

ZORIĆ, Zdravka
Former Yugoslavia Witnesses Documentation Project
Serbian
RG-50.585*0023

Tape 1

In this interview, Zdravka Zorić, born in 1932, talks about the deportation of the Serbian population from the village she lived in her whole life, Trijebovljani, to the Jasenovac camp. She gives details of maltreatment and describes the sufferings this population was subjected to. She explains the techniques used to separate children from their parents who were killed, while they were further transferred to different camps where torture continued to take place.

[01:] 00:33:20 – [01:] 10:20:25

Zdravka Zorić first notes that her maiden name is Guskić and that she was born in 1932, in Trijebovljani, a village close to Bosanska Gradiška; says she was the youngest of eight children and that her first memories of World War II are of when the army came into their village, forcing them to flee their houses and go to Bosanska Gradiška; remembers soldiers wearing black uniforms (the Ustaša) and that they spoke a language that was not entirely understandable, but says it was clear they used a dialect of Croatian; says that during the transport there were attacks that caused many civilian casualties; recalls that all their possessions were taken away once they were in Bosanska Gradiška, and that beatings occurred; remembers that machine guns could be heard and says she witnessed two dead children being thrown in the river; recalls the triage that was made on the bridge that separated Croatia from Bosnia over the Sava river, where some people were left to cross the bridge while the others stayed on the Bosnian side and were sent to Mlaka.

[01:] 10:21:00 – [01:] 20:55:25

She remembers that when they arrived in Mlaka, they were held on a field surrounded with electrified barbed wire that caused many deaths; notes that because of her young age at the time and her parents' protectiveness, she cannot offer details on the guards' behavior; says that after an unknown number of days spent in Mlaka, they were forced to move towards the Jasenovac camp. The moment her family entered the camp, her father was taken from the group, separated with all the men, while women and children stayed on the other side; says soldiers then took all the children from their mothers; notes that six of her brothers and sisters were taken away; says because she was the youngest, her mother did not want to leave her and held her in her arms; says that soldiers tried but failed to separate them and as her mother held her, one of the soldiers decapitated her mother; says she ran towards the entrance of the camp, but fires were shot and she was severely wounded in her legs and head; notes that after that moment, she cannot recall any day of her stay in Jasenovac camp; remembers only that she and one of her brothers were transferred to the Jastebarsko children's camp, guarded by the army and nuns; says the nuns were

very cruel to the children—they would handcuff them and make them hang from the metal bars installed high up; recalls that numerous children died and were transferred to pits where they were buried; explains she was hanged twice, but with the assistance of her brother she succeeded to take off the handcuffs and returned unnoticed to the group of children; says she asked a nun to pick a pear for her, but the children were not allowed to have fruit, and that is why she was punished.

[01:] 20:56:00 – [01:] 29:50:25

She indicates that every morning in Jastrebarsko a man with a wheelbarrow that could fit six children would check on all barracks and take dead children to dispose of them; describes everyday life in the camp: waking, physical exercise, eating an insufficient liquid meal for their age, and being in the barracks; says that one day a truck transported many of the children to Sisak, Croatia; says they were put in a big empty building with no beds or any sanitary facility; mentions that some people came and took children they wanted for no apparent reason; recalls that conditions in Sisak were better because meals consisted of some sort of loaves of bread that had more nutritional value than the food given in Jastrebarsko; explains that despite the bread, every day at least three children died of malnutrition and exhaustion and would be taken out of the big room where the rest stayed watched by armed guards.

[01:] 29:51:00 – [01:] 40:55:25

She explains that again, a truck transferred the children to Sunja, Croatia, where they were held in another warehouse and were told they would have new families and all life's necessities would be at their disposal; says that a number of men and women came and took some of the children with them; notes that she was chosen two times, but her brother did not want to be separated from her, and said they would have to go together; says [*referring to the last time she was chosen*] the next day one woman came with her neighbor and took her, and the neighbor took her brother; says they would try and meet, as their houses were next to each other; says her family did not treat her well, and they would give her an amount of food sufficient only to survive; explains they changed her name and wanted her baptized as a Catholic so she could be considered their daughter; says the day she was to be baptized, 25 other Orthodox children were slaughtered; explains she was saved by the patron of her house who refused to take her to the church.

[01:] 40:56:00 – [01:] 46:47:00

She explains that after liberation, the patron of the family where she lived killed a patron of the neighboring house where her brother lived and was repeatedly beaten and tortured; says the reason behind the murder was that the neighbor was Ustaša while the patron of her house was a partisan fighter; recalls that her uncle survived the war and took her brother to their old home so that the family could rebuild from start; says she stayed in the nursery for children of dead soldiers; explains that the children who stayed in the nursery started school and that it was the first sign of normal post war everyday life.