

USHMM Archives, RG-50.468*0005

Mihajlo Mari} born in 1920 in a Serbian village near Daruvar in Slavonia was among the early Serbs to be put in prisons by the Usta{a regime. In April of 1941, the same month when the Usta{as took power, Mari} was detained during a police raid in the center of Zagreb. All people with a Serbian and Jewish names were taken to the police station while the Croats were mostly released on the spot. "I had the wrong name" - Mari} said.

His testimony is interesting in so far as he has seen both Krapje and Jasenovac 3 camps in their early days. From Zagreb he was deported to the camp near the village Krapje which was the first camp of the future Jasenovac complex. There were only few precarious barracks, about 1200 inmates, who had to do heavy outdoor work and received 3 time a day a thin soup. Killings and random beatings were frequent. In August 1941 Mari} was sent to Jasenovac 3 around the brick mill near the village Jasenovac where at that time no barracks existed yet. Mari} survived 4 years of Jasenovac thank to the fact that he was an expert plumber who worked in the Chain and metal good workshop (Lancara) and in the Hospital for the Usta{as outside the camp in the Jasenovac village. He has obviously seen very much but it was not easy to extract from him what he knew. All survivors from Jasenovac recommended him for interview, but his testimony is somehow disappointing. His recollections are vacillating, sometimes contradictory, and he is not articulate enough. I had to extract answers from his so that the greatest part of the interview consists of short questions and answers. He did not narrate, he did not deliver stories about various events. .

According to him there were three kinds of "apelo" (line up) in Jasenovac. They were not convoked on regular bases. The siren called the inmates when the Usta{as had to execute or punish somebody, when the inmates were to be assigned to various of works or when selections were to take place.

Mari} spoke favorably about of Ing. Salmon, the Jewish expert, and of the Jew Blauhorn, the chief in the Chain and metal goods workshop where about 30 inmates toiled. Mari} said that Salamon achieved with the Usta{a command that inmates working in the Chain workshop could sleep in its premises among the machines and not in the barracks where Usta{as used to come during the night to beat the prisoners or to select for the killing. There were times when his workers had been selected and Salamon saved them.

Mari} confirmed that inmates used for work were not spared from extermination. He has seen in 1943 his maternal aunt Ana Pocuca in a column of women from the camp farm being taken across the river Sava to be killed at the site near the village Gradina.

Mari} was member of a solidarity group which the clandestine organization encouraged. Two other members of his group were a Serb, Duzemli}, and a Jew from Sarajevo, Leker. They shared whatever food they could arrange. Food packages were not received in 1941 according to him, only in 1943 and 1944. Once per month. He received them from his mother who was a victim of ethnic cleansing in Croatia and fled to Belgrade. They could also write once per month few standard words on postcards provided by the camp command.

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Asked about the statements that Jews were denouncers in the camp, Mari} replied: "My experience confirms that in every wheat there is tare. People of this kind you could find among the Serbs and among the Jews. Because of one or two persons you can not condemn a whole nation."

Asked about the statesmen of Jovan Prnjatovi}, former secretary of the Serbian Chamber of Commerce in Sarajevo, given officially in Belgrade in 1942 after his release from Jasenovac, that Jews remained Jews in the camp with their defects accentuated, Mari} said: "His writing is contradictory. I lived a long time with the Jews. If we speak frankly we have to say that Jews in respect of a job or work to be done are the most capable".

Ciliga in his book "Alone through Europe in War" said that Jews in the internal administration of the camp had participated both in determining who is to die and in the executions, and Franjo Tudjam quoted this in his book (i989). I asked all interviewees about it and all denied any knowledge of it except Mari} who gave an mixed answer. He said: : Jews who commanded and had the position of "Grupnik" (note: head of a working group) could not order kill this or that one, that he could not. The selection for the killing was done only by the Usta{as. But I heard, I have not seen it, that Jews were killing inmates".

From whom did you hear this ?

- They were not resistant enough. I heard about it as there were groups of people who were assigned to cross over to Gradina and liquidate inmates."

Were not the Usta{as those who did the liquidation ?

- The Usta{as could not do it alone. Gypsies and Jews they also did it. And after they finish the liquidation, they were also so that evidence is not left, and then others were selected for the job. Jews were for instance grave diggers".

We intend to ask Mari} about this issue: from whom did he hear what he told, from one or more persons, when, where etc.