

JOVANOVIĆ, Aleksandar  
Former Yugoslavia Witnesses Documentation Project  
Serbian  
RG-50.585\*0015

DVD 1

In this interview **Aleksandar** Jovanović discusses the deportation of the Serbian population from the village of Veliko Nabrđe. He explains which techniques have been used in order to round-up all of the citizens, the methods of transportation to the camp, and the conditions they endured during the transport and in the camp. Moreover, he speaks about the ruling political structure during the war, which was the Nezavisna država Hrvatska (Independent State of Croatia) and the government's role in the expulsion of the population. He also discusses the Jasenovac camp and the fate of the children who were separated from their parents.

**[01:] 00:31:15 – [01:] 01:10:10**

[Veliko Nabrđe, Slavonija (Slovenia), present-day Croatia (Hrvatska)] He discusses the details of his family; explains that at the age of ten or eleven he realized the inevitability of war, as he recalls important events that preceded military action; he speaks about units of Croatian army that were working to disarm the regular army; explains that the village had approximately 1,200 inhabitants: 96% were Serbian and the remaining four percent were Croat, German and Hungarian; explains that before the war began swastikas and the letters ŽAP (*Živeo Ante Pavelić*, Long Live Ante Pavelich) were written on the walls of Serbian houses and stores; explains that the occupation of Yugoslavia was prepared in advance because the army was in chaos and the soldiers had been deprived of arms; explains that Croats were not interested in defending Yugoslavia; points out that only a few Serbs remained in the regular army; explains that Vlatko Maček, president of the government during the war, formed an army of 200,000 Croatian soldiers; talks about his house being searched because his father was a teacher and a prominent member of the village; explains that his family had five members—father, mother, two sisters and himself; points out that during home searches the whole family needed to be present so as not to raise suspicion that they were hiding illegal possessions or engaging in subversive activity; explains that when the arrests began his father went into hiding; explains that as a result his mother along with there other villagers were arrested and an ultimatum was issued—all the men in hiding needed to surrender or the whole family would be arrested; explains that three villagers surrendered after three months and were released immediately from prison in order to encourage others in hiding to surrender themselves without fear of incarceration; points out how many villagers were never released from prison during the war.

**[01:] 01:10:11 – [01:] 01:20:59**

He explains that the village church was intended to be destroyed but that its destruction would happen much later; explains how the Serbs were forced to convert to Catholicism; explains that the conversion was attended by Catholic priests and some new villagers who came from Slovenia; explains that conversion was forced on the Serbs by the Croats; explains that all citizens of the state had to be of catholic faith; points out that a marriage ban was issued on unions between Croats and “non-Aryan” people, and that it was also illegal to go out in public without wearing the identifying blue stripe around one’s arm; explains that all of these bans were published in the local media on July 15, 1942; explains that there was a military school that had 60 students placed on school premises as guards as well as a unit of soldiers who had fought at the Battle of Kozara; he speaks of the false reconciliatory attitude of the soldiers in order to build false trust and confidence for the army within the local population; explains that this particular unit was the group that carried out the deportations of the local population; recounts how the deportations began on August 11, 1942; explains that all belongings and winter clothing were put in different carriages while the people were put in animal wagons and then deported first to **Djakovo** and then to Jasenovac; explains that it is a historical inaccuracy to put the blame on the “Ustaše” (Ustasha) for causing the genocide; explains that the “Ustaše” was simply the executioner but that the genocide was really facilitated by the Independent State of Croatia; points out that the Independent State of Croatia was called the “so-called” state during Tito’s regime; argues that the name “so-called” state is incorrect because the government was a proper state with complete control over the courts and government; speaks about the bad conditions in the wagons—no space or sufficient air; explains that upon arrival at Jasenovac there was a selection—the elderly and the disabled were separated from those that were capable for physical work; explains that from the wagon for women and children the young girls were taken to **Gradina** where they were confined to houses that had walls covered with blood; says that his sister was in one of these houses; explains that many were deported again and sent to Germany as forced laborers.

[01:] 01:21:00 – [01:] 01:30:03

He explains that the rules for boys differed from case to case—sometimes 14-year-old boys were allowed to stay with their mothers and sometimes they were not; says that because he was only 11 he was allowed to stay with his mother; explains that because he was with his mother he did not suffer physical abuse; explains that men were sent to an unknown place in **Gradina** along with the elderly and killed that same night; discusses how grave diggers who worked in the fields recounted the atrocities when they came to the camp to sleep; continues with the story of the deportation that went to Okučani, 60km away from the village; points out that after the train ride, from Okučani they went on foot 16km to Stara Gradiška, a concentration and extermination camp specifically for women and children; explains that they carried their belongings on their backs; explains that because of his elderly grandmother they could not walk fast and as a result she received several kicks from the soldiers; explains that during the walk people were throwing away belongings because they were too heavy to carry; points out that in Stara Gradiška all belongings had to be left with a priest named **Vrban**; explains that when they arrived at the camp everyone was forced to go to **Kula**, a part of the camp barracks that already contained several prisoners.

[01:] 01:30:04 – [01:] 01:40:57

He explains that there were already many Jewish women who had been brought from Kozara a month earlier; points out that Jewish women who were used to the city life had a particularly hard time in the camp; explains that everybody slept outside under the sky on the pebbles; discusses the bad condition of food; says that there were approximately a thousand people housed at that part of the camp; discusses how carrying water was a big problem because no cans were provided; points out that the heat was unbearable and the two litres of water that he could carry in a hood was not enough for the whole family; explains that after couple of days there was a selection of women: the old, sick, pregnant and then those capable for work; explains that the Jews who used to live in his village were taken earlier than Serbs to the camp of Djakovo; points out how the majority of Croats at that time were members of the Croatian Peasant Party, “Hrvatska Seljačka Stranka,” (HSS); explains that the events during the war helped to contribute to the eventual break-up of Yugoslavia; discusses the deportation of a village priest to the camp of Slavenska Požega and then later to Serbia; returns to conditions of the wagons in which the people were transported—everybody was standing and close together and there were sudden breaks; explains that there was hope that the deportation would go to Serbia; points out that Serbia was a destination for the first deportees but the final destination was Jasenovac.

## DVD 2

[02:] 02:00:35 – [02:] 02:10:47

He talks about the order to separate all children up to age of 14 from their mothers; comments on different ways that women reacted to being separated from their children; points out that they were taken to another part of the camp where there was an area in which children up to age of 3 were lying on the ground; recounts that the day after they went to that part of the camp the above-mentioned children disappeared; explains that children who were brought there after the battle of Kozara saw that the young children were tucked in blankets put in the truck and then taken to an unknown place; points out that it was later confirmed in publications that these children had been killed in gas chambers; describes the transport of male children in wagons to Okučani; explains that their mothers and sisters were forced to walk to the camp in **Sisak** from which they were transported to Germany; describes how their mother put male clothes on his sister so that they could be transported in the same wagon; points out that distance between Zagreb and Okučani is 123 kilometres and that the trip lasted for three days and two nights; explains that they did not have any food or water and that doors were opened several times so that the air could get into the wagon; discusses how it was obvious that some children already passed away in the train; comments on an incident where a German soldier slapped one “Ustaše” for not leaving the door open and from that point the door remained open during the rest of the trip; states that on one of the stops local women came and brought some water; points out that when they arrived at Zagreb, their clothes were taken away.

[02:] 02:10:48 – [02:] 02:18:39

He explains that after their arrival in **Ilica** (a part of Zagreb) they were taken to the **Gluhonijemi zavod** (Institute for the Deaf and Mute) where they were beaten by “Ustaše” youth; discusses the “Ustaše” youth uniforms—gray shirts, short pants, and ties; explains that the youths were orphans from Bosnia, were up to 16 years old, and were very brutal; describes an incident that happened in the court of the institute when a boy wanted to reach a plum but was hit by a brick thrown from one of the surrounding buildings; explains how the boy collapsed and was killed by the iron fence he fell upon; comments on the fact that after the first beating they were taken to a barrack painted red; discusses how in the following days they received two rations per day that were better than those in Stara Gradiška; explains that children did not know what their fate would be; talks about his mother finding their relative in Zagreb who had privileges because he was a Montenegrin and how he managed to save him and his sister from the camp.

[02:] 02:18:40 – [02:] 02:32:54

He talks about people who witnessed the crimes in Jasenovac; explains that after the war it was mostly women who returned to the village because the men and young children had been killed; comments on how the village was called “black scarves” after the war; explains that some men who had been partisans during the war and the few who had survived camps also returned and the village was recovered after around 10 to 15 years; states that agricultural reform ruined the village once again by taking away land from peasants who had more than 10 hectares; adds that in year 1963 the villagers were removed from the village for purpose of building a military practice area; notes that this structure was not used for 24 years and the only purpose for relocating the peasants to Vojvodina (present day province of Serbia) was to settle Croats from Herzegovina (present day Bosnia) in these villages; states that apart from death of his grandparents as consequence of beating and shooting his family did not have great losses.

[02:] 02:32:55 – [02:] 02:35: 54

He talks about facts that he has not yet mentioned during the interview; comments on arrival of communists before the “Ustaše” came and the public meetings in which they demanded that the villagers join their movement; states that people felt that the movement would never represent Serbian interests; discusses how the partisans would bring wounded people to the village but would not intervene when people were taken to the camps; says he believes that minor military action could have diminished the number of victims; comments on the statement by **Pavle Jakšić's**, commander of Croatian army in 1944, that partisans were much stronger than the “Ustaše” and that Jasenovac could have been destroyed without major problems if the political will had existed.