

THE THIRD ROUND TABLE

ŠUŠNJAR 1941.

*PROCEEDINGS
PAPERS AND TESTIMONES*



OŠTRA LUKA
1st AUGUST 2013

ŠUŠNJAR 1941

PROCEEDINGS OF THE THIRD ROUND TABLE
PAPERS AND WITNESS ACCOUNTS

Oštra Luka, 1st August 2013

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2014

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In place of a foreword

THIRD ROUND TABLE “ŠUŠNJAR 1941”

On 1st August 2013, the Third Round Table “Šušnjar 1941” was held in Oštra Luka, with around 45 historians, civil servants and scientists, veterans of the NOR [Narodno-oslobodilački rat, People’s Liberation War], surviving victims, writers, journalists and others. It was organised by the Municipality of Oštra Luka and the Organising Committee consisting of Prof. Vladimir Lukić, PhD, Petar Dodik, Mihajlo Orlović, Ranko Pavlović and Vukašin Davidović.

More than 35 testimonies and witness accounts were given on the horrifying slaughter that took place on Saint Elijah’s Day (2nd August) in 1941.

At the very beginning, the poet Boro Kapetanović recited verses from his touching poem about Šušnjar, followed by one minute’s silence dedicated to the victims of the Second World War and the deceased participants of the First and Second Round Table.

The following participants were elected working chairpersons: Prof. Vladimir Lukić, PhD, chairman of the Organising Committee; Dragan Stanar, mayor of the Municipality of Oštra Luka; Petar Dodik; Mihajlo Orlović and Ranko Pavlović.

The assembly was then addressed by Mayor Dragan Stanar, member of the Organising Committee Mihajlo Orlović, and Prof. Vladimir Lukić, PhD. The convention was blessed by the priest Ilija Milovac.

In a remarkable, one could even say solemn atmosphere, sorrowful voices gave out words that were carved into the silence and testified, with the firmness of their arguments and their enormous emotional charge, to atrocities we must not forget.

At the end of the Round Table certain conclusions were reached, one of which is that assemblies such as this one are to continue to be held biannually. One of a number of special tasks is that, while there are still living witnesses, we should meticulously record the memories of the victims that came out alive and of those who witnessed the satanic feast of the bloodthirsty Ustashas, as well as of family members of the innocent people who were murdered. It was also concluded that a book of proceedings of testimonies and witness accounts would be published from this round table as well, both in the Serbian and in the English language.

The Third Round Table “Šušnjar 1941” was moderated by the writer Ranko Pavlović.

On the next day, 2nd August, Saint Elijah’s Day, a memorial service was held at the Šušnjar memorial cemetery.



**Dragan Stanar,
mayor of Oštra Luka Municipality**

MORAL AND HUMAN DUTY

Ladies and gentlemen, honourable chairpersons, distinguished guests, representatives of the media,

Please let me welcome you on behalf of the Administrative Service of Oštra Luka Municipality and on behalf of our residents!

I am very pleased that we have managed to organise this Third Round Table and that by doing so we are carrying out both our moral and human duty, which is to gather and preserve from oblivion the testimonies about the suffering of our people in the area of what used to be the Sana County.

I know it is difficult to speak of Šušnjar without emotions. However, the time has come for us to use a scientific approach and historical facts to bring the scale of this genocide to the attention of both the local and global public.

The facts are appalling. Gestapo's status report for the period of April 1941 to March 1942 states that on St. Elijah's Day alone 2862 Serbs were slaughtered, and further lists the names of young women who were raped that day by the Ustashas in Suhača, Kljevci and other villages with exclusively Serbian population.

It is also a fact that nearly 10,000 Serbs were killed in this region during World War II.

By all parameters of crime, Šušnjar is second only to Jasenovac in the amount of suffering of the Serbian population during WWII in ex-Yugoslavia.

Unfortunately, we failed to realise in time the scale of the tragedy that had come upon us. We had learned no lessons, so during the last war, in 1995, the entire Serbian population was exiled from a large part of the Serbian municipality of Sanski Most. Only Oštra Luka, where we are today, preserved its population by remaining within the boundaries of the Republic of Srpska.

I hope today's Round Table contributes to the propagation of truth, and as I said earlier, to preserve from oblivion the suffering we endured.

Thank you!



Mihajlo Orlović,
member of the Organising Committee

TRUTH AS A SHIELD FROM EVIL

We are here once more because of truth. We seek it and wonder how it is that, except to us, the cries of thousands of voices from 1st and 2nd of August 1941 fall on deaf ears. How come it ails only our hearts and why does it echo so painfully in our memories?

We do not need the bare truth. We know the truth. We know how many of us perished and by whose hand. We need the truth with the reasons and consequences. We need it to shield us from all possible evil.

The cries of Šušnjar are still echoing. Let them echo! For what did a human – a victim – have at the killing field but the cry of his voice? Today's generations see those cries as something that is cursed. Something that brooded mistrust towards everything. Something which, if unrevealed, stops us from finding our path.

And that is why we have decided to voice these victims' ordeals. Some have asked us, "What is the point of these round tables after everything we went through? Life goes on." Of course it does, but we remind them of this:

After two round tables, held here in this place, the truth was sent out into the world, but not timidly like before. It emerged strong, backed with arguments. Today we have two books of recollections before us. We have a completely different approach to what happened at Šušnjar. Now, when historians and others who speak of the crimes of WWII list places where horror took place, they say: Jasenovac, Sajmište, Jadovno, Šušnjar... Or sometimes they list Šušnjar straight after Jasenovac. That means that the truth has reached them at some extent. It continues to spread. Today people speak of Šušnjar with piety and sadness, and all

mostly thanks to these Round Tables about the agonies at Šušnjar. It is a confirmation that what we were doing made sense and was of great value. At least we did plenty to save those victims from dying again, this time forever. Because if that had happened, they would never have forgiven us.

For us, the word Šušnjar induces feelings of pain, injustice, sorrow, horror, distrust and who knows what else. What really hurts us is the minimisation of crimes against innocent Serbs and Jews whose lives were only beginning. Can you imagine the progeny that we would have today had that crime not happened – surely it would be a mid-sized town.

Some of the words spoken in 1941 by the villains of Šušnjar and Sanski Most still echo with malice. For example, Gutić's paraphrase of a folk song: "Roads will miss Serbs, but there will be no Serbs to walk them", or the words heralds were given to call out, "From this day forward not everyone is entitled to killing Serbs...", which made Serbs sound like animals to be killed off by only the chosen ones. We are asked to apologise for so-called murders we had to commit in order to defend ourselves a hundred years ago in the Balkan Wars or in this last war. It is a human act to apologise for any injustice committed against a fellow human, to seek forgiveness, and not only that, but also never to repeat it again. Everything else is hypocrisy. But who has apologised for the crimes committed at Šušnjar? Nobody ever has! Witnesses to the massacre say it pained them immensely to see how the common people who did not take part in the slaughter looked at them with contempt as they were marched to be executed by the malefactors.

Criminals, the ones that evaded justice, went into hiding and continued to live after the war with the descendants of their victims as if they had done nothing at all. They were not haunted with conscience or guilt. When reading the crime reports they sent to their superiors, one cannot but wonder: how is it possible that the monstrosity of evildoers is endless? In their eyes, their actions at Šušnjar and other places of execution were a completely logical chain of events, and their hypocrisy reaches its highest with that announcement, "Not everyone is entitled to killing Serbs..."

Living witnesses to the crimes at Šušnjar and other places of execution are fewer and fewer; Nature is running its course. What remains are their memories, which are passed on from generation to generation. If we do not record them, they too will perish or turn into legends and myths no one will believe. The cries of 5,500 voices from Šušnjar will be in vain. This is why this painstaking labour of collecting material needs to go on. I know, there are those who will nag, “What use is that, who are you working for, don’t open old wounds because they cause pain, and pain causes other reactions, life goes on” etc. I say, let them grumble, for it is because of those people who want us to forget everything that we keep suffering misery and trouble. Because of them today we have no homeland or motherland. Let us be ourselves.



**Prof. Vladimir Lukić, PhD,
chairman of the Organising
Committee**

MONUMENTS IN WRITING LARGER THAN THOSE IN STONE

Opening statement at the Third Round Table “Šušnjar 1941”

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends, dear witnesses, authors of the texts that were published in the Books of Proceedings of the First and Second Round Tables “Šušnjar 1941” and which will be published in the third Book of Proceedings,

First of all, I would like to give special thanks to all guests, to all those people who came to honour and dignify this convention, to writers and journalists, to everyone who has in any way contributed to the organisation of the First, Second and Third Round Table! I also give special thanks to the hosts who found a way, which has never been easy, to make this assembly possible.

At the very beginning, I would like to say the following.

You are surely wondering why we have these round tables. When we analysed the international conferences on Jasenovac and when we reviewed the Books of Proceedings which were consequently published, we thought it was very useful and good. But we have noticed that many citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, ex-Yugoslavia, and especially people abroad, believe that Jasenovac was practically the only place of mass execution in this region.

Having talked to some foreigners, and even our people who live abroad, we realised that they know very little about, for example, Garavice (12,000 dead), Šušnjar (5,500 dead), then Šurmanci, Prebilovci, Ržani Do, Korita and many other places of execution which our people know little about. The decision was thus made to shed some

more light on the slaughter at Šušnjar, which led to the First Round Table in 2008. It was also decided to publish a book of proceedings with the testimonies and witness accounts heard in that convention in Serbian and English, which along with materials from the Fourth and Fifth International Conferences on Jasenovac made its way to Russia, Israel, Italy, Austria, Germany, England, France, the United States of America, and all the countries that arose from the fall of ex-Yugoslavia.

Let me mention something you may have already read. Academician and Professor Srboľjub Źivanović, upon reviewing the Book of Proceedings of the First Round Table, said: "This is a greater monument to the victims of Šušnjar than any monument of stone that was built there!"

We set out to erect these written monuments in other places as well. So we had a round table about the crimes on the Kozara Mountain and the villages of Potkozarje below it, where the Committee is chaired by Prof. Todić. We hope that for the next International Conference on Jasenovac in May 2014 we will have a book of proceedings from that convention as well. Then, we organised round tables about the atrocities in Grahovo, Glamoč, Livno, Duvno, Kupres. This book of proceedings is also under preparation and I believe it will be ready for the International Conference in the second half of May, and then it will be sent out into the world.

Certain data tells us that in the area of Sanski Most more than 10,000 Serbs were killed in the Second World War. To the best of my knowledge there is not a single village in this municipality where no crimes took place back then.

It is therefore my desire for all the speakers today to freely say what they know and to help us make sure that those who still have not given their testimonies (and they can give them in the next two months) do so, in order that we can have the third Book of Proceedings ready.

Perhaps there is one more important thing to say here. There is plenty more to be done to service and properly mark places of execution. Some of them seem quite eerie. It seems to me that we should engage some organisations and individuals to get these sites into the condition that such sites boast in other regions, not to say other parts of the world, especially Europe, where crimes were also committed.

I would like to most sincerely invite you to take part in these activities.

Please accept my kindest regards and thank you!



Poet Boro Kapetanovic (behind the presidency of the Round Table) speaks disturbing verses about Susnjar



Homage to all victims of crime in Susnjar



Organising Committee



Presentations of the participants of the Round Table was followed by
with special attention »





Writers Zoran Kostic and Dusan Praca



Participant of all poetry event "Susnjar" poet Dobrica Eric joins his verses on homage to the innocent victims of the memorial centre Susnjar



Writers Ruzica Komar and Krstan Sucur - Evidence of crime warning not to forget





PAPERS

Dušan Lukač

RECKONING IN SANSKI MOST

The atmosphere of hatred towards Serbs could be felt right after the proclamation of the NHD [Nezavisna država Hrvatska, The Independent State of Croatia] on 10th April 1941. In the breakdown of the Yugoslavian army and its disorganised retreat, Croatian radical elements stood out with their uncooperative and destructive attitude towards the then still existing Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Since the percentage of Croats in the population of Bosanska Krajina was lower than in other areas, the number of covert Ustasha “camps” and “clusters” was lower. Pavelić and his associates tried to include most of the Muslims of Western Bosnia into the hunt on Serbs. They were largely successful, having enlisted into the Ustasha ranks the majority of Muslims from the towns of Cazin, Bihać, Velika Kladuša and Kulen-Vakuf. This is where Serbian villages surrounded by Muslim ones suffered the most.

The recognisable Serbian identity of Bosanska Krajina, its epic spirit and highland individualism, which was expressed through the uprising of 1875 (which even King Petar took part in as the Chetnik Duke Petar Mrkonjić), as well as the resistance to the Austro-Hungarian Empire (grand treason processes from the beginning of the 20th century), agitated the Ustasha leaders, especially the commissioner Viktor Gutić. The Serbian libertarian spirit, epitomised in the heroes of Petar Kočić’s literature, and the persistent heritage of the soldier Golub Babić also became prominent in these times, so difficult for western Serbs.

On St. George’s Day, 6th May 1941, the first armed conflict took place between the Serbs and Ustasha units. The fanatical Croats and Muslims decided to attack the Serbs on this great Orthodox Christian holiday, to insult their religious sentiments and to demonstrate power and arrogance. The situation did not quite follow the oppressors’ plans. On that day, the haughty Ustashes stormed the village of Srpsko Kijevo, lying

southeast of Sanski Most, intending to interrupt the celebration of the patron saint's day. A large group of peasants confronted them and managed to drive the Ustashas away from the village. The Banja Luka Ustasha HQ launched a story that "a large group of Chetniks is gathering and preparing to revolt," so a squad of 40 German soldiers were sent out into Srpsko Kijevo, led by two officers and reinforced by units of the Ustasha camp in Sanski Most. German reports say that around 1000 Serbs, some armed with primitive fire-weapons, but most armed only with cold weapons, repelled the German-Ustasha attack, having killed 3 Wermacht soldiers and many more Ustashas. What followed was a punitive expedition with artillery attacks and armoured vehicles. The outcome was bloody. The epicentre of the revolt, the Sjenokose hamlet of Kijevo, went up in flames. A total of 450 Serbs were arrested, 100 of whom were kept in prison; 27 of them, mainly from the hamlet of Vidovići, were shot at dawn on 9th May. Their bodies were hung in the park in the centre of Sanski Most.¹

¹ Ustanak u Bosanskoj Krajini, Beograd 1967, pp. 61-62.

Petar Dodik

A MASS GRAVE OF SERBS IN THE SANA RIVER

On the last days of July 1941, great tragedy struck the Serbian people, especially the young men who were labouring at the construction of the road from Sanski Most to Lušci Palanka, which ran past our village, so these youths, forced labourers, were close to their homes, working for free and on their own food. They were forced to do it, because no one would dare not show up for work, and especially no one dared run away from the road during the working hours.

The NDH was formally formed on 10th April 1941, and immediately started conjuring up various measures to make the lives of the Serbs miserable, all with the agenda of making them consider moving away or converting to Roman Catholicism.

The government programme of the new state listed all the measures to be implemented to cleanse its entire territory of Serbs. It was decided to wipe out one-third of the Serbs, to convert another third, and to banish the remaining third to Serbia. At a fair in Sanski Most at the end of June 1941, the Banja Luka Commissioner Viktor Gutić said, "Roads will miss Serbs, but there will be no Serbs to walk them". The threat pronounced by Gutić became known to all Serbs – those working on the road as well as those staying at home.

The labour was forced upon young men between 20 and 30 years of age, which included my two brothers, Jovo, who was born in 1914, and Mile, who was born in 1921 and had just turned 20, and was supposed to be conscripted into the army. However, he was selected to toil away on the road instead of doing basic army training, which was the common procedure, the first training for new recruits. The forced labour

that was introduced for young Serbs lasted only one month. From my family, as I said, that included my two brothers.

Our mother used to prepare the meals, and she took special care of Mile, who was her favourite. He was the best-looking, so it was no wonder she cared for him the most, and when he went missing she mourned him the most, she would spend days lamenting and weeping. At that time, Muslims from Skucani Vakuf, Naprelje, Gorice, Fajtovci, Modra, Gornji and Donji Kamengrad, i.e. from all the villages of Podgrmeč where there were Muslims, were running away from their homes on a mass scale. They travelled on horse wagons, with some livestock, mostly calves, lambs and hens, ducks, geese and chickens. This indicates that they believed there would be no livestock or fowl at their destination, which would make survival impossible, especially for the children.

This act of mass fleeing induced a psychosis of fear with the Serbian populace as well. If some people are leaving their homes, those who are not usually become increasingly anxious and worried. So, this was a strange situation for everyone. Nobody knew where to go or how long this turmoil and suspense would last. They had to ponder issues of day-to-day survival and shelter for their families. Since normal life was disrupted, one had to conceive a new life for the entire family, which could be very disconcerting, especially for the householder, who was expected to tend to everybody's needs. It was hardest to find bathing water, especially for the children, as it was something that could not be postponed.

One day at the end of July 1941, only Mile, the younger of my two brothers, went to work, while Jovo did not. Around 10 o'clock that day, rumour spread that the labourers were going to be taken away somewhere, but nobody knew where. While they were still there on the road, in our village, we were peaceful and not really concerned. However, when they stopped working and were gathered into one motionless group, we kept our calm and prayed to God that they would not be taken to Sanski Most, for it was not safe there. Albeit for as long as they were in the hands of the Ustashas and their foreman for forced labourers, they were not safe. Since our house was on a rise, we had a good view of everything that was going on down on the road.

My mother, with her strong and penetrating voice, called out for Mile and begged him to come home, without explaining her plea. But it was not possible, for they were all under threat of being shot if they tried to run away, and they were all discouraged from running away, including our Mile.

My entire family was dispirited, because we knew that danger awaited them in Sanski Most. Mother cried and grieved in a peculiar way, and since we all listened to it, the rest of us also became overcome with grief. At dusk that day rebels appeared; there were a few gunshots, which perturbed us greatly, and some of the rebels advised us to get away from home, which we did. We took some blankets and herded our livestock to where we wanted to go. There was a thick forest above our house so we set up camp and spent the night there. A few moments later, the group on the road was formed into a column, to be escorted to Sanski Most, which worsened our mood, because it was obvious that they would not be dismissed to go home. I remembered the fair in Sanski Most where the Banja Luka Commissioner had held a speech and uttered the greatest threat to Serbs: "Roads will miss Serbs, but there will be no Serbs to walk them." This was a major threat aimed at the Serbs, hinting at their annihilation. Fear was at the highest possible. We did not like the fact they were moving towards Sanski Most, because we were afraid something would happen to these youths, including our Mile. Around half way from the starting point, that is from the house of Abid Karabeg, near the village of Podbriježje, the procession was stopped. Then the guards picked out 10-15 youths whose lives were to end there, a fact known only to the foreman Halilović and the rest of the Ustasha guards. It is unknown what criteria were applied in the selection, but it was most probably physical appearance. And that means that they hand-picked those who were sentenced to death, while those who were most concerned knew nothing of it. All the youths who were singled out like that were killed with blunt objects: mallets, axes, wooden pitchforks and hefty sticks. No traces were left, and no grave was found where they could have been buried. All the families whose members were in that unfortunate procession spent days looking for any markings, but they found nothing. It is unknown what the motives were for murdering those poor souls with blunt objects, but something can be assumed. Surely the motive was not to save bullets. Gunshots are loud

and leave bullet casings behind, and these executioners wanted to hide the place and manner in which they killed those poor souls.

When the youths were murdered, their bodies were to be disposed of. No mass graves were found, not then and not later, so it may be assumed they were thrown into water, because the Bliha River was near, and somewhat further away was the Zdena River, with a similar water-level. Even further away was the Sana River, so they may have used horse-wagons to haul them there and throw them into the Sana. During larger floods Sana was known to carry logs and tree-trunks into the Danube, and even as far as the Black Sea, so the crime scene was easy to conceal.

And so the Sana River became the hidden tomb of Serbian youths – forced labourers from the construction site for the road from Sanski Most to Lušci Palanka, since the Bliha and Zdena rivers were small, and the bodies would have been washed ashore. After this hapless war many families went looking for their missing relatives, finding fault with everyone in sight, but many have never found those they were looking for, blaming the authorities as much as the killers. One can imagine what the families whose members were killed back in 1941 feel like, because today, more than 70 years later, they still know nothing about them. Not a whisper of them in all these years. The youths we are talking about were killed before the great massacre at the ŠUŠNJAR graveyard in August 1941, following a Serb rebellion in the village of Kijevo, which was a response to the Ustasha malefactions, because on St. George's Day the Ustasas raided the houses of Serbs who celebrated it as their patron saint, and molested the hosts and guests for the duration of the festivity, which is the greatest offence for the man of the house, as well as for all the Serbs around.

It remains unclear why these villains tried to hide this crime. Later that year in September, a penal battalion came along set on killing, burning and pillaging Serbian houses, commanded by Alija Kamber. When Alija came to our house, he asked my father: "Ilija, where are your sons?" Father pointed at my eldest brother Jovo and myself, but Alija asked: "And where is the third one?" Father told him that Mile had worked with the other labourers on the road and that he had been taken away with the rest of them and there had been no word of them since

then. Then Alija said: "Well maybe he joined the Chetniks". And if anyone knew what had happened to that group of youths, it would be Alija Kamber himself, since he is from the village of Podbriježje, and we had heard that 10-15 of those youths had been killed with blunt objects in the vicinity of that village. But that was not where they were buried, because neither then nor later did anyone ever find any trace of them, not even a hole which they could have been buried in. They might have been thrown into the Bliha River, which ran past that spot, or the Zdena, which is two kilometres away. The third river, which was three to four kilometres away, was the Sana River. Since we know that the villains wanted to hide their crime, then it is most probable that the bodies were carted to that river and disposed of there. If that is what they did, if the Sana is where they threw the bodies of those youths, the labourers from the Sanski Most – Lušci Palanka road, then the Sana River is the hidden mass grave of the young Serbian forced labourers killed in late July 1941.

At the end of July, when the Serbian rebels reached our house, including several famous people, such as Milančić Miljević, his son Veljko Miljević, the Brkić brothers etc., we could not ignore their advice to get away from our homes and into the woods, or to seek refuge in the village of Dabar, far away from Sanski Most, because that town was a threat for the local Serbians and Serbian people in general. A few days earlier we had watched Muslims flee their homes, and now it was our turn.

That first night in the forest above our house was grim and short; we kept thinking about what the next day would bring. At the crack of dawn we drove our livestock onwards, across Do and towards Dabar, that is, towards the Smrešnjak hill, where Mile Miljević lived, and we reached him by noon. We mourned mostly for our brother Mile, while the appearance of the rebels and gunfire in the night unsettled all the neighbouring Serbians, who were just as worried about what was going on as about what was to come. Together with the livestock we passed the hamlet of Kakići and moved away from the gunshots that were closing in on us. Around 10 o'clock a small biplane appeared, increasing our unease and fear, although it did not fire upon the villagers but at the rebels, who were fighting the Ustashas and the Croatian army. We made no stops, moving on to Smrešnjak. Mile Miljević knew my father Ilija, so we were warmly welcomed by Mile's whole family. We heard that the

rebels had dispersed, some of them to their homes. Much of Dabar was hit by the Croatian troops. They burned down houses and farms in each and every hamlet they reached. Word of this spread among those who were involved in the fighting, but also among those who were far from the Ustasha terror. These clashes claimed the life of Mića Milinković, which grieved his family, as well as his neighbours and relatives.

We stayed with the kind Miljević family for only one night and one day, and then we headed back to our village and our house, but it was gone. It had been burned down on the very first day of the skirmish in the village. Some farm buildings had also been set on fire, so we could only take shelter from the rain in the summer kitchen and the corn crib. Since we had not reaped the wheat and rye, now was the time for those chores. Although we did the reaping, we did not have the machines for threshing. We held the corn in sheaves stacked into several hayricks, which were later burned as well, so we had nothing to eat any more. Those in the family who had not been killed were now dependant on the neighbours, who were willing to provide that part of our unfortunate family with food and lodging.

Radovan Jović

SAINT GEORGE'S DAY UPRISING IN TRAMOŠNJA

Seven decades had passed before July 2013, when the press in Belgrade finally published the bitter truth about how the communist authorities in ex-Yugoslavia had altered the facts about the July 1941 uprisings against the fascist aggressor in the former Yugoslavian republics.

On the same note, the renowned historian Dragan Petrović, PhD, reminds the public that all the uprisings in the former Yugoslavian republics, except in Slovenia, were anti-fascist movements of the Serbian people, and not of Croats, Muslims or Montenegrins, as it was usually interpreted in history books from the end of WWII up to 1990, the beginning of the violent secession and destruction of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

It was Serbians who were the most endangered by the foreign occupation, but also by puppet establishments across the Serbian ethnic territory, such as the quisling establishment of the NDH. In Montenegro, there was a mass uprising of Serbian people on 13th July, the day after the puppet government under Sekula Drljević was proclaimed in Cetinje. The Serbs in Lika rose against the Ustasha regime on 27th July 1941 in the town of Srb, and on the same day, the Serbian people in Drvar and Bosansko Grahovo revolted as well. The fact that it was the Serbs in Lika who fiercely resisted Pavelić's Ustasas does not stop today's Croatia from celebrating this date as its Anti-fascist Resistance Day.

Unlike Croatia, in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina there is no official date to commemorate the beginning of armed resistance, despite the great numbers of casualties against the German and other aggressors. Truth be told, for years representatives of one of the ruling

parties, the SPS, have been marking 7th July as the anniversary of the anti-fascist struggle in Serbia. This year, they marked the 72nd anniversary, which in turn re-opened the debate that has been going on since political changes took place on 5th October 2000, whether the famous events of Bela Crkva should in fact be celebrated as an uprising or it was really only a crime, with one Serbian killing another for political reasons. There is no doubt that, as some historians are already proposing in Serbia, a new date will definitely be determined as the Uprising Day, and the main criterion to mark the beginning of the uprising will be the liberation of towns, such as Loznica, Kraljevo or Kruševac.

Although there has been an initiative in Croatia to once again make 27th July a state holiday, in 2009 a very influential magazine called "Hrvatsko slovo" ["Croatian Letters"] published a nine-part pro-Ustasha column, which was essentially a debate on "What was it that was celebrated from 1945 to 1990 as the Croatian Uprising Day and Bosnia and Herzegovina Uprising Day, with the "celebration" being renewed in recent years under the patronage of officials from the public and political life of the Republic of Croatia". The entire column is permeated with a note that the uprising in the village of Srb, as well as the ones in Drvar and Bosansko Grahovo, was launched by the Chetniks.

Unlike many generations who were fed historical forgeries for decades, since 2002, pupils in primary and secondary schools in Serbia have studied historical events from the Second World War free of ideological bias.

For the people of the Republic of Srpska, there is a secondary school history textbook of special importance, specifically the gymnasium [school that prepared pupils exclusively for university, translator's note] history textbook for the third grade, for majors in natural sciences and mathematics, i.e. the fourth grade, for majors in general education and humanities. The authors of this textbook, which was approved on 23rd May 2002 by the Ministry of Education and Sport of the Republic of Serbia, are Kosta Nikolić, Nikola Žutić, Momčilo Pavlović and Zorica Špadijer. Considering the fact it is a very important textbook, one which gives our secondary school students, specifically gymnasium students, a certain knowledge of our past, it should be noted that the reviewers of

the textbook were Dragoljub Živojinović, PhD, full professor at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade; Milan Vesović, PhD, scientific advisor at the Institute of Contemporary History in Belgrade, and Rako Tomović, history teacher at the Zrenjanin Gymnasium.

Among other things, the 238 pages of this history textbook give pupils in Serbia the opportunity and the obligation not only to get acquainted with, but also to learn about this topic from a separate chapter titled “Genocide and terror in the Independent State of Croatia and Kosovo and Metohija”.

This lesson briefly reminds pupils in Serbia of the following historical events:

The establishment of the Ustasha regime. – The Independent State of Croatia was created on 10th April 1941 with the help of German troops, who entered Zagreb that day. The Croatian people saw it as a century-old dream come true, as an act of renewing national independence and liberation from the “Serbian hegemony”. The first recognition of the new state immediately came from Vladko Maček, then vice-president of the Yugoslavian government, in a statement in which he supported the Ustashas and demanded transfer of authority. Support also came from the Catholic clergy.

The genocide. – Right after the NDH was declared Serbs were outlawed: they were removed from public service, their movement was limited, they were forbidden to use the Cyrillic script, the names of their districts were changed, Orthodox Christian religious schools were abolished, printing Serbian books became illegal, even in the Latin script. The Serbian people were proclaimed as public enemy number one for the Croatian people. As early as 17th April, a decree on the protection of the people and state was passed, which introduced a state of martial law in the NDH against the Serbians, and on 25th April, the Cyrillic script was outlawed. All traces of the Serbian past were destroyed, and churches, libraries and culture association buildings were burnt to the ground.¹

¹ Kosta Nikolić i dr., *Istorija 3/4: za III razred gimnazije prirodno-matematičkog smera i IV razred gimnazije opšteg i društveno-jezičkog smera*, Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, Beograd, 2005, p. 154.

The first under attack were Orthodox Christian priests, Serbian leaders, notable householders, elites and wealthier people. – In the first half of May, the Ustasha authorities issued orders that all Serbians were to carry a white armband on their left arm stating their religion. The Serbians were to be suppressed one way or the other. All trace of them was to be destroyed for good.

Ustasha death camps. – The most infamous means by which the Ustashes reinforced their rule were certainly concentration camps. As early as April 1941, the Ustashes formed a camp in Koprivnica, followed by another one in Stara Gradiška in May. The conditions in the camp were unbearable: insufficient water, poor food, lots of prisoners dying of typhoid and dysentery. Incomplete data indicates that 75,000 people were murdered in this camp during the war. A “speciality” of the Ustashes were children’s concentration camps, something which even the Nazis did not have. Children’s camps were organised in Stara Gradiška, Sisak, Jastrebarsko, Novska and other places. Seventy-two thousand children were imprisoned in these camps, and around 55,000 were killed. The imprisoned children were mainly of Serbian ethnicity.

The Serbians suffered their greatest losses at the Jasenovac camp, which was established in September 1941. Jasenovac was a huge factory of death, where the cruellest methods were used to kill human beings. Apart from exhausting labour, the prisoners were exposed to severe torture. The victims were buried in mass graves, thrown into the Sava River or burned in crematoriums. The exact number of people who died at Jasenovac is unknown. The range is quite extensive. Those who have tried to minimise the crime of genocide said it was around 50,000 victims. According to a German source (report by SS General Fink to Heinrich Himmler, dated March 1944) between 600,000 and 700,000 people were killed in the entire NDH, mostly Serbs, Jews and Roma people, mainly in Jasenovac.²

This school textbook for junior and senior gymnasium students in Serbia finally rectifies the multi-decennial injustice and great shame that was purposely used to conceal the dedication and courage first exhibited by the Serbs from the area of Sanski Most in all of the occupied

² Kosta Nikolić i dr., *ibid.*, p. 155.

Europe. Nearly a month before the Communist Party of Yugoslavia under Josip Broz Tito passed a resolution by which 4th July was declared Fighter's Day, Serbs in the village of Tramošnja near Sanski Most rose against the occupying forces and the Ustasha regime of the criminal establishment that was the Independent State of Croatia.

So it is not Bela Crkva, Kolašin, Srb, Drvar or Bosansko Grahovo that should bear the title of the first rebel outbreak, since two, even three months before all of them the bold and courageous Serbs from Tramošnja rebelled against the Ustasha slayers and German aggressors.

This is why we give the complete, word-for-word text from the aforementioned textbook, which the current and future gymnasium pupils in Serbia are obliged to learn as part of their education on our past.

“**UPRISING.** – The Serbian uprising in the NDH was staged spontaneously, as a defence from a general slaughter that was being prepared and was in the initial stage of implementation as of May 1941. The first uprising of the Serbian people against the Ustasha authorities happened on 6th and 7th May 1941, near Sanski Most (the village of Tramošnja, a/c). The Serbian peasants fought not only the Ustashas, but also the German army, which also used heavy artillery on those days.

After Tramošnja near Sanski Most, armed resistance commenced on 3rd June in the Nevesinje County. Next, it spread to the area around Gacko, Bileća and Trebinje. By the end of the month, most of the Nevesinje and Gacko counties had been liberated.

In the west of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which had since early April 1941 been entirely annexed to the Independent State of Croatia, Serbian resistance started at the end of July, as a response to the mass killings by the Ustashas in the town and region of Bihać. The Serbian uprising at Tromeda (the tripoint between Kninska Krajina, western Bosnia and northern Dalmatia) started in late July around Drvar, Lapac and some other villages. Peasant companies from villages around Knin and across the Dinara Mountain towards Lika easily took over smaller Ustasha and Croatian Home Guard outposts. Free territory spread out towards Lika, to the

north of Knin, towards Gospić, and to the east, towards Bosanska Krajina.³

It is true that Tramošnja and Sanski Most entered school curricula only in the first decade of the third millennium, but lest the wrong conclusion is made, it should be noted that the exploits of the bold Serbs of Tramošnja and other Serb villages in Sanski Most have been the topic of many independent publications, such as those authored by Branko J. Bokan, Dušan Lukač, Milan Zorić, Ratko Ilić and others.

First resistance to the fascists

The first cases of resistance to the fascist and Ustasha forces after the capitulation of the Yugoslavian army were noted in the western parts of Yugoslavia, in areas predominantly populated by Serbian people. Italian sources noted resistance in the area of the Adriatic Division, i.e. around Knin and Kninska Krajina. More pronounced spontaneous forms of resistance arose in Bosanska Krajina and east Herzegovina, as a consequence of the formation of the NDH and abuse against Serbian people.

A month after the beginning of the April War and 18 days after the Capitulation Act, there was a confrontation of Serb peasants from the area of Sanski Most, more precisely, from the villages of Kijevo and Tramošnja, on 6th, 7th and 8th May 1941, known as the St. George's Day Uprising of the Sana peasants. The peasants responded to the Ustasha abuse with gunfire and repelled the Ustashas from their villages. As soon as the peasants from Kozice, Hazići, Skratinska, Obrovac and other neighbouring Serbian villages learned of the confrontation with the Ustashas on Kijevska Gora, they headed to aid the people of Tramošnja. "The commander of the Croatian troops deployed in Bosanska Krajina" informed "the Commander of the entire Croatian Land Army" about the fight with "the Chetniks of Sanski Most". The Ustashas received help in these clashes from Prijedor; on 7th May, the rebelling peasants were attacked by a German unit from the First Division of the 132nd Battalion stationed in Prijedor. At dawn on 8th May, a German armoured division managed to disperse the rebel positions, which did not have a

³ Kosta Nikolić i dr., *ibid.*

unified command. For their casualties, and in accordance with their ratio of ten Serbs for one of their own, the Germans executed 27 Serbs in Sanski Most and then hung their bodies in the city park, which the Ustashas used as a horrifying example and warning for the May (“St. George’s Day”) rebellion and to increase their terror over the Serbs.⁴

Dušan Lukač wrote about the same event in 1967:

“On St. George’s Day, 6th May 1941, the first armed conflict took place between the Serbs and Ustasha units. The fanatical Croats and Muslims decided to attack the Serbs on this great Orthodox Christian holiday, to insult their religious sentiments and to demonstrate power and arrogance. The situation did not quite follow the oppressors’ plans. On that day, the haughty Ustashas stormed the village of Srpsko Kijevo, located southeast of Sanski Most, intending to interrupt the celebration of the patron saint’s day. A large group of peasants confronted them and managed to drive the Ustashas away from the village. The Banja Luka Ustasha HQ launched a story that “a large group of Chetniks is gathering and preparing to revolt”, so a squad of 40 German soldiers were sent out into Srpsko Kijevo, led by two officers and reinforced by units from the Sanski Most Ustasha camp.

German reports say that around 1000 Serbs, some armed with primitive fire-weapons, but most armed only with cold weapons, repelled the German-Ustasha attack, having killed 3 Wehrmacht soldiers and many more Ustashas. What followed was a punitive expedition with artillery attacks and armoured vehicles. The outcome was bloody. Four-hundred and fifty Serbs were arrested, a hundred of whom were kept in prison; 27 of the captives, mainly from a hamlet named Vidovići, were shot at dawn on 9th May. Their bodies were hung in the park in the centre of Sanski Most.⁵

Refugees on the run

In the night between 7th and 8th May 1941, the rebelling Serbs of Tramošnja received help from the surrounding villages. Although

⁴ Branko J. Bokan, *Opština Sanski Most. Dio 1, Do jula 1941. g.*, Borba, OOUR Ekonomska politika, Beograd, Skupština opštine Sanski Most, 1974, pp. 271-285.

⁵ Dušan Lukač, *Ustanak u Bosanskoj Krajini*, Vojnoizdavački zavod, Beograd, 1967, pp. 61-62.

their number considerably increased, they still lacked unified, firm command, which is understandable considering the fact that the rebels did not have time to organise and that Vid Đaković and the others lacked military training. Women, children and all those who were not fit for combat escaped on the very first day, 6th May, out of their houses near the battle-zone and into the surrounding forest, or even further away.

On 7th May, Vid Đaković visited the positions. He explained that they had “agreed, made arrangements”, although he did not say who “they” were (probably himself, Risto Kovačević, Đorđe Suljić and Lieutenant Stanislav Maričić), that he was to visit the positions and tell the men that they were going to attack the enemy the next day and drive them off to Sanski Most. He said that the enemy were fewer in number than the rebelling Serbs.

That evening the Serbs from Tramošnja and the neighbouring villages brought the fighters ample dinner, which greatly boosted their morale and determination.

On 8th May at dawn, a German armoured division shifted to the offensive: they set up artillery on a road in the village of Čaplja to support the infantry. One-half of the troops went behind the rebels’ back through Podovi, Donja Kozica and Tukovi, while the other half attacked frontally from the direction of Kijevo. The battle of Sjenokose lasted for 2-3 hours.

Unfortunately, their numbers and arms being superior, the enemy forces crushed the rebel fortifications.

By noon of 8th May, in Tomina, near the house of the Vidović family, the Germans had gathered around 300 men who had been caught at the battlefield and the neighbouring villages. Many had escaped imprisonment by going deep into the villages of Tramošnja and Kozice and had nothing to fear. Most of those who were armed and had engaged in the fighting managed to avoid being captured by escaping deep into the villages of Tramošnja, Kozice, Padovi, Hazići.⁶

⁶ Branko J. Bokan, *Srez Sanski Most u NOB: 1941-1945*, Skupština opštine, Sanski Most, 1980.

A mass slaughter of Serbs

“While the men were still thinking of the weapons they had not got, on 27th July a mounted peasant arrived at Vitogor and gave word that ten Ustashas had come to the village school in Dabar and were capturing people and taking them to Sanski Most. We immediately decided that the captured people were to be saved. Several dozen men headed to Sanski Most to intercept the Usta-sha group and set the peasants free. The men set off without any weapons – barehanded. But they soon started to “arm” themselves along the way – many got hold of axes, pitchforks, stakes or any objects that could hurt the enemy. Some people found old hunting rifles, and others had carbines left over from the previous war. The morale was slowly changing. Everybody was focused on freeing the captured peasants and disarming the Ustashas. “We need weapons, and we must get them from the enemy”, this was what all those men thought and wanted.

They caught up with the Ustashas in Do, at the house of the Žutić family. The Ustashas were taking around fifteen peasants to Sanski Most, among whom were Obrad and Sava Ilić, Nikola and Petar Dobrić, Miloš Vokić, Jovo Žutić, Luka Kragulj, Milan Pajković, Božo Petrović and Mile Stupar.

Prior to 27th July, the Ustashas undertook a campaign in and around Sanski Most. They captured and imprisoned all male Serbs over the age of sixteen. They arrested everyone they deemed even the slightest threat, everyone who could resist them in any way. The lives of those people were in danger. On 30th and 31st July, the Ustashas carried out a massacre in the town. The prisons, which had been filled with people and had no room for newcomers, were suddenly completely empty. It was not only the prisoners who were killed, but also the young men who were toiling away on the road construction site near Sanski Most. Women and children of the village of Kljevci witnessed one of the most horrific slaughters around Sanski Most.”

The sole survivor of this slaughter was Dušan Bodiroža, a peasant, who has described the tragic event:

“In the evening of 1st August, the Ustashas stormed the village and started taking people out of their homes. The houses were soon left empty. Around seventy people, including myself, were tied

with wire. Some of us were tied in twos, some in threes or fours, and some were tied individually. I was tied alone, but it did not occur to me at that moment that it could be a fortunate circumstance. The seventy of us slowly started walking and would speed up only when one of us got hit in the back with the butt of a rifle. We did not know where we were going, but we all felt that we would not be coming back to our homes again. It was obvious by the way the Ustashas treated us.

No more than twenty minutes later the Ustashas stopped us at the Čapljanske Bare, the great plains of this village. Suddenly, before we had time to think about what was going to happen, terrible gunfire was heard. The Ustashas started firing short bursts at us with their machine guns. All chaos broke loose. Some people screamed, others merely moaned. People muttered words, mentioning their children, wives, mothers. Just next to me someone said, "Didn't I tell you we should run away!"

The slaughter in Sanski Most lasted three days, during which all Serbs who had been caught in the town or the surrounding villages were killed. In the days following 27th July, Sanski Most became a real human slaughterhouse. If the Ustashas got hold of you in that period, you were dead. There was another mass slaughter those days in the village of Čaplje near Sanski Most.

Having heard of these mass slaughters in several neighbouring villages, the people of Kljevci, Dabar, Djedovača, Bosanski Milenovac, Grdenovci and others realised that the time had come to fight the enemy. It was the only way to save their lives. Masses started to gather and prepare for battle. The trouble was that weapons were nowhere to be found at the time. What weapons had been hidden were now brought to light of day. Rifles were scarce. These five villages, although of considerable size, did not yield more than a dozen carbines and fifteen handguns. The first days were very difficult. Not only were weapons scarce, but there was almost no organisation, nobody to tell the people what to do. Many people did what they thought was necessary and useful, in

other words, they were on their own. There were no men to organise the crowds and take command.”⁷

A new attack on the Tramošnja repelled

Having gone through the entire area east of Sanski Most, units of the 13th Krajina Brigade ended up in Kijevo, Tramošnja and Stratinska on 30th August. The 2nd Battalion was stationed in the village of Tramošnja, in the Kondići hamlet, e. 455. The 3rd Battalion arrived in Tramošnja from Stratinska in the evening of 31st August. Upon arrival, they set up camp in the Đakovići hamlet, 2.5 km east from the school. The two battalions remained in those positions until 2nd September, right up to the enemy attack on the 2nd Battalion. On 2nd September, around 300 Germans headed from Bronzani Majdan, over the Stratinska village, towards Tramošnja and the two battalions of the 13th Brigade.

During the confrontation, the 2nd Battalion managed to cut off some of the enemy troops, but thanks to their automatic weapons, the enemy fought back hard. However, the 2nd Battalion laid down suppressing fire on the front, while a part of the troops went behind the enemy's back. When they got close enough, they charged. One of the enemy's machine gunners, Abdurahman Atabajev, fought until our soldiers physically overcame him. There were several such examples.⁸

“They all put up a bloody fight and did not want to surrender until our guys grabbed them by their throats”. This broke down the enemy attack, which turned into a defensive, and in the end into a messy retreat. They were able to retreat towards Stratinska and Bronzani Majdan because it was already dark, the land was intersected and the Germans were accompanied by the Chetniks, who were familiar with the terrain.⁹

⁷ Ratko Ilić, “Od neizvjesnosti do slobode”, in: *Ustanak naroda Jugoslavije 1941: Zbornik: Knjiga šesta*, Vojnoizdavački zavod JNA “Novo delo”, Beograd, 1964, pp. 330-353.

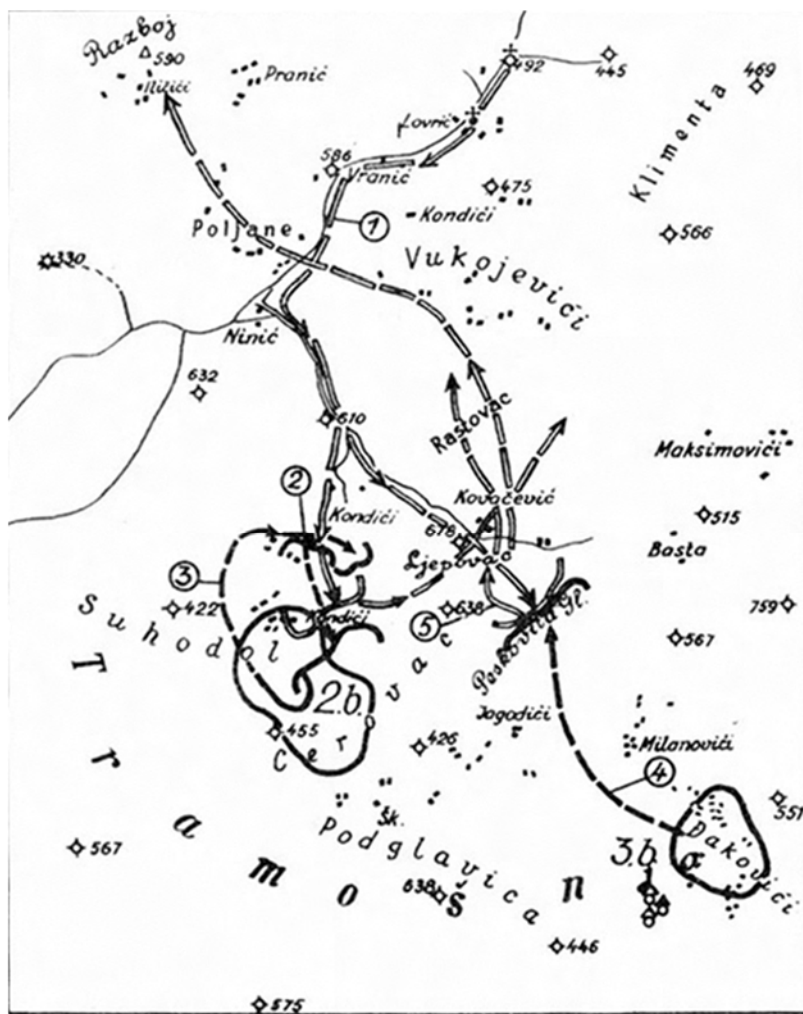
⁸ Milan N. Zorić, *XIII krajiška brigada*, Vojnoizdavački zavod, Beograd, 1968.

⁹ Report by Commander of the 13th Krajina Brigade, dated 4th September 1943, JNA Archives III, e. 1626, reg. no. 9/1-21.

Map legend:

Tramošnja

- 1) Direction of the arrival of enemy forces to Tramošnja.
- 2) Location of the confrontation with parts of the 2nd Battalion.
- 3) Direction from which a platoon of the 2nd Battalion got behind the enemy's back.
- 4) Direction of the 3rd Battalion's advance towards the enemy.
- 5) Directions of enemy retreat after the attack failed.



Vaso Predojević, PhD

**PODGRMEČ BETWEEN TWO
CRIMES OF GENOCIDE
(ŠUŠNJAR 1941 AND GRMEČ 1943)
AND THE ETHNIC CLEANSING IN
1995 AS THEIR FINAL CHAPTER**

“If you run in the path of life and fall down, dust yourself off,
because it is not the one who falls that loses,
but the one who remains on the ground.”

Aristotle

In my testimony titled “Crime after Crime – the Crime of Genocide” from the Second Round Table “Šušnjar 1941”¹ I dealt with the crime of genocide against the Serbs of Grmeč and Podgrmeč in and around the municipality of Sanski Most and presented the historical fact that the crime of genocide was repeated in the form of ethnic cleansing and complete destruction of the ancient Serbian population and homes around the Grmeč Mountain. I say ancient because I possess historical information that even my clan, the Predojević clan, lived there from 1546 to 1995, when, like many other clans, fearing for their lives from the so-called army of Bosnia and Herzegovina, or better said, the Muslim-Croatian army, they left their homes and hearths. What followed was the vicious destruction of immovable property, including utilities and other infrastructure (water works and power grid, roads etc.). All

¹ ŠUŠNJAR 1941 PROCEEDINGS OF THE THIRD ROUND TABLE Proceedings Papers, Testimonies and Documents, Oštra Luka, 1st August 2013, Slovo, Banja Luka, 2010, p.150

that was left were the foundations and basements of houses, overgrown with shrubs, a solitary “headless” post or a chimney here and there to hint that there used to be a hearth in that place. Testaments to what once was, and is no more. This fact is in no way mitigated or alleviated by those who have returned to their land and their hearths, neither with their age structure nor the lack of conditions for sustainable living, especially having in mind that they are cut off from the rest of their people, outside of the Republic of Srpska, destined to die out one by one.

This historical fact – the recurrence of genocide – is valid “only if it is understood as a historical category and placed within the frame of a specific time and space”, as I claimed in my testimony at the Second Round Table. Between the two genocides, at Šušnjar in 1941 and on Grmeč in 1943, which are impossible to observe separately,² there was a historical drama of persecution, torture, rape and mass murder in the cruelest ways, including burning people alive, entire families and clans in their houses or stables, burning elderly and weak persons, women, girls and children, even in cribs and in their mothers’ arms. The crimes were committed by the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) and its Ustasha army and troops, alone or in unison with the German occupiers, while the Ustasha cruelty surpassed even the most notorious German executioners – the legionnaires. This can be verified if we look at the chroniclers of that time. They in fact testify that out of 5119 “victims of fascism” many were victims of outright terror – 3428 murders at people’s doorsteps and 358 in death camps; that the direct executors of these crimes were Germans in 504 cases, the Ustashas in 1614, Muslims in 212 and that the perpetrators are “unknown” when it comes to 3863 cases!³ That way the Ustashas are identified mainly as Croats, although Muslims in the Ustasha uniforms were the majority here. This historical drama is what this testimony is about.

² *Ibid.*, p. 151. The Predojevićs were the indigenous population of Predojevića Glavice, the village the “new authorities” have renamed as “Glavice”.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 37-52.

I

Right after the NDH was instituted in Sanski Most (15-18th April 1941), and even prior to that, the manhunt on Serbs began with the intent to destroy them and banish them from their age-old homes and hearths. The hunters on Serbs were all those who accepted the Ustasha ideology and the German aggressor as liberators. Namely, any Muslim or Croat who joined the Ustasha movement took on the right and felt licenced to freely persecute and kill Serbs, and plunder and destroy their property. The scale of this phenomenon was so horrific in the villages around Sanski Most and the peripheral villages towards Podgrmeč that the German command was “forced” to inform the public in the town and the villages through the local drummer (herald), or rather to let them know whose privilege it was to kill Serbs and plunder their property. “Hear, hear! From this day forward not everyone is entitled to killing Serbs. From this day forwards Serbs can only be killed by members of the powerful German Reich and members of the armed forces of the Independent State of Croatia!”⁴ So, the right to kill Serbs belonged only to the brothers in arms and blood, the Ustashes and Germans! This so-called “right” looked like this: “The Ustashes went out every day to fetch people (Serbs, needles to say, a/c), to plunder, to harass women and children. It was horrible. Simply walking down the road they would see a mother with a child in her arms and they would hit the child in the head with the butt of a rifle, and the child’s brains would spill out,” testified Katarina Čanak, a Croat woman from Gornja Sanica.⁵ The suffering of children is most deeply imprinted in the hearts and minds of the Serbs. The knowledge that 140 children who were born during the war⁶ became victims of direct Ustasha terror in their cribs or in their mother’s arms is deeply rooted in people’s minds and is on the scale of a racist and genocidal act! Here are merely two pieces of evidence:

In our region of Podgrmeč there is a widespread song: “In Grmeč, a child crawls / and tells me – hello friend! / Hello friend, hello brother! / Have you seen my old man around?”, and the song is well remembered

⁴ Branko J. Bokan, *Srez Sanski Most u NOB: 1941-1945*, Vol. 2, p. 94.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, p. 94.

⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, pp. 728-733.

by all of us whose fathers forever disappeared into the white nights of Grmeč. Here is another testimony on the suffering of children in Podgrmeč:

“We were captured (during their refuge on the Grmeč Mountain in February 1943, a/c) by the Jerries and Muslim Ustashas and they moved us to Bosanska Krupa... They herded us like some cattle into a barn. There were no blankets. Not to mention fire. And the winter was cold, so cold that long after the war it was still mentioned as the coldest winter anyone could remember. People said it was as if God and the “infidels” (Muslims) had consorted against Serbs. My mother Đurdija was with us, my three sisters and myself; one of them was older and the other two were younger than I was, with only a few years difference, aged two to nine... In that month of slavery the children were smitten by death. They died at almost regular intervals. They froze and starved to death. Then they were carried out of the barn and buried somewhere... And they have remained there for all eternity. With no markings. With no graves. With no names... The first to die were my two younger sisters, aged one and three. They had not even been baptised, so I do not even know their names. And one after another, the children died. The adults died as well. Not a day went by without a death. We were not allowed to mourn. Not to mention lament. There were no funerals. They carried our deceased outside and “buried” them out there, I do not know where...

Before that, they had picked out some of us for slavery in Germany. From our clan they had chosen Dmtar's Joka and Ilija Kosta's Jela... They came back from slavery after the war, in 1946. Jela was particularly afraid. She did not know what was going to happen to her son Boško (not even two years of age). She was also concerned about her brother-in-law Trivo (aged 13) and his eleven-year-old sister Koviljka, who was one of the first to die... Trivo snuck little Boško out, put him in a bag and ran away from the barn – from Krupa to our Glavica (a distance of 38 km, a/c). Probably even he himself did not know which way he was going. He was shrouded by the forest, wilderness, deep snow and sheer cold. The boy carried the baby, running for his life. Then he encountered some of our people, Serbs, refugees from Andulajevići. They were on an oxcart, on their way back to Andulajevići. Trivo told them about his ordeal, and they took him onto the oxcart. He took the bag off

his back and saw that Boško was dead. He had frozen to death. With his dead nephew Trivo reached Andulajevići, and then Glavica, where he found his parents, Stojko and Kosta, shrouded in pain and grief – their sons Drago and Marko had died fighting alongside the Partisans, and Trivo brought them a dead grandson and news of the death of their granddaughter Koviljka. Could there be any greater sorrow, any greater tragedy...”⁷ These were the words of Stevo Predojević, nicknamed Čevo, from the village of Predojevića Glavice, born in 1938, now a refugee.

II

During the July 1941 uprising, the Podgrmeč region, with its centre Lušci Palanka and the nearby Grmeč Mountain, became a large, well-organised free territory. Things remained like this until February 1943, as opposed to the occupied part of the Sanski Most area, more precisely, its villages bordering Podgrmeč. These villages were raided by the Ustasha villains called “bashibazouk” and “akinci” (damaged heads and raiders) [from Turkish başıbozuk or delibaş, meaning free-headed, leaderless or disorderly, and akıncı, historically referring to irregular light cavalry, translator’s note] and, together with them, elite German troops – the legionaries, whose task was to occupy the free territory. Meanwhile, on one side there were the Serbs, with very few exceptions, while on the other were the Ustashes and their minion executioners. Here is a record of this: out of 475 holders of the Yugoslav Partisan Commemorative Medal 1941 [awarded to individuals who joined the Partisan movement during 1941, translator’s note], only four of those who were among the first to join the Partisan movement (1299 of them, 388 of whom did not get the medal for various reasons, while 436 died during the war) were not Serbs. In that period, the NDH authorities in Sanski Most were proud to have “three hundred Ustasha troops”, most of whom were Muslims. Moreover, out of 3605 of the so-called victims of fascism (the official data, which is in opposition to the real number of victims at Šušnjar in 1941 and the Grmeč Mountain in 1943), only 26 were not Serbs.⁸

⁷ Vaso Predojević, *Iskoraci*, Studio grad, Škofja Loka, 2009, pp. 20-22.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

The Serbs' reaction to the plan to exterminate them was one of neighbourly relations with their Muslim and Croatian compatriots. A chronicle from that period states that only on and around St. Elijah's Day (2nd August), i.e. in late July and early August 1941, 5500 Serbs were killed and thrown into pits at Šušnjar during the Viktor-Hamza campaign.⁹ Why? Only because they were Serbs and Orthodox Christians! Similarly, the chronicle records that 5119 Serbs perished on the Grmeč Mountain, during the white winter nights of February and March 1943, which included 1001 Partisans and 316 wounded whose lives ended at the Partisan hospital in Korčanica.¹⁰ Again, why? Only because they were all, or almost all, Serbs! The Jews from Sanski Most were the only other community that suffered the same fate at Šušnjar, simply because they were Jews.

During the time between the two genocides, that at Šušnjar and that on the Grmeč Mountain, another genocide took place, "supplementing" them in terms of agenda and bestiality. The blood of the Serbs from the villages bordering the free Podgrmeč territory, then known as "The Grmeč Republic", soaked their homes and dwellings. Bloody furrows were ploughed by the Ustashas from Sanski Most, Bosanska Krupa, Sanica and Ključ, especially the bashibazouk and akinci, who were Muslims; the bloody furrows had never stopped bleeding, only to be reploughed in 1995 and become overgrown in thicket. How was this done and what bloody furrows and tears have been left behind for good, as traces of the Nazi and Ustasha monsters?

First, immediately upon the establishment of NDH, the respectable Serbs from the Grmeč-bordering villages (Gorica, Skucani Vakuf, Lipnik, Đurići, Kozin etc.) were deceived by being summoned to Sanski Most over different "duties", including "the duty to defend their country". Unfortunately, they obeyed, disregarding the warnings by some

⁹ Viktor Gutić, commander of the Ustasha Headquarters, and Hamzo Rešić Pašić, Sanski Most Mayor.

¹⁰ Vaso Predojević, *Putevima Podgrmeča*, Unigraf, Ljubljana, 2004. On Grmeč, 3370 men, women and children were killed, 1222 were taken prisoner and 493 disappeared; 1256 froze to death, while in villages at the foot of Mount Grmeč 1142 houses, 1143 barns and 229 other structures were burnt, making a total of 5119 Serbs and their property.

Muslim people from Kamengrad. They obeyed only to be end up in different places of execution, mostly at Šušnjar, while the horses and carts in which they arrived became loot. All this was said to me by Svetko Šuput from Skucani Vakuf, born in 1927, who is a refugee now. In the same way, 14 Serbian WWI volunteers were perfidiously executed as early as 5th May, two of whom were priests and one a holder of Order of the Star of Karadorđe [a decoration established in Serbia on 1st January 1904 by King Peter I, translator's note], along with many respectable Serbs and Jews.

At the same time, a census of young Serbs (in Lipnik, Đurići, Bosanski Milanovac, Podvidača, Bošnjaci, Grdanovci, Tomina etc.) born 1916-1922 was taking place; they were gathered at muster points and taken away for forced labour such as repairing the macadam roads leading to Podgrmeč, especially the road along Kisak, from Kamengrad to Fajtovci. Most of these young Serbs were executed, especially at Šušnjar, while a small number of them survived owing to their Muslim forced labour supervisors.

The Roman Catholic Church also contributed to the genocide against the Serbs. Namely, apart from the full support it gave to the NDH, the Catholic Church organised forced conversion to Catholicism. Many examples show that this was just a trap set by the Catholic Church and the Ustashas because what followed was the not only the execution of those who had not converted but also of those who had. Some Serbs from Sanski Most converted into Catholicism to keep their lives; however, they were the first to be executed. Their new religion did not help them; the only thing that mattered was the fact they were Serbs! There were no attempts of conversion made in Podgrmeč, because this region was populated exclusively by Serbs, with the exception of the villages bordering Sanski Most, such as Skucani Vakuf, Gorica etc., which had a mixed ethnic structure.¹¹

III

The legacy of bestial crimes, blood and tears shed between the two genocides, but also before and after them, soaked the land of Podgrmeč,

¹¹ Branko J. Bokan, *ibid.*, Vol. 2, pp. 78-81.

a centuries-long home of Serbs. Murderers attacked Podgrmeč from three directions: Sanski Most, Bosanska Krupa, and Sanica and Ključ. Here is some evidence to confirm the tradition of genocide:

Immediately upon the occupation and establishment of the NDH, “a rule was established” according to which people would be detained and killed for merely a shot at a German soldier. In line with the rule, 27 Serbs were shot and their bodies hung at a square in Sanski Most with the following message: “This will be the fate of all those who are against the state” – against the NDH.¹² The persecution and pogrom of the Serbs ensued.

In the village of Gorice (ethnically mixed – Serbs and Muslims), in the Serbian part of the village, the Ustashas arrested nine members of the Rodić family, took them to Sanski Most and executed them. Later that day, they arrested five Serbs in Naprelj and seventeen in Fajtovci, took them to Kamengrad and also killed them. The Ustashas returned to both villages in early 1943 to arrest sixteen members of the Rodić family in the Serbian part of Gorice and burned them alive in Spasoje Rodić’s house. In the same village, at Petar Došenović’s barn, the Ustashas immolated 34 relatives (women, young girls and a boy) from the families Rodić, Došenović, Malić, Ranić, Predojević, Škundrić and Zavoda. They also arrested and burnt 150 people – Serbs, in hamlets Orašje and Dolovi of the village of Fajtovci¹³.

In Budimlić Japra and Marina, the Ustashas arrested 27 and 64 Serbs respectively and killed them after sadistic torture on 2nd August 1941. In Majkić Japra, a combined Nazi and Ustasha patrol of 15 criminals raped a woman, who died from internal injuries at her home. Her female neighbour was found dead at her hearth, where she had been murdered. The Nazis and Ustashas went hunting down people in the largely desolate villages (the population had sought refuge in the Grmeč Mountain), arresting helpless old people and refugees from Banija, Kordun and even Slovenia (there were 2797 refugees, 1973 of whom women and children – 187 of them from the surroundings of Murska Sobota

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 105-107.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 22-24.

and Maribor), taking them to nearby forests and executing them on a massive scale.¹⁴

In the village of Jelašinovci, the Nazis and Ustashas killed and burnt a large group of men, women, girls and children in their houses and stables, whose number has never been determined. After that, in the meadows called Đakov Grob and Plećine they executed 43 villagers – elderly men, women, girls and children (the eight-year-old Marko Srdić stayed alive, protected by the bodies of his three brothers, his sister and mother). Simo Kukolj's family was also killed, with the exception of their ten-year-old daughter Koviljka, who stayed alive the same way Marko Srdić did. Similarly, on 12th and 13th February 1943, Jelašinovci paid a great death toll with the lives of its 256 villagers – men, women, girls and children.¹⁵

In Drenova Glavica and Rudnice, the Ustashas from Bosanska Krupa slaughtered and burned 180 and 427 men, women and children respectively, compounded by another 226 victims in Srpska Jasenica.¹⁶

IV

The traces of the atrocities committed abounded, along with the blood and tears shed. The best evidence of this is data on the so-called victims of fascism, victims of the Muslim-Croatian Ustasha monstrous soldiery, or better said, the civilian casualty statistics, which is three-fold compared to the number of dead Serbian rebels, the Partisans, who fought the Nazi aggressors and their Ustasha minions. The official record says there were 3605 victims of fascist terror and 1001 dead soldiers, 75 of whom were women. Out of 3605 casualties, 1196 were women! This is evidence of terrible genocide, and more than that. Many Podgrmeč villages suffered such great losses and the consequences of the atrocities were felt by the post-war generations for many years. Listed below are more villages where atrocities took place, which is not meant to belittle in any way the genocide committed at other places, no matter how few the victims may have been: Brdari – 307 villagers, 99

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 318.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 72.

casualties (30 women; 17 people killed in combat); Đedovača – 182 villagers, 56 casualties (15 women; 9 killed in combat); Jelašinovci – 1059 villagers, 262 casualties (143 women; 69 killed in combat); the villages of Majkić Japra Gornja and Majkić Japra Donja – 1059 villagers, 279 casualties (143 women; 104 killed in combat); Miljevci – 710 villagers, 91 casualties (35 women; 28 people killed in combat); Otiš – 476 villagers, 66 casualties (36 women; 28 killed in combat); Predojevića Glavica – 630 villagers, 90 casualties (42 women; 36 people killed in combat) – the places of killing and graves of 18 dead Partisans have never been discovered; Praštali – 400 villagers, 107 casualties (52 women; 38 people killed in combat); Tuk Bobija – 352 villagers, 47 casualties (17 women; 19 people killed in combat); Podvidača – 889 villagers, 50 casualties (one woman; 35 people killed in combat); Lukavice – 910 villagers, 33 casualties (2 women; 24 people killed in combat); Kruhari – 1120 villagers, 95 casualties (18 women; 24 people killed in combat) etc.¹⁷ The village of Hašani in the Grmeč Mountain suffered 71 casualties; 47 people froze to death and 24 died from spotted fever, while 72 died as members of the resistance movement; Srpska Jasenica village suffered 226 casualties of the Nazi and Ustasha terror (92 froze to death or died from spotted fever, while 49 were killed in combat).¹⁸

All these people became victims of the Ustasha monsters or, in a smaller number of cases, of atrocities jointly committed by the Ustashas and Nazi legionaries. Those people, our Serbian people, were sentenced without a trial – to death! The death toll was most tragically paid by women, children and the elderly, especially those who had not taken refuge in the Grmeč Mountain, where all they could hope for was to find death in the embrace of the mountain on white winter nights. Both those who had not fled and had rather stayed in their villages, as well as those who had taken refuge, in hope they would stay alive and be witnesses to the Ustashas' monstrous atrocities, knew and remembered that hell had not satisfied its hunger; like in the famous literary work *Death and the Dervish* by Meša Selimović, whenever asked “Are you full now?”, Hell's answer was always, “Is there more?”

¹⁷ Ibid., Vol. 3, p. 67.

¹⁸ Vaso Predojević, *Putevima Podgrmeča*, pp. 44 and 52.

V

It has been like that for centuries! Genocidal crimes saw a sequel, the final act of this insane play, during the religious-civil war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, more precisely, in 1995. The Muslim-Croatian or so-called Bosnia-Herzegovina Army campaigned again using the proven Viktor-Hamza model; as a result, the complete population of the Podgrmeč area took refuge to save their lives, only this time not to the Grmeč Mountain but to the Kozara Mountain instead, seeking shelter from extermination and hoping for a chance to return to their homes again. Podgrmeč thus became, and has remained, a major place of execution of the Serbs, of the annihilation of their souls and fate!

The war in B&H (1992–1995) ravaged this area and sent it back to 1530, when it was still uninhabited. Not a living soul there! No houses. No conditions for life. No conditions for sustainable return. Seventy years ago, 1142 houses out of a total of 5000 were destroyed; 1995 saw the destruction of all the houses. The only thing that remained was the centre of Lušci Palanka, which was, by a “revolutionary decree”, immediately renamed into “Muslim Palanka”.

Similarly, the village of Predojevića Glavica, which has existed since 1546, was recently renamed Glavice. No one has been held responsible for that! If we look back, it may certainly be claimed that no one has been accused or convicted of committing a crime against peace. As if the reason for this religious-civil war, as well as all the other wars fought in the former Yugoslavia and beyond it, had not been violence but the Nobel Peace Prize. In other words, no one has been accused or convicted of committing a crime against peace for the wars that have taken place in Europe in the last 20 years. No one can be accused or convicted because those who are guilty have indeed been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize!

Not only in connection with the religious-civil war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also with the other conflicts of the same kind in the former Yugoslavia, especially in Croatia and Kosovo, the Serbs have been vilified and defamed on a massive scale, especially by the media; a bloody media war was waged and media crimes were committed against the Serbs. Has it not also been attested by our famous writer

Milovan Danajlić: “When it comes to Serbian blood, the cameras are always far away; when the blood of Serbian enemies is spilt, every single drop is shown...!”¹⁹ Is this not most conclusive evidence that the Serbs have indeed been vilified? The so-called international community and its “peace corps” deployed in this region have merely served the vilification purposes. Under the “watchful eye” of the international community and with the help of its “peace corps”, “more Serbs were displaced – ethnically cleansed – by the wars in the Balkans than any other community. [...] Almost no one has been held to account, and it appears that no one will be. [...] This will amplify the worst political instincts of the peoples of the former Yugoslavia: the persecution complex of the Serbs; the triumphalism of the Croats; the sense of victimization of the Bosnian Muslims; the vindication of the Kosovar Albanian quest for racial purity.”²⁰ The international community did not react to the revival of the Ustasha ideology in Croatia either, which resurrected to live its “millennial dream”, or to Bosnia and Herzegovina’s links with the jihadi movement. “The lack of legal reckoning will once again channel grievances into the political process, laying up plenty of ammunition for further rounds of conflict. It is the opposite of what the war crimes tribunal for the former Yugoslavia was created to achieve.”²¹

This has been proven by numerous facts and atrocities which make blood run cold and cloud the mind. Here are just two examples: A Nigerian UNPROFOR soldier in Croatia wrote the following to his mother: “Dear mother, they kill each other so much here, but they do not eat their victims. Today we have buried a mother killed in her bed and a child boiled in a pot.”²² Furthermore, a general commanding the notorious “Storm” operation “kills a nine-year-old boy by hitting his head against the wall of his parents house” (Dr Žarko Puhovski, Croatian Television, 6 February 2007). This is the “Ustasha school” from the notorious concentration camp Jasenovac from 70 years ago.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 99

²⁰ David Harland, “Selective Justice for the Balkans.” http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/08/opinion/global/selective-justice-for-the-balkans.html?_r=0. Access: 14 February 2014.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Svetozar Livada, *Etničko čišćenje – ozakonjeni zločin stoljeća*, Euroknjiga, Zagreb, 2007, p. 51.

VI

So, what is the conclusion? Is there no conclusion, or is it unspeakable? There has been a prologue, with no end in sight yet! The Serbs as a people are a victim of a schizophrenic situation, vilification and defamation used as instruments of politics, a victim of a confused policy dictated from the outside. Through hatred, we are meant to be excluded from the circle of the civilised world, deprived of the right to live, have our own territory or state. They want to turn us into Balkan Palestinians or Kurds and exterminate us. This is why they need Kosovo and Metohija, and it is hard to say what they will need afterwards. All that is done in the name of an armed democracy and a new empire of evil. "All they want is Serbian blood, Serbian horror, Serbian disaster!" (Leonid Nikolayevich Andreyev, *About Serbs*, 1914). Is this the common policy when the Serbs are concerned? Yes! History is full of facts and evidence of it.

"I am not sure I will not end up like this in this world where the grim reaper still wanders with his scythe. Let it go, Zijo... Everyone defends themselves with their own scythe, but the sword has not yet been smitten to cut our moonlights, smiling dawns and sad twilights"²³ – this is from a prophetic letter written by the famous writer Branko Ćopić to Zijo Dizdarević, a writer himself, killed in the Ustasha concentration camp Jasenovac in 1942. "Dark murderers with human faces" (Branko Ćopić) were destroying our lives and cutting off our heads again. Nobody saw it, similar to 1876, as described in this testimony: "One nation is being killed. Where? In Europe. Is there anybody to testify to that? The witness is only one: the whole world! And governments, do they see that? They do not. (Victor Hugo, *For Serbia*, 1876).²⁴ History remembers: those were punitive expeditions, revenge for defeats, especially in the two World Wars, return of the criminals to the crime scene in the form of the "Merciful Angel" campaign...! This means the prologue has been written but not the epilogue! "Messy situations are like muddy rivers: they bring all the sludge up to the surface" (Jovan Dučić, 1924).

²³ Branko Ćopić, *Bašta sljezove boje*, Besjeda, Banja Luka, 2003, p. 7.

²⁴ Vaso Predojević, *ibid.*, p. 91

Krstan Šućur

TO REMEMBER AND TESTIFY

There is probably nothing to add to the testimonies of those who were lined up, tied with wire and scattered in pits at Šušnjar and Žegar waiting to be executed. Their arrest and taking away took place before their closest relatives and neighbours. These were executions of unarmed civilians, not because they participated in the war but only because they were Serbs or Jews, since Hitler's Germany decided to wipe out those two ethnic groups from Europe. It was in line with the establishment of the NDH, whose plan was to eliminate the Serbs and Jews from this region and thus accomplish the goal to be a loyal ally to the Nazi Germany and create an ethnically cleansed NDH. Actions were taken as early as May; the genocidal extermination of the Serbs and taking them to concentration camps meant cleansing the area from the Serbs and Jews. The events and actions of the Ustasha authorities in Sanski Most, which is the far west of the Krajina region, Petrovac, Kupres and Glamoč, including the surroundings of Banja Luka, indicate the presence of all characteristics of genocide.

One can only imagine that Monday in May 1941 in Sanski Most, the market day, when harmless villagers from Jelašincevi, Lušci Palanka, Tomina, Tramošnja, Kijev, Kozice and other villages in Sanski Most municipality saw what the Ustashas were doing. As early as 4th May, they took away the first people from their houses and locked them in a shack at the railway station. Villagers ran into Ustasha units, which were already raiding villages, plundering, demonstrating power and authority and instilling fear. People already knew Rajko Stojnić had been arrested, while his brother and some other villagers had been tortured in Kijev on 4th May. According to some testimonies, people from Donja and Gornja Tramošnja, as well as the hamlets of Tukovi, Šućuri, Krejići and Dakovići took up arms in the afternoon of 6th May, Saint George's Day. In a hamlet at the border between Kijevo and Donja Tramošnja,

around 9 a.m. on 6th May, a villager informed the men keeping watch nearby about the movements of an Ustasha patrol. One of the present people immediately suggested going home and taking weapons. In less than an hour, they brought their hidden arms, mainly guns. They took positions 300 to 400 metres from the house of Marko Kondić, who had been arrested by the Ustashas in the centre of the village and taken to his home. They was a group of five; meanwhile, another group of people were gathering in the background. Just as they were reaching Marko's house, they saw an Ustasha abusing Marko's sister. When the group noticed it, a signal was given to start shooting at the Ustashas. The Ustashas fled, taking Marko away with them. The group and those from the background withdrew in fear, assuming the Ustashas would return with reinforcement.

The news about the skirmish and the attack on the Ustasha patrol spread overnight to the surrounding area, reaching even faraway villages. It was believed that the Ustashas would seek revenge and crush the resistance. A defence line was established, which went above Kijevska Kosa and Sjenokos, where villagers from the surrounding villages were supposed to establish a defence line and watch the ground. Well-known activists and resistance agitators stirring people against the Ustashas came in the afternoon the same day: Vid Đaković, Đorđe Suljić, a monk from Gomionica Monastery, Milan Đaković and, followed by villagers from the adjacent villages, Risto Kovačević.

The preparations for armed resistance began as early as 7th May. About 70 guns were distributed; Đurađ Panić (from Kozica, Gračanica hamlet) brought a light machine gun, and from Pervan (a village near Bronzani Majdan near Banja Luka) came Ratko Jović Palir with a machine gun, which his uncle Gojko had hidden, after bringing it with him from the Yugoslav Royal Army in April 1941. A large quantity of weaponry was taken by activists from the dismissed gendarmery in Vrhpolje. According to Ustasha reports and testimonies by some people, the skirmish lasted from 9 a.m. to 12.15 p.m. on 7th May. Three Ustashas were wounded. When the fighting stopped, the Ustashas put up a defence line above Kijevo village, inhabited by Muslims. It was expected that, in the following days, the Ustashas would launch a serious attack on the villages of Donja and Gornja Tramošnja, Kozica, Podovi, Ilidža and Tomina.

Memories of these events told by eyewitnesses can also be found in the first volume of the book on Sanski Most by Branko J. Bokan.

Anxiously awaiting

When the Nazi Germany began to enslave Europe's nations, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia joined the Tripartite Pact on 25th March 1941. The ensuing events served as a warning that defence was necessary, especially because the capitulation of the Yugoslav Royal Army caused a great fear. The establishment of the NDH and especially its occupation of Western Bosnia put the Serbs in a tragic position. It is a historical fact that people from certain areas, especially the Manjača Mountain and the right bank of the Sana River, as well as from the villages surrounding Banja Luka (Vilusi, Bronzani Majdan) and a part of Ključ municipality, supported the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and believed in their historical connections with Mother Serbia. After the collapse of the Yugoslav Royal Army, some of its units gathered on the Manjača Mountain. Uroš Drenović, a Serbian vojvoda [the principal military commander, warlord, translator's note] played a significant role in that. Soldiers and military officers gathered and all kinds of weaponry were collected. After the happenings in Sanski Most and the terror inflicted by the Ustasas (both Muslims and Croats were conscripted into Ustasha units), who knew the Serbs very well since they were neighbours, the assembled Chetniks, Commander Drenović and his associates started to collect information and take interest in the Ustasha crimes. They used to send military messengers to the villages of Kozica, Hazić, Tramošnja and Podovi to learn about the happenings there. People from those villages, which bordered the Manjača Mountain, saw the presence of Chetnik forces as a guarantee of their safety. There was also collaboration with the resistance movement activists, regardless of the fact that some of them were members of the Communist Party. Numerous testimonies state that Commander Drenović used to send messages to the Ustasha and German headquarters in Sanski Most. It is assumed that the German Command demanded from the Ustasha authorities to establish a contact and cooperation with the Chetnik movement. It was rumoured that even a non-aggression pact had been signed between the Ustasha authorities and Commander Drenović, under the auspices of the German Command. Drenović explicitly requested that all harassment and

arrests of the Serb population stop, referring to the places listed above, as well as places on the left bank of the Sana River.

After the first armed uprising (on the Yugoslav territory) and events that took place in the first half of May, most population living on the right, and partially on the left side of the Sana River, lived in an atmosphere of a strange combination of restfulness and fear. The same could be said about the life of the assembled Chetnik troops in the Manjača area.

It should be pointed out that after the St. George's Day uprising and the atrocities committed by the Ustashas in the villages of Kruvari, Tomina and Kijevo, some families sought refuge in the villages of Donja and Gornja Tramošnja and Kozica (hamlets Đakovići, Krujići, Šučuri and Čukovići). Equally worth noting is the fact that the Ustashas looked for support in those villages that had any sort of family ties with the Catholic and Muslim populations. So, the Ustashas managed to find a villager in Kozica who was married to a Catholic woman; they appointed him the village mayor and people used to call him the Ustasha knez [the informal title of the elder or mayor of a village, translator's note]. This despicable man took the Ustasha demands seriously and started to mistreat his neighbours (they had to do field work for him and give him livestock and other contributions). When the Ustasha authorities realised what he was doing, they removed him (early July 1941) and were unable, from that day onward, to find another loyal collaborator, so they no longer appointed any village mayors.

Two Muslim brothers (one of them had a barber shop at the square next to the bridge on the right bank of the Sana River, and the other was a waiter in the old Sana Hotel) told some Serbs that, allegedly, Commander Drenović came in June to talk with the Ustasha and German command. When the Germans asked if anybody had any objections, Drenović answered that Serb people were being mistreated and arrested, which was a breach of the pact. He pointed out that he had around 6000 men under arms and, if the incidents continued, he would not be able to hold his troops. The Germans reassured him there would be no more incidents.

People's uprising against fascist terror and occupation

As it is known, the uprising against the aggressor was sparked off in Drvar on 27th July. The news of it spread quickly across Bosanska Krajina. Most of the activists from the right bank of the Sana River and the Đurđevdan uprising leaders were hiding in the forests near Kmećani. They mingled with people saying that the uprising was soon to be staged. It was sparked off in the area of Lušci Palanka on 30th July and the news spread across the Krajina overnight. It had a significant impact on the situation in the whole area of Sanski Most municipality, while the population was desperate due to the aggressor's brutality.

In late July and early August, when it became clear that an uprising had been sparked in the Sanski Most and Drvar area, it deeply upset the Chetnik forces in the Manjača area. The villagers of Hazići, Kozice and Tramošnja, as well as the complete Serb population on the right bank of the Sana River could no longer expect the Chetniks to protect them. Some of Commander Drenović's people used to come and canvass for support, asking people not to join the rebels and communists. Threats ensued, and the people from these villages avoided going to or having contacts with the villages around Manjača. It has to be mentioned here that, based on valid historical records, the villagers of Hazići, Kozice and Gornja/Donja Tramošnja gave massive support to the rebel units and considered joining them to be the only solution. From villages Gornja Kozica and Donja Kozica, 334 people fought in the National Liberation War, of whom 55 died. Seventeen civilians were executed, five villagers were awarded the Yugoslav Partisan Commemorative Medal 1941, two were awarded the Order of the National Hero [a Yugoslav gallantry medal, the second highest military award, and third overall Yugoslav decoration, translator's note] – Risto Kovačević, who was betrayed and killed by the Chetniks mid-way between villages Pavići and Stričići in 1942 and Simo Bajić, who also died during the war. From the two Tramošnja villages there were a total of 255 Partisans, of whom 41 died, 9 became holders of the 1941 Commemorative Medal and 45 became victims of fascism.

Vojvoda Uroš Drenović's Chetniks managed to reach Kozice and get only three villagers to join them, while from the two Tramošnja villages

they only recruited four, but they also joined the Partisan movement after August 1943. During the war, the Chetnik movement had substantial forces in the Manjača area, which were mobile and fought alongside the Partisan forces.

The suffering of Sanski Most Serbs and Jews at Šušnjar

During July 1941, the authorities began arresting the Serbs from Sanski Most and the surrounding villages. They were detained or sent to do forced labour, and some were sent to concentration camps. Some of them were restricted freedom of movement and visits by their families while in captivity. Because of the uprising in the aforesaid places at the end of July, on 30th July the Serbs kept in Sanski Most were forbidden movement and receiving visits. The Ustashas took swift action and overnight started to massively arrest Serbian men and take them to prisons on both banks of the river, as testified by the relatives, friends and neighbours of the captured. On 2nd August, the Ustashas began to shoot and throw the prisoners into pits in Šušnjar they had been forced to dig. Living witnesses have testified to that and that is definitely true.

Testimonies and records state that the largest number of Serbs and Jews were killed in nearby settlements, which had a high concentration of that population and which were surrounded by their Muslim and Croat neighbours. Here is one example: the village of Lužani near Sanski Most, a small settlement, lost 60 householders; only 20 heads of families managed to join the Liberation Movement. The data say that the killed Serb population were from the town as well as the villages of Kruvari, Tomine, Podluga, Kljevci, Dabar and so on. It should be noted that many Serbs (women, children and the elderly) took refuge in the villages of Tramošnja, Kozica and others towards Bronzani Majdan in the Banja Luka region. According to the people who accommodated those refugees and the participants of the uprising, there were about 450 refugees in those two villages alone (Tramošnja and Kozinci).

It must be mentioned that in the Vrhpolje area over 500 civilians were executed during the period of the crime in Šušnjar, an area belonging to the Sanski Most area, although Vrhpolje belonged to the Ključ municipality before the war.

Besides Šušnjar, it can be claimed that massive executions of Serbs and their burial in mass graves also happened in Žegar, a village between Čaplje and Sanski Most. Apart from the killings in Šušnjar, the villagers of Žegar, Lužani, a part of Tomine, Kljevci and other surrounding villages were executed in Žegar. Testimonies say that in some cases the groups to be executed in Sanski Most were instead sent to Žegar for execution. This was vividly testified by Rade Knežević, Niko Burić (a tax inspector after the war), both from Žegar, Zoran Bjelanović from Kozice (a post-war judge in Sanski Most), Mitar Grković, Vid Petrić, Vid Čolić and many other survivors. The execution of the captured Serbs was carried on in the swamps about 800 metres along the left side of Kriva Cesta from Žegar towards Sanski Most. According to witnesses' assumptions, between 800 and 1000 civilians were thrown into two mass graves. Testimonies say that the Ustashas used to bring their victims from Peć, Vrhpolje and other southern villages and leave them in Žegar for execution. This was happening in parallel to the mass executions at Šušnjar.

After the Second World War, a 4-metre high monument to the victims was erected in that place, engraved with the names of only those who were known to have been executed there. Since it is known that, in the post-war period, Žegar, Šušnjar and other places of mass execution of Serbs and Jews used to be mentioned with shyness and fear for 40 years (as it was in the interest of the regime), in order to preserve "brotherhood and unity" [a guiding principle of Yugoslavia's post-war inter-ethnic policy, translator's note], with the goal to preserve the communist regime, too little was investigated and recorded. Nowadays, the Žegar monument, which I visited on 1st August 2013, stands with almost all its ceramics destroyed; the remaining inscription still shows the family name Gavranović from Lužani; others are barely visible. My bow, my clenched teeth and a bunch of flowers I had picked nearby served as a symbolic memorial upon my visit.

Preserving places of mass execution from oblivion

If it is true that history is the teacher of life, we should learn from our national history and the wars we have waged. It is well-known the

Serbs have always waged liberation wars. It should not be forgotten that our people sided with the Allies in the two World Wars, fighting alongside the victors against the aggressors and conquerors. Those who started the world wars chose the Serbs to be their victims but also the cause and reason for the wars.

The proof of this is especially the beginning of the Second World War and the creation of the NDH, which was a fine pretext for Ante Pavelić to destroy Serbian people in an easy way.

I do not wish to speculate about how much the Serbs have succeeded in protecting their national interests after the Second World War. However, the results, prospects and disintegration of SFR Yugoslavia, as well as the destiny of the Serbs in Croatia and the civil war in Bosnia and Herzegovina have led to disastrous results and consequences. It is possible to say a lot about the contribution of the Serbs to the victory in the Second World War or do historical research on the Balkan Wars. Also, it is especially important for new generations to be told the truth, which has often been pushed aside. We must cherish the memory of our freedom fighters and casualties in the liberation wars, as well as erect and preserve monuments for them to be duly remembered.

It is a fact that history textbooks in Serbia say that the first armed resistance and attack on fascist military units was carried out in the Sanski Most district around Saint George's Day (6th May), which is also written in many records and documents in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Today, there are about 20 associations in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Srpska in connection with the liberation wars, which try to preserve the values of the liberation wars and memories of the fight for the truth and rights of participants and casualties of the liberation wars. Numerous associations work in the public interest and are partners of republic institutions, but sometimes their most immediate goal is to simply determine the truth, which is justifiable. However, there is no noticeable unity and desire for all the victims, achievements, values and contributions of our wars and suffering to be valued. Common messages and a common legacy for all Serbs should be derived from the liberation wars, with full respect for the victims. In the last 15 years, I have been observing and participating in commemorations, memorial services, conferences and panels, reading and listening to conclusions,

messages and appeals, and what I can notice is disunity, divisions and turning to the needs of daily politics, even fear of disclosing the truth, as well as submitting to legitimately partial interests. Apart from noticing the disagreement between the associations that cherish the tradition and values of the liberation wars, their participants and casualties, there is a lack of due interest on the part of relevant institutions, intellectuals and historians (sometimes disregarded altogether). The fight to preserve these values must find its place in the Academy of Sciences and Arts of Serbia, and that of the Republic of Srpska.

I have noticed that the places of mass killings of civilians and national liberation movement members are badly neglected, some of the memorials even crumbling, which means that those places are doomed. I have mentioned the monument in Žegar, but the Šušnjar monument and its grounds are also an eyesore. Some memorials (especially those in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina) are in critical condition. Authorities in both entities claim that the reason for this is the lack of money for renovation of these memorials and centres.

Maybe we should look at how small countries and nations cherish their past and history, preserving them carefully and trying to neglect some dark events in which they took part, while trying to find values, or even ascribe the achievements of other nations to themselves as their own contribution to the liberation and victory of the people of Europe, in order to remove the stigma from their nation and past.

The Serbian history and meritable achievements necessitate that we keep the memory of our liberators and victims alive and maintain the memorials dedicated to them with greater care.

Vaso Mikan

MEMORY OF THE USORA VILLAGERS KILLED IN THE SUMMER OF 1941

Village Usorci is located on the right bank of the Sana River and is almost entirely on a hilly terrain, with hamlets scattered on hummocks, apart from the few houses of the families Crnobrnja, Majkić, Brkić and Džaja located near the river. There were once around a hundred houses in this purely Serbian village.

Immediately next to Usora hummocks, the narrow-gauge railway Prijedor – Lička Kaldrma curved along the Sana River valley, where since the Austro-Hungarian time up to the 1970s the famous čiro steam train clattered. The railway station in Usorci was exactly at the 17th kilometre from Prijedor and the 11th kilometre from Sanski Most.

During the Second World War, the village of Usorci was surrounded by Ustasha villages on three sides. To the south, Trnova lay between Usorci and Sanski Most; a Muslim village and a notorious Ustasha hot-bed. To the east towards Bronzani Majdan and Banja Luka, there was the purely Croatian village Sasina, also a notorious Ustasha base. To the north, across the Sana River, there was the Muslim village of Ališići, from where the Ustashas committed terrible atrocities in Oštra Luka and Usorci.

A book called *The Sanski Most District in the National Liberation War* by Branko Bokan contains the information on the killed Usora villagers. This information is not complete and not chronologically in tune with the actual times when the atrocities occurred, there are no details on the events taking place during the crimes, the interpretation of certain crimes is not consistent with the memories being retold in Usorci for decades. These memories have been recorded for this reason.

Unfortunately, there are almost no living witnesses to these events who were really present at the time when they took place. This is why this book contains memories of relatives and children of the executed, who remember what their mothers told them, although they themselves are rather old.

It was the most respectable people who were immediately targeted by the Ustasha authorities.

The first Usora people who got arrested were:

- Aćim Savić, a father of four and a First World War volunteer, holder of the Order of the Star of Karadorđe, deeply respected as a man and farmer, and

- Blagoje Crnobrnja, a father of five and one of the wealthiest villagers, who, besides farming, also worked as a merchant.

One day, most probably during May, four armed men came into Aćim Savić's house with a warrant for his apprehension and transport to Sanski Most for a hearing and pledging allegiance to the new authorities. According to his deceased wife Stana, who told their eldest son Milan about the course of events, Aćim told his wife that he was able to kill the four Ustashas but was afraid of the Ustashas taking revenge and killing her and the children, so he surrendered and went with them to Sanski Most. He was sadistically tortured together with a few other WWI volunteers and killed in Šušnjar on 2nd August 1941. When people learnt that he had been executed, his eldest son Milan, who was 15 at the time, went to the Kozara Mountain to join the Partisan unit under the command of the famous Mladen Stojanović. After the war, he graduated from the Military Aviation Academy and became a pilot in the Yugoslav People's Army. Aćim Savić retired as a colonel. He died recently.

Almost at the same time, according to Ranko Kajtez, who was 11 at the time, one day while he was keeping cattle in a field near Blagoja Crnobrnja's house, a train came from Prijedor and stopped by the house which was very near the railway. A railway employee named Toljagić, who worked as a conductor before the war, got off the train. He was an acquaintance with a lot of Usora villagers.

He shouted several times:

- Hey Blagoje! Hey Blagoje!

Blagoje soon appeared at a window, asking Toljagić why he was calling him.

- Come quickly, I've got something very important for you – Toljagić answered.

- Wait a moment, let me just put my shoes on – answered Blagoje and disappeared from the window. An armed soldier immediately ran into the house to fetch Blagoje.

According to what Mihajlo Orlović wrote in his book titled *A Town on a Lake of Blood* (probably based on the memories of family members), when the Ustasha Jandre from Sasina ordered him to come to town with him, Blagoje went to his room to bring out a bag full of money. He hit the bag with his hand believing that money could solve everything.

- It won't help you, you're never going to get back home again – Jandre said.

- As long as I have money, I am not going to die – said Blagoje with confidence.

When they got onto the train, Blagoje asked why they were calling for him and bent down to lace up his shoes, at which the Ustasha shouted:

- Get on the train, we don't have that much time!

They put him in a cattle wagon, got on the train after him and slammed the door. The train then departed.

A person from Usorci happened to be in Sanski Most when the Ustasas took Blagoje out of the train. Later, this person said that Blagoje was all covered in blood, his clothes torn and, as he could barely walk, the Ustasas were almost dragging him.

He was executed at Šušnjar on 2nd August the same year.

The massacre at Varda

It was spring, the time when maize is hoed. Anđelka Plavšić remembers the story told by her mother, Jovanka Vasiljević, Niko Vasiljević's wife: there were some people in one of Ostoja Plavšić's fields, hoeing maize.

Around midday a group of Ustashas came to the village from Trnova, split into groups and started to search for people in the surrounding hamlets. A lot of people from the village were hiding from the Ustashas in the woods during the day. One group of Ustashas came to the Plavšić family, in the field where the people were working. There they found the householder Ostoja Plavšić and helpers Niko Vasiljević, his brother Pero Vasiljević and Marko Plavšić. They asked them to go to Trnova with them for a meeting to agree about the protection of Usorci. Two of the Ustashas came to the hamlet of Gončine, where they found and brought Ostoja Gončin and Marko Gončin. A group of the Ustashas brought Tode Vasiljević and Petar – Šumar Andrijević from another hamlet. The Ustashas took all of them towards Trnova, reassuring them that nothing bad would happen.

The road to Trnova goes along the upper part of Usorci, through the last hill in Usorci called Varda, and then down to a field where the Sana River flows immediately next to the hill, leaving a narrow space just for the railway and the road. A mill owned by a Memišević from Trnova was in the field where the Trnova area begins.

According to the story told to Mirko Savić by a man from Trnova, all those eight people from Usora were killed at Memišević's mill. A mute Muslim from Trnova, mentally disabled, was with the Ustashas. The Ustashas brought one prisoner at a time and he cut their heads off and threw them into the river. This story is probably mostly true, since neither the graves nor the bodies of the slaughtered have ever been found. The Sana River took them away. Only one grave was found in a little pond near the mill, and the body inside identified as Tode Vasiljević's.

Never believe the Ustashas

Corporal Ante Mandić and Smiljan Kozić, Ustashas from the village of Sasine, who were the most notorious ones, came to Vaso Crnobrnja's

house, which was the last house in Usorci in the direction towards Sasina. Threatening to kill Vaso, they ordered him to pass on a message to Savo Crnobrnja, Vaso Mikan and Milan Gvozden to come to Sasina to make a non-aggression agreement with the Ustashas.

Vaso Crnobrnja passed the message to them and they went to Sasina “for an agreement”.

Ranko Kajtez, Stanko’s son, remembers everything that happened in Sasina as he heard the story a number of times from the late Mile Gvozden (the only survivor of the Sasina shooting). Mile Gvozden’s account is similarly remembered by another person, Dušan Kecman, Jovan Kecman’s son, who heard it from his mother, Gospa Kecman, who also heard it personally from Mile Gvozden.

When the four men arrived at Tada’s grocery store in Sasina, a group of Ustashas took them to a house. They locked them in the basement, where there were already a few prisoners. Approaching the house, they had noticed an Ustasha with a machine gun on the upper floor and several armed guards at the entrance and around the house. They were guarded well. The Ustashas kept on bringing new prisoners.

The following day, they took them in front of the house; there were 15 or 16 prisoners and the same number of Ustashas, perhaps a few more. They lined up the prisoners and forced them towards Dakića grove. They stopped in the meadow at the rim of the grove, which was enclosed with a rather tall hawthorn hedge. The Ustashas ordered them to line up beside the hedge and turn towards the forest. The Ustashas lined up about ten metres behind them. One of them asked:

- Does anybody want to say their last wish?

Savo Crnobrnja left the group, took a few steps forward, took his wallet out and said:

- I want to pay for my life, here you are, take as much as you want.

- We will take both your life and your money, so get back in the line right now! - one Ustasha shouted.

The Ustashas were bustling confusedly for a few moments and suddenly a command was heard – Fire! The prisoners fell to the ground; two of them fell over Mile, but he felt no pain. He turned and took a

look; all of them were lying, only Savo Crnobrnja was still standing and swaying back and forth.

The Ustasha commander ordered one of the Ustashes:

- Take a gun and shoot each one of them a bullet in the head so that no dog stays alive!

The Ustasha came closer and started to shoot. Mile was lying at around the centre of the group. When he heard the third or fourth shot, he slowly got out of the pile of corpses and suddenly jumped over the hedge, rolled away a bit and then jumped to his feet and ran to the forest.

Soon bullets were heard whistling past him and there was shouting and noise from the Ustashes, who were running along the fence to cut off his path. Mile managed to run across the grove and reach a wheat field with some reapers. As Rajko Kajtez remembers it, Mile said he had run between the reapers so that the Ustashes would not fire out of fear they might shoot their own villagers; so Mile reached the forest and got away. Dušan Kecman remembers that Mile told his mother Gospa, Jovan's wife, that the owner of the wheat field called him over to hide among them and then they put some sheaves on him before the Ustashes managed to reach the field. They told the Ustashes that Mile had escaped to the forest. After the war, that man was a dear guest in Usorci. After the war, Mile Gvozden used to take the relatives of the murdered to the place of execution. The corpses of Savo Crnobrnja and Jovan Kecman were found in the mass grave and buried in the Usorci local cemetery. The corpse of Vaso Mikan was never identified and he is believed to have stayed in the mass grave.

The massacre at Todor Crnobrnja's house

After the killing of Savo Crnobrnja, Vukosava, his wife, and Bosiljka, Blagoja Crnobrnja's wife, left their houses in the field by the railway and, together with their children, went to the hills, to Todor Crnobrnja's cousin. The house was full of people. Among others, there were two adult sons of Blagoja Crnobrnja, Gavro and Rade, who was a cadet of the royal army academy.

One day, around noon, while Rade and his older sister Radojka were tending cattle in a field by the road leading to Todor's house, a group of Ustashas from village Ališići appeared on the road, led by Islam Ališić. A little further down the road was Mladen Crnobrnja with his sister. They were carrying two bucketfuls of well water each. Islam shouted "Get him!" and then started to call:

- Hey Todor! - Hey Todor!

When Todor answered in front of the house, Islam asked him:

- Are you home? Wait for us, we're coming.

Todor saw just how roughly the Ustashas handled Mladen as they grabbed him and took him towards the group which was in front of Todor's house. He realised he was in danger, ran into the house and said the Ustashas were coming. He took his son Aleksa by the hand and jumped through the window to the backyard and ran towards the cemetery. The family members ran out of the house in panic; however, some were too late, as shouting and the clang of arms began. Among those in the house was Milka Crnobrnja, born in 1922, who had recently got married to Veljko Crnobrnja, at the age of 19. Today she is a very vigorous and bright elderly woman, who remembers all the details of what happened inside and outside the house that day.

In front of the house, the Ustashas immediately separated Gavro and Rade Crnobrnja, Simo Bašić, who just happened to be there, and Mladen Crnobrnja, who they had caught on the road. When they saw that Todor had escaped, one group of the Ustashas went to search the other houses of the Crnobrnja family. They soon found and brought Milan Crnobrnja, Trivuna's husband, while the rest of the family members were already hiding outside their houses.

The Ustashas forced all the men into the house and locked them up in a room, while the others were ordered to lie on the ground wherever they were at the moment. When they got into the room, an Ustasha walked in after them, a gun in his hand. He noticed the watch Gavro Crnobrnja had around his wrist and ordered him to take it off. While taking off the watch and giving it to the Ustasha, Gavro seized his chance, grabbed the Ustasha's gun and started to fight him. While

struggling with the Ustasha, the bayonet cut his face a bit; still, he managed to push the Ustasha away, take his rifle and jump out of the window, which had been open since Todor's escape. Jumping over the fence in the backyard, the rifle strap got stuck to a pole but the Ustashes had already started to shoot at him so he dropped the rifle and ran across the garden and into the forest.

When the Ustashes rushed into the room, Milka remembers, shooting and screaming started. When all that stopped, the Ustashes came out of the house and then women and children started to cry. Milka was the first to get up on her feet and open the room door. The room was crowded with blood and corpses. Mladen Crnobrnja was lying in a pool of blood and Rade was lying dead under the bed, where he had probably tried to hide. Leaning against the wall, Milan Crnobrnja was sitting on the bed, dead and mutilated; his arm had been cut off and blood was gushing from all the wounds. After the war, people used to say it must have been impossible to kill Milan with a gun, which is why the Ustashes stabbed him to death. Simo Bašić was found dead behind the house afterwards, because he had also jumped through the window hoping to escape.

After Todor had escaped, he came to an old cemetery, hid behind a tombstone, and watched what was going on at his house. When he saw that the Ustashes were going to take away his wife and children, he shouted:

- O Islam, don't touch my family, I'm still alive and I'll take revenge on you, sooner or later! I'll destroy even the ashes from your hearth!

The Ustashes started to shoot at him but he was protected by the tombstones. Then Islam shouted:

- Hey Todor, wait for us there at the cemetery, let's make a deal.

- I don't make deals with murderers – answered Todor and escaped to the forest.

Then the Ustashes left and did not harass women and children any more.

An armoured train sowing death

On 3rd August, the following day, an armoured train from Prijedor stopped at the Usorci station. A group of Ustashas got off it.

They found Mile and Jevto Majkić, Trivo Stojanović and Drago Gončin in Mile Majkić's house, which housed the grocery store. They soon brought Boško Brkić out of his house, which stood right next to the railway.

The Ustashas lined them up on the river bank, right next to the water. The only thing to be heard was the command "Fire!"

Drago Gončin jumped into the water as soon as he heard the command, while the others fell into the river as they shot with bullets. The Ustashas kept shooting at the floating corpses. Unharmed, Drago managed to get hold of some branches and slip under the bank directly beneath the Ustashas. The bank was quite steep with some branches over it so the Ustashas were unable to spot him. Soon he heard one of the Ustashas saying:

- I can't see the damned one with the hat!

- Look, there's his hat floating down the river, he must have gone down before it - said another Ustasha.

It was Drago's hat. When the train left, Drago came out of the water and, out of fear, ran away from the railway as far as possible. Drago also told this story to the author of this text, and the whole story was confirmed by Milan Brkić, a grandson of Boško Brkić, who had been shot.

The same day around noon, a group of Ustashas from village Trnova, led by Nezir Kamenčić, were seen walking along the railway; they were coming towards Džaja's mill, which stood at the very entrance to the village of Usorci. They were noticed by Blagoje Džaja, who was accidentally in front of the mill. He quickly ran away and hid in the bushes, near the Sana River bank. The Ustashas soon came and caught Milica Damjanović and Đurđe Zorić in the mill and took them to Džaja's family houses. Another group of Ustashas had already caught Lazar Džaja at home and killed him next to the house. They got separated there – one group took Milica and Đurđe uphill towards the hamlets of Vasiljevići

and Vujkovići, while the other group went down along the railway towards the hamlet of Brkići.

The Ustahas did not find any men in Brkići and Majkići due to the events of just a few hours before. They only found the old Pero Brkić, a paralytic, lying in his bed. They carried him out in a sheet and took him to the railway intersection, where they killed him.

Everybody had fled before the group that went uphill reached the village, so they found nobody there, and after reaching the end of Varda hill together with Milica and Đurđe, they let them go back home.

The same memories of this event were shared by Đordo Damjanović, Milica's son, and Milan Brkić, a grandson of Boško, who was killed at the station and was a great-grandson of Pero, the old paralytic.

The endless tragedies that took place in Usora

In the spring of 1942, strong Ustasha forces advanced along the right bank of the Sana River up to Sanski Most, burning Serbian houses and arresting Serbs on their way. As they entered Usorci, a large number of plunderers from Trnova came following them. Terror-stricken and in a state of panic, the villagers of Usorci fled to Prijedor and in the direction right of Gomjenica to seek refuge on the Kozara Mountain, in an area under the control of the Partisans.

Village Usorci was plundered, burned and totally destroyed. When they returned several months later, they found their houses burnt; not even a single chicken was alive.

Thirty-eight members of the National Liberation Army from Usorci died fighting in the Second World War.

Only 50 years later, the monster reared its head again, threatening to destroy every Serbian soul. The grandchildren of the people from Usorci who were killed in 1941 took up arms to defend the Serbs and the Republic of Srpska. Five of the grandsons of the killed Usora villagers gave their lives during the 1992 – 1995 Patriotic-Defensive War.

Marko and Ostoja Plavšić, Ostoja Gončin and Boško Brkić, who had been named after their killed grandfathers, also died. Mirko Mikan, a grandson of Vaso Mikan, who had been killed in Sasina, died as well.

In the Patriotic-Defensive War, sixteen young people from Usorac built their lives in the foundations of the Republic of Srpska.

Dear God, will the Usora tragedies ever end?

Duro Trkulja

THREE WAR STORIES FROM KORČANICA ON THE GRMEČ MOUNTAIN

From 1979 to the beginning of the 1992 Civil War, the Korčanica Memorial Area was visited by over half a million visitors from all over the former Yugoslavia, as well as by foreign visitors. It is an honour and pleasure for me to have worked for ten years as a curator, historian and researcher in the Korčanica Memorial Area, which was recognised as an institution of special interest for the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and as such existed within the so-called Self-Governing Community of Interest for Cultural, Historical and Natural Heritage of Bosnia and Herzegovina until 1992.

All the visitors I met were greatly impressed by this locality, its historical importance and the beauty and splendour of the picturesque landscapes of the Grmeč Mountain. For that reason, they would return many times to this oasis of Nature's beauty to enjoy its enchanting magnificence. I talked with many of those who survived the atrocities in Grmeč about their most striking experiences from that period. I used to tape their stories so I gradually created a rich audio archive, which was an integral part of a memorial room with more than 2000 exhibits. Unfortunately, all those priceless items were destroyed during the last war. The only things which have remained are sad memories, an eerie ruin and the walls of the building where that treasure was kept as a silent witness of the fatality of war and human madness it produces.

Fortunately, what has also remained is a diary of reminiscences, still ingrained on my mind, which I sentimentally leaf through; writing these lines, I strive to preserve those reminiscences from the mighty streams

of oblivion. Out of the numerous encounters, I separate three particularly striking ones.

Story one

One beautiful spring day, after the Grmeč Mountain had already cast away its winter shroud and put on its leafy green clothes, adorned with colourful fragrant flowers, where hard-working bees and birds were performing their concert, a car stopped in front of the museum. Aided by his carer, a man in a wheelchair came out of the car. This detail as well as his physiognomy of a sixty-year-old mountain man, gave me the impression that he was a war invalid, probably one of the witnesses of the Grmeč events. I approached him, introduced myself and offered my assistance as a curator. His wrinkled face, which clearly showed traces of his rough past, lit up with a warm smile as if he had met up somebody very close, which is a general feature of the Krajina people, who express their heartfelt closeness even during the first contact, making the interlocutor free to communicate.

When I introduced myself, he said cheerfully: “Hello, countryman! I am Simo Knežević aka Dika Električka [Dika the Electricity, translator’s note]. I got this nickname right here, in Korčanica, in 1942. This is my first time here after the war; I have wanted to visit this place, which I have so many memories of, before I die. So please, tell me what I can see here today.”

As a curator, I had been involved in the research concerning the place and the historical events there, and was delighted to have a witness of the Grmeč war reality, an authentic source of historical data. My happiness was even greater when I noticed at first sight that he liked and wanted to talk, was a man of cheerful disposition, and also one who could spin a yarn.

First, I showed him the memorial room. Impressed by the exhibition, he said he would also like to contribute to that by presenting a set of tools he had used as a handyman during the construction and maintenance of buildings in Korčanica during the war. I learnt from him that he was a general technician, although with a specialty in electrical engineering. He was the chief designer and contractor during the installation of a power station powered by a steam locomotive, which was the

main power source of all lighting facilities in that locality. Apart from powering the local hospital, it was also used to power a steam mill where grain from many Grmeč silos was milled and bread baked for the needs of the hospital and soldiers. It was him, Simo Knežević, a man from Drvar and member of the resistance movement since 1941, who had masterminded all those operations. Back in the day, he had proved his skill with electricity and had rightfully earned both the admiration of his associates and his nickname, Dika the Electricity; for many people that was the only name he ever went by.

After I showed the Memorial Area to the dear guest and made him familiar in detail with all the memorial items and their symbolism, we continued our conversation over a glass of Grmeč slivovitz [plum brandy, translator's note], with a tape recorder turned on. Feeling cheered up, Dika Električka told stories one after another, spinning his yarn, with occasional jokes to assuage the bitterness of the reality of war.

One particular detail remained engraved in my memory, like a burr sticking to one's clothes; from then onwards, I regularly told it as a highlight of the historical lectures I gave to our visitors. It was about the activities organised by the Podgrmeč pioneers during the construction of the hospital and supporting facilities in 1942. The major problem was the lack of nails. That critical building material was not easy to procure, given the circumstances. The pioneers managed to solve the problem in a very resourceful way. Organised in units, they would go from one burnt house to another, a large number of which remained after occasional Ustasha intrusions into this free territory during 1941. They would patiently search the ash and collect charred nails, which had remained after the houses were burnt; they would straighten them with a hammer on a flat stone, put them into small colourful hand-woven bags and take them to handimen in Korčanica. Apart from nails, they often picked wild strawberries and other fruit for the wounded soldiers from the abundance of Podgrmeč orchards. This story was the most engrossing for the visitors, making a lot of them cry.

As we were saying goodbye to each other, I promised Dika Električka, at his request, to visit him at his home in Prijedor, which I did later,

once again feeling exhilarated to hear stories about his adventures during the war. He was not able to give me the promised set of tools as his family wanted to keep it as a family memento, which did not change my impression about their generous hospitality.

Story two

Another remarkably touching meeting was that with Ljubica Todrović, who was a nurse in Korčanica during the war. This elderly lady, traces of the war noticeable in her physiognomy and psyche, could not resist her strong desire to visit Korčanica, although her health was rather fragile for something like that.

- I firmly decided to make this visit, even if that meant dying right away – she told me before we reached the monument, the place where the hospital used to be. When we got to the monument, she suddenly stopped and started to tremble. Her eyes stared at the flower nipped in the bud and its inside, which represented a warm motherly bosom. Suddenly, like a torrential rain, huge tears ran down her pale face, accompanied by a loud bitter cry. Ljubica was so overwhelmed that she could not say a single word. Since I had heard she had a weak heart and bad nerves, I was scared she might suffer a heart attack or a stroke. I held her on and slowly escorted her to the nearest bench in the park, not far away from the monument. One of our maintenance workers was nearby, so I asked him to run for a glass of water and a cube of sugar from the administrative building. Refreshed with cold mountain water from a Korčanica spring and calmed with the sedative she took from her purse, Ljubica pulled herself together and, after a long silence, started to talk.

- Although I mentally prepared for this visit for a long time, I can't bear it. The feelings are stronger than my reason and the awareness that too much excitement could be fatal for me. Like in a film, horrible scenes from the period I worked in the hospital started to reappear. After being wounded, those big, strong, young men – Partisans full of strength they were – were brought to hospital, often without their legs or arms, with holes in their stomach through which you could see their guts. I thought of each of them as my brothers, looking after them and feeling their horrible pains with a sisterly love. My most difficult mo-

ments were when surgeons had to amputate parts of their bodies without an anaesthetic because there wasn't any in the hospital. The only anaesthesia was the Grmeč slivovitz, which we, fortunately, had in large amounts, as the locals used to bring it together with food and other things. After taking some slivovitz, some of the bravest among the wounded soldiers would find the strength to sing a Partisan songs. Their loud singing reverberated the heights of Grmeč, blended with occasional painful wails; we, the nurses, still burst into tears watching these scenes. However, that was not the most painful thing. The most difficult of all was when these brave young men, who had just started to live and had never even kissed a girl, were dying in our arms. Nevertheless, there were some wonderful moments too. Some of the wounded had a talent for music and played the tamburizza [a small, long-necked string instrument, translator's note], fife or accordion. They got the instruments from Partisan music and dance ensembles, which were very active on the free Podgrmeč territory, then called "Bihaćka Republika" [the Bihać Republic]. They would often organise entertaining programmes for the wounded soldiers, who would practically forget the war at such moments. They would sing and dance and, secretly, since it was forbidden for it to take place publicly, an occasional spark of youthful love would flare. Such was life in this small Partisan town, which was our term of endearment, because regarding the number of facilities and the variety of social, military, political, sanitary, economic, and craftsmanship activities, that territory really deserved to be called a town. As I recalled all that, I became overwhelmed and couldn't resist crying. I have feelings of sorrow for so many young people who rest in these graves here, among these centennial fir and spruce trees, these silent witnesses of the glorious, epic fight for liberation in the Grmeč area, mixed with feelings of happiness because all that is commemorated in such a wonderful and dignified way. I wouldn't regret dying now as I have fulfilled the wish of my life – concluded Ljubica Todorović, the brave Partisan nurse from village Koprivne near Sanski Most, who resided in Zenica at the time.

Story three

The third hero of these stories is the now late Dane Miljuš, from the village of Miljevci, a colonel of the Yugoslav People's Army, who lived in

Split. However, nostalgia for his homeland was too strong so after retirement he decided to swap the busy city life for a calm and quiet life on the slopes of his beloved Mount Grmeč, in Lušci Palanka, where he built a family home and spent the rest of his life. We were first-door neighbours, but much closer, like true friends. His rich life experience, but mostly the purity of his highland character, earned him my deepest respect and shared with me his considerable and invaluable experience.

As a mature young man, he joined the National Liberation War on the very first day of the uprising in Podgrmeč, and was rightfully awarded a Partisan Commemorative Medal 1941. In addition to his many positive qualities, modesty was his greatest virtue. He did not like talking about his accomplishments in the war, which he did not have to, because his comrades talked about them quite often and writers put them into books, preserved as morals for the generations to come. Since he was a gunner during his regular military service, which he completed before the war, he put himself at the disposal of the liberation movement and, after the first canons were captured from the enemy in Prijedor in 1942, he formed the First Partisan Artillery Division and became its commanding officer. As the National Liberation Fight grew, the First Artillery Brigade was formed, with Dane as its first commanding officer; this brigade helped conquer the enemy strongholds in many towns and cities. When the war ended, he had already been given many medals; he graduated from the High Military Academy and became a true expert, one of the most famous and most appreciated artillery officers of the Yugoslav People's Army. He reached the rank of commanding artillery officer for the Sarajevo military area, the largest one in Bosnia and Herzegovina at the time. Dane was captivated by Korčanica, by the many memories of the war and time spent there. The headquarters of his artillery division was located there during 1942 until the Fourth Enemy Offensive. At that place, within the memorial complex, a canon was set up, a war trophy and museum exhibit dedicated to the memory of the mentioned division. That was why he was a frequent guest at Korčanica, which helped me a great deal in my curatorial work. Although greatly held back by his principles of modesty, he could not resist my friendly persuasion to tape his story about his war odyssey, which was one of the jewels in my audio archive.

One episode from that impressive story especially deserves to be told. The style of his storytelling easy and likeable, easily recognised and associated with anyone from Mount Grmeč, his tone serious, as befitting the nature of the events recounted, he spun his yarn, frequently broken by fits of chronic asthma ripping his chest.

- This happened during January 1943, at the time of the Grmeč Offensive. The Germans fierce infantry attacks were aided by airplanes; the air raids went on forever, targeting primarily the Grmeč hospitals and its facilities, in order to cut the supply of Partisan units with food, weapons and medical supplies, and to drive them into a tight circle on the snowbound Grmeč Mountain, and eventually destroy them, along with thousands of wounded people and refugees. Also, to the Germans' advantage, the winter was very harsh, with snow up to two meters deep and temperatures dropping to minus 30 degrees. Due to such weather conditions, the offensive was given a special name and was known among the people as THE WHITE OFFENSIVE, and described in The Grmeč White Nights. Our forces were ordered to break through the Grmeč Mountain to Bosanski Petrovac, get hold of the wounded, join the hospital of the Supreme Headquarters, which was located in that area, and continue the journey over the Šator Mountain towards the Neretva River. Weary from constantly hiding and fleeing German planes (locally known as "pikes"), which produced eerie, frightening sounds and made blood run cold, some soldiers began to experience hallucinations, since they were without any food or water, scantily clothed, and forced to tread through deep snow. They imagined the trees to be warm houses, and approached them with bowls in their hands to get some food. Some of them even removed their greatcoats, spread them under trees and lay down, imagining they were lying down next to a fire. Being delirious, some started suspecting they had been betrayed by those who were at the head of the column and were being taken straight to the enemy. The people leading the column were locals, and they were the only ones familiar with the Grmeč wilderness. During such moments of obsessive doubt, individuals even shot at their comrades. It became a real nightmare and the situation seemed hopeless.

The soldiers suffering this ordeal were mostly from the Second and Third Krajina Brigade. Owing to the composure of the brigade commanders, especially one of them, Đurin Predojević, who the soldiers

trusted immensely, the units consolidated and eventually broke out of the enemy encirclement, making it a superhuman effort.

My artillery division was not evacuated at that time because of the harsh weather conditions, and for the protection of our troops. Only later, upon an order that came from Kosta Nađ, the commander of the Operations Staff for Bosanska Krajina, I was supposed to drive the canons across the Grmeč peaks. For this very complex operation we mobilised dozens of pairs of ox-drawn carts from Podgrmeč villages in order to go up a very steep slope. The drama lasted for hours, but the slope could not be overcome. Both the men and the oxen were completely exhausted. Then, commander Nađ came and, after he had seen the efforts we were putting in, he told me to stop the activities and not to put any further strain on the troops because he estimated that we would not be able to succeed. I replied in a military manner: "Comrade Commander, I have already received your order to get the canons over Mount Grmeč and I will not quit on that order. Therefore, I will disobey your second order and abide by your first order. Only when I conclude that I cannot execute the first order will I proceed by the second one."

It was the first time in my military career that I refused an order from a superior officer. Kosta Nađ had fought in the Spanish civil war and was a very sensible, humane and experienced officer, so he did not reprimand me, when he could even have punished me, but rather calmly addressed me: "If you feel you can do it, try again, but you also have my permission to give up."

"Yes, sir, Comrade Commander!" I curtly replied, satisfied he did not insist on his second order. I was not able to accept failure. Our highlander perseverance and determination, as well as resourcefulness, were fully shown. Some of the soldiers in my division, who had worked in the forests before the war, remembered there should be a winch at the top of the slope, which was used to pull logs to the forest railway line that was close by and was used to transport logs to sawmills. The presumption proved to be true. We found the winch and used it to pull the canons to the top, one by one. After that, it went much more easily with the help of the ox-drawn carts, over the Grmeč Mountain and to our destination.

After this event, on our next encounter, Commander Nad praised my division for the success in doing something that had seemed unattainable to him. I always had that case in mind during my military and officer career. I always appreciated any initiative coming from my subordinates, not adhering to the rigid rule that only superior officers' orders are productive, as one man alone is never clever enough. You should always hear the opinions and suggestions of other people and then analytically come to a solution for any problem in life – Dane Miljuš, an eloquent and wise man from whom I received many valuable life lessons, ended his instructive story.



WITNESS
ACCOUNTS

Professor Vladimir Lukić

CRIMES NOT FORGOTTEN

The peaceful and hard-working residents of the village Dabar, or rather the hamlet Brajića Tavan, practically had no problems until the war mobilisation in 1941. Brajića Tavan is located on a beautiful plateau above the Dabar River, that is, Dabar Springs, next to which is the large and beautiful Dabar cave, with numerous cave decorations and hollows that are home to a variety of birds. That is where shepherds took shelter with their herds during summer heat and storms. The village had very good family and neighbourly relationships; in the true sense of the word, the villagers had good interpersonal relationships. It can be said that the people of Brajića Tavan lived very well for the period. Brajića Tavan is lined by the Dabar River to the east and partly to the south, and further west by quite a spacious area called Dol, lying a few hundred metres below the level of the hamlet.

Nikola Lukić, my father, was mobilised like many other men from Dabar and the surrounding area. After the fall of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, soldiers in uniforms of the Yugoslav army but without weapons, began to pass through our village. We waited for our father's return for a long time and to our great satisfaction and joy, he also appeared in military uniform. He told us that he and his two companions had been disarmed in Slavonia and confined within the perimeter of some military barracks enclosed by wire. When an air strike on the barracks happened, he asked his friends to go over the wire but they told him they would get killed. My father replied that all of them would certainly be killed if they did not escape, after which they went over the wire and, fleeing across the Slavonian fields, reached the Sava River, close to Gradiška, crossed the river by boat and went up the Kozara Mountain. After that they descended to the Sana River to the south of Prijedor and then went through Serbian villages to Brajića Tavan, my father's birthplace.

As soon as he arrived home he said: "There's going to be a war and we will have to fight!" Straight away he bought a new carbine for 1,000 dinars; that carbine and another one found in the village, belonging to Vico Brajić, saved the lives of many people from Brajića Tavan and Dabar. Also, one night, the two carbines had a crucial role in preventing the entire population of Brajića Tavan from being taken to Sanski Most and baptised; instead, the people went to the Mriježnica Mountain. Sadly, many of those from the neighbouring villages and hamlets who agreed to leave to be baptised that night did not return to their homes.

Those were days and months of peril for Serbs. A speech by the military official Viktor Gutić was a truly bloodthirsty call to annihilate the Serbs. After that came forced labour, looting, arrests and the killing of the most prominent Serbs (Vidović brothers, gendarme Vezmar and so on) and Jews. They began with mass arrests in villages (Podlug, Kruhari, Kijevo, Čaplje, Tomina, Kljevci, Krkojevci, Zdena and many other villages). In Sanski Most, prisons, schools, storerooms, grain storage and other spaces were filled with innocent Serbs.

In late July, a mass slaughter began at Šušnjar near Sanski Most, where about 5,500 Serbs and about 50 Jews were killed, while the peak of the carnage happened, not coincidentally, on Saint Elijah Day, 2nd August 1941. My peers I were watching and listening to this massacre day and night from the highest hills above Krkojevci, and I was only eight years and four months old. Innocent victims were massacred around the clock by Croat and Muslim villains. We got some actual information on the manner of torture and killing, killing tools, as well as many crimes and other details from our neighbour Jovan Starčević, who was not wounded but fell into a large grave. He managed to get out of the grave; the same night he reached the Sana River, swam across and got to Brajića Tavan. The atrocities, torture, beatings and executions which Jovan described cannot be forgotten. In addition to Šušnjari, other places of execution were initiated: Stočna pijaca, Vrponje, Čaplje, Stari Majdan. In other words, there were no villages in the Sanski Most municipality without places of execution, whether small or large.

Horrible news reached the village every day. In the meantime, my father had learned that one Muslim (Kenjar... of course, a villain) took away Jeka Trivić, his sister, Jovo Trivić, her husband, and Dušan, their

son (about 20 years old), to be executed. He found out everything about this villain. As fate would have it, in the winter of 1941, Mile Borovnica, my father's comrade, from Miloš Perišić's platoon, intercepted a sled in Kljevci, on which was the villain's wife and their five or six children. My father was thus given the opportunity to revenge the deaths of his sister, brother-in-law and nephew, who he loved immensely. Not only did Nikola Lukić, my father, not want to take revenge, but he also prohibited others to do that for him. Given the fact that this act caused many discussions, often very conflicting, and even minor quarrels, my father's decision still arouses admiration in me. I do not think there are Serbs from any village or town that have not lost a close or distant relative in the mentioned places of execution.

The crimes in Sanski Most and around it led to a massive uprising of the Serbs in the whole Podgrmeč area. The rebels prevented the villains from going around the villages without danger to their lives. Due to frequent attacks, many people from Donji Dabar, as well as Brajića Tavan, fled to the mountains Mriježnica, Gradina, and also to Gornji Dabar – Perišići, Crnomarkovići, Miljevići, Crnovoda, Jelašinovci, Lušci Palanka and so on. The people of Brajića Tavan repeatedly fled to almost all of the mentioned places. All that fleeing lasted until 26th June 1942, when strong enemy forces burned Brajića Tavan to the ground. Houses and other buildings made of stone were torn down and the stone taken away to the highest elevations north of the village, for the construction of bunkers and trenches, east to the confluence of the Dabar River and Sana and to the highest elevations toward Đedovača, and also further to the west. That was a day like any other, and we the children, shepherds, competed who would get their livestock to pasture first. As soon as we drove the livestock to Škarić Glavica, and it was very early in the morning, we noticed two men galloping from Krkojevci over Brajića Hill towards the village. When they reached the first houses, people began to flee towards the Dabar Springs with unthinkable noise and shouting: "Run!" We heard the call to run away, and we already knew the direction of our escape – the livestock was to be taken to Dabar, that is, Dabar cave.

Since my mother, Dragica Lukić, had a baby in the cradle, I decided to go back home to find her and help her. Luckily, our house was on the edge of the village. At that moment, I was the only one heading from the

Dabar cave in the opposite direction of the movement of flight – towards the house, regardless of the fact many neighbours informed me that the entire village had fled, including my mother. I did not know that she had fled to Vilender (a slope lying between the village and the Dabar River) with two neighbours and taken refuge in a gully, which protected them from the shells falling around them. Ceaseless explosions petrified my little sister and even though our mother constantly protected and covered her, she died several months later. I barely made my way to the house through the large crowd of fleeing people, animals and carts. What made the panic worse was the heavy artillery shelling the roads, the Dabar valley and the front area of the springs and caves, where the enemy supposed the people were taking refuge. In front of the village, I met Živka Lukić, perhaps the last person I saw; this cousin of mine, still a little girl, had had her palm shot through with a bullet.

My house was completely empty, and after I made certain that my mother had escaped with the baby, I went back the same way. Above Crkvina, on the road, I found Stevo Lukić, a cousin of mine (born in 1939), in a large crowd of mostly children, adults and livestock; he was holding on to a stone at the side of the road. I ran over to him because I was afraid the livestock might trample him. I put Stevo on my back and went downhill to Miljuša Luka (about 1 km), and then uphill on a winding, mostly dirt road (about 3 km), walking slouched rather than upright, going beyond the edges of the trodden path, and in many places crawling because most of the road was under heavy fire. The road took me to the house of my uncle Ostoja Šušnica and my grandmother Joka. Stevo was practically taken off me; Savka, my older sister, and Anka, my younger sister, arrived shortly after (Savka was born in 1926 and Anka in 1936). My grandmother asked me many questions, especially about my mother and the baby, but I did not know what had happened to them. Even though night approached, at dusk, I arrived again in front of the Dabar cave, or rather at the Dabar Springs. To my great joy, which did not last long, I found my mother, aunt Ljubosava and uncle Obrad. When I told them that I had carried Stevo to Šušnice and that he was now at grandmother Joka's, my mother, aunt and uncle went beyond themselves with joy. My mother immediately started to feed me kaymak and bread from a copper pot, because I had had nothing to eat all day, but I must admit that not even once had I thought about food. As soon

as I started to eat, and there were dozens of people from Brajića Tavan, perhaps mostly women and children, a grenade came down and fell near the Dabar spring, close to a group of people from Brajića Tavan; fortunately, it landed in shallow water and sand. My mother shouted to my uncle: "Brother, I've been hit!" She got wounded; a piece of shrapnel hit her in the back, in the direction of the heart.

The shell explosion got us moving immediately, under the cover of the night, despite the severe shelling, whose intensity often changed. Considering I had already taken that road while it was still daytime, I was told to go first. My mother and I continuously and quietly called out to each other; my aunt Ljubosava was also with us, and along with the others we formed a large crawling line. Our retreat lasted almost until dawn. Under the cover of the night, uncle Obrad and several other people drove a large number of livestock, among which was our own cow and horse. Nobody was sleeping when we arrived at my uncle's house (Ostoja Šušnica); everybody was waiting for us. Their biggest concern was my mother. Only she and God knew how she had endured the retreat, which meant stopping and going, lying down and standing up, bending down and crawling; although she was wounded, she had carried the baby the entire way, which meant a climb of over three kilometres.

As soon as it dawned, it was clear that we are within range of the artillery shelling at us from Brajića Tavan and that we had to move away from my uncle's house. At dawn, the escapees began to disperse in different directions; together with many other people from Brajića Tavan, we headed to Crnovoda, to Dušan Kragulj's house, a comrade of my father's, which was about four kilometres away. We were given a small wooden building in which four or five family members could lie down. Everybody was terrified, the youngest child as well as the oldest person. When we went to sleep, my mother lay down beside me with the baby and, although wounded, she kept an axe under her head. That image has been with me my entire life.

In the meantime, my father came from the Sixth Krajiška Brigade, which was located in the direction of Krupa. He brought a large military tent, in which a few families settled. The next day, he took my mother on a horse to hospital in Korčanica for treatment, where they removed

the shrapnel that almost reached her heart; her wounds were now properly taken care of for the first time. The following day, my father took us from Crnovoda to Sanička Rijeka, to the house of Bogdan and Pepa (Petra) Babić, at the foot of Medija Brdo, on the recommendation of his fellow soldier Stevan Babić, Pepa and Bogdan's younger brother. There were a lot of children and young people of all ages in their house and we really nicely fit in with these two families that lived as if they were one. In July, I saw some bullfights on Medije Brdo, and I also met some of the organisers, such as Cvijeta Babić and Lazija Stanić, who raised fighting bulls.

Despite fearing that we might be attacked by the enemy from Sanica and Ključ, it can be said that we mostly lived peacefully, almost like in time of peace, until the month of February 1943. The only sad event was the death of my grandmother Joka. My mother went to her funeral. In fact, on 11th February 1943, if I can remember correctly, a column of our soldiers, the size of a large company, went over Zavolj. We, the little shepherds, did not even notice that one soldier had left the column and come round to the Babić house. That man was my father. He just said to my mother: "Dragica, an offensive is coming and we are heading out to fight them – take care of the children!"

The following day at dawn, we started across Medije Brdo and went over the Kosa Mountain, without really knowing where we were going or had best go. As soon as we came to Kosa, my mother took off my clothes made of tent canvas and left them in a hollow beech tree; I continued walking in linen pants and a woollen vest, and it was through a heavy snowfall. When we arrived at a forest intersection where the road split into two, one of which led to the middle of Crnovoda, rather to Pilipovići across Mriježnica, and the other, turning left, towards Pezići (Mijatići), where more than 210 people, mostly women, children and helpless elderly people, were to be killed, my mother turned to me and asked: "Vlade, where shall we go?" I said that we should go to grandmother's house. My mother took my advice, so we did not end up in the massacre in Pezići. We went over the Kosa Mountain and got to the middle of Crnovoda. I led the cow, while my older sister led the horse. Our mother went behind us with our younger sister. We went far ahead of mother and sister and headed up the hill towards the Čukanović houses. When we had climbed half of the hill, we met a lot of fleeing

people. Among them was a neighbour of ours, Vid Brajić, who told us to go back because there were troops following them. We returned to the bottom of Crnovoda, to the crossroads, where we had already been fired upon by artillery from Pezić Plećina, which we were able to see. A shell flew over us and fell in the valley, upon which the horse got startled and threw off his load. Thanks to Vid Brajić and some other people, the pack saddle with the luggage was placed on the horse again, and we were able to continue down Crnovoda towards Čelići.

After one kilometer, Kuzman Vajagić (Reljić) met us and invited my mother and the rest of us to descend into a deep valley where his entire family were situated. My mother thanked him and the four of us continued with our horse and cow. However, my younger sister fell into the snow and shouted she could not move on, after which my mother started to cry. My mother and I went back and picked her up. My mother pulled out a bone of some sort and gave it to her to nibble on. My older sister led both the cow and the horse; as it later turned out, it was fortunate that I decided to take the horse from her then. After a few kilometres, we came across some mountain cabins, which we called huts. There were people lying outside these huts. Women, children, mostly typhus patients, the sick, wounded and helpless, all taken out not to burn up, because there was no one to carry them. As soon as we had got past these wretched people, we came to some huge oak-trees; at that moment, an enemy plane came and started circling above us, almost touching the canopies of the oak-trees that camouflaged us. While the plane circled, the horse that I was leading did not drag me but actually tossed me around; still, I did not let go of it. Our entire luggage was on it (blankets and some food). My sister failed to keep hold of the cow and it ran off. The army chased it off with the other animals. In that chaos, we were joined by the wife of Nikola Nebesilović (Vučković), a fallen soldier, and her two small children. She carried one child and led the other one by the hand.

My mother decided not to continue to Čelići, but rather turned left to some deep valleys, which she knew well. The enemy column that had killed the people at the Čukanović houses was moving along the road across Mriježnica, above the Kragulj house, in the direction of Čelići; we went behind them, through the woods, watched the column as it advanced. Despite the deep snow and dusk, we went down into a valley;

my mother took the axe we carried on horseback, cleared the snow, chopped some wood and started a fire, which basically saved us. We had something to eat, covered ourselves with what we had, sharing everything with the woman who had joined us and her two children. and her children.

When daylight came, my mother went to scout the surroundings. She met Kuzman Vajagić, who had called us to go down into a deep valley, to join his family. He was carrying a pickaxe and shovel. He asked my mother: "Dragica, are your children alive?" My mother responded that we were, to which he told her: "Go to your children, I am going to bury all my nineteen family members, who were killed in the valley below." After this encounter, which our mother told us about, we started pulling out of the valley where we had spent the night, not knowing the snow was over half a meter deep. When we got onto the road which the enemy column took to come down Mriježnica, headed for Vrpolje, the woman with two small children went left, and we took the Mriježnica road above Dušan Kragulj's house, above the Čukanović houses, over Mriježnica and to my uncle Ostoja Šušnica's house. We started in the morning, probably around ten o'clock, and reached my uncle's house in the evening, between nine and ten. Normally, it is a seven-kilometre trip but how long it took us that time is a clear indication how difficult it was for us to move. While walking above the Čukanović houses, we saw dead bodies in the snow, outside a wooden fence, on it and under it. I will never forget those human corpses in the snow.

As we were walking down a path on the Lisina Mountain, we came across a large gully, and then another accident happened to us. The horse stumbled and almost fell into the gully. The three of us could hardly hold the horse. It was only when I lay down next to it – it was lying on its stomach – that I managed to pull its leg and place it on some solid ground, after which it was able to stand up, of course with the help of the three of us. We were happy again to have saved it, because it had also saved us.

The arrival at my uncle's house brought us immense joy and happiness. The first thing my mother did was heat some water for us to take a bath and go to bed. I remember well that she woke me up in the middle of the night, and gave me a glass of brandy to drink; rather, she poured

it down my throat. The following day, when we woke up, we were worried about whether father was alive, because we had heard his company had fought the enemy on the hill Smršnjak all day. When Vid Brajić told him that he had seen the four of us in Crnovoda and had sent us away from the Čukanović houses, where people of all ages had been killed, my father assumed that if we were alive, we had probably gone to my uncle's house. His assumption was correct and he found us alive and well at my uncle's house. Seeing our father Nikola, our joy was complete. We stayed there until the liberation of Sanski Most. I remembered the advice my father had given my mother, repeating it several times: "Dragica, do not go into the woods with the kids without an axe or fire (matches)."

The first news we heard there was about the death of some people from Brajića Tavan: Stana, Milan Brajić's wife and their six children had been killed in the offensive, including David, my best friend; the woman and two children lying on Lazo Brajić's chest; Mile Maljuga's wife and daughter... Those horrendous images are forever engraved in one's mind.

Banja Luka, 1st August 2013

Rade Stojanović

THINGS BEYOND DESCRIPTION

Introduction: Rade Stojanović wrote down his life's record in exile, in Prijedor, in May 1997, unaware that his life story would become one of the most authentic testimonies about events during the Second World War. Rade (10th October 1926 - 15th January 2001) was born in Lužani, where he lived until 1959, when he moved to Sanski Most. He and his family spent the following three and a half decades in that town, until his 69th birthday. On that day exactly, along with the rest of the Serbs, he was forced to leave his home. He spent the rest of his life as a refugee in Prijedor, but he was buried in Sanski Most of his own will.

Rade Stojanović's memoirs consist of three parts. In the first part, he describes his origins, his village and the life in it. He also describes the appearance of the houses, the way people dressed and how they made a living. The entire second part, which is the longest, represents memories of the war and Rade's so-called childhood. In the third part, he talks about his family life, starting a family with his wife Anda, née Karanović, and their four children, as well as his career, what his jobs were, where he worked and where and what he did in life. The second part of Rade's story has been adapted for this book of proceedings.

This record was typed on a typewriter, on eight (8) pages in Latin letters. The author left it to his son Dane for the reading and keeping. It is from his son that I received this valuable testimony of past events, as well as permission to publish it. In this way, I publicly thank him for his trust and cooperation.

There are only minimal changes in this version as compared to the original text; no changes have been made to the content or the author's authentic language. The text has been retyped in the Cyrillic script. Some typos have been corrected, including joining or separating words, a consistent use of the ijekavian dialect (in the original both the ekavian

and ijekavian dialects can be found), and some corrections have been made concerning the timeframe. I intentionally left some words misspelt, as representative of the colloquial speech of the area concerned, for the text to have linguistic value. The word order has been changed in some sentences or words complemented with addition given in brackets, for a better understanding of the text. As Rade wrote his memoirs almost 60 years after the event, it is not unusual that he could not recall some details with absolute accuracy; also, some information is partial or is considered less important. The facts that I had information on are given in the footnotes.

Prepared by: Dušanka Marković

When I think of my childhood days, it seems to me that this world came into existence 200 to 300 years ago, although I am aware it has been here since times immemorial. I was led to this conclusion by the fact that during my childhood people lived primitively; they cultivated land with wooden ploughs and subsisted on what they produced. Dishes were made from wood, and those that had to be used to cook food in were usually made of clay... Garments were made from hemp and linen... Shoes were mostly made from cow and sheep hide, the so-called oputnjak, which people used to make themselves... But when I remember that we were under the Ottoman Turks for 500 years, and when I remember the Balkan wars, frequent rebellions and uprisings, as well as the First World War, not to mention the Second World War, and the one that ended just recently, things become somewhat clearer.¹

All children in the world have a childhood to live; some are happy, others not quite so happy. Many things lead to a happy and joyful childhood, like whether you come from a rich or a poor family; whether you have parents or not; whether you are healthy or ill; whether your parents are married or divorced; and also whether you are growing up in peace or war...

¹ The war Rade refers to as the “one that ended recently” is the civil war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1990s.

In order to describe my childhood, I must go back to the life of my parents. My paternal grandfather did not remember his parents. My father did not remember his father, while his mother had a long life. My mother did not remember her mother, while her father had a long life. I lost my father when I was 15 years old. Nutrition was bad and there was little food; to us, it tasted savoury, and we contended for it. On many occasions, we even fought over it. It was food from plants: fruit, vegetables, strawberries, cornel and so on, which we picked, stole and ate. Perhaps, that is why we were healthy. However, back then, women gave birth to many children, the weak died and the healthy ones survived. My mother had nine children, four of whom died and five survived...

...I worked the land with my father. When he went to villages to do craftwork, he often took me along to help him and learn from him. I was glad to go because it was not hard for me, and the food offered to craftsmen was excellent.

Such were my childhood and boyhood days until May 1941. Then, the Second World War started. That year, on 8th May, Germans shot 30 Serb civilians and hung their dead bodies in front of the town hall building in Sanski Most.² Three days later, they were buried in the town cemetery in Šušnjar. My father, Pero, was one of the people who were shot.

After that, hard and difficult days came for our mother and us, the children. Among the executed, there were 7 people from our village, Lužani.³ This might not have been a great loss for our village, which had 37 homes, had not there been for the sad and dark 2nd August 1941.⁴ The Ustashas came to the village of Lužani, rounded up all men aged 18 years and above and took them to the village of Čaplje. They locked them in a storeroom, where they spent the night. The following day, 2nd August, in the afternoon, they tied them in groups of four and took them to Žegar. They were shot and buried at the ponds near the "winding road" in Čaplje. The Serbs from Čaplje and Lužani were shot there.

² Twenty-seven Serbs were shot on that day, 8th May.

³ Nine Serbs from Lužani were shot. Those were Tomo Vrkeš, Veljko Praća, Miloš Delić, Dušan Jovanović, Ilija Milanko, Prole Milanko, Pero Stojanović, Petar Šobot and Ljubomir-Ljupko Šobot.

⁴ In the original text, the author wrote 2nd April by mistake.

Forty-one of the men killed that day came from but one village, that of Lužani.⁵ On the second day, the same Ustashas came to our village and killed another seven women.⁶

After the death of our father, difficult, gloomy days came, especially for our mother. She had to hide us day and night, in the woods, hedges and maize, when it grew tall. Since my sister and I were slightly bigger than the others, on a few occasions she sent us to Kozica and Tramošnja for a few days. That happened when she anticipated serious danger. I believe other mothers did the same, all those whose husbands were executed in May. As I have already mentioned, even more dreary days were coming. On 2nd August, they killed 41 men and 7 women. This left so many fatherless orphans, and some children lost both their parents. Almost every household lost one or two people. In one house, they killed an old woman and her three sons;⁷ in another, they killed a man, his wife and their five adult sons, who had already moved out of their father's house.⁸ Those seven women were shot in the village, at their homes, in front of the children and women who happened to be there. After these dark days and this suffering, mothers and children succumbed to fear, and no one dared stay in the houses, whether by day or night. We hid in hedges, fields of maize and woods.

Three days later, an order came that there would be no more killings, but we could not believe it. We continued to hide. After a while, we were taken to Kijevesko Polje, to Roman Catholic homes, where we continued hiding. Those Catholic families were glad to have us, despite fearing the authorities. While there, we felt a lot freer and more content. Mothers used to sneak up to the houses and bring us food every day. After some time, we started to go back home, where during the day

⁵ On that day, 33 people from Lužani were shot in Žegar, but 7 more died when the Ustashas went through the village looking for men who had not gone to the meeting in Čaplje. Only five survived the execution.

⁶ These events connected with the village of Lužani are described in detail in the text "The Suffering of the People of the Village of Lužani, with a Special Regard to the Child Victims", Dušanka Marković, *Šušnjar 1941, Proceedings – Papers, Testimonies and Documents*, Oštra Luka, 2010, pp. 99-126

⁷ This refers to Marija Milanko and her three sons, Ilija, Prole i Duje.

⁸ This refers to Simeun Šobot, his third wife Jelka Bjelovuk and his five sons, Mile, Petar, Dušan, Ljupko and Kosta.

we fed the livestock and cultivated the crops; we went back to our Catholic host families to spend the nights. We gradually became accustomed to that, so two or three of the mothers would at somebody's house and spend the night, along with a toddler or two. That went on for about two months, if not more. After that, all of us, one by one, began to return home, until we all came back. We can only thank those Roman Catholics for everything they did for us, especially Lovro Banović, his mother Luca and his wife Zorka.

Here, I described the dreary life in the unfortunate year of 1941. There were no more killings for the rest of the year, but we were afraid and occasionally fled and hid at night. In the year 1942, there were no executions, but fear and danger were constantly present. Since Ključ, Petrovac, and Drvar, sometimes Kozica also, were in the Partisan hands, while our region was under the Germans and Ustashas, they often fought and we felt the consequences. Those two years (1941/42) were truly dreary and hard, especially when it came to farming and food. The children were too weak; the mothers were ignorant and too weak to tend to hard agricultural work. We struggled working the land and were rather hungry.

Around 20th October, the Partisans attacked Sanski Most and conquered all the villages up to the Sana River, in the direction of Ključ, but they failed to conquer Sanski Most. The villages of Čaplje, Lužani, Tomina, Kruhari etc. that the Partisans liberated stayed under their control from 20th December 1942 to 17th January 1943. On 17th January 1943, the Germans, Ustashas and Croatian Home Guard started the Fourth Offensive from Sanski Most, intent on breaking through the Partisan lines and reaching Ključ. The Partisans started their retreat to Ključ and the Grmeč Mountain. We, Serbian people, dared not wait for the Germans and Ustashas. We were told to pack and flee. I and my cousin Bogdan, who was one year older than me, were given a single cart and one horse each.⁹ We quickly fetched our horses and harnessed them to the cart, piled up food and some clothes, blankets mostly, because it was a harsh winter. Small children were put on the cart and

⁹ Bogdan Vukmir is Rade Stojanović's cousin (his uncle's lineage). Pero Stojanović, Rade's father, and Mitar Vukmir, Bogdan's grandfather, came from one mother, Mara Vukmir (Stojanović), née Simić.

wrapped in the blankets, and we, the stronger ones, came on foot with our mothers. We tied the cows to the cart and fled. I believe the whole village headed out. We headed out in a column through Tomina and Ilidža and got to Podovi, more precisely, to the school in Podovi. Since the winter was so harsh, we put mothers and children inside the school, while my cousin and I slept on the cart because the school was pack full. I still remember how long that night was because of the cold, fear and uncertainty – we did not know where to move on from that place, where to go.

Our column of refugees had in it over 30 families from Lužani, and we were also joined by some people from Čaplja, Tominjani, as well as from Kruhari and Ilidža, and everyone settled down in Podovi for the night as best they could. Early in the morning, someone informed us that the Germans were coming from Ilidža and that we needed to continue. Those of us who had spent the night at the school went to Sokolovo, while the others, those from the houses, headed to Kozica. The column in front of us was long, and I did not even know how long it was behind us. Upon our arrival at Sokolovo, some time in the afternoon, we scattered all over Donje Sokolovo. We were taken in by a good family living by the Sana River, right at the entrance to Sokolovo. We spent two nights there, 18th and 19th January. The following morning was 20th January, our patron saint's day, St. John's Day. Our mother prepared some food. She took out some bacon, meat and brandy. The host read the prayer, and I, as the oldest male of the Stojanović family, was asked to light the candle and pour everybody some brandy. I did that with a sense of pleasure. In the afternoon, just as we had finished lunch and started to relax, news came that the Germans were moving from Podovi towards Sokolovo. It meant getting ready, packing and fleeing again. We were close to the Sana River and the bridge which we had to cross. When we came to the bridge, a large column had already formed, so we, people from Lužani, scattered, with only 5 or 6 families sticking together in the column. We went through unknown villages. It was pitch dark and incredibly cold. You could not see anything. The livestock roared. The children on the carts cried. Good Lord, it was a terrible sight!

We came to Ramići and headed towards Pudín Han. Next, we reached the road Ključ - Petrovac. The entire column headed towards

Petrovac then. It was not clear who led the column. We came to a road which goes to Gornja Sanica. The column stopped there and it was decided who was going to go where. People started looking for their relatives, neighbours and friends, in order to decide who would go to Petrovac and who would go to Sanica. There, we found our sister, her husband and mother-in-law.¹⁰ Everyone who had any relatives in Petrovac, Drvar or Lika headed to Petrovac. The rest of us went to Gornja Sanica. There was a lot of crying and tears at that leave-taking. We were happy, especially our mother, because our sister and her family decided to join us. As for the other refugees who went to Sanica, there were about ten families from Lužani.

When we left the road leading to Petrovac and turned to Sanica, it was already about 2 o'clock in the afternoon. After one to two kilometres, a German aircraft suddenly came and began to bomb the column of refugees. Those of us who went on foot lay down in the ditches, but the children who were on the carts simply stayed there, because there was no time to get them off the carts. Then the children started to scream, the cows went mooing, the horses neighed, it was horrible. Luckily, it did not last long. The bombing stopped. Fortunately, they overshot the column and no one was hurt. After that, we continued our journey and came to Sanica before nightfall.

As we entered Sanica, we were welcomed by the Sanica town councilmen. They took us to the houses of the Muslims who had fled to escape the Partisans, just as we had escaped from the Germans. My family were all placed together in one house. We settled in the house and put our livestock in the basement. We were there during February and part of March and started to feel at home. We ate the food we had brought with us. Our two families ate together. We were frugal with the food to make it last longer. We ate as much as we were given, not as much as we could, because we received no aid in the form of food. Meanwhile, the Germans occupied Ključ and the area reaching as far as Pudin Han. One morning, at about 5 o'clock, we received the terrible news that we had to pack and move on. Quickly, we got up and got ready. My cousin and I rushed out to prepare the horses and the cart. To our

¹⁰ The author is referring to Dara Šobot, his sister, Simeun, Dara's husband, and Deva Šobot née Simić, her mother-in-law.

great misfortune, someone had stolen our cart that night and driven off with it. We went into the house and told our mothers what had happened. They burst into tears, wailed and cried out loud. In the end, we decided to put the blankets and clothes on the livestock, and top it all with the little food we had left. We would lead the small children by the hand, or sometimes carry them. We agreed that was the way to proceed. We set off to Lušci Palanka. After going through some villages, we got to Zavolj near Medede Brdo. We were stopped there and told we could not continue, because the Germans from Bihać were on their way to Sanski Most and were about to pass through Palanka. As if the the situation was not sad enough, the people now had to hide in the houses around. About ten families stuck as close together as possible; we settled in three houses that stood next to each other. Those were Serbian houses, and we moved in with the families living there. Life was miserable there; we were terror-stricken, and had to fight hunger, lice and other adversities.

The month of March drew to a close. It was obvious spring would soon reach the plains along the Sanica River. For us at the foot of the Grmeč Mountain, as if our troubles were not bad enough, the winter was a harsh one, with snow one metre deep; on the mountain, it was even deeper. In such a situation, we got the news the Germans were moving from Sanica and Lušci Palanka and were about to meet at Zavolj – exactly where we were. Panic struck both the troops and civilians. Our troop retreated from the Sanica and Lušci Palanka areas. Many columns were on their way to the Grmeč Mountain; each one of them looked for a favourable, passable path. The ten families from Lužani, including ours, set off after one Partisan unit so we could also get to Grmeč, but the Partisans did not allow us, arguing that we would die of exhaustion and frostbite in the cold, complete with out livestock and small children. At that time, we did not know what had happened to the other families, or where they had gone.

Since there was no other way, as wretched as we were, we chose to cross Medede Brdo and Čelić Kosa. Whatever God had in store for us, we chose to go across Kljevci to our homes. We had no other option. It took us all day to cross Čelić Kosa and descend to Sjenokose in Čelić. We settled in some shepherds' huts and spent the night there. The next morning, we saw people fleeing from Crnovoda. They said the Germans

were coming, burning houses and killing everyone on the way. We quickly packed our things, crossed Malovani and Kljevci, and went down to Donji Kljevci, to some Roman Catholic houses called the Bakarićes. It was about noon when we sneaked into those houses. Suddenly, someone noticed the Germans coming down the same road we had taken to get there. Someone remembered to put a white flag on the roof. There was a road about a hundred metres above us; it ran to Vrhpolje, and the Germans took it. They did not go past us. Whether it was the white flag that saved us or they simply did not pay attention to us has remained a mystery. Those were the same Germans who came from Jelašinočid, where they had killed people and burned their property.

We spent the night there and rested a little. The next day, we agreed that a group of men should go to Sana and cut down poles close to the railway, in order to make a raft and use the night to cross the Sana River and get to Tomina, to the Vidović houses, which stood next to the river. Since Kljevci was abandoned and there was no one around, we were able to do that without being disturbed. The ones who had gone to make a raft told us, just before nightfall, that everything was ready and that we needed to pack and set out at about 9 o'clock. So we did. First, we got the people and things across the river, then we had to force the livestock into the water; but it swam to the other side easily. We came to the Vidović family, who were still awake. They quickly took us into their houses and put our livestock in their barns, so that we would not be noticed by the Germans, who were located along the road. Fortunately, our journey ended with nobody noticing us.

We spent the night there and set off to Lužani the next day, one little group at a time, taking the livestock with us. We came home without even being asked where we were coming from. We found the houses intact, except that they had been looted and emptied of all their contents.

Let us go back to our flight. Those who had turned to Kozica or had been fortunate enough and stayed in Sokolovo, they all set off for home after exactly 10 days, and those who had gone to Drvar or Lika returned when Sana was liberated. We had chosen the worst route. Fortunately, not one of all those refugees got killed. Only Savka Mijić was killed in Crnovoda, and how she got there I do not know. She was about 16 years

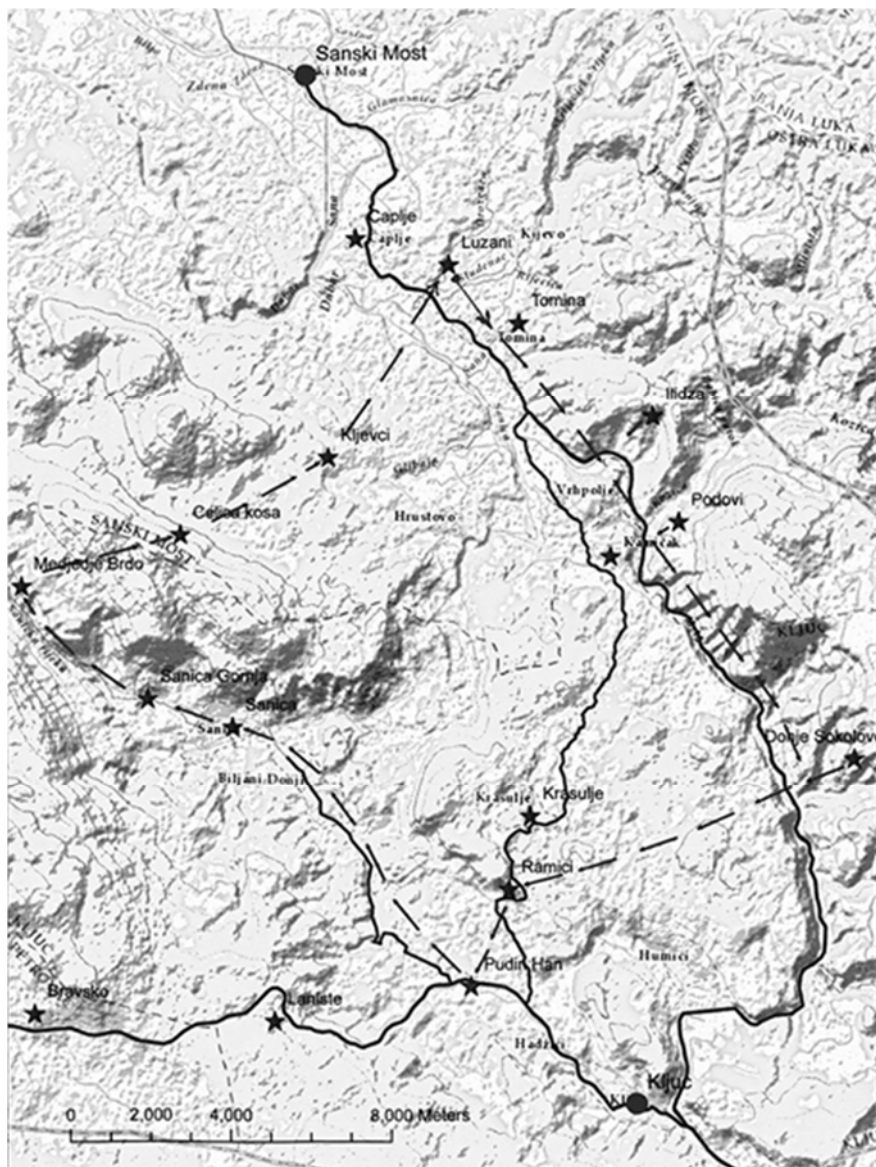
old. Her father, Đurađ, was shot in 1941 and her mother had died before that.¹¹ Many families from Palanka and Jelašinovci went to the Grmeč Mountain; some of them were later found next to some beech trees, where they had frozen to death.

Those families that were fortunate enough to get back home quickly found their houses had not been looted and all their things and grains at home. As for those of us who returned later, we found nothing; my mother and I thus had to go and work in other people's fields for a mere kilo or two of maize. We were also given some for free, that is, we did not have to pay for it. Concerning food, we somehow survived the year of 1943. The political and military situation often saw change of luck; it was volatile beyond description. From March until August, there was frequent fighting between the Partisans and the Germans, right in our area, but we stayed calm and did not flee. Starting in August, the Partisans became stronger and too dangerous for the Germans. The Germans retreated to Sanski Most, so our area became nobody's and everybody's at the same time. Sometimes the Partisans came and sometimes the Germans and Ustashas; it was uncertain what the next day or night would bring. That went on until 20th October 1943.

The Partisans launched an assault on Sanski Most on 19th October and liberated it on 20th October, after which it never fell into the enemy's hands again. Freedom and liberation came on 15th May 1945. I do not know what to say about this long awaited freedom. My generation grew up and matured during those war years. We became young men and women. The children who were small during the war grew up to become boys and girls. The women who had lost their husbands in the war were happy to have kept their children at least. A sense of cheerfulness, joy and youth spread, like nature blossoms in spring. It is beyond my power to describe. One has to experience it. After such a war and the joy of being free again, we could finally return to our private lives and work, as well as courting, falling in love, getting married...

Prijedor, 3rd May 1997

¹¹ The author lists only one person who died in the Fourth Offensive. However, 21 people from Lužani died that winter, of whom 17 were children. The children who did not survive the war atrocities were not registered as war casualties.



Mirjana Milivojčević Praća

THE SAD LOOKS OF IMPRISONED JEWS

Sanski Most was well-known as a trading town. Jews, Serbs and a few Muslims owned large stores, and there was a newsstand that sold newspapers. Jewish people owned some large stores, which were packed full of various goods, and they had regular customers. They were very helpful and liked children a lot, whom they always gave chocolate, candy and other trifles. It was a town that lived a peaceful, friendly life, where no one paid attention to ethnicity. Everyone lived peacefully; it was a real pleasure to live there. That wonderful peace was soon disturbed by the fascist Ustasha hordes and Germans, who began arresting the local Serbs, Jews and Roma. I often walked to school next to the barracks where the Jews were imprisoned, and they permanently engraved on my mind, the image of those sad, crying, exhausted Jews, who could think of nothing but the fate awaiting them.

They were without food for three days, then came the Ustashas and took them, tormented as they were, to the train station, where they put them in cattle cars and sent them straight to the concentration camps in Jasenovac, Stara Gradiška and Gradina. There, they went through hell. They were beaten, hit in their arms and legs with heavy objects, not just the adults, but complete families. There were so many children. They were given no mercy, not even the youngest. The Germans planned to kill half of them, and the second half they locked in gas chambers and incinerated. Normal people cannot comprehend such evil and atrocities. Many prisoners were thrown into the river and thus “dispatched” to Belgrade, while others were transported to Sajmište in Belgrade and killed in gas vans. Similarly, they killed people by the Sana River; Rahela lost her two brothers there. The most respectable Jews from Sanski Most who lost their lives were from the families Albahari,

Atijas, Kabiljo, Papo, Levi, Isak, Lezo, Hadson, Godberg, Ninberg, Nasmijan, Rajh and others. The large field at Jasenovac, with a flower-shaped monument, tells about the sufferings of those wretched people and warns that such evil should never happen again.

Ljuban Mijatović

THEY DEMOLISHED, BURNED AND KILLED ALL IN THEIR PATH

On 19th February 1942, to the great horror and suffering of the Serbian people, the Ustashas attacked Kljevci from Rustovo, Tominska Palanka, Vrhpolje, Čaplje and other surrounding villages, intent on killing the remaining Serbs, those who were not killed in 1941 at Šušnjar, Vrpolje, Čaplje and Sanski Most.

On that day, when the Ustashas attacked Kljevci, they tore down and burned everything, and killed everyone they caught.

They killed the daughter of Laka Ćosić; the wife of Đurađ Trivić; Ilija Utješanović, Rade Stojković, Damjan Karanović; they also beat Damjan's wife Stana, permanently scarring her lower jaw. Dušan Stojković died with a gun in his hands, protecting his village. We who survived fled to Dabar, Crnovoda, Jelašinovci and other Serbian villages on the Grmeč Mountain.

The third adversity for the Serbian people in the village of Kljevci came when it was hit by the calamitous German offensive that swept the Grmeč Mountain and Podgrmeč area, when the Serbs were put in huts and houses and set on fire. Those were the houses of Mićo and Nikola Srdić. Later they went to Crnovoda and Mijatovići, called Pezići. They filled a valley with Serbs and shot them. My aunt Ljuba Mijatović survived the shooting. Some of the people from Kljevci who were shot there were Đuka Zmijanac, her daughter Anda and the wife and daughter of Branko Stojinović. Many a Serb was killed at Mriježnica, near the house of Stole Petrović, one of whom was my grandmother Đuja Stojković, who was about 80 years old. Then they continued their attack on Kljevci; below the collards, near Bajić Lake, they killed the families of Jovo Zmijanac and his brothers Đuka and Vid, as well as their mother,

who was 85 years old. Only one boy, who was 3 or 4 years old, survived. They killed Vid Mijatović on the church grounds on the hill Risonjinka and then moved on to Kljevci. They came to the house of Jovo Utješanović, where I was; the house was full of people. They wanted to get into the house, but old Mara Miljatović went out to meet them and presented them with three letters from Germany; two of her sons were imprisoned, and so was Trivo, her brother-in-law's son. They took the letters, read them and went back to Sanski Most. Thus ended the third suffering of the Serbs from the village of Kljevci. Tomo Stojković was killed in Mriježnica, but his remains were never found.

In Bajti, in the forest on the Dabar slope, they immolated the son of Kosta Stojković, Stevan, and Đuja, Dušan Stojković's wife, who both had typhus; whoever could run got away. The village of Kljevci, located near Sanski Most under the Grmeč Mountain and Čelić Kosa, lost 361 of its villagers to fascist terror in the Second World War, along with 18 soldiers killed in combat, out of its total of 64 soldiers, 15 of whom received the Partisan Commemorative Medal 1941: Milan Damjanović, Nikola, Dušan and Gojko Stojković, Jovan and Dušan Stojković, Mile and Mima Mijatović, Đuro Karanović, Đuro Karan, Nikola Vučković, Ilija Martić, Dušan Radić, Marko Krička, and Pero Erak.

Unfortunately, of all those soldiers only two are still alive, Petar Savić and Petar Utješanović, both aged 88.

Here is another account concerning Gornji Kljevci and the time we were taken to Šušnjar by the Ustashas, our neighbours, in 1941, to be killed there. There were over 20 Serbian houses in the hamlet of Dolinari; the Ustashas did not dare go there because of Milan Damjanović, a gendarme who lived there. He had been fired because he was a Serb, and he had returned home. Only one Ustasha ventured to the house of Mitar and Trivo Utješanović; he was Luka Bakarić called Lujin, who told Mitar to go to Vrhpolje straight away, and then went back. Mitar summoned his family, all twenty-eight of them, because he was the head of the house. He told them he was going to Vrhpolje. His sons Drago, Mirko, Marko and Sava told him not to go to Vrhpolje, but to flee to the woods instead. Gojkan and Branko, Trivun's sons, said that they would also flee to the woods. Then Mitar cried and said: "My dear children, I was the head of this family until today, but from now on, it is all up to

you, individually.” Six of them joined the Partisans, only Dragan disappeared on the Grmeč Mountain during that wretched German offensive, never to be found.

I remember my uncle Mile Mijatović telling me about 1941, when his Ustasha neighbours from Kenjare came to take them to Vrhpolje. His father Vid said: “I’m not coming, kill me right here in front of my house!” And he stayed. Mile’s wife, Mitar and children went, so Mile went after them and stopped at Biba Kenjar’s store to buy some tobacco. Biba’s two sons, Arif and Ale, both of them Ustashes, were there. They were Mile’s close friends but they told him to go quickly to Vrhpolje. Abid Cerić, an old Muslim, was also there, and he said: “My children, it would be a shame to kill such a man.” Arif grabbed him by the shoulder and threw him out, but he came back and said: “Children, a God’s plan cannot be undone.”

Mile went away, but as he was passing by Marta Bakarić’s house, she told him not to go to Vrhpolje but to hide in her stable instead. That was exactly what he did; he hid there for three days and stayed alive. He joined the rebels in 1941, along with other people from Kljevci, Damjanovići, Stojakovići...

Cvjeta Kondić, née Vokić

THEY KEPT SHOOTING AND KILLING

The testimony given by Cvjeta Kondić, née Vokić, from the village of Kruvare near Sanski Most, is about the atrocities committed by the Ustashas and Germans at the beginning of the Second World War. Cvjeta gave her testimony on 12th May 2011 in the village Stratinska, Banja Luka municipality, where she lives with her son Ratko Kondić and his family. When the war broke out, Cvjeta was 13 years old.

According to Cvjeta Kondić's account and what she was able to see from her house at the beginning of the Second World War, Serbs were killed at Šušnjar, "on hill slopes" and in Sanski Most, near the warehouse, where the market place used to be and where there is a slaughter house now. She had also heard many people had been killed in Čaplje, by the "winding road".

I was 13 when the war broke out. At that time my family and I were living in Kruvari. My father's name was Đurađ Vokić; our family celebrated St. John the Baptist. I had mother, two brothers and one sister, there were four of us.

Here is what Cvjeta said about how it was during the first days of the war:

- When Yugoslavia was occupied, when everything fell apart, new soldiers showed up every single day, they came out of the woods and went to the Grmeč Mountain. Then the war started, it came to us; the Germans came just before St. George's Day, and on St. George's they took the Kruvari road; some turned to Kijeva at the crossroads, while others took the Winding Road – the main road. They came to the family

Borenović; they encircled and captured the people as they were celebrating their patron saint's day. They captured around ten people, took them to Sana and hanged them all in the park. They dug a large grave across from our cemetery and buried them all in it. Later on, Italians and Croats arrived. All sorts of people came, and the war started. They took all of our men, first for forced labour in Sasina. All the boys who were taken were forced to work on the roads. They were captured, tied into pairs and had their noses cut off. As they went down the road, they were spotted by one of our people, Mladen Vulić from Stratinska. A Catholic man came along and told him to hide: "Run, hide in the woods, behind the brushwood, here they come, bringing them, two by two!" They were taken to the warehouse in Sana near the market place, across the bridge. Everyone was there, the Branković family – four houses, all ten of them, the sons and the old Stanko Branković, who used to have three sons, all of them taken and killed in the alder-tree grove near Poljaci on the day they started to capture people. They came to get us too. They took my father, and up Lajo's slope, the Ustashas started shooting and yelling: "Stop, don't let them get away!"

- Some people did get way, so they went after them – Cvjeta was in tears as she recalled the scene. My father was taken. They came to our yard, and it was the Razboj Ustashas that took him away. He asked for his tobacco from the house but the Ustashas told him he would not need his tobacco any more. They had known my father from before the war. So, they took him away and he said nothing, and as for us, we did not even dare watch. We ran and hid behind the house, it was a terrible scene. They did not let him say anything and just took him down the road. They only arrested men then, but I also saw them take Stevan Glamocić's wife and daughter away. I saw them taking them away, it was about ten people they captured. On the eve of the day my father was taken away, there were gunshots near the cemetery; that was around St. Elijah's Day, and many people were killed then. Shots missed their targets and whizzed around us. We heard the Ustashas yelling: "Tell us, where are the Chetniks?!" They said this over and over again, apparently to the people they brought. The shooting continued all night – Cvjeta spoke through tears. – We hid in the house, we did not eat anything, or turn the lights on, we just went to bed. We were woken up by Stanko Topić, a Croat. He was the main Ustasha in the village. He called my

mother Joka and asked whether all the children were in the house. That's how it was, we did not dare leave the house for three days, or take the cattle to graze. The shooting lasted for two nights – they killed those people of ours they had captured in Sanski Most. The people were shot at the edge of previously dug holes, but who had dug them, I do not know. The Delić family were taken and beaten, next to the road and near the cemetery. But before that, the entire Milinković family was killed first, all the men, women and a girl, Nikola Milinković's only daughter, the Ustashas killed everyone. They told her to get inside the house, but she did not want to and said: "Now that you've killed everyone, kill me too." And they did. Some Gypsies dug the pits for them to be buried in.

Vico Milinković was a young man. He tried to run away, but they caught him near the brickyard, in the grove where they dug clay. They killed him there and brought his body back to the Milinković house in a wheelbarrow. And so they killed everyone. Vico was a hard-working young man. They also killed Stojan and Tomo Delić, the family that later made monuments, they were all killed by the Ustashas. In the autumn they called us, the women, to harvest the maize: "Come on, just do the work, or the maize will go to waste!" they said. There were no men around, they had killed everyone. The only men who came were some Catholics from Poljaci, who brought their horses with them. The Milinković and Delić families had good horses, but it was the Catholics who drove the maize, so they called us and we went to harvest their maize. I was paid 10 dinars a day, and when we went to harvest the wheat, a day's wage was 12 dinars. We were asked to go to their church, we learned all their prayers and confessed and received communion. We had to go there, make the Catholic sign of the cross, dip hands into that bowl of theirs, with holy water, and make the sign of the cross again. We went up to a man, he put us on a list and asked if we could read, about our beliefs, some service or something, God knows what else, I can't even remember. He would take their ceremonial bread and turned it like this, to give us communion. We went to their main ceremonies too. We weren't allowed to make the sign of the cross with three fingers but had to do it with an open hand, according to their custom – Cvjeta showed how they were ordered to make the sign of the cross. – We went to church both on Easter and the Nativity of Mary. We went to the church in Sasina. They took us their with those horses that used to belong to

the Milinković family, and we also did forced labour. There were Catholic churches in Sasina, Sana, Poljak, but not in Škrljevita. That was where we received communion. There was also a church in Stratinska, the same church we have today, nothing happened to it in the war, it was preserved.

When my father was killed, my mother stayed with us. I heard Serbs were killed in other villages too, captured and taken to Sana (Sanski Most). They did not destroy the Orthodox Church in Kruvari. I don't know where the Orthodox Christian priest who lived in the village went. We were not allowed to observe our customs, but on Christmas we secretly closed our windows and lit a candle so they would not see. I have forgotten many things; it was a long time ago. Back then, we had our "fair share of fear" – she sighed and moaned. – I used to say: "Oh Lord, why didn't you take me?!"

In the autumn of 1941, as we were going to harvest maize, we went past the graves where the Serbs had been buried. Blood streamed from the graves, it kept flowing, and down below you could see blood bubbles. The women cried, there were three women with us, but we kept silent. We were told the dead bodies had been covered with some rock, lime, and when the women cried and moaned, the Ustashas told them to be quiet or they would kill them as well. "Why are you crying, why are you mourning them? They are over there eating sugar, you see, they covered them in sugar." Then they covered them with dirt. They frequently warned women not to cry or they would kill them. "Why are you mourning them, can't you see they're eating sugar?"

Not all the Catholics were bad. There were good people, like our neighbours. One neighbour took our two boys straight away, Stanko and Sava, my brothers, took them to his house and hid them in the attic during the executions. They were about ten. We went crazy then, we were completely out of our minds with fear. We had cows in the barn; we had bread, potatoes in our garden, but we did not dare leave the house for two days. Stanko Topić, the main Ustasha, told my mother Joka that she must not leave the house. They were in uniform, with the letter "U" on their caps.

On one occasion, they told us we could observe our customs, have our religion and abide by our laws. Those neighbours never attacked us;

they never forced us to do anything. When we lit a candle for Christmas, they were never bothered, but our people never bothered them later either, when the Partisans came.

We fled our homes during the offensive in Kozica and Vilusi. Those who were young left with the troops, but the elderly came back. They charged on St. John's Day from the direction of Prijedor and Banja Luka and followed our troops headed for the Grmeč Mountain. We fled during the night, travelled all night to Kozica. A child fell off a sleigh, the snow was deep. A man said to the woman her child had fallen off, but she said: "Let them fall, I have no idea where I am taking them or what will become of us." The carts were pulled by oxen. People fled in all directions, young people went to Vilusi. There were some Chetniks, but they had allied with the Germans. We went to the Šator Mountain with the troops, and then to Crikvenica. We had to go, there was nowhere to go back and we were there for a long time. The elderly people returned home from exile but we came back only later, when Sanski Most was liberated. The women and children went back, some Croats also helped them a little. They managed to save some things by taking them to their houses and then returning them when the people came back from exile.

The Ilinčić family were the worst Ustashas, they were captured later on and taken to Tominska Palanka. There were four of us, four young girls from Kruvari, and we joined the Partisans. We tended to the wounded, the Partisans tried to capture Prijedor two times. Later, in Husimovci, they put the wounded near the mosque. I was with the Partisans for over a year.

During Tito's time, I received a pension, but since this war I have not got anything. I went around and asked, I had all the paperwork, they read it, but they gave me nothing, saying: "Tito's gone, the old country's gone. No country – no money." You cannot get anything. I only get 60 Bosnian marks, as a kind of aid. It's all gone, we're done, that's it.

Interview by: Gojko Vokić



The old woman is Cvjeta Kondic, née Vokic
Attached is a photograph taken on 12th May 2011

Jovan Vidović

A HERO OF HIS TIME

Until 1941, the village of Tomina, located a few kilometers from Sanski Most, was a Serb community. It used to be divided into two parts, of which the high-lying one was inhabited by poor families, mainly farmers, and the low-lying one by rich people, of whom the most prominent was the populous Vidović family.

The restfulness and beauty of rural life vanished into thin air with the arrival of Ante Pavelić's Ustasha cutthroats. Black clouds obscured the sky above the village. The Ustasha killing began, but the highlanders of the village met it with resistance, rising up in rebellion with whatever arms they had at hand. This was the first rebellion mounted in Bosanska Krajina. The Ustashes took away the Vidović brothers, seven of them. They executed them at the Engineering Bridge over the Sana River, took their bodies to the centre of Sanski Most and hung them on the trees in the town park.

The victims remained hanging for three days. The Serb population living in that part of the town were beside themselves with fear and no one dared leave their homes the day of the hanging. The only people lingering at the square were the Ustashes and their followers.

It was merely by chance that Jovan Vidović escaped the same fate and stayed alive. He was at work at the time and was getting ready to visit his parents for a celebration of Saint George, their family patron saint. A friend warned him to escape – they were after him as well.

Jovan decided to fetch his wife Sava and their two-year-old boy Drago. Mother put Drago in a bag and together they set off for the Grmeč Mountain – the Ustashes had not come that far yet. Mother Sava stumbled as she carried her boy across the moor and through the thicket, and when they reached an opening in the ground, Drago, the son, burst into tears and said to his mother: "Leave me in the thicket,

you and Dad go and save yourselves, for it's a long way to the Grmeč Mountain." Mother refused, and she and her husband managed to reach the outskirts of the town of Ključ. It was at Ključ that Jovan decided to join the Partisan troops, while Drago and his mother found a temporary refuge in the house of a Serb family. Jovan had lost his parents, his home and seven brothers, so he fought bravely, avenging his loss.

As a result, he got himself into trouble with Đuro Pucar, and General Morača had to come to his rescue, defending Jovan Vidović as one of the best intelligence men in Bosanska Krajina. The family temporarily left Drago with a friend of theirs living on the Manjača Mountain, after which they took him to Majkić Japra, to his grandmother and grandfather, who looked after him and protected him for the rest of the war. Sava joined her husband and became a Partisan as well; it was at that time that the Partisan forces spread their military operations across the country. Jovan was first promoted to the rank of major, and later even to colonel. As the war drew to a close and people felt liberation was imminent, Jovan was offered a position with the State Security Service (UDBA). He refused the offer and stayed in the military, first in Banja Luka, followed by Sarajevo, and finally in Belgrade. In Belgrade, he was appointed Head of the JNA Headquarters Personnel Department. He was a hero of his time, and continued to love and respect people even after the war. I can remember him well: he helped me and my sisters, by finding us a room to rent, and we were then able to continue our studies. Also, he helped Mirjana Praća to get a hefty scholarship from one of the ministries, since she was a good student, daughter of a man who had been killed in Sanski Most. Drago, his son, graduated from a college of agriculture and married Gordana, a native of Belgrade, an architecture undergraduate at the time.

*Written by: Gordana Vidović, daughter-in-law,
Predrag Vidović, grandson, and
Mirjana Praća, retired teacher*

Mirjana Milivojčević Praća

FORCED CONVERSION INTO ROMAN CATHOLICISM

IN A TIME OF GENOCIDE

Remembering 3rd August 1941, as it was in Sanski Most

As the Ustahas took control of the country, the Serbs were subjected to systemic persecution. Many wonder today, why did the Serbs not offer resistance in defence of their lives? All those who were imprisoned told their families they needed to bow to the pressures, or else they faced the threat of confinement in a death camp. They stressed the need to convert to Islam or Roman Catholicism; somehow, Catholicism felt closer, because the faith was also Christian.

After performing the conversion ritual, the priest told us he was doing it to protect us from deportation to a death camp, and our obligation was to attend Sunday mass, and we the youths were to join the church choir.

The next day – it was 3rd August 1941, one day after our dearest ones had been brutally shot – the Catholic priest Šeremet told us our families were to take turns in attending a ritual in which they would be converted to Roman Catholicism, a faith superior to Orthodox Christianity. The Praća and Lazić families attended the ritual in the morning, along with the singer Kristina Petković.

Frenzied, offended and humiliated, we entered the church and knelt before the altar. The priest said Mass and gave us rosaries to pray to God, saying he only did it to save us from deportation to a death camp – despite the fact we were already Christian. We received Communion following the Roman Catholic ritual: “Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord

is with Thee.” He insisted that we attend Mass regularly, and that we, the youngsters, join the Catholic children and sing in the church choir. Filled with terror, we obeyed.

From time to time, Mass was disrupted by the screams and cries of a two-year-old boy, whose name was Radoslav “Rade” Lazić; the church echoed with his voice. The priest warned me and my sister Borka to stop the boy from crying. In vain – the toddler sobbed incessantly, making us all more and more sorrowful.

After the conversion ritual finished, we went home, all of us dressed in black; meanwhile, Rade the toddler kept howling like a wolf in the woods. He would not be consoled. We all cried and wondered: was it indeed necessary to convert us to Roman Catholicism, since we were also Christians and shared the same customs and holidays?

No answer ever came in response to that question; an order had been given by Pavelić and his Ustasha authorities – the Serbs were to be killed, some of them converted to Roman Catholicism, and some banished. So, we returned home. There was no consolation for us – we were to regularly attend Sunday Mass with our good women and men comrades, and pray to God in their Roman Catholic fashion.

Here I wish to mention Radoslav Lazić and say something about his life.



Radoslav Lazić, PhD

Radoslav Lazić, PhD, professor at Belgrade University, theatre director and theorist of theatre studies

Radoslav Lazić, PhD, now a resident of Belgrade, is a famous director, theorist of theatre studies and Belgrade University professor. This renowned humanitarian, researcher and writer has never reconciled with the great tragedy of genocide committed against the Serb people by the Croat and Muslim Ustasha murderers. On 1st and 2nd August 1941, he lost his father Panto, a station master, and two

brothers, Branko and Obrad “The Silky”, students of the Prijedor Gymnasium, in the killings committed at Šušnjar, Sanski Most. Seventy-two years after the tragedy, the memorial plaque that used to stand at Šušnjar, this terrible graveyard, and hold their noble names was destroyed by the original perpetrators’ beastly descendants from the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Petar Dodik

OBRAD “THE SILKY” (“PANTE”) LAZIĆ

Obrad Lazić was a student of the Civil School in Sanski Most, at the time when I attended the same school. He had a nickname, “The Silky”. Girls used to say his hair was as smooth as silk, which earned him the above nickname.

School ended in April 1941, and that was when I last saw him. Shortly afterwards, Germany attacked Yugoslavia and the war came. Next, it is a well-known fact, the quisling state of the NDH was created, whose one agenda was annihilating the Serbs and Jews. Thus, there was a massacre of the Serbs in Sanski Most, during which Panto, the father of the family, was killed together with his sons Branko and The Silky, who was still underage at that time.

As far as I can remember, he was an agreeable person. He was rather handsome, of medium height, always well dressed and elegant. He used to sit in the back row with Veljko Dodik. He was a good student, but I cannot remember his actual marks. As far as I may recall, he always finished the form with very good or excellent marks.

Obrad Lazić was a progressive youth; rumour had it he was a communist. At that time, I did not know who communists were, but I cherished and liked him, not because of his political affiliation, but because of his pleasant manner and his fair treatment of others. He was slightly mysterious, because he came from a family richer than those of the other students, which he never showed; instead, he respected his classmates, regardless of their backgrounds, and never rebuffed any of the children coming from underprivileged families.

All members of the Lazić family were greatly respected – Panto, the father, and Staka, the mother, as well as the brothers, well-educated and

appreciated by their local community. Thus, The Silky came from a well-known, respectable family, for which he also deserved recognition and esteem. All his brothers – Branko, Milan, Jujo and Rade – finished university; because he was killed by the Ustashas in 1941, The Silky never got more education, ending his life with a diploma of the Civil School.

Sarajevo, 22nd September 2010

Petar Popović

THE TOMINA GENOCIDE: 1941, 1995

What happened in Tomina, first in 1941, then again in 1995?

I may rightfully claim that the goal of the Ustasha criminals and Nazi supporters in the NDH was to annihilate the Serb populations of Tomina and the surrounding villages, likewise in the County of Sanski Most, the valley of the Sana River and Podgrmeč. More than that – all across Krajina and Bosnia and Herzegovina, let alone Croatia, wherever the Serbs had lived for centuries, an entire people was to have been destroyed in a crime of genocide.

Tomina was the wealthiest village in the area of Podgrmeč. It consisted of two parts, Gornja Tomina, inhabited mainly by the Popović clan, and Donja Tomina, with the Vidović clan as the most populous. There was also part of the village inhabited exclusively by the Muslims, called Tominska Palanka.

Tomina Municipality, the County of Sanski Most, also comprised the villages of Donja and Gornja Tramošnja, Kijevo, Čaplje, Vrhpolje, Hrustovo, Ilidža, Podovi, Kozica, Sokolovo... Back in 1941, there was an Orthodox Christian church in Tomina, which was partly demolished during the war.

My earliest memories relate to the accounts of my uncles Savo and Milo Popović. They told me that in 1941, the Ustashas came to Tomina and killed their parents, my grandparents, Đuka and Đujo Popović, in their own house. Their plan was to kill the two most populous clans of the village, the Vidoviées and the Popoviées, who also owned the fertile land along the Sana River. The Popoviées also possessed woodland and were best known as cattle-breeders.

During this first attack, the criminals killed several more members of the Popović family, who were all my cousins.

Đurađ Popović, my father, was an outstanding stonecutter. For a long time, he worked in Belgrade, where he was engaged in the construction of the administrative building of the National Post Office and the Aircraft Centre in Zemun, as well as the Faculty of Technics and Technology in Belgrade, which I would graduate from in the late 1960's. My father also helped with the construction of the Palace Hotel in Banja Luka. When the war started, he was drafted and joined the Army of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. He left the army to return to Tomina and protect his family, Stoja, his wife, Boja, my sister, Dušan, my brother, and myself, Petar Popović.

Soon after returning to Tomina, my father Đurađ was arrested, along with other Popovićeš and Serb inhabitants, and sent to a concentration camp in Banja Luka, from which he was dispatched to Germany, where he was interned and spent five years, from 1941 to 1945, doing forced labour.

Stoja, my mother, realised everybody's life was in danger. She decided to leave the village and seek refuge with all of us – we were only small children at the time – in Gornja Tramošnjia and Kozica, followed by Kočić's Zmijanje, where the Chetniks fought to save the Serb people from being exterminated by the Ustashas.

Our house, like all Serb houses, was robbed and put on fire. There was a Muslim community in Tomina, the so-called jamaat of Tominska Palanka. I heard stories that Muslim criminals partook in the Ustashas' murderous crimes, for example, the Mušić family, our nearest neighbours.

In 1945, my mother, brother, sister and I returned to our demolished house in Tomina. Đurađ, my father, was still interned. When he came back to Tomina, the people began to rebuild the devastated village. School opened in Tominska Palanka, in the building which previously housed the Muslim primary school. My first teacher's name was Zaga, she came from Belgrade. It was 1945, and we had religious education, as did the Muslim children, only at the local mosque. The church was

soon renovated, whereas the mosque had not been demolished in the war.

All houses belonging to Serb families, those of the Popoviće, Čukoviće, Kuzmanoviće, Bornoviće, Bubutas, Đuriće, Simiće, as well as the Vidoviće, Stojanoviće, Vojnoviće... all Serb houses were either burnt or torn down, and many of the Serb villagers of Tomina killed.

* * *

A crime of genocide shook Tomina in 1995, and was even more sinister than that committed in 1941.

As told by my aunt Deva Popović, née Vidović, the Muslim troops led by General Dudaković, among whom there were mujahideen, ransacked the village, killing on their way all members of the Serb clan Popović, who had stayed in the village to look after their houses and estates.

The villains first killed Uncle Savo, an old man, whose innocent parents were killed in 1941 by the Ustasha cutthroats. In 1995, it was the Muslim murderers who killed Đurađ Popović, a cousin of mine, Soka Popović and Vid Popović – who were all at least seventy years of age, as well as Zora Gogić, a disabled person who could not move on her own... And then there was also Deva Popović. Somehow, Deva managed to survive the massacre. Her neighbours found her three days later, in a ditch, heavily wounded. All Serb houses were pillaged and burnt one more time.

The people found a way to transport Deva Popović, though seriously wounded, to the Prijedor Hospital, where she received treatment. Although with difficulty, she gave an account of what had happened:

- When the Muslim murderers came, together with the mujahideen, Sava Popović, my husband, stood before them and said: "Surely you won't kill us, like our parents were killed in 1941?" At that, they shot him. They shot or massacred many Serbs, whose houses they robbed and burnt down, stealing their cattle and other possessions.

Deva Popović, murdered by cutthroats, still found the strength to tell the truth about the crimes that had taken place. She died in extreme pain at the Prijedor Hospital six months later.

* * *

It is an appalling fact that the Serbs living in Tomina found themselves at the mercy of villains again, during their exodus from Sanski Most in 1995. The genocide that took place in 1941 recurred in 1995.

Today, the once Serb village of Tomina is a wild, devastated place. There is no school or doctor, there is no post office or church... I have heard the news that the Wahhabi are planning on building yet another mosque at the very heart of the once Serb village of Tomina... unfortunately.

(Petar Popović, a technologist and textile engineer, was born in Tomina in July 1939. He went to school in Tomina, Sanski Most and Sremski Karlovci. He graduated from the Faculty of Technology in Belgrade in 1969. He spent most of his career working in industry. He has a wife, Vera, a son, Đurađ, who is an economist, and a daughter, Svetlana, who is a lawyer.)

Account written by:
Prof. Radoslav Lazić, Belgrade, 8th July 2013

Rade Stanisavljević (1932)

I SAW CRIMES BEING COMMITTED AT ŠUŠNJAR

After searching for Rade for nearly a year, I found him at his Kruvari home. He greeted us very warmly, kissing us when he saw us. Mićo Došenović knew where his house was, so this year, on the Pentecostal Day of the Dead, I drove him to the graveyard in Sanski Most. Rade used the opportunity to tell me about his hardships when he had first returned home after his time as a refugee, as though he were afraid he might not have another chance, as though telling about it were a matter of utmost urgency. Unexpectedly, this cheerful eighty-year-old grew sad in the face. Somebody had dug a canal across his land to dispose of wastewater in the nearby stream, which he used for feeding his cattle; somebody had thrown a dead sheep two metres away from the source of the stream; his diesel engine and bicycle had been stolen, together with his hunting rifle and his bitch; trees in his woods were felled; he had not received the complete sum he had been donated to reconstruct his house. In a short while, he listed quite a few things. He had tried asking for help from the local authorities, but to no avail. We made promises, the two of us; Mićo left to look for his wife, leaving the two of us alone.

A column of martyrs

When he understood the reason for my visit, Rade pulled himself together and told me his story:

It was 1941 – I was nine years old and remember everything. I was in the first form of primary school, and my teacher's name was Jelena Drakulić. My older brother was in the third form, and he no longer

dared deliver the milk; I was younger and smaller, so I took it over. His peers had already been shot. Every day, I went to town to deliver our milk in a little container. I took it to a Serb, a teacher, whose name was Ubiparip, and to a gendarme, whose name was Duraković. As we, children, left the town, we would look at the columns of Serbs bound together with rope or wire. Each man's arms rested on the shoulders of the one walking right before him, and they looked like some kind of sticks to me. Of course, their forearms and upper arms were bare, and it seemed as if the men were joined together with those sticks. Because they were a very short distance apart, they walked with difficulty, making only very short steps. We followed them all the way to Šušnjar, to the burial pit in the ground there. We looked on as those people were being killed; the Ustashas drove us, the children, away, so we hid behind the nearby thicket and peered from there, and then reappeared only to be driven away again, until we went home just before dark. I was often accompanied by a neighbour of mine, Marko Bajam, a Croat, and another boy, whose name I do not remember. The Ustashas may have thought I was a Croat too, because little Marko was known to the Ustashas from Poljak, a nearby village. That was how it ended, the Ustashas would yell at us, we would hide behind some bushes, show up again, and be there until they turned us off again. I saw very well that column of martyrs slowly treading from the town to Šušnjar, as their steps were not very long, because of how they were tied together, and they were also not beaten as they walked through the town, for the sake of bystanders. Instead, they were first steered to Gojko Delić's house. My God, the thrashing they were given there – the Ustashas jumped on them like mad dogs. First with the butts of their guns, and then with whatever they got their hands on, all the way to where the Šušnjar graveyard began, to the burial pit. There was this man called Pračo, from Kijevo, whom they hit so badly that his head fell onto his shoulder. He quite possibly took a blow with an axe so the head collapsed after the muscles in his neck had been cut, and then he collapsed onto the poor man walking before him. This poor man in front of him carried him on his back to the pit, only for them both to be pushed down the pit by the Ustashas.

Cinders burning on a man's chest

I saw them torturing a young man. First, they tied one of his arms to a tree, and then an Ustasha stepped with his boots on his other arm. He thus lay fast against the ground. While the rest of the people were being killed and the number of corpses in the pit grew, the young man was the object of their vicious torment, for God knows what reason. They laughed and made fun of him, as one of the Ustashas emptied shovelfuls of cinders onto the young man's chest – he simply poured them onto his chest. I will never forget the young man's screaming. He would hurl his legs high into the air, but the Ustasha brought them both back to the ground by hitting them hard with the shovel, and I am sure they were both broken. The torture went on forever; they only killed him and threw him in the pit just before midnight – he must have been half-dead from it. Just imagine the Ustasha who had stood on his arm all along, revelling in the young man's agony.

A fire burnt at Šušnjar, at the graveyard, next to the pit; it burnt day and night, never going out. I remember well and know the name of a beautiful girl, whose hair was in plaits reaching all the way to her waist; it was Mara Štrbac, whom the Ustashas raped by that fire, from dusk until dawn, only to kill her and push her in the pit in the end. I am now 80 years old, I am a family man, but I still wonder – how can one be capable of such things?

A bridge made of corpses

It was a large pit, probably dug out by the Muslims; the Muslims spent days on end at Šušnjar, shovels and pickaxes in hands, and whenever something needed to be done, there they were, at hand. They were a kind of gang. The pit was shallow at one end to be descended into, but 2-3 meters deep and rather steep on the other three sides. The shallow end linked to the road and was meant to receive the arriving columns, a kind of platform leading to the pit. As the columns of people approached it, those at the head were immediately murdered and their dead bodies arranged so that their heads faced opposite sides. One person's head went right, the next went left. Dirt was thrown over these martyrs' bodies to level the ground, all the way to the other end of the

pit. The next group of the Serbs walked over their brethren's dead bodies, to the places where rifles and machine guns opened fire, turning them as well into human planks making the body of this human bridge. The pit thus filled, from the entrance to the opposite end. The next layer was made from the opposite side, the steep one, towards to the entrance, and then back again. Importantly, the ground was inclined, which had made it easy to dig into the hill. The work had been done by the Muslims, by the above-mentioned gang. As the pit filled, up above it, at the level of Šušnjar and the road, all sorts of tortures were inflicted: women were raped in the small hours, poor men suffered as cinders were poured onto their chests, and any attempt to escape was punished with a hit of a pickaxe into the back or on the head.

A pickaxe in the back

A martyr sprang from the burial pit, in an attempt to escape by crossing the distance between Šušnjar and the other end, the side that led to Kruvari, to the east. He managed to cross about 100 metres, with several guns shooting in his direction but failing to hit him. A group of Muslim civilians were working along that part of the road, with pickaxes and shovels in their hands. The poor man was a hair's breadth away from safety, when one of the Muslim workers hit him in the back with the point of his pickaxe. The man made another four or five steps with the tool in his back, only to collapse on the other side of the road leading from Šušnjar. The Muslim worker ran over to the dying man, bent over him to see him toss and twitch; at that, he also spotted us, the children – we had also run over to the spot – and sent us running back, to hide behind the bushes.

As I walked past the same place two or three days later, I saw a freshly dug grave: the man had been buried on the spot.

The killing of the Branković brothers

Here is an explanation of the position of the Branković house in Kruvari. Kruvari is divided into Donji Kruvari, Gornji Kruvari, and there is also a third part, between Gornji Kruvari and Poljak, stretching all the way to Škljevita. Locally, this part of the village is known as Kruvaruša, and the folk also call it "Little Albania", for a reason unknown to me. It

is quite a wonder that they all probably knew that the people of Poljak had been armed with guns, because they were Croatian, and Roman Catholics, naturally. That is why they were killed first, the four Branković brothers, Marko, Drago, Vasilj, I cannot remember the fourth brother's name. They were killed in Poljak, but one of them, Vasilj, rose from the dead and managed to reach his home, which was one kilometre away from the execution place. His mouth and nose had been smashed by a bullet and the only thing that remained on his face was his eyes. A man by the name of Omer, called "The Sweeper", sighted him and took him back to the place he had escaped from, where he was shot again, so he would stay with his brothers. It is quite interesting that this naive Serb ran back to his house, where he was sure to be found, and not somewhere else, away from the village, to escape death.

The person responsible for the shooting of the Branković brothers was Nikola Grgić, called "Ničalj". Just as Viktor Tunić, an Ustasha from Zdena, is to blame for the Šušnjar killings, so was Nikola "Ničalj" Grgić the sole culprit and fully responsible for the killing of the Branković brothers and other neighbours.

The killing of the Milinković family

That day, Svetko Milinković paid a visit to Toma Milinković's house and witnessed their death at the hands of an Ustasha, originally from Herzegovina. The Ustasha had caught them seated at the table, as they were having lunch. The whole family were killed, Toma, the father, his son, even his daughter, who was fortunate enough to outlive the rest and go into mourning, only to be slaughtered herself. For a moment, the Ustasha stopped shooting and looked around to see where the pantry was. Svetko had hidden beneath the pantry floor; the floor planks were slightly apart and he saw the Ustasha entering. The Ustasha found milk and started drinking; the milk kept running down his chin, through the spaces in the floor and on Svetko. When he had slaked his thirst with milk, the Ustasha went back to where he had left the poor girl crying, and just killed her.

After leaving his hiding place, Svetko came to our house and told my father about the event, shaking with fear; we, the youngsters, also heard his account.

The populous Grulović family also perished in the killings, but for a child or two. I know for sure that year after year after the war, Joka Grulović wailed and invoked her dearest ones at the graveyard, which she did for the rest of her life. I can still remember her keen:

“Alas, Niko, alas, Mirko,
Alas my fateful days
Where is your last resting place?”

(The gentle old man offered this sorrowful account, praying that we send him the press willing to write about his most recent ordeal, as a returnee to his home village.)

Written by Vukašin M. Davidović, Kruvari, 11th June 2011,
Pentecostal Day of the Dead

Radmila Vuković, née Kragulj

A CHILDHOOD SPENT AMONGST BLACK KERCHIEFS

Jovo and Desa, my parents, used to live in our family house. Back in those days, the house stood on Sanski Most's high street, on the left bank of the Sana.

Father kept an inn on the ground floor, while the first floor, where my brother, sister and I used to live, was residential. It was only May 1941, but Vitomir Gutić, a chief official of the Banja Luka Ustasha Headquarters, was already making speeches asking for the destruction of the Serbs, and later also for their extermination. This alarmed many respectable Serbs, who began making plans to seek refuge in Belgrade. Rumour has it that my father was reserved and reticent, so he said he was not going because he had done nothing wrong, and chose to stay.

It was a warm night in June 1941, and as usual, he lay in bed next to me to help me get to sleep, because I was still a little girl at the time.

The Ustashes arrived in the house not long afterwards, and took him away; supposedly, he was to be sent to Germany for forced labour. They told my mother to prepare the clothes he would need while there. Hastily, she prepared the clothes, and they took him away.

However, this was simply a trick on their part, a lie, because they took him to the town crop warehouse on the left bank of the Sana, quite close to our house.

The next morning, Desa, my mother, rushed across the street, to the house of Doctor Josip Cerjan. His wife was at home, so my mother told her about what had happened the night before, hoping to hear words of comfort. Not looking in the least upset, the neighbour said: "Desa, my dear lady, it is God you should pray to"; that was all she had to say to my mother. Mother immediately knew Father was in dire straits.

Not long afterwards, after days of torture and starvation at the warehouse, which kept receiving ever new arrivals from the surrounding villages, on 2nd August 1941 – it was St. Elijah’s Day – the men were taken out and put in a column, two by two; they were led through the town, thinking they were going to Germany.

No, it was not Germany they were headed for tied like that, it was for Šušnjar. My father was tied to Pero Zurinić, because they used to live close to one another. Even today, their names stand side by side on the Šušnjar Memorial Plaque.

The same happened to Mother’s brother, my uncle, Dušan Kovačević, a 19-year-old student, who had come from Belgrade to spend his holidays at home.

When the Ustashas came to their house on Ključ Street, they literally dragged him out of bed and of the house and took him nearby, to the primary school located at the park on the square. The most respectable citizens of Sanski Most were arrested that night, only to be taken to Šušnjar, bound in pairs, after a while. Mother told us that after they had all been led away, shots were heard from the direction of Šušnjar at around noon that day.

Lamenting was heard from across the town, cries made by children, mothers and wives, for they could hear what was happening to their dearest ones.

Several thousand Serbs were shot in Sanski Most on 2nd August 1941. The number exceeded the population of the town – all Serbs had been brought in from the neighbouring villages.

The citizens of other nationalities did not protest against these crimes, which is curious enough, since they all knew each other well and had truly neighbourly relations.

Still, according to my mother, there was a small number of honourable friends, individuals, both Croats and Muslims. The natives of Sanski Most knew well who those people were.

After the shooting, Mother used to say, the bell sadly pealed from the Orthodox Church, a farewell to the Serbs of Sanski Most, who had departed in such a horrifying way.

As if what had happened on the previous day did not suffice, on 3rd August 1941, the Roman Catholic Church announced that the survivors, mainly women and children, were to come before the church to be converted into Roman Catholicism. The Roman Catholic priest Šeremet, a well-known Ustasha, held a sermon and told them they would be protected from deportation to a death -camp. They were all distributed rosaries and continued to live life like that.

The Kragulj family, who came from Kruhari, my father's village, were also shot.

So, I spent my childhood amidst the black kerchiefs of neighbours, of women in mourning – my mother, grandmother, aunt and all the others who gathered at our house, I suppose, to speak about the horrible events and nothing else.

I grew up without a single male relation – father, grandfather or uncle – because they had all been shot.

After all these happenings, the citizens of Sanski Most affiliating with the Ustasha movement founded a local Ustasha council, and one of the people who joined it was Josip Cerjan, our neighbour.

Not long afterwards, Hasan Kikić, Lazar Šušnica and Milančić Miljević, who had by then joined the Partisan movement, approached Desa, my mother, and persuaded her to continue running Father's inn so they could meet there in secrecy, hold meetings and send food and ammunition to the troops on the Grmeč Mountain. Desa agreed.

The Ustashes soon learnt my mother had sided with the Partisans and arrested her. Luckily, she only spent a short while in prison, because the Italian troops arrived in Sanski Most. The Italians did not act like conquerors, and thanks to them, Mother was soon released from prison. Her secret assistance to the Partisans continued, and later, Hasan Kikić wrote about her collaboration in his works.

When the war ended, she worked in a general shop for a while, and retired as a veteran.

When it was time for me to start secondary school, I was given a scholarship by the authorities, as “a victim of fascist terror”.

My mother is the source of this whole account, because I was very small when Father Jovo died and do not remember anything.

Mirjana Jurišić, née Nikolić, and Ljiljana Nikolić

THE KILLING OF JEKA AND PETAR DELIĆ'S SONS

This information tells about the killing of the sons of Jeka Delić, née Vučković, from Čaplje, a village in the vicinity of Sanski Most, which took place in 1941.

As far as we know (we are Mirjana Jurišić, née Nikolić, and Ljiljana Nikolić, retired secondary school teachers and Jeka Delić's great-granddaughters), prior to the Second World War, Jeka and her three sons – Mirko, Đorđo and Vlado – lived in the village of Čaplje. Petar Delić, her late husband, had been a well-known merchant from Sanski Most, whose boat on the Sana is still called his name, The Delić Boat.

Mirko, their first son, used to study and work in Zagreb, in a court, but because of illness he was forced to return to his family estate in Čaplje. Đorđo, the second son, had chosen farming over schooling. The third son, Vlado, was a graduate of the agricultural school. The fourth son, Jovo Delić, worked as a merchant in Sanski Most, and married Miss Mejić, a teacher. Apart from these four sons, our great-grandmother had three daughters, Marija, Persa and Zorka. (Marija was our maternal grandmother, the mother of Draginja, our mother.)

In 1941, the Ustahas arrested three of the sons, with the intention of shooting them on their estate in Čaplje. They succeeded in killing Mirko and Đorđo; Vlado, although wounded, managed to swim across the Sana and fled to Slavonia, where he later married. Jovo Delić was arrested in Sanski Most on several occasions, for which reason he decided to escape to Serbia, to Belgrade, and take his family with him. He remained there for the rest of the war and later returned to Sanski Most, where he died and was buried at the local cemetery.

Simo Živković wrote about the Delić family in his book, and their birth information may be found in the Sanski Most Birth Records, that is, if the books have been preserved.

The above family history information was given by two sisters, Mirjana Jurišić, née

Nikolić, and Ljiljana Nikolić, retired teachers, in Belgrade, on 24th June 2013



Šušnjara (Delić)
Delić (+ 1941)

Tomo Đurđević

A FLIGHT TO SAFETY

A few days before the 1941 mass killings of the Serbs in Sanski Most, Šušnjar and other places, there was a killing of Serb people not far from Sanski Most, in the hamlet of Hrast.

Several Ustashas went on a killing spree in the upper part of the hamlet of Hrast. Just above Brdenik, near Uncle Stevan's house, they repeatedly hit five people, all of them Serbs, with cold weapons, until they thought they had killed them all. One of them was Ljubo Đurđević, my cousin.

The Ustashas considered their job done – all the five people were unconscious and appeared dead – so they left the crime scene and moved on through Hrast, to hunt down and kill some more Serbs.

After a while, Ljubo, my cousin, regained consciousness and crawled to the nearest bush. He hid in the bush until dark, mustered all his strength, and managed to get to Đedovača, and eventually to Dabar. He later joined the People's Liberation Movement, and fought alongside the Partisans until the war ended.

There is a story worth sharing, which has to do with Ljubo's time while hiding in the bush, which he told us afterwards. As he was squatting in the bush trying to hide from the Ustashas, a big viper came up to the bush. Ljubo froze with fear, but for his fear of the Ustashas he did not dare leave his hideaway either, although he had nothing to defend himself against the snake. He was fortunate, though: the viper moved around Ljubo's hiding place, after which it went away...

After the killing described above, the Ustashas came to our house, located in the lower part of Hrast, intent on killing my father Milan as well. Staying in front of the house, they called Milan to come out, most certainly with the intention of killing him. Milan told them: "I'm coming

right away, let me just get my coat.” The murderers yelled back: “Just come outside, you don’t need your coat, we’re not going far.” This did not dismay or trick Milan – he grabbed his coat from the hanger, dashed through the house to the other end, to the balcony, and jumped into the yard. While the villains were still on the other side of the house, he acted wisely; instead of fleeing to Lazo Kordić’s grove, which stood near our house, he fled to the Zdena River. Seeing that Milan was not coming out of the house, the Ustashas immediately ran behind it, to the Kordić grove, to look for him, because it seemed logical if he had decided to run away, he must have fled into the woods. If Milan had indeed done so, he would most certainly have been shot, for bullets are faster than man. By the time the Ustashas had reached the space behind the house, Milan was already wading through the cold Zdena, which runs close to our house. He did not dare go across the bridge, since he would immediately have been spotted by the Ustashas.

After crossing the Zdena, Milan decided to escape to our woods in Podlug. When he reached the road leading from Pobježje to Sanski Most, before he actually crossed it, he saw a large group of people driven in the direction of Sanski Most by several armed Ustashas. He even recognised some of these people, because they came from Podlug. He hid in the thicket by the road until the last person in the line had walked past, then dashed across the road, waded through the Blija rivulet and cautiously, hiding, went to our Podlug woods.

The poor people from Podlug escorted by the handful of armed Ustashas, as we learned afterwards, were locked in the crop warehouse at the cattle market, only to be killed later on; there was a sole survivor, who did get wounded while trying to escape, as the Ustashas naturally shot after him. I have forgotten the man’s name. People later said that the captives held in the crop warehouse at the cattle market had to either stand or lie on the cold bare concrete floor. They did not dare rise for fear of being hit with bullets; the guards instantly fired warning shots above their heads.

After a few days, Milan decided to visit his family, under the cover of the night, and see if they had kept us alive after his flight. Luckily, before he came to the house, he visited Jasim Cerić, our neighbor, whom he trusted completely, even though Jasim was a Muslim. When Jasim woke

up and recognised Milan, he tossed him a piece of bread from the first floor of his house and said: "Neighbour" (he did not dare say his name, probably because he was afraid someone might hear it), "Your family are at home, but don't go there, because there are people waiting for you at your house to kill you as soon as you show up." Milan believed Jasim and went to Dabar, where groups of people were already assembling to join the People's Liberation Movement.

At the same time while the Ustashas were trying to kill Milan, my father, I was in town, pushed and shoved and beaten by an Ustasha. There is a detailed account of my ordeal, entitled "A Woolen Coverlet", published in the second book of proceedings ŠUŠNJAR 1941.

It was a time and an occasion when a father and son were in similar situations, without knowing what the other one was going through. Father did not know I was being beaten by an Ustasha, and I had no idea he was trying to escape Ustasha troops; we had peacefully parted at home several hours earlier, without ever assuming what was to befall us.

Tomo Đurđević

CONVERSION

After the 1941 mass killings of the Serbs and Jews in Sanski Most and the adjacent villages by the Ustashas and their like-minded allies, indoctrination began, with previously prepared announcements and Croatian prayer books, to be used to convert the Serbs from Orthodox Christianity to the Roman Catholic faith.

Pressed by this kind of propaganda, the terrified Serbs, mostly women and children – since the men had either been killed or had fled their homes – agreed to convert, that is, relinquish their Orthodox Christianity and embrace Roman Catholicism, as a way to preserve their lives.

Before the conversion, the Serbs were asked to make statements they agreed to the ritual, that is, they voluntarily accepted Roman Catholicism, as long as in return, they were guaranteed their survival.

I remember that before the conversion ritual, we were supposed to memorise some of the Roman Catholic prayers, like the Lord's Prayer, Hail Mary, etc. So, the Lord's Prayer was no longer in Church Slavic, but in the Croatian vernacular... I remember I could tell the Lord's Prayer by heart, but I believe I never got down to learn Hail Mary... As far as I can recall, the conversions continued for around two months.

One day, while the conversions were still taking place, Milica, my mother, my brothers Vladija, Slavko, Đuro, Miloš and myself, without our father, who had escaped being shot by the Ustashas some time before that, found ourselves in the yard of the Roman Catholic church in Sanski Most, together with many other Serb families, to attend the conversion ceremony.



Roman Catholic church in Sanski Most

As we waited for our turn to get in the church and attend the ritual, we heard cannon shots somewhere in Dabar. Whether they were sounds of cannons, guns or perhaps dynamite, we, women and children, had no idea at that time, but we still whispered to each other that it was probably our folk shooting, and that they would shortly come to save us from our hardship. Milica, our mother, and we, her five sons, listened to the shooting and hoped our father, Milan, was also there – we had had no news from him since his fleeing his home to avoid dying at the hands of the Ustashas.

The conversion ritual was an exasperating one, especially as we had to take the Eucharist, which the Catholic priest gave to each one of us individually. I do not remember if he ever asked us if we knew any of the prayers by heart. It may not have been part of that religious ritual.

After the ritual, we were forced to put wooden boards on the walls of our houses, made by a Roman Catholic, for money, of course. I have forgotten his name, but I remember his house was on Zdenska Street, near the Sakradžija house. The boards read, THIS IS A ROMAN CATHOLIC HOUSE.

I was thirteen at the time, and I remember well these boards. Once, I was in the workshop belonging to Ante Sorić, a smith, my Roman Catholic neighbor, when an Ustasha came in, I did not know who he was, and asked Ante: “Ante, why are there boards on your neighbours’ houses saying, THIS IS A ROMAN CATHOLIC HOUSE?”

Ante said: “They used to be Orthodox, they have converted to Catholics.”

I was really fortunate Ante did not tell him I was also one of the converts, because the Ustasha may easily have seen to my end.

Things became somewhat more bearable after the conversion, at least locally; at the same time, the People’s Liberation Movement began assembling, as resistance against the Germans and their allies, the Ustasas and Croatian Home Guard, in order to protect our people.

A faint, stylized cross symbol is centered in the background. The cross has a vertical stem and a horizontal bar. The top of the vertical stem is rounded and features a small circular detail. The horizontal bar also has rounded ends with small circular details. The entire cross is rendered in a light, monochromatic tone against a slightly textured, light gray background.

CONCLUSIONS

Prof. Vladimir Lukić

THE VICTIMS WANT THE TRUTH

The speech made during the closing of
the Third Round Table “Šušnjar 1941”

First of all, a few remarks.

We did not fall victim to the Ustashas so much as we did to our neighbours, Croats and Muslims, who killed us. They killed us because they were indoctrinated by the Ustasha ideology, and I am not in favour of the idea that we should forgive them, I do not support revenge either, but forgiving anyone for those graves, those dead people, as I see it – that must be out of the question.

Let us not fight shy of telling the truth, anywhere. I was capable of telling the truth in The Hague just recently, why should anyone not be able to tell it in Oštra Luka?!

Secondly, several more people were supposed to be here. They are not present, but they certainly made sure The Hearths of Sanski Most Association and the Šušnjar website stopped existing.

However, The Jasenovac – Donja Gradina Association has launched a new Šušnjar website, to be accessible as of Sunday. We're giving you another thing. We have been working on a project of surveying all execution places and camps in the Independent State of Croatia, using the so-called GPS system, and it is our intention to write a short text of explanation of the project and put it on GoogleEarth, along with a few shots. To that end, about twenty days ago a young colleague and myself used the GPS to survey and map Milin Birt and Šušnjar. I hold the opinion that all those places of execution should be surveyed. As you can see, Šušnjar will be a test, as have been these round tables. I think they will be on GoogleEarth in about two months' time, Šušnjar, Garavice,

Jasenovac, Donja Gradina. That means that shortly, basic information about Sajmište, Prebilovci, Šušnjar and other places of mass killings will be available on the Internet. That is one thing that needs working on.

It is very important – and I plead with you – let us all work on it, let us collect more testimonies of persecution. You have all seen how stirring these testimonies can be, like those read by Professor Davidović.

Another important thing is that the other day we agreed with the President of the Republic that the Sixth International Conference on Jasenovac and Donja Gradina will be held in the second half of the month of May 2014.

Here, we heard some comments and testimonies that do not directly concern the Municipality of Sanski Most. They are invaluable and should be prepared for the Sixth International Conference, and I am hopeful we will do everything to make sure the proceedings of this round table are published by the time of the Conference so things can then proceed as they should.

Let me inform you about one more thing. We will submit a request for the current Jasenovac exhibition to be either reconstructed or removed altogether. Let me not explain why. Since Cardinal Hočevar wrote a letter specifying the terms and conditions on which the Pope will attend the celebration commemorating the Edict of Milan, in other words, that we ask him to come without offering an apology, we certainly intend to write him a letter and tell him what needs to be told.

As for the Fourth Conference, the proceedings have been published, in both Serbian and English, and we are doing the same with the proceedings of the round tables. As for the Fifth Conference, we have published the Declaration, which I am sure many of you have; as for those who do not, it can be found on the website of the Association. Let me inform you that we have succeeded in making sure it is on the agenda of one of the sessions of the National Assembly. It has to be adopted by the Assembly, and we believe that will happen.

Those are some of the things that are probably of importance and that we are currently working on.

Furthermore, let me ask you, whoever you find that is willing to write a contribution, let them write and send their texts to us, so we can

make the proceedings richer. Let me also inform you that we have some more copies of the Proceedings of the First and Second Round Table to hand out, so please take them if you do not have them.

As far as the conclusions of this round table are concerned, I suggest we take the conclusions of the Second Round Table, which are excellent, and the chairperson widens them based on the speeches, personal accounts and discussions we heard here.

Finally, let me express my most sincere gratitude to you! Coming here was an effort itself, and when it comes to writing – that is always difficult. But do we have a right, in regard to those buried at Šušnjar – let me not enumerate all the execution places between here and the Grmeč Mountain and Stari Majdan, not to pass our testimonies on to those who come after us, and to historians? Therefore, let me thank all of you who participated or simply attended this round table, and made it a truly important event. I am sure you will not mind it if I bring up the name of Petar Dodik, one of our oldest participants and a Second World War veteran, to whom I am particularly indebted, because he has always seen eye to eye with me regarding all my initiatives to shed new light on the crimes committed in the Second World War against the innocent Serb victims.

Let me thank you one more time and wish you all a safe journey home!

C O N C L U S I O N S

of The Third Round Table “ŠUŠNJAR 1941”, held in Oštra Luka on 1st August 2013

The Round Table “Šušnjar 1941”, held in Oštra Luka on 1st August 2013 by the Municipality of Oštra Luka and the Round Table Organising Committee, in which around 45 historians, researchers, public servants, representatives of various institutions, prominent NOR veterans, survivors of atrocities, writers, journalists and others participated and more than 35 speeches and accounts by eye witnesses and survivors were given – it is important to remark that along with Šušnjar, one of the largest places of mass execution in the Second World War in the former Yugoslavia, there were a number of other execution sites in the Municipality of Sanski Most where crimes of genocide were perpetrated against Orthodox Christian Serbs and Jews, against the weak, children, women and old people, only because they were of other faiths and other ethnicities, by the Ustasha Independent State of Croatia, with the support and assistance of the Roman Catholic Church and under the aegis of and in collaboration with the fascist conqueror – unanimously adopted the following

C o n c l u s i o n s :

1. A book of proceedings with the speeches, discussion and conclusions of The Third Round Table “Šušnjar 1941” will be published in Serbian and English.
2. A round table on Šušnjar and other places of execution on the territory of the Municipality of Sanski Most will be held every other year, in order to collect as much historical and documentary evidence as possible, especially accounts and testimonies


of the eyewitnesses of the crimes of genocide, who are now mostly elderly (while they are still alive and may offer their accounts), and also their relatives, so the new generations learn the truth and the world acknowledges it.

3. An expert board, i.e. commission will be formed, to consist of researchers and other interested individuals, who will investigate the genocide and holocaust committed in Sanski Most and be in charge of the organisation of round tables and similar events on Šušnjar and other places of execution on the territory of the Municipality of Sanski Most.
4. Efforts will be made to promote the Šušnjar execution site as a memorial of the persecution of the innocent, who died because they came from other nations and were of other faiths, the Serbs and Jews, and not as an ordinary memorial of struggle against fascism.
5. Appropriate measures will be taken to ensure the relevant institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina admit the true character of the Šušnjar execution site (as well as other such sites), as a place where innocent Serbs and Jews were executed, and it will be requested that it be preserved and maintained as a memorial. Also, appropriate memorial markers are to be placed along the banks of the Sana and Una rivers, at all sites where the Serbs, Jews and Roma were brutally tortured, murdered and thrown into water, to preserve the memory of the innocent victims of NDH murderers.
6. Since it was only members of two nations that were killed at Šušnjar, the Serbs and Jews, it is to be requested that the traditional Jewish symbol, the Star of David, be placed next to the cross, and that no other symbols may stand there, especially those representative of ideologies, other nations or religions.
7. A museum will be founded, whose mission will be to collect evidence on the Šušnjar atrocities (initially, the collection may be kept in another similar institution). It will collect, store and promote evidence of the atrocities and the suffering of victims,

- audio and visual materials with survivor and eyewitness accounts and testimonies, books on Šušnjar, and other items.
8. A thematic library department is to be opened at the Oštra Luka Library or one of Banja Luka libraries, to collect exclusively publications and printed materials related to Šušnjar.
 9. The incomplete list of victims as produced in the 1964 population census, which was presented in The First Round Table, is to be published as an offprint and made available online, to be open for review, corrections and extension in the future. This activity ought to begin as soon as possible, in order to ascertain the exact number of Serb and Jewish victims.
 10. An initiative is to be started to engage the relevant institutions and organisations to appoint special boards and commissions, whose task will be to produce lists with the names of all victims coming from the territory of the Municipality of Sanski Most, who were killed in all wars in the 20th century (First and Second World Wars, 1992-1995 Patriotic-Defensive War, etc.), and to ensure the lists are published and duly promoted.
 11. The first and last names of all perpetrators of atrocities are to be collected and published, meaning all those who brutally murdered the Serbs, Jews and Roma in the area of Sanski Most, but also in other places, in the name of the Independent State of Croatia. This is to be accomplished as soon as possible, while there are still live eyewitnesses.
 12. Special attention will be paid to the atrocities committed against women, children and old people, including unborn babies, by dignitaries of the Roman Catholic Church and Islamic Community (very often, they were at the head of military units and formations), as well as to the assistance of the Vatican in the afore-said crimes.
 13. Support is to be offered to help with the writing and publication of scientific, historiographic, journalistic and literary works on Šušnjar and other execution sites.
 14. We are particularly indebted to the media for their invaluable contribution to ensuring the general public and institutions,

both local and international, learn about the atrocities committed at Šušnjar. We are hopeful this contribution will be even greater in the future.

15. The Organising Board now has a preliminary design for a church (chapel) to be built to commemorate the Šušnjar victims (Serbs and Jews), and preparations ought to begin for its construction. With regard to that, we are enormously grateful to the US architect Oton Župan, who is also author of this second preliminary design.
16. Support will be given to help stage round tables on the atrocities committed against the Serbs, Jews and Roma on the territory of the Republic of Srpska, that is, Bosnia and Herzegovina.
17. Cooperation will be started with other institutions in charge of memorials commemorating innocent Serb, Jewish and Roma victims, such as Donja Gradina, Šumarice near Kragujevac, Museum of the Victims of Genocide Belgrade, Yad Vashem Jerusalem, Banja Luka-based Jasenovac – Donja Gradina Association, International Commission for the Truth on Jasenovac, as well as other institutions and associations with the same or similar programmes of activities.
18. Efforts are to be made to promote and conduct investigations into the war crimes of genocide, holocaust and exodus of the Serbs and Jews committed in the region in the 20th century.
19. Representatives of the Organising Committee are to present the conclusions of The Third Round Table to the relevant institutions and individuals of the Republic of Srpska.



POEMS ON
ŠUŠNJAR

Ranko Pavlović

ŠUŠNJAR AND POETRY

Historical facts need no supplementing; they are the most conclusive evidence as they are, testifying to the truth with their arguments, free of all emotion. Consider this example: if we say around five thousand five hundred innocent Serbs now rest at Šušnjar together with around 50 Jews, having perished at the hands of their murderous neighbours – slain, shot, hammered to death only because they were Serbs and Jews – we need say no more.

More persuasive than mere information may only be a work of art. Perhaps even more than facts, powerful is its expression, the feelings and beauty of that which it depicts with words, colour, lines, notes...

The pain and pride of the Jugović Mother make her a character worthy of ancient drama. Rakić's "Gazimestan" is more magnificent than any granite monument. Bojić's "Blue Graveyard" sublimates the courage and suffering of the Serbian soldier in the First World War. Skender's Stojanka is symbolic of the Kozara Mountain, as well as of all the other tragic mountains of our history...

In the beginning, there were very few literary works about Šušnjar. Then a group of enthusiastic young writers and poets launched an eponymous literature event, and ho! verses and prose multiplied. Of the long list of authors who have written on Sanski Most, each of whom deserves to find his or her name mentioned here, it is verses by Boro Kapetanović that are the most magnificent, but there are also Jovo Tontić, Dušan Praća... To read all of Mihailo Orlović's prose sketches, one need only take one deep breath...

There are practically no major contemporary Serbian writers who have not taken part in the Šušnjar International Literary Gathering. While for many authors their only bond to Sanski Most is through their poetry, offerings in heartrending verses on the Šušnjar Golgotha have

been made by poets such as Dara Sekulić, Stevka Kozić Preradović, Jovanka Stojčinović Nikolić, Ružica Komar...

Truly stirring are the testimonies offered at the Šušnjar round tables by those who accidentally survived the killings at this place of execution, were eyewitnesses or heard about the atrocities from their forefathers. Writing down and publishing such recollections is priceless.

If another collection is published along with these proceedings, one that will contain, in a single book, all literary creations on the subject of Šušnjar, it will be a major contribution to keeping the memory of these innocent victims alive, and a powerful reminder that battle against evil must never be allowed to stop.

Note:

As proposed and agreed in The Third Round Table “Šušnjar 1943”, poets from the area of Sanski Most have gathered as many poems (including all other forms of poetic texts) as they were able to, by the end of the preparations of these proceedings. Nevertheless, it is certain that many more verses preserve for eternity the tale of the Šušnjar Golgotha; the task thus remains to collect all the related literary works and publish them as a separate book.

Nenad Grujičić

THE GRACE OF THE SOULS OF ŠUŠNJAR

Language is a miracle that feeds and guides our lives, and stores them in its memory. It is our homeland, the most spacious and dearest one, with each of its words a capital city in its own right. Such is the word Šušnjar as we utter it here today, a word evocative of dry leaves that have been shed. Above it drift the living souls of our Šušnjar. This rustle of dry leaves, mixed with the shadows of five and a half thousand Serb souls, stirs us with the quality of a memory that is only occasionally found in a nation.

Again and again, one asks and pleads, what is it that separates life from death? Could it be the memory of a saddest St. Elijah's Day, rekindled every year by the image of leaves being shed too soon? What about poetry, is it not a passionate measure as well, a border between the two worlds, that of the quick and that of the dead? Language, too – maternal – is it not a living death in the epiphany of the truth? The fragrance, breath and fire of the poem? The never-ending renewal of that which was primordial, of that word which was in the beginning and which was in God, who was a word Himself? The alpha and omega of everything, for good? Joy and fear? Day and night, at the same time?

How much longer are we to listen to the prayers over the bones of Šušnjar, how much longer is to be drained this teardrop the size of the sky, on which the Earth rests, and heaven and hell on it? Man is in everything, coming and going unbendingly. Such is the grace he has been given, to embellish his mortal self with temptations and sins, to show his face to God. But, overstepping the line, raising one's hand against another man is like raising it against God himself. Even if it is against oneself, it is against God. God – a cycle of miraculous inceptions, transformations and closures, to the infinitude of love, as named by the mind

and lived by the heart! The soul leaves have been shed, the dry leaves of Sana, the leaves of Krajina. The Serb Šušnjar!

Poetry has the power to travel through time and to make space relative. Incessantly at work, rejuvenating itself, it is in others that it finds itself. The poets of Sanski Most have not betrayed Šušnjar. They persisted in Oštra Luka during the war, and worthy of the precious memory, they found the best way to bring poetry and life together, generating an event meriting attention, an event commemorating the dead. While other precious memories randomly faded, in literary life and elsewhere, or occasionally flooded back, serving as channels for all sorts of improvisation, Boro, Dušan, Mihajlo, Milan and a myriad other great residents of Sanski Most, hovering heady with poetry, yielded their whole selves to Šušnjar, Grmeč and Krajina. Their faith in Šušnjar and in poetry, in their father and mother, their votive spiritual dignity, found its place in the blossom of a rare lasting tradition of Serb literature.

There is no such false authority who, come unsummoned with stories that charm and entice, will force them to admit to seeing the emperor's invisible clothes, at the expense of their talent, honour and integrity. Their moral grandeur and spiritual audacity to safeguard Šušnjar in poetry come from an Ossianic root, from a tradition so peculiarly and specifically Serbian, from whose shoots, growing in Krajina, not only have folk lyric and epic poetry been born, but also buds most resembling Kočić's Zmijanje, his Lujó and Mrgud, Čopić's lassie from Bosanska Krupa, Kulenović's Stojanka, mother from Knežopolje, Kolundžija's Poglede hillock, onto which he fell out of his mother's womb, Dara Sekulić's eulogies to Kordunski Ljeskovac... The stakes were high for the poets of Sanski Most to write about Šušnjar, but so has been the yield of their efforts; their marks have been deep, like banners fluttering high above our humble heads, in spheres where light breaks down into colours and sounds.

As I congratulate my excellent, gifted hosts on their ability to keep alive the poetic soul of Šušnjar, and thank them for this rare opportunity and privilege to receive an award equalling the tenderest grace of one's homeland, I – a lyrical bard amid the vicissitudes of a literary career, whose fate unwinds at the foot of Mount Fruška Gora and Stražilovo, where yellow leaves are already being shed, a place between

Novi Sad and Belgrade that is only physically distant from here – bow to the spirits of Šušnjar, the name of this prestigious award, which I accept in full awareness of not only its literary halo, but also of those of living life and living death. This is a recognition that obliges me, a petty, sinful laureate, to set out on a road of abnegation, of debts whose payment commands that I pray in silence through my waking hours.

Šušnjar is a slumbering poem, dry leaves shed with the whispering of time that drags along the Sana River, inspiring and rejuvenating. It is within this circle that we, the living, also rush to the spirits of Šušnjar. Thus far, we have been halted by the deep waters of modern history, and like the ancient Slavs, breath through a reed, patiently waiting. For poetry knows that human life, its duration, is neither the measure of all things nor a panacea. The poem has but one sister, eternity.

The speech held on the receipt of the Šušnjar Award, 2002

Mihajlo Orlović

THE STORY OF THE ONE WHO FAILED TO TELL IT BY HIMSELF

Some say it was in the Biblical days of Sodom and Gomorrah. Others say it came to pass in the days of Evil. Others claim it never happened, for it is impossible for man, whatever the kind of creature he may be, to fall so low.

I, a martyr in those days, in the days of malice and evil, am not telling my story to the wind and silence, but to the light that pulses above my grave every morning, to those who are yet to come. Those who will have the power to tell between disaster and fear, fear and crime, crime and passion, passion and hatred, hatred and man, man and shadow, shadow and light, light and Day One, Day One and nothingness, nothingness and that which used to be. I believe someone will have that power, and if not, then may there be no people left.

If I had borne a different name, I would still be alive today. I would have lived longer than the ash-tree planted in the yard before my house on the day I was born. It was cut on the day my mother died, so full of sorrow was she for me, to build her a casket out of it.

I was killed because of my name, quite an ordinary name, one that anticipates dawn. I do not even remember it anymore, for as soon as I learned how to walk, they called me a nickname that spoke of my character. They say good people have simple and funny nicknames.

You must be wondering: where and when was it that people were killed because of their names, when was it that man to man was like beast to beast. It happened in a peaceful, ordinary town. A town on nine rivers. A town where each morning baker greeted lawyer, tailor greeted station master, raftsmen greeted gentlemanly school teacher, men of this faith greeted men of that faith. It would all have been good if the

beast had not awakened, thirsty for blood. Instead of the rivulets running through the town, it craved streams of blood. On St. Elijah's Day of 1941, the beast armed itself with a mallet and began killing people because of a name, without asking them what their names were or why they bore them. It did not even condescend to look its victims in the eye – even the viper, the horror of the Earth, looks its victim in the eye before it strikes.

Though I was but a child (it was as a child they killed me), I recall I enjoyed cutting grass. Actually, it was the swishing sound of the steel blade I loved, the sweet crackle of blades of grass, exuding the smell of summer. At Šušnjar, we were those blades of grass, our dreams shattered in the hot sun of St. Elijah's Day, exuding the sweetness of our wedding nights, never to be lived.

I used not to fear dying. I thought it was nonsense. Just as a camel cannot drown in deep waters in a hot desert, it, death, seemed like a joke to me.

I used to live on the outskirts of town, beside the Sana. In the morning I greeted the sun, at noon I was lighter than a butterfly, in the evening the ruddy light of the day glossed my cheeks. Light as a feather I was, so light I could leap over the ash-tree that grew side by side with me.

I still do not believe, although I am as dead as dead can be (shortly, I will have been dead for a hundred years), that what happened at Šušnjar on that hot night, on St. Elijah's, was death. I reckon, it must be an awful, recurrent dream; something will happen, and I will awaken the same moment. And yet, they will not let it happen. As if somebody was still holding the same mallet in his hands. Saliva still smeared on his sleeve, still uttering threats, just like that day.

As five and a half thousand of us lie in the ground, in endless silence, guarded by a monument made of rusty steel decorated with inscriptions screaming about disaster, we wonder if bearing a name is a sin or not.

As I behold constellations of stars twinkle above me like silvery dew, buried deep in the sky – like we are buried deep in the ground, as they cover us again and again, like grass, I am overwhelmed by a sorrowful feeling of senselessness. As much as I may not believe what happened,

I must admit it to myself, the truth and answers are in the hands of the living. And we, who are in the ground, we are but a dark shadow stumbling against roots, pushing hard to make it to the light of day instead of them, to talk to bugs, crickets and beetles... that at least, if we were meant not to rejoice in the sun.

The world of the living breathes lies, cynicism, brutality... Thus, the senselessness gnawing at me is quite possible, even though I do not believe in it. I anticipate an answer that may yet awaken me from my chilly dream.

From the book of accounts A Town on a Lake of Blood









МИЛАДИНОВИЋ С.
ЛУКА
МИЛАДИНОВИЋ М.
МИЛОРАД

СТРЕЉАНИ У
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МАЈДАНУ
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ЂЕРАНИЋ М. СПАСОЈА
ЂЕРАНИЋ М. ЈОВАН

СТРЕЉАНИ У
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