

USHMM Archives, RG-50.468*0003

Eduard [ajer, an electrician from a rather poor Eshkenazi family in Sarajevo gave an interview which lasted five hours and covered many aspects of the life and death in the Jasenovac concentration camp. In the late thirties he joined a union sport club and later the Communist Youth organization and as such was imprisoned by the Usta{as in August 1941 and deported to Jasenovac camp in November 1941.

Eduard said that after an exhausting train journey of four days the Usta{a guards made them run from the railway station in Jasenovac to the command of the camp and whoever could not make it was shot. At that time there were separate barracks for Sephardi and Eshkenazi Jews and Serbs. There were not even wooden beds. He and his older brother slept sitting on the muddy floor embracing each other to keep warm. They remained without any beds from November 1941 to February 1942. That winter was extraordinary cold.

Eduard survived Jasenovac until the breakthrough in April 1945 as the administration of the camp used his skills as electrician. Before doing professional work he was assigned during a short spell to the group of grave diggers and lived to see the terrible killing of his younger brother Albert. That critical day the grave diggers were taken to the camp in the village Brojica which made part of the Jasenovac complex. There was only one barrack with entrance on one side and exit on the opposite side where Eduard and his mates were ordered to prepare a mass grave. They did not yet finish their work when lorries with selected weak and exhausted inmates started arriving. They were entered into the barrack, ordered to take off their clothes off and naked led to the exit where two Usta{a guards awaited them with mallets in their hands. They struck them on their heads, the grave diggers had to tie their legs with straps and drag them into the mass grave. When the last lorry arrived Eduard saw his younger brother Albert (18) in it. He was meager and worn-out. He called Eduard who made a first step towards him but was stopped by his mates. Eduard said that blow with the mallet smashed the skull of his brother. The only thing he could do was for him was not to strap his legs and drag him to the grave but take him on his arms and put him gently to rest.

There were 20 men in the grave digger's group. Their head was a Jew from Sarajevo whose family name was Danon and about whom other survivors had only bad things to say. It is believed that he managed to escape from the camp but was sentenced to death by the partisans because of his mis-deeds in Jasenovac. Eduard does not condemn him too much. He said that Danon was obliged to force other inmates to work, he obviously did things which invited vengeance, but he fought for his own life. we can not look at this matters in a simplistic way.

Recognizing that often the law of jungle prevailed, Eduard described also a different kind of relations among the inmates. Those who were leftist or linked to the illegal communist network in the camp were encouraged to form small solidarity groups for survival. Eduard belonged to such a group of three while working as an electrician in the Jasenovac workshop producing chains and metal goods. Two other members of the group were Serbs. In such groups some members had family outside the camp and could occasionally receive from them food packages which were then shared by the members of the group. Eduard did not get any packages as all members of his family were deported but was contributing with food he was able to get while assigned to work as electrician outside the camp. Before he was sent to the chain factory he did not receive any bread from November 1941 to April 1942. Their food was a thin cornflower soup without any salt or fat. The water was also very scarce. In the main section of Jasenovac called Ciglana (Brickmill) where several thousand inmates were held there was only one water tap near the kitchen. Many had to drink heavily polluted water from a pond. Eduard said that at that time he not drink any water except the daily soup. His nails did not grow, nor his beard or hair.

Eduard related in detail the breakthrough which the inmates undertook on 22 April 1945. The Usta{as were systematically killing the prisoners as the liberators were advancing and only about 1200 remained alive on the day when the illegal organization decided to storm the gates. About 70 to 80 of them survived. Eduard realized the assigned duty of climbing the telephone pole and cut the wires while the Usta{as were firing at them from all directions. Eduard joined Tito's units, remained in the army and retired as captain.