was pointing back toward Jasenovac.

That lasted a short time until one man, anxious with uncertainty, started running. He was running forward, and all of us were running behind him. After about 15 minutes, we came to the path, and there guns and machine guns fired again. Some fell immediately, without any voice. We had probably come to the outside and last obstacle with which Ustashas were protecting Jasenovac. We spread all around and ran into the forest. In front of me was a young man who was running fast. I was yelling, calling him. *I can't keep up with his steps. I'm afraid to stay alone. He's not turning back. He's just running forward.* I kept watching him and following his steps,

but the distance between us was getting longer and longer. We were running like that a long time until we came to some field. The distance between us was becoming longer and longer. Again, I tried to call him but all in vain. I was putting effort, speeding, but without results. In front of us was the Strug River. My "escapee" was maybe 100 or 150 meters in front of me. He was stepping across the stream, and I was going behind him.

We were out of the field and in the forest again. He went into the forest where I lost sight of him, and until I came to the edge of the forest, I couldn't see him anymore. I continued straight, hoping that I would find him somewhere. I was completely wet. What the rain didn't soak, the Strug did.

Again, I came to a field, but now I was alone. I had a horrible fever. I don't know if it was from fear or from the cold. Probably both. I wasn't running anymore. I was watching my surrounding and looking for hay stacks in a desire to come to something dry. I found a place where there might be a hay stack, but there were just a few bits of hay left, and they were completely wet and mushy. I dug through the hay, but there was nothing dry in there.

Am I going to freeze from the cold? I had avoided Ustashas' knives, but how could I save myself from the cold that was coming into my marrow. *I'm shaking. I have to move*, I concluded. *I can't stop. If I stop and sit somewhere, I will freeze.*

I tried to discover where I was. The rain stopped, and it was getting brighter. In moments, I saw the sun, the first free sun after 1,000 days of imprisonment in Jasenovac. *If it could just be brighter, so the sun could dry me and warm me—*. I could stand the hunger somehow. For 24 hours, I hadn't eaten anything. The last camp meal was the day before, April 21, 1945.

I noticed the tops of some mountain. *That's Prosara*, I was thinking. *Soon I will get to the Sava. I will swim across.* I was a good swimmer. *And when I get to Bosnia—that will be real freedom.*

My thoughts were interrupted by the whistle of a train. I was surprised. *Where is the train? On the Bosnian side under Prosara Mountain, there is no railroad, so that means that is not the Prosara Mountain. But which one is it?* There, my modest knowledge of geography helped me. I discovered that I was going to the north and that in front of me was the Psunj Mountain. *What now? Ustashas can circle this area and catch me, and that would be the real end.* I decided that I had to cross the railroad to Psunj Mountain to avoid circling. I went carefully by the hedge fence that protected me from one side. The train passed by. I could see it clearly. It was a freight train. On the right and left by the railroad, I noticed bunkers. The distance between them was about one kilometer. Behind the railroad, under the mountain, I saw a village—a lot of houses, a whole line of red roofs. On the pedestrian path by the hedge fence, I hid from the closer bunker and from the other one that was further. I didn't have any protection. I hoped that if they noticed me, they would think that I was a boy from one of the nearby villages. I was going closer to the railroad and thinking, *If they see me and try to catch me, I will run. I would rather be killed while running than be caught alive. Not alive in their hands anymore. Rather death.*

I went across the railroad, and I saw a boxcar turned on its side. I had to pass by it. I didn't notice anything. I went further. And just when I was about to pass by the boxcar, a Croatian army soldier jumped from behind it. And before I could do anything, he caught me.

Completely surprised, I didn't resist. And even if I had, it would have been in vain. I was powerless, and the Croatian soldier roughly grabbed my hand. I was thinking it was over. The soldier started asking me, "Where are you coming from boy?"

"I'm running away from Partisans," I answered without thinking. It was strange to me why I said that.

"What's your name?"

"Stipe Franjić," I lied to him as I decided to use the last thing I had—cunning.

"What is the name of your father?" the soldier asked me.

"Josip."

"And mother?"

"Jozefina."

"Where do you come from?"

"From Dubrave by Bosanska Gradiska."

"So, what are you doing here in Slavonia?"

"Yesterday, I was taking care of cows with one girl on the fields further from my village when Partisans came and took our cows. They let her go and took me to herd the stolen cows. Last night a few Partisans came across the Sava with a boat, and they took me with them," I lied imaginatively. "We came to a village where Partisans spent the night. This morning in the dawn, I used the chance and ran away."

The soldier searched my pockets, where I didn't have anything except my mother's picture that I had gotten in the first parcel. He asked me whose picture it was, and I answered that it was a picture of my mother.

"Come with me to the bunker to the Ustashas," said the soldier, and he took me there.

When he mentioned Ustashas, my blood froze. *Now they are going to take me back to Jasenovac, you know—*, I was thinking. We were coming closer to the bunker. My brain was working. All the time I was repeating my imagined name and the rest of the story, so they wouldn't catch me in a lie. *Every time, I have to tell the same story. I can't make any mistakes—otherwise . . . .*

"Boy, you came across a minefield," said the soldier. I shrugged my shoulders. I didn't understand him. At that time, I didn't even know what *minefield* meant. I was thinking it was the name of the field around the railroad. I remembered that the teacher taught us there was a Lijevče field, a Gacko field, a Popovo field, but not a Mine field. I had never heard of that.

"I didn't know I mustn't walk across these fields," I answered him, making excuses because I felt from the voice of the soldier that I had done something that wasn't allowed.

We came to the bunker. The soldier gave me to Ustashas, telling them: "I caught this boy on the railroad. He came across the mine field. He said that he ran away from Partisans."

There were seven or eight Ustashas in the bunker. They were sitting around the table and playing cards. On the table was a pile of money. In front of one Ustasha, there was a knife stabbed into the table. They were playing cards and didn't stop but just offhandedly asked me different questions. I repeated the story I had told the soldier. One Ustashas said, "Maybe you are from Jasenovac. This morning there was some chaos."

"No, I am from Dubrava," I answered.

"And why are you wet?"

"I went across some river, and the rain made me wet."

"That must be the Strug," said the soldier who captured me for the Ustashas.

I looked really poor—bare feet, my legs were full of thorns, dirty and scratched. Everything on me was wet. I was shaking.

"Are you hungry?" asked one Ustashas.

"Yes. I haven't eaten anything since yesterday."

"Didn't Partisans give you something to eat?"

"No."

"You see," he told his colleagues, "people are talking about Partisans—they are good and just—and what is this boy guilty of?" Then he turned to me and said, "Now you will see how Ustasha will feed you. Screw their bandit mothers.

"Cook, what do we have to eat?"

"There is only bread, white coffee, without cream, and marmalade.* The lunch is not finished yet."

But what else do I need? I hadn't seen white coffee and marmalade for almost three years. We got only 100 grams of bread per day, only for lunch. Meals were terribly poor. We got only enough food not to die from starvation. All the time I spent in Jasenovac, I was hungry. It wasn't ordinary hunger.

* White coffee is regular coffee, as opposed to Turkish coffee.

My heart was hungry. My eyes were hungry. Famine went deep into my soul.

"Heat him some coffee, and then feed him," the Ustasha commanded the cook, and then he turned to me and told me to take off my clothes and dry them by the stove.

That saved me. I got a full soldier's portion of warm white coffee, a big piece of bread, and marmalade. I ate this very fast, thinking about my strange destiny.

I'm running from Ustashas and these Ustashas here feed me. Eh-h, if they could know who they are giving food to, they would give me a knife in the heart instead of bread and marmalade. I was sitting by the stove in my underwear, trying to warm myself, and I was thinking about how to run away.

Soon the lunch was finished, and they were eating. They gave me some, too. In the meantime, my clothes dried. *I'm dry, full, and rested. Now I can run great. But how?*

The older Ustasha, who was quiet all the time, was watching me constantly. His look was heavy and questioning —a look that was piercing. It hurt.

Does he suspect something? I was wondering. While the rest of the Ustashas were having fun playing cards, the one who was watching me stood up, took his gun, and said, "Boy, come with me outside."

I grew stiff with fright.

We went out of the bunker. He was herding me down the railroad.

What is he planning? I was thinking.

When we went a little bit further from the bunker, my unpleasant follower stopped and asked me, "What did you say your name is?"

I repeated the false name and surname and then the false name of my father and mother.

"You say you are from Dubrave by Bosanska Gradiska?"

"Yes."

The Ustasha was silent a little bit and then took my chin, put my head back so he could look straight in my eyes, and he told me, "So how is it possible that I am from Dubrave, and I

don't know your father and mother. There are no people like that."

I was shocked and mute. Through my head whistled, *It's over. This one caught me in lie.* I didn't have the courage to say anything else. I was frozen. Thousands of questions, thoughts, and decisions were swirling in my head.

Why did he take me out here? Is he going to kill me? I should run away. I will run as fast as I can, so he will kill me while I'm running. It is better than slaughtering. Now I'm going to leave, I decided, but I didn't move. My muscles were frozen. Suddenly movement—the Ustasha said the words that sounded completely impossible.

"Don't you be afraid. You will stay alive. I know your father very well. I drank a lot of *rakia* with him."*

Obviously, the Ustasha wasn't like those in Jasenovac. He had the Ustasha uniform, but he wasn't a criminal. At least, he acted like that. He caught me in lie. It was clear that I wasn't the one I was telling I was. My life depended on just one word from him. We went back into the bunker. I was apprehensive about his every movement or word, but he didn't betray me. He was silent. *Why?* Even today I don't know. Maybe his conscience bothered him because of the crimes he did before, so he wanted to feel better in this way.

I was imagining how to run away and to liberate myself from the unpleasant and undesirable company. I asked them if I could go to the toilet. I noticed that they didn't have one, so I was hoping they would leave me alone outside, and then I would run away. But the lieutenant ordered one Ustasha to follow me. He started out, not taking a gun, but the lieutenant said, "Where are you going without a gun?"

It was clear that there was some suspicion, and they didn't completely believe my story. We went out and had walked a little bit further from the bunker when my follower showed me a bush and told me, "Here. Shit."

* *Rakia*: Homemade brandy made from pears or plums.

I squatted behind the bush and acted like I was doing my physical needs, and I was thinking, actually, I was trying to decide whether to run away or not. *If I try to run away, this one will shoot,* I thought. *The others will come out of the bunker, and they will shoot me in the clear space. No, I don't have a chance. And who knows what I can expect up there in the village on the road.* I concluded that if I tried, it would be stupid, almost like I was killing myself. *I will go back. I will continue to act innocent and wait for a better opportunity.*

The Ustashas decided, because I wasn't good enough for their army, to give me to some peasant man to be his servant-shepherd. That was good for me because, in case I needed to, I could easily run away from peasant people.

A train with two boxcars was full of Germans. On the last boxcar was a big iron hook that was tearing up the railroad. The Germans were throwing some leaflets, and Ustashas were taking them to read. In the leaflets, the Germans admitted that they were losing the war—but just temporarily. They promised the Ustashas a final victory and that they would come back. In the leaflets, there were more things, especially tips for the Ustashas—what they needed to do, but I don't remember the specific things anymore.

The railroad was destroyed. The Ustashas didn't need to take care of it anymore. They got the command to retreat. Quickly, they got ready and took me with them.

When we came to the road, I saw that an attempt to escape would be completely unsuccessful. On the road from Okučani to Novska, a live river of people was flowing. There were all kinds of enemy soldiers—Germans, Ustashas, regular Croatian soldiers, Chetniks and others, and there were some civilians, too. All of them were going toward the west. On the road was complete chaos.

We were leaving the village of Paklenica near Novska, and we were going toward the east, the opposite direction of the way other people were going. I didn't know why the Ustashas were going toward the east, but that was the way that suited

me because I was shortening the distance to my home land. The lieutenant gave one Ustasha the task of following me and said he could leave me with some peasant man who would agree to accept me. On the way, Partisan airplanes attacked us a few times.

Am I going to be killed by my own people? I was thinking as I ran to protection.

We were going further. A peasant man was standing in his yard and watching the people who were passing. I asked the Ustashas to ask the man if he needed a shepherd.

"Landlord, do you need a servant?" asked the Ustasha.

"No. I don't need one. I don't know what to do with myself."

"The boy is good, obedient. He could help you."

"Take him yourself. I don't need him." The peasant man was stubborn.

From Paklenica to Gornji Rajići, we asked about ten peasant people to take me as a servant, and every time we got the same answer. "I don't need him."

I went with the Ustashas, sad and disappointed. No one wanted me. No one needed me. *If some man would take me just for ten minutes while these beasts go on, I could run away. In this chaos, no one knows who I am.*

In Gornji Rajići

At dusk we came to Gornji Rajići. My follower took me to an Ustasha officer, who lighted me with a flashlight in the half-dark and asked me a few questions. Then he ordered the Ustashas to put me somewhere to sleep. They took me to the house of Pavle Babić, who allowed me to spend the night. And old Granny Jula wanted me to stay me with them, too.

Finally, someone accepted me, I was thinking and looked with fear at the Ustasha. He agreed that I could stay there, and for me, that meant that I was staying alive. Old Pavle and Granny were very friendly. I got a good dinner and went to sleep. When I got up, there were no Ustashas that brought me there. During the night, they left the village and Germans came.

No one knows who I am. The old people in the house called me Stipe, and when I was turned with my back to them and thinking, they had to call me a few times. I needed time to get used to the new name. No danger was threatening me, so I decided to stay there and wait for Partisans, even though I could have gone wherever I wanted because no one was guarding me. I didn't know that area, so running away could have been dangerous.

When I was running from Jasenovac, barefoot through the forest, my legs got scratched and full of thorns. On the morning of April 23rd, I could hardly walk because the wounds on my legs were full of puss and hurting. A German officer noticed and asked what happened to me. He spoke the Serbian-Croatian language very well.

I answered that I was injured running from Partisans. Granny confirmed that, and he ordered her, "Granny, bring a tub of water and soap." Granny brought everything

"Wash your legs," he ordered me.

I obeyed, but it hurt me so much that I was doing it slowly. He got angry, took the soap, and—not paying attention to my tears and jerks—he washed my legs.

Eh-h, what I achieved that a German officer is washing my legs, I was thinking and clinching my teeth because of the pain. After the washing, the German, who was probably a doctor, and Granny took the thorns from my legs, and afterward, the German took some grease and put on my wounds. He asked Granny to find me some shoes, and she brought me old sneakers and thin socks. After he bound my legs and commanded me not to take it off for three days, I put on the socks and tennis shoes. That was really good. In three days, when I took off the bandage, almost all the wounds were healed.

The same day, I went with peasant children to herd animals in the fields by the forest. It was the forest I had been running through the day before—just a little more eastern. We took a lot of food—what was really important to me. During the sunny morning, nothing special happened. In the afternoon, it was a little bit colder, so we lit a small fire. We gathered around the fire and warmed ourselves. One girl had a piece of bacon on a stick and was heating it to put it on a piece of bread.

On the edge of the forest, maybe about 100 meters from us, a man appeared. He came toward us. The children were scared and were saying that it must be a bandit. I was trying to calm them down. While the man was coming closer, I was more and more sure that he was a prisoner from Jasenovac. When he was at a distance of about 10-to-15 meters from us, I was sure. I knew him from somewhere. He was staring at me, questioning me, too. Obvious, he recognized me. I gave him a sign to stay silent, putting my finger to my lips. He understood. He came to us, squatted by the fire, and started to warm himself. His eyes were glued to the piece of bread in the girl's hands. His look was frozen. From him was manifesting a long, insatiable famine. He was swallowing saliva, and the

really noticeable Adam's apple on his skinny neck was going up and down.

The girl just extended her hand and gave him the piece of bread and bacon, then she relaxed. After he ate it, he started talking to us and asking about the surroundings and soldiers in the villages. We told him everything honestly. After that, he went into the forest again, and we took our animals back to the village.

We herded animals to graze one more day, and then the front was closer, so it was impossible. There were battles between Germans and Partisans in Donji Rajići for two days, and at the dusk of the second day, the Germans retreated. I stayed in Rajići five days, and Partisans liberated us on April 26, 1945. I remember it was a Thursday.

The Germans were retreating toward Zagreb during the night. When they were retreating, one German soldier was running through Pavle's yard, trying to protect himself from the dog that was attacking him. We were watching from behind the window. Old Pavle was standing by me and said, "You see, even our dogs hate the fascistic army."

It was night. There were no Germans anymore. Partisans didn't come. We were in no one's area. We were expecting liberators at any moment. Old Pavle and the other people in the house were afraid. The enemy propaganda showed Partisans in a bad light, so they were expecting them with fear. My heart was beating so wildly because of the excitement that I thought it would jump out of my chest. I couldn't stand anymore not to tell them who I was. The behavior of people in the house and the words of old Pavle that their dogs hate fascists helped me. I felt I was safe and, because I was expecting Partisans at any moment, I decided to reveal myself.

I was in the kitchen with Granny Jula. I thought she was the most suitable person to tell. I started talking.

"Granny, did you think I was suspicious during these days?"

"No, Stipe."

"Granny, I'm not Stipe."

"You told us you are Stipe," Granny said, looking at me strangely.

"I'm not Stipe. I am Ilija Ivanović. I didn't run away from Partisans. I ran away from Ustashas, from Jasenovac."

When I told her these words, the religious Granny knelt on the floor and started praying to God. When she finished the prayer, she stood up, kissed me a few times, and went into the room where old Pavle was. In a second, everyone gathered around me, asking how to welcome Partisans. Because I was hungry for almost three years in the camp, I thought the whole world was hungry—so Partisans, too. I told the people in the house to prepare food and drink, and they did that immediately. There were two tables full of different food and drink. Drink was even poured in glasses. Everything was ready for the Partisans.

We were waiting. The time passed, but the Partisans didn't appear. I became anxious. Around 1 o'clock, after midnight, a lot of soldiers appeared on the road. I was watching from the window from the dark room and saw that the soldiers were wearing *šajkače*s. A few days ago, I saw Chetnicks in these hats, and they were running together with Germans. I was afraid. I was scolding myself because I uncovered myself too early. At that moment, one soldier, lighted with the weak moonlight, turned his head toward the window I was behind, and a star shined on his forehead. The flash of the star made me feel so happy. I screamed, "Partisans! Freedom!"

Then in front of the house, someone called Pavle, and he went out. Then the Partisans came in, and we greeted them and invited them to dinner. They sat down and talked to us about the fights. I was sitting in some Partisan's lap.* He was from Kozara, somewhere near Prijedor, and he was wearing a machine gun. He gave me, as his compatriot, a couple glasses of wine, and I don't know what happened later. I was drunk.

* Although Ilija was sixteen years old at the time, his growth had been stunted by malnutrition so that he was the size of a much younger boy.

In the morning, I woke up in a modern bed with clean sheets that were as white as snow. No one was bothering me. Granny Jula was carefully coming into the room, trying not to wake me up. I asked myself, *Is this reality?* I sensed that someone was opening the door slowly because I was sleeping. How opposite it was from those creepy nights in Jasenovac.

I woke up and washed my face while Granny was making breakfast. After breakfast, Mišo, Pavle's grandson, and I sat down on the bench in the yard and started playing cards. Just when we became hot for the game, Grandpa Pavle interrupted us.

"Stipe, come here.* The commander is calling you."

I left the cards and Mišo and went to the troop commander. While I was sleeping, Grandpa and Granny had told them my story about the escape from the camp. I went into the room, and the commander wanted me to tell him everything about the camp and the escape. He was interested in everything.

I talked a long time, maybe a whole hour. Whenever I stopped, he would ask me a new question. At the end, he asked me what I was going to do now, where I was going. I answered that I would like to go with them or, if they wouldn't accept me, I would go to my home.

"We will accept you, of course, but you are so skinny and exhausted that it would be better for you to go to your home. Anyway, the war is at its end. It would be a pity for you to die now after you survived all these things."

"A bullet doesn't want me," I told him, and he smiled sweetly.

"But still you can't go home. The road isn't safe," the commander said. "You will do one job for us, will you?"

"Yes, why not?" I answered and anxiously waited for my task.

* *Author's footnote:* For this family, I stayed Stipe forever. After the war, I visited them often. Granny and Grandpa passed away. Their daughter-in-law and granddaughter died in 1945 because of a landmine, and Mišo still lives in Rajići.

"Go to the village, from house to house, and ask people everywhere to bring food for the National Liberation Army to Pavle's house. But be careful. You have to tell everyone that it's voluntary. Do you understand?"

"Yes," I answered.

I flew through the village, happy because even I was doing something for the Partisans. I was important. With my head high, I went through the village and commanded people to bring food to Pavle's house. While I was talking, I avoided the word *voluntary* because I was afraid that they would bring just a little bit of food, and there were a lot of Partisans. Somehow, I couldn't free myself from the fear of famine. When one person asked me what to bring and how much, I answered, "Bring flour, meat, lard, bacon, beans—the more the better."

"Do we have to?"

"Yes. You have to."

When I went back, I found many people in the yard. They were bringing food and leaving. There was a lot of food. The commander came, congratulated me, and patted my shoulder, and I was glowing from some unexplainable happiness and grandiose.

"And tell me, my Kozaran, did you tell people that giving is voluntary?"

"Yes," I lied and hung my head.

"Okay, okay," he said. But it was clear to me that he suspected.

I was comfortable with myself that I had done a good job. For me, it was important that they got a lot of food. All day I walked in the yard, and I especially liked to be close to the commander or the commissary.

Who is happier than I am?

In Mother's Arms

A new happy and completely free day came. I woke up early. I was so excited that I couldn't sleep. Commander told me that the road was free and I could go home. Granny prepared a lot of food for me. I told them goodbye and went toward Okučani. On the way, I met two Partisan girls that were going in the same direction. We continued together. We were walking, and we heard an engine behind us. It was a truck. The Partisan girls stopped the truck and asked the driver, "Friend, where are you going?"

"To Gradiska," he answered.

"Can we go with you?"

"Yes."

"Can I go too?" I quickly asked.

"Jump in."

We got into the truck, where there were about ten more Partisans, and the truck started leaving.

Soon we came to some unfamiliar town. The driver stopped the vehicle, and we got out. While I was staring at the houses and traffic police officer at the crossroads, the people who were with me separated. I went to the traffic police officer and asked him, "Excuse me, which town is this?"

"Novi Gradiska."

"And how far it is to Bosanska Gradiska?"

"Thirty kilometers."

"And what is the way to Bosanska Gradiska?"

"That way," he showed with his hand the same way I had come from.

When I was leaving Rajići, Bosanska Gradiska was 24 kilometers, and now it was 30 kilometers away. I should have gotten out of the truck in Okučani, but because I didn't know

the places, I missed the road. If I had been going on foot, that wouldn't have happened to me.

I tied my bundle of food and went down the dusty road, not worrying because I was further from my goal. A truck full of Partisans passed by me. I was waving my hand, trying to stop them, but they didn't stop. A horse carriage passed by me with two Partisan officers. They accepted me and took me to Okučani. After they showed me the way, they went further to Novska, and I went to Bosanska Gradiska on foot.

The bridge on the Sava River was broken, so they were driving passengers to the other side with a raft. The water was carrying bloated and broken bodies. Most of the floating victims had their hands tied behind their backs. The passengers were moaning, and the raft man was explaining:

"For a few days the water has been carrying those people. The Ustashas killed the last prisoners in Jasenovac. It is said that prisoners tried to escape, and they were killed. Just a few of them were saved." I was quiet. I didn't tell them that I was one of the survivors. I was too busy watching bodies in hope that I would recognize someone. One of them was small, probably one of my peers. I didn't recognize anyone. It was impossible.

The raft came to the bank. As I was getting off, I heard an unfamiliar song, but those were loud people from Krajina:

Sava, the water and willows by you,
You are not going to carry Serbs anymore
But bloodthirsty Ustashas . . . .

The day was at its end. The sun was close to the horizon, and my home was still far away. I was anxious. I was hurrying. In town I met a group of boys from Gornji Podgradaci. They noticed me first and yelled, "There is Ilija!"

I learned that my family was alive. Two boys, Branko Zrnić and Bogdan Panić, agreed to come with me back to Podgradci, and after four hours of walking, we came to the front of my home.

It had been dark a long time. In the house, a suffocated, weak light was coming from the stove. I peeked through the window and saw the shadow of my mother. She was walking in the half-dark kitchen. I gave a sign to Branko and Bogdan to hide because I wanted to surprise her. I went to the door. I wanted to see if she was going to recognize me.

I tried to open the door, but I couldn't. There was no handle. I thought there might be a hook and put my hand through the broken glass, trying to unhook the door, but I couldn't touch anything. I guess my mother heard the tapping and squeaking of the door, so she came into the hall. Now only doors were between us. She peeked through the broken window and asked, "Who is this?"

I was quiet and she repeated the same question. I had to say, "Open, Mother."

The doors flew open. I stepped in and fell into her arms. We were kissing. She was crying and yelling, "Here's my Ilija! I told you he is alive and he will come!"

The house was becoming a mess. Everyone except my mother had been sleeping, and now—groggy and half-naked—they jumped out of the beds, made a circle around me, and started kissing me and crying because they were so happy. I was confused. *What's wrong with them? Why are they crying now?*

"What's wrong with you?" I asked. "I came home, and I'm alive. Shush."

They calmed down. Then came a flood of questions. I was talking. They were listening.

In the meantime, Branko and Bogdan had told the neighborhood, and soon the house was full. They were looking at me, amazed, just like they couldn't believe their eyes.

But I was there—a LIVE WITNESS come from HELL.

It Cannot be Forgotten

I was born in 1928 in the village of Gornji Podgradci, in the municipality of Bosanska Gradiska. My father Mile Ivanović and mother Jovanka (maiden name Ninković) had seven children—five daughters and two sons.

Before the war, we were living quite modestly and poor. My parents were illiterate but intelligent people, and they took care to educate their children. Until the war, all of us finished four classes of elementary school except Koviljka, Nikola, and Ranko, who were too small. Marija also finished a vocational school. In our village and also in neighboring villages, my father was highly respected. We were proud of that in him. He and my mother taught us to be honest, diligent, and honorable. Even today, after all these years, old people mention our father with respect.

When the old Yugoslavia fell and Ustashas took over, that honor put him in jail. Immediately, with other respectable people, my father was captured and taken hostage. He ran away and hid with friends in the village of Sovjak until the autumn of 1941 when he went to the Partisans.

After the liberation of Podgradaci, my sisters Mara, Marija, and Zorka were actively working in the National Liberation battle, and all three of them were soldiers from 1941. Marija and Zorka were honored for their valor in 1941. At the time of the offensive on Kozara, Marija succeeded in escaping toward Grmeč. And we, the rest of the members of the family, stayed in the circle. My father hid a weapon somewhere and came with us. He took off the soldier's uniform except his pants and wore civilian pants over the soldier's pants. Later, those pants were dangerous for him.

Except Marija, our whole family was taken to the camps at Stara Gradiska, Jablanac, Mlaka, and Jasenovac. Sister Zorka ran away from Jablanac to Gređani and later managed to go

across the Sava and come back to Podgradci. From Jablanac, with other peers, Ustashas took me to Jasenovac. Mother succeeded to keep the youngest children Koviljka, Nikola, and Ranko with her when they went through the village of Jasenovac. The Ustashas herded them by the camp and loaded them into a cattle car. There they separated my father from them, and we have never discovered what happened to him. Probably, he was immediately herded to Gradina and liquidated. The oldest sister Mara was married and, separated from us, went through the camp.

My mother with the three youngest children, after much torturous work and traveling around villages in Slavonia, happily managed to come home to Podgradci.

I stayed in Jasenovac from the middle of July, 1942, until April 22, 1945—about 1,000 days—when, in the famous escape of the last 1,060 prisoners, I managed to avoid the Ustashas dagger or mallet.

I have spent 43 years in freedom, and Jasenovac's wounds that were etched in my soul have not healed. The memories of all that I experienced and saw are indelible. They can't be forgotten.

Every year, on that day—April 22—survivors gather, and every year there are fewer and fewer of us. Live witnesses of the horror are dying, the witnesses of the hell of the Ustashas' camp in Jasenovac. At the end of the war, Ustashas tried to destroy the proof by burning bodies from the massive graves, but they didn't succeed in that. Still new graves and piles of bones of murdered patriots are being discovered. And seeing those bones haunts me. It's as if I hear their voices, "Write, Ilija, write. Don't let them forget, because you are living for us."

If I succeeded at least partly to satisfy that calling, I have paid my debt to my dead peers and to other known and unknown Jasenovac victims, and to today's and future generations, I have left the truth about the price of freedom.

The author

To Svetozar Cikić

Dedicated to a friend who was a member of the escape from Jasenovac on April 22, 1945, swam across the Sava River, reached Prosara Mountain but, on the night of April 23, 1945, died from famine and exhaustion without reaching home.

You were 13 years old in 1942
When, in the offensive on Kozara, they took you
From your birthplace Gašnica to Jasenovac.
You didn't know the meaning of *fascism*, *capitalism*,
Socialism, *communism*,
But you died because of these strange,
For you, barely pronounceable words.
You listened to a fiery speech with which Čoče
Invited to the fight and sang songs about Mladen.
You saw the terribleness of Jasenovac
And there spent around 1,000 days,
Floating all the time between life and death.
You cheated death
And out-witted death
In *nastups* ordered by Luburić,
Ljubo Miloš, Pićilli,
And other monsters this fascism had born.
You took part in the April 22, 1945, final attack
Of the bare-handed on concrete bunkers and red-hot
Barrels of machine guns.
You managed to escape the Ustashas,
Reach the forest by the Strug
And swim across the big Sava.
You saw the newborn sun of freedom
And looked for Partisans on the heights of Prosara.
You crossed all obstacles and came

Within reach of your home threshold.
You needed just a little bit more to sustain
And reach dawn, but your
Famine-exhausted body didn't withstand the cold
April night.
You died quietly, unheard on the stump of
A hundred-year-old oak
On your Prosara.

List of Some of the Boys

A small number of boys who were in Camp Jasenovac:

	[from]	
Adžić Mihajlo	Turjak	killed
Adžić Milorad	Turjak	killed
Adžić Ljubomir	Turjak	killed
Adžić Stevo	Turjak	killed
Adžić Zdravko	Turjak	killed
Adžić Živko	Turjak	in escape, alive
Babić Milan	Gašnica	ran away 1942, then killed
Babić Ostoja	Gašnica	killed
Bajić Desimir	Mašić	died
Batajić Miloš	Međeda	ran away, alive
Bogunović Milutin	D. Podgradaci*	killed
Bjelajac Dragoja	Gašnica	killed
Bjelajac Rade	Gašnica	ran away, alive
Bjelovuk Drago	Jablanica	killed
Bjelovuk Pavle	Jablanica	killed
Bunčić Milan	Banija	alive
Bunčić Milan	Banija	alive
Čekić Žarko	Gašnica	killed
Čikić Đoko	Gašnica	killed
Čikić Svetozar	Gašnica	in escape, died on Prosara 23 April 1945, didn't make it home
Čikić (P.) Branko	G. Podgradaci	killed

* D. (Donja) Podgradaci is lower Podgradaci; G. (Gornji) Podgradaci is upper Podgradaci.

Čikić Miloš	G. Podgradaci	killed
Čikić Slavko	G. Podgradaci	killed
Danilović Pero	Gašnica	escaped 1942, alive
Desančić Branko	D. Podgradaci	killed
Desančić Slavko	D. Podgradaci	killed
Gigović Ilija	Trebovljani	killed
Gigović Marijan	Trebovljani	killed
Gigović Živko	Trebovljani	in escape, died 1982
Gligić Jovan	Milosevo Brdo	killed
Ilisević Vasilija	Vrbaška	killed
Ivanović Jovan	G. Podgradaci	killed
Ivanović Jevto	G. Podgradaci	ran away 1942, alive
Ivanović Ilija	G. Podgradaci	in escape, alive
Ivanović Savo	G. Podgradaci	killed
Janković Savo	Vrbaška	killed
Janjetović Branko	D. Podgradaci	alive
Jokić Radovan	Turjak	killed
Kolarić Stojan	Trebovljani	killed
Kukavica Milan	Gašnica	killed
Kukavica Jovan	Gašnica	killed
Kukavica Ilija	Gašnica	killed
Kukavica Rade	Gašnica	killed
Kukavica Stevo	Gašnica	killed
Kukavica Savo	Gašnica	killed
Kukavica Đuro	Gašnica	ran away 1942, alive
Lukić Milan	G. Podgradaci	killed
Lukić (R) Milorad	G. Podgradaci	killed
Lukić (R) Milan	G. Podgradaci	killed
Levi Samuel (Mile)	Prijedor	killed
Lipovac Ostoja	Turjak	ran away 1942, alive
Mandić Mirko	Gašnica	ran away 1942, alive

Mirić Milutin	Gašnica	in escape, died 1997
Mijić Ostoja	Bistrica	in escape, alive
Mutić Mirko	Gašnica	killed
Ostojić (D) Stojan	Trebovljani	killed
Panić (I) Dragutin	G. Podgradaci	killed
Panić (Đ) Lazar	G. Podgradaci	killed
Panić (V) Jovan	G. Podgradaci	killed
Pavković Božo	Demirovaci	ran away 1942, alive
Pejić (L) Radojica	G. Podgradaci	killed
Popović (N)Radovan	Trebovljani	in escape, alive
Popović Ostoja	Trebovljani	in escape, died
Popović (M)Radovan	Trebovljani	killed
Popović (S) Vojislav	D. Podgradaci	killed
Popović (S) Žarko	D. Podgradaci	killed
Popović (B) Ostoja	Trebovljani	killed
Prelić Boško	Miloševo Brdo	killed
Prelić Dušan	Miloševo Brdo	ran away 1945, died
Prelić Vlado	Miloševo Brdo	killed
Prpoš Dušan	Sovjak	killed
Pureta Jovo	Gašnica	ran away 1942, alive
Pureta Mile	Gašnica	killed
Sandalj Milivoj	Vrbaška	killed
Stojaković Rajko	Vrbaška	in escape, alive
Stojaković Slavko	Trebovljani	killed
Starčević Boro	G. Podgradaci	killed
Subotić Vaso	Vrbaška	killed
Šerbula Mile	Gašnica	killed
Šešum Mirko	Gašnica	killed
Šinik (S) Milovan	G. Podgradaci	killed
Šinik (S) Milan	G. Podgradaci	killed
Šinik Milovan	Cimiroti	alive
Šormaz Drago	G. Jelovac	rescued 1942, alive

Šuvak Dušan	Međeda	killed
Šuvak Lazo	Gašnica	killed
Šuvak Milan	Gašnica	killed
Šuvak Miro	Gašnica	killed
Šuvak Nikola	Gašnica	killed
Šuvak Rade	Međeda	killed
Tepić Milenko	Gašnica	killed
Tepić Milan	Gašnica	killed
Tošić Mirko	Miloševo Brdo	ran away 1943, alive
Vidović Radomir	Jablanica	killed
Vidović Momir	Mašici	in escape, alive
Vračar Dušan	Gašnica	killed
Vračar Stevo	Gašnica	killed
Vujić Miloš	Trebovljani	killed
Vučkovac Uroš	G. Podgradaci	killed
Vukelić Pero	Vrbaška	killed
Ugrenović Vojo	Drageliji	killed
Zmijanjac Branko	Miloševo Brdo	killed
Zmijanjac Savo	Gašnica	killed

Editor's Epilogue

A marble monument on the Bosnia side of the Sava River xplains that Lower Gradina was part of Jasenovac where 00,000 were murdered. Another monument explains that ore than half of the estimated 700,000 killed in the asenovac camps were killed at Gradina. Anthropological ork in 1964 and 1976 identified three kinds of grave fields nd documented almost half of the mass graves at Gradina asenovac Memorial Complex). Yet 105 mass graves still ave not been explored, according to the *CNN/Time* report No Harm Done?" The report represented the first real limpse provided by major media into what was certainly an ssential ingredient in the recent war in Bosnia and Croatia. A erbian-American noted, "My brother and I, around 1995, did computer cross-reference of all newspaper stories from the ajor U.S. papers, and out of thousands of stories on the ugoslav civil war to that date, there was virtually *no* direct eference to the Serbian genocide and four references to the oman Catholic Church in Yugoslavia, all of which were ositive. It is like writing about the Jewish experience in WII and omitting the Holocaust and saying the Nazis did ood things for the Jews in WWII."

The exact number of victims at Jasenovac has not been stablished. In addition to the executions at Jasenovac, bands f Ustashas and Franciscan priests raided Serb villages, assacring the inhabitants in a barbaric frenzy. While the stasha documented their killing at Jasenovac with notographs and reports, as did the Germans who were ationed at the camp to protect German interests, Franjo udjman, the first president of Croatia as it exists now, eferred to the "Jasenovac Myth" and claimed in his 1989 ook that only a few people were killed because of retaliation r some infraction by a prisoner and that the camp was a labor amp rather than a death camp (qtd. in Bulajić). Others speak terms of "tens" of thousands, not "hundreds" of thousands

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The exact number of victims at Jasenovac has not been established. In addition to the executions at Jasenovac, bands of Ustashas and Franciscan priests raided Serb villages, massacring the inhabitants in a barbaric frenzy. While the Ustasha documented their killing at Jasenovac with photographs and reports, as did the Germans who were stationed at the camp to protect German interests, Franjo Tudjman, the first president of Croatia as it exists now, referred to the "Jasenovac Myth" and claimed in his 1989 book that only a few people were killed because of retaliation or some infraction by a prisoner and that the camp was a labor camp rather than a death camp (qtd. in Bulajić). Others speak in terms of "tens" of thousands, not "hundreds" of thousands

of victims in the camp, and even Christianne Amonpour used the same terminology—"tens of thousands"—in her report on the trial of Dinko Šakić (CNN), even as the Croatian prosecutor concluded ample evidence exists to classify Jasenovac as a "camp of death" (qtd. in Bulajić).

Because of those who would deny or minimize the genocide perpetrated against Serbs, Jews, and Gypsies by the Croat Ustasha, I have relied heavily on sources from Croats or Catholics from other parts of the world who are devoted to truth. One such source is Edmund Paris' *Genocide in Satellite Croatia 1941-1945*, which was translated from French and published here in 1961. Paris claims,

> [T]he Orthodox Serbs in Croatia barely escaped complete extermination. Yet this gigantic holocaust, which took place only a few years ago and which was witnessed by the present generation, has given rise to the most fantastic stories, accompanied by an intense propaganda that still continues a tireless effort to "cleanse" the guilty of any sense of responsibility. All kinds of printed matter, written under the guise of the "greatest objectivity," and published largely by the Croatian and Vatican printing presses, is being circulated throughout the world. (4-5)

Paris further states,

> The greatest genocide during World War II, in proportion to a nation's population, took place, not in Nazi Germany but in the nazi-created puppet state of Croatia. There, in the years 1941-1945, some 750,000 Serbs, 60,000 Jews and 26,000 Gypsies—men, women and children—perished in a gigantic holocaust. These are the figures used by most foreign authors, especially the Germans, who were in the best position to know. Hermann Neubacher, perhaps the most important of Hitler's trouble-shooters in the Balkans, reports that although some of the perpetrators of the crime estimated the number of Serbs killed at one million, the more accurate figure is 750,000. (9)

John Cornwell, in *Hitler's Pope*, provides the background and the Vatican's complicity for,

> [T]he campaign of terror and extermination conducted by the Ustashe of Croatia against two million Serb Orthodox Christians and a smaller number of Jews, Gypsies, and Communists between 1941 and 1945. An act of 'ethnic cleansing' before that hideous term came into vogue, it was an attempt to create a 'pure' Catholic Croatia by enforced conversions, deportations, and mass extermination. So dreadful were the acts of torture and murder that even hardened German troops registered their horror. Even by comparison with the recent bloodshed in Yugoslavia at the time of this writing, Pavelic's onslaught against the Orthodox Serbs remains one of the most appalling civilian massacres known to history. (249)

Sadly, the story of the Serb holocaust is unknown to most Americans. The story is missing from our history books. So before the last war began, when Croat politicians again espoused openly the neo-Ustasha rhetoric as they declared their independence from Yugoslavia, the world did not take notice. And when the new "democratic" Croatia began taking rights from Serbs, actually amending the constitution of the Croatian republic to do so, firing Serbs from their jobs, and actually slaughtering Serbs, Americans had no idea what this all meant to our former allies, the Serbs. And when Americans were fed media reports that originated in the Croat and Muslim Ministries of Information and pictures of Serb victims that were presented as Croat and Muslim victims—propaganda so blatantly false that it constituted, according to journalist Richard Ross, "a criminal disservice to the American people"—Americans believed the Serbs had suddenly become a race (or religion) of demons.

Michael Lees, a British officer who had been in Yugoslavia in World War II, went back to see the truth first-hand. He gave his report in the documentary *Rape of Reason: Yugoslavia: The Untold Story*:

> This is just one of many houses which have been destroyed in what seems to have been a deliberate Croatian policy to harass and oppress Serbs in the areas where there are mixed populations and drive them out, presumably in

order to grab their lands—which was the policy in 1941. Are we going to see a repetition of this? Neighboring this destroyed property are rich vineyards that the old lady says belong to Ustasha—she means the Croats. And they lived here as neighbors until this new drive for Croatian independence and the grabbing of land started.

It is a tragedy if this is going to happen, and I believe it is the duty of the western world to ensure that it does not happen and to enable these people, who have been here for 700 or maybe a 1000 years, to live quietly on their land, not oppressing anybody and to live as they always did and as they always wanted to do.

The Croatians, unfortunately, have once again shown that they are unfit to rule other peoples. No one contests their right to live in their own state under their own rules. Let them have their state. Let them go out of Yugoslavia and take these nasty habits and hate with them. Leave the Serbian communities to live in peace in whatever new form Yugoslavia may take. (In Ross)

It didn't happen that way. The lies made possible the continuation of the policy that had been in place 50 years earlier. And when truth (such as the fact that we bombed Serbs over acts committed by the mujahidin Bosnian Muslim government forces to blame on Serbs) finally did leak out, it was too little, too late. The demonetizing of Serbs had stuck with even a congressman referring to the "bastard" Serbs and the Clinton administration taking steps further denying rights (and voice) to Bosnia and Krajina Serbs, the very people who had fifty years earlier suffered untold tragedy and fought heroically with Allies for freedom.

Had Americans known the truth—that old enemies of the Serb people (of Orthodox Christianity, in fact), the neo-Ustasha Croats, backed by Germany and the Vatican, and Islamic fundamentalists, backed by Iran, Afghanistan, and other Middle East religious states, were again coming together to purge Serb people and their religion from the areas of the old Independent State of Croatia—it is inconceivable that Americans would have succumbed to the relentless media lies

and the administration's irrational characterizations of both the Serbs and the situation.

Croatia was able to grab Serb land, and oddly, Bosnia and Krajina Serbs would be characterized as "aggressors" on their own homeland as they protected their homes and families. In village after village, memorials list the names of hundreds of people who died at the hands of Croats and Muslims, but memorials added after the last war lists victims in single digits or, at the most, in tens. In one tiny village, sixteen names are listed on a memorial to those who died when Croats invaded there (an invasion that, along with bombing of Bosnian Serbs by Croat planes was not characterized as "aggression").

The difference in the number of victims in the two wars, Bosnian Serbs say, is that they were prepared to defend themselves in the last war. They knew what it meant when Croats broadcast the songs of the World War II Ustasha, legislated discrimination against Serbs, and began killing Serb peasants in their homes. They also knew what it meant to live under Muslim domination. In World War II, Bosnian Serbs had been so busy fighting for Allies that they left their "defenseless," their children, unprotected, and Tito (mysteriously) never led them to liberate Jasenovac. In the last war, they would stay close to their homes, protecting their families, and strangely, die under the bombs of an enemy that had always before been their ally—the United States. While they had fought the Axis forces of Germany, Austria, Croatia, Italy, Hungary, Albania, and the fundamentalist Muslims in World War II, they would by 1996 be occupied by the forces of most of those very countries. For that, Bosnian Serbs were not prepared.

When Bosnian Serbs try to explain why America turned against them, they almost always do so with one word—*oil.* Many think the West, especially Germany, needed a route from the Middle East for a new oil pipeline, and Germany and the U.S. needed a military presence in the Balkans to protect it. (We now have a huge military base in Kosovo.) They believe Germany and the U.S. used neo-fascists and fundamentalist Muslims as tools to achieve their objectives

and that the destruction of Yugoslavia and the "beautiful lives" enjoyed there prior to 1990 were merely by-products.

Remarkably, Bosnian Serbs differentiated between Croats and Ustasha after World War II. Even those whose families were slaughtered lived in peace for more than forty years beside Croat and Muslim neighbors and intermarried at a rate of thirty percent. Even more remarkable is that Serbs even now differentiate between Croats and Ustasha, or at least between Croatian Croats and Bosnian Croats, even after the last war when Serbs were again slaughtered in the first killing of the war and Serb farmers had their eyes gouged out before they were killed by neo-Ustashas in Vukovar and again heard the song about Ustashas drinking the blood of Serbs instead of wine and a song with the words "Danke Deuschland" played on the Croatian television stations as it had been played on the radio in World War II. What they want most now is truth. To proud Serbs, media lies hurt more than the bombs and bullets. In the words of one Serb man, "We can take the slaughter. We are used to that. But we must regain our sense of honor."

Americans, especially after terrorist attacks in our country, deserve explanations for media omissions and lies regarding the war in Yugoslavia and for our government's support of Croat and Muslim forces. The Arab mujahidin remain in Bosnia (in violation of the Dayton agreement) and have a mujahidin training camp in the Muslim and Croat Federation while the international community continues to punish the Serb Republic that is more tolerant but much poorer.

Furthermore, the Catholic people whose faith was "betrayed" (*A&E*) by Pius XII, those who collaborated with Hitler and Pavelić, and those who concealed the truth (Cornwell) and even nominated Bishop Stepinac for sainthood deserve explanations for these unholy actions. Americans can no longer afford to trust leaders, religious or political, as guardians of the truth. Even in this time of media proliferation, these words were never more relevant: "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be" (Thomas Jefferson).

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