

SADIK DANON'S TESTIMONY

CONDUCTED ON APRIL 24TH 1997 IN BELGRADE

Q: Now we will hear the testimony of Sadik Danon who survived the horrible camp Jasenovac. From the camp's agricultural property, he escaped the Ustasha's Jasenovac and joined partisans in 1942. He fought until the end of the war. He graduated with a degree in architecture. His mother and two of his sisters also survived Jasenovac, while his father was killed in this camp. Jasa Almuli, a journalist from Belgrade, conducts this interview for the U.S. Holocaust Museum and the Jeff and Toby Herr collection. Sadik, please:

A: My name is Sadik Danon, and I was born in Sarajevo in 1923. There I finished my elementary school, and then we moved to Belgrade in 1934. I graduated from The First Male Gymnasium, and in 1939, I started at a technical school, in the department for architecture. Predominantly poor students attended this technical school. The students with a poor financial status attended this school in their hope to reach a complete qualification in four years. Since this was a school of the poor, most of its students were left-oriented. There was a small group of Ljotic followers, Serbian fascists, but generally the school was left oriented. On September 1 1939, the war already started, and I was accepted to SKOJ¹. SKOJ's main tendencies were anti-fascism. As a Jew I was completely against fascism, so we were preparing for the already recognizable events. I completed my sophomore year. Actually we attended school only until April. Some stormy events followed the pact in which Yugoslavia joined the Axis, Germany, Italy, and

¹ Alliance of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia

Japan. Prior to that, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria had already signed the pact, so Yugoslavia was surrounded, and on March 25th, the government of Cvetkovic-Macek joined the pact. The revolts of people, especially students, started the same night. In the night between the 26th and 27th, the governmental overturn took a place and the pact was abolished. I hadn't heard of the overturn until the next morning. I went to school and met my friends in the front. They told me about the overturn. We went to the city to celebrate this event. Workers were joining us while we walked down Dusanova Street. I remembered workers of "Elka" factory joined us and we cheered, "Alliance with Russia," "Army with people," while nationalists were yelling, "Better war than a pact," "Better grave than to be slave." Our aim was not to provoke the enemy, but to make a connection with the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union was supposed to help us, because we believed that the Soviet Union is an unbeatable power. We reached the main square at Terazije, and then we walked through Knez Mihajlo Street, Kralj Milan Street, and the entire day we were celebrating this event.

Q: Tell me where were you on April 6th when the Germans bombed Belgrade and the war against Yugoslavia started?

A: On April 6th I was in my bed. It was on Sunday morning. I remember I was reading the last pages of Solohov's book *Rotated Yard*, when suddenly I heard sirens, explosions, breaking windows...

Q: Was your entire family in Belgrade?

A: ...all of us were in Belgrade, but my sisters went to celebrate in front of the Soviet Union's embassy. Bombing started, we went down...

Q: Now tell me, did you leave Belgrade after its bombing, where did your family go?

A: Well, see this, I would like to tell you this. Perhaps two or three months prior to the war, in our school a course in anti-air-strike protection was organized. Upon the completion of this course, we were told that our meeting place would be the school on the corner of Dusanova and Dubrovacka Street. Since we lived in Jovanova, we had to act as the first aid and provide services necessary for defense. When the first wave of air strikes was over, I told my family that I had to go. My mother grabbed me and tried to persuade me to stay in the house. I ran away, went down Kralja Petra Street, and entered the school. There were already a lot of refugees there, but I was looking for some of my friends. An engineer who was a group leader was supposed to be there, but no one was there. Afterwards I returned home, and by then my sisters were home too. We waited for several air strikes to be over, and then we went to Zvezdara using a longer pause between bombings. While walking, I faced horrible scenes of the killed and dead. We walked toward Kaludjerici Village from where we planned to go to the Greek haven Solun. However, the circumstances were different than we thought. We didn't even reach Mladenovac, when we figured out that there was total chaos and final dissolution of the Yugoslav army. Then we returned back. The Germans were already in Belgrade.

Q: Who returned, you and your sister?

A: Yes, we all returned. My father and mother, all of us. We entered Belgrade and saw Germans on their motorcycles and in trucks. We returned home, and just two days later they announce that all Jews have to report to the Command, that is currently Tasmajdan, otherwise they will be severely

prosecuted. Many of Jews reported, as well as my mother and father. I didn't register myself. Germans immediately created work groups. Germans made lists of people who were engaged in cleaning. I hid myself at one friend of mine, so I didn't participate in cleaning. My brother-in-law, who was a very skillful and practical person, persuaded my parents to move away from Belgrade. His name was Rade Kusic, and he was my sister Sarina's husband.

Q: So he convinced you to leave Belgrade?

A: Yes. My father had a manufacturer's store. It was filled with nice items. My brother-in-law organized his friends to evacuate the most valuable items from my father's store. The rest of the things were left, and the Germans took them away.

Q: You had two sisters?

A: Sarina-Ina and Simka, who we called Sida. One of them studied architecture and the other one, medicine.

Q: She already attended medical school?

A: Yes. She was a freshman.

Q: And you listened to Rade's advice?

A: We all decided to leave. Our house was bombed, my sisters were SKOJ members, so we decided to go to Tuzla to my uncle's house. He was my father's brother. Since we felt Bosnian, we decided to go to our homeland.

Q: Where was your father born?

A: He was born in Bijeljina. His name was Isidor, and my mother was born in Gracanica near Tuzla. Sida and I left first. Her boyfriend was with us. We traveled by train in the direction of Sid, over Bijeljina, to Tuzla.

Q: Did you wear yellow armbands, and what kind of documents did you have?

A: I had my school ID in my name, Sadik Danon, as well as my sister Sida and her boyfriend Djura Stefanovic. They carded us on the train. By the way they behaved, we thought that was our end. Luckily, one of these Ustasha asked who we were. At that time they did not have uniforms, just hats with the Croatian three-color flag on it. My future brother-in-law told him that we were visiting family in Sid, and he emphasized the name of the family. Ustasha understood that Djura was half Croat and half Serb, and his father was a Croat, which was good enough. This soldier personally escorted us to that family in Sid, and if it was not for him, we would be liquidated.

Q: How long did you stay in Sid for?

A: We spent the night in Sid, and the next morning I took a bus to Tuzla. When I reached Bijeljina and crossed the Sava river, I stopped at my uncle Gedalja's house in Bijeljina. His wife was there with his son, and I stayed with them. I looked at Bijeljina where every house had a German flag with a swastika.

Q: What kind of population was that?

A: The population was mixed, but I was wondering why there were so many German flags. I went out to the main square where a huge crowd of

people was concentrated. King Alexander's monument was there. They were trying to tear down the monument with a rope tied around the king's neck. The mayor of the town yelled, "Tear that ugliness down!" I heard people mumbling and searched reasons for that. I was told that that was the same mayor who introduced the same monument several years before. Most of people around me were Serbs, and the mayor was a Muslim. I remained in Tuzla for a couple of days and continued to Tuzla. I was the first one who came to my uncle's house in Tuzla. Sida arrived two or three days later. My older sister and her husband remained in Serbia, but they moved to Gornji Milanovac because the Liberation Front was about to start. So Sara-Ina, an architect, went with her husband. Sida arrived in Tuzla, as well as my parents, several days later.

Q: Did your parents have hard time escaping Belgrade?

A: There was still confusion and disorganization, so they managed to escape. In wartime, people have to use a moment. If you prolong to escape, each new day is more difficult.

Q: Well, what kind of situation did you meet in Tuzla? Tuzla is in Bosnia, and Bosnia was a part of an Independent State of Croatia, Ustasha's state. What kind of treatment did Jews have?

A: In the beginning there was nothing. Later they ordered all Jews to report. Jews had to wear a yellow armband. Then they created work groups and forced us to work kinds of jobs that were dangerous for them. I remember we would go to the sawmill in Petrovo Selo and load wooden materials, while Ustasha were in their trenches on the front line. Ustasha

started slaughtering in surrounding villages with a predominantly Serb population. They were acting wildly.

Q: Did Tuzla have a mixed population?

A: Serbs, Croats, Muslims were mixed.

Q: What about surrounding villages?

A: Surrounding villages had a predominately Serbian population, although there were some Muslim villages.

Q: How did Muslims behave in a Croat state?

A: Muslims mostly claim themselves Croats. I know during Austro-Hungarian domination in 1914, so-called "Sutskor" was formed. That was Austrian creation that organized Muslims from East Bosnia who later killed Serbs. In 1918 Muslims declared as Serbs, but in 1941 they declared as Croats. Pavelic called them flowers of the Croatian nation, and they joined the Ustasha's movement. There were some progressive Muslims who remained correct. Mostly they were left-wingers, so they joined the Liberation Front. However, most of the Liberation Front members were Serbs.

Q: When did the Jewish arrest started in Tuzla?

A: Well, they arrested my father in August 1941. They kept him for several days, and then he was released. He told me that they mentioned liquidation, and at that time, he did not even know what that meant. A real capturing started at the end of December of 1941. However, I joined the Liberation Movement. My sister and I made contact with local people and

started organizing relief. We provided shelter for illegal members who searched the Liberation Front. For example, Mahmut Busatlija, a Belgrade student, was hiding in our house before joining the partisans. He put the Yugoslav uniform on in order to present the picture of a Yugoslav soldier. His group left the next morning, but the Ustasha captured them and killed them all, except one girl who...

Q: Did they capture them immediately?

A: ...They captured them immediately. The organization was still really bad. That was a beginning stage, so people were not cautious. A partisan platoon was formed on Majevisa. Sida and I looked for permission to join the partisans. Illegal potential members of partisan movement were transported from our house on the route Sarajevo-Tuzla-Zagreb. One day, a familiar man with red fez² on his head showed up. He was Drago Kurilic, a Serb and Communist, son of the director of the rehabilitation center Kiseljak. He had a brother, Jova, and a sister, Mira, and all of them were Communists. I approached him and mentioned his name, but he was quiet. I understood that he was here illegally. We took him upstairs, and he started telling us stories from Romanija, where Chetniks and partisans were together, and everything was well-organized.

Q: Romanija, a mountain near Sarajevo?

A: Correct. Suddenly he was gone, and he was supposed to go to Zagreb. Unfortunately, he was not lucky. His school friend, Ustasha, recognized him, and he was arrested. We were scared that under the pressure he might not keep a secret. But he was a hero and didn't say a word. They killed him. His

brother Jova was taken to Jasenovac, and he was murdered too. So this illegal work in Tuzla was very dangerous, and it lasted until the end of 1941, when they discovered...

Q: Did police discover the organization?

A: They discovered the organization, and a big volume of arresting took a place. We had a comrade who was a member of the Communist Party in Tuzla. Her name was Ludmila Handja. She was a Croat, and later, her married name was Androsevic. Her father was a security guard in Stok, which was Tuzla's prison. She worked illegally, and she was also visiting and encouraging us. She was employed in post office, so all of the telegrams from Zagreb that described people who were supposed to be arrested went through her hands. She informed people who were on a list, and by doing that, she saved many lives. At the end of 1941...

Q: partisans did not accept you and Sida?

A: They gave us a permit at the end of 1941. I remember that we tried one night. It was winter and frost, and police hour started at seven, so we left at six. There was nobody on the street but Ustasha's controls. We pretended to be a couple. We successfully reached the chemical industry plant "Kreka." We knocked at the door in a certain code, and then introduced ourselves. The people that we stayed with were Croats and Communists, and their last name was Pavelic. We stayed there for four or five days, waiting for our connection. Our connection didn't show up, so after five days, a local messenger came and told us that our transport to partisans cannot be arranged. So we had to go back. We walked back during the day, and the

² traditional Muslim hat

messenger explained what happened. Chetniks attacked partisans at Majevisa and mostly killed them all. Our connection was captured and slaughtered too. The Party organization ordered me and Sida to get in contact with one Jewish man from Tuzla who was a chemist and who could give us a formula to make nitroglycerin.

Q: What was his name?

A: I cannot recall. He was an Ashkenazi Jew, and he survived the war. Sida pretended to be interested in private lessons in math, but she took me there as well. We started talking about math, but suddenly Sida openly told him, "The party is sending me, and they want to have a formula to get nitroglycerine." The partisans had to steal weapons from the enemy, and we were totally armless. With a red face he admitted that he doesn't know. Prior to our decision to join the partisans, my aunt from Mostar wanted to send someone to escort us to Mostar. The situation in Mostar was better. The Italians were there, and the Muslims were very nice. I think that Mostar was the only place where Muslims were honest. My aunt requested from us to send her our pictures so she could manage to get some identification cards, some permits, or passports so they can come and pick us up. Since Sida and I decided to join the partisans, only my parents sent her their pictures. After our unsuccessfully planned transportation, we decided to wait for the next chance. Several days later, during my lunch, someone rang the doorbell. My mother opened and immediately started screaming. I could predict what was happening. I went to the balcony and thought about jumping down, but two Ustasha with knives and rifles caught me there and deported me to the Kreka prison. There I met my father who was picked up from the street with many other men over the age of 18.

Q: When was that?

A: That was at the end of December 1941. It was the beginning of January after the Orthodox Christmas. They concentrated us in an empty hall, and afterwards our family brought us mattresses. Since women and children were free, they were bringing us food. One day, I was observing through the metal bars on the window a large group of people being escorted to the prison by Ustasha. By the way that they were dressed, I could tell that they were Serbs. At the entrance door, each of them was hit with rifle-butt and literally all of them flew inside the prison. That's how these confused and scared people ended up among us. We approached them and told them that we were Jews, so they gained confidence and trust. We gave them food to eat, and they rested for a while. I offered to one of them to share my mattress with me. Lying next to me he told me...

Q: Where did he come from?

A: He was from one village near Vlasenica toward Griga. That was a Chetnik region, the Chetniks' commander Dangic was from there, as well as captain Todorovic. All of them were monarchist and the followers of the monarchy regime. He told me that they fought Chetniks, and the Germans did not stay there, because they continued to the eastern front. In the beginning, partisans and Chetniks were together. They all consider themselves rebels. That was December of 1941. He told me the story: "Our commander lined us up and informed us that we made the agreement with Ustasha and the Germans so they would not attack us. We were supposed to disarm and return home. That's what we did. Several days later, Ustasha surrounded our houses and arrested the entire male population. This way, we ended up in this prison." He also added that most of the people arrested

would rather die than be arrested in such a sham way. That was one of the bigger betrayals that Chetniks did. Chetniks were in Serbia and collaborated with partisans until November, but they were for the monarchy, for king and capitalism, generally for something that opposed the partisans' views, so after November they decided to attack the partisans.

Q: Then the civil war started?

A: The main partisans' defeat was Ustasha Republic, and then the civil war started mixed with liberation front against Germans. Since Ustasha completely collaborated with Germans, partisans were the only force that fought the Germans.

Q: Did the Chetniks play a double game?

A: Double game, but such a game was so obvious that it was easy to recognize their cooperation with the aggressor. Later it became an open collaboration.

Q: For how long did you stay in Prison Kreka, and what kind of treatment did you have there? How many Jews were there?

A: My estimates are 100 to 120.

Q: Tell me, how many of these 100 or 120 survived the war?

A: I was the only one. All of them were taken to Jasenovac.

Q: When did they take you to Ustasha's camp, Jasenovac, in Slavonija, Croatia?

A: It was near Sisak in Croatia. They transferred us in February of 1942. We were lucky that during the most severe winter we were still in Kreka. That winter was fatal for many, but we spent it in Kreka. Fifteen days prior to our transfer to Jasenovac, they came with the lists and announced the names of the younger people who were Zionists and Communists. Before they were transported, some Jewish man who owned the hat store delivered nice fur and leather hats to these fifteen people. Those hats were modern before the war. I am emphasizing this story because of a detail that I will explain later. However, these fifteen men, who were mostly left-Zionist and Communists, were taken in an unknown direction, but we were told about Jasenovac. They had such nice hats.

Q: Did this guy bring those hats to the prison?

A: Yes, he did. The day came when we were told to pack ourselves up.

Q: How did they transport you to Jasenovac?

A: We traveled by train. I think that they did not want to be so harsh, therefore they put us in the third class boxcars. Along with us, there were Serbs, those villagers, and Chetniks. Among them there was one eighteen-year-old man who came with the Chetniks' hat and their symbol on it. I am not sure whether they put it on his head or he wanted to have it, but I don't know why didn't he take it off. My sister and Sida came to say good-bye.

Q: To you and your father?

A: To me and my father. Sida told me quietly, "I heard that partisans will attack the train and try to liberate you. If you hear the gunshots, lay down and tell others to do the same so you don't get killed." I hugged my mother,

actually first my father did, and then he hugged Sida and both started crying. My mother hugged me, and we all cried. Ustasha came and said, "Come on," and pulled me out of my mother's hug and pushed me into the train. In each boxcar, on both sides, there were Ustasha. I was sitting and crying. I heard my mother's scream, and that was a scream after which you feel you will die. I left and calmed down slightly, because I expected the partisans' attack. When we reached Petrovo Selo, they told the Serbs that they were going for work in Germany, and us that we were going to the Jasenovac camp. Prior to our transfer to Jasenovac, a policeman came to talk to us, and we were all accused as the partisans' collaborators. That was ridiculous. I was collaborating with them, but the old man next to me did not have a clue about anything. Certainly I told then that I don't know anything about it, but that was just a formality. Several days before, Ante Pavelic, in his desire to expose his state as lawful, issued the statement saying that nobody would be prosecuted without fair trial. That policeman's visit to the prison was supposed to be our fair trial. In the train, the same policeman distributed the final verdict. We were sentenced to go to the camp. One paper described a decision to transfer to the camp. I was accused of collaborating with partisans and sentenced to go to the work camp Jasenovac. My father received the same sentence. Only one Ashkenaz Jew, whose wife was Hungarian, was sentenced for three years. We knew what that meant. The train stopped in Petrovo Selo. That was in the direction of Dobojski, the narrow railroad Tuzla-Dobojski in Bosnia. In Petrovo Selo, Serbs were taken out of train, and the young guy with Chetnik's hat on his head was led by Ustasha. Later we learned that they were taken into the woods and killed. We continued our trip, and later I heard machine gun shooting from the distance. I could not tell what kind of machine gun that was. Later I learned that that

was Franc Loze machine gun. Since shooting was coming from a distance, I thought that any moment the fight will intensify. I lay down and suggested to the rest to do the same. But the shooting remained the same and after a while completely disappeared. So instead of joining the partisans, I went to the prison. It was well known that Jasenovac was a harsh place, but nobody knew that was a death camp. Nobody knew that was an extermination camp. In the summer of 1941, my uncle Gadalja was in Tuzla, and he returned to Bijeljina to his family. We went through Doboje and arrived at night. It was cold, dark, and they yelled, "Get out!" We stepped out, and they put us in some wooden barrack. A wind was coming through, and it was horribly cold. One of the guys told them that we might freeze to death, while Ustasha from outside sarcastically answered, "Well, you did not come for summer vacation." The next day we left this barrack, and now we had to walk for several hundreds of meters. All of us had some of our belongings brought from home. We carried some food, blankets, some of us even suitcases. The walking to the camp was painful. Ustasha were beating us with rifle-butts. We hardly reached the prison's entrance, and here I saw the three-meter-wide gate opening. From both sides there were tall guards' checkpoints. These towers were ten meters tall, and you could see a spotlight and machine gun. We entered the prison that from inside looked like brick factory. They put us in a hallway and lined us up and then ordered us to stretch our blankets and empty our bags and belongings onto it. They immediately searched for watches, pens, something valuable, money, etc. At that moment, a young guy approached me. He told me, "Braco, I am not happy to see you here." I was standing next to my father. I looked at him, but I could not recognize him. He says, "I am Nisim Montiljo from Kiseljak near Sarajevo. Don't you remember me? Every summer we used to spend

two moths together.” I said, “Nisim, is that you?” The first thing that he asked me was whether I had some bread. I told him that I had, but I emptied it all. He asked me to double check. At that moment, I understood that a fatal starvation was present. He looked like a dead man. Suddenly, something happened that I did not expect. A large group of young guys started running to the pile with our belongings. They grabbed bread and continued running in the opposite direction. Ustasha pulled their guns out and started shooting their backs. They hit some of them, some were killed right away, but some successfully ran away. Wounded people continued to run further, because that was a game for death or life. They preferred to get killed rather than to starve to death.

Q: Where was that, inside or outside?

A: We were not inside. This happened outside. As soon as they stopped, Ustasha started yelling, “Gravediggers, gravediggers!” Gravediggers were regular prisoners, and their commander was the engineer Danon from Sarajevo.

Q: That was Rabbi’s son from Sarajevo...?

A: Correct. His son Han Denijel. He was a geodesist, but in the jail he claimed himself as an engineer. He was the gravediggers’ leader. People would join gravediggers because they received better food. That was a good enough reason for people to join this group. So gravediggers came to pick up these people who were either wounded or dead.

Q: Were gravediggers mostly Jews, Serbs, Croats, mixed..?

A: It was mixed. Serbs, Jews, Croats, anti-fascist. The only reason was that they had better food. So they lined us up, and one Jew came in front of the line and announced that would be good to deposit gold if we had, because in that way it will be preserved. Nisim who stood next to us suggested not handing in anything, because anyone who possessed any gold would be slaughtered right away. This guy kept telling that we need to turn the gold in, and Ustasha stood next to him. Among us from Tuzla there was my uncle, husband of my father's sister, Hajm Romano. He was a quiet, sad, and not very intelligent guy. So my aunt was managing the store. The next moment, I saw my uncle stepping out of the line and claiming that he had gold. Ustasha approached to him and asked for it. He opened his pants and took out a couple gold coins from his waist. I was breathless, and I was expecting something to happen. But nothing happened. Nisim told me later that the regime is softer since the representatives of the International Red Cross were present. Ustasha kept asking for more gold, and a major incident did not occur. Before the representatives of the International Red Cross arrived, Ustasha killed most of the prisoners that looked bad, built an ambulance, cleaned the kitchen and workshops, so the Red Cross representatives would get a picture of a work camp rather than an extermination camp.

Q: When did you arrive at Jasenovac?

A: I cannot recall the exact date, but I know it was the middle or the end of February 1942. After they finished with taking our gold away, we were told to pick up our blankets and covers and were distributed throughout barracks. The barracks were separated. Jewish, Serbian, and Croatian and Muslim Communists' barracks.

Q: Were you allowed to mix within the group?

A: We were. Across from us was the Serbian barrack. Those were wooden barracks placed on wooden posts, so the freezing air was coming from the floor. Only a tiny wooden board was on the floor. I remember, the joints that connected roof and walls were open five centimeters. But before my arrival, they filled these barracks with straw and fixed the gaps. At the moment we entered the barrack, Ustasha strictly ordered to remove the straw. One prisoner did it, so it was wide open again. We slept on the floor. Only a bare wooden board. That was what we slept on. That was a three-level board, and in the middle was a hallway. There was no pillow, no sheet, and only one blanket. Clothes that we had, we kept.

Q: How many people were in one barrack?

A: Since that was a three floor barrack, I would say a hundred, or perhaps more. The group from Tuzla was everywhere. Since people were dying every day, the barracks were filling and emptying constantly.

Q: Did you stay with your father?

A: I stayed with my father. We placed our belongings next to each other, and a guy Bararan who my father knew from Sarajevo was there. That Bararan behaved very nicely towards us, but generally he was a very rude man.

Q: Was he the barrack chief?

A: Yes. Well, then was the time for lunch. We came in line, and our portion of food consisted of water from the river Sava and some cattle food

mixed with that. We received a full dish of such awful food. Suddenly, at the moment when my father and I received food, a creature that looked like a dead man approached to us. He came to me and hardly said, "Isidor, Isidor, Braco, Braco." I looked at him, but I could not recognize him. He said, "I am Gedalja, Gedalja." We could not believe it. That was my father's youngest brother, who was the first to be transported to Jasenovac from Bijeljina. I told him that his wife and son asked about him, but he explained that he does not care about anything except to eat something. Father and I tried to eat, but that was awful. That was Sava River water, no salt, no smell, and no taste. In that water they put some cattle food which had a horrible smell and taste. We could not eat. After picking pieces of food from his portion, the rest of the food, Gedalja poured down his throat. Then he asked us if we were going to eat ours. Father and I gave him our portions too, and he poured that too. As soon as he finished, he said, "I am hungry again." Later we returned to our barrack, settled down, and talked for a while. Father found some of his friends from Sarajevo. I remembered two guys from Zagreb. There was one light bulb and a heat made of barrel. This heat could not keep any fire, what ever was put inside would immediately burn down and cool off. In the other corner was a barrel which was used as a toilet. A horrible smell that did not allow people to breathe was everywhere. So two guys from Zagreb were standing next to the heat and talked about food. One of them imagined soup with noodles, then roast meat, then some kind of stew, and this and that, and at the end, pancakes. The other one said, "At the end, I would like donuts." That was their imagination trapped in a deadly starvation presented in this camp. I understood that to starve people was the Ustasha's strongest weapon. They fed you only enough to remain alive, and by doing that, they constantly wasted your energy.

Q: How often did you receive these horrible soups?

A: Once a day. That was all. No bread, no corn, absolutely nothing. I saw people finding bones. They would dig inside the bone and eat whatever they found in order to somehow satisfy a horrible hunger. The worst thing was that the dysentery appeared. I remember one friend of mine from Sarajevo who was the same age as I was, he found a head of black onion on the ground, and he ate it. He poisoned himself. A couple days later, I saw him on the toilet, a pure blood was coming out of him. Several days later, the “gravediggers” took him out of the barrack. Each morning in front of the barracks were piles of dead people, died from starvation. They were sorted like firewood logs.

Q: Do you remember the name of that poor guy?

A: No, I do not, I can’t recall his name. Starvation was fatal, and people would last no more than a month. One day, we were working somewhere, and we sit on the log to rest for a couple of minutes, when the guy next to me fell down and died. His name was Sveher, and he was from Sarajevo.

Q: Did they force you to work? How did you spend your days?

A: As I said, their strongest weapon was to keep people hungry. By doing that, they killed people mentally, as well as their desire to escape, or desire for resistance. The life was senseless. That was their tactic. I can tell you that a large number of people died as a result of hunger. They forced us to work. By observing, I understood that there is no possible chance for survival unless you escape. I told this to my father, and he agreed with me. But I did not know where Jasenovac was geographically located. Jasenovac is on

River Sava, near Sava, where Una and Sava meet. Around is Lonjsko Field, which was scary pond and even further is Belgrade-Zabreb railroad. So escape from Jasenovac was practically impossible. However, I did not lose my hope, I was young, and I always looked for work that was stationed behind the wire. So one day they said...

Q: I think that you have one more scene to explain, a scene that is connected with food, about the young guy who picked the potato remnants.

A: Correct. I forgot to explain that. One day we were cleaning the space in front of the officers' kitchen. A cook came out and on the muddy ground emptied the bucket with potato remnants. A young guy who was from Sarajevo and who stood next to me, looked left and right to be sure that there was no Ustasha, sat down and started collecting these muddy potato remnants. He was filling his mouth, his pockets, but unfortunately an Ustasha noticed him, approached him from the back, grabbed the boy's forehead with the left arm, and with the right hand, cut his throat with a knife. He fell down with his head stuck in the potato pile. Blood was dripping out in the rhythm of the heartbeat. Everything around was red, and Ustasha just yelled, "Gravediggers." However, the gravediggers did not show up immediately. Do you know who was the first to approach that poor guy? Stray dogs from the neighboring Serbian village. They started licking the still-warm blood. Later, the gravediggers arrived and took him away. The Ustasha licked the bloody knife, wiped it off on his coat, and put it back in its case.

Q: Did he lick the blood from the knife that he just used?

A: Yes, he licked the blood from the knife that he used to slaughter this poor guy.

Q: Before you went to the agriculture yard, you already met some of the new Ustasha...

A: Correct. As I said, I looked for the work outside the prison. One day, they created a construction group. I thought that constructors might go outside the prison, so I joined them. Along with this group, I went outside the prison. We were building Ustasha's barracks, which were similar to ours but isolated. Ustasha wanted to separate officers' rooms, and the guy who was our leader ordered me to start cutting some boards. I stepped outside and started cutting them.

Sadik 2

... I started cutting boards. In the yard, right in front of these buildings and barracks, I saw some guys wearing rural or semi-urban clothes. They were my age. While I was cutting a board, one of them approached me and tried to help me by holding an opposite end of the board. That way I was able to cut easier. As soon as I finished cutting the board, I asked him where was he coming from. He responded to me in such a Bosnian way, with a stretched accent, "From Bihac." I asked him what his name was. He said, "Mustafa, and where are you from?" I told him that I was a Bosnian and that we are countrymen. "That's good," he responded. "What are you doing here?" "I am a Zidov," I answered, because in Croatian, Zidov stands for a Jew. "Well, I don't know what it means," he said. I told him I was a Jevrej³. He did not know that either. Then I remembered that Muslims used to call Jews Cifuts. "I am a Cifut," I told him. "Oh, I see," was his answer. He asked me again what I was doing there, and I explained to him that we were deported. I told him that I do not know a reason. I told him we were innocent. When I asked him what he is doing here, his answer was that he is a volunteer. I did not know what volunteer meant, and he explained that he voluntarily joined the Ustasha. I asked him why did he join the Ustasha. His answer was that a messenger came to his village and promised everyone who joined the Ustasha a salary and pensions for families. "I am telling you exactly the way he was telling us," Mustafa said. However, the one who refused to join would have to join a regular Croatian army, no salary, no pension. A reason

why Mustafa decided to join the Ustasha was that a salary and pension for his parents were promised to him. He was not aware of anything. He was raw meat. Afterwards I saw these volunteers being invited for lunch. He got a portion of beans and a slice of bread. He came to me, sat on the log, and started to eat. I stared at him. He ate a half of his portion and offered me the rest. I swallowed the rest in a couple of seconds. Shortly after, from his personal bag he took out a corn, split in two parts and gave me one. I saved that one for my father. The next day, I signed up for the construction group again. However, these volunteers have already got the Ustasha's uniforms. They were khaki color, with the letter U, which was a symbol of Ustasha.

Q: So, he was already in uniform?

A: He was already in uniform, and he already had a belt. He started fixing his shirt, tiding his belt, and he looked around differently. Half an hour later, I saw him talking to the officer. The officer was a Hercegovian. He was lining them up. After that he would give them speeches. I can not recall exactly what was he saying, but I remember some of it. He was telling them that Croatia is mother of all Croatians. Ante Pavelic is father of all Croatians. He told them that in Croatia only Croatians can live, and all other Serbs, Jews, and Romas have to disappear. They all have to be killed. He also added what each of them has to do. He explained the way they have to behave, he talked about a discipline. The result of that speech was that the same guy who gave me that lunch, the next day stood next to me with his portion of beef stew, and instead of offering me a bit, he emptied the half of his meal in the garbage can right in front of my eyes. He did not give me

³ Jew in Serbian

any. Several days later, a period of heavy rains just started. It was the beginning of March. Thunderstorms lasted for days. They lined us up, gave us tools and sent us to work. Water spilled out, and we had to go and try to save from flooding. Under the light of flashlights, Ustasha showed us where to go.

Q: Was that River Sava?

N: No, it was a field. Lomsko field got filled and water spilled over its banks. Previous prisoners made these banks. Water was running aggressively. We tried to add soil, but water was crushing all. Whatever we put in, it was gone. I tried to stick the soil to the ground with a piece of tool I got, but it did not work. After a while, I lost a lot of my energy. I leaned on to my piece of tool just to get some rest, when I was hardly hit over my back. I turned around and looked back. I saw the friend of mine from the day before who gave me beans. He became a hard-core Ustasha. He hit me and then asked why I wasn't working. After me, he hit the other one so badly, so this poor guy fell down. Surprisingly, he fell right on the spot where water was breaking its bank. So, body of this poor guy was temporarily stopping water. Officer who stood below saw this and started laughing. He saw this as a smart act, so he ordered his soldier to knock more people down and to use them as a water shield. He started hitting people with the wooden board that has been used in construction as a roof support. One end was sharpened, so the soldier had a better grip. He was knocking the prisoners down, while his officer was yelling, "Lay them down so they crossing!" He used us, prisoners, to lay these dead bodies along this bank's split. We had to lay them down just like firewoods. Once we reached a meter tall stack of dead bodies, they ordered to cover them with soil. They brought more people to

participate in covering, while my duty was to press new layers of soil. In that way, we finally stopped the water. I am telling you a story that involves only one spot, but the same story took a place along the entire bank. Dead people were stacked on the bunch and covered with soil. They became construction material. The same night, as water spilled out, Ustasha came to our barracks and with the metal sticks, started slamming over our barrack. They yelled, "Line up, line up!" I just woke up. Inmates warned me to hurry, because if I did not get out in five minutes, I could be dead. I just put my shoes on, same as my dad, and we ran out in the rain. In such dark, I lost my father. We lined up in front of the barrack. It was pouring outside. The only light we could see was the light from inside of the barrack. Suddenly, I saw a light approaching me from the left. It was Ustasha Majstorovic-Filipovic. He was a Catholic priest and also the prison's vice commander.

Q: He was a Catholic priest!

A: Correct. He was a master in slaughtering, so he got a nickname Majstorovic⁴. He walked around each of us pointing his flashlight to our faces. Next to me was Nisim from Kiseljak. He looked so exhausted... Oh, I skipped something. Once they lined us up, Ustasha led by Majstorovic were looking if anyone stayed inside of barrack. Only the sick ones remained in. Majstorovic cynically stated, "Bring them out, we will heal them." They walked inside of the barrack. Since the interior light was on, I could see them swinging with these metal sticks. Horrible screaming by sick prisoners followed such mistreatment. They were beaten in the area of their necks and backs, murdering them momentarily. A couple minutes later, soldiers would come out calling gravediggers. I was observing gravediggers that just came

there with their stretchers, leaned them against the barrack, and ran into the barracks. They were bringing prisoners' bodies out, piling them on the side. Their heads were bouncing off the stairs while they were carried out. Majstorovic was grouping prisoners on the basis of their working abilities. Exhausted ones were sent to the second row. Nisim was standing next to me. He was looking at his two sick brothers. They were sick ever since they came to the prison. The rest of his brothers were already dead. There were eight of them. He was watching two of his brothers being carried out and piled on the same bunch. Majstorovic directed Nisim to the second row too. Poor Nisim, using the last strength that remained in him, joined the second row. That was the end of the family Montiljo from Kiseljak. Majstorovic approached me and directed his flashlight straight into my face. I could not see anything. I felt a horrible cramp. I was just waiting to be selected for the second row and that would be my end. I knew what it meant to be selected. However, I assume I was still fresh thanks to my father who started working in the kitchen. He would often supply me with warm potatoes. My father, while roasting potatoes, managed to hide some of them in the ash and later bring them to me. That kept me alive. Majstorovic passed me and stopped at the next prisoner and said, "You." When this one heard him, he just collapsed on the muddy ground. Ustasha picked him from the ground and dragged him to the second row.

Q: So, that was happening in the night, on the rainy night..?

A: During the night. It was around midnight, and it was pouring. All of us were beside ourselves. Majstorovic continued his selection, and I could

⁴ Majstor means master in Serbian

hear his, “You, you, you.” I can tell you that even today that fatal “you” comes to my dream. Can we please stop...

A moment when Ustasha passed me, I started shaking. Literally, I had a nerve breakdown, and my legs were shaking. If I fell, it would be over. They would come, pick me up, and drag me into the second row. At the first moment, I leaned forward, but then, by holding my knees, I tried to keep myself in balance. That saved my life. That was a horrible feeling, when your life depends on one specific moment. Right after that, they gave us tools, and sent us to the embankment, and that was a story that I already explained above. There were Ustasha waiting for us. Among them there was my Ustasha, a guy who gave me to eat first day. I was looking at him and his fellow volunteers. Most of them had their origin from West Herzegovina, from the dry and poor land where Catholic priests are religiously uneducated, illiterate, and they were the ones who were spreading the seeds of hatred and Ustasha ideologies. This one I knew was from the Bihac area, from some hilly village, so he was not familiar with these ideas. That was why he joined the Ustasha, only because he was paid and pension was promised for his family. The other part most of them were coming from was Dalmatinska Zagora, especially Lika, and the city of Gospic. Most of Ustasha's authorities, officers, and ideologist were from Gospic. Most of them were in exile during the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and when the war started, they returned. Ante Pavelic came back from Italy with 190 Ustasha. Right after Germany defeated Yugoslavia, Croatia proclaimed its independence on April 10th, and most of them returned from exile. Ante Pavelic came with his soldiers, who later became Ustasha's elite. So, as I said, approximately 80% of these soldiers came from such areas. This was

the way that these poor people found resolution to their poverty and their social problems. They could corrupt and rob, they could take personal properties in the name of the national ideology and in the name of creation of Independent State of Croatia based on the extermination of Serbs, Jews, and Romas.

Q: Where did Ante Pavelic come from?

A: He came from Herzegovina, along the river Neretva, I do not exactly.

Q: From Herzegovina! I thought that he was a lawyer in Gospic, in Lika?

A: He was a lawyer, and that is correct. Before he run away from Yugoslavia, he was supported by fascist forces from Hungary and Italy. There was a terrorist group in Hungary, they were Croatians, who killed Yugoslav King Alexander.

Q: Well, the night at the embankment was the worst night that you experienced. What did happen latter?

A: Well, one they were looking for volunteers to go to press the pile of straw. I knew that was not within the prison, rather in some surrounding village. I checked in voluntarily. There were ten of us. River Sava was frozen. Only a ten-meter, tiny strip was defrosted. I saw Ustasha throwing bombs into the river. That was the way they were catching fish. Explosion would bring fish to the surface, and then soldiers would pick them up by using specialized nets. We crossed the river in little boats. The other side of the river was Bosnia. I recognized the village Gradina. I will tell you later what was there. I had no orientation at all. I saw a group of Ustasha that were standing there with the leather hats on their heads. I knew that was not

a regular Ustasha uniform. These hats looked just like the hats that group of Jew prisoners had in Prison Kreka. I understood momentarily what happened. Ustasha liked these hats because they were warm and cozy. At that moment, one Ustasha came to me and looked at my boots. I had brand new boots on. These were brand new, leather boots with a double sole. He ordered me to give them to him. I agreed, but I asked him to give me some to put on, so I am not barefoot. He told me to go to these surrounding houses and find something for myself. These houses were burned and abandoned, there was not a living soul in there. I entered one and saw a huge pile of clothes, laundry, sweaters, pants, and I became aware that I was standing at the site where the liquidation of people occurred. So I walked from one house to another. I walked through ten of them, and I remember that I found a scarf in of them. That was a very nice, hand-made scarf. It was a very characteristic scarf. It was Professor Salom's scarf. He was a very nice, cultivated man from Tuzla. I understood that he ended up here. I resumed my search for shoes. I could not find them. Either they were too small or ripped off. Further more I saw a hole and the smoke coming out. I approached the hole slowly and saw a 20-meter-long hole filled with bodies of slaughtered men, women, and children. Looking at their clothes, I could tell that they were Serbs. I quickly turned back so Ustasha don't see me, because I could end up in the same hole. I looked back, and so Ustasha coming to me with a pair of shoes in his hands. These were old Yugoslav army shoes. He came to me and said, "Here, try these!" I gave him my shoes, and he left very happy. We continued pressing the straw. We were piling the straw until dark. On the way back to the camp, we were transported in the same way. I came back to the barrack and saw my dad standing there. Next to him was Bararor, an old prisoner, who was a chief of

our barrack. My father asked me where I was, and when I told him where I went, Bararon said that today's date I should consider my new birthday, because from that site no one came back alive. Most of the prisoners would be directly transported to that point, never even entering the prison, and they would be slaughtered right away.

Q: Where was that place?

A: That was Gradina, Lower Gradina. That was a Serb village which Ustasha burned and destroyed right in the beginning. As soon as they decided that they want to create a concentration camp here, they killed everyone around. Exactly that village was considered a spot where most of the killings and murdering was done. That was in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and that was the only place where the search for the mass graves was conducted. Croatia never allowed such search.

Q: So it means that the Croatian government during the Tito's regime never conducted a mass grave search?

A: Correct. One day, some of us were cleaning mud in front of the officers' offices, when we saw a gate was opening. Behind this huge prison gate, a large column of people appeared. Looking at their clothes, I knew that they were villagers, they were Serbs. Women were carrying children or holding their hands, and old people were hardly moving at all. I remember at the head of column was a beautiful young woman, maybe 23 or 24 years old. She was carrying one child, and the other one was walking next to her. That was a boy, three or four years old. As soon as she entered the prison, they took her son away. Ustasha were separating children in the prison. But when one of these Ustasha tried to take her baby, she held the baby with one hand,

and with the other one, she grabbed the Ustasha's throat and squeezed very hard. Ustasha started rolling his eyes and flipping his tongue. The other Ustasha came from behind and hit her straight in the head with the rifle-butt. She fell on the ground facing the mud with her child still in her hands. Then these Ustasha rolled her on her back and tried to take her baby away. She did not release it. But after Ustasha hit her in the stomach with his heel and knocked the wind out of her, she could not hold her child anymore. The Ustasha was full of rage, especially since she embarrassed him in front of his fellow soldiers. He was swearing at her and threatening her by saying that he will kill her. He grabbed the child's leg with his three fingers and started waving it. He was cursing and waving the child in his hands faster and faster, and at the moment when he reached the highest speed, he dropped child right next to its mother. I looked with my own eyes. Baby's brain spilled around, and mother released a desperate scream and fell into a coma. I just saw that afterwards they dragged her somewhere.

Q: So these were Serb peasants, where did they come from?

A: I do not know. I think that they were from some villages in Bosnia. When they lined us up next morning, one Ustasha came and looked for 20 young, stronger men. I assumed that this work would be out of camp. I always waited for the first chance to run away. So, what happened. We were on our way out of camp, and we were heading east. We walked about one kilometer. Once we reached a final destination, Ustasha posted four sticks, and ordered us to dig the hole. I could not recall the exact dimension we were supposed to dig, but I know that hole was huge. We were digging very fast and finished it in two hours. A short after, we saw Ustasha coming towards us and next to them something little. In the beginning, I thought that

were sheep. But once they came closer, I recognized children. These were Serbian and Jewish children, ages two to five. They looked dirty, sick, and diseased. They brought them to about one hundred meters away from the hole.

Q: Can you tell how many of them were there?

A: Later, I discussed with others, and we thought that were 200-250 of them. They stopped a hundred meters away, and then one officer told them that they are going to see their mothers, grandmothers, etc. Children believed him and followed to in front of this hole. Here Ustasha surrounded them and created a chain reaction. They were hit in their heads simply with hammer, a regular carpenter's hammer, and then thrown into this hole. For me it seemed to be eternity. I watched from the distance of 20-30 meters. That was something horrible, and I think that I've never seen anything like that. While they were doing this, I remember one older Jew, I was only 18 years old, he was looking up at the sky. I remember it was a beautiful March day, and we could hear only a dimmed sound of the hammer that was hitting heads of these children. That older Jew was crying and looking at the sky, and then he said, "God, if you can hear me, send the thunder from the sky to kill these criminals." Unfortunately, God did not help. Nothing happened. The only thing that happened was that I lost that little faith that I had. If God punishes criminals, why were these children dying, they were so innocent.

Q: Did the rest of the children see the way the other ones were killed?

A: No. They were one hundred meters apart. They did the same thing with other groups too. Than they ordered to us to cover these kids. We were covering them until dark. We were waiting for the moment when we would

be killed. Fortunately, they did not touch us. It was strange, since Ustasha tried to kill anyone who could witness their crimes. Later I talked to these people who worked that day with me. Even though I saw all this mistreatment, I still felt some hidden satisfaction, because I stayed alive. I think that human's need for its physical survival is something strongest in each of us. These kids were from surrounding villages, but I did not know where they picked these Jewish children.

Q: Probably when they were separating them from their parents!

A: Another day, I was cleaning again in front of the entrance, when the truck full of people came inside and stopped right in the center of the prison's yard. So many people were staying on the truck, and in the middle, I could see something tall and white. That was a Jewish Rabbi with his white scarf. In the Jewish religion exists the belief that this white scarf is protector from the evil. So Rabbi put that scarf on, trying to protect himself and these poor people around him. It was ordered to them to step down. All of them swiftly left the truck while Rabbi was taken and his throat was cut while he was still standing. Suddenly, his blood started spraying around, I could see his larynx sticking out just like a white ring. He was left on the ground to die slowly, while others were taken straight to Gradina where they were exterminated immediately. Since I did not have a chance to get in contact with any of them, I do not know where they were coming from.

Q: I think you were trying to tell something about that guy who practiced shooting.

A: Correct, that was Ljuba Milos. He was an officer in Ustasha's army. I do not know which rank he was, but I know that he was the chief of

Jasenovac prison. His deputy was Priest Filipovic-Majstorovic. Ljuba Milos had a habit to go out in the morning, just in his shirt, and with his hunting rifle, walk around the prison looking for his target. Once he spotted a prisoner, he would order him to run and just shoot at him. Usually it wasn't a long distance, so mainly he hit most of his targets. Behind him walked his soldiers, who would applaud him once he shot the prisoner and cheer his success. I witnessed these events. And there was an Ustasha, prisoners warned me to watch out for him. He was Hercegovian, middle height, red hair, and very thick moustache. People recommended hiding away from his sight in case you see him. One day, I was laying down some bricks when I noticed this guy coming up. I hid behind these bricks. At that moment, some other guy with a very intelligent face walked toward him. Ustasha stopped him and asked him who he was. He said that he was a Jew. Then he asked what his occupation was. He said that he was a lawyer, and he was from Zagreb. Ustasha started yelling and cursing. He was insulting his mother and threatening to kill him. Then he ordered him to turn around and put his hands in the back so he could tie them with the wire. Right after that, he started rolling his cigarettes in paper, and continued to insult him and threaten his life. Poor guy was so frightened, he hardly breathed. Suddenly, Ustasha pulled his knife out and stuck it in the prisoner's throat. He pulled his knife out, and blood was bleeding slowly. Right after, he licked the knife and said, "What sweet Jewish blood." Then he wiped his knife on the prisoner's hat and called gravediggers. I looked from a distance. Gravediggers were scared too. They were running with their stretchers afraid to make a wrong move. They always looked for the most sadistic method to kill and to mistreat. The way they killed was horrible, same as the way they mistreated people.

Q: Do you think that Jasenovac was worse than Auschwitz? In Auschwitz there was a lot of killing but that was highly industrialized.

A: I talked to my aunt and to my cousin who were in Auschwitz. They were working with some wicks for the military industry. They did not even know where they were, nor what was going on around them. Director Zafanovic, who was supposed to make a movie dedicated to Jasenovac, and whose aim was to describe as accurately as possible, said that Jasenovac was the worst camp by far. He had access to most of the documents, pictures, photographs, and video clips from Jasenovac. He said that most of these video footages were made by professionals in that time. These were the most sadistic scenes that a human eye has ever seen. He explained footage where they taped a prisoner being cut into pieces by guards, while cameraman was recording. His conclusion was that Jasenovac was the most inhuman prison in entire occupied Europe. I can tell they were animals. That would be an insult for animals to compare them with Ustasha. Tiger does not eat tiger. Lion does not eat lion. These were monsters in the shape of humans who enjoyed the extermination of humankind, Jews, Serbs, and Romas. That was the way they progressed, gained their ranks, and built their careers.

Sadik 3

Once I was lying next to my father inside the barrack, when I smelled grilling. It reminded me of the days when the entire family would go on Sunday and barbecue outside, and how our life was carefree. I was wondering where that smell was coming from. I asked my father, but he did not know either. Next morning, I asked the friend of my father who was a chief of our barrack what that smell was. He said that Ustasha were throwing people in the brickyard, in the fired heats, and that smell was a smell of a human flesh.

Q: Do you remember your barrack chief's name?

A: His name was Bararon, and he was from Sarajevo. He is not alive. I think that most of these people who were group chiefs did not survive.

Q: How far was the brickyard from you?

A: It was about 100-150 meters, but that smell was so intensive, and it is understandable because they threw more than 100 people inside the fired heats.

Q: Who did they throw in?

A: Prisoners. Serbs, Jews, etc. They did not make that much of a difference. Thanks to my father who was very skillful, and who had a lot of his friends from Sarajevo, Tuzla, and Bijeljina where he once lived. His friends helped me to work in tailor shop. There was a tailor, who taught me

many different things. I remember the day when they threw these people into the fire, one guy came into the shop and asked to hide himself just for a while. He was exhausted, dirty, and he looked very hungry. He told us that he just avoided a certain death, and he needed to recover somewhere. Otherwise, they would find him and kill him right away. Ustasha used to kill everyone who looked exhausted. That's why my father used to bring me a potato every day and by doing that, kept me strong and alive. I gave this guy the potato that I had in my pocket. These potatoes my father used to sneak to me every day. He ate this potato very fast, looking around in his fear that someone will come any moment and kill him. I asked who he was and where was he coming from. He told me that he was from Sarajevo, and his last name was Mordo. "Are you that Mordehaj?" I asked him. I was wondering what happened to him. Then he told us his story. He was cleaning inside the prison, but since he looked very exhausted, they took him to the brickyard. There were many of them exhausted just like him, who were brought into the brickyard. A heat in the brickyard was already fired up, and Ustasha built a path of wooden boards that led to the hole through which they filled the heat with coal. Ustasha forced all of them to take their clothes off, and then one by one, they pushed them inside the heat. He explained that it was dark inside the brickyard and only one light bulb was on. He used a dimmed light to sneak out, kneeling to the back door. That way he saved his life, and in the morning, he came and hid in our tailor shop. We hid him behind the sheet that used to be a fitting room. Ustasha used to get their uniforms sewed in this shop. The main tailor was a guy from Sarajevo, and his last name was Papo. He was a very nice and quiet man, but he was very scared. I remember one time he was finishing a uniform for Ustasha, and this one was trying his uniform on when a louse appeared on the back of his uniform.

Pretending that he was fixing his uniform, Papo successfully removed the louse from his uniform and saved himself from possible death. That would be good enough reason for Ustasha to kill him. After that day we had to close, so we told that poor guy to come tomorrow and hide himself again, but the next day he never showed up. Same night we heard the same fatal noise and smelled the same smell of human roasted flesh.

Another day I was cleaning again in front of the entrance, when the truck full of people came inside and stopped right in the center of the prison's yard. So many people were staying on the truck, and in the middle I could see something tall and white. That was a Jewish Rabbi with his white scarf. In the Jewish religion exists the belief that this white scarf is protector from the evil. So, Rabbi put that scarf on trying to protect himself and these poor people around him. It was ordered to them to step down. All of them swiftly left the truck, while Rabbi was taken and his trout was cut while he was still standing. The rest of the group was taken to Gradina, where they all ended up dead.

One day they took us like we were going to clean some barracks, and it was away from our barracks. This place they called the hospital, but this was a death place, or at least a place where they concentrated people that were going to die. I remember one who was lying, and next to him a beautiful brand new coat. One of the guys from my group approached him and asked whether he wanted to sell that coat or exchange for something else. This poor guy wanted to end his life with his biggest obsession and that was a cigarette. He got a cigarette, and the other guy got his coat. Here I met

Doctor Peric from Sarajevo. He was a Jew, and he was our family physician. Once he saw me, his eyes were full of tears. He told me, "Did I really have to see you here?" I said, "What we can do? This the it is." I asked if he could help these sick people. He said, "Literally, I don't have anything, not even an aspirin, and the only thing I could offer them is a nice word." While we were talking, Ustasha ordered gravediggers to take one by one out and to load them on the truck. In two trips, they unloaded the entire barrack full of live copses. There were five Jewish brothers, among the group from Tuzla. I can not recall their names. That was a group that I came with, and there were about 120 of us. These five brothers were shepherds, and they were all very poor people. One of them was more skilful then others, so he managed to set them all into the gravediggers group. gravediggers were given slightly better food. A chief of gravediggers was an engineer and his name was Danon. This guy used to report to me every day how many people died, since they were the ones responsible for dead. He would report to me how many corpses they picked up that day, because people were dying during the nights. Also, he would report how many were killed during the day. He new where the new groups were coming from, were they from Bosnia or Croatia, and were they going to prison or straight to Gradina. Most of them ended up in Gradina right away. It is interesting what he once told me. "Be glad that they are taking these people straight to Gradina, otherwise they could "clean" and search the prison. Then they would choose prisoners to be killed." That's how far the drive for self-survival had gone. The maximum capacity was 3000 people. If there were a couple hundred more, the weakest ones were immediately chosen for liquidation. I remember one night, across from our barrack was a barrack with Serbs in it. A chief of the barrack was some guy Jova, whose father my father knew, so he made connection with

Jova too. He was very friendly towards my father. He was a very handsome and young man. One night, I heard some noise coming from that barrack. Someone was looking for something in the mud. Then I heard constant entering and exiting of their barrack. A little after, I heard punching, beating, screaming, but I did not understand what was happening. In the morning, a friend of mine, Mirko, who lived in Kiseljak near Sarajevo, and who I knew because we had a cottage there, he told me what happened that night. One of the prisoners from their barrack decided to run away. He hid himself and Mirko sent his mates to look for him. They knew that he was hiding underneath the construction material that was placed on the side. They found him, brought him back into the barrack, tied him, and Mirko ordered everyone to beat him as hard as they could. Why did they beat him? They did because Ustasha would find out and then dozens of Serbs would be killed. Close to our barrack there was a wooden post standing. Our barrack was the Jewish barrack number 3. I asked Bararon what they used that post for. He explained how in the beginning, during the 1941/42 winter, that post served for the mistreatment. That winter was very cold, so Ustasha would punish prisoners by tying them totally naked to that post, and then ordering others to empty buckets of cold water on him all the way until he dies. They would let him stay there frozen for several days.

Q: How far was Serbs' barrack away from yours?

A: Perhaps five to six meters, as wide as the strip between was.

Q: Were you able to communicate?

A: Yes, we were able to communicate, and we were very friendly to each other. We were all on death row, so we could feel each other's pains.

Ustasha did not make any difference between Jews and Serbs. At that time in Jasenovac there were no Romas yet.

Q: Did they take you to work sites together, both Serbs and Jews?

A: They did, but they did not let Serbs go outside the camp, because they were afraid that they will try to run away. However that was a wrong assumption, and you will hear that further in my testimony. Every day was the same. People would go to work on the embankment, then they would be killed and installed into the embankment and then covered with soil. One they there was a rumor going through the prison that whoever wants to go to Stara Gradiska, they can do so by checking in. I talked to my father, but he was indecisive. My argument was that it can't be worse than this. There was no chance for escape from here, and maybe it could be better in Stara Gradiska.

Q: Why did you think that, and where was Stara Gradiska?

A: I simply thought that it can't be worse than this. Stara Gradiska was just another prison on River Sava. I did not know anything about it, but I hoped it might be better than this. So we decided to go, and Father checked us in. Two days later, they lined us up to go to Stara Gradiska. They put us on freight trains, and after a long trip, we were in Stara Gradiska. In double columns we walked toward the prison. Far away, I saw an old medieval fortress on River Sava. We entered inside and saw high walls, two gate doors, etc. They took us to the tower right away. The tower was the most infamous place in entire Stara Gradiska. Here were large rooms, dimensions of 20x30 meters, with one window. It must be living space for the soldiers back in that time. This fortress was built during the Austro-Hungarian

power as the bordering fortress towards Bosnia. Turks were in Bosnia at that time. I saw that there was no chance for escape from this prison. I often watched children, women, and elderly people coming to the prison. Same groups would be taken away very soon. I remembered poor people asking whether they need to bring their belongings with them. Ustasha would sarcastically state that their belongings will follow them. These people were about to be liquidated. These poor people, women and young girls, children, they did not know that they are going to certain death. Ustasha didn't even want to waste their ammunition. To murder, they used their knives, sledge hammers, and other tools normally used in timberwork. In Stara Gradiska, food was miserable. My father was lucky to find some of his friends again who set him in the kitchen. They hoped he would give them some of the food. This way, I was getting my baked potatoes again. Typhoid was everywhere. Especially young guys were sensitive to it. Every morning, in front of the tower, there was a huge bunch of dead corpses. I remember I was lying on the floor while Father was talking to his friend in Spanish. From time to time, he was looking at me with the warm father's look. Then I heard my father saying to his friend that most important thing for him was to provide just enough food for me. For my father, the only important thing was that I stay alive. And I say, only with his support I managed to eat enough and to hide in the tailor's shop for the time while Ustasha were taking many to certain death. One day a rumor went through the prison that Ustasha are looking for volunteers for the agricultural work. They informed us to be ready in the afternoon. I believed it. I tried to wash and shave myself. I believed that for such work they would choose younger and stronger people. And it was true. They lined us up. They started selection from my left side. I saw that they were selecting younger people, so that

gave me confidence that they are choosing for the agricultural work. He came to me, looked at me, and said, "You too, step in that row!" He selected thirty of us. All of us were younger, and we were told to be in front of the main gate tomorrow at eight o'clock, even though no one had a watch.

Q: Did they chose mostly Jews, and were there any Serbs?

A: Mostly Jews and very few Serbs.

Q: Please tell me something before you start telling about the agricultural work. You said that there was just one tailor in that shop and his name was Papo. Do you remember stories that some of the Serbs who were released from Jasenovac told? They came back from Jasenovac to Belgrade in 1942. Belgrade was still under the German occupation. Their story, told to the Commissioner for Refugees, was that Jews had a major role and they decided who is going to live or die. They had a special status, and all that they did was protect each other by providing jobs in different workshops. What do you think about this testimony, and do you think that this story has an anti-Semitic connotation, since this is the story that German commanders wanted to hear back in Belgrade? Or is this story true?

A: First it was questionable a release of these 20-30 men from. We all knew that anyone who entered Jasenovac, whether Jew or Serb, was not voluntarily released. So there was no such release. Only Croats and Muslims, with some good, paid bribe could be released. So their release was very questionable, not only release, but their arrival to Belgrade too. If they had been released then they must have had some kind of mission in Jasenovac. Either they had Ustasha confidence or they had some propaganda messages. We all knew that Hitler thought that Jews are the worst and that

his anti-Semitism was a part of his psyche. Perhaps someone who was a chief of a certain workshop wanted to help his cousin or friend, but both Jews and Serbs did these things. I did not see any difference in treatment of Jews or Serbs.

Q: Were there more skilled workers among Jews than among Serbs, who were mostly peasants?

A: Yes, there were. Jews were more qualified and intellectually advanced in comparison to Serbs, who were mostly villagers.

Q: Who were the first to be sent to Jasenovac, Jews or Serbs?

A: As far as I know, the first ones to be sent to Jasenovac were Jews. I was in the prison number three. Before that, there were numbers one and two, but later they were shut down and number three was opened. This prison had the best location, it had a brickyard so Ustasha could engage prisoners in labor. Also, they had their own building where they could accommodate themselves. The location of Jasenovac was such that no one could possibly run away. Not only wire, but terrain around was so difficult for escape. I do not know anyone that ran away from inside the prison.

Q: Now you wanted to talk about group that went to work on agricultural property?

A: Correct. That night I was lying next to my father and neither of us could sleep. I knew that I was leaving my father, and I did not know whether I am going to see him ever again. My father could not sleep either. He had to work in the kitchen early in the morning, so he told me to stop there on my way out to work. I came to see him. My father had one hand around me, and

looking disturbed, mentioned what is left of our property. He told me to take a care of my mother and sister if I survived. Then he told me not to turn around and to go straight to the gate. I was aware that that was the last moment I spent with my father, but my need for self-survival was strong, so I left him without turning back. Ustasha were waiting for us at the gate, and the bucket full of already cut, old bread. We were told to take one piece each, and that was the first time I saw bread after a long time. We exited the prison, and they put us in trains. The train stopped at the station in Nasice. We continued walking. I did not know where we were, not even where we go. Later I learned that was a place called Fericanci, property of Orthodox priests.

Q: In which part of Croatia was that?

A: Near Nasica, Eastern Slavonia. They killed Orthodox priests, and there was nice property and an economy that Serbs called citluk. That word remained from the Turkish period. As soon as we got there, Ustasha ordered to clean barns that were in ruins and to make them useable for living conditions. So we were the ones who were preparing terrain for the people that were supposed to come later. Aim was to use that land and facilities, as well as to use us, who had some of the energy left, to make this space available for future usage. The groups were coming, and at the end of April, one group went to plow and plant corn. One of the guys, who was a Serb, tried to escape just by running into a nearby forest. Ustasha caught him, and the same day he was executed. They ordered us to line up, and one of the officers took him in front of the row, aimed at his forehead, and shot him dead right away. The officer received a huge applause from his colleagues for his good shot. I was lucky that I was chosen to watch cows. Ustasha stole

these cows from the neighboring Serb villages. They selected twenty to thirty of us to watch them closely. Close to this place were fields seeded with corn and wheat, so our part of the job was to watch these cows and not let them graze inside the fields. Among these Ustasha was one who used to mistreat me all the time. He was my age, my height, and quite a handsome guy. He was a Herzegovian. Every day he would create a story, like my cows went into the fields, so that way he could beat me. He had a thick wooden stick, and as soon as I said that cows did not go in the fields, he would start beating me. He used to hit everywhere, on my head, over my back. Before that, he requested from me to turn my palms up so that he would beat my palms. My palms swelled so much that they looked just like donuts. At the end, he would beat me that hard that I would stay lying on the ground. As soon as he leaves, I would start crying, not because it hurt, but because of my helplessness and how low I went just because of human sadism. He continued to beat me. I endured all of it, but I was constantly looking to the mountains that were close to us. These were Slavonian mountains, Papuk, Psunj, Dil, Krndija. One day we were taking cows, and I was looking at these mountains. Next to me was Hirsl, a Jew from Vojvodina. He said, "You are looking, ah!" "Yes," I said, "I am looking." He asked me if I would like to go, and I responded positively. We were lucky, because around here there was not enough grass for grazing, so Ustasha ordered us to go to the north. Fifteen Ustasha were supposed to follow us. There were thirty of us. I was shocked when I saw that the guy who was mistreating me all the time is going too. We walked the entire day, and at the end of night, we came in front of the house that used to be the forester's house. That was in village Obradovici. That was a Serb village, and all its people were already killed. We slept in the attic, while they slept

down. They did not give us anything to eat. An armed Ustasha was watching us. In the morning, they appointed Feliks Hirsła to be our commander. Ustasha always let us decide about internal organization. There were a couple hundred cows. So he had to make groups since all of them could not graze at the same spot. Ten of these cows were given to me. Mostly one or two guards were always with one herd. Since I stayed close to the camp, I had some observers, but they would rotate. No one would be with me all the time. Also, that guy who used to mistreat me all the time stopped beating me. It was probably ordered to them to be little gentler with us since we were outside the prison. They thought that we Jews are fearful and they would not run away, while Serbs did not go easily out of prison.

Sadik 3a

I forgot to mention something that happened while I was in Fericancima. That was that center of economy. One day they lined us up, and then brought two guys out. One of them was a tall guy in boots with a tiny mustache. He looked nice and he was middle-aged. We knew that he was privileged. They used to let him go outside the camp to finish some work. He was brought out as first. There was a log in front of us, and this guy was supposed to lay over that log. An Ustasha stood above him with the wooden stick. The prison commander stated that prisoner will receive 50 hits for his behavior which crossed the rules of the prison. Also, this poor guy was supposed to count these 50 hits. After him, a smaller guy was brought out. He was less tough than the previous guy. After several hits, he started begging for help. However, both of them received 50 hits, and everything in their bodies seemed to be broken. They were carried out back to the barrack. Later I understood the reason they received these 50 hits. There was a rumor in the prison about "golden affairs." Later I learned what golden affairs meant. An Ustasha knew that most of the prisoners had some gold with them, and he would search them upon the prisoners' arrival. They also believed that they did not deposit all of it once they came to the prison. I remember an older man from the group that I came with. It was ordered to him to take off his wedding band and to deposit it. Since it took him longer to take it off, an Ustasha came and cut his finger, took the ring, and put in his pocket. The prisoner that was beaten that badly was the one who was collecting gold from fellow mates and turning it to the Ustasha. I believe that last time he did not turn the entire amount of gold, so he was punished. Several days later, these two men were taken out for another fifty hits. This was on top of

the original and already-survived fifty. We could see open wounds. A taller guy, his name was Farakas, tried to stay quiet in the beginning, but after while he was screaming, crying just like the other one. The other one's screaming was not like anything I ever heard in my life. Both were dragged back to the barrack and we did not see them ever again.

Q: What was the other one's name? Where was Farakas from?

A: I did not know who the other one was. Farakas was from Vojvodina. He was a Hungarian Jew. I said that I was watching my cows in Obradovici. That was close to the prison, actually close to that forester's house. One day, a short guy with glasses came to me and introduced himself. He said he was a veterinarian. He said his name. His name was Zorislav Golub. He was an assistant at the faculty and he was from Zagreb. I asked him for his nationality, and he said that he was a Croat. It was clear to me that he was Communist. The Ustasha did not bring Croats to this prison unless they were Communists. He was visiting cows every day. We started talking. Usually, he would come at dusk, and we would talk for a long time. I came to the point where I told him my experience from March 27th 1941 in Belgrade.

Q That was the day when the pact between Yugoslavia and Germany was abandoned?

A: Correct. I told him that I was in that high school protesting the entire day. I told him that I picked the old sheet from my house and that we wrote a message on it, brought it out on the street, and protested. He understood that I was a member of the Communist youth. After that he opened himself and told me his story. First question he asked me was whether I would be interested in running away. I answered positively, since that was the only

way to survive. He told me that there was a group inside the prison that was preparing riot. A cook who was preparing food for the Ustasha was named Dragan Mautner. He was a Jew from Zagreb. He was close to Ustasha's rooms and had access to the bombs. The idea was that Dragan would steal bombs that were standing in front of the Ustasha's rooms. We would sneak and throw the bombs, take their rifles, and kill them all. The plan seemed to be real. Especially since Mautner had access to these bombs and rifles, and he knew how to throw bombs. He used to serve in the old Yugoslav army. Although shortly after, I heard that Dragan Mautnera was taken and he discovered all the names that were preparing riot. One day Dragan's friends from school saw him in the prison. They asked what was he doing here. They were Ustasha's pilots. They offered him to make a contact with his parents. After several days, he received a postcard from his parents stating that they were still alive and that they were still in their home. The Ustasha awarded us for our good work by allowing some kind of communication with our family. We were allowed to send a 20-word postcard, and that was the only communication we were allowed to get. After Dragan received a postcard from his parents, he was taken back to the main prison. Edo Sajer, who transported food from the main prison to our station, was the only source of information. He told us that Dragan was slaughtered in the worst possible way. The Ustasha were drinking, singing their songs, and slaughter around. It was their favorite party. We lost the chance for escape and felt mindless. Dragan's brother Mirko was a very quiet man. Before Dragan's death, he already lost his wife who he loved very much. They killed her. Now they killed his brother. I whistled very nicely. Mirko used to come after dinner and asked me to whistle a French romance song, "Every bird goes back to its nest." I can not recall the tune, but I can tell you, it was beautiful.

He told me that he married a beautiful woman just before the war, and then they killed her. Right after that, they killed his brother. He was devastated. I remember, one night we slept in the attic. It was so warm that roofing tiles were burning. I heard someone screaming. I fell asleep, then someone's scream woke me up. I asked Boza Cvarac who was next to me what was happening. He told me that the Ustasha killed Dusan Holcner's wife and three daughters. He was a merchant from Daruvar. He was in our group. Our only aim was not to escape, but to die with the rifle in my hands. One day I saw a villager from the neighboring Serb village cutting an oak tree. I saw him taking food out of his bag. He turned to me and invited me to get something. These Serbs around were very sensitive. They would always offer us some food. They did that secretly so the Ustasha would not see it. I forced a cow to go in his direction. I had a whip, hit the cow, and it started running towards the forest. I wanted to use a cow as my excuse. If an Ustasha asked me, I would say that the cow went that way. I came to him, and he asked whether I was hungry. I told him that I was. He gave me a large piece of homemade bread and a slice of bacon with onion. I ate so fast, while he was looking at me and laughing. He asked me how I liked being in prison. I was suspicious of everyone, so I said that it was OK. He said that he understands what OK means in the Ustasha's prison. He was in the prison himself. Then he opened his shirt and showed me all the scars that he had. He took his shoes off and showed me his toes. They were burned and full of scars. He mentioned that the Ustasha would stick cloths dipped in diesel between his toes and then burn them. They let him go since they could not prove his wrongdoing. He asked me whether I was interested in escaping. I answered positively. He said that he was in contact with Liberation Front. He pointed to the surrounding mountain Krndija. "The partisans are over

there,” he said. He mentioned that they illegally receive arms from Zagreb. He said that there were around 8000 of them. I knew that he was lying and exaggerating. His conclusion was that he would inform the partisans to come and attack the prison, while we should attack from within and free ourselves. In the meantime, the partisans started circulating around Podravina, Slavonija. Attacks mostly came from the small intervention platoons. One day at dusk, I was taking cows to the barn when I noticed a civilian with the Ustasha’s hat on his head riding a bicycle. He came to the commander and told him something. I saw confusion and fear. Commander lined his soldiers up, and I saw the man who used to beat me very badly totally fearful running into the bathroom. Ustasha’s platoon went to the neighboring village, and then I heard shooting, bombs. Soon after, I saw the Ustasha coming back having captured a partisan. These were political activists who came to this village, in the house of one Serb. Once his neighbor, who was a Croat, spotted something suspicious, he came and informed the Ustasha’s commander. The Ustasha surrounded the house where these five partisans were and asked them to surrender. The partisans refused to surrender, so the Ustasha burned the house. All of them ran out trying to escape, and four of them were killed and the last one was captured. The same day he was sent to Ferice, which was the central prison. Edo Sajer, who transported food, told us the same story. He said that the Ustasha had a banquet. They sliced the man in pieces. They were drinking, singing, and partying. We were waiting for the partisans to come around. Seven of us were quite prepared. We looked for some tools, or some metal bars that could help us in the beginning. I remember that I finally got a knife through a trade inside the prison. I held it among the roofing tiles. Seven of us were waiting prepared every night for the partisans to come around. Unfortunately, they were not

coming. August was over, September just started, but the partisans were not coming. One day, the man who was cutting oak trees passed me on his horse. At the first moment he did not look at me. Then he turned his head, lit his cigarette, and said that the man who was supposed to be our connection with the partisans ran away and joined the partisans. I did not understand why he disappeared. He told me that he was scared to wait any longer, because his son ran away the day before. I asked whether he left any messages for us. I was told to wait and not to go anywhere. The partisans' offensive was taking place at that time, so it wasn't a good moment to plan any escapes. The Ustasha's check points were controlled well. However, we knew that it was the middle of September, there was less and less grazing, and at any moment we could have been transported back to the main prison. In that case, no one would survive. I asked this man if there was any other male soul who could help me. He told me that only Ilija's wife was here. I asked him to send her. Right when the sun started going down, I heard a noise that was coming the forest, and I saw a village woman covered with a scarf, walking slowly. She was looking around and was pretending to pick up dry branches. I immediately understood that it was she. She came to me and asked, "Are you Braco?"

"Yes I am," I said. She told me that Ilija sent her to help me. I asked her whether her husband left any messages before he left. She told me the exact same story as Ilija did. She said to stay put and not to go anywhere. However, I knew our time was limited, and we could not wait any longer. So I asked her whether there were any men in her family who could help me. Her reply was only her godfather. I told her, "Please ask him to be here tomorrow." She said she would tell him. Once I returned to the camp, I told our veterinarian that Drajsa escaped and our connection was lost. I also

informed him that I invited his godfather to meet me tomorrow. I asked the veterinarian to be there too. So the veterinarian, whose name was Golub, came to our secret meeting. Since the Ustasha did not control me all that time, I had a chance to talk to the local Serb villagers. While Golub and I were discussing what we should do, we heard branches breaking in the distance. Ilija's godfather had arrived. He was a tall skinny man around 35 or 36. I later learned that his name was Pera Agic, and he was from Obradovac. As soon as he approached us, we stepped deeper into the forest, sat down and started talking. He was wondering why we had brought him here. We explained that our plan was to escape. He understood our plan. I asked him in which direction we should go and what we should use as our orientation. He described terrain which we should take. First we had to cross the railroad that was connecting Zagreb with Osijek. There was a railroad station called Zdenci, where the Ustasha kept a lot of their soldiers. After that, you will reach Unska railroad, which you will cross. And once you reach rolling hills and vineyards, consider yourself safe. That is partisans' territory, there is also a partisans' village, and there you will be free. He pointed to several Croatian villages that we were supposed to go through on our way and said that we must avoid these villages, because they were the Ustasha's villages. At the end I asked him for one more favor, to cut seven wooden bats just in case we need to protect ourselves. He agreed but wanted to make sure he understood what kind of weapon we wanted him to make. I described the shape and the length of the bats we wanted. I asked him to make them 60 to 70 centimeters long. We then agreed on a place where he would leave them for us. I showed him the spot and mentioned that he should hide them beneath the branches. We decided to escape on December 12, 1942. Golub was familiar with astronomy and developed a

plan for escape. We could not escape under the full moon, because the brightness of its glare blocked the pattern of the stars, and they were our compasses. We had to walk in the opposite direction from the Pole star. We were going south towards Krndiji. It was a beautiful night on September 12th. Unfortunately, on this date was the Jewish New Year. On September 11th, all of us got together in the attic of our prison building. Feliks Hirs, who was our leader, took out the Jewish religious scarf, placed it around his neck, and started reading his prayer book. I was crying like a child, because I knew what was going to happen to these people who were going to be left behind. However, in such situations there was no mercy. We were very rational, it was better for seven of us to escape than for all 30 of us to go back to prison. I had a horrible dilemma, because I knew what was going to happen to them.. That was their last prayer. The next morning, the seven of us tried to dress as warmly as possible, because we knew it was going to be very cold. In the meantime, Felix transferred me to the group that was going to escape. We managed to be the last group to take cows to the water source. That way we could stay out of prison until dark. That night, only one Ustasha was controlling us. There were two other prisoners who were reliable, so we waited for them to leave. Fortunately, they were hungry, so they rushed back to the prison. We all were pretending like we were working on something. The veterinarian and I worked around the cow, Hugo was around the bull. Hugo was an officer in the army of old Yugoslavia. We prepared ourselves for all possible circumstances. We agreed that if an Ustasha would come after us, Hugo would grab him from the back, and I would hit him with the rock. Hugo was our commander. He was the only one with any military experience, so we choose him to be the commander of our escape. The people who decided to escape were Feliks Hirs from

Zagreb, Zorislav Golub the veterinarian, Dusan Hocevar, a merchant from Daruvar, Mirko Mauter, a banker from Zagreb, Mirko's brother Dragan who was later killed, Boza Svarc, a student from Zagreb, and me. Hugo ordered us to jump over the wire. We cut that wire previously, so it was easy to go over it. I was in shock. I thought about people who stayed in the prison. My legs were on two separate sides of the wire when I caught myself thinking about these people. I knew what was going to happen to them, but then I thought that we could all die. We had to run over a plain meadow in order to reach the forest where our wooden bats were hidden. Luckily, there was an irrigation ditch, so we jumped in it. It was a nice protection. From time to time, we looked over to see if anyone was following us. We thought that we were making a tremendous noise. A ditch ended where a forest started. At first we could not see the wooden bats. Fortunately, they were hidden further away under the branches. They were beautifully prepared. We all grabbed the bats and continued our escape through the forest. We heard the first gunshots. The Ustasha fired three red arrows as a signal to the prison in Fericianci. We heard them yelling, screaming, and running. Later, we heard from the local villagers that the Ustasha were scared to go into the forest, because of the partisans' possible presence. It was seven thirty. Our direction was the Pole star. We had to stop to discuss our future moves. Hugo said that railroad will be carefully watched. His suggestion was that we should go as close to the station as possible. The railroad was on top of a two-meter-high embankment. Then we agreed on what kind of signal we should use among us. We choose a frog's croak to be our signal. It seemed to be the most natural signal. We reached the bottom of the embankment, when we noticed the Ustasha's patrol coming in our direction. Above us, about ten meters away, was one Ustasha. The patrol that was coming was supposed to replace

this soldier. He could not see him clearly, so he stopped him and asked him for a password. Once the guard was replaced, a remaining soldier moved a hundred meters away from the point where we were. Hugo observed all of that. Hugo ordered us to cross the railroad. I volunteered to be the first to cross the railroad. I was the youngest. I rolled down the other side of embankment. I gave the signal to the others to cross. All of them crossed except Mirko Mautner who stayed on the other side. The last one that crossed told us that Mirko was warm, so he tried to take his sweater off and by doing that, he lost his glasses. Eventually he could not see without them. We thought it was better for six to escape than for all to be killed. We continued on our trip, but we did not know anything else about him. There was a time to cross an another railroad. That one we crossed without any problem. Now we reached the dirt road, which was the last hurdle we had to cross before a forest. This time, instead of crossing one by one, Hugo ordered us to cross all together at the same time. We lined up with ten meters apart from each other and on his signal, ran across the dirt road. The road was a trap. We knew that the Ustasha had a machine gun covering the clearance. However, they did not see us, but they heard some noises. They shot above our heads. We reached the vineyards and hilly terrain with a fresh grape. We kissed and congratulated each other, ate some grapes, and prepared to continue. All this time, I was thinking about Mirko who stayed under the railroad, but I did not have a choice. Hugo stopped for a moment. We needed to discuss new issues. Now we had to join partisans, but they did not expect us. We did not know their positions or their passwords. We could be easily be killed. We agreed to spend the night hidden in nearby bushes and to continue in the morning. As soon as we fell asleep, more shooting started. They were shooting all night long. We did not know what to do in

this situation. At dawn, the shooting stopped, and Hugo ordered us to get out and to try to figure out where we were. I was the youngest one, so I stood up first. A few meters away was a dirt road that led further through forest. Footprints were visible. I could see prints of shoes, boots, and bare feet. Different footprints told us that these were not Ustasha's footprints, so we followed that path. This road brought us to a plain with tall grass, and in the middle, some children were sitting. They were two boys of 12 to 13 years of age. It was a beautiful September day, 13 of September, a voice was spreading very far during the day, so we heard these boys talking about the partisans. We decided to approach them. We had to make contact with someone and possibly get some information. We had to make a connection with someone in order to figure out where we were. We agreed to surround these two boys. We held our wooden bats and surrounded them. They did not get confused, they just said, "Hello comrades." We responded in the same way. We told them that we just escaped prison, and we were looking for the partisans. They were wondering if we heard of the battle last night. They mentioned that the partisans destroyed the Ustasha in Nasice Village. We were very close to Nasice last night, and that was the fire we heard. That night, the 2nd Slavonian platoon attacked the Ustasha. These kids showed us the way to get to the partisans. They said that some of them just passed by here. We found the guard and he showed us the way to get to the village, which was a pure partisan village. Kokosak village was a Serb village. This was something to see. The partisans were sitting and washing their faces in the creek. Nearby was a house, and its host was roasting a pig. They welcomed us friendly. The host gave us liver right away because he knew that we were starving. Then he pointed to his barn where we could rest on the piles of straw. However, we were so excited that we were unable to

sleep at all. One day we were surrounded by the Ustasha, and the next day we were among partisans. Then we walked along the creek that led to different groups of soldiers. I asked them for the reason that they joined the partisans. I learned that most of them felt endangered due to the Ustasha starting a massive slaughtering in the local villages. The majority of them were Serb villagers. That afternoon, a courier informed us that we had to go for the talks in the command. We came to the house, and tables were set in the shape of the letter G. All of the officers were sitting there, and among them was one of the main men. We were lined up in front of them, and they started a cross-examination. Each of us had to respond to personal questions, who we were, where we were coming from, etc. I saw that the faces of these officers changed. They looked at us angrily. They were whispering to each other with unfriendly faces. I saw that there was a problem. We escaped the prison easily, without blood and fighting, so they were suspicious that we might be spies. I understood their fear, and I whispered that to doctor. I said, "Doctor, this does not seem to be good." But at that moment, the rear door opened, and a man in his thirties entered the room. He was a handsome, tall man wearing a blue Gestapo shirt, and he looked at me as if I was a ghost. He looked familiar to me, but I was unable to recall who he was.

Fortunately, at that moment, the doctor who was sitting next to me jumped from his chair like some one stuck a needle in his leg. He jumped over the tables and ran into this man's arms. They kissed and welcomed each other. They could not believe that they found each other here. This man was a the doctor's party supervisor back in Zagreb. This was just like a movie scenario. And at that moment, this angry commander whose name was Grga Jankez called the other man and whispered something into his ear. Shortly thereafter, his angry faced turned into a big smile. They stopped with

examining when they found who we were. At that moment, Grga stood up and said something that I cannot repeat completely, but I remember he said that the partisans do not have arms factories, and they do not have clothing factories, and all that has been taken from their enemies. He said that we were an excellent group and that he was going to send us with the platoon that was planing to attack the Ustasha that same night.

Q: Who was the party leader from Zagreb?

A: I never found out. At the end of this meeting, the last word he said was to report him tomorrow morning, and we said we would. The same afternoon, we were assigned to the platoon we were supposed to attack with. We were organized in smaller groups. I was wondering which rifle to steal. A man next to me said that *mauzerka* rifle was the best. I asked him how to recognize it. He showed me his rifle, which was *mauzerka*. I was wondering how it differed from the others. So he explained to me the way it is supposed to be cleaned. We left during the day. We were supposed to learn the password and the proper response to the password. I cannot recall the password we used that night, but here is one we used later on, cow-sock. The password was cow and the response was sock. We walked to the top of the hill, and stopped once, we saw a village at the bottom of the hill, Slatinski Drenovac. There was a sawmill. We could see lights in the village. The commander ordered us to hike down the hill. We were supposed to attack a school. Supposedly, the Ustasha settled the school, so our plan was to sneak one hundred meters away from the school and hide in the plum orchard. Unfortunately, the other group that was coming from the other side hit the Ustasha's checkpoint and fire started before we had planned. Immediately, the Ustasha started intensive firing from the school. We were totally

unprotected, just standing in the plum orchard. Our commander concluded that we would all get killed if we attacked at that point. He ordered bombers to sneak into the school while we were covering them with intensive firing. They were crawling all the way and threw several bombs into the school. Heavy explosions signaled that it was a perfect moment to attack. We all started running towards the school. I was running with my knife, along with armed partisans. The armed ones jumped into the school first, into the classrooms full of smoke, and wounded the Ustasha. Finally, I jumped into the school and found myself surrounded by heavy smoke. I heard screaming, fighting, and I could not see anything due to the dense smoke and dust. The only thing that I had was a little knife. Suddenly, a man in uniform without a hat stood in front of me. Inexperienced as I was, I asked him for the password. He did not understand what I meant, so I asked him again. He did not respond, and then I understood that my enemy was right in front of me. He tried to attack me and I stabbed a knife straight into his heart. He screamed for a moment and slowly fell down. I sat down, trying to find a rifle. I saw that he was holding a rifle. I tried to get it from him, but he was holding it firmly. The interesting thing was that after I stabbed him in his chest, I tried to pull the knife out, but the knife's handle stayed in my hand. I took his gun, but I did not know what to do with it. I was holding the gun by its barrel and planned to hit him in the head. I took the rifle and ran into the fight, looking for the next one who does not know our password. Whoever would not respond to our password, I would hit him straight in the head. I remember that I almost hit one of my partisan friends. We killed many of them in that school. The other group caught the Ustasha in the trap. Immediately, they were disarmed. I found myself among many corpses and a lot of rifles and weapons. I remembered that our mission here was to find as

many weapons as possible. I was looking for the best rifle. The one I had was an old Austrian rifle, and I was looking for *mauzerka*. I was told that was the best rifle. I was touching different ones and finally found the one I was looking for. I put it around me, as well as three belts full of ammunition. I was looking for a good bayonet, but I could not find any. Finally, I found one that was very long. At that moment, I dreamed my dream, I was an armed soldier for the first time in my life. I walked out, and our officer was looking for volunteers to take the arrested Ustasha back to our command. I volunteered to take them, but I had a problem taking the bayonet out of its case. I thought that the bayonet was rusty, but fortunately the only problem was that the safety strap had been snapped. I pulled it out, and it was a nice, greasy bayonet that I installed on my rifle and escorted the Ustasha back to our command. We all entered the command, and there was Grga Jankez, a commander of the 3rd Operational Zone for Slavonija and Srem. He told us, "Comrades you've done a great job. Just keep doing it!" We went for breakfast. We saw a familiar man coming in our direction. I looked closer and recognized Dragic from Obradovac. He was the one that was our connection with the partisans. He was the one that was feeding me while I was in the prison. We hugged and kissed each other, and then he said that the man we lost during our escape is down in a village eating his meal. We ran down to him where he was sitting and eating in the kitchen next to the creek. We approached him from the back, hugged and welcomed him, and sat to hear his story. He said that he lost his glasses, and once he crossed the railroad, he did not see us anymore. Then he continued on his own, but he was totally disoriented. We learned that the man who does not have a sense of direction usually walks in circle. He said that the next day he found himself at the same spot as before. So he hid himself in some bushes and

waited for the entire day to continue. He saw kids playing and walking around the forest, but he was afraid to approach them. He said that was the longest day in his life. He waited until dark to continue his escape. This time he knew where to go. He reached the road, but a machine gun was shooting along the road. He crawled across in order to avoid getting hit, when he heard *auf*. That was the German soldier standing right above him with the gun pointed at his head. He tried to escort him back to the prison, but our friend remembered that he was carrying a wooden bat. He swung with his bat and kicked the rifle out of the German soldier's hands and continued running. The soldier stood up and fired couple of hits, but fortunately, he missed our friend who already reached the forest. The next morning he met the partisan group which brought him there. We were assigned to different groups. I was looking for the group that was going to the front lines. I wanted to fight. I felt a need for revenge. I looked to join the proletariat brigade. I heard that there was a brigade consisting of Bosnians here in Slavonija. But I received a negative response, with the explanation that the proletariat brigade was going back to Bosnia to fight Chetniks. They told me that they have the perfect brigade for me. That was the striking brigade designed for the attacks. Felix was assigned to be the economist in the 1st Slavonian Brigade. Dusan Holcner was the one whose three daughters and wife were killed. He was the one that wanted to die with the rifle in his hands. And he got his wish. One day the Ustasha surprised us with their attack. We were about to eat, when the Ustasha's plane started bombing, followed by the ground strike. We had to withdraw from that village. A half-an-hour later we reorganized ourselves and attacked back. That was the knife-to-knife battle. Most of the Ustasha that survived ran away, and then I found Dusan Holcner dead with the rifle in his hand. Mirko Mautner could

not fit in the army very well. He was not flexible, so he mostly worked in the logistic. In 1944, we attacked one of the Pavelic's famous brigades' headquarters in Zaglin, Pozecka Kotlina. Mirko's unit was involved in this operation. He did not need to go, he got caught in the siege. And so what happened. The Ustasha came to give support to the Pavelic unit that was under siege in Caglin. They formed the fire line right against the forest where we were located. Unfortunately, Mirko stepped out of the forest, aimed towards the Ustasha, and shot at the same time as the Ustasha on the other side. They both fell dead. Mirko had already lost his wife, most likely his parents, while his brother was tortured to death in a very sadistic way in the prison Fericanci. So from our group, only the following people remained: Bozo Svarc, he volunteered to join the Liberation Front that departed to Hrvatsko Zagorje. Since he was from Zagreb, he wanted to go to the mountain of Kalnik and fight there. He participated for two more years in heavy fights. He retired as a colonel of the Yugoslav Army. Hugo Stern started working in the partisan information agency in Slavonija. During our escape, he was chosen to be our commander. He was from Julovac and he came from a very wealthy family. His family owned a brickyard and a store. In the beginning it was the information agency, and later it became OZNA [department for the public protection]. So what happened to him? In 1944, I was heavily wounded in Virovitica, and he came to that region for his duty. He was already a higher informational officer, which was an informer from the terrain. Later we talked a lot, and he was complaining that people from the command do not like him very much, so they send him to the front very often. He received the order to go to neighboring Hungary, which was already liberated, to go there and bring a salt. He told me that he met one of the escaped prisoners, who told him that my father was still alive. After that,

I have not seen Hugo ever again. I found the prisoner who escaped the prison, and he told the story. He was an eyewitness. My father was a cook. He was an extremely nice man who tried to help as many as possible. One day, this poor man came to my father and asked him for the piece of cattle the turnip. My father looked around and gave him a piece. This man put it under his coat and left. Unfortunately, the Ustasha spotted this and my father was momentarily kicked out of the kitchen. Luckily, he was placed to work in storage, although that was a good enough reason to be slaughtered. In the storage, they were storing clothes and possessions of the dead people. That storage was located in the basement, while the clothes and other stuff was sorted on the upper floor. And one day, he slipped on the stairs, broke his glasses, and ended up completely disoriented. Being hopeless and vulnerable, he was a subject of extinction in the prison. This man saw my father with the rest of the exhausted prisoners being taken on a truck who knows where. But that was my father's end. It was in Stara Gradiska prison in 1942. I do not know if he heard about my escape, but I am sure that would be a relief for him. In the beginning, I was in an intervention platoon that consisted of volunteers, a platoon that fought the battles all the time.

Q: Which brigade was that?

A: That was the second Slavonian platoon. The last battle that platoon ever had was the battle for Spanovica. Spanovica was near Psunj, close to Daruvar. That was a pure Ustastas' village. They talked in a specific accent, they were newcomers called *kranjci*. All of them were very bloody Ustasas. They burned all of the surrounding Serb villages, then robbed them and killed most of their population. I recall a day when our officer said that we were going to attack Spanovica village. All of us were very happy. We

wanted revenge for the harm they did to the innocent people. There was a wedding party in Spanovica. We surprised them with our bombs. A bomb was the heaviest piece of artillery we had. We were fighting, but someone lit the pile of straw, so we could not approach any closer. I was helping the man with a machine gun. I remembered that people who were expelled from Spanovica came back to pick up their robbed things. During the Tito period, this village was renamed and settled with Serbs, but at the time Franjo Tudjman was elected, an old name, and old settlers returned there. At that time, the first Slavonian striking brigade was formed. That was the most famous brigade in Slavonia. This brigade was fantastic. First I was a soldier, then co-machine gunman, and later I was promoted to the Commissary of the brigade. As the Commissary, I was wounded in the stomach. I was wounded in Virovitica on February 11th 1943. The commander of the brigade I was previously in made a big mistake. He became a commander of the 16th brigade, and his aim was to destroy the railroad with his brigade. First they destroyed the Ustasha's bunker, but they came to the railroad without any tools. The only thing they did was that they cut the telegraphic posts. But the Ustasha's shielded train came from Osijek and opened fire. Instead of withdrawing, the commander ordered the attack. They had a lot of casualties. Out of the entire brigade, only two soldiers survived. He was brought before the court where he was sentenced to death. He was a Muslim, and his name was Zijad. He was a great fighter, but he made a mistake that cost many lives. Because of his mistake, my brigade ended up in the horseshoe, surrounded by the Ustasha. Most of my soldiers withdrew, but I stayed wounded in the middle of the field. I saw a group of Ustasha coming in my direction. I looked for a way to kill myself, because I did not want to be captured again. First I wanted to stab the knife in my heart, but then I

found that I could use a bomb. I was going to detonate a bomb next to my stomach. But I was not able to find any firm object in order to initiate a bomb. They were getting closer to me. I grabbed my rifle in order to liquidate at least some of them before they killed me. I did not aim at all. I saw double contours in front of my eyes. I shot, hit the Ustasha, and did it one more time. My soldiers behind me gave me support. The man with the machine gun started shooting, and he liquidated three of them. They turned around and started running. I crawled back, when I saw our nurse wounded in her chest. She was exhausted, and foam was coming out of her mouth. She asked me not to leave her there. I helped her move, even though I was badly wounded. My stomach had a huge hole. I kept crawling for about 500 meters, and there I found many of my soldiers badly wounded. Everyone was demoralized. Now, I, as a Commissary had to bring the faith back to the soldiers. So, I just started singing the partisan song. I looked around, and all of them were quiet. I told them to sing. Most of them were crying and singing at the same time. I remember one of them was from Istra, and his name was Galekovic. I leaned my arm over his shoulders and started singing. He told me that he was not able to go on anymore. The next thing I remember, I was in the hospital. There was Doctor Stojan, who was the brigade's doctor. He was actually a student in medical school. He gave me first aid, and then I was transported to the real hospital. The transport took about three days. Once we reached the hospital, we had to wait five more days for the surgeon to come to the hospital. There were about eighty wounded people waiting for surgery. The surgeon was an inexperienced one, just graduated from the medical school. All he had was a wooden saw that he used for his surgeries. Alcohol was the only disinfecting fluid available. And there was my turn for surgery. Several days prior to that I was in agony.

I felt like sinking, then I felt like flying. I could not see anything for days because I had such a huge temperature. My urine tract was cut, so the urine was spilling over the wound. It burned so bad, because urine was so salty. During this agony, one of the nurses told me that Zijad was taken before the fire squad and liquidated. I loved him like he was my brother. I felt that I lost my brother. I was taken to the surgery room. The entire hospital was made of wood, hidden in the forest. The surgery room was located in the built shack. Wooden boards served as the operational desk. They carried me inside where I saw the doctor holding a human arm cut from the elbow. Next to it was a trunk, where he dumped the cut pieces of the human body. I was taken in, and there I saw the man from my brigade who was sitting on the chair without his arm. His bone was sticking out, and pieces of meat were left so the wound could heal up. I was placed on the table, and I remember that they sprayed something in my eyes and my nose. That was a disinfecting substance. Doctor sewed me up while I was screaming like a crazy man. However, my wound healed quickly, but I still had a problem with urinating on my wound. At that time, a huge German offensive called *Weiss* started in Bosnia. It was ordered to our brigade to get the Germans' attention with our attack. There were three brigades participating, and Petar Drapsin was a commander of the entire division. We attacked Okucani, Pakrac, and Viroviticu, and we gained the German's attention. Now the offensive started against us. I was in the shack where the worst wounded soldiers were. My case was the worst. We had to be evacuated. They brought us into the large bunkers, 60 by 60 in size. We were placed in a tunnel, about twenty of us. It was very calm inside the bunker. They placed us down next to each other on the piles of straw. To my left side was a member of Croatian Peasants' Party, Glukovic, who joined the partisans. To

my right side was a young Kozara boy, only 14 years old. He got wounded in his knee, and an infection started to grow. Galekovic was supposed to be a representative at the AVNOJ in Bihac in 1942. But on his way there, right before he crossed river Sava, the Ustasha wounded him, so instead of AVNOJ, he came to the hospital. He had a problem with his wound because it was infected as well. Once they filled the entire bunker with the wounded people, a nurse and doctor came in. I was hoping that would be the nurse from my brigade, but it was not her. Some other young and cute nurse served us. I did not know her real name, but everyone called her Banijka. She was a Serb girl who was from Banija, so we called her Banijka. Once they shut the bunker, there was total darkness. I lit my flashlight so Nurse could light a candle. As soon as she lit the matches, the fire pulled out. There was not enough oxygen. People who made this bunker were uneducated villagers, and they did not know that you have to provide a ventilation system. One hose to bring the air inside and the other one to carry it out. There was the only one hole that took air out of bunker. Through this hole we were able to see whether it was day or night. It was a rainy March day. Snow was melting, so we were totally wet inside the bunker. It was dripping on me, right next to my heart. I would wait until it fills with water and then lean on the side and empty it. But while I was asleep, water would stay, so I was completely wet. A moist inside the bunker dragged lice. The worst thing was that lice came under the bend and sucked on our blood. We were inside this bunker for weeks.

Q: Was there a doctor there?

A: There was no any doctor with us, only a nurse. She was not knowledgeable either, just trained for a short period of time.

Q: Did anyone bend your wounds?

A: My wound was bent only once in three weeks. Once we left the bunker, doctors were shocked about the way these wounds healed up. It seemed that each time the bend was taken off, the new piece of skin would be ripped, which stopped efficient healing of the wounds. One day, I looked at this boy who was next to me, when he started suffocate. He lacked oxygen, same as the man on the other side of me. I saw that they were going to die. With all my remaining energy, I managed to stand up and walk to the top of the bunker and open its cover. I was pushing with my back, when in the moment, I lost my conscience. I remember that I woke up among many who were inhaling the fresh air. We left the cover open for the entire night in order to refresh the bunker. A soldier went to bring several buckets of water, because all we had was a barrel of water, some salami, and old bread. We had done all of the necessities right next to us, so the smell was awful. This room was tall enough that it was possible to walk, 1,80 m tall, and 2,20 m wide.

Q: Which offensive was that, so you had to hide?

A: That was a German Weiss offensive. That was the fourth offensive that ended up on the river Neretva. I already mentioned that our command received an order from the Supreme Command to attack in order to stretch the German army concentrated in Bosnia.

Q: Did enemy come close to the bunker?

A: The partisans left that territory, and we were left to God's mercy. The Germans walked around with their dogs and searched terrain. There were around twenty of us, but typhus did its role. One by one they were falling into agony and coma. They were out of mind, screaming, yelling, and telling reports. A boy who sat next to me got the typhus too. He swelled more and more each day, but the worst thing was that some yellow fluid was coming out of his ears, his mouth, and nose. That was a signal of dying. The soldier who was inside with us took him to the creek, laid him down, covered him with leaves, and left him there. The next day we heard some noise and barks. I remember that I was thinking that man had to hide from another one, deep under the ground. We heard someone opening the cover. I remembered that I had a spare bomb in my pocket. Galekovic, who lay next to me, offered to trade his watch for the bomb. At the most risky moment, when we all had to be quiet, one of these people diseased by typhus started screaming. We tried to calm him down, but it was impossible. I told the man next to him to take one corner of the blanket and to stick it in his mouth. We were waiting for more than one hour, but nothing happened. We took the blanket out of this poor man's mouth, but he was already dead. Galekovic, our nurse, and many others got typhus too. We spent three full weeks there when the cover finally opened and we heard, "Comrades, I am your doctor." That was the Russian woman Kiseljevska. She was fantastic as a doctor and as a person. They brought us food and helped us come outside. At that moment, Galekovic died.

Q: What was a Russian woman doing there?

A: She was an emigrant from Russia who joined the partisan movement. She was anti-fascist, but I heard that she ended up in the jail on Goli Otok.

Q: That was a Tito-Stalin dispute!

A: Correct. Once we walked out, they gave us some dry beans to eat and some fresh water. She told us that the partisans won and that the offensive was over. She noted that they arrested some of the heavy artillery. In addition, she mentioned that we have to stay in the bunker, because our hospital was demolished.

Q: Where was that happening?

A: That was on Papuk. That was a mountain about 950 meters high. It had a lot of forests. Our hospital was number three on Ravna Gora. Most of the surrounding villages were Serbian. Serbs settled this region a long time ago. At the beginning they were converting and taking Catholicism, but later, in order to avoid conversion, they settled these mountains. Serbs mostly settled mountains like Psunj, Papuk, Krndija, and Dilj. That was a good signal not to worry about treason. The bunkers like this one were all over these mountains. Most of them stayed secret and were never discovered.

Q: Was that the west Slavonia from where most of the Serbs were expelled during the current war?

A: Correct. That was a territory where most of the Serbs were kicked out. We were told that we can stay outside the bunker. It was April, days were warmer, and I told myself not to go to that hole ever again. I had a pocketknife which I used to cut two branches in order to make some kind of

crutches. These crutches I wanted to use to walk back to the hospital. Even though I knew that the hospital was burned, I wanted to go there. I did not want to tell anyone, in order not to create confusion. I walked six or seven steps and then sat and rested. So the distance of a couple hundred meters I walked through the entire day. I came to the hospital and saw others lying on the ground under the trees. I sat down next to the couple of wounded soldiers, when the nurse who used to bend my wound asked me if I needed any assistance. He did not recognize me. Once I said who I was, he looked at me surprised, like he could not believe that it was me. He told me that I was operated on just because of doctors' ethics to treat everyone. But my wounds were so bad that no one believed that I could survive. They thought that I would get blood poisoning and die. I saw Banijaka the same day. She recovered and felt better. I was exhausted, tired, and my soul suffered for the young nurse who died in the same battle when I was wounded. I would like to mention that after I was taken away, most of my soldiers stayed and fought until the last one was alive. They all died in the field.

Q: Are you talking about the nurse from your brigade?

A: Yes, about her. She was the one I was helping to crawl and who I was deeply in love with. Soon after, we were transferred to another hospital. Every day Banijka was next to me, helping me recover. I asked her to help me find shoes, since I did not have any except woolen socks. She told me to wait some time and that she would find me some. I understood that she waited for someone to die to give me his. She invited me into her barrack, gave me shoes and the release letter from the hospital, and I went to join my brigade.

Q: What brigade, battalion, and unit was that?

A: That was the 2nd unit of the 2nd battalion of the 12th proletariat striking brigade. When I approached my brigade, my co-soldiers could not believe that it was me. They all thought that I could not survive my wounds. I asked for the rifle, but I was told that I had enough of battling, and I was going into logistic. I was appointed as the commissary of the guards in the bordering territory. It was amazing how well-organized people were in the town Podgorje where I was transferred. Everything worked for the army and the united front. Arms and ammunition workshops, tailors, shoe repairs, etc., all of them worked for the army. Podgorje was a Serb village where all of the men were taken away and killed. Only some women and children survived. So the partisans lived here with the rest of the surviving population. I received an invitation in October of 1943 to report to the commander of the region. There was horrible and deep mud all around, so I asked the president of the local Communist Council to let me use his horse. He gave me his mule, and since I did not have a saddle, I rolled a blanket over its back and tied it with the rope around the mule's stomach. While I was approaching Paucja, a place where the regional command was located, I heard some strange noise. It became louder and louder. I turned back and spotted German tanks coming in our direction. It was a surprise, because we thought that there was no chance that any motorized vehicle could cross such deep mud. I rushed to the command in order to inform them about the upcoming trouble. But the commander did not believe me, and he decided to go by himself and check. As soon as he recognized that I was right, he ordered me to go to Zivcani where the hospital was, in order to inform these people that the wounded ones had to be evacuated into the bunkers. I followed his order, and all of the soldiers were evacuated on time. On the way back, I met the

commander who said that I was right, and that he should have listened to me. If he had listened to me, many of the people could have been saved, but once tanks entered the village, there was no chance. Around fifteen people got killed, as well as his cousin Nikola. I was ordered to go back to my zone to carefully follow the movement of the enemy. On the way back, I rode my mule through the forest when I heard someone cutting the trees deep inside the forest. It was suspicious, because no villager would cut the tree inside the forest. They cut at the end of the forest and saved time and energy in the transporting of the tree. I stepped down from my mule and hid behind the beech tree. Then I spotted a tank rolled over at an angle of thirty degrees and its crew around. There were five or six of them sitting next to the tank and around the fire. One of them was cutting branches for the fire. I took my rifle and shot, but one of them jumped in the tank, grabbed the machine gun and started firing around me. The mule ran away, right among the German soldiers. I had to go back to the regional command to inform them about this tank. This time they believed me because they heard shots. The next morning, on the way back to my post, I saw prints in the ground that told me that the other tank from Djakovo towed this one away. Back in my village, one woman who was very brave and who used to go to the German village of Djakovo told me that she spotted the German soldier with the wounded arm riding the mule. I would like to emphasize that the partisans were organized so well. All these letters that were coming all the time even on the banded piece of paper. I received mail from all around the country. These couriers were doing a great job. I received from my first cousin, Beba Danon Levi. She was a teacher in Banija. She heard from friend of mine, Dusko Brkic, that I was alive. She wrote me a letter, telling me the situation of my

family. She wrote that my family was alive and that they were in the Italian zone, and once Italy capitulated, they joined the partisans.

Q: Were they on the island Rab?

A: Some of them were on Rab, while my mother and her sisters were in Kasteli. Her sister was married to the Italian man, so they did not have any problems. Also, the Italians did not have any anti-Semitic feelings. Even though fascism came to Italy earlier than in Germany, they did not have any genocide programs. Once Italy capitulated my family joined the partisans. My cousin told me the story of how she made a contact with me. She was sitting in the officers' cafeteria, when one of the officers approached her and asked her if she knew me. At the first moment she told that I was dead, so she started screaming. But he explained to her that he knew me and knew where I was. That's how we got in contact, and from there I was able to make contact with my mother.

Q: Where was your mother at that time?

A: At that time my mother was with the partisans. She was a cook in the command of the air force, which was created in Livno in 1943.

Q: Where was your sister Sida at that time?

A: Sida was in Dalmatian brigade, Biokovska brigade, and she was a nurse. Later she became part of the team that undertook most of the surgery.

Q: What about your grandmother?

A: My grandmother went to Italy with her daughter and granddaughter. Once my mother got ill, they transferred her to Italy by plane.

Q: Where was your sister Sarina, called Ina?

A: She remained in Serbia all this time, and she survived living in the partisan units. She was wounded in her head, but fortunately, she survived, so at the beginning of June 1945, we all got together in Belgrade.

Q: Tell me what happened with Banijka?

A: At the time I was there, she was alive. We met once, but each of us was in rush, so we did not have enough time for each other. Later I heard that she died.

Q: How many of these seven that escaped the prison survived?

A: Out of these seven people, Bozo Svarc, Ferick and Zorislav Golub, and I survived. Two of them got killed, while one of them, Hugo Stern, went to Hungary to get some salt and never appeared again.

Sadik 6

On this checkpoint I remained until spring of 1944. Afterwards, I was appointed as a political instructor in the regional command. I was circulating and politically performed around this region, visiting guards, workshops, etc. Afterwards, I was transferred to the position of the Commissary for the airport Vocin. That was a place where the airport was built, and the English used its strip for landing. After the German bomber hit the English plane, they stopped landing and continued to drop material support by parachute.

Q: On which territory was that?

A: That was in the west Slavonija, actually, the entire region below Papuk Mountain is considered to be west Slavonija. I stayed there for four or five months. The English mission was stationed there. I spoke French as well as one of the English officers, so we maintained a nice collaboration. After the airport was shut down, I became a political commissary in Podravska Slatina. There we were under constant siege. We lived close to the front, and from one side we faced Sava and on the other, Drava. One day a red haired man was walking toward me with a smile on his face. He looked at me and asked, "Commissary, do you remember me?" I could not remember him. After he told me his name, everything was clear. This young man was still a boy when he came to join my platoon. He was not even fourteen years old. At the first moment, I refused to let him join the partisans, but after he told me his life story and that Ustasha slaughtered his entire family and burned his house and that he did not have anywhere to go, I agreed with his desire to stay with us.

Q: What was the name of his village, and where was that?

A: It was on Psunj. I can't recall the exact name of his village. We called him a hen. He had red hair just like a hen. I invited him to my room to tell me about his progress. I remembered he was my courier. His obsession was revenge to the Ustasha. That was his drive. He came to my room and we talked about these days when we were fighting. He was telling me a story, and in a moment he started suffocating. I was aware of this sudden reaction. That was the illness that seemed to be epilepsy, but it was not. That was some kind of nerve breakdown caused by war destruction. These young organisms were not adjusted for such efforts. He started waving with his hands right and left. He was sweating and breathing hard. I understood that he was here on rehabilitation, but he was ashamed to talk about it. He buttoned his clothes and left. Podravska Slatina was mostly a Serb town where we officers lived and attended these political courses.

Q: Was that the partisan political police, department for civil protection?

A: Correct. That was the department for civil protection in the Croatian region. We were all very good friends. One day a deputy political commander came in our room and said that he made a bet with his chief that Sadik Danon was a Sarajevan and that he escaped the prison. I answered positively. Then he told me to go to see his chief in order to fill out some papers. I went there at the time they were having lunch. They offered me to

eat, and I accepted. Then I was told that I had to go and report to OZNA⁵. I looked outside the window and saw a coach with a horseman in it. I was given a route that I had to take, as well as the tasks I had to undertake. I had to go to Pozecka Kotlina. The first night we spent in a local village where I slept in the same room with the soldier who was traveling with me. He looked at me strangely. He told me that he was carrying a letter and that he was escorting me. I asked him why did he believe me, because I had a gun on me. He said that he knew that I was OK. I could not sleep the entire night. I tried to recall whether I made any mistakes, but I could not remember. I knew that I would give ten of my lives for anti-fascism. The next morning we continued our trip. We came to the regional OZNA in Kutjevo. Kutjevo was well-known for its wine production. We entered a castle with high walls. This castle has been built by the count Turkovic. I was taken downstairs and left in front of the office to wait. Soon after, a handsome, young officer came and offered me to come inside the office. He asked me if I knew him. I could not remember him. He said that we were in the same platoon, as well as in the same platoon's choir. He asked me if I remembered an engineer Danon. I told him that I remembered him. Really, I knew him very well. He was a criminal. His father was a Rabbi. He told me that there is a chase for him, and they thought that it was you. Right then, I understood that my life is saved again. If there was not this person who knew me and who knew an engineer Danon, I would probably be killed.

Q: What did you know about the engineer Danon?

⁵ Information Agency

A: He was a group chief. He was a chief of gravediggers. There was a rumor that on a couple occasions he helped Ustasha to finish killing of some of the prisoners. Maybe he tried to end their suffering, but I am not sure. Also, there were rumors that he used to beat other prisoners on the embankment. Besides that, he used to eat the Ustasha's advanced food, and he was in a great shape. He was able to provide a full portion for his father, who worked as a tailor. I was sure that they knew more about him than I did, especially since they had a chase for him. Later I heard that he joined the partisans, but some of the soldiers recognized him and told what he did, so he was put in front of a firing squad.

Q: That was such a happy circumstance that OZNA had a man that was familiar with you!

A: Yes, I almost got killed. On the way back to my post, the enemy's offensive started, and they broke our defensive lines. We had to withdraw, and we did go back to Hungary. We went over Virovitica and Drava back to Hungary. I was lucky, because when the offensive was going on, most of the prisoners were killed right away without any trial. After Hungary, we came back to Podravina, where we held lines towards Osijek. First I was in the propaganda department of Osijek's brigade, but later my original brigade needed someone for its own propaganda department, so I went and joined them. We were pushing our enemy out of the country. We crossed Drava and went to Austria. An order was to go to the Koruska province in Austria and to try to catch Pavelic and his generals. We had to march a non-stop march. It was May, and Germany already capitulated. We came to Celovec

which was the capital of Koruska province. We had to station in the hills above a little town. In the bottom of the valley was a beautiful lake.

Q: What was the name of this little town?

A: It was Bleiburg. That village was called Bleiburg. Later I learned what happened. Our commander tried to make contact with the Allies' troops. There was the English tank unit around here. Our commander went to find the English officer, but he found the Ustasha's officers. Our commissary introduced himself to the soldier who stood in front of the office.

Q: Who was he?

A That was Milan Basta, a commissary of our brigade. He found two of the Ustasha's generals. The Ustasha were trying to surrender to the English and avoid the partisans' persecution. But Milan Basta explained to him who the Ustasha were and what they did, so they should be given to the partisans. The English soldier understood and agreed to give the Ustasha to us and also offered us their tanks in case we needed them.

Sadik 6A

Milan Basta felt disappointed at the moment when the English officer agreed to hand the Ustasha over to us, because at that moment he had not enough troops that could take over the Ustasha. Fortunately, soon after, he looked through the window and saw a column of the 12th Proletariat Brigade passing by. Milan Basta and the English officers negotiated a procedure of surrender with the Ustasha. An agreement was that the Ustasha had to be disarmed and only officers could have their pistols. Those who committed crimes would be taken before the court, while the rest would be spared. There were around one thousand of our soldiers. We created a horseshoe around them, while the English tanks joined us. They were still waiting in the forest. In the morning they started coming out of the forest. Disciplinary, without any attempts of wrongdoing they started coming out. The Commanders rode their horses in the front and the soldiers walked behind them. At that moment, I felt such a strong need to find some of these criminals who were in the Jasenovac prison. I could not resist standing calmly, so I walked towards them. I asked the first person where the brigade is that served in Jasenovac. He explained that these people were behind and that I could recognize them because they wore black shirts. I continued walking towards them. I saw them coming in my direction, and at the head of the column was a commander on his horse. I told him to remove his weapons. He dropped his automatic machine gun from the horse, and it broke. Then he put his hand on the pistol case like he was going to take it out. I grabbed my pistol sooner, put it under his chin, and ordered him to

disarm himself. That probably scared him, so he removed his pistol. I took it and ordered them to continue disarmament.

Q: Were they passing by?

A: Correct. They were passing by, unit by unit.

Q: How far did they go? Who was disarming them?

A: The partisans were disarming them. That was an agreement, and everything went pretty smoothly. I was standing at that place, and they were dropping their weapons in front of my legs. The pile was bigger and bigger. Next to me was a Slovenian man who was taking pictures of this event. I looked them straight in their eyes, hoping to recognize someone from Jasenovac. I wanted so badly to see a man who sadistically mistreated me in Jasenovac.

Q: Did you find any of those criminals from 1942?

A: No one. All of them passed me, but I could not recognize any. I felt so hurt that I almost started crying. Jasenovac was an educational center for the Ustasha officers. The better they slaughtered, the sooner they progressed and gained better ranks. Kozara was close too, so they can practice their fighting and get valuable experience. I looked at this huge pile of different weapons, figured out that we are on the territory of Austria and that these weapons had to be transferred to the territory of Yugoslavia. That was a province in which the people decided in the plebiscite in 1918 that they want to stay in Austria. The Ustasha had their trucks parked on the side for which they claimed to be out of order. The next thing was that we called all of the drivers and told them to try to repair these trucks, because we decided to transport them to

Zagreb and let them go free. They bought that story and started all of the trucks. We used them to transport all of those weapons back to Yugoslavia. I remember that they were concentrated in Dravograd and Maribor.

Q: How many thousands of Ustasha were there?

A: It was questionable, but Milan Basta was negotiating with them, and he said that there were 100-120 thousand Ustasha.

Q: Were there just Ustasha or some other groups too?

A: Most of them were the Ustasha, even though there were some Domobrans and the regular German soldiers. The Germans were such disciplined soldiers. They turned in a list of names of the soldiers that surrendered and the amount of weapons they turned in. That was real German precision.

Q: Who else was there?

A: There were Chetniks.

Q: They were the Serbian Royalists, and the partisans fought a civil war against them!

A: Correct. There were bloody Chetniks too. Their Commander was Pavle Djuric, who was with Draza Mihajlovic in Bosnia in 1944. Draza Mihajlovic wanted to go to Serbia, while Djuric decided to go to the west and surrender to the Allies. However, the Ustasha found them near Banja Luka, and the Chetniks surrendered themselves. They were taken to the Stara Gradiska prison. I saw a picture of Max Luburic holding a cut head of Pavle Djuric in his hands. I heard that our soldier transferred all of these

Ustasha back to Yugoslav territory and persecuted them, but they did not serve a full sentence. Most of them were released after half of their original sentence because of their good behavior.

Q: Don't tell me that no one got killed?

A: Some did, but only people who were found guilty and who committed crimes, and the fact is that no one was killed in Bleiburg.

Q: Well, you as the partisan officer and a Jew had a chance to control the Ustasha disarmament.

A: That was May 15, a week after Germany capitulated. We were fighting for one more week.

Q: Could you tell us something about your family?

A: Well, I had a big family from both sides. My father's family mostly lived in Belgrade and Bijeljina, as well as in Tuzla. Father's family was killed almost entirely. Some of them tried to escape to Skopje, they were captured and killed. Some of them went to Dalmatia over Zagreb, Split, and Dubrovnik. One of my uncles got killed in Sarajevo. After the war, when I was visiting Sarajevo's Jewish Museum I saw his picture on the wall. It looked like a picture from the police file, both profiles and the front. Out of the entire father's family, only his sister who was in Aushwitz and his cousin survived. Only two of them survived. Most of my mother's family lived in Sarajevo, and they mostly tried to escape southward to the Italian zone. Out of nine kids my grandmother had, there were eight daughters and only one son, and that son died. His name was Moric Danon, and he was in the command of the partisans' Air Force when the Germans captured him. I

have made a list of all these poor people, and it took me a long time to do this.

Q: How many dead people did you find?

A: Unfortunately, 40 people from 2 until 60 years of age. While I was writing this list, I cried like a baby. I remember I fell asleep at the table.

Q: Did you make your own family?

A: When I returned from the war, I found my mother and two of my sisters in Belgrade, while my father died in Stara Gradiska. My biggest idea was to be an architect. After the war, I started working in “Jugopetrol” and attended a Gymnasium for those who served in the partisan Army. I graduated in two years and then went to Prague to study architecture.

Q: Did the government send you?

A: Correct. The Serbian government sent me on a scholarship. I spent only one year there, and I had to return because of Inforbiro. I finished my studies in Belgrade, got married, had a baby, and then I got divorced. It was an unsuccessful marriage. I was saving the energy for another marriage. I married a wrong person again who I had another child with. Today I have two beautiful daughters, one of them lives in Zagreb and one on Krk.

Q: Which rank did you hold when you got demobilized?

A: I was demobilized as the captain of the first class after what I did not progress any more. I did not have any ambitions to progress in the military service. Since I was an active from the beginning, I had a first-involved status. I received a lot of military medals, but all of them are in my drawer.

Q: How do you observe this current tragedy and the dissolution of Yugoslavia?

A: I see it as a tragedy. All our ideals that we fought for are destroyed. We fought for Yugoslavia, not for Croatia or Serbia, but Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia where everyone would enjoy equality, democracy, and freedom. However, forces that started this dissolution came from Germany and Austria, two fascist states. Later, the Vatican, America, and other West European countries joined them in their effort to destroy Yugoslavia. They used it as long as they needed, once the Soviet Union collapsed and the need for Yugoslavia disappeared, they decided to destroy it. They do not bring democracy, and the example is South America and its dictators. I am disappointed in the entire humankind.

Q: This was my longest interview, you talked for seven and a half-hours. Where did you find energy?

A: Well, ever since the war was over, I carried a huge pain inside myself. There was not a night that I did not dream of Jasenovac and the killings, the slaughtering that occurred inside. I tried to write so many times, but as soon as I would start, these horrible memories came to my mind and unable me to write. I have to tell you that my arrival to the partisans' units was my personal renaissance. Beside all of the hard times and the constant fighting, I was happy and optimistic, and I believed in a better future. I was telling the commissary of the 3rd Operational Zone that in the partisans' army, I felt like being on vacation. I was happy since I knew that if I died, it would be with a rifle in my hands.

Q: Did this interview help you a little bit, since you told us your story?

A: I feel a big relief. That was like a poison standing inside of me. I planned to write some of these memories, to publish a book or some kind of biography. I wanted to do it in order to provide a source for new generations, so they can stop a possible rise of fascism.

Let me introduce: to my right is director and cameraman Zlatko Dukic, and I am what they call interviewer Jasa Almuni.

It was my pleasure. We are done.

THE END