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# KOZARA 1942

SELECTED TESTIMONIES  
AND DOCUMENTS

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## **KOZARA 1941 – 1942: ANGUISH, REBELLION, COMBAT**

After numerous events from March 27, 1941, which prevented the accession of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia to the Tripartite Pact from being implemented (massive demonstrations in Belgrade and other Yugoslav cities with a majority Serbian population, opposition from the Serbian Orthodox Church and a coup d'état that resulted in the underage King Petar II acceding to the throne) the attack of Germany, Italy and their allies on Yugoslavia followed. The attack began on April 6, 1941, and the army of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, unprepared for war and ravaged by ethnic conflicts and mass desertion of Croats and other non-Serbs, was defeated after two weeks of fighting.

This turn of events suited all anti-state and anti-Serb elements in Yugoslavia, especially the Croatian Ustashas. The Ustashas were a Croatian fascist revolutionary organization of a pronounced anti-Serb and anti-Yugoslav character which fought for the separation of those Yugoslav territories that they considered exclusively Croatian and which sought to form a Croatian state. Taking advantage of the rapid advance of the Germans and their allies through Yugoslavia, the Ustasha representatives, as early as on April 10, 1941, proclaimed the Independent State of Croatia which included most of the present-day Republic of Croatia (except for the part of the Adriatic coast that went to Italy, from Split to Zadar, the city of Rijeka, Istria with nearby islands, the southern islands of Mljet, Vis, Korčula and some smaller islands in their vicinity), as well as the entire territory of the present day Bosnia and Herzegovina and Srem in today's Republic of Serbia.

The Independent State of Croatia, led by Ante Pavelić and the Ustasha movement, would very quickly begin to fulfill the set goals, in the first place the cleansing of the NDH (\*Independent State of Croatia) from undesirable “elements” — Serbs, then Jews, Roma and political dissidents from other nations. They set their plan in the motion with the help of law and media propaganda. The first mass crimes against the Serbian people were committed shortly after. The first mass slaughter of the Serbs was carried out less than twenty days after the proclamation of the NDH, in the village of Gudovac, near Bjelovar, where on April 27 and 28, 1941, around 190 Serb “men, residents of a dozen villages in the Bjelovar” region were killed. It was the beginning of the genocide against the Serbs in the NDH.

In the first months of the NDH’s existence, the Ustasha representatives organized public meetings where the Croat and Muslim populations gathered. The gathered people were told about the Ustasha principles and incited to clash with Serbs and other national and political elements Ustashes deemed unsuitable. On the territory of Bosanska Krajina, the Ustasha leader for Bosanska Krajina and one of the main instigators of the genocide against Serbs in the NDH – lawyer Viktor Gutić from Banja Luka put the most effort into this work.

At the end of July and beginning of August 1941, mass killings of Serbs in the NDH were carried out. On the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina the most mass atrocities were committed in Bosnian Krajina and Herzegovina. These crimes are known as the Ilindan (\*St. Prophet Elijah festive day) massacres.

In the summer of 1941, in addition to the regular Ustashes, Home Guard and armed (gendarmerie) forces, a large number of Croatian and Muslim residents participated in the killing of the Serbs – the so-called wild Ustashes (paramilitary Ustasha units). In the area of Mt. Kozara and its surroundings, which is the subject of this publication, the Croatian population was small in number, the Croatian authorities therefore relied on the Muslim population, which was sec-

ond in number. Many Muslim and Croat villages turned into strong Ustasha strongholds from which armed Ustashas and civilians moved to kill their Serb neighbors or bring Serbs to local execution grounds and liquidate them there. One of the larger execution sites was in Zajednice, in Kozarac near Prijedor.

A huge part of the Croatian population around Mt. Kozara sided with the Ustashas or were involved in crimes against the Serbian population. For example, in the area of the post-war region of Bosanska Dubica, due to the aforementioned responsibility, a very small number of Croats had the right to vote in the 1945 elections. In some areas, such as in Prijedor and Ljubija, armed civilians who participated in crimes against the Serbs wore white bands around their arms as an identifying mark. In addition to the liquidation of the Serbs, the genocide was carried out by the forced conversion of Orthodox Serbs to Roman Catholicism or Islam. Thus, after the Ilindan massacres, all surviving Serbs from the area of the municipality of Ljubija near Prijedor were converted to Roman Catholicism. The christening ceremony was carried out in the Croatian village of Šurkovac. In the wider area around the village of Suhača near Bosanski Novi, Roman Catholic and Muslim religious representatives clashed over who would convert more Serbs to their religion:

*From Blagaj Japra, Hodja Silić Ahmed went to Vitasovci and started advising the Serbs against converting to the Roman Catholicism and to embrace Islam. Having learned about these preparations of Hodja Silić, Friars Lujo and Bosiljko from Šurkovac rode their horses in front of the Hodja to prevent his attempts because these Serbs should become Roman Catholics and they had already made considerable effort to achieve that.*

The crimes against the Serbian population in Bosanska Krajina, at the end of July and beginning of August 1941, coincided with

a mass Serbian uprising against the NDH. The Serbian people had a premonition of what was about to happen to them and they could see the crimes, arrests and looting carried out by the Ustashas and armed civilians in the months before the uprising. The people first rose up around Drvar, on July 27, 1941, and then almost all areas of Bosanska Krajina with a Serbian population “rose up” in turn. The following data tells us that this uprising was Serbian in nature - out of about 20,000 insurgents in the first days of the uprising only 17 of them were non-Serbs: 10 Croats, 4 Muslims, 2 Jews and 1 Ukrainian. By the end of 1941, 97 non-Serbs had joined the insurgents in the area of Bosanska Krajina. This refers only to those who joined the Serbian insurgents to fight against the Croat-Muslim, German and Italian forces. The number of non-Serbs who helped the struggle of the Serbian people behind the enemy’s back, sending the insurgents food, ammunition, giving them important information and the like was greater than the mentioned number, but it was not of a mass character.

Gradually, during the year of 1941 and the first half of 1942, the Serbian insurgents would split into Partisans and Chetniks (\*Yugoslav Army in Fatherland) and come into conflict with each other. In the area of the Mt. Kozara and its surroundings most of the insurgents were in Partisan units that were under the political and ideological leadership of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. Although the communists in the Mt. Kozara were surprised by the mass uprising of the Serbian population, they succeeded in bringing the uprising under their control. According to Sava Kesar:

*The armed struggle did not start and did not develop in the form of actions and diversions as it was originally intended, but a mass uprising began... Thus, on July 31, 1941, there was an unforeseen uproar. The bells of some churches rang. The semantrons were being played. The people rushed to the gatherings at the churches, schools... Communists and comrades*

*who worked on the preparation of the uprising also came to the gatherings. They too did not know whether the directive for a general uprising had been issued or not so they assumed leadership roles within the masses and started an action for which there had been no plans until then.*

Serbian insurgents gathered in partisan formations in the Mt. Kozara succeeded in liberating almost the entire Kozara mountain by the spring of 1942. At that time, there were about 3,500 armed partisans in Mt. Kozara assigned to the battalions of the Second Krajina People's Liberation Partisan Detachment. The communist leadership of the Partisan movement decided to attack towns of Prijedor and Ljubija, thereby obtaining large spoils of war, shaking the morale of the Croatian and German forces and cutting the important communication between Banjaluka and Zagreb. Prijedor was liberated on May 16, and Ljubija on May 17, 1942. Although the communists were aware that they would not be able to maintain their positions in Prijedor and Ljubija for a long time, they sought to gain the maximum benefit from that action and to consolidate their political leadership among the insurgents of Mt. Kozara and the entire Bosnian Krajina. This action was well received by the Serbian insurgents and the people who fought against the NDH and their German allies. Kosta Nad, commander of the Operations Headquarters of the People's Liberation Partisan Detachments for Bosnian Krajina, explained the reason for the attack on the Croatian-German forces in Prijedor and Ljubija as follows:

*We were never rigidly attached to one territory and it was not crucial for us whether we would lose one liberated town. The important thing was that the uprising was constantly growing. We knew that we would temporarily lose Prijedor and Ljubija, but it was important not to lose what we gained with Prijedor and Ljubija...*

Partisans remained in Prijedor and Ljubija until June 10, 1942. On that day, a large Croatian-German offensive against the partisans and the people of Kozara began. The combat team “Western Bosnia” was in charge of it (in some documents, the code name of the operation for Kozara was “Xaver”) while about 11,000 German and 19,000 Croatian soldiers were engaged. The German general Friedrich Stahl was appointed head of the “Western Bosnia” combat group.

During the first days of the Offensive the partisans offered strong resistance to a much superior enemy and in the face of the pressure they gradually retreated deeper into Mt. Kozara. About 80,000 civilians, mostly Serbs, retreated with them. Refuges were organized by municipalities and counties. The people from the area of Bosanski Novi took refuge in the valley of the Mlječanica river, from the hamlet of Bokana to the Grabovac stream. The population of the municipality of Bosanska Kostajnica settled in the area of Gračanica, Mlječanica and Palež. People from the Prijedor county also fled to the area of Mlječanica (Široka Luka area), then to the area of Maslin bair, Gradina and Komanda. People fled from the territory of Bosanska Dubica to the area of the confluence of Gračanica, Pašini konaci and Palež.

When it became clear that the partisans could not offer resistance the headquarters decided to try to break through the enemy lines. The headquarters of the detachment and the District Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia held a meeting on July 2 in Mrakovica and made a decision to break through the ring. Breakthrough was to begin on July 3–4, 1942, in the area of Patrija, in the Mt. Kozara near the village of Gornji Jelovac. The given direction of the breakthrough was on the line Jelovac–Jutrogošta–Gradina–Kriva Rijeka–Karan. The breakthrough began exactly at midnight between July 3 and 4. The forces of the First and Shock Battalions managed to break through the ring on the Patrija-Planinica-Jutrogošta line. The Second Battalion was stopped on Jugovića Hill and, with heavy losses, was forced to retreat to its initial positions as was the Third Battalion whose left flank was thus threatened.

During the operation to break through the enemy lines the First and Shock Battalion managed to escape with about 10,000 civilians, mostly from the area of the Bosanski Novi county. The Second, Third and Fourth Battalions of the Second KNOP (\*Krajina People's Liberation Movement) Detachment and parts of the Fourth Battalion of the First Krajina Brigade remained in the ring. A large number of civilians and all the wounded remained with them in Mt. Kozara. The next day, on July 4, there was a major crisis among the forces that failed to break through. Considerable efforts were made to receive and bandage the new wounded from the breach. In such a difficult situation the remaining military and political leadership of the insurgents in Mt. Kozara, headed by the members of the headquarters of detachment, Josip Mažar Šoš and Miloš Šiljegović, made a decision to attempt another breakthrough.

The second breakthrough was attempted exactly at midnight between July 4 and 5, in the same area as the previous one, only with a narrowed front. This time the fighting was fiercer and with much more losses. The enemy was in an even better position because the reinforcements had been brought in and positions were better established. The Second Krajina Detachment suffered heavy losses and only smaller teams of soldiers managed to break out of the ring. Most of the surviving partisans remained trapped in the ring, along with civilians and the wounded. A decimated detachment of about 400–500 armed partisans retreated to the Živoder hill near the village of Vojskove. There, under the leadership of Josip Mažar Šoš and Miloš Šiljegović, it was decided that the remaining forces would be disarmed, broken into smaller groups and hide from the enemy in order to assemble later at the assigned assembly points in Mt. Kozara. Weapons had to be hidden in convenient places. The same order was sent to the civilians in Mt. Kozara. This order was carried out even though there were disagreements and demands to continue the fight. The continuation of the fight was especially demanded by the people of Mt. Kozara whose families were in the refuges. Certain groups of

insurgents disobeyed the order and went to their families in Mt. Kozara while most of the younger fighters obeyed the order.

The losses of the combat team “Western Bosnia”, from June 5 to July 31, were as follows: 69 dead, 160 wounded and 7 missing Germans as well as 445 dead, 654 wounded and 498 missing Croats. It is the German documents, which talk about the losses of the “Western Bosnia” combat team, that refute the Yugoslav historiography after the Second World War which claimed that around 2,000 Chetniks participated in the Mt. Kozara offensive. The Chetniks as active participants in the operation are not mentioned in the other documents of the operative group “Western Bosnia”. Some authors cited Chetnik activity in the outer ring, however, these had been the zones of their activity even before the Mt. Kozara offensive. At the beginning of June 1942, in the vicinity of Bronzani Majdan, partisans of the First Krajina Brigade and Chetniks clashed. Some partisan documents mention the alleged participation of the Chetniks on the side of the Germans and Croats in the attack on Prijedor on June 10, 1942. This is refuted by the order of the headquarters of the operative group “Western Bosnia”, the order discloses that 7,553 soldiers (3,121 German and 4,432 Croatian soldiers) participated in that battle while the Chetniks are not mentioned because they did not participate in the attack on Prijedor.

After the cease of organized Partisan resistance in Mt. Kozara, the civilian population and the wounded were left at the mercy of Croatian and German units. Wounded Partisans were mostly liquidated on the spot, in the areas of Kozara hospitals or places where they were hidden. The seriously wounded were killed in the underground bunker under Projsa, in the valley of Mlječanica (Široka Luka). The wounded in the hospital on Vitlovska and in other areas, were discovered, killed and somewhere they were set on fire along with hospitals and food caches. Documents and bibliography state the number of 450 to 500 wounded at Mt. Kozara, but it is possible that there were significantly more wounded after the breakthrough attempt. The testimonies of several wounded survivors are horrific,

for example the testimony of Milorad Vikalo, who survived the massacre of the wounded in the Mlječanica valley:

*The ring was not broken through that night. We were not taken out. Cannon shells and grenades fell on the wounded and the people. There was a commotion. People and livestock flew into the air, mixing with stones, earth and leaves.*

Throughout Mt. Kozara, during and after the Offensive, Serbs were killed at local execution grounds. One of those execution sites is Macurska krčevina (Macura hamlet, Gornji Jelovac) where around 312 Serbian civilians were killed. Nothing was found about this crime in Croatian and German documents as if it had never happened. Weapons used to slaughter civilians were found in the basement of Milutin Macura's family home; blades were attached to the both sides of the rods.

A terrible fate also befell the civilians in Mt. Kozara. Those who had not died in the action or had not been killed at Mt. Kozara were taken to the camps. Concentration camps sprung up all around Mt. Kozara and most of the prisoners perished in the Croatian death camp complex in Jasenovac, Sajmište in Zemun and some ended up in camps in Norway and Germany. The first mass executions of prisoners took place at the city cemetery in Bosanska Dubica where around 1,600 men, women and children were killed. About 800 civilians were killed at the sawmill in Dubička ravan (\*Dubica plane) and about 700 more people from Mt. Kozara in Dubičke krečane (\*Dubica lime pits).

Camp survivor Dado Stojković recalled how his neighbor Milja died:

*We were playing next to the wire and ten meters from us a guard was reading a newspaper. Suddenly, the guard swung a metal bar above us and struck little Milja on the head. The handkerchief fell, blood gushed from the head and the poor child died.*

There were also babies dying of hunger and disease in Ciglana (\*Brick factory):

*One morning she walked past us and was carrying something in a bundle tied to her belt. What are you bringing us, dear Joja, did you get some food, my mom asked. “No sister, I’m carrying little Rajkić. He died on my lap last night, so I’m carrying him to the gravediggers. Do you know, folks, that it is better that he died, lest he continued to suffer like that”, Joja told us, calm and collected, with no tears on her face.*

Some of the detainees were released from the Ciglana at the request of local Chetniks who had an agreement with the Germans and the NDH on non-aggression and fighting against the communists. These were local formations that operated mainly in their villages, protecting them from Ustasha incursions and fighting against the communists:

*They were coming, that Oste (Oste Radulj), I knew him, and my father told me that he was coming to intervene with that command there.*

A part of the civilians from Mt. Kozara, mostly women and children, ended up in Slavonia, dispensed in Croatian villages as free labor. Many of them later returned to Mt. Kozara. The total suffering of the civilian population of Mt. Kozara during the Second World War exceeds 40,000 killed or perished persons. About 12,000 were children under the age of 15. At least two-thirds of the civilian victims lost their lives during the Offensive or in the camps and killing fields after the Offensive, during the purge of Mt. Kozara from the Serbian population.

In the NDH, there were camps specifically for children: Gornja Rijeka near Križevac, Jastrebarsko and the camp in Sisak. In addition to killing or letting children die of disease and malnutrition, the

Ustashas tried to turn some of the little prisoners into Ustasha youth through conversion to Roman Catholicism and education.

There are terrible testimonies about the suffering of Serbian children from Mt. Kozara and their separation from their families. Old woman Mika Mandić from the village of Turjak, municipality of Bosanska Gradiška, was captured in Mt. Kozara with the rest of fugitives from her refuge and taken to Stara Gradiška. Her two-year-old grandson Luka was taken with her. In Stara Gradiška, the Ustashas started to separate children from their mothers and grandmothers. When they came to take her grandson from her arms, she tried to resist them. The Ustashas were stronger and snatched her grandson from her arms. Mika, dressed in a traditional clothing and with a scarf on her head, tore her blouse baring her old breasts and told the Ustashas that her breasts nourished six heroes and that one of them would avenge her. They immediately butchered her on the spot in a concrete trough. Little Luka did not survive the war. He is on the list of hundreds of civilians killed in the village of Turjak.

The suffering of the Serbian children from Mt. Kozara would have been even greater if it had not been for the help that Dijana Budisavljević initiated for the Serbs in the Ustasha concentration camps.

*My seamstress is Slovenian. I heard from her about the help that local Slovenians provide to the refugees from Slovenian areas occupied by the Germans. My modiste is Jewish. She told me several times about the great aid campaign that the Jewish Religious Municipality had allocated to its members in the concentration camps. There was no aid campaign in Zagreb for persecuted members of the Orthodox faith. My suggestions to some ladies from Orthodox circles were not met with interest.*

The help initiated and organized by this brave woman, originally from Austria, would soon grow into an organized action called “Ac-

tion of Diana Budisavljević”. By October 1941, she managed to gather a significant number of collaborators. By 1942, the action had grown into one of the most complex and noble actions of its kind in Europe. Thanks to Diana and her collaborators, over 7,000 Serbian children were rescued from the camps in the Independent State of Croatia. Kamilo Bresler, adviser in the Ministry of Associations of the NDH, joined her campaign. Teacher Tatjana Marinić, a native of Slavonia, a member of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, and Dragica Habazin, who worked for the Croatian Red Cross as the head volunteer nurse during the war and whose humanity is evidenced by her nickname – Mother, provided her with great help.

Through the German captain Gustav von Koczian, Diana Budisavljević received permission to take the children from the Croatian death camps and place them in shelters in Zagreb. Diana personally went to the camps (several times in Stara Gradiška and Jablanac, once in Mlaka and Košutarica) to take over Serbian children from the Ustashas, even taking infants with her. Since hunger reigned in the camp and sanitary conditions were practically non-existent children suffered from infectious diseases so a large number of them did not even survive the transport to Zagreb. In the war conditions it was difficult to provide adequate help for the survivors because they had serious health conditions. From August 1942, Diana tried to place the children with families that could and wanted to take them.

In this regard, it was necessary to register all these children so that they could be returned to their parents after the war. Diana and her colleagues created records with data and photos for more than 12,000 children which she had to hand over to the Ministry of Social Policy after the war.

The population of Mt. Kozara, who returned to their villages from the Croatian death camps or escaped capture, also died after the Offensive. The greatest suffering in the second half of 1942 in Mt. Kozara were the massacres of the Serbian population in the villages of Veliko and Malo Palančište when 411 inhabitants of Ve-

liko Palančište were slaughtered during three days (October 21–23) (218 of which were children under the age of 14) while 98 civilians (52 of which were children) were slaughtered in Malo Palančište. At the same time, massacres were carried out in the village of Gornji Jelovac, in the places of Lakino kućište, near Hajdučki izvor, and in Kneževića Luka. During the Second World War, 626 civilians (359 adults and 267 children) were killed in the village of Gornji Jelovac. Of this number, 50 mothers were killed together with their children and 34 families who did not survive the war were recorded. The most victims were killed during the year of 1942.

The surviving Partisan forces, gathered after the big Offensive in the summer of 1942, continued their operations during September and October of the same year in the area of Mt. Kozara. This led to the launch of new, smaller offensives in some areas of this mountain.



## CIRCUMSTANCES IN MT. KOZARA AFTER THE OFFENSIVE IN THE SUMMER OF 1942

### A selection from Partisan and Ustasha documentation

The great Croatian–German offensive in Mt. Kozara, in the summer of 1942, officially ended on July 18, 1942. Yet, after the official end of the operation Croatian and German forces continued to persecute civilians and take them to camps until the end of July. At the same time, the search for the remaining partisan groups that were hiding in Mt. Kozara and preparing to regroup and continue the fight went on. Of the total number of civilians killed in Mt. Kozara the largest part died during 1942 and especially during and after the Offensive. Although a lot has been written about Mt. Kozara, at least when it comes to the former Yugoslavia, there are still many unknowns or unspoken truths. In order to shed light on the darkened pages of the Kozara epic in this publication we bring selected testimonies about the suffering during and after the Offensive and several documents that were insufficiently or not used at all in historiography by whom we try to illuminate the darkened pages of the Kozara epic.

In the first part of the publication we present previously recorded testimonies of people from Mt. Kozara who survived the Offensive and looked death in the eye. Selected testimonies were published during the seventies of the twentieth century in the edition of *Kozara in the National Liberation War – Records and Memories*, volumes III–IV, in an effort to point out to modern researchers' important sources

for the history of the Second World War in the area of Bosanska Krajina. Among the testimonies are the memories of partisans, medical workers and civilians who were eyewitnesses of the genocide against Serbs in the NDH in the Mt. Kozara area. We decided to include testimonies about military casualties in the battle which also contain parts that more or less touch on the suffering of Serbian civilians in Mt. Kozara during the Offensive. We believe that, thanks to them, the picture of the suffering of the Serbian population in that area will be much clearer and more complete. In some cases, it is impossible to separate the suffering of civilians from military victims because on some Mt. Kozara killing grounds both civilians and partisans were killed at the same time. A personal and family tragedy is told through individual stories.

At the beginning of the second part of the publication we bring one extensive document of the District Committee of the KPJ for Mt. Kozara as well as several documents from the civil authorities of the NDH that talk about the appropriation of material goods from Mt. Kozara after the Offensive. The first document is the Minutes of the District Council of the District Committee of the KPJ for Mt. Kozara which was held after the Offensive and the gathering of the remaining insurgent forces in Mt. Kozara — on September 20 and 21, 1942. The Council was attended by all members of the District Committee, secretaries of battalion, Partisan bureaus and delegates of all party units – a total of 55 members. In other words, the political and military leadership of the Mt. Kozara partisans was present.

The topics discussed at the Council were: the external and internal political situation, a critical review of the Offensive, reports of party organizations in Mt. Kozara, future tasks and the like. The discussants were asked to be as objective and self-critical as possible which was largely achieved. They exchanged their views on the Offensive and the role of the Party in the fight and among the civilians in the mountain refuges. They also discussed the attitude towards the Western allies and the possibility of opening a second front – in

the West. However, their conclusions about the imminent opening of the western front turned out to be premature. During the discussion of internal political issues the ideological point of view regarding the Yugoslav Army in the Fatherland (\*Chetniks), which was a rival insurgent force, was mentioned. Thus, among other things, it was concluded that the “Ustasha gangs” are no longer a “stronghold of the occupiers”, but have become “Chetnik gangs”. This highlighted the “enormous significance in relation to the Croatian people who ceased to be the base of the occupiers and who rise up to fight today”, as stated in the document. Such a conclusion sounds terrifying knowing the fact that almost 20,000 members of the Croatian and Muslim people participated in the Mt. Kozara offensive, committing crimes against Serbs, killing wounded partisans and taking captured Serbian civilians to Croatian death camps. After the Offensive most of the Croatian and Muslim villages around Mt. Kozara would become safe strongholds for the Ustashas and Home Guards, and the residents of those villages will join the Ustasha and Home Guard units. The occurrence of looting of Serbian villages during and after the Offensive, by Muslim and Croatian peasants, was also recorded. Just one month after the Council, the Ustashas would commit a terrible massacre of the Serbian population in the villages of Veliko and Malo Palančište as well as of Gornji Jelovac and less than four months later members of the Croatian and Muslim people would massively participate in the offensive against the insurgent forces of Grmeč, Kordun, Banija and Lika. In historiography, this operation is known as the Fourth Enemy Offensive.

The Minutes from the aforementioned Council are followed by several copies of documents of the NDH authorities that are kept in the archives of the Memorial Museum in Mrakovica on Mt. Kozara which testify to the appropriation of material goods from that area and to the praise given to the NDH officials who led that action. The documents were written in August, October and November 1942, as we can see, after the Mt. Kozara Offensive. With this, the NDH tried

to economically destroy the Serbian people of Mt. Kozara, cause famine among the surviving Serbian peasants and prevent the sustenance and support of Partisan units.

Based on the analysis of the documents published in this publication we can understand the extent of the suffering of the Serbian people in Mt. Kozara during and after the great Offensive. In addition to the great losses of Partisan forces, the killings and deportation of the civilian population to death camps, the NDH authorities sought to economically destroy Mt. Kozara. The genocide against the Serbs in the NDH showed its most terrible features in Mt. Kozara during 1942.

Boris Radaković





# TESTIMONIES



## OFFENSIVE TO KOZARA

*In Kozara there is a grave next to a grave,  
a mother is looking for her son's one*

The riddled and burnt plane of Franjo Kluz, the glowing blaze, seemed to be the first terrible fiery sign of the great offensive that, in the following days, descended in Mt. Kozara, the famous Partisan fortress, the pride of the Bosnian Krajina.

The Partisans of Mt. Kozara crushed enemy troops and battalions, blew up armoured trains, demolished railways, destroyed trucks and tanks, defied Hitler's war machine in the middle of enslaved Europe.

The Rebels of Mt. Kozara had to be stopped at any cost.

In the headquarters of the German commander, General Stahl, a war plan for a major military offensive on the liberated territory of Mt. Kozara had been prepared for a long time. Enemy divisions, regiments and battalions gathered around Mt. Kozara from all sides. Tanks and artillery were brought in. A firm encirclement was created around the famous partisan base.

"First, we will wipe out Mt. Kozara and then the next in turn will be the partisan nests on Grmeč and Drvar", they said in the headquarters of General Stahl.

Almost eighty thousand enemy soldiers concentrated on positions around Mt. Kozara and were vigilantly waiting for the signal for a general attack.

It was the beginning of the summer of 1942 when the first nazi tanks thundered through the streets of liberated town of Prijedor announcing the beginning of the enemy's offensive to Mt. Kozara.

A fiery inferno flared up from all sides around Mt. Kozara. The cannons, pointed towards the libertarian mountain, began to belch the red-hot steel hail on the green hills on the approaches to Mt. Kozara. From dawn to dusk planes flew over partisan territory dropping bombs and machine-gunning everything alive.

Four thousand Mt. Kozara partisans opposed that and such an enemy force. One partisan to twenty enemy soldiers.

The partisans of Drvar, Grmeč and other parts of Bosnian Krajina tirelessly attacked the enemy day and night to help, as much as they could, their comrades who were caught in the firm encirclement of the offensive. However, the encirclement did not yield anywhere.

A single battalion of Mt. Kozara managed to break through several lines of enemy trenches in the course of one night and escape from the steel embrace in the direction of Grmeč mountain. Behind them, the firm encirclement closed again so that it would never open again until the end of the offensive.

The entire Krajina, with trepidation and love, followed this unequal and gigantic battle between the libertarians and the enslavers.

It was no laughing matter. Not even for our friend Lijan or his boys. After the downfall of Franja's partisan plane they all returned to their troop and now the Youth Strike Battalion was non-stop flying into enemy positions in front of Mt. Kozara. One night, near the Ivanjske railway station, during the fight, they almost fell into the encirclement themselves.

On that dangerous night, Lijan was rescued from the encirclement by his friend Šušlja who took him out through a narrow stream bed over which flashes of lightening bullets were whipping all the time. Unable to find his way on unknown terrain, lost in the dark, Lijan wanted to go down the stream and Šušlja persistently dragged along the stream and so they resisted and stretched in the dark for a long time until the old man finally gave in.

— Let's use the horse's mind this time too, I've done that often before.

Indeed, after half an hour, Šušlja led him outside the last enemy trenches.

In the evening, as soon as it got dark, the enemy artillery would start bombarding Mt. Kozara from all their cannons.

Lijan and his boys would gather in a crowd and, anxious and cheerless as they were, they would listen to the endless and powerful cannonade.

— Bang – bang – bang – bang! — cannon after cannon would roar and their thunder flowed into one continuous powerful rumble as if the hills themselves were collapsing and sinking somewhere into the dark underground.

— Eighty thousand women and children are in the besieged Mt. Kozara — someone would whisper to him and then each of our boys would feel the horror of the enemy's offensive with a sharp pain in his soul.

— Tonight, dozens and dozens of cannons are sending their heavy shells into the mountain refuges where scattered and frightened children are shivering in the darkness — said fieldman Lijan solemnly as if warning his boys never to forget those terrible moments.

The windows of the rural houses below Mt. Grmeč rattled from the cannonade as if they were shaking with fever. No one felt like sleeping, neither the fighters nor the people.

— It will be for seven years that Mt. Kozara will stink! — shouted the German commander at a group of girls captured in Mt. Kozara.

— For seven hundred years the glory of Mt. Kozara will be remembered! — youngster Nena Bokanova told him proudly.

An uneven life and death battle lasted for about a month and a half, and then the cannons fell silent. The heroic defense of Mt. Kozara was shattered. The enemy broke into the mountain. Three dense German machine gun troops trampled through Mt. Kozara searching

every bush and killing everything alive. Columns of women and children left the village for the Croatian death camps in Jasenovac and Gradiška to their deaths.

But, as soon as the enemy machine guns “combed” Mt. Kozara the rebellious mountain came to life again. The surviving fighters crawled out from under fallen trees and tangled tree veins, emerged from thick ferns, hollow trees, descended from dense beech treetops. It seemed as if the very land of revenge was giving birth to new heroes.

Shortly after the offensive, the Fifth Krajina Strike Brigade was created from the surviving fighters from Mt. Kozara.

Revenge rifles fired in unison again and our acquaintances the fighters of the Youth Battalion, hearing the fire from the overrun Mt. Kozara, cheerfully looked at each other.

— Listen, what is this? Kozara mount was run over, but not conquered!

Branko ĆOPIĆ

## **LETTER FROM PARTISAN MIRA CIKOTA BEFORE SHE WAS EXECUTED**

My dear mom,

It's been many months since I wrote to you ... And here, after many months I'm writing to you, unfortunately, the last letter. The sentence has been pronounced. I am sitting in the cell and waiting for them to come for me. I'm not here alone. We talk, we sing, we're thoughtful, but believe me, mom, it's not terrible. That's why I'm writing to you.

I would like to tell you all not to be sad. While a man is free, this position seems terrible to him, but it is not. I got used to this situation and the thought that thousands and thousands of other people ended up like this alleviates my pain and sorrow for life. I heard that my lovely Ljiljana is with you. That made this situation easier for me. I am calm because she was my only thought and I was afraid that she would stay far from you. I promised her the last few days, when we were together in Prijedor, that she would go to her grandmother's so now I am satisfied that it turned out that way. My little sun, she suffered a lot in the last few days wandering and running away with me.

I hope that she will recover soon, that she will be a good girl to her grandparents' delight. I know that you all love her very much, but I know that I, dear mother, have given you a lot of care because she is still small, spoiled and you do not give in because she needs to get used to a new life. A life in which she will not have a mother who understands her child and always stands with him and by his side.

Teach her to work and let her help you with the housework, and I know her good aunts will love her and take care of her.

I think it would be good for her not to go to school this year because she is physically weak, but, if possible, let her go to a children's playground. Buy her a small schoolbag and some kind of children's book she can already read a little. Kiss her many times and tell her that her mother greets her and asks her to be good and obedient. One day her dad will come because I hope he's still alive. I told her that. I don't know if she remembered what I told her...

I will finish this letter. My dear mother, don't be sad. I guess it had to be like this. Now Ljilja is here for you. Take care of yourself. I know you are weak and sensitive. Send my regards and kiss my dad. I thank him for everything. I love you both very much! Let Ljilja, Lala and Nada fulfil my wish and let them be serious and good.

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*Partisan Mira Cikota's letter before she was executed,  
Memorial Museum in Mrakovica, permanent exhibition*

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## **IN THE MT. KOZARA OFFENSIVE**

The beginning of the Mt. Kozara offensive found me in the 2nd troop of the 2nd battalion whose commander was Vaso Tomaš. I was currently at the district party conference for Mt. Kozara at the school in Meduvode. In addition to communists from the units the conference was attended by members of the Party who worked in the background. Among others, Radovan Miljatović spoke at the conference. We were surprised how well he spoke even though he was a peasant with a primary school education. Otherwise, both he and his brother Milorad were free to express themselves. There was talk about our successes in destroying the enemy and in particular there was talk about strengthening organisations in the countryside, organising the people. Prijedor was liberated as well as a good part of the Mt. Kozara area. There was also talk that councillors are to be elected by the people at meetings and not appointed, etc.

Enemy forces moved towards Mt. Kozara, towards the municipalities of Ravljan and Moštani. These enemy forces were routed. This was followed by the breakthrough of the enemy from Bosanska Kostajnica. Our 2nd troop was located towards Ševarlije, Johova, Komlenac and Mrazovci. As the enemy advanced with stronger forces we had to retreat. We retreated below Mt. Kozara to the village of Pogledevo.

A position was established at Pogledevo to defend Mt. Kozara. The troop had three platoons. The sergeants were: Ilija Balaban Iliš, Pero Katić and Alija Pašalić. We also took part in the action against

the positions at the Bjelajac school where the enemy was well entrenched. It was at the end of June 1942. It was the last action to break out of the encirclement at the beginning of July.

Before that, our troop went on a breakthrough and broke out on the road Bosanska Dubica—Knežica in Međuvode, Vlaškovac and Međuvode. However, we had to retreat. When I talked about it with the troop commander Vasa Tomaš he told me that this breakthrough was made to allow the encirclement of Patrija and Jelovac to be broken. While we were breaking through and crossing the road in the direction of Čelebinac our forces were breaking through the encirclement towards the Jelovac road.

During the second night we did not manage to get through the encirclement. Parts of our 1st troop broke through while the rest of our troops and the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion remained in Mt. Kozara.

We returned from the failed breakthrough and headed towards Vitlovska. There were fighters from several units and battalions. This was followed by a regrouping of the troop. It was no longer known what happened to the fighters who did not come to Vitlovska. There were stories that they broke through, that they perished, etc. I remember that I came to Macur, above Bokan, in Gornji Jelovac. The order to withdraw followed. We were mixed up with enemy soldiers. They were also afraid when they noticed us. We returned to Mt. Kozara. Maybe we could have even passed, but the order was to retreat and that at the time when we were already close to the Jelovac road. After the exit to Vitlovska troops were created from the fighters bought from the area. It was said that the commissar of our 2nd battalion Nikola Luketić and the commissar of the troop Dušan Kos were killed.

More than half of the fighters from our 2nd troop returned from the breakthrough. So much the same from Tomica Španović's troop and most of the fighters of the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion. There were a lot of fighters from Pera Milanković's troop. Most of the fighters that broke through were from the 1<sup>st</sup> troop. Commander Sreto Đenadija and deputy commander of our battalion Dragutin Čurguz passed with it.

When the troops on Vitlovska were restored there was talk that we would break through somewhere across the river Sava. We arrived above the village of Vojskova. Here, the commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion Stanko Milić gave a speech and told the fighters to disperse into groups. We were surprised by this attitude. Some began to lay down their weapons, others did not. Thus, a very difficult situation arose.

And finally, we started to separate into groups. We went in a group: Vaso Tomaš, commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> troop, Tomica Španović, commander of the 3<sup>rd</sup> troop, Jovo Bijelić, I think he was the deputy commander of the 4<sup>th</sup> troop, Blagoja Vučićević, Simo Miljatović, myself and a certain number of other comrades. When we arrived in the village of Pucare we saw that almost all the people had left Mt. Kozara. Before that, we met Rade Međeda in the village of Vojskova and talked with him. We found some food there. We didn't carry weapons yet. There were wavering people among the people who would ask us: "Where are you going with your weapons? Why are you carrying them?" and the like.

In the village of Pucare we agreed to divide into smaller groups. I found myself in a group with my uncle Miloš Jajčanin, Sreto Grujičić and Drago Đapa. We found a place in Pačnjak and dug a shelter there by the stream. The entrance is from the stream. We strung a willow tree at the entrance. We decided to stay there. However, we were found by Mika Kos, the wife of Miloš Jajčanin. She wanted to stay with her husband. Her mother was with her. Miloš said that she was to go with her mother, but she didn't want to so he also left us and went with his wife. Sreto Grujičić and Dragoja Đapa also went away. I was left alone.

When I came to Pucare I found Ratko Burazor, his brother Perica, and Vlada Grujičić and joined them. We found Pera Kos, Mirko Jaruga and Stanko Ćurić. We came to a hedge in the middle of a field, in Pucare. A deep trench was dug in that hedge. One crawled into the ditch. We asked him if he saw us. He said yes, but we didn't

see him. The place is convenient because it also protects us from bullets. We noticed that the enemy in the attack was shooting and searching the land in front of them. We crawled into this ditch in the hedge. Pero Kos, Mirko Jaruga and Stanko Ćurić left us. They said they were going to change clothes. But they didn't come back. As we were tired, we fell asleep. We only woke up when the sun shone through the hedge. We probably wouldn't have woken up hadn't we heard the commotion. We raised our heads and looked ahead. We saw a dense array of enemy soldiers. There was no way out, but to calm down and wait. We unscrewed the hand grenades. There are four of us: Ratko and Perica Burazor, Vlado Grujičić and me. We had agreed not to allow the enemy to capture us. In case they discovered us we decided to kill each other with bombs.

When they got close one Ustasha soldier noticed a shoe near us. He shouted, "Here's the shoe." This recklessness could have cost us our lives. When I had entered the trench, I had taken off my shoes because they had been tight. So, one shoe had been left by the hedge. Another Ustasha soldier asked where the other shoe was and this one replied that it was not there. That was the end of their conversation. Vlado Grujičić whispers to me that it is my shoe. I was so upset I didn't know it was mine. I only saw it when the Ustasha threw it into the hedge where we were.

The Ustasha soldiers stopped and started digging trenches. We felt safer then because they passed by us. They made themselves comfortable and went to the river Rakovica to swim. They left the weapons stacked in cones. We could have run to the weapons and picked them up, but we were not allowed to reveal ourselves.

A summer day is very long. And for us, at the reach of the enemy, even longer. It becomes eternity. The Ustasha soldiers returned from swimming and continued digging trenches. We had some food, but we didn't feel hungry. We were just thirsty and simply tired. We stayed in this place until evening. We noticed an Ustasha guard about ten meters from us. He kept shooting. The other Ustashes went

to dinner. We were preparing to get out and go because it was unbearable in the immediate vicinity of the Ustashas. We got dressed, took our guns and bombs and we were on our way. It was night. We crawled on the ground. We saw an Ustasha guard. It seemed to us that he saw us, too. When we were about fifty meters away we got up and left. We were going, but we didn't know what was ahead of us. We were in a hurry to get to the water. After drinking water we became stronger. It seemed to us that we could fight.

We are moving towards Vojskova. Along the way we came across a telephone wire and cut it. We saw a guard at a house. He shouted, "Who is there?" We ran away. Later we found out that Šoša was there with some friends. And they scared us and moved on. We headed towards Mt. Kozara. The next day we noticed a woman. She was dressed in a peasant costume with a big scarf. We decided to go to her place and look for bread. The house was lonely, at the end of Vojskova, next to the forest with two entrances. We entered the house and addressed the woman: "Mother, do you have some bread?" She was witty so she told us: "I had some, but I gave it to the army." "To what army?" — "There they are in the courtyard." We noticed a group of Ustasha soldiers in the yard. We hurriedly went out the door we had just entered and fled towards the river Moštanica. Luckily, we came to a side entrance, otherwise we could have encountered Ustasha soldiers.

From Vojskova we went towards the Moštanica monastery. We wanted to come closer to our villages because we thought it would be easier to navigate there. We also thought about our families assuming that the enemy would let the women and children go home. When we came to the Moštanica monastery and wanted to rest we saw a lot of enemy troops. We wore home defender suits. The enemy noticed us, but did not assume that we were partisans. They thought we were home defenders who were in the forest. We managed to get out and go back. We came to Palež, in Mt. Kozara. We found and slaughtered a pig and started roasting it. Then, a group of friends came across.

They were: Đuran Arsenić, Marinko Krnjajić and others. We cordially greeted one another. Only then did we feel how much we are dear to each other and how much we need each other.

We had lunch there. Arsenić and Krnjajić intend to go to their villages, Johova and Ševarlije. They started across the Bosanska Dubica–Prijedor road. We went to Pogledevo. There we found Rade Kos, Blagoje and Dušan Trkulja and a certain number of comrades who survived the offensive. Later, Stojan Grujičić Jaruga came to us. He managed to pass through the encirclement during the breakthrough. He returned to Mt. Kozara and told us that Boško Šiljegović was alive, that he was with Dragutin Čurguz, Jovica Kos, Sreta Đenadi and others.

Soon, the surviving fighters returned here and gathered so the troop and battalion began to be rebuilt. Now Mirko Pekić came as the commander of the 2nd battalion, Pero Čurguz as the commissioner; the deputy commander is Dragutin Čurguz and the deputy commissioner is Dušan Utješinović.

The first troop with commander Sreta Đenadi and commissar Milan Budimir was closer to Pogledev, in a place called Ljeskare. The second troop is in Razvale. The commander for a period was Vaso Trkulja, then Mirko Šiljar came; the commissioner is Jovica Kos and his deputy is Dušan Čulum. The third troop is in Brljug with commander Đurđe Vučen and commissioner Vaso Petrović. There was also headquarters of the Mt. Kozara military detachment in Brljug.

Milinko Jajčanin

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*Milinko Jajčanin, "In the Kozara offensive", Mount Kozara in the National Liberation War. Records and memories, Book III, Vojnoizdavački zavod, Belgrade 1971, 309–313.*

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## FROM BALJ TO MT. KOZARA

When the offensive in Mt. Kozara began I was on the party course in Karan. We were told to report to our troops immediately. As soon as I joined the Balj troop, Commander Stevan Janjetović assigned me to a platoon located in Bačvani.

Germans, Ustasha and Home Guards were attacking from Bosanska Kostajnica and Bosanska Dubica. On the other bank of the river Una the enemy fortified themselves in trenches.

Soon the order came to withdraw because the enemy had come out to Balj and fortified themselves in Tavia and Palež. When I joined the troop Jovica Dragović from Slovinac (from Croatia) joined me.

We headed towards Balj and fought with the enemy for two days. The machine gunner was Nikolica Budimir. We stormed near the house of Trivun Borojević and expelled the enemy. From Trivun Palija's house on the enemy burned buildings and properties. We accepted the fight from the road towards Palija. Here I also met Mića Zec, the commissar of the troop. We fought until the night-time.

The order to withdraw came the next day. We headed towards Štekovići, from Pale via Čajna. There, in Soldat's ditch, we fought for several hours. We did not retreat until the enemy slipped through the ditch and reached the cemetery in Podoška. We retreated across Čajna. When we were going towards Čitluk, Stojan Jelisavac Čolaga was seriously injured. I heard someone moaning in the hedge. I sent fighters Nikolica Budimir and Gojko Kušić to see who it is. They found Jelisavac so we carried him to Serdar. We left him there.

When we started to recede this far we went all the way to Dvorište where we spent the night. We reached Jelovac and Čupić hill. This was where our forces were gathered. We were now part of the battalion. That's where I saw commander Žarko Zgonjanin.

Battles are fought both day and night. We moved to Bokan. One evening we fought in the Cvijića grove and we spent the day there. We managed to pass to the right of the enemy artillery. We crossed the road and were moving on in order to climb the slope. The fight subsided. The fighters Trivun Karan was with ran into a group of enemy soldiers who had laid down their weapons and were resting. We went there, but commander Stevan Janjetović ordered Dragan Kljajić's platoon to stay here. I was with Kljajić so we moved forward. Pepa Slijepac, Gojko Kušić and several other fighters were with me. I feel that someone is shooting at us: mud is rising from the road. I saw a sprawled beech tree. I noticed a man. True, our comrades went there. I took aim and fired two rounds. He stopped shooting. Battalion commander Žarko Zgonjanin was walking behind me with a gun in his hand. He shouted at me. He warned me that our comrades were there. Why was I shooting? I explained to him that they were shooting at us from there, but Žarko told me that they were shooting so that I would take cover and lie down. We found a murdered German behind a fallen tree. He was shot in the head, had a machine gun and binoculars. A lot of enemy soldiers were captured in this action. We were ordered to let them go.

A breakthrough soon followed at Ravni Gaj. I am in Dragutin Kljajić's platoon. In the direction of our breakthrough there was an enemy machine gun which prevented us from moving. We decided to collect the bombs and liquidate this enemy nest. I went forward and I know I dropped two bombs. I don't know what happened next because I was wounded. After I regained consciousness I noticed that Božo Šteković was carrying me. Milan Plavšić was also wounded in the hand. From here I went to Mednjak to hospital.

I stayed in the hospital for a while. The fight was still going on and sometimes shells were falling around us. Other wounded are ar-

iving. We were told that we should go to Vojskova and that other wounded people would be accommodated here. The hospital in Med-njak is small and could receive 30–40 wounded. We are housed in woven barracks. When the new wounded arrived we asked where they were from, which unit they were from and they said they were from the Petar Mećava battalion, from the First Krajina Brigade, which went to help us. There was a fight between Mećava's and our army until they recognized Mećava's: "Oh, year be fruitful, I'm going to go to Mt. Kozara", etc. Only then did the fire stop. After leaving the hospital I managed to find my troop which was preparing to break through from the encirclement.

We went out to Ravni gaj under combat. We were in a narrow space through which we had to pass. Mićo Zec was with us. Farther below us a horse pulling a small cannon fell. That's where I found Dragutin Bajalica, Gutan. We agreed that he should release the horse and pull out the cannon with his hands. Then the women, together with Dragutin Bajalica, dragged the cannon up the hill. So, we continued to clean the area from Ravni gaj towards Jutrogušta. A lot of people went through there (with the First Battalion).

Since my wound became inflamed it was decided that I should immediately go to the hospital in Podgrmeč. When I recovered in hospital, after 15 days, the headquarters of the 1st Krajina Brigade assigned me to be the commissar of the hospital in Mt. Grmeč. I begged Ratko Marušić to let me go to my unit. Then he told me that the First Battalion was not in Mt. Kozara, but it was across the river Sana, in Radimirovac. The courier from the First Battalion, Perica Vukelja, arrived then. I set off with him from Johovica and arrived above Ljubija where I found the battalion. I already felt well. The wound was almost healed.

At that time, the battalion was fighting the enemy around Ljubija and Miska Glava. While the fight was going on here the enemy was assembling encirclement around Svodna. The order arrived to fight only that evening and to move back to Mt. Kozara during the night.

The same night in Petkovac we crossed the river Sana and then headed towards Dubrava. From Križ we watched the enemy machine gun troop moving from Knežica. It was then decided that our troop should head towards Balj and find a place to break through. Mihajlo Gačić is the commander of a troop and the commander of our troop is Ostoja Miljaković. So, these two troops set off together. We parted ways with the battalion, came to Jošine, went down to Strigova and then to Čitluk from where we went to Reljića gaj. We sent scouts from there. Ostoja Miljaković gave me and Vasa Jovanković the task of finding a way out. We were supposed to go down Čitluk towards Ribića Bridge. We went towards Radoška and the enemy was in Đenadije and near Serdar. We could have passed if we were going between Serdar and Sljepac to Drljići. We lost contact with the troop and took shelter in the bunker until the enemy passed. From here we went to Bačvane and from there to Mt. Kozara. There were fifteen of us.

When we arrived at Mednjak, I found Ostoja Miljaković, Ostoja Risojević and many people known from the Balj troop. There were the First Battalion and a troop of the Strike Battalion. Some of our troops went towards Maslin Bajir. We went in patrols to Mt. Kozara, collected food, chased the pigs and cleaned up. I spoke with Ostoja Miljaković. He had previously left Reljić gaj with his troop for Hum and Babinac. He claimed that he was captured, but managed to escape.

Soon, a party counselling was held in Mt. Kozara which I also attended. There was sharp criticism of our actions during the offensive. After this consultation meetings were held with communists in battalion. That's when I learned for the first time that during the offensive there were disagreements in the headquarters of the military detachment.

Marko Gačić

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*Marko Gačić, "From Balj to Kozara", Kozara III, 319–322.*

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## **MT. KOZARA REFUGE**

When the enemy tanks penetrated from Banja Luka into Prijedor, I found myself in the town. We were surprised. The abandonment of the city had begun. That's how I ran away to Palančište. The municipality was then near Bašinci in the so-called Dalmatian house. We moved here after the liberation of Prijedor. While I was going to the municipality enemy planes landed on Urije. They flew over the surroundings of Prijedor and followed the movement of people fleeing the town. They beat with machine guns and threw bombs. As there were a lot of things and materials in the municipality I ordered that they be quickly picked up and taken to Mt. Kozara. There was an unplanned withdrawal and escape. After the occupation of Prijedor the enemy advanced towards Mt. Kozara. The people fled towards Mt. Kozara as before during enemy raids. However, no one knew that it was a larger enemy offensive and that it would last a long time.

The people from the villages of Potkozara region retreated to Mt. Kozara. He moved around the forest from Maslin Bair to Mlječanica. There were mostly people from the Prijedor region. Some went even further, to the Dubica section, even to the village of Vojskova. But, the people from the Prijedor region were mostly located on Maslin Bair, Gradina, Komanda and around Mlječanica. It is a rare case that a family stayed in the village except for the village below the Prijedor–Kozarac road. They did not run away to Mt. Kozara.

The units are in position and defending the enemy's breakthrough in Mt. Kozara. Our main concern is the accommodation of

the people, the organization of food and the feeding of the units in the positions. We went to the people and talked about the situation. I was in constant contact with the headquarters of the Strike Battalion, its commander Ranko Šipka and commissioner Niko Jurinčić.

We had about fifty cows. We organized the milking of these cows and supplied milk to the wounded and children on the escape. We picked cherries and sent them to the wounded. There were plenty of cattle so we had meat.

The people believed that we would defend Mt. Kozara and that we would save them. But, the situation was very difficult. When it was decided to break through the encirclement people asked what would happen to the population. They asked for explanations.

Before the departure of our units for the breakthrough we were informed about it. This was communicated to us by the headquarters of the Strike Battalion. We prepared the wounded and the people for getting out of the ring. Along with that we were told to tell people to hide. The rear leaders were informed at the Strike Battalion headquarters that we were retreating with them. So, it was. Some went and failed to break through. I went through the encirclement with the Strike Battalion.

I went out on the first night and came upon Karan. Here I found parts of the First Krajina Brigade that participated in the action on Dobrljin. They had just returned. Boško Šiljegović was also there. He told me to go to Podgrmeč, to the Operational Headquarters, from where I had to deliver some horses. I went and took the letter to the Operations Headquarters. After returning from Podgrmeč, I came to Boško Šiljegović who directed me to Mt. Kozara. He headed towards Bosanska Dubica with our forces and I returned to Kozara with a troop of partisans. I know that Brane Kovačević went with that troop as a commissar. Arriving in Mt. Kozara we settled on the slope above Zidan mlin (\*Brick Mill). We stayed here for a while. The troop went further to Mt. Kozara and I returned to the village to find out what happened to the people and if there were any board members left.

I saw desolation in the village of Palančište. Very few people survived the offensive. All were driven to Croatian death camps. Some people managed to hide and we started to work with them, to gather. We were still alone and did as we thought we should have. There were wounded that we placed in Pavetnjak. There was a barrack left here which was built earlier so we collected the surviving wounded in it. There were about twenty of them. The wounded Rade Kondić, who stayed somewhere in Mt. Kozara, also came. We brought milk and other food to the wounded. The enemy cruised through the villages, collected the harvest and took it to Prijedor. Another offensive in Mt. Kozara followed.

Boško Simatović

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*Boško Simatović, "Kozara refuge", Kozara III, 485–487.*

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## SANA MUNICIPALITY IN KOZARA REFUGE

Although I was the commander of the Sana municipality I did not know about the enemy's offensive in Mt. Kozara until it began, i.e. to the movement of enemy troops from Bosanska Kostajnica and Bosanski Novi towards Mt. Kozara. Moreover, before that, the enemy occupied Prijedor, but we considered it normal because we did not expect that Prijedor would remain in our hands for a long time. However, we did not expect that the enemy would attack our free territory. Nevertheless, the movement of the enemy towards Mt. Kozara began. The people retreated spontaneously before the attack of the enemy. As the enemy advanced, so did the people retreat. The enemy moved towards Mt. Kozara even from Prijedor, Banja Luka, Bosanski Novi and Bosanska Dubica.

The majority of families from the Sana municipality found themselves in Mt. Kozara. True, there were individuals, even households who stayed at their homes (some were caught and killed). Some left their houses and stayed in the forest on the way, but were later discovered and killed. So, Vaso Dragić went with his family and stayed at Ravni gaj where the enemy found and killed them. Only the individuals who knew how to avoid encounters with the enemy survived.

Partisan troops held back the enemy and enabled the retreat of the people towards Mt. Kozara. The people from villages and hamlets joined together in one line. Upon arrival in Mt. Kozara they poured into a huge column in the Mlječanica valley. That's how the families from the Sana municipality found themselves in the Mlječanica val-

ley (from Bokan, towards Vitlovska and along the Gračanica river). Right and left along the Mlječanica river people from the municipalities of Dobrljina and Svodan arrived. The families settled under the trees next to the cattle cart. They brought some food, chased cows, sheep and other livestock.

In those days of retreat each region stuck to its own partisan unit. That's how the people from our region stuck to the 1st Battalion. We maintained contact with the battalion headquarters.

The enemy was held above the road Prijedor—Knežica—Bosanska Dubica. The front and defence of Mt. Kozara was organized. On the second day after arriving in Mt. Kozara a committee for the defence of Mt. Kozara was created. It was the body for the entire Mt. Kozara. At the same time committees were formed for certain areas. There were no more municipal committees because the people got mixed up so committees of individual parts of the area were created. These are narrower bodies which took care of housing and feeding the people, lighting fires, collecting youth to help units at positions, filling in troops, evacuating the wounded, etc. Female youth were especially prominent in carrying the wounded and food.

The committees informed the people about the situation in the positions. Newspapers were also printed in which they wrote about the battles, the successes of the partisans and more. This restored confidence to a certain extent and created the impression of strong resistance to the enemy on the slopes of Mt. Kozara. Assemblies were also held. They said: Vaso Butozan, Skender Kulenović and others: that we should hold on bravely and endure difficulties, that we will repel and crush the enemy.

However, it must be said that the situation was difficult and heart-breaking. The people found themselves in a forest area with part of their movable property. The weather changed; heavy rains began. The hastily built barracks began to leak. The enemy attacked day and night. Casualties fell every day; fighters were killed and wounded — they were sons, parents and relatives of families in Mt. Kozara. I also found

myself in qualm. When we arrived in Mt. Kozara and the people settled down I got the impression that this is how you can live and resist. Everything was involved in the common struggle in its own way even though it was a large group of people. The organization of the people began. Older youths went to the units in position and joined the ranks of the fighters. They waited to receive weapons or participated in actions without weapons and helped carry out the wounded and bring in ammunition; they took weapons from the wounded or dead and even participated in combat with fighters. Therefore, it seems to me that there were also many bare-handed peasants in the positions who were waiting for weapons to continue fighting. It could be said only one rifle was at the disposal of two men and two fighters.

The people were informed about the situation in the positions every day. The belief was created that Mt. Kozara would defend itself against the enemy. Such a belief prevailed especially after enemy regiments were defeated on the slopes of Mt. Kozara (at Patrija and Pogledovo). We knew that the commander of the 1st battalion, Žarko Zgonjanin, went behind the enemy's back to attack and defeat them. With the destruction of enemy forces in this area a large number of households were pulled out of the encirclement. The people passed by all day and there were no enemies. During that time, with the tacit consent of the headquarters of the 1st battalion, a large number of residents of the municipality of Sana as well as those of Svoda and Kostajnica came out, perhaps several thousand. The next day the enemy again established a front towards Mt. Kozara and cut off the further withdrawal of the people from the encirclement. It was on 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> of June, 1942.

After the re-establishment of the enemy encirclement around Mt. Kozara new anticipation arose. Fierce fighting continued. I think that soon the enemy on the front will be defeated again. I went to the commander of the 1st battalion and suggested that we take the people out of the ring during the night. He told me that there were certain conditions although there were no orders for the people to leave,

that everyone who could go should be mobilized and that he would provide military security. Then I was back on the run. Lazo Krneta was with me. We informed the population of Sana, Ravnica and Dobrljina municipalities that they are preparing for the movement. In a short time, everything was ready. The column started. Two Janjoš brothers from Kriva Rijeka were our guides. We headed past the Jelovac church (in Donji Jelovac). The enemy was near the church, a few hundred meters from the road we were passing. Perhaps a shorter route was via Patrija to Ravni gaj and further to Planinica. We went in front of Planinica. We went to the village of Gradina. We managed to pass happily and take the whole column which went from evening to morning. There were difficulties because carts got stuck in the road and stopped the column. We had to remove these carts so that the column could extend its movement. If there were no obstacles like this more people would get out of the encirclement. In the morning the enemy cut the passage. After that, no one came out. This could have been around the 25th of June. Later, when our forces broke through the encirclement, individuals got out, but there was no organized exit. I think that Žarko Zgonjanin, as the battalion commander, assessed the situation well and made it possible to get a lot of people out of the encirclement. It even seems to me that he did it on his own initiative without the orders of the Committee for the Defence of Mt. Kozara.

After returning from Mt. Kozara the people returned to their homes. The enemy kept the main force towards Mt. Kozara although some units stayed in the villages; the people took shelter. Until the forces from Mt. Kozara broke through there were units of the 1st Krajina Brigade which contributed to the self-confidence of the people and the enemy could not move freely, but had to approach the front and group together with stronger forces. This is how this people expected the outcome in Mt. Kozara. They still had hope for our victory. We did not think of such a tragic ending. We lost the wounded and the people in the refuge.

When the 1st battalion broke through we realized that Mt. Kozara was not as big and impassable as people imagined. A sickening mood prevailed. The Ustasha authorities began the restoration of the railway line Prijedor–Bosanski Novi. Enemy patrols went into the villages to search the households that had come home, to look for hidden railroad thresholds and labour for railroad repairs. The enemy established gendarmerie stations in some villages. Strongholds were created in Jelovac and Martin. All men were invited to the construction of the railroad with propaganda that nothing would happen to them. They were promised ID cards; they were promised that they would be able to live peacefully in their own homes, etc. Thanks to this propaganda a greater number of men from the lower villages went to the railway even though we said that they should not do so. Nevertheless, some people left because they thought that this would alleviate the misfortune and suffering.

On the first day people went at the doorstep and returned to their homes. On the second day even more of them left believing that nothing would happen to them either. However, the soldiers picked them up and took them away. The army sent them to work, then surrounded them and took them away. They were all taken to a Croatian death camp in Prijedor. They let some of the older ones go while the younger ones were taken to Croatian death camps system in Jasenovac and other death camps from where they never returned. Among these people there were councilors, too.

We stayed in the villages. We linked up with the 1st Battalion. Additionally, the work was difficult. There were no people. Enemy units were cruising more and more freely through the villages. Gendarmerie patrols were also looking for survivors, asking who was a communist, who were the wives and mothers of fighters. So, they took my mother to Luplje and asked her where her son was, threatened her, etc. She told them she didn't know so they let her go. However, individuals informed the gendarmes about who had which role. At the same time, they persuaded people to go to the railway. They

said that we couldn't fight with the forceful power, that we should obey the authorities. This contributed to the fact that a great number of people went to the railway. These traitors were later revealed and shot. When the partisans invaded the municipality in Brezičani they found the enemy's archive in which they also found the reports of two people from our region: they informed about the partisans and said that they returned from Mt. Grmeč frozen and barefoot, etc.

An enemy firing machine ("rake") moved from Mt. Kozara to the villages. It was really difficult. It was a real rake. Three firing troops moved one behind the other, soldier to soldier. The soldiers went where they were ordered, regardless whether the land was passable or not. They had to stick to a certain direction and search everything. I watched from the hill as the soldiers went down to the stream and searched the thickets and the forest. During the day they covered only 3–4 kilometers. Then they stopped, dug trenches and waited for the next day to move on. It was difficult to pass behind the enemy's back.

How to hide? Some decided to retreat in front of the enemy so they went far and were discovered. Lazo Krneta and I decided to hide in the dugout, in the basement of my house. We entered the shelter from the basement and my mother placed a stone behind us. When the Germans entered they saw the cattle and did not look inside. However, there was a possibility that the enemy would set fire to the house which would be disastrous as the smoke would suffocate us. But, we had no other way out. We had to take cover. Some comrades stayed in the forests. Đuro Kantar hid in a bush, in a wood. Otherwise, people took shelter in various ways and camouflaged themselves well so they could only be discovered if the enemy stepped on them. We did not know how the 1st battalion and our other forces would pass. However, the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion escaped and survived. They crossed Sana and returned to Mt. Kozara again. When the "rakes" left for Una, the battalion was in Mt. Kozara. Gendarmerie stations and enemy strongholds remained in some villages.

After the passing of the enemy machine gun troop and the gathering of our forces in Mt. Kozara, in August 1942, I was at a party meeting of the surviving communists from the units and rear army in Palež. The secretary of the District Committee of the KPJ, Branko Babič, a Slovenian, gave an account of the offensive and our failures, perhaps not with the right picture in the detachment's headquarters, but that did not prevent the discussion from developing and taking a critical look at the events. In truth, it was difficult to accuse or justify anyone. Most of the criticism was due to the wounded and a certain number of fighters who lost their lives, as well as the failed breakthrough, which was not carried out as planned. There was also talk about the weak work of our intelligence service, as well as the fact that the necessary attention was not paid to the information received by that service.

Rade Kantar

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*Rade Kantar, "Sana municipality in Mt. Kozara refuge",  
Kozara III, 491–495*

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## REFUGE IN THE MT. KOZARA OFFENSIVE

When the offensive began, I learned that the enemy moved with strong forces via Pastirevo, from Bosanska Kostajnica. I went there, but I saw that the enemy had already arrived at Križ which means that they had passed through Pastirevo. Then I found Žarko Zgonjanin and someone else from the headquarters. I was told that Žarko's brother, Branko Zgonjanin, deputy commissar in Laza Banjca's troop, was killed. He should have been buried. The enemy was also reaching the village of Dragotinja and the people were retreating.

The enemy was moving fast. They were already at the marine church. I managed to get past Krnet and pass through Koprivnjak to Lajić. I joined the people in Jutrogušta near Bojanić and thus arrived in Mlječanica. I joined the column for Mt. Kozara.

The people spread out along the Mlječanica valley. They chased the cattle with them and took everything they managed to pick up in a hurry. Families built fires and prepared food. Concern and sadness were visible in their eyes. Political workers and councilors gathered so we started talking about what needs to be done. We connected with comrades in the position and thus established a solid connection between the front and the people in Mt. Kozara. Members of the Regional Committee of the KPJ, Miloš Stojaković and others, came among us and held meetings, talked about the situation that had arisen and that we would defeat the enemy and return the people to their homes, etc.

There were daily battles on Pogledovo and Patrija. There were many dead and wounded, who were being taken to hospitals in Mt.

Kozara. We knew that our fighters were fighting fiercely and repelling the attacks of the enemy.

We spent ten days here. The situation is really difficult. Food was also running out. In addition, heavy rains began to fall and the people were under trees or in huts made of branches through which it leaked.

Airplanes often flew over and dropped bombs which fell among the fleeing crowd causing parts of the human bodies to fly in all directions. People ran away not knowing how to save their lives.

This lasted until the 1st battalion under the command of Žarko Zgonjanin broke through the encirclement destroying the enemy battalion. Several hundred enemy soldiers were captured and chased through Mt. Kozara. The people were resentful so they started attacking and beating them.

During the destruction of this enemy unit a wider area was also cleared through which it was possible to pass from the ring. We learned that there were no enemies in our area and that the people could return to their villages. We proposed it to Miloš Stojaković and some other managers, but we were told that it was impossible and that Branko Babič Slovenac, secretary of the KPJ District Committee for Mt. Kozara, believed that we should stay in Mt. Kozara. We resented it because we believed that the people should be taken out to the villages. I found Žarko and Šoša (in Mlječanica near Bokan) and we agreed to evacuate people from our area. I mentioned to them that some disagreed and that Šoša and Žarko should write that we would be allowed to lead the people out of the encirclement. Then Šoša told Žarko to write this. He wrote on the note that all councillors, guards with the municipality and other political workers should try to lead as many people as possible out of the encirclement.

I headed up Mlječanica and told people to leave Mt. Kozara immediately. When the people found out they loaded what they had into their carts and the convoy started down Mlječanica. Next to Bokan

and through Jelovac we went down to the road Prijedor–Knežica. We held on to Planinice and moved on. It was day. I went along with the column and occasionally turned back to hasten crossing the road. At one point, the convoy stopped (when we crossed the Jelovac road). We found out that the cart of a family from Žuljevica broke down in a ravine in Planinica. I said that those carts should be moved out of the way because it is better for it to perish than for us to wait for the enemy to come. We broke up these carts and piled the luggage into the others and the convoy continued to pull out. I could not say how many people came out this time, but I know that the number was not small. People came out from the villages around Dobrljina: Žuljevica, Ravnica, Poljavnica, a number from Marin, Dragotinja, Jutrogušta and surrounding villages. I am sure that there were more people who left these villages than those who remained in Mt. Kozara.

Among the last I found Gojko Kantar with a cart. I told him to turn off the lantern because Dušan Mijić told me that the enemy was coming from Prijedor (from Stojanović Maidan) and that other forces were coming from Bosanska Dubica and Knežica. That was why we should have retreated as soon as possible. I directed Gojko further and I returned to the group of youths who were walking with a loaded horse. They didn't know where to go. I approached them and told them to move to Planinica. It was night. We stopped at the barn and spent the night.

The next day I went to Rista Balaban's house and found guard Mihajlo Kantar. He showed me that the enemy was not far from us. As soon as we started talking fire was opened on us. We took cover and headed towards the Bojanović's, Majstorović's and grabbed to Luplje. A few families from Marin remained who were apparently cut off and captured by the enemy. I know that Vukašin Marjanović and some of his relatives were caught. Everyone was chased away.

There was a lull. Fighting was going on in Mt. Kozara. This lasted until the beginning of July when our forces broke through from Mt. Kozara. There were a lot of people in the village. Only a few

families remained in Mt. Kozara. They were captured and driven to Croatia or to Croatian death camps. (Some families returned in the fall of 1942.)

After our forces left Mt. Kozara, I went to Kesare and found Žarko Zgonjanin, Obrad Stišović, the commander of the detachment, and Ranko Šipka, the commander of the Strike Battalion. They told me that the work in the village should continue. Everything had to be rebuilt. After some time, it was ordered to move to Podgrmeč because it was expected that the enemy would return from Mt. Kozara. Rade Kantar and Dušan Krneta told me that. They said that the people should also be transferred across river Sana to Podgrmeč. I couldn't understand the justification of this point of view so I said that I didn't agree with the people leaving their region because we already had the experience of going to Mt. Kozara. I was told that such a decision was made since the partisans were also leaving and that we had to go too. When I talked to people during the day they said that they would not leave their hearths.

One evening we left for Podgrmeč. The following got across: Rade Kantar, Lazo and Dušan Krneta, Dušan Marin, Dragan Zgonjanin and others. We retreated with the partisans to Podgrmeč. We were with the 1st battalion. We found ourselves on the other bank of the river Sana, in the village of Radimirovac. There we met with Dragan Vujanović and Obrad Stišović. He said that the people should not be left alone and that someone should return to the village, to work with the people. Then Dragan Vujanović asked us to declare ourselves. Milan Zgonjanin, the candidate of the Party, Mirko Ugren and I declared. Milan Zgonjanin was a guard at the Sana municipality and did a lot to transfer the people from Mt. Kozara.

In the evening, the three of us crossed back over the river Sana. A boat that was submerged in the water was found. We did not report in the village, but went to Milan Zgonjanin's wife and told her that we had returned. Comrades who crossed the Sana remained there with the 1st Battalion.

After our return to the village we found complete peace and quiet. It was just like life had expired. No one was heard. It was difficult to meet the man. If there was anyone left that one hid in corn, plum trees, etc. There was complete uncertainty and everyone was expecting something. It was generally expected that the enemy would come soon.

Soon the enemy began to act. People were told to come, to report to the authorities and that nothing would happen to them. Even the rulers were appointed. This hostile enterprise was successful. A certain number of people came to the railway where they were soon picked up and taken away. There was a wail for the people who were driven away. Some were driven into Croatian death camp, but managed to escape.

News began to circulate that the enemy was clearing Mt. Kozara and that the so-called rake would come to us. The enemy was moving with a machine gun troops and searching. I was with Milan Zgonjanin. Mirko Ugren separated from us and went to his village. We spotted an enemy machine gun troop. Milan and I hid in the forest in a suitable place. On the morning of the same day, the "rakes" passed. The next day they came across again and passed. Now there was a hush. We saw that there was no enemy army, so we started to move.

After passing the "rake", I received a letter from Žarko Zgonjanin. It was brought by a woman from the other side of the Sana. She asked me to come to the Stojaković houses. Žarko wrote to me and asked what had happened in the village. The woman crossed the Sana in Donja Dragotinja. She was transported by the Home Guard. With this woman I sent a letter to Žarko and told him what it was like with us. I wrote to him that the "rakes" had passed, what happened to the people who were driven away, who remained in the village, that the enemy was creating armed stations and their own government, appointing leaders, etc. The gendarmes walked around the village presenting themselves as the government and saying that there were no more partisans, etc.

It is still quiet in the village. There is no action of ours. It wasn't until the end of the summer that I was invited to the village of Strig-

ova. I was told to come to the house of Mila Sajak Pula. There I found comrades who were probably members of the Party. We held a party conference where we discussed what we should do since the enemy had begun to act and gain influence. Partisans started attacking smaller enemy forces, gendarmerie patrols, etc. There was a hint that there were partisans. It was necessary to awaken hope and trust because the people were disheartened although they never lost faith in the partisans.

Dragan Zgonjanin

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*Dragan Zgonjanin, "Refuge in Kozara offensive",  
Kozara III, 511–514*

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## REAR ARMY OF THE KOZARA OFFENSIVE

At the time when the enemy forces broke through from Banja Luka towards Prijedor, I found myself in the Municipality, in Butković's house, near Pašinac. We were evacuating the goods that were taken out of the liberated Prijedor. As soon as we were informed that the enemy had come to Prijedor, Boško Simatović and I took measures to move the goods to a suitable place. The goods were intended for the people and for the needs of the partisans. I wanted the goods buried. However, Boško Simatović, as the commander of the municipality, demanded that all goods be distributed to the people immediately. So, it was. I thought it was better to bury it in the ground and save it for a more difficult situation because the people soon lost what they had in the offensive and if we had hidden the goods somewhere, we might have used them later.

Our task is not to leave the area, but to meet at the battalion headquarters and to maintain the connection between the partisan units and the people in the refuge in Mt. Kozara. Now we are in special conditions. A connection was immediately organized with the councillors who are in the refuge with the people. Soon, after capturing Prijedor, the enemy moved with stronger forces towards the villages of Mt. Kozara. However, it was not known what the scope of this offensive was, what proportions it would take, how long it would last, etc. We assumed that this offensive would end like the previous ones.

The enemy tried to break into Mt. Kozara through Jelovac. There, in the ditch, our forces defeated the enemy and captured several hundred soldiers who had just finished their training.

This was followed by an attack on the enemy from Cvijić grove. And this attempt of enemy breakthrough failed. The enemy then brought in new forces and began to dig in and fortify. Only then did we realize that it was a larger offensive. The enemy positioned themselves frontally towards Mt. Kozara. Our units were on the opposite side.

The position of the enemy forces stretched from Mlječanica, through Vinogradin, near Lukić to Patrija and from Patrija through Goljak and near Aleksić to the Jelovac cemetery and the road Prijedor–Knežica. From here he went along the road towards Puharine.

My task was to inform the people through the representatives about how they should behave in a refuge. It was necessary to develop self-help in the refuge from Gradina and Komanda to Mlječanica and Jelovača. Here were the people from the villages of Podkozara and from the area of Bosanski Novi, Bosanska Kostajnica and Bosanska Dubica. It was necessary: to maintain a connection with the people, to organize a somewhat normal life in exile; establish a connection with the people who are in charge of supplying the units of the 1st Battalion; to ensure the supply of fighters at the front. At the same time, we also organized the rear forces, which participated with the partisans in actions against the enemy. That's how we went into action at Vinogradine. People from the background did not have weapons, but when a fighter was wounded or killed they took his weapon and moved on to fight or they captured weapons from the enemy and armed themselves. In this action I pulled out three comrades from the 1st Battalion who died in enemy trenches. There were several wounded and dead fighters so it was not even possible to establish who they were and which unit they belonged to. It was only important that they did not fall into the hands of the enemy. Comrades from the rear immediately arrived at their places, took their weapons and continued the fight.

We often discussed the new situation at the battalion headquarters. I went among the fleeing people and introduced them to what was needed. I also held meetings with the representatives and gave

them notifications, made arrangements on the supply of fighters at the positions.

We tried to get out of the encirclement several times. For this purpose the encirclement was cut through in some sectors and on that occasion the people were pulled out of Mt. Kozara, especially from the area of the Bosnian border. During the first breakthrough part of our forces escaped from the encirclement including Žarko Zgonjanin with the 1st Battalion. They passed by the Jelovac cemetery. However, part of our forces with the people did not manage to pass because tanks arrived on the Jelovac road. We had to return to Mt. Kozara. When we arrived at a place called Komanda a short meeting was held. It was already clear that the enemy broke through our positions and went to Mt. Kozara. Sitting on a tree stump Miloš Šiljegović told us that the enemy was entering Mt. Kozara. He noted that women and children would be spared while adult men had to hide. Miloš said that those who knew the area of Mt. Kozara should take a number of comrades and hide them in suitable shelters.

Five friends came with me. I no longer remember their names. We went to Klinovi, to Jelovača. I found one beech tree, very thick. It started to rot. We dug a shelter under this beech tree and I hid them there. It was safe to expect that the enemy would not discover them. The access was difficult. I was masked by the little girl Persa Lukić who had lost her way looking for her parents not far from the same beech tree. A certain number of comrades took shelter in the trees around us. This is how one Čađo and Stevo Madžar took refuge. Soon an enemy machine gun troop came by. The soldiers were shooting on the move. I heard tree branches snapping and people falling down. They were discovered and killed in the trees.

Hearing about it, the comrades I had sheltered under the beech tree jumped out of the shelter. They also called me saying that the enemy was moving in a machine gun troop and that it was hard to believe that we would not be discovered. I calmed them down and told them that their shelter was safe, safer than mine, and that they

should mask me and leave me. That's how it was. I had two bombs. If the enemy had discovered me, I would have thrown one and kept the other for myself. Luck served me and the enemy passed me by. Those comrades went further to Mt. Kozara, and under Gradina moved behind the enemy.

I stayed in the place where I disguised myself for 24 hours. I was very thirsty and hungry. The enemy was encamped nearby. Before dawn I got out of the shelter and set off. I noticed a man searching the things left behind by the people. I approached him and began to criticise him for taking the things that the people had left in their misery. He cried and said that his children were left with nothing in Crna Dolina. It was a certain Glušac from Crna Dolina. He thought his children were alive so he wanted to bring them something.

When the enemy moved to Mt. Kozara, I found myself behind them. I was looking for people. I also met fighters who managed to hide. I met with my brother Uroš and Živko Macura. My other brother and his family stayed in a ditch. He had some food so he gave it to me. There were still survivors from Jelovac and other villages. We agreed to find and gather the fugitives. The enemy was far away in Mt. Kozara.

We knew that the enemy had spent more than a month in the village. However, the rear units of the enemy were still scurrying around the villages. When the background moved away from the village towards Knežica, Bosanska Dubica and Prijedor, we went to the village to bury the fallen fighters, men, women and children. We reached Patria. We couldn't stand the smell of corpses. There were dead bodies lying at almost every step. There were also enemy soldiers and dead animals. We took towels and put them over our mouths and noses to resist the stench. We started to bury them, but we didn't succeed. The enemy stationed a crew directly next to Mt. Kozara, near Macure. It was impossible for them to stand the stench of corpses. Then they sprinkled quicklime on all the corpses.

With the arrival of this enemy unit there was a hunt for the part of the people that managed to survive the offensive. I observed how

the Ustasha lead groups of people (near Macure) to be shot. We were to save ourselves. We posted sentinels to monitor the enemy's movements. We were on guard day and night. The enemy searched slope by slope, ditch by ditch.

Nevertheless, we managed to save a certain number of people. However, those who approached the houses were picked up, killed or sent to Croatian death camps. This was the case not only in Jelovac, but also in Palančište, Hajderovci and Donji Jelovac from where people were brought to Macura and were liquidated there as well as near the Kolar bridge on the road and near Knežević.

Jelovac and Palančište suffered the most. There were 1,600 inhabitants in Gornji Jelovac before the offensive, but only 600 inhabitants survived after all the enemy raids and offensives.

Whole families disappeared — such as the Maletić family (except for one girl), the families of Dobrijević, Marin, Knežević, Mirko Cvijić, Bogdan Joja, Vidović, partially Vila and Bokan, Prodan, Savić, Topić and some others.

When the offensive was over I went to the village of Božići and found Secretary Ilija Bursać. Boško Simatović was also there with a certain number of friends. We held a party meeting and determined new tasks.

We hoped that a number of residents and our units, which were heading towards the Podgrmeč area, would return.

We decided to find out how many partisans remained in Mt. Kozara. The second task was to bury as many victims as possible and feed the survivors, then to collect the livestock around Mt. Kozara that the enemy did not capture and drive away. We were forced to drive the cattle out of the village towards the inner land of Mt. Kozara. Otherwise, enemy forces were still active on the road Prijedor—Bosanska Dubica. This was where their greatest concentration was and where they committed the greatest crimes. Possibly also because they suffered the biggest losses here.

I worked in the village. Kosta Savić was left alone because he lost his entire family. Savić was simply lost and could not act even though

he was very active before. I found Milorad Ćurin, who was wounded, so we accepted him into the Party. We also received Blagoja Vila and thus in the fall of 1942 we created the first party cell in Gornji Jelovac. For some time, I was the secretary of this party cell.

Even in September, we created the Communist Party of Yugoslavia Municipal Committee for the municipality of Palančište. I was appointed a member of this committee and Milorad Ćurin was elected secretary of the cell in Jelovac.

Pero Gajić

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*Pero Gajić, “Rear Army in the Kozara Offensive”,  
Kozara III, 516–520.*

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## A THIRTEEN-YEAR-OLD BOY IN THE REFUGE

We arrived in Mt. Kozara from Palančiste during the night. We woke up under a beech tree under Rajlić's thicket. There is no road there. The forest is dense. We make fires. Vis would protect us from the cannons from Prijedor as well Command from Knežica and Bosanska Dubica. The mother hid us five weak children under the farm cart which we pushed under a beech tree. We sleep outside. Aunt Anda is crying over her sleeping sons — Laza and Blaža. Uncle Dragoja has been with the partisans since the beginning of the uprising. Father Petar is in the Second Troop of the Strike Battalion stationed in the village of Jaruge. The fight does not stop on the slopes of Mt. Kozara. The partisans repel the intrusion of the enemy.

Maslin-bair, Lajšinovac, Mačkovac, Kosa Čekina, Jezero, Mlječanica, Duboki jarak, Komanda, Palež and other slopes in Mt. Kozara dawned full of people, women and children. You can hear tumult, children crying, livestock roaring... Nearby are the neighbours the Vukadinoviés, Banoviés, Žabiés, Radišičs, Rajiliés, Bursaés, Gavriloviés, Kovačevićs, Matijašs, Mikiés, Simatoviés, Stegiés, Ličans, Vučkoviés, Babiés and others.

Representatives Jovo Banovié, Stojan Rajilié, Nikola Kovačević and others arrange the escape. Boško Simatovié, the commander of the municipality of Palančište, is also busy. They calm people down, determine where a village will take shelter, invite adults to report to corporals and leaders in the rear troop, inform about the movement of the enemy. Blagoja Knjeginjié and Ilija Bursaé deploy the rear troop to dig trench-

es, dig the road Prijedor—Bosanska Dubica. Young men and women and members of SKOJ (\*Social Communist Youth of Yugoslavia) left their families and put themselves in the service of the defence of Mt. Kozara. The wounded should be taken to Vitlovska, food should be collected from the fugitives and carried to the position to the fighters.

The first day of the refuge was sunny. On that day, a fierce battle was fought in Palančište. We were close to the position. The enemy entered the village. Near the school, which the Ustashas burned down in the first days of the uprising, the enemy got established. They dotted our fields with trenches on which there were unharnessed grain and unburied corn. They demolished our homes and covered their trenches. From Vis it was possible to see that the trenches were dug from Crna Dolina, through Veliko and Malo Palančište, Božići, Gornji Garevac and Jaruga to Kozarac. Everyone escaped from the village except our grandfather, sixty-five-year-old Stevan Vukadinović. It was hard for him to leave home. He calculated that the soldiers would do nothing to him, an old man. He survived the First World War, captivity in Russia, the October Revolution and only returned home in 1922. Grandpa was mistaken. The enemy did not spare him. He was taken away and never returned.

Sad news was reaching the people. The lead fighter Mile Rajilić, commander of Prijedor, died fighting his way out of the town. His comrades carried him across the road near Batoz and buried him in a grove under Kecman's houses in Orlovci. There is sadness in the family of Stojan Rajilić, the first councillor and insurgent, who in 1920, together with Milo Vuković, was the guardian of the box on the list of communist deputies. Dr. Mladen Stojanović and Osman Karabegović came to his house before the uprising. Gojko Vukadinović, neighbour, was seriously wounded in the breakthrough towards Mt. Grmeč.

On the third day, we realized that this was not an escape like the one on St. Ilija day, August 2, 1941, when for the first time we heard the explosion of artillery shells around our houses and smelled burning buildings.

Little Stanko, my three-year-old brother, fell ill. He breathes hard and calls: "Mom, mom, Gojko, Gojko, it hurts, it hurts..." The mother is crying and worried. I am the oldest and powerless to help her.

The first rains came. The blankets are soaked. We are wet. We are trembling with cold. Bowels cramp from hunger. Children are crying.

During the day planes flew over our shelters. They were so close, almost touching the trees. They threw bombs and machine-gunned the forest. Pieces of bone and flesh fly through the trees. A cow wounded in its hind legs tries to get up. A frightened horse rushes down Mačkovac, towards the Zidan mlin.

The cattle were to be gathered before evening.

Sad news comes again. A neighbour, young Slavko Banović, was killed in Pogledevo. Marko Žabić, a soldier of the Second Troop of the Strike Battalion, was seriously wounded in Jaruga.

Even more difficult was the news that Rade Kondić, the brave commander, was wounded. A large number of captured Ustashas gathered around Rajilić. There are several hundred of them. The peasants want to kill them.

The mother baked a cake and gave it to the children. Children are nibbling on leaves. In the forest there is no more sremush plant which tastes like a young garlic. The clothes are torn and there is nothing to mend. The lice have spread. You can't clean them. The children are itchy and can't sleep.

Father Petar came by. He gave the children several pieces of twice-baked bread which he got in Vitlovska. He said to his mother: "We are going to break through the encirclement tonight. It will be hard! Who knows who will remain alive. Take care of the children".

There is a commotion in the escape locations. The enemy moved out of the trenches. They poke the ground with a wire. They search and shoot.

I joined a group of partisans. I followed them past the Command. We passed the escape places. We left the carts, the cattle. There were a lot of people going. We were all in a hurry. There were fights all night long. There were lightnings and bangs. Bullets and shells were

pouring around us. Moans were heard. I think I crossed the road twice. I noticed the soldiers and ran away from them. Before dawn I found myself in front of a house. I saw that this was the house from which we went after the partisans last night. There was no hope to breakthrough from the encirclement. We must run deep into the forest. There was no shelter. In the evening, I met the seriously wounded Radan Rajlić. He was carried by brothers.

In Duboki jarak, I hid under a fallen beech tree, in the mud. I camouflaged myself well so that through the rustle I could see along the ditch. I was more thirsty than hungry. Time passed. I was sleepy. The night passed. And the day was coming to an end. The sun set towards Vis. Several shots were fired, there were wails and shouts: “Surrender, hands up! Come out, I see you.” There was a loud crack of the rifle. Around ten o’clock cries were heard. Someone was coming. I saw a soldier down the ditch. He stopped near my shelter. He looked around and came back. Soldiers’ voices and a song can be heard. It was past noon. Dead silence again. My leg was stiff, numb, I couldn’t feel it. I couldn’t turn around. I was all wet, full of moisture. In the evening I decided to get out. I wanted to go over the mountain of Vis. Someone called me quietly. I turned around in fright. A well-known face peeked out from a deep hollow: there was my neighbour Jovan Banović Špirić with his wife Mara and son Živko. They gave me a bite of corn. At dusk I crossed Vis and descended into a deserted village. I saw Mara Špirić dead at Nikola Rajlić’s house.

Later I heard that near Mrakovica, Hasan Hušidić, unable to get out of the encirclement or hide and not wanting to be captured, killed his two daughters, his wife and then himself. Chance allowed the youngest son not to end up with them. He survived the Mt. Kozara offensive.

Gojko Vukadinović

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*Gojko Vukadinović, “A thirteen-year-old boy in the refuge”,  
Kozara III, 521–524*

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## **THE TERRIBLE FATE OF THE IMMOBILE WOUNDED IN MT. KAZARA**

At the beginning of June 1942, I joined the partisans. I was in the platoon of Ilija Balaban Iliš, in the 2nd troop of commander Vasa Tomaš. This platoon was positioned towards Croatia, on the right bank of the Una River, protecting our villages. There he was caught by the beginning of the enemy's offensive in Mt. Kozara.

Retreating in front of the enemy forces, which were advancing from Bosanska Kostajnica and Bosanska Dubica, we reached the slopes of Mt. Kozara. The people were also retreating in front of us. We were in a position at Pogledevo. In the first days I didn't have a carbine rifle. However, soon we took part in the action, on Patria. Then I got a carbine rifle. At night, we bypassed the enemy, attacked them from behind and suppressed them.

My corporal is Mićo Aćimović. I was assigned as the assistant of machine gunner Milan Ećim. We are often on the move so the troop was not together. From the action at Patrija, we returned to the position at Potledevo. We stayed for a short time and fought with the advancing enemy. The action against the enemy who had established themselves in Bjelajci, in the school, was carried out in the last days of June 1942. I was tired and hungry. I used to go in front of our position to the house where the corns were hidden and feed on these corns. The access was exposed, the enemy was shooting at us, but we still went there to quench our hunger.

One day dinner arrives early together with the order to move. We knew immediately that we were going into action. We went to the

enemy's stronghold in the Bjelajac school. After a long journey we received our assignments and then we set off in the firing squad. As I did not know the terrain it seemed to me that we walked for a long time. True, we moved cautiously. In other areas our troops fought fiercely. The rockets also illuminated us, but despite that we managed to get close to the enemy. We reached a grove in front of which was an enemy trench (bunker). The enemy opened fire first. We also lay down and opened fire. Fierce mutual fire ensued. Yet, in the first moments of the fight, not far from me, one fighter was wounded. He was lying unconscious. Unfortunately, I don't remember his name.

At that time, I was the assistant of machine gunner Svetko Kos from Tukličan. I was lying to the right of him. An enemy machine gun was firing to my right. They beat with thick fire; and very close, next to my right hand they tore up the ground. It was already dawn. The order to retreat came. The enemy wounded Kos, machine gunner. I took responsibility for him with one other comrade and we retreated. We were in a clear area. We were being showered by enemy fire. Svetko was hit again. Then I was hit in both legs and I fell against the hedge. I don't know what has happened to machine gunner Svetko Kos.

Although I was badly wounded, I firmly decided to retreat. I was aware that withdrawal was difficult. I gathered my strength and went out on the hill. There, the centre for bandaging wounds accepted me. As soon as I was bandaged, I moved on to the forest, but on all fours because both of my wounds were below the knees. Enemy planes are following us, machine-gunning and dropping bombs.

I was exhausted. I couldn't go on. Dragutin Arsenić from Johova and Branko Ećim from Dvorište accepted me and carried me through the forest. When we got out into the clearing, the plane swooped down on us and fired machine guns, but luckily without success. Arsenić and Ećim suggested that they hide me so that they would come for me in the evening, but I did not agree because the enemy was close. I did everything to get them to leave me. It was difficult for

them too. I unscrewed the bomb to kill myself. Then Ećim suggested that they carry me at the cost of their lives. They took me to the village of Koturovi. Soon a man came with a cattle cart and took me to the hospital in Vojskova. I had a hard time on the way because my wounds hurt. They hurt a lot, especially on the right leg.

The first three days in the hospital I struggled a lot, especially while the gauze was removed from the wounds. I felt better afterwards. I started to engage in funny stories with the wounded. We sang. We probably did it so as not to think about the families on the run in Mt. Kozara. There were ten of us in a small peasant house. I was trying to connect with my family. However, I failed. My father was also looking for me, but he did not find me. That was my luck because many of the wounded were being driven by their parents until the enemy arrived and captured them.

As the encirclement around Mt. Kozara tightened, there was less and less chance of maintaining a frontal defense. Because of this, the order followed for the wounded to retreat towards the place of the breakthrough with the intention of getting out of the encirclement. I spent only a few days in Vojskova village. A movement followed. Going through Mt. Kozara towards the place of breakthrough, towards Bokani, I met many locals whom I had not seen for a long time. They were going in one direction and we were going in another. They went on to Mt. Kozara.

Night came. We were approaching the Široka port. The column of wounded, on stretchers and carts, was long. The people also mingled with the column. Some of the wounded recognized their own so they called out to them. Someone met their loved ones that way, but many were separated forever along the way.\* At that time, on a July

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\* The largest number of seriously wounded people died in the enemy's offensive: "Our forces and the Strike Battalion, as well as the forces of the II, III and IV battalions that broke through the enemy encirclement, are now on the fields of the I battalion." In Mt. Kozara most of the strength of the II and III battalions remained. All the seriously wounded as well as a good number of the lightly wounded remained with them.

night, in Široka Luka there were a lot of cattle carts with wounded men. There were many people, women, children, old people, livestock.

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“We made the breakthrough on Saturday evening, July 4. With the forces of the Strike Battalion and I (battalion) we managed to break through the enemy lines on the road Prijedor–Dubica. We started the whole column forward which included all the lightly wounded and a part of the more seriously wounded. The enemy met us again at Ravni Gaj. We received a fight with a part of the forces of the Strike Battalion and the headquarters platoon. Under the fighting, we made our way half–right towards Planinica, the column moved comfortably while the armed forces accepted the fight. However, while we were shooting, some people panicked and started to go back and create panic and thus broke the column and brought them back to Mt. Kozara. We deployed the forces that moved to Planinica immediately to secure and help the other forces break through. On the evening of July 5, our remaining forces tried to break through again, but only a few companies broke through while the majority remained in Mt. Kozara. Comrades Šoš, Miloš, Čoč, commanders and commissars of the II and III battalions and the commissar of the IV battalion remained with those forces. All the doctors and most of the medical staff stayed with them. According to the reports of civilians who escaped from Mt. Kozara these forces retreated deep into the forest. In recent days, no fighting has been heard in Mt. Kozara. We sent some patrols to get in touch with them, but the first patrols did not succeed. The night before we sent a platoon of volunteers with the task of not returning until they had established contact with those forces as well as with the wounded who remained in various shelters. I still don’t know if there was any report from those comrades. A part of the enemy forces went through the forest and set fire to the II Battalion camp on Vitlovska and the camp on Mednjak. The direction of its further movement is not exactly known to us, but according to the rockets it seems that they went towards Podgradci and a part probably through the monastery of Gomjenica to Prosara. We heard that they captured a part of the civilians, some were released, but only a small number, while most were driven to Prijedor and Dubica.

The other part of the enemy forces remained in the trenches next to the road Prijedor–Dubica. Likewise, all the forces that were at Ravni Gaj, Asina Straža, Vranić and Kapela are still there. Tanks cruise along the road Dubica–Prijedor and some trucks while there have been no army movements these past few days. Enemy activity can be felt on the road Prijedor–Novi near the Prljugovac bridge. It seems that the enemy’s intention is to restore the bridge and secure it. According to the statement of the captured home guard the Germans also need to break through to Novi. Their patrols examine the terrain every day and today the tanks were also there and opened fire. We have deployed our forces to secure the villages from various robbers and arsonists and to cultivate the harvest. If the situation does not change we will remain on this terrain. It would recommend you to send us as many bottles filled with petrol as possible for setting fire to the tanks. During the breakthrough, 3 tanks were burned.”

(From the report of the commander of the Second Krajina NOP (\*National Liberation Movement) detachment on July 19, 1942 to the operational headquarters of the NOP (\*National Liberation Movement) and DV (\*Volunteer Army) for Bosnian Krajina on the reorganization of units and the situation on the field after the breakthrough from Mt. Kozara.)

The encirclement was not broken that night, we were not taken out. Cannon shells and mines fell into the throng of the wounded and people. There was a commotion. People and cattle flew into the air, mixing with stones, earth and leaves. It looked like no one was going to get away.

It's been a hard night. It dawned. The people who drove us in carts took shelter under the trees. I was with Rade Gajić from Vlaškovići in the same cart. We were lying under the hornbeam tree. The man who drove us was not there. We could hardly see anyone. Enemy fire storming was already reaching us. This warned us that the enemy is nearby. Some people were retreating with someone's help or alone. The immobile ones remain motionless in the carts. We were in suspense.

My friend in Rade Gajić's cart took the carbine rifle of a nurse and fired a bullet. I sensed what he had been up to. I tried to stop him. He, without saying anything, pushed me away with his elbow and then he turned the carbine rifle at his head and the bullet went off. His brain spilled onto my winter coat. I grabbed my carbine rifle thinking of doing the same thing because I didn't want to fall alive into enemy hands.

While I was thinking about it, Stanko Ćibić from my village came next to me. I asked him to take me out of the cart. He approached me, took me, but said: "Throw that log." He was scared, so he thought I had better get rid of the carbine rifle. I told him that I was not leaving the carbine. Stanko was dazed. He didn't even look at who I was even though we are from the same village and maybe he didn't even recognize me since I was exhausted and weak. He dropped me off not far from the cart and told me to go. I asked him to hold me because I was going to fall since it was my first walk after being wounded. I started to faint. When I called Stanko by name, he recognized me. He couldn't leave me now. He found a horse and made bridles out of the rope that the people used to tie the things in the cart. So, I became more mobile. I rode a horse. However, I didn't sit on the horse

for long either. I fainted. I could not see well so I had to stop and ask for help. My uncle's brother Boško Vujanović came then. His younger brother Milan recognized me by the leather cap. Boško approached me and helped me. Seeing my situation, he cried. We started together along the Grabovac ditch. Soon it was impossible to go any further with the horse. Now Boško took me and carried me away. I was also tired and exhausted from hunger. He put me down on a log. He asked me what to do: "I can't carry you and I can't leave you." I suggested that he save himself, and I will kill myself: "You certainly can't help me." Boško advised me: "Don't kill yourself until the enemy become aware of you because the enemy uses deception as if they noticed even though they didn't notice you." Boško set off through Mt. Kozara. And he lost his life somewhere.

I remained on the log, resting my head on the carbine. It was my only comfort and hope. Two families passed by me that I didn't want to address. I tried not to let anyone know about me. I thought I would end up here so it would be better that my family didn't know what happened to me either. One family came across with Boško Vujanović who was crying. They asked him why he was in tears. He told them that I had been wounded and left in the ditch and that I would not survive.

I was in hospital clothes. I also had a hat. That's when Anda Pečić saw me so she sent me a woman's scarf via my younger brother Milan so that I could wrap my wounded legs. Night was already approaching. Mileva Miljatić brought me coffee and two pieces of twice-baked bread. And their family was at a side not far from me. I didn't know how they found out where I was.

Later I decided to settle down under the sprawling beech tree on which I was sitting. Its peaks lay crossed over the ditch. I wrapped myself in a scarf and spent the night like that. The next day I felt that my legs were naked because the scarf I used to wrap them fell off. They were swollen and cold. I could only move them using my hands.

So, I spent the night under the log. During the night, I decided to go out into the hollow next to the log made by spreading out the

tree. There I wrapped myself in a scarf and decided to accept my suffering fate.

Around ten o'clock in the morning an enemy machine gun came by. On the opposite side, on the hill. There was a man with two little girls. He was in front of the machine gun troop. He shouted: "Army, I surrender." He also mentioned the partisans, but I couldn't understand. However, the soldiers did not pay attention to what he was saying. They pushed him in front of them with their gunstocks and chased him on.

Above me, on the side, there were soldiers. They talked about how they had found the goods and how they will send them to their homes, what they will distribute for whom, etc. They were going slowly and I was thinking what would happen to me. Suddenly a soldier appeared above me. He was very close so I could have reached him with my stick. He sat down nearby. Between us there was a low bush (shrub) which disguised me. My eyes were fixed on the enemy. The barrel was on the forehead. I had only three bullets.

To make it even more difficult and worse the soldiers were impelling a woman down the street. It seemed to me that this woman had passed by me the day before. She was in front of the shooting line and she was saying something to them. Now all the soldiers looked at the woman. (Later it was rumored that the woman was captured by partisans and that's how she ended up in Mt. Kozara.)

They soon chased this woman away and left. The nervous tension eased. I stayed in the same place until two in the afternoon. I was thirsty. I decided to go down the side. I came to the water although it was impure. I spent three or four days here. I plucked and ate sour grass (rabbit cabbage). Cattle passed by me, looking for food. I was glad that the cattle were there, that I was not alone. A cow came under the log I was sitting on. She was dragging the chain with which she had been tied once. I caught it and tied it up. I got down under the cow and extracted the milk into my leather cap, once it was well placed. I drank what I have milked. The milk invigorated me. When

the herds of cattle passed through the ditch, I was alone again. I saw only one horse; it got tangled in the logs and it is struggling a lot.

Sitting alone, I turned and looked around. I was thinking about killing myself. I no longer knew what I was waiting for and what I was hoping for, left in the forest. Worst of all, I'm immobile. I have already firmly decided to commit suicide. I mentally prepared myself and only had to pull the carbine trigger. The bullet is always in the barrel. However, stories from my childhood came to my mind. Our elders told how they starved for eight or more days and survived again. I gave up on suicidal thoughts. I decided to start from this place, to crawl along the opposite side. I had to move on my elbows, because there was no other way to go sideways. I moved a few meters at a time. I felt I would faint. It was already the sixth day of solitude in the forest. Wounds, hunger and mental stress exhausted me so much that I could barely move.

To my great surprise an unknown woman approached me. She asked me who I was and where I was from. She brought me some water because that was the first and most important thing. She had no food either. She was the daughter-in-law of Stevan Banjac from Brekinja. I didn't know her name. She said that she was going, but that she would come again soon. And indeed, she soon returned and brought me food. I think it was porridge. She apologized for not having anything else. This was good and enough for me after so much starvation. She introduced me to Petrović, from Ušivac, who started feeding me. He gave me a few spoonfuls of turkey and some meat. At the same time, I learned about the two wounded near me — Mirko Babić from Čitluk and one of the Popovićs (I didn't know his name) from Košuća. They were slightly wounded. Leaning on our hands we talked in low voices. As they were lightly wounded so that the enemy would not notice them, they left this place and went to Mt. Kozara. They left two blankets to me.

I took those blankets and lodged on level ground. There I found leaves and settled down. Some survivors were already starting to

come forward. They would come up to me and ask who I was. I asked them to report for me. A few more days passed like that. It started to rain. It soaked the leaves and the blanket I had wrapped myself in. My legs were cold and started to burn. A yellow liquid was oozing from the wounds. I thought it was already the tenth day I had been here.

On the knoll, not far from me, some people were gathering – surviving fighters and wounded. They got together and prepared food. They were roasting a pig. I was moving with difficulties and I crawled to them. Moving and dragging things, I didn't go very long. Everything slipped out of my hands and flew into the ditch. Still, I stuck to my decision to go on. I came across a ditch that got in the way. I had to pull myself along (to crawl like a snake). I gathered all my strength and moved on my hands. I persevered and finally managed to get to the place. I couldn't stand on either leg. When I arrived among my friends who saw me dragging myself, some expressed amusement saying that brother Lazar was coming (they remembered Lazar from the Bible).

The wounded were already having lunch. Some of them got cigarettes from somewhere and lit them up. An elderly man, I think his last name was Gvozden, from Mirkovac, warmed the water and washed the wounds. There were already worms in them, thin as thread. There was also dirt. I tore the only shirt and put a dry, albeit dirty, cloth on the wounds, and left the wet bandage to dry.

I got a roast. They warned me not to eat much because there was no bread, and there was no salt either. I decided to eat my fill. While I was eating my friends moved on. I was with them for a short time. I was alone again. They left me their blankets. There was also some meat left over which I wrapped in a shirt cloth. When I later decided to eat it, the meat was unusable because the flies had poisoned it.

Disappointment again. I had no food. It was raining non-stop. I put half of the blankets under me and covered myself with the other half. I could not put my wounded legs on the ground, but held them in my hands, fearing a greater inflammation. I called out at night and

was silent during the day because the enemy was moving through Mt. Kozara. I would crawl on towards the plain, between the dead, whose bodies were decomposing. The pigs were carrying them off.

So, I waited there. And one day Pane Jakšić, a neighbour from my village, came (he died last year). He was leading the horse. He made me leg supports out of towels so I could hold on to the horse. We headed towards the house in Široka Luka. There were two more wounded in that house. One had his leg amputated above the knee and the other was blind. I heard that a Roman Catholic priest shot him in the eyes during the action in Prijedor, thus he lost his eyes. These two stayed in Mt. Kozara. When they were to fetch water, then the legless wounded man directed the one without eyes where to move. These wounded men peeled two beech trees by eating the bark. The one without a leg tried to commit suicide by cutting his veins so the cuts were visible. I think the one without eyes was blond and tall. I think it was Kosta Lažić from Svodna. I forgot the other one's name.

An elderly man and woman were preparing a cart with oxen. They were here with the wounded. It seemed to me that the old man was also wounded and that a bullet had hit him in the mouth. The only food he could take was milk. Thus, we found ourselves together: two wounded, one without a leg, the other without eyes, an old man, also wounded, his wife and me. We stayed there. One evening the partisans came for us. The elderly man and woman remained. I heard that the next day the enemy found them and killed them.

Partisans placed us above Zidani mlin. There was a partisan troop with 24 wounded. Partisans were just gathering. That is why it was decided to move the wounded to Maslin-bair, towards Prijedor. We were placed in two barracks (12 wounded each). Seven more wounded people joined our group so there were 19 of us. It was difficult for us here as well. Lice and hunger. We had to stay still. We just weren't allowed to cough. One of our men, wounded in the thigh, developed severe inflammation. He was unconscious so he shouted at the top of his voice calling for help. We were in danger because

the enemy could uncover us. The wounded man asked for someone to kill him and thus end his suffering, but no one had the strength to do so although we were aware of the danger if we are disclosed. He soon expired.

The second accident was that the enemy clashed with the partisans above our barracks so we were in danger in that way as well. In the fight we lost the councilor who had fed us. He died in combat. I think his name was Blagoje. (Svetko Bursać said that it was Blagoja Knjeginjić.)

One sergeant was among the wounded. He suggested we get out of there. Out of 18 of us, because one died, 12 of the wounded went with the sergeant. I heard later that they fared badly because they fell among the enemy. They were trying to take shelter and they even climbed trees. None of them returned to the barracks. They joined the partisans.

There were five of us left and we could not move. At the last moment we went our separate ways. Then, in addition to the wounds on my legs I also got ulcers, big and black. Nevertheless, I went and walked upright for about fifty meters. Then I slid down the side and buried myself in the leaves against the log. I put a dry branch on my head. I could see through the leaves. I thought that I was well disguised although the trail behind me where I had crawled was obvious. I stayed there for some time until I estimated that the enemy was not coming closer. Then I got out and after that I climbed up the hill from where I could observe the enemy. The enemy was catching cattle and it seems that they had also found shelter for the food they were taking away. I was clinging grass to the ulcers so they burst.

One day, at sunset, Stanko Bursać, the father of Ilija and Svetko Bursać, came to us. He was carrying a bag of bread. He left a piece of bread with each wounded man. Below me, in the ditch, lay a seriously wounded man from Tomica Španović's troop. At the same time, he had a stomach ailment. Flies gathered on his blanket, leaving spittle, which smudged the blanket. He spoke with difficulty. Stanko Bur-

sać, it seemed, was less able to hear so they could not come to an agreement. Crawling towards them I was in a hurry afraid that Uncle Stanko would not leave. I threw a rock. When he saw me he walked towards me. He gave me a piece of bread and invited me to explain what this wounded man wanted. I wanted another piece of bread because I knew he wouldn't be able to eat it. The wounded man asked for milk because he could not eat bread. Uncle Stanko told him that he could not come that night because his house was far away, but that he could only come early the following day. The wounded man told him that he would be dead tomorrow. And indeed, they took him away the next day. He died during the night. He did not wait for the milk to be brought to him and for his last wish to be fulfilled.

After I ate the bread I went to the barracks. The other three wounded also returned and the fourth died. We had a doctor who ostensibly treated us because there were no medicines. He often brought us fruit and food from somewhere. He even cooked for us. I don't remember his name, but it seemed to me that he was from Prijedor. We only had hyper manganese which we used to wash the wounds. In the evening the doctor criticized us for leaving the barracks because we were in a safe place. We were saying that the sergeant who took the group of wounded people was to be blamed. True, the enemy did not enter here. But fear is fear. We had experience and we knew that the enemy was close. When everything calmed down the doctor gathered us. There were 12 of us wounded. These were mostly those who could not move or were just starting to walk. He started feeding us better. Partisans brought us several sheep.

When the ulcers broke my right leg seemed to rot. Veins, blood vessels, ligaments were visible. If I had gotten to a hospital they would probably have cut off my leg because there was no way it would heal. Everything below the knee was rotten.

With me there was an older fighter, Bulić, I think from Mrakodol from Bosanska Kostajnica. He told me to lean on my legs and move. I was afraid: if I moved, I would open the blood from the wounds. I

listened to him anyway. The wound soon healed. Now I rested on my feet again. I was joyful, simply overjoyed and grateful to Comrade Bulić. When he was rolling a cigarette, as a sign of gratitude and respect, I would go towards the stove to bring him a fire, to light it.

One day I decided to leave the barracks and go to the nearby hill towards the village. I didn't make it on the first day. Halfway through I ran out of energy and had to return to the barracks. Until then I was just moving around the room and now I was trying to go further. The next day I succeeded. I went out to the orchard and picked some fruit. I also found tobacco so I could treat my friends.

When I was walking the doctor assigned me to take care of the sheep. That's how I found the water source. I was very dirty. In addition, there were a lot of lice so it started itching. So, I decided to wash myself well. I also had soap, but I didn't know where we got it from. I took a bath and went back to the barracks. I jokingly "reported" that everything was fine. Although we were almost all cripples, and we were left without anyone of our own, we still had humorous conversations. There was also an older man from Kozarac, a joker, with us, but I don't remember his name. Everyone laughed at my "reporting" and were glad that I started walking. Later, I went out with the sheep towards Palančište. The doctor was angry, thinking that the enemy would notice us. I was still moving slowly. It happened that the sheep arrived at the war camp before me. One day I found an empty house. I think it belonged to the Banović family who had disappeared. I found sheets with a bed. I spent the night there, alone. One night I was scared by peasants who were driving food to Mt. Kozara. They were hiding grain. I thought they were the enemy so I ran out of the house and hid in the grass.

When the doctor found out about this he referred me to my former unit, the II troop of the II Battalion. I was afraid that I would fall into the hands of the enemy. On the way to the troop, which was located in Mt. Kozara, I met three partisans. They were DMITAR Crnogorac, MILAN Plavšić from Dizdarlije and KOSTA Novaković from

Dvorište. All three were my acquaintances. The meeting was joyful. Moving on, I came across the guard Rajko Vikalo from Dizdarlije. He was in the I troop of the II Battalion. He was very surprised when he saw me. He said I looked very feeble.

I headed towards the war camp of the II troop. I met the deputy commander of the II Battalion, Dragutin Ćurguz. I asked him to allow me to transfer to the I troop because I found out that I have a lot of acquaintances there. Ćurguz smiled and answered: “Go to any troop you want as long as you are alive and well.” Until then I had relied on the stick and then I threw it away because Ćurguz’s answer gave me new strength.

I was well received in the troop. Attention was drawn to our diet. The cook was Trivun Vikalo from Dizdarlije and the baker was Stojan Dostica from Mirkovac. The commander of the I troop was Sreto Đenadija and the commissar was Milan Budimir.

I forgot to mention that the carbine I saved during the passage of the enemy machine gun troop was hidden. When I joined the troop I had no rifles, but I remembered where I hid the carbine. I went to that place and brought the rifle to the troop.

I recovered fairly in the troop. I was still wearing the pants I ripped when I was crawling. Soon, Dragoja Vujanović, who brought me a suit with two pairs of underwear, arrived. I was still weak. Dragoja was afraid that I would not survive. Partisans were very busy. I couldn’t say how many there were. Seemed like a strong troop to me. We kept guard. Later we also went to actions. We collected food and the like. Now I could move. I asked to go to sentry duty. One evening, the comrades returned from an assignment. They gathered in the war camp above Košuča. They had dinner and continued to make merry. They sang and danced Kozara kolo. During that time I was on sentry duty. It seems that my comrades forgot about my shift and I was not allowed to leave the guard post. I couldn’t stand anymore. I called, but no one answered. Then I fired a bullet into the beech tree. Soon the fighters and the troop commander ran towards

me. They were interested in what happened. Afterwards, the platoon delegate criticized me for shooting, saying that we covered each bullet with blood. He told me that I had to report to the commander. However, I went to the kitchen, to Trivun Vikalo and Stojan Dostica, and I told them what happened to me. I jokingly told them that the beech tree I shot was shaking. That was the end of it.

Milorad Vikalo

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*Milorad Vikalo, "The Terrible Fate of the Immobile Wounded in Kozara", Kozara III, 525–537.*

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## **THE DIFFICULT TRAGEDY OF THE WOUNDED IN KOZARA**

During the offensive of Mt. Kozara in the summer of 1942, I was the courier in the Youth Troop of the II Battalion of the II Kozara Detachment. Our troop held the position of Banjčev and Pavića gaj and further to the village of Koturovo towards the enemy who had established themselves in Bjelajci.

On the second of July 1942 the cook was late in preparing the food so it arrived late to the fighters. At lunchtime, I went to Sreta Denadija's platoon which was holding a position in the Pavić Grove to inform them that the fighters on shift were to withdraw to the first houses at the back of the grove and have lunch there. I haven't had lunch yet. I was asked by some fighters to stand in for them on guard while they were having lunch. I obeyed them and remained in the grove in position to follow the movement of the enemy. While the fighters were having lunch, the enemy opened artillery fire on our position in Pavića gaj. We, guards, did not leave our position. We opened rifle and machine gun fire on the enemy who were looting a house between our position and their position. Shells were constantly falling around us, but we were determined to stay in position and act. Several shells fell on the place where our machine gun was operating. Then Stanko Burazor from the village of Odžinac and Branko Milanković from the village of Vlaškovića were seriously wounded, they succumbed to their wounds after a few minutes.

On this occasion, I was wounded in the stomach and traumatised by the explosion of a shell. In the mist of dust, I saw Stanko Burazor

leaning on his rifle to hold on. Not yet knowing that I was wounded, I went to meet Stanko to help him, but I fell to the ground. Gojko Gvozden approached me and pulled me out of the line of fire. I was given first aid. I had to be transferred urgently to the hospital in the village of Vojskova. We arrived late at night. Here, in hospital, I was treated. I was put to bed and soon fell asleep. My sleep was short. It was quickly interrupted by the explanation that the hospital was leaving the village that same night.

There were carts in front of the hospital. There was hay and straw in them. Our wounded were hurriedly taken out and put in carts. The column of carts with the wounded started. A nurse Bosa, called Borka, was assigned to be with me. She was from Mt. Kozara, 17 years old, of medium height, with brown hair. Although she was looking at the heavily wounded fighters, her eyes were smiling. It was possible that she wanted to help us in this way. Her words and hands were gentle. I felt it when I put my head on her lap. On the way, I was leaning on her lap, holding my hands around her neck, in order to lift my stomach and back from the cart which shook as it passed over the stones and caused unbearable pain from my wounded and swollen stomach.

The rain followed us all the way through Mt. Kozara. By the side of the road there were many peasants they lit a fire fighting the rain. Men and women, mostly old men and grandmothers, approached the carts looking for their wounded sons, daughters and grandchildren. Some recognized me by the name Braco. When they saw me they started crying. I heard a heavy moan. A mass of people came out in front of the cart in which I was lying and simply stopped the column. They came to me in shifts, kissed me and cried, asking me to stay with them. I barely managed to prove to them that I was not who they thought I was. But despite that, the crying and wailing continued. The people mourned the wounded fighters even though their relatives were not among them.

The column of wounded went in the direction of Tromeda—Pašina Konaci—Sastavci, to the river Mlječanica.

During the night and before noon on July 4, 1942, a cloudburst occurred over Mt. Kozara. The wounded arrived in cars and on stretchers to the collection point. They were launched from hospitals in the villages below Mt. Kozara and in Mt. Kozara. There was no rest on the way through Mt. Kozara. Separated from their families, possessed by the fear of the enemy, the coachmen of cattle carts and carriers did not heed the cries of the wounded. They hurriedly walked through the forest paths and valleys to the collection point. It arrived from several directions and poured into a long procession. It looked like small streams that made up a big river.

Columns of the wounded reached the village of Grabovac, in the ditch above Mlječanica. In this place, the last preparation of the wounded for movement was carried out. They ordered me to be in charge of arranging carrying on stretchers because the swelling of the stomach was large and sensitive to the touch and the pains were sharp to the point of exhaustion. At the same time, parents, relatives, friends and colleagues from childhood started arriving. They approached the column of wounded and gave them food and other contributions. The of July 4 was sunny. Time passed quickly and it was time to part with the visitors who said goodbye to the wounded, not knowing that they would never see each other again.

At the head of the column there was a troop of fighters. In the back were the wounded on stretchers and behind them the wounded in the cart. Behind this column moved a mass of people with farm carriages and bundles that they managed to save. It moved at a slow pace, with pauses, down the Mlječanica River to the Bokan houses. We arrived late in the evening. The darkness of the night was occasionally broken by enemy rockets which illuminated the column of the wounded. When the Partisan troops in this direction began to attack the enemy and break through the ring the column of the wounded was stopped under the hill next to Mlječanica. A shower of enemy mortar shells fell on the column of the wounded. Falling and exploding among the wounded the shells blew up or seriously injured

the wounded and those who carried them. Thus, many disappeared from the column and only spilled blood remained.

Without reaching the place of the breakthrough the wounded on the carts were returned to their starting position, to the place of Grabovac. The weak wounded on stretchers, who did not die from enemy shells, were left in the place they reached on the way to the breakthrough. The morning dawned on July 5, 1942. There was a hush. The shooting stopped. A small number of fighters or civilians were returning from their positions. The wounded survivors on stretchers begged passers-by to kill them with a rifle or a stone. It was difficult to comply with the pleas of the helpless wounded. Because of this, the passers-by went on, sad and in a bad mood, nevertheless they could not fulfil the requests of the wounded. When the wounded saw that the passers-by were not going to kill them, they started cursing and insulting them in order to provoke them, if only this could help them end their suffering.

Individuals, including me, were dragging themselves on their hands. We dragged ourselves to the river and drank the dirty and bloody water, then dragged ourselves through the water, crossing to the other side of the river with the intention of escaping. In this, my school friend Grujičić, nicknamed Zele, came from his position with two boys. They helped me out of the river. Since they didn't have the strength to carry me, they looked for a cart and took me with three wounded men to Grabovac.

Almost all the seriously wounded from the Mt. Kozara area were in the Grabovac ditch. I found myself in a group of about a hundred wounded. I asked Grujičić to take me out of the car and leave me by the stream. He did it. Soon the enemy came from Pogledevo and from above, from the hill, opened machine gun fire on the wounded. Now these were even more difficult sufferings. All the wounded who could move as much as possible left the carts. The mobile wounded went into the depths of Mt. Kozara. The wounded in the carts that had pistols or carbines (although there were fewer of them)

shot and killed anyone who asked for it, leaving the last bullet for the themselves. Then calls and cries were heard. The words were heard: "Kill me, I can't run away!" The explosion of bombs started. They were thrown by the wounded that could not move from the carts. The wounded were gathering around the carts and those who had bombs. One bomb could not kill everyone so that there were those who remained even more disfigured and mutilated. There was a rush to see who would be the first to have a bomb or a gun to end his life and suffering, lest he fall alive into the hands of the enemy.

I was by the stream. I couldn't run away. All that was left for me was to try to hide under the bank in the stream that the water had dug up. Along the way, in the carts and next to them, there was wailing and weeping among the wounded. The enemy plane descended low and in sweeping flight between the hills, along the Mlječanica river bed, dropped bombs and hit with machine gun fire.

Lying under the slant in the stream after some time I felt the swelling in my stomach subsided. It seemed to me that I would be able to walk. Then I felt the muscles in my legs. Around 11 am, on July 5, I looked towards the wounded. I saw the home guards walking around the carts with the wounded that could not leave the place or end their lives by committing suicide. The home guards soon left.

Exhausted, I fell asleep worrying. I didn't sleep for a long time. I was awakened by the firing of rifles nearby. I looked towards the carts where the wounded were. I become aware of the Ustasha killing the wounded. Through a small opening, under the slant, I saw a dozen carts in which the Ustashes were beating the wounded with their butts. I lost my composure at the horror I observed.

Towards evening I regained consciousness. The shooting stopped. Dusk was falling. When it got dark, I tried to get out. Uncertain, I started up the stream, past the killed and wounded. I wanted to run away. I also gained strength from knowing the trails of Mt. Kozara well. I was passing by Grabovac. At a distance of about two hundred meters there was a cart with the wounded that were killed.

I saw excruciating scenes. The dead were lying in carts or hanging from the sides. Carts were overturned on top of some of the dead. Some of the wounded were slaughtered so their heads lay next to the cart. Along the stream there were many train cars with dead wounded, but I did not go any further, but decided to turn aside.

During the night I came across an enemy war camp on Paripovac. Noticing that I had come close to a group of sleeping soldiers, I turned back a little, then went around and headed into the depths of Mt. Kozara.

In getting around through Mt. Kozara, I found a multitude of people, including my parents. My parents helped me find a shelter near Palež. I took shelter in a fir tree between two logs. I was left alone again. Father promised to come, but he was gone. I didn't feel safe. At night, I got up from the shelter and headed towards the town of Maglaj. Then I came again to the war camp of the enemy soldiers. I was carried away by the thought that it was a mass of people who had gathered together with carts. When I saw the tents, I realized that it was an enemy army.

I returned to the depths of the Bundelj ditch. I looked for shelter again. I saw three densely grown fir trees next to the log. I went to dig in between the fir tree and the log. As I started to remove the leaves, I noticed the shoes. I pulled on these shoes, but they wouldn't come out of the ground. I dug further and saw that a man was buried here. Grabbing the ground, I saw that the man was alive. I removed the soil and leaves up to the man's head. The man uttered a word, probably in fear that the enemy had discovered him. I told him and freed him not to be afraid because I was also wounded and I was seeking to take refuge. I asked him to move so that I could lie down next to him. He told me: "Go to another place. If the enemy discovers us, let him not find both of us." I went to the branches at the top of the log. I went to the stream and poured water into the flask that I always carried. Returning, I unfurled the branches. He crawled into the rubble and lay down.

After some time, below me, in the ditch, I heard calling. The shouting got closer and, in the afternoon, an enemy machine gun troop came by. They were walking towards the log I was hiding next to. I had a good view of the entire train of enemy soldiers. It seemed to me that the enemy soldiers saw me. I especially followed the home guard that walked towards me and spoke and cursed in the Zagorje dialect. He came to a thick and long branch which was blocked between me and the enemy soldier. The soldier turned aside.

I was exhausted and stiff. I stopped breathing. I felt my heart beating like a clock. My eyes just ceased and I stopped blinking. I heard movements and the noise of ants. My jaws and mouth were shaking. I also got weakness in my legs. It was like paralysis. Pressure in the head. And the brain was deteriorating. I expected the enemy soldier to shout that he had found me. I looked into his eyes and into his mouth. Everything in me gave way and I started to lose myself. But at the same time I saw the back of the soldier who was walking away. I began to feel confident that I would stay alive.

When night fell, I came out of the shelter. I did not turn to the comrade under the log. I set out through the desolate Mt. Kozara. I met Draginja Cikota from the village of Odžinci. She offered me corn porridge. I didn't bother to eat even though I hadn't eaten anything since I had been wounded. I stayed several days without food. I drank a lot of water instead of eating food. I was too exhausted and worn out.

After the passing of the enemy machine gun the wandering around Mt. Kozara began. I had been acquainted with Mt. Kozara when I was a child. Perhaps that contributed to the fact that I managed to escape, because I believed that I would find salvation in Mt. Kozara. However, many were killed. In a place called Ledena voda (\*Ice Water), I came across a group of slain people. There was also a living child, 3–4 months old, lying next to the dead mother. I could not help the child. I had to be more careful because the enemy had almost passed this way. And in the further road through Mt. Kozara,

on the Podi, there were the corpses of the families who had found themselves around. Here I also noticed two living children who were sitting and watching the chamois grazing in the immediate vicinity.

I was moving through Mt. Kozara alone until I met Nikola Trkulja from the village of Maglajac. We spent the night in a leaky dugout. In the morning I parted ways with him and moved on to soon meet up with the surviving fighters who had saved themselves in various ways. Afterwards, Mt. Kozara came back to life. It accepted fighters who had survived the offensive.

Borko Karan

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*Borko Karan, "Tough drama of the wounded in Kozara",  
Kozara III, 538–543.*

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## WITH THE WOUNDED IN BOŽIĆI AND IN KOZARA

After returning from Banja Luka, I stayed in Vučkovci until the beginning of 1942. During that time, I met more often with Nela Bojanić, a teacher from Lamovita, and with Mica Vrhovac who also came from Prijedor. In the meantime, Dr. Alfred held a short first aid course which I also completed.

In January 1942, I was transferred to hospital in Božići. I found my sister Mira there. Our hospital, as we called it then, was located in Radakovići, in two houses. The wounded were placed in houses and subsisted in difficult conditions. We received the lightly wounded. There were nurses in hospital: Mileva Kusonić, Dušanka and Nevenka Radonić. Bora Batoz and a friend whose name I have forgotten (she was killed in the Mt. Kozara offensive) were also engaged for some time in our hospital.

After my arrival and appointment as commissioner of the hospital my sister Mira went to the village to organize the youth. I must mention that at first the wounded did not trust me. Somehow, they saw a “city lady” in me. They had become friends with Mira. She founded this hospital, welcomed the wounded and received them well. That’s why they trusted her more. It was difficult for me at first. Over time we adapted and established a relationship. Some of the wounded called me mother. In the hospital there were: Ilija Šurlan, Gojko Šiljegović, Mišo (I don’t remember their last names). There were about fifteen wounded. We had little medical supplies. We used towels and sheets for bandages. We had a lot of food. They brought us from the village. Dr. Alfred visited us once

or twice a week. He had not only ours, but also other hospitals in Mt. Kozara. After that we were able to handle. A priest's house was confiscated. A lot of material for the hospital was found. We had enough bed linen and dishes and other things. Dr. Alfred was our immediate supervisor and we are attached to the I troop of the II Battalion whose commander was Rade Kondić and the commissar was Mile Rajlić.

In the hospital in Božići, I adapted quickly. Even though from here you could see Prijedor, where I spent many of my youthful years, I still well adapted to the conditions of partisan life. I was particularly impressed by the village women. I especially admired the attitude of grandmother Anja in whose house there was a hospital. I also remembered Mileva Radaković.

I stayed in that hospital until the offensive in 1942. After healing, the wounded left and others came. (Especially during the liberation of Prijedor in May 1942). We accepted the lightly wounded and sent the more seriously wounded to the hospital above Kozarac, near Pilana. When Prijedor was liberated, I went to the city twice. I came with the Mt. Kozara youth to the assembly and stayed only one day. I had to go back among the wounded. Afterwards, I went to Prijedor to get medical supplies.

### **In the Kozara offensive**

When the Germans invaded the liberated Prijedor, I was in hospital, in Božići. One day, Mira Cikota and Esad Kapetanović came to me. (After the German invasion they fled towards Mt. Kozara.) They stayed at my place for a short time and left. At the same time my mother also arrived who also had to leave Prijedor. She stayed with me in hospital.

I no longer remember who issued the order to evacuate the wounded, but I know that one night we went to Mt. Kozara, towards Vitlovska, with the wounded. We had 14–18 wounded in hospital. There were also several seriously wounded. We drove them by carts. The lighter ones were walking with us.

The wounded from all the hospitals from the liberated area of Mt. Kozara gathered in Vitlovska. I think even the wounded came from the area of the I Battalion from the Sana and the Una rivers. In the hospital in Vitlovska, I was appointed as a health care officer. The hospital was located in several barracks. Food was cooked in cauldrons. We didn't have salt or bread. We didn't even have medical supplies. One day I bandaged about a hundred wounded. While I was dressing them, Dr. Zukanović said: "Maria, you are better as a nurse than as a hospital commissioner." I think there were about two hundred wounded people in Vitlovska (in two or three barracks). One of the wounded had a nervous breakdown so he got up and wandered at night.

The quartermaster of the Džudža hospital, from the I Battalion, looked suspicious. It even seemed to me that he was connected with the enemy. At that time, he was supplying the hospital as quartermaster. He had sugar and food in stock, but he did not give it to the wounded. I presented this at the meeting which was also attended by Obrad Stišović, the commander of the detachment. They didn't believe me.

The situation in hospital was quite difficult. The seriously wounded died and were immediately buried. When I would visit the hospital at night I would come across wounded who passed away whom we buried the next day. One child, a Gypsy, aged 5, was wounded in eight places. The child was very handsome. Mileva Obradović and I even had an argument about him because I said that this little one would be mine if he stayed alive. (Mileva is the wife of Ivica Marušić Ratko).

During my stay in the hospital in Vitlovska a doctor who was captured by the partisans came to us. He worked with us. I don't remember his last name. I told him that the little Gypsy was my child and that he should treat him, and that if he sabotaged it, I would kill him. One day this doctor disappeared because he ran away and our little darling died. It was getting harder every day in hospital. Food was running out, and the number of the wounded was increasing. At first, we decently buried those who died, but later we did not have time. There were no medicines. We could only bandage them.

It lasted until the decision to move. The order arrived to take the wounded to Mt. Grmeč. We prepared a stretcher (two tree branches and some clothes or a blanket over them) and thus carried the wounded. We were going down to Mlječanica. We were told that during the night we would cross the Prijedor—Knežica—Bosanska Dubica road and continue to Podgrmeč. Since all the wounded were on the move I asked Dr. Alfred if I should go with them. He told me to stay with the last wounded man in Vitlovska. It was supposed to stay until all the wounded left. Those who remained were Dr. Zukanović, a Jewish doctor and myself. It is not Moric, but another, a veterinarian, with whom I found myself in the Croatian death camp in 1942.

The three of us remained while the wounded went to the front to break out of the ring. We wandered during the night. On the second day, when we fell asleep, a shell woke us up. I got up and realized that I was alone. These two were not there. I went down Mlječanica and found myself in awe. I found all the wounded. They were all returned to the ditch.

I entered the yard of a house at the entrance to Mt. Kozara. I saw a woman who had given birth. An artillery shell blew up part of her body and the child remained on the mother's cord. I don't even remember what I used in order to separate the mother from the child. I entered the house. I noticed the dead. Everyone in this house was killed. The shell blew up the roof and those who were inside were all killed. It was a gruesome sight. True, in the Mt. Kozara offensive, I saw human intestines scattered on the trees.

When I returned, I found all the wounded on stretchers. They were left in the valley. In the meantime, a courier arrived and told me: "Get ready and run." I asked whose order it was. He told me: "Šoša's". I told the courier that I would stay there until the last wounded man. The courier said: "If everyone who can go does not go, I will shoot". The wounded began to shout and moan: "Commissar, kill us". I had a bomb and a gun with three or four bullets. I could do nothing. If I had had more bullets perhaps I would have complied with the wish of those seriously wounded and killed them. It was difficult to

leave them to the enemy. The enemy was already close and advancing through Mt. Kozara. However, I had to obey the order and leave the wounded. It was, I think, the most difficult hour of my life. The wounded moaned, wailed and called out, but they were left helpless. I left them. Even today it's hard for me when I think about it.

Along the way, I met our quartermaster, Džudža. (He was shot during the war as a traitor.) I set off through Mt. Kozara. There were more of us. We spent the whole day walking on the mountain. I noticed that the quartermaster was pulling a bag. I asked what was in the bag and found that he was carrying sugar, men's shirts and other things. He even gave me a man's shirt. I couldn't stand it, so I remarked to him: "Aren't you ashamed to be hauling this much sugar and the wounded on Vitlovska are without sugar?" I also stated to him: "If I stay alive, I will kill you. Remember that I will kill you." This is where we separated.

I set off on my way through Mt. Kozara. There are two or three other girls with me. Along the way, I met the commander of the II Battalion, Stanko Milić. Dušan Glamočanin Pele also happened to be there. I turned to Stanko: "Comrade commander, I was left alone. Where should I go?" He looked at me and didn't answer. I repeated the question, but he didn't say anything even then. I think I was wandering for two days. Later I met Mira Cikota and Julia. I don't remember how long we rambled, but I know that we came to a stream. I took a bath there and then got pneumonia. I felt that I was breathing very hard. I ran into Moric who told me that I had pneumonia. I walked around Mt. Kozara with this kind of inflammation.

Marija Kaus-Škundrić

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*Marija Kaus-Škundrić, "With the wounded in  
Božići and Kozara", Kozara III, 544–548.*

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## WITH THE WOUNDED IN KOZARA

I experienced the occupation as an eighteen-year-old girl. I was not involved in politics, but I was interested in what was happening. I learned about it from our cousin Gojko Kusonić. Before the beginning of the war he came to our house more often. He engaged in a conversation with my father, and later with my brother Sretko, and with me as well. He was organized. However, with the establishment of the Ustasha government, a difficult situation arose. My sister Bora, brother Sretko, Drago Kunić and I started planning to run away to Belgrade. At that time, Serbian families were fleeing so we also thought that we would be safer there. We were mostly running away from the Ustasha massacre.

Gojko Kusonić came to us. I told him how our group agreed to run away to Belgrade. Gojko was surprised. He did not agree with our proposal. He said: "If the Ustashas go to the village, run towards Miljakovci." So, we gave up going to Belgrade.

In September 1941, Gojko gave me tasks. This connection went through Dragutin Topić, from Miljakovci. Gojko told me to collect data on the enemy army, Ustasha, Germans and Home Guards. In addition, I also collected paper, pencils, medical supplies. I had to go to Prijedor. I was told to go to the bookstore which was located in front of the family Berek's and the family Radošević's houses. Gojko told me that I will get everything I need in that bookstore. I also received medical supplies there. There was a man working in the bookstore, but I wasn't interested in who he was. It was important for me

to get the material and get it out of town. The conditions for export were very difficult. I had to pass the Ustasha guards on Miloševica near the old Stanivuković's storehouse. Ustashes usually stopped me, talked to me and I was in a hurry because I was wearing material under my coat. I usually kept batteries for the radio, a pen or two in my pockets and there were also office supplies that I hid under my coat. In order to ensure an easier passage past the Ustasha guards, I seemed cheerful, smiled at the soldiers, etc. Some of them demanded that I stay longer, that I come to the dating.

When I arrived home, I picked up some things and went to Miljakovci with my father. There I met with Gojko Kusonić and told him that I must not return home. Gojko could not understand my difficulties and asked me to continue working on this relationship that I am very suitable and confident. At that time, I think, on this part I was the only connection. I did not tell anyone about the work, not because there were no suitable persons, but because no one told me that I could involve other persons. I remained persistent in my request not to return to the village. I wanted to stay with the partisans.

In the course of functioning in the village and activities towards the city, I also received various literature from Mt. Kozara, some newsletters, etc. I spread those around the houses and read them there. I was mostly reading in houses separately. At the same time, I would talk to people about what was happening in Mt. Kozara, how the partisans carried out actions, etc. This news was brought by Dragomir Dimić from Gornja Gomjenica. He was a wealthy man. Later, I received some packages through him. If we needed something, I would tell Dimić and he would send it. Dimić cooperated even though it was difficult considering the Ustashes in Čela.

I stayed with the partisans. It was a big surprise for my family. My brother Sretko also wanted to join the Partisans, but Gojko Kusonić held him back so he stayed until the beginning of 1942 working in the village.

I went out to Miljakovci. There was also Soja Mrkšić, the daughter of a teacher from Miljakovci, who worked here. (She died in Par-

tisans). Soja told me that she had to move to Mt. Kozara and that I should stay in the village. I wasn't for that. We mainly worked on collecting food and clothes for the partisans. We went to the women and talked with them about what they should prepare: to knit socks, gloves, sweaters, etc. There are also the Šiljegovići active in this area: Vasilije, Lazar, Dejan and Ljupko. They maintained a relationship with Mt. Kozara. By the way, other families also provided help, especially in Miljakovci and Rakelići. One could freely come to any house and ask for something for the partisans. The people gave everything they had: food, socks, gloves, scarves, sweaters and more.

At the beginning of 1942. I left for Mt. Kozara without Soja's knowledge. She wanted me to work here with youth and women. I wanted to fight, to be in the unit. Before my departure for Mt. Kozara, a partisan troop with commander Mile Vučenović arrived. I went to Mile and told him that I would like to go to Mt. Kozara or to be accepted into this troop as a nurse. There were no female nurses in the troop. Mile recommended me to stay. Soja had already left. I firmly decided to go too. I was interested in when the couriers would go to Mt. Kozara so that I could go with them. I didn't think about how I would be accepted in Mt. Kozara whether I would meet someone famous. It seemed to me that what I had done so far was insufficient and that in Mt. Kozara there were more opportunities to fight, to contribute to the fight. There were partisans there and that was why Mt. Kozara attracted me so much. I assumed that Mica Vrhovac, my teacher, was also there and I wanted to find her.

I finally arrived in Mt. Kozara. I came to the command of a troop. That was where I found Dušan Utješinović. Strahinja Gnjatić and others came with me. We spoke with Dušan Utješinović. He told me that the partisans have a hospital in the village of Božići, at Mitar Radaković's. He recommended that I go to the hospital, to Radakovići, where there was Mira Kaus, who, in addition to working in the hospital, also worked among the youth. I went to the hospital. There I found Maria Kaus and Jelena, the wife of a notary from Kozarac.

This hospital was located in the Radaković's houses. That was where I found Bora Batoz and Soja. Bora and Soja went to the hospital in Vojskova. Jelena was the commissioner of the hospital and Marija Kaus was her deputy. Jelena left later. She told me that she wanted to go to Kordun where she was from. Maria Kaus was appointed commissioner of the hospital.

Now Marija Kaus and I remained in the hospital. Soon, Dušanka and Nevenka Radonić came to us. Mira Kaus also came occasionally, but she mostly worked with the youth.

The wounded in our hospital were: Ilija Šurlan, Mlado Graonić, Sveto and Gojko Knežević, Obrad Davidović, Gojko Šiljegović, Miloš Vujčić, Ćuro Vučenović and others. One of the seriously wounded had his leg amputated, but he did not recover. He died in March or April 1942 in hospital. He was born in Brezičani and his last name was Munjiza. I know that he was transported to the village and buried there.

We were supplied by the then municipal command. Boško Simatović, Nikola Kovačević and Živko Marjanović worked mostly on this. We went to them and got everything that we could get under the conditions of the time. The food was good. They also collected bedding through the women's organization.

After the second liberation of Kozarac we received a lot of materials for the needs of the hospital. We also procured something from Prijedor, through a connection. But we had to save and keep aside. We had cauldrons in which we boiled bandages on a daily basis. There were twenty wounded in hospital. The lightly wounded did not stay long. It was distinctive that the wounded did not want to stay in hospital. Everyone wanted to return to their unit.

Our hospital worked under the control of Dr. Alfred Ržehak. He came once a week, and sometimes twice a week. He examined the wounded and gave instructions on what to do next. The hospital belonged to the II Battalion which was located on Vitlovska.

The four of us, Marija Kaus, Dušanka and Nevenka Radonić and I worked in the hospital. In addition to being on duty and chang-

ing clothes we cooked food, cleaned rooms, washed bed linen and clothes. Women from Radaković also helped us. We became close friends. We felt very accepted there.

We stayed in hospital until the start of the Mt. Kozara offensive. After the German forces invaded Prijedor we were informed that an enemy offensive had begun and that the wounded should be evacuated to Mt. Kozara. I was in charge of leading the column of wounded in Mt. Kozara. It was difficult for me to accept that and I asked to stay in my position. But I had to obey the order. Nevenka Radonić was with me. Transportation by cattle carts was organized. We put the immobile wounded in the carts. The mobile ones went with us. The journey was very tiring. While we were travelling we had no food, but the wounded bravely endured all the hardships.

We came to Pogledevo with the wounded. We were placed in a large house which had a veranda fenced with planks. The hospital of the I Battalion also arrived here. We set off for Mednjak where all the wounded were gathered. The weather was rainy. It was raining constantly. It was cold. There were more and more wounded every day. Fighting is taking place around Mt. Kozara. We did not stay long in Mednjak. It was ordered that all the wounded should be gathered at Vitlovska. We had to get moving. It was difficult. There were a lot of immobile wounded. There were people who escaped the enemy. There was also disorganization. Movements of the wounded were frequent and this was difficult to do. But we knew that it was war and what it was like. We got used to everything. There were no fighters to help us with the organisation. Everyone capable of carrying a rifle went into position to fight. It was necessary to prevent the enemy's intrusion into Mt. Kozara.

We went from Mednjak to Vitlovska. The more seriously wounded were transported in carts. A number of the wounded were carried, others were lead, some moved independently. A long column of the wounded went through Mt. Kozara. Barracks (two or three repositories) were built on Vitlovska. A difficult life ensued. Six nurses bandaged the wounded all day, but we didn't have time to bandage all of

them. Some of them we didn't even change every day. There could have been 200–300 wounded on Vitlovska.

Dr. Alfred only came and helped with more difficult cases. We ourselves had to bandage the wounded and provide them with aid. The following came here as nurses: Nevenka Milanović–Zgonjanin, Mileva Obradović (Ratko Marušić's wife) and Ljubica Šinik. They stayed for a shorter time. Some young women also came. Food was procured by Džudža.

On Vitlovska, we were visited by the detachment commander Obrad Stišović. Sveto Marjanović also came with him. They checked how the wounded were accommodated, what kind of food they had, how they were feeling, etc. There were difficulties with nutrition. We cooked food in the stream. No fire was allowed during the day because the enemy was flying over with airplanes and, as soon as he noticed the smoke, he bombarded and pounded it with machine guns. We had tea and marmalade for food in the morning, soup and sometimes meat for lunch. We mostly cooked beans. There was plenty of bread, but the food as a whole was poor. The people ran out of food because they did not have the opportunity to take it with them during the movement to Mt. Kozara.

We were on duty all night because we had to help the wounded, bandage them, adjust their position (some could not move on their own). Many called out and asked for help. We approached them and helped them. One wounded man, wounded in the head, was on the verge of consciousness. At night, he jumped up and started running through the forest. We turned on the lamp so Ljubica Šinik ran after him and brought him back. She was the strongest among us so she dared to go into the forest and catch this seriously wounded man. The wounded respected and appreciated us. We were considered experts even though we only knew what Dr. Alfred showed us. We mostly knew how to bandage and that was the most important thing.

During the first bandaging I fainted because I could not look at the wounds and human blood. But over time I got used to it. I remember Luka Stojanović, Mitro's brother. He was wounded through

the mouth. He held on bravely. There were also: Gojko Kukavica, Vasan Daković, Šobota from Orlovac, I think Mihajlo. Before our departure to break through the encirclement, Vlado Pekić, commander of the IV troop, came. Unfortunately, I don't remember many of the wounded.

We also had an enemy doctor, captured in Mt. Kozara. We were all in one room. This doctor did not sleep. He would usually get up and sit down. I was afraid of him. I had a feeling he might kill us. One night the couriers came. They called me and asked if there was a doctor there. He was sleeping. The couriers woke him up and took him away. I think he was shot the same night. The next day we were informed that he was a felon.

The wounded held on bravely and courageously. Even though they knew it was an offensive, that the enemy surrounded us, that they were firing machine guns and bombing every day, they endured everything sober-blooded and without panic. They had unlimited confidence in their comrades and in the leadership. They lay and waited, regardless of the news that came.

Before leaving for the breakthrough we received a notification to make preparations. We also received help from fighters and youth. And we set off. Some were carried on stretchers. Others were driven in carts and others were helped to move. We put two or more of them in the carts. If they were more seriously wounded they had to lie down two at a time and somewhere we put more of them to sit. We went down to Mlječanica and headed towards the position to get out of the encirclement.

I don't remember how far we got. I didn't know this area and now I couldn't get to know it because it was night. We were close to the position because the guns were being fired next to us. The rockets were illuminating so that the night looked like day. We were all night around Bokan in Mlječanica. Before dawn, we started retreating to Mt. Kozara. Now a difficult situation arose. Some of the wounded took their own lives. Vlado Pekić also committed suicide there. I heard when the bullet was fired and when the rumour spread that Commander Pekić had killed himself. He was seriously wounded and was taken away in a cart.

After returning from the failed breakthrough there was a retreat. The mobile wounded were leaving for Mt. Kozara. Many relatives and acquaintances found them and took them. So, they went to Mt. Kozara. Those who did not have relatives joined together in groups and tried to move. They were helped by those who were more mobile. Only those who could not move remained.”

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“ The Operational Headquarters informed the Supreme Headquarters of the NOP and the DVJ (\*People’s Liberation Partisan and Voluntary Army of Yugoslavia) about the suffering of the wounded and the people on Kozara: “Our forces have been fighting for almost 2 months with the enemy who moved to the Krajina with quite large forces, estimated at 30–35,000, with good military equipment and with weapons. A German division operates together with the Hungarian army. The main battles were fought in the area of Mt. Kozara. There was a systematic and strong blockade of our army and the people who fled in the number of 80–90,000 before being slaughtered and killed in Mt. Kozara. Enemy losses on Mt. Kozara are estimated at 5–6,000 people. A lot of weapons were captured, but our forces, accepting the frontal fight and defending the people on Mt. Kozara, suffered heavy losses. It is estimated that around 4–500 partisans were killed or wounded. Our forces fought from June 1 to July 3, when, due to the great pressure of the enemy and the tightened enemy ring around Mt. Kozara, they had to break through and transfer to the field of I K.N.O.P. detachment across the Sana River. Fighting continued on the ground between Kostajnica–Prijedor–B. Novo and Dubica, but on a smaller scale, until July 15. The battle in the Mt. Kozara area was the fiercest of all the battles fought with the enemy so far. Kozara Mount and the area around it were bombarded daily by aviation and artillery also bombarded all sides of Mt. Kozara. The enemy under the command of the German General Stahl and German non-commissioned officers and officers were very persistent. They were Mrak’s troops, brought up in Germany, well fed and trained. The enemy did not pay attention to all the actions we took in order to relieve Mt. Kozara. With the forces (of Mt. Kozara) behind the encirclement and with the forces of the I detachment we attacked Bosanska Krupa, Sanski Most, Bosanski Novi and Dobrljin. We occupied Krupa and Dobrljin and confiscated a lot of weapons and ammunition. In Bosanski Novi and in Sanski Most we inflicted great losses on the enemy. In the fighting, we completely destroyed several battalions, but the enemy constantly filled the gaps in the front with fresh forces. In this offensive we have not suffered damage in weapons so far. There are even more of them than before the start of the offensive. It’s just that we lost a lot of fighters and many political leaders in these fierce battles. We were unable to extract a part of the wounded during the breakthrough, and the enemy committed terrible atrocities against them. The population of the Mt. Kozara region suffered a lot. The enemy was furious that our armed forces had broken through and attacked the civilian population. He drove the men to work in Germany, took village girls to brothels in Prijedor and the surrounding towns. It should be pointed out that the enemy searched the forest very carefully when they entered it, lifted fallen beech trees, machine-gunned the crowns of trees, searched ditches and went in a machine gun array through the entire Mt. Kozara. It was so difficult to shelter the civilian population and a part of the army

It was very difficult for me to separate myself from the wounded. Many people told me to go, to save my life. I approached the wounded, gave them bandages and bandaged them. That's how I found myself with a group of wounded people who were moving on crutches. There were ten of them. Along the way, my friend Neda (possibly Dimitrijević) from Bosanska Dubica joined me. Now there are two of us with this group of the wounded.

First, I found Rade Kondić. I offered him help, but he told me that his brother Milan was with him and that he didn't need anyone. I left him a few bandages and moved on. Rade Kondić and some other wounded were found by their relatives, wives, sisters, mothers and children who took them to Mt. Kozara. Only the seriously wounded, driven in carts, remained in Široka Luka because we could not help them. It could not be claimed that most of the wounded remained in Široka Luka since during the day, after the breakthrough attempt, the separation of the wounded in Mt. Kozara began. The mobile wounded left alone or with their relatives. Some were led by fighters returning from their positions and a certain number of seriously wounded left with their relatives. Such was the fate of several hundred wounded.

I spent the night with a group of the wounded in Mt. Kozara. The next day, the Party members withdrew and held a meeting. I was not at that meeting. When the meeting ended, in the afternoon, we were told that the fighters should separate into groups, put away their weapons

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that could not break through the enemy encirclement. Now the enemy left certain strongholds around Mt. Kozara and concentrated the army in the garrisons of Prijedor, Sanski Most, Bosanski Novi, Dubica, Kostajnica, Gradiška. From time to time, some battalions cruise Mt. Kozara with the aim of looting and searching the forest. Our forces are returning again from the field of I detachment, via the River Sana, to Mt. Kozara. For now, they are being collected and connected with that part of the population that managed to hide from the enemy. A part of the forces of our Mt. Kozara detachment is on the ground of our I detachment. The enemy is trying by all means to disable the connections between our I Grmeč and II Kozara detachments."

(From the report of the Operational Headquarters of the NOP and DV (\*National liberation movement and volunteer army) for the Bosnian Krajina dated 26th July, 1942 to the Supreme Headquarters of the NOP and DV (\*National liberation movement and volunteer army) of Yugoslavia and the situation in the Bosnian Krajina after the enemy's offensive on Kozara.)

and bury them. The commander of the II Battalion, Stanko Milić, was also there, and he was heading for a stream. Several shots were fired. It was rumored that Stanko had committed suicide although it was later established that he surrendered and treacherously kept himself in prison.

From this place, the fighters left in groups. It is interesting that some even started singing. I also went with one of the groups. I didn't know the fighters, but we were all equal then. However, they did not receive me, telling me to go back to help the wounded. It wasn't easy for me, but I went back. Later we were told: "You are women, you will manage more easily and go to the people." So, we were left to ourselves.

When the fighters dispersed I was left, like many women, to fend for myself. I wasn't scared. I thought about hiding in the bushes and staying that way. I didn't think of climbing trees because I was afraid of that. There was only my friend Neda, from Bosanska Dubica, who was with me. While we were walking around Mt. Kozara we kept finding wounded people. We helped them. We went down to Vojskova and the surrounding villages. We even reached Prosara. Although we teamed up with some of our friends we were mostly alone. It was difficult for us at night. We were afraid. We lay under the beech trees. The enemy was using artillery, but we still managed to fall asleep. When the day dawned in the morning we thought about which way to turn. Uncertainty was hard. I had a bomb and a gun. It seemed to me that I got them on Vitlovska when we went to the breakthrough. I put on a navy skirt and a red blouse. Neda used to tell me: "Why don't you ask a woman for country clothes, for a black blouse? If the enemy catches you, they'll say you're a partisan." Neda was beautiful, black-haired, tall, courageous and a good friend. But now she started to lose herself. We wandered around Mt. Kozara and the villages alone. We thought that we would find someone in the village and find out more. One day we came to Vojskova and found several wounded in a house. They made a fire and cooked corn. They ate boiled grain. We washed their bandages in the stream and bandaged their wounds. They told us to go to the people and save ourselves with the people.

Wandering like that, we came across a stream. We also heard the conversation. It was crucial to establish who was there. We decided to go and to see. Neda dissuaded me, but I resolutely walked towards the place from where the conversation was heard. We hear a woman's voice. They were Vuka Miodrag and Vlasta Lenardić and with them Šoša, Šiljegović and others. We stayed for a while and moved on. We came across a group of partisans, five or six of them, in the yard. They were in a very good mood. Their mood encouraged both me and Neda. We approached them and told them who we were. They accepted us with distrust. They said that they intended to break through the encirclement and get away and that we would not be able to withstand it. We left this group and continued on our own.

Neda also started suggesting that we join the people. She was fed up that no one would accept us into the group. We also spent that day alone. We did not return to the forest. We were there, in the village, below Mt. Kozara. I heard men's voices. I thought they were partisans and I was happy about that. I suggested to Neda that we see who was at those houses. There were ten partisans in one yard. We were happy. We greeted them joyfully with: "Death to fascism". And they were in a good mood. Those were Bašić, Pećan and others who were there. We started a conversation and got to know each other better. I asked Bašić if he would accept us in his group. Mirko laughed and said he would receive us. He asked me if I had a weapon. I said I had a bomb and a gun. Neda had nothing.

The fighters of this group were resting and wanted to break through the enemy machine gun troop in Mt. Kozara during the night. Preparations were made and a breakthrough plan was worked out. I got another bomb and Neda got two. We left during the night. We couldn't pass, so we turned back. Later we met with Mirko Pekić and others. In this group were: Mirko Bašić, Mirko Drlić (called Stojić), Mileva Kusonić, from the partisan hospital (then there were no medical officers), and one friend from Hrvatska Dubica, Đuka Trninić's sister-in-law, Milan Egić, Mihajlo Pećanac, Mirko Šiljak, Jovo Bijelić and his

brother, two Dragičevićs. We wanted to make a breakthrough through the machine gun troop at a suitable place. However, Mirko Pekić suggested that Neda and I go with the people. It was very difficult for us. Mirko was even in favour of separating this group. And so, I don't know how, the separation happened. Mirko Pekić left with some others and the group with Mirko Bašić remained. We did not want to separate from Bašić's group. I know that one night we roasted a pig that Mirko bought from a peasant (we also got salt). We were still in Prosara.

We spent the night near a cemetery. Comrades were sent to investigate the whereabouts of the enemy. We stayed in the forest. This group did not return. The other one also left and did not return. I also went with two friends and we found friends who had left before us. It was said that we were going across the Sava River, to Slavonia.

Thanks to the skill of Mirko Bašić we managed to pass through Mt. Kozara and later go to Slavonia. Before we passed through the enemy machine–gun troop Neda separated from us. We were very well received in Slavonia. That's when I got separated from Bašić and was assigned to a troop as a nurse. The commander of this troop was a man nicknamed Vuk. Later I was withdrawn to the headquarters of the detachment. During the whole time I kept thinking about Mt. Kozara. I asked the headquarters what they knew about Mt. Kozara. They told me that couriers were coming and that Mt. Kozara was fine, that the partisans had organized themselves. I was driven by the desire to return to Mt. Kozara as soon as possible. I found out that a group of Krajina proletarians was returning from Slavonia and I returned to Mt. Kozara with them.

Mileva Vujčić–Kusonić

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*Mileva Vujčić–Kusonić, "With the wounded in Kozara",  
Kozara III, 549–558.*

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## FORLORN KOZARA

Towards evening there was the announcement that Šoša was looking for us. When we arrived I saw many partisan leaders. The headquarters of our battalion also arrived, all the troop commanders, except for the commander of the III troop, Ljuban Aćimović who was killed in the attack on the tanks last night. Ratko Vujović Čoče, a Spanish fighter, was also there. The meeting was led by Šoša. After he introduced us to the situation we moved on to a discussion. We wondered what we would do?! Some suggested that we go to the breakthrough again. Others were in favour of breaking through between Prijedor and Kozarac; the third is to go across the River Sava, to Slavonia. But when we heard that there were ships on the River Sava and that the Ustashas had taken up a position on its left bank to prevent our breakthrough into Slavonia this possibility fell away. It is not advisable to go to the breakthrough between Prijedor and Kozarac again, given that the breakthrough is far away, that the enemy is quite strong and that our units are exhausted. Someone suggested that we split up and hide and when the enemy passes, that we gather together again at the assembly points. A cannon shell was heard coming from some direction. Thus, the debate ended.

We dispersed, the commissioner and I returned to the fighters, discussed the situation we were in and asked for their suggestions. In the end we agreed to separate in groups and individually, find suitable shelters, hide until the enemy's offensive passes and then return to the meeting place. I was in favour of hiding weapons, except for guns. Fighters had a hard time parting with their weapons. I

only managed to take away machine guns; the deputy commissioner and I hid them in the immediate vicinity. Afterwards, I said goodbye to the fighters and leaders. That was the most difficult moment in the war for me. I remained alone, but without hope of meeting my friends soon. The enemy appeared in an intense shooting machine-gun array, searching every house, every bush, throwing hand grenades and firing machine guns. That's why I believed that few of us would be left alive. My father heard that I was nearby so he went looking for me. He found me and we started looking for the mother and five younger children. We found them, but I didn't stay longer with them, we just talked. I told my father that he must not surrender at any cost because almost everyone in Dubica knew that he was a partisan. The mother was supposed to go with the children. My father agreed with me, but when we parted he did not have the strength to part with the family. As soon as he arrived in Dubica he was recognised and shot as were thousands of Mt. Kozara residents. I was left without friends and now without a family. What was to be done? I must not allow myself to fall alive into the hands of the enemy. I made a decision: if there is no way out I will first kill as many enemy soldiers as possible and finally myself.

I first thought about what would happen to me when the enemy left Mt Kozara. The people would have been captured and destroyed. Mt. Kozara would remain deserted. I had hope left in the Red Army, but how and where to survive until it arrives??! I was thinking of joining haiduks until the arrival of the Red Army. I was led to this thought by the fact that earlier in school, and later, I read almost all the poems about haiduks, their heroism, their way of fighting, etc. What else could I think as a peasant child without education at the age of 22?

Before evening, I followed the people to the villages of Potkozarje. On the way, I meet Zijad Čamdžić, he was left alone, no one wanted to take him and he hardly knew anyone, nor did he know the area. I saw sadness and concern in his eyes and I felt pity for the young man who distinguished himself in battle. I suggested that he come with me to share our fate. Then it meant I had someone to talk

to. We came across Miloš Kasabašić, a young man whom I especially appreciated and esteemed, because he was calm, silent, but brave. We didn't know this area. A local should have been found to help until the enemy passes. Milovan Jekić, a middle-aged man, a native of that region, a fighter from the first days of the uprising, came by. Kasabašić and I met at Vitlovska in 1941 when he was our troop medical orderly. Since he was older and more experienced I also allowed him to be in command of our small group. He brought us to the village of Sreflije, near Dubica, at Marija Krneta's place. Marija brought out roasted pork and we hadn't seen anything like that for a long time. After we had eaten, the leader of the group suggested that we go back towards Mt. Kozara and that we would find a place to shelter on the way. Going towards Mt. Kozara he suggested we hide the guns because it would be easier to move and hide. We accepted that. While we were hiding our guns a group of enemy soldiers appeared on a hill. Seeing that, Jekić took my binoculars, took a closer look and told me to wait and that he would be back soon. It was before sunset. We were waiting for him, but Jekić was not there. We didn't even see each other anymore. The night was approaching. We went along a small river, I think it's called the Rijeka. It springs above the village of Vojskova. Since we are very tired we decide to rest in the meadow, on the hay. We slept all night. When we woke up it was daylight. We were awakened by the noise and the clanking of weapons and flasks.

We kept our mind composed and quickly found the solution. The farmer who owned the meadow, in order to prevent water from spilling into the field, tied a fence around the river and then threw corn on it from which a thick vine grew and tied itself to the fence. Zijad suggested that we go into the water and from the water we pass through the fence into the wild vineyard. There was a footpath next to the wild vine. We lay down next to the fence, on our backs, with our legs facing each other. As it seemed to us we camouflaged ourselves well. Now we have to wait for the hardest part: for the enemy machine gun troop to pass. Zijad had better luck. He entered the Rijeka, came across an old

willow tree that let its veins into the water and he crawled there. I had a gun with 4–5 bullets. We didn't wait long. An enemy soldier came by next to us. A second one passed, a third one. When the fourth approached us he stopped and stared into the water. It took a few minutes, but it was scary for me. I slowed my breathing. But what if I accidentally had to cough? The order to move was coming soon. I heard a German on the other side. After everything was over we got up from the shelter and sat down in the bush. Now we're wondering how we're going to get to Mt. Kozara again. We could see it. It was not far, but we didn't know how many enemies were behind her. That was why we agreed to wait for the night and, when it got dark, to head towards Mt. Kozara. I think it was one of the longest days of my life. I felt like I was in a cage. Enemy units were passing around us, setting up a telephone line, dragging cannons, kitchens, etc. Their communication officer threw the cable over our bush and moved on.

We could hardly wait for it to get dark and we immediately started towards Mt. Kozara, towards the village of Vojskova. Going by the Rijeka, along the path that the enemy came this morning, we came across artillery. Fortunately, no one noticed us and we retreated. It was night and the enemy was at every turn. We crawled into a shelter. We spent the night in a wood, near enemy artillery. During the night, there was no shooting, except for rockets, by which we could judge where the enemy units were. We hadn't eaten anything and now we're also without water. In the evening I went to the village house to see if I could find something to eat or at least some water. Walking by the hedge I met a girl who was very surprised to see me. She said there were several women in the yard. I asked them to give me a piece of bread. They gave me some corn bread. I divided that piece into three parts and ate my part immediately. I came to my two friends, gave them each a bite of corn and we quickly hid in the woods. Here you should wait for the night. The enemy had gone towards Prosara, but they were also in Gaj, close to us. We had no weapons. We could hardly escape without the enemy noticing us

and there were still a few hours until nightfall. Waiting for the night we heard voices and movements in the grove. Later I found out that the Ustasha slaughtered and shot several hundred Mt. Kozara youths here. After they had done their “work” the executioners came to the women, killed chickens and piglets with guns in order to entertain themselves. We saw them, but we were powerless.

Without waiting for it to get dark we headed towards Vojskova. We reached the village. We went from house to house, but nowhere did a soul live. Everything was open. Things were scattered around the yard and sometimes a pig grunted and ran away. We noticed a fire in the middle of the village. So, someone was still alive. We went faster. We cautiously approached the house where the fire was burning. We noticed a woman at the village hearth. She invited us to the house and immediately started apologizing that there was no bread, but there was milk. We saw many small children around the fire. They were waiting for the milk to be boiled. We heard the hoofing of horses. The woman jumped up, stood at the door, spread her arms and began to explain herself to Schwab who asked in our language where the army was. We spent the night in an orchard. When it dawned we saw that there were cattle and poultry in the village and there was also grain.

The three of us are now like born brothers. I cannot forget the woman with five small children who hid the three of us from the enemy’s eye.

It dawned. Suddenly, mines started exploding near us – the enemy group was moving from Mt. Kozara towards their front. A few civilians ran towards the forest. We barely got along with them. Partisan Boško Sekulić told us that he was under the forest in a house with a group of partisans. He went to bring food from the village. Since the enemy noticed him, he ran back. He took us to that partisan group. There were ten of them. I recognized Joca Marjanović, the commissar of our battalion. Skender Kulenović, Nikica Pavlić and others were also there.

The offensive was still going on. We knew that in the Una–Sava valley there was a large mass of Mt. Kozara people who had nowhere to go

but into the hands of the executioner. We came to the conclusion that a unit should be formed from the arrived fighters as soon as possible; its place of encampment should be determined and it should be prepared for combat. With us there were also several Slavonians who survived the Mt. Kozara offensive. They also called several leaders from Mt. Kozara to help the Slavonian partisans. Mirko Bašić, commander of the First Troop, would go there with a few fighters. They also took my Zijad. Grga heard that I praised Zijad, so he said: “Well, I need someone like that.” I haven’t heard anything about him since then.

We started rebuilding the units. At first, a few fighters from each troop arrived; it was the core. As a fighter arrived, he went to his troop. One platoon from my troop (about 40 fighters) passed through the enemy encirclement and went far so I suggested to the battalion headquarters that I go look for him. That was very dangerous. I went in search of water with two fighters. I came across many sights along the way. We found Trivun Karan, from the village of Slabinje, with a darkened mind. Trivun had been a fighter since the uprising in 1941. He went to look for his family. Going through Mt. Kozara, he encountered an Ustasha ambush and the Ustasha caught him. They started slaughtering him. They knocked him to the ground, one Ustasha sat on his chest, took out a knife and put it under his throat. In order to make the torture last as long as possible, the Ustasha put down the knife, took a cigar and started lighting it. Karan took advantage of the butcher’s lack of vigilance, threw him off him and ran away.

The enemy did not leave Mt. Kozara. We were avoiding them. There was a terrible desolation everywhere: village belongings scattered and cattle left behind. I wanted to see what had happened to the wounded who during the breakthrough had asked me to kill them. I found them slaughtered and mutilated. I then encountered a group of fighters. They came to look for the wounded. They found some and helped them. Here I met Rade Čekić and Brane Kovačević, the commander and commissar of the II troop of our battalion. In the second breakthrough, with the main part of the troop, they passed

through the enemy ring and when the enemy left Mt. Kozara, they returned here. They collected the wounded, set up a war camp. We agreed that we would hand over the war camp and the wounded to the units of the II Battalion and that we would join our battalion.

After we arrived at the battalion headquarters, we saw the new battalion commander, an unknown man. We were not enthusiastic about that. We found out that the new commander's name is Petar Mećava. He received us nicely, determined the war camp site and gave us tasks. He informed us that we would avoid conflict with the enemy for the time being.

I gathered the fighters. A number of fighters did not return. I came to the war camp site. That was a slope of a dense beech forest, above the village of Vojskova. When we arrived we had nothing but mountain water. The troop was re-established. There were corporals, sergeants and the four-member troop command. There was no former commissioner and his deputy. I never learned anything about their fate. Biro Bogićević was appointed commissioner and Kosta Semiz, a young man from Knešpolje, was appointed as his assistant.

We formed a party organization in the troop. Everything was arranged. The most difficult issue was nutrition. We decided to go down to the village, abandoned for days, to find dishes and cutlery there. I assigned a group to find grain in the village and grind it in mills. We all got to work. That's how we "hunkered down", set up a kitchen and stocked up on groceries. We also made small barracks. War camp life began.

Surviving fighters were still coming to the troop. Some escaped from the shooting from Dubica and other places; the wounded had got out of the pile of corpses and ran away. As they told us, the shooting was done in the afternoon; then the executioners would leave and the gravediggers would come to bury the corpses. These fighters seized the moment and escaped being wounded. Marijan Dončić was one of them.

We started accepting women in the troop – those were girls or younger women, mostly the wives of those who died. They were more

resilient than many men on the march. There were fighters, nurses, laundresses. Many of them became members of the Party and SKOJ (\*Union of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia).

Civilians also built a camp near us. These were mainly families who took refuge from the enemy and were no longer allowed to stay at their houses in the village, but came to the forest, closer to the partisans. There were background workers among them. They are our helpers. They collected and delivered food, followed enemy movements and informed us about everything. We organized patrolling and observation, but their observers were more successful. These were usually little pioneers who spend almost the whole day roaming around the village and discovering the enemy's movement in time.

After the offensive in Mt. Kozara, the occupier left fairly strong garrisons in several places. Their main task was to rob villages. To that end, they used slaves taken from Mt. Kozara for the harvest. Almost every day they sent stronger patrols to take away the abandoned village livestock. They shot at everyone who harvested wheat, regardless of whether it was a child, a woman or an adult.

The guard above the war camp informed me that the enemy was advancing towards us. We all went into battle, even the chefs. Eager for revenge, almost without firing a shot, we jumped on an enemy patrol, which went to the village in a horse-drawn carriage. We captured four enemy soldiers and seized two horse drawn carts. With a machine gun in his hands, battalion commander Petar Mečava shouted at the top of his voice: "Go ahead, Vignjević." When we heard his voice, it seemed to us that there were no more obstacles. This was my troop's first fight after the offensive.

Branko Vignjević

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*Branko Vignjević, "Forlorn Kozara", Kozara III, 559–566.*

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## MASSACRE OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN PALANCIŠTE

In the summer of 1942, an enemy army came from Prijedor towards the villages at the bottom of Mt. Kozara. They arrived at the Simatović's houses. When we heard about it, we picked up the children and some clothes and food and fled to Mt. Kozara. I had two children at the time: a four-year-old daughter and a two-year-old son. My husband Ljuban was in the partisans.

We stayed at Limani in Mt. Kozara. There were a lot of people from all the villages. We spent a month and more days there. Among the famous ones, I remember the families of Ostoja Banović, Jova Banović, Ilija Banović, then Bojanović and many more families from Palančište and nearby villages. There were about five thousand of us, under the beech trees. It was raining. My children were small and they were lying under a tree and the water was flowing under them. They kept shouting, "Mom, let's go home." It was not possible because the enemy army was in the village.

Old Stevanija Banović was with us. She had 13 family members. Only one of her sons was in captivity in Germany. The others were with us in Mt. Kozara. When the enemy army came, old Stevanija went out to face it on Vis. The rest of us went out too. The Germans, Ustasha and Home Guards searched us, looking for weapons and ammunition.

From here they took us to Prijedor and then to the Croatian death camp near Vlačina. It was a specially prepared death camp, surrounded by wire, intended for the people from Mt. Kozara. There

were mostly women and children, and there were also old people. When we passed by the Roman Catholic cemetery, the Ustashas started telling us that they were going to kill us there. However, there were soldiers who were already saying that we should not be afraid, that nothing would happen to us. I was carrying my two children. A German soldier helped me carrying them. He knew our language so he told me not to be afraid. He gave candies to the children.

We were placed in a war camp. There were guards at the gate. My sister Stana, the wife of Slavko Vujčić, lived near the war camp. She made sure that I got out of the war camp after a few days. When I left, I stayed with my sister in Orlovci. The very next day I saw that the Ustashas were driving the people out of the war camp, towards Prijedor. It happened at the beginning of August 1942. Some women from Prijedor with children managed to get home. However, many men and women with children did not return and their fate is unknown.

I returned home to Palančište with my children. At home I found father-in-law Đuro Banović, his brother Ilija, Vuka Banović, Brane's wife and their children Rajko, Rada and Radoslavka, two children of brother-in-law Đuro, Lazo and Petra. They were also in the Croatian death camp, but they managed to get out and come home. There was also Draginja Banović with seven small children. The houses were deserted. The family of Pera Banović had 12 members and now there was no one.

We stayed there until the fall of 1942 when a strong enemy army came again and picked us up and drove us away.

They gathered all the people from Malo and Veliko Palančište and from Jelovac. There were several hundred of us. They brought us to the Vujčića orchard. Ustashas expelled us. When they caught us and extruded us away, they said – “Why are you afraid?” The people were crying and moaning, carrying children. We were all afraid that they would kill us because we knew that the Ustashas kill. They said that we should not be afraid, that they were keeping us away from the partisans, so that they would not kill us. We were not allowed to

speak. They drove us to Pera Banović's house. They ordered us to sit down. We were sitting and waiting. Ustashas cursed our Serbian ancestry. They told us – "Why are you not satisfied in this kind of country and what would you like?" They said that they would drive us to the Croatian death camp to move over each other. We asked if they were going to kill us and they told us that they knew what they were going to do with us. They soon chased us away. There could have been 300–360 of us there. They were forcing us over the hill. It was night. I carried my children. My sister-in-law Anđa was with me. She was 17 years old. She took my 4-year-old daughter to help me, because in addition to the two children, I also carried blankets and some food. My aunt Stoja Banović and her daughter Ruža were also coming with us. Little Anđa and Ruža were saying that the Ustashas would kill us.

Later they extruded us away; they gathered people from houses along the road. When we got to Vučković, an officer, probably the commander, ordered us to stop. We all stopped. Ustashas gathered around us. There were many of them. And as soon as we stopped we were ordered to move again. We were tired of the burdens we carry. Children were crying all the time.

We arrived at Vujčić's orchard. Here they stopped us and surrounded us. They told us not to be afraid. It was late at night. We stayed here during the night and the next day. They started telling us again that we will go to our homes.

During the second night they started separating us. My aunt Anđa ran to me, telling me that everyone was going home. I told her to wait and that I don't know where we were going that night. She was constantly crying, calling for us to go. We went and encountered Ustashas. We saw them counting down. They said that there should not be more than 25 members in the group because supposedly they couldn't take more of us. It was not yet known what happened to those who were separated and taken away. There is no firing or wailing to be heard.

While I was talking to Anda, a shot was heard towards Mt. Kozara. Ustashas gathered around us and reinforced the guards. An Ustasha approached us and started shouting how we could say that there were no partisans when it was heard towards Mt. Kozara. “Wait a little longer and you will go home. In the direction of Mt. Kozara everything is burning from the shooting.”

We stayed for about half an hour and then they told us to go home. Anda called me, so we went. There were plenty of us. It was night, so we didn’t recognise each other. However, I noticed that there were not many of us. Around us, the Ustashas were densely placed like a fence. They chased us and told us not to be afraid. They brought us to Vučkovići. Some went down the hill and we went uphill. We heard someone yelling for us to go back. We were thinking about what would happen. From the way we were moving it looked like we were going home.

They brought us back to Salijevac. There was a field and rowan berry on it. They stopped us there. We saw a lot of Ustashas there. They gathered around a lot of kegs of brandy. Everyone was drunk. Anda, who was carrying my daughter, left her with me and ran away somewhere. She did not manage to escape. They opened fire on her, the whole platoon. They caught her in the woods and brought her to us. They started asking her who she was with. She said there was no one. She didn’t want to talk about us. They asked her where her brother was so she answered that she had no brother. They ordered her to come with them. They took her there, to the trench. They kept her with them.

Then they started gathering people in groups and taking them away. We didn’t know where we were going thus far. That was somewhere remote, in the valley, near the mill. They usually chased in groups of four or five and pushed on. Mijat Vučković’s two children stayed with me. They started crying and calling me — “Maja, what are we going to do?” (My children called me Maja so they were called that, too.) I comforted them and told them that they would go with me. Their parents perished. I and my children were among the last ones to stay.

Ustashas gathered around us. They ordered me to go, too. I asked where we were going. They answered that I should come with them and that they would take me home. They asked if I had any money. I said I didn't have any, but I remembered that I had something. At the same time, I remembered that I had pictures and letters of my husband Ljuban who was in the partisans. I received a letter from him a few days ago. One of the Ustashas started cursing my Serbian mother — "Should we take you home for 300 Croatian kunas?" After asking me if I had socks he ordered me to take my children and things and leave. I was very scared and saw that they were going to kill us.

I stood up and took my daughter in my left hand and my little son in my right hand. They were forcing me go down. When we got to the border, they told me to stop. They ordered me to hand over 300 Croatian kunas. There was moonlight. I took out the money that I had and handed it to them. I took the opportunity to drop my husband's picture with the letter in front of me into the grass. (Later, Sretko Simatović found the pictures left at the border.)

I told them to go to my house and take whatever they want. They lead me across the gap, to the mill. While crossing, I noticed the corpses of the slaughtered. I started moaning loudly. I shouted "Are you going to slaughter us?" They ordered me to move on. My little son, who was not even two years old, fell out of my hands. I was very scared. The Ustasha dragged the little one to himself, and I didn't allow it, and I pulled the child back to me. I said, "When I've carried him this far, I'll carry him on until one or the other dies." As soon as they brought me over the gap they grabbed me and twisted my neck, stabbing me three times in the neck. The children were still in my arms. When they stabbed me for the fourth time the children fell out of my hands. The little daughter cried and shouted "Mom, hit him with a stone and run away." When the Ustasha hit me across the neck with a knife I felt something snap and then he threw me. I fell and blood flowed from me and bloodied the slaughterer. I still heard his voice when he said that he had slaughtered 464 people that day, but

that he had not come across anything like this. I was lying in blood. Only my eyes were visible and everything else was covered in blood.

I was still conscious. I noticed when the Ustasha took my daughter (4 years old) and hit her above the ear with a knife. The little one moaned. One of the Ustashes threw a remark at him “Kill her. Kill the child, what are you doing!” This one slaughtered my little daughter and threw her away. He came and took my little son, put him on his knee and hit him with the knife, throwing him to my left side. He shouted — “Now, you fight, I swear your Serbian ancestry. When your mother wakes up, let her breastfeed you.”

The four Ustashes moved away from us. The little boy was showing signs of life. He was not slaughtered. He started to move. I thought — “God, is he going to live? If I save myself, I will save him too.” Ustasha took the little boy and hit him hard. He was no longer showing signs of life. Later, my father-in-law Đuro told me that the little boy was hit so hard that his eye popped out.

I stayed there lying down. The Ustashes brought more people, women and children, and killed them there. But not with weapons. Not a single gun went off here. They just slaughtered, killed with mallets and trampled over people. Some were brought and others, five or six of them, were collected and beaten with mallets and slaughtered with knives.

After the slaughter, the Ustasha left. I heard a wail above the grove — they were slaughtering people there as well. Although I was stabbed all over, I still remained conscious. However, I couldn’t get it to move. Some time passed and nothing was heard. The wind was blowing. It was night. Soon it started to rain. I felt it all. However, when the wind started to blow stronger and the rain started to fall I started to lose my consciousness. I heard someone singing somewhere. Those were Ustashes singing.

Among the corpses there was a girl from Macura. She was at Vuka Banović’s house. She was caught and slaughtered here. When the Ustashes came to her corpse they took off her clothes. They tore

her skirt into several pieces, put them on guns and waved them. I heard them saying what they were going to do with that skirt. They continued to curse the Partisan and Serbian mother. If they had known she was a virgin they said they would have charged differently and that they would not have taken off the clothes. I heard nothing more. There was a deadly silence. The guards were still in the trenches, not far from the scene of the massacre.

With the wind blowing hard, the rain kept falling. I started to lose consciousness. I don't know how long I stayed there. I heard someone call me. I don't know if it was real or if it seemed to me. An unknown man told me to go home. I told him that I couldn't because my head was so heavy that I couldn't lift it. It seemed to me that this man took my hand and pulled me. I started to drag myself. I crawled through the blood and entered Tramošnjak, into the water. I had shoes on. I took them off and left them in Jošika's stump. I was saying something, but I don't know what. There was no one. There were just the slaughtered. It seemed to me that I saw the dead Vuka Banović on the right to whom I said — "My Vuko, I'm gone, and you and my children are stay here."

I started down the water. I was going towards Rašinac. I went out to the river port by the bridge. I kept going through the water. When I got out on the bridge, I sat down. I would go towards Mt. Kozara, someone would help me there, but I can't go any further. Ustashas were still in the region and were shooting. I tried to go several times, but I couldn't cross the bridge. Nevertheless, I gathered my strength and went to the forest of Jovica Matijaš. I spent the night there. I came to the tree and sat down next to it. It was raining. I didn't feel cold, even though it was cold. I took off my coat and put it under me. I also took off the vest and bandaged the wounds on my neck with it. I lay down under a tree and fell asleep. I don't know how long I was lying there. And here it seemed to me that someone woke me up, that he told me to go and that there was a road in front of me, then to go to the fence of Jovica Matijaš. I got up and left. It seemed to me that

everything in front of me was clean even though there was a dense forest that was difficult to walk through. I came to Jovica Matijaš's fence, crossed it and headed to the house. I went further and entered the house. The fire was burning. There were a lot of people in the house. They ran away when they saw me. Only Jovica remained. He asked me what happened so I started talking. I was warming myself by the stove and got lost again. I don't know what happened to me.

While I was recovering the slaughtered people were buried. My father-in-law Đuro buried two of my children, his daughter, his cousin Jova and his grandson, Vasa and Petra Banović and Ostoja Banović's family. They buried some in the cemetery, but there were not enough people to bury all the victims.

Six hundred and sixty four people were killed then, mostly women and children, because many men had died earlier in the offensive in Mt. Kozara.

Dara Banović

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*Dara Banović, "Slaughter of women and children in Palančiste", Kozara III, 605–610.*

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## **IN THE CROATIAN CONCENTRATION AND DEATH CAMP SYSTEM IN JASENOVAC**

When the offensive began, I went with my family to Mt. Kozara. I stayed only six days and decided to return to the village. My wife Draginja and Stojan Vujanović were with me. However, the two of them returned to Mt. Kozara and I headed down Mlječanica, towards the road Dubica—Prijedor, to transfer to my village Dizdarlije. Near Vlada Januz's house, three home guards came out in front of me. They ordered me to stop and put my hands up. One came and searched me. They were interested in where I was. I told them that I was going from the mill, because I did not dare say that I was going from Kozara. They ordered me to go towards Latinovići. When we started up the hill, we passed the Ustashas who demanded that I be handed over to them and that they would know what they were going to do with me. However, the home guards did not do that. An Ustasha officer came up and started pulling my beard which I hadn't shaved in a long time.

At Vlade Janjuz's house, these windows were broken. The soldiers stopped me and told me to look inside. I looked and saw a slaughtered old woman on the bed. It was Ana Janjuz, whom I knew. When they led me past the forest, they told me — "If the partisans attack us lie down on the ground and we will fight with them." When I was brought to the command post on Latinovića brdo, the Ustashas wanted to gouge out my eyes. We came to Latinović's yard. There were apples there. A group of officers hold maps in front of them. In front of them was a large table. They didn't pay attention to me.

Only one asked the home guard where they found me. They reported what I told them. He ordered them to hand me over to the gendarmes. They forced me to go past the house and some fences. There I was met by a soldier in a black suit. He grabbed me by the hair and knocked me down. Then he knelt on my chest. He started cursing my Serbian and Partisan mother. He was holding a knife in his hands. I was very scared. I thought they were going to slaughter me. But he changed his mind, hit me with a knife and ordered me to stand up. I could barely get up because my strength failed me. The legs went limp. The villain was gone. There were no soldiers who escorted me.

I saw an officer. He walked towards me. He asked me where I was from. I told him what I told the home guards, but he didn't believe me either because he recognized me as being from Dizdaruje. Then he asked me about my brother Rajko and Milan Plavšić who were in the partisans. I said that Rajko died in Knežica and Milan Plavšić in Petrinja. He was a gendarme who previously served in Bosanska Dubica. He knew the villages and people of Dubica, including me.

Three soldiers soon arrived. One of them tied a string to my left hand. I thought they were taking me to be shot. They forced me out on the road towards the road to Međuvode.

When we got on the road to Međuvode, I noticed a lot of enemy troops. Many asked them to hand me over to them, to take out my eyes, because I should not go to Dubica. We came across a dug-up road. One was filling up the ditch. He asked me where I was from and added – “If I knew you were digging this, I would bury you alive in this ground.” I said that I was an elderly man and that I was unable to work. Three Ustashas appeared behind us in a horse-drawn carriage. They stopped the car and ordered me to sit in the back. The one who was holding me by the leash also sat down with me. Nobody asked me anything. I was thinking how to escape.

Under Aginci, on the plain, the coachman stopped the cart. To our right there were the tents. We arrived in Bosanska Dubica. I was put in prison. In the cell I found Pera Kolar from Slabinje, from Hr-

vatska Dubica. He was only in his underwear, all blue. He had been in prison for eight days. He was terribly beaten. He said that he was beaten and tortured every night. He received neither food, nor water. He was exhausted and worn out.

In the evening, the door was unlocked. A turnkey showed up at the door with a flashlight because we had no lights in the cell. Halid Hadžić, the police chief in Bosanska Dubica, came. He said he saw when I was brought so he came to see what was happening to me. I told him how I was caught. He told me that he would come the next day and that he would take me to the municipality (county) for questioning, that he would try to release me and issue me a permit to move. We got macaroni and bread for dinner. Kolar was exhausted from hunger so he welcomed this.

We continued to talk. The summer night passed quickly. The next day we heard a truck stop below the prison. A turnkey appeared at the door with three Ustashas. They wore chains. There was no Halid Hadžić who said he would come. They ordered us to get out of the cell. They tied us together and drove us out. When we got to the truck they ordered us to get in. As soon as we sat down, Hadžić arrived and told me that we were going to Germany to work — “Be good and don’t run away.” I said he promised to come get me, to release me from prison. He added that he could not do that. He gave us a cigarette. I told him we were tied so he suggested the attendants untie us. We left from Bosanska Dubica, across the bridge to Hrvatska Dubica. We were talking about where he would go with us. If they had turned right at the crossroads in Dubica in Croatia it would have meant we were going to the Croatian death camps system in Jasenovac and if they had gone left, maybe it would have been better. The truck turned right. We arrived at the Jasenovac death camp. We were welcomed by the Ustashas. They started pulling out our beards and hair.

As soon as we got out of the truck they took us to the cell. The cell was so small that one could only stand in it. Our hands were tied behind our backs. Since they were tight, they soon became numb.

I turned them towards Pera Kolar and asked him how my hands looked and he said they were blackened, blood stopped circulating and the hands were swollen. The left hand was so swollen that I could not bear the pain. It was night. No one addressed us. We couldn't sit. If we accidentally fell on the floor, we could not get up. We huddled together and stood. I felt I would faint. I was thinking about suicide. We realized that we had no life in front of us.

After some time, I heard footsteps. A light came on in the hallway. The jailer opened the door. I asked for some water. We were exhausted by thirst. It couldn't be taken anymore. I said that we were tightly bound and that it would be easier to bear being killed. This guy didn't seem to know we were tied up. He agreed to bring us water, but he must not untie us. The jailer brought a bucket of water and put it with us. He went away. We wanted to drink water, but we couldn't. I decided to kneel down and bend down to the bucket. And it was difficult because my hands were tied behind my back and swollen. I still managed to drink some water. Pero Kolar also acted in the same way. My hat fell off. I pressed it with my head and pushed it against the wall and put it on my head. We continued to stand in the cell. The night passed.

The next day, the Ustashas sang. Trucks passed by. The jailer came with an Ustasha to our cell. They ordered us out of the cell. They took the wire off our hands. I couldn't move my hands. I was shaking with pain. The Ustasha ordered me to wave my hands, to move my fingers, but I couldn't. I couldn't even stretch them. The tissue was shredded to the veins. He asked for water and told me to wash my hands. I told him I couldn't do anything with my hands. Then the Ustasha came to the bucket and started washing my hands. He was putting together the cut skin on his hands to close the wound. I gave him a tissue which he used to bandage the wound. Afterwards we got some food.

This Ustasha came again and took us to the storehouse to get suits. Afterwards, a priest came, took us between the barracks and

brought us to the office where he took our personal data and entered them in a book. From here he took us further. We saw a death camp in front of us. A guard was standing at the gate. There was a wire fence around. When we got to the guard, he opened the gate. Then the civilian who brought us showed us two people in the death camp. He ordered us to go towards them and what they were doing, we should do as well. We started through the death camp and came to two inmates, Jews from Zagreb. They were elderly people. They were interested to find out where we were from. We were not allowed to speak to them openly. They told us that they had been there for a month. We started working. I was unrolling the wire and did fencing. These two told us that they were getting some food around 12 noon. The food was very poor.

Around twelve o'clock the bell rang. We went for lunch and a short rest. Lunch was only for two Jews. There was nothing for us. We decided to wait while these two were eating lunch so if there was anything left we would eat too. We went to rest for two hours.

We kept looking towards the gate expecting that maybe someone else would come. Around five o'clock in the afternoon a group appeared. Ustashas were going around them. We stopped to see who was coming. They were forced into the death camp. Then they were taken away, they were tied together in pairs. They walked towards us. We were going towards them.

We spent the night in the death camp. We didn't get dinner. The two Jews left because they were placed in a barrack. We were lying on the grass. There were about 27 people from Bosanska Dubica in this group. I only knew Miloš Zjedlar and Nika the teacher. Miloš was with his younger son who was later killed in the death camp. Miloš tried to escape from the death camp passing through the gate with a cattle cart with hay. He was exposed and brought before the inmates and shot.

After some time, after the arrival of the group from Bosanska Dubica, a group of Gypsies was also brought to the death camp. One of them recognized me. He used to come to my house before the

war. I asked him where his wife Mara was. He said that their wives were separated into another death camp. He suggested that we try to escape from the death camp. He told me that he had pliers that he could use to cut the wire and that he knew where we could go next. I did not dare embark on such an undertaking.

We spent the night in the death camp. The next day, a group of Ustashas arrived. They ordered us to line up. They called us “white” and they called Gypsies “black”. They ordered the whites to line up on one side and the blacks on the other. About thirty of us. There were more Gypsies. Then we were informed that we were going to work on the arrangement of the embankment on the Sava. If someone tried to escape the guards would kill him on the spot.

We went to work. We were provided with the tools. When we arrived at the workplace the schedule was made. We worked for about two hours. Soon, an Ustasha officer came to the site and ordered the weak and sick to go to the side, that they would go to the doctor. Two people from our group responded. About thirty gypsies stood out. They were lined up in a column of two. The Ustasha approached them and tied them with wire. We hid our views, but we saw what was being done. If someone looked more openly, he too would be singled out.

When they attached the group of inmates, the Ustasha officer ordered that two of our group be separated. He singled out two inmates, but they were not related. Four Ustashas forced a group of inmates to move. In front of them there was an officer on horseback. We are watching them. After a short time, a shot was heard. We thought they must have been killed. After some time, the Ustashas and our two men returned. They told us in a whisper that the Gypsies were killed and thrown into the Sava.

We continued to work until twelve o'clock. Then they ordered four inmates to go get food. They also brought us some bread. We continued working again. In the afternoon they ordered the so-called discharge. Ustashas impelled us and in front of us there was an officer on a horse. He ordered us to sing. They compelled us to go into

the death camp. Again, they ordered to stand out in groups — white on one side, black on the other. I was standing next to Miloš Zdjelar. In addition to the two Ustasha officers there was also a civilian who was signing us in the book. We were all ordered to stretch out our hands. He was passing by us and pulling us aside. He singled me out too. There were 17 of us. A civilian made an agreement with an Ustasha officer. He said he chose good guys. We were taken from the death camp. We came to the barracks where the entries were made in the books. Those who were not introduced were now enrolled. We got something for dinner. We were placed in a barrack, to spend the night. We were thinking about what would become of us.

The next day we were told that we were assigned to look after the horses. They took us to a civilian and said that he would be our group leader. The second day we went to herd the horses. Six Ustashes also went to guard us. They were young men. We were told again not to try to escape because the Ustasha would kill any escapee.

We reached the wire fence. There were horses inside. All these were brought from Mt. Kozara and looted in the villages. We headed to the village of Mlaka next to the Sava. We kept the horses there for about three weeks. One day, eight inmates were driving their horses across the Sava, in Bosnia, to the village of Gradina. Since I got to know Ustasha Ivo during my work I asked him to go with this group. I wanted to cross the Sava. The next day, eight of us went to Gradina. We will look after the horses again. We were placed in houses that people had abandoned.

Towards evening, when we were passing by a large willow or poplar tree in Gradina, we saw a group of Ustashes. They sang, next to the women hanging from the poplar branch. The men were hanging from the tree trunk.

Looking after the horses, we spent about two weeks in Gradina. Ustashes were guarding us. During that time I had conversations with Ustasha Ivo. He was interested in where my family was so I told him that they had been sent to the death camp. He told me

that people from Mt. Kozara were coming to the death camp. There were plenty of them. That same evening we went to the death camp. I didn't find any of my family there. I found only the daughter of Ilija Ćibić from Ševarlije. She told me that my people were in the death camp. However, I was not allowed to stay and move around the death camp so I returned to Gradina. We also spent two or three weeks there. One morning, the order was given to “discharge” (line up). It was said that we were going to Jasenovac.

We were in the death camp again. They told us that we would work at a brickyard. We heard that some inmates were escaping. That was why they seemed to have pulled us, too.

We were assigned to work at the brickyard. Ustashas were kept watching us again. There I also found Gojko Balaban, from Slavinja. Gojko stayed behind to find some food because they were near the kitchen. Soon we saw Gojko being pursued by the Ustasha. He was dirty with mud. He started shouting at us. He said, “If I find someone else walking around the kitchen like this one, I will kill him on the spot.”

We continued to work for a few more days. They brought up with the people from Mt. Kozara again. I went to see. I managed to find my daughter-in-law Marija and my wife. I could not approach them; I only saw them.

Before evening they lined us up again. It was on Our Lady's Day, autumn holiday. The separation began. One of the inmates told me that it would not bring any good. It looked like they were going to take us to the shooting range. We were told that no one would go to work the next day. They started calling our names. We were taken to the barracks and we are waiting. There I met Đorđe Prodanović from Košuća. We were considering what to do. We agreed to try to escape. We assumed that the shooting was the next day.

We agreed to leave around three in the morning. His two cousins would also come. We got up and left. We knew that we had to go over the wire fence. It was not far away. There was a road passing by the

wire fence. Ustashas were singing. Three wire fences had to be overcome. Đorđe went first. He had already managed to get over the first line of wire. I went behind him. When he reached the second line of wire, I threw my coat at him. The wire was barbed and it was worth protecting from the sting with a coat. As soon as he crossed, he returned my coat so that I could cross too. We climbed when the Ustashas were singing because then they didn't pay attention. When we got across we would go towards the Sava in the canal. There would be a meeting place. I went over and looked; I didn't see the two who came with us. I followed Đorđe. To the left of our passage was an Ustasha guard. In front of us there was the Sava River. We took the opportunity when the guard was singing.

We came to Sava. We saw a boat. Two smaller boats were tied to this boat. We got into the boat, but we couldn't unlock the small boats. We were going down the Sava. Ustashas were singing again. We couldn't go past them; we had to get on the road. We came closer and lay down the hornbeam. When the Ustashas started singing, we jumped up and moved on. The day was approaching. We managed to get through. We passed through a garden. We got tired of running. We fell under the plum trees. We were excited. Our hearts were beating fast. We listened to see if anyone was following us. After we had calmed down, we saw that we passed unnoticed. We picked plums and ate them.

We came to an oak grove near the village of Mlaka. We entered the forest and were thinking about what to do next. It was already day. We climbed the oak tree and observed. We didn't know this area. We had corn and we were calming the hunger. We were thirsty. The day was long. We were wet from walking in the dew. We were drying our clothes on an oak tree. We were sleepy. We couldn't keep up. However, we did not dare sleep because we would fall from the oak tree. We chose an oak tree with thick branches so that you wouldn't notice us from the ground.

At around eleven o'clock, the livestock keepers arrived. The Ustashas also went with them. They passed under the oak we were on.

They didn't pay attention. They passed by singing. We would stay at the oak tree until five in the afternoon. We were so thirsty that we didn't know what to do. Not far away was a barrack with tools used by inmates. There was also water there. We decided to get off the oak tree and get some water to drink. We knew that there was no one here at this time. We drank some water and went back to the oak. There was hay not far away. We brought hay under the oak, then lay down and slept. We woke up on the second day. The sun was shining on us. We jumped up. We were going through the forest, towards Novska, even though we knew it was far. We heard a song in front of us. We came close to a field. We sat down on a fallen tree. An elderly man and three women were moving towards us. They turned into a corn field and began to pick them. They took a basket out of the cart. We were waiting for the old man to leave with the cart of corn.

After the old man left, the women sat down to have breakfast. We assumed that there would be some leftovers. After eating, they continued to pick corn. I pulled myself up and brought the basket into the woods along with a bottle of water. We found food in the basket and ate it. The women noticed that there was no basket so they began to say that someone was in the forest. When the old man came back, they told him that there was no basket and no water bottle. The old man joked that someone was playing a joke on them. "They must be some of your acquaintances from corn husking gathering."

Towards evening we returned to the forest. We moved forward. We heard in the death camp that there were partisans towards Novska. We travelled all night towards Novska. We crossed the railroad. We hoped to find partisans there.

We didn't know what was ahead of us. We decided to enter the forest and climb the tree again, to look around. When we entered the forest we saw two boats. They were full of leaves. Sava was far away. One of the boats was damaged, while the other one could be used even though it was also damaged at the top. We decided to take this boat to the Sava during the night. How should we carry it? We were

exhausted and had difficulty moving. But we had to. We found a log on which we put the boat, moored it, and then carried it away. The paling took the skin off our shoulders. We kept on going like that and then stopped. We went like that and stopped again. We didn't know how far it was to the Sava. We were aware that we could not arrive during the night. We stopped and camouflaged the boat. We climbed the tree again and looked around where we were going. We were going the same way we came here. We stayed the day in the same forest. In the evening we headed towards the Sava. We had to pass the guard again and cross the road. We stopped in the hornbeam. The guard shouted "Stop". We thought he noticed us. However, another guard was going to meet him. He passed us. They approached each other and lit cigarettes.

We crossed the road with the boat and entered the corn fields. We reached the bank of the Sava and lowered the boat into the water. We reconciled a little. No one said a word. But neither of us had driven a boat before. We didn't have oars. We took the sticks and started pushing the boat with them. I put the lining of the coat on the damaged spot on the boat. When we were in the middle of the Sava, the hole on the boat broke and water began to enter. We moved to the other side and thus the damaged part of the boat was raised above the water.

We went towards the right bank of the Sava, in Bosnia. The boat filled well with water. However, we managed to reach the shore safely. We jumped out of the boat, put the wooden stakes in it, and then pushed it down the water. We found ourselves lower of Gradina. We know that in front of us there were the villages of Draksenić, Mededa, Demirovac and others. We headed there. We heard a song. It was quite far. We were going like this and we were looking forward to being here and that the day will come soon. It has already begun to dawn. We came close to the road Bosanska Dubica—Orahova. There was army with trucks on the road. We turned into Šumarak. We decided to wait there for the day and see where we could cross. Not far

from us we saw a house and a vine around it. I suggested to Đorđe going to this house and finding food. He brought tomatoes, so we ate. Three Ustashes were passing by with a cattle cart. They were driving potatoes. We kept quiet while they passed.

We stayed here until the evening. We went towards the road. We wanted to go further, towards Mt. Kozara, towards Prosara. Men and women were singing in the orchard. We also noticed a guard with a civilian nearby. We jumped onto the road and crossed it. We ran into the stream and stopped, hiding. No one noticed us. We got out and moved on. Đorđe knew the area so our journey was made easier. When we came to Gornje Lesce, near the Moštanica monastery, we found hay and slept. Having rested, we moved on. Along the way, we came across a telephone line which the enemy had set up. We thought about cutting this wire, but gave up. We wanted to get out as soon as possible.

We arrived at Đorđe's house when the sun was rising. It was the end of September or the beginning of October 1942. The house was damaged. The woman and children were driven to the death camp. Simo Prodanović was also there with his wife. He was also captured, but managed to escape from the train station in Dubica. We were going towards his house. When he saw us, he started to run away. His wife recognized us and called Sima to come back. The meeting was cordial. We entered the house. He told us that the partisan troop was in Mt. Kozara, on Mednjak, that my brother Rajko and Trivun Vikalo were there as well. I rested at Sima's place and had lunch.

Here I parted ways with Đorđe Prodanović and headed to Mt. Kozara. I found a partisan troop in which there were Rajko and Trivun Vikalo, Petar Novaković and others. Milorad Vikalo was also there, seriously wounded. He was lying in the barracks. I stayed here for a while, and then I headed home, to the village of Dizdarlije, across the Bosanska Dubica—Knežica road. The enemy was passing along the road.

I arrived home. I found Rade Vikalo. There were no people in the village. A hundred and several days passed from my capture (July 12, 1942) to my arrival home.

Ostoja Vikalo

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*Ostoja Vikalo, "In the Jasenovac concentration camp",  
Kozara III, 619–627.*

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## FROM KOZARA REFUGE TO SLAVONIA

I was a 14-year-old boy at the time. Father read us news written on a typewriter. He read that the enemy was preparing to attack Mt. Kozara, but that he would not succeed that time either.

After a few days, the enemy started an attack. It went quite fast. As we were near Kostajnica, we were most interested in the movement of the enemy from this town. The people were fleeing from the villages near Una, arriving in our village and saying that the enemy was killing people. So, the situation was not the same as before when you could wait sometimes (not flee). As a few days passed, more and more people from the village on the right bank of the Una, from Bosanska Kostajnica, arrived to our village. The enemy was reportedly also moving from Bosanski Novi and Bosanska Dubica.

I was very interested in that. At that time, there was a partisan hospital in the school of the village of Strigova. We expected to hear most important information in the hospital. When I went to the hospital, the wounded were getting ready to leave and some were already heading towards Mt. Kozara. They were sent to Mt. Kozara by cattle carts. I stayed at the hospital until everyone was shipped out. Then I saw Veljko Zec. He was a partisan and leader. Veljko said that we should all go towards Mt. Kozara.

When I got home, everything was ready for the move. People had already been notified. A cattle cart was prepared, food was prepared, etc. We were told to bring as much flour as possible because we would stay in Mt. Kozara for a long time. Livestock was also led

away. So, we headed across the village towards Mt. Kozara. During that day, we crossed the Knežica–Prijedor road. Many people were moving towards Mt. Kozara. We were in Jelovac when night fell so we spent the night there. On the second day we move on and arrive to Mt. Kozara. I had heard from the elders and my father that this is a revolution and that it will be very difficult. They also mentioned the Russian Revolution and the First World War. This will be even more difficult.

We started through the forest and stopped at one place. It was said that that was the middle of Mt. Kozara. This was where we made a refuge. We made huts out of wood and branches and settled down. The huts were densely placed, families next to each other. A difficult life started for us. It is rainy. We had to prepare food, but we are not allowed to light fires. As soon as we start a fire to prepare food and it was cold too, the order comes to put out the fire because enemy planes are dropping bombs. This lasted a long time. We heard that fierce fighting was taking place in Pogledevo, Jelovac and other places. Wounded partisans also came to the refuge. They were lightly wounded, so they could visit their families.

Our stay in Mt. Kozara was prolonged because we thought it would last a shorter time. Ten days have passed. One day a meeting was called in the clearing. Everyone was told to come. Dušan Stojnić, a party worker from my village, also spoke at the gathering among others. Speakers called for all able-bodied men to join the fight. We must drive the enemy away from Mt. Kozara. Many people stepped forward. They went to the front towards Jelovac. After a few days it was rumored that many had died. Those who died from my and neighboring villages were mentioned by name. It was said that they participated in the attack with the partisans and that they pushed the enemy towards the church in Jelovac.

Life in the refuge is getting harder. The food is gone. There was no salt from the beginning. We cook corn and wheat or eat them raw. We did not even have enough drinking water. We carried water

from the stream, but it was polluted. Because of this, children fell ill. Every day it was getting harder. However, despite that, people were in a good mood. The youth performed Kozara kolo at the clearing almost every night. The elders are worried.

One day, an order came that a breakthrough from the ring would begin during the night. Then everyone got ready. We went towards the Kozara gate, towards Patrija: a long column, cart to cart; people, women, children. Almost everyone led livestock: oxen, cows, horses, pigs and sheep. This slowed down the movement towards the breach site.

The column I was in traveled all night. We arrived to Patrija at dawn. We went out on the road that leads from Mt. Kozara. There are several houses here. We were told families Macura and Ćurina lived there. In the meantime, 6 German Stukas<sup>\*\*\*</sup> arrived from Dubica. They went low. At the same time, the enemy artillery fired fiercely. The column is long and dense, so every shell hits people or livestock. We came to the orchard near the house. The dawn was breaking. I turned left, under a big beech tree, and since I was tired, I immediately fell asleep. I was woken up by gunfire. The people are running and shouting. They order us to go back, because we can not go forward. Those who arrived earlier have passed the breach, but we must go back. I joined the column and went. My family has already left. I will find them later.

We retreated to Mt. Kozara and stayed there for one day. German planes were flying over and firing from machine guns and were also throwing bombs. In the evening we were ordered to go deep into the forest. We went, but not very deep into the forest. We built huts there and stayed for a few days. We were waiting for a new breakthrough. But there was no breakthrough. We were told to go towards Vojskova. We traveled all night and day. We passed through Mt. Kozara. We stayed in the villages of Vojskova and Sjeverovci. The news spread that my father had also died. My uncle also died. Many people

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<sup>\*\*\*</sup> The Junkers Ju 87 or "Štuka" is a German dive bomber and ground-attack aircraft.

I knew died. We stayed in Vojskova and Sjeverovci, and then they told us that a breakthrough was being prepared again and that we should go back. We reached the middle of Mt. Kozara. We stayed there. We had to wait. After a few days, we were told to move again towards the western slopes of Mt. Kozara. When we walked for the third time (it will be our last time) towards the edge of Mt. Kozara we encountered a column of people. There were acquaintances and relatives there. We thought they had gone through the ring. Our columns were headed towards Bokani, in Mlječanica.

We stopped in front of Bokani. We were told not to go any further. My uncle's family had already gone ahead, and we wanted to meet them. However, the partisans did not let us go. My two younger brothers are with this family. Mother, sister and I stayed behind. (They would also be captured later.) The partisans told us that they would attack and break through the ring that night, and that we may be in the way. And really, I think we were getting in their way because the people created a hustle and bustle and were thus revealing the position and movements of the partisans.

The partisans did not let us go any further. We stayed in the ditch. There are several families from my village and from the village of Brekinje. Some I did not know. The people abandoned the cattle because they are a lot of trouble. Not far from us, in the clearing, there were many cattle, sheep and pigs left. The people let them all go in order to save their lives. People slaughtered some livestock so we got roast meat. We had to put out the fire because enemy planes were flying over every hour.

Below us, towards the Bokani, a fierce fight could be heard. In the morning, the partisans began to retreat. The people say that the partisans are retreating. We see them: they are walking as if in front of a firing squad and shouting: "Hello, signal, signal". Some of the leaders is telling the partisans to act at their own will. Since it is daytime, we see how some partisans put on civilian clothes. Some lay down their weapons. There are not enough civilian suits for everyone

to change clothes. Some took off their blouses, pants and hats, and some just a few things. One partisan did not manage to remove anything from himself, nor did he put down his weapon, but took refuge in a bush. There was a lot of shooting. I had never heard such a fire.

Velimir Tubić

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*Velimir Tubić, "From Kozara refuge to Slavonia",  
Kozara III, 631–634*

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## **THE HORRORS OF THE JASENOVAC DEATH CAMP SYSTEM**

At the time of the Mt. Kozara Offensive I was a fighter of the Balj Company positioned at the river Una. It was a platoon that protected this region from enemy penetration across the Una. I think the platoon was commanded by Marko Gačić. When the enemy penetrated into the liberated territory from the direction of Bosanska Kostajnica, in the evening of June 12, we offered him fierce resistance and he retreated. We received orders to prepare because it was assumed that the enemy would attack again the following day. Our platoon was on the part of the road in Gornja Slabinja towards Bosanska Kostajnica. Vasan Đaković with the machine gun platoon was also there. We were ordered to open fire after the heavy machine gun goes into action.

The following morning, the enemy moved towards our position. He was getting closer and closer and the machine gun could not be heard. I was directed towards the place where the heavy machine gun was located. When I got there, I noticed that there were no machine guns and that the fighters had retreated. The enemy was moving towards the houses of Budimirs. I had to retreat in a hurry, in order to join the platoon. While I was retreating the enemy noticed me when I was beside Rade Borojević's house and opened fire. He also fired mortars. I was wounded. However, I was able to move and was retreating towards Palijin točak. Three enemy soldiers were walking towards me through the wheat. I think they were Ustashas. They are shouting, cursing and saying that they will catch me alive. I turned towards them and saw that they had come too close. I jumped into

the cut in the road near Palijin. I was out of strength. In addition to the carbine, I also had a bomb. I knew that I must not fall into the hands of the enemy. I thought: if I am not able to go any further and if the Ustashas come towards me I will activate the bomb and thus make it impossible for them to catch me. Nevertheless, I gathered my strength and decided to shoot at the three Ustashas. I had good cover. I took aim and fired. One of them fell. A moan was heard. Two of them lay down. I took advantage of that and continued to retreat.

I saw a partisan Kučina and told him to go towards the platoon's position, to say that I had been wounded and that a group of fighters with a heavy machine gun had retreated. I headed towards Budimir's house. When I climbed up the hill, I noticed a group of soldiers. I did not know who they were, the partisans or the enemy. I shouted: "Who is there?" It turned out that they were partisans. They sent Pera Obradović from Utolica from Croatia to get me. Since I was exhausted he carried me on his back. He carried me for a long time until we caught up with the ox cart, because the people were also retreating. I was put in a car and sent to our hospital in the village of Strigovi. When we reached the hospital, they evacuated from there as well. The doctor told us to go to the village of Jutrogušta and that I would be bandaged there. There were more wounded. Branko Marjanović, whose spine had been wounded, also arrived. When we arrived in Jutrogušta we were bandaged and directed towards Mt. Kozara, to the hospital in Pogledevo.

The hospital in Pogledevo was in a larger house, right next to Mt. Kozara. There were about fifty wounded: Milovan Rodić, Branko Marjanović, Dragan Muharem and others. When the enemy began to advance towards Mt. Kozara, the wounded from the hospital on Pogledevo were transferred to the hospital on Vitlovska, to the barrack. There were sixty of us, maybe more. The nurses were Jula Popović from Hrvatska Slabinja and Lojza Horvat from Banja Luka, and the doctor was Dr. Alfred.

I stayed in the hospital on Vitlovska until we left for the breakthrough from the ring where we wounded men also went. As I had

recovered, I went on crutches. That night I managed to get to Jelovac with the others, to the road Prijedor–Knežica. I got very tired while moving. However, luck was on my side. I found a horse tied to a tree. I mounted that horse and set off. Thus, is how I managed to reach the road in Jelovac. There were a lot of wounded. Some managed to cross the road and get out of the ring.

From the road in Jelovac, Stanko Milić, commander of the II Battalion, took us back. Groups of wounded and fighters returned to Mt. Kozara although we could have crossed the road. I found the horse again and went. I arrived in Široka Luka in Mt. Kozara. I think it was July 5. The enemy was penetrating towards Široka Luka. Seriously wounded people were lying in carts on all sides. Shots were heard. The wounded are being killed by bombs. Panic reigned. No wonder some ended their own lives.

We came to Vitlovska again. We assumed that we would receive notifications there about what we were to do. A larger group of partisans gathered on Vitlovska. They slaughtered an ox and prepared food. We got half-cooked meat. We rested a bit and ate.

We left Vitlovska before evening for Vojskova, a village on the other side of Mt. Kozara. We traveled all night. On the way, I met Draginja and Dušanka Bajalica, daughters of Miloš Bajalica. We came to a house where we found corn and some meat. From there we headed towards Vrištik, towards Prosara. We stayed with an acquaintance for two days. Now it is just the three of us. We do not know what happened to our families. The enemy attacked from Mt. Kozara, then from Bosanska Dubica and Orahova. We had to take cover. We found a beech tree, under which they hid me. Draginja and Dušanka left. Soon I sensed that the enemy was passing not far away. I knew he did not realize I was there. He is moving through Prosara.

I thought that the enemy would certainly not succeed in destroying the partisans in Mt. Kozara. When he has passed, I will get out of the shelter and find a partisan. Before entering the shelter, I knew that there was a source of water nearby. After two days in the shelter, under

a log, I was so thirsty that I could not stand it. I decided to go to the spring to drink water and thus, it seemed to me, save my life. I probably fell asleep afterwards because I do not remember anything after.

I felt that someone was hitting me and cursing me. I came to my senses and noticed a group of Ustashas and Home Guards. They gathered around me. Sleepy as I was, I wiped my eyes and thought of trying to save myself. I said: “There you are, my saviors?” It was necessary to try something. I knew that they would shoot me if they found that I was a wounded partisan. I told them a fabricated story that two years ago I got sick (that I had unhealed wound) and that the partisans persecuted me. The wound was large and infected so one could believe that it was a wound that could not be healed. Fortunately, I was wearing a civilian suit which was given to me by nurse Jula Popović at the hospital. It was the suit of her brother Milorad who was also in the partisans.

I used the story about my long-term illness and immobility, but without much hope that the executioners would believe it. However, the Ustashas seemed to believe in it at first. They were interested in who I was and how I got there. It was just a pretense.

There was an officer in the group of Ustashas and Home Guards, who ordered that they should not touch me, that they should give me something to eat. First, they gave me water and then army hardtack. I could hardly eat although I was simply exhausted from hunger. I still had to eat. From here I was escorted to Bosanska Dubica. It was the end of the first half of July. In the village of Draksenić, near Bosanska Dubica, I spent the night with captured people. There were women and children there. During the night, the Ustashas were transporting the looted cattle across the Una towards Croatian death camp system in Jasenovac.

Many people were gathered along the road towards Bosanska Dubica. Among them there were also those who were partisans. The Ustashas forced us past Una in a column. They led us towards the former county headquarters where the prison was located. When we

reached the town, where the Binjačka river flows into the Una, they began to search us. Fighting and killing began. At that place, about fifty people were killed and immediately thrown into the Una. When we were entering Bosanska Dubica I noticed that the Ustashas were chasing Dušan Arsenić, from Johova, who had worked as a blacksmith in Bosanska Kostajnica and in our village before the war and then joined the fight during the uprising. The Ustashas beat him a lot. One Ustasha hit him in the back with a butt and Dušan started vomiting and spewing blood in front of us. I do not know what happened to him later.

They brought the larger group to the yard of the former county headquarters. They lined us up there. A German officer who spoke Serbo-Croatian well came out in front of us. (It seems that he was Augustin Klima, a Volksdeutscher, who lived in Bosanska Dubica before the war and joined their ranks with the arrival of the Germans. It was rumored that he was a major in the German army and he was in Bosanska Dubica during the Kozara Offensive). He addressed us with the following words: "Guys, we know very well that among you there are those who are innocent. Maybe someone had to be a partisan or councilor and someone had to be in the Party. But be honest and sincere, confess and nothing will happen to you". Everyone stayed silent. We were silent for ten to twenty minutes. It started after all. First, one man from Lijevče polje started to talk. He mentioned those he knew. Later, another one talked, from some village below Mt. Kozara, maybe from Kadin Jelovac or Sreflije. He also denounced people. When they started to denounce people in line the Ustashas were readily waiting. Two Ustashas with rifles would jump up at the same time grab him one from one side and the other from the other side, put the barrel of the carbine on his back and pull him out of the line to the other side. Thus, they singled out a group of twenty people.

At one point, one Maljak from Petrinja started to speak and pointed at me: "Ljuban, why don't you answer, you were with me in the partisans." We were together in a platoon. He first betrayed Miloš Bijelić,

from Petrinja. There are two Miloš Bijelićs in Petrinja and that one is from Brdo. When he pointed at me I saw that I was going to get hurt, so I shouted loudly: “Is it allowed to speak untruths here?” The Ustasas were already walking towards me, to pull me out of the column, but a German officer stopped them saying to leave me alone so that he could hear what I had to say. I repeated again what I told the Ustasas when I was caught. I said that two years ago I got sick and had an unhealed wound, that I went to Bosanska Kostajnica for treatment before the war and I even went there when the partisans started fighting. I mentioned that Krešimir Hajdić and some other people from Bosanska Kostajnica, who knew me, knew that. As soon as I finished, the voice of the policeman from Bosanska Kostajnica Suljo Ćurta was heard. He approached the German officer, stood at attention in front of him and said that he vouched for me, because he knew that I used to come to them in Kostajnica and that I was honest. The German officer remarked that he wanted us to tell the truth, not lies, and left me in the column. He ordered that Maljak be sent to another line where those who were said to be partisans or collaborators were singled out.

They took our group to prison. They put us in cells. There were thirty of us in one cell. We stayed there for ten days. Every day they took us out for questioning. On the first day, I placed myself in the corner of the cell and when I heard the keys in the lock, I would calm down as if I were sleeping. When the Ustasha guard came and unlocked the door I pretended to be asleep again. However, the Ustasha shouted: “Give me that one that pretends to be asleep.” He ordered me to go with him. He took me to the county office. There they interrogated me and asked me to say who was in the partisans.

I knew I had to say something. I thought, if I have to say something then I will talk about those that I know are not there or are dead. I will mention those that are not in Mt. Kozara, those whom I am sure will not fall into the hands of the enemy. However, the Ustasas were not satisfied, but asked me to speak about those who were in the cell with me. I said that I did not know any of them although I knew Ostoja Vi-

gnjević from Johova, then Đenadija, called Ćata, who was with me in the Balj company. I firmly decided not to talk about those I knew.

My behavior provoked the Ustashas and one of them hit me in the head with a boot. I passed out and fell to the floor. They poured water on me so that I would regain consciousness. They took a box of matches which contained small needles. They threatened to stick these needles under my nails if I did not speak. I repeated that I had nothing more to say. They started sticking needles under my nails. The pain was unbearable, I started to lose consciousness. They were not satisfied so they tried another thing. In the corner there was an iron lever for stone extracting. They put it over my legs, and then two Ustashas stood on top and pressed on my legs. My bones seemed to crack. I lost consciousness. I do not know what happened to me afterwards.

Afterwards, I felt that I was back in a cell with the others. They brought me back and put me in the same cell. I was wet and dirty. I wanted to know when I had been brought back. They told me: "Three or four hours ago." The daily removal of people from the cells began. After some time, only I remained, Ostoja Vignjević, who was also terribly tortured, then Đenadija Ćato and some others. One day they came and ordered us to get ready. They gave us a little cornbread each. It was very hard and looked more like stone and baked earth than bread. They tied us up in the cell and took us to the prison yard. They put us in a truck with several pigs. There were four of us: Ostoja Vignjević, Đenadija, a friend from Lijevče polje and I. We were taken to the Croatian death camp system in Jasenovac.

In Jasenovac, an elderly man met us in front of the reception office. He was holding a rubber bat. As we were thrown out of the truck he waited for us and beat us with a bat. He beat Vignjević a lot. He was older and very exhausted from torture in the prison in Bosanska Dubica. They took us away and put us in the camp without taking any information. We were placed in a part of the camp called IIIc.

In the camp, I found many acquaintances from Mt. Kozara. The camp was a large area surrounded by barbed wire. The wire fence was

5 meters high; behind it was the second line of wire. Between those lines are the so-called hedgehogs. Not even a bird could get out of there. There is no grass in the camp. The prisoners plucked it because they could not bear the hunger anymore so they also ate grass.

We were lying on the ground. We were tormented by lice and fleas. They made our lives impossible. We got food every 48 hours. We got ten to twenty decagrams of cornbread. For breakfast, we were given lukewarm water with *posija* (remains of sifted flour), but without salt. Boiled potato peels or cabbage leaf were mostly given for lunch. Usually, such leaves would be thrown into a cauldron with pitchforks and, when boiled, would be given to the inmates for lunch. This was cooked by our people in the camp, of course, on the orders of the camp's Ustasha authorities. For dinner we got porridge, that was what they called it, but it was actually cornmeal mixed with warm water, weaker than what is given to pigs.

We grew more exhausted every day. Along with that, diseases were rampant: typhus and stomach diseases, and mostly dysentery. The Ustashes sensed this and, as soon as they noticed that one of the inmates could not go to work, they took him to Gradina, to the confluence of the Una and Sava, on the Bosnian side. They killed inmates there. Gravediggers were also the camp inmates. I knew Božo Gačić from Bobinci who acted as a gravedigger. After a certain time, they would kill those gravediggers and take others. It seems that Gačić ended up like that. I had the opportunity to talk to him and he told me how the exhausted were taken out of the camp and taken away by car, and then transported by boat to Gradina. There, they put them half-alive into dug-out graves and buried them.

I was going to labor in Bročice. We cut hedges and landscaped the land towards Novska. There I met Živan Stojanović from Slavonia. One day, when we got to know each other better, he told me that he gathered a group that was preparing to escape. He suggested that we go together. In those days, some actions were carried out in Croatia and shooting was heard, and some Ustashes left the camp. Živan

told me that in the evening he would go with the group and let the others out of the camp. He mentioned that there were few Ustashas in the camp, that he would cut the wire and that he would be among the first to go. I agreed, saying that I would keep the secret even if they discovered our intentions. I wanted to get out of the camp somehow.

However, when we arrived at the camp something had happened that we had not foreseen. Živan had already prepared the scissors with which he was supposed to cut the wire fence. Upon arrival at the camp the camp commander ordered “performance” (lining up). Živan surmised why the lineup was ordered so he approached Commander Marčić (he was commander of the camp IIIc) and told him that he had forgotten to hand over the scissors. The commander said that this was the reason for his ordering the “performance” noting that Živan did not forget to hand over the scissors, but that he left them to cut the wire fence. Živan denied it, but Commander Marčić was persistent. He called a few more Ustashas and then took a knife and used it to cut Živan’s face above the eyes, above the ears and on the nose. He asked him if he would admit what he wanted to do with the scissors. Živan still claimed that he had nothing to confess because he forgot to hand over the scissors. That was how it ended that evening. The following day, they took him in front of the line and cut him more above the eyes, ears and nose. He did not admit anything this time either. On the third day, they cut off both of his ears, leaving them hanging, and dug out his eyes. He did not want to admit with whom he wanted to run away, but he mentioned (cursing the Ustashas executioners’s mothers) that he himself intended to run away and cut the wire. Realizing that he was about to die, he shouted at the Ustashas, saying that the Party would avenge him. Marčić and the Ustashas called an inmate, who was mentally ill, who beat Živan with a wooden stake. (The Ustashas used this young man when they needed to beat someone up.) This is how Živan Stojanović, a brave inmate, who, even after the most severe tortures, did not betray any of his comrades with whom he was preparing to escape from the camp, ended up.

In the meantime, Miloš Zdjelar, a shoemaker from Bosanska Dubica, tried to escape, but was caught, brought to the camp and killed. I also knew Miloš Vuković from Johova, Ilija's son, who one day was brought before the lined up camp inmates. I did not know why, but some people told me that he also tried to escape. He allegedly grabbed an Ustasha and strangled him. People were telling that story about Vuković. They brought Vuković in front of us and shot him with a submachine gun. He was hit in the head and his brain spilled out in front of the inmates. He was very strong and for a few moments after the shooting his body was still jumping off the ground.

There were more escape attempts. After the discovery, they would bring the inmates, including the ones who tried to escape or escaped, before the firing squad and kill them.

In addition to camp IIIc, in which there were many people from Mt. Kozara, there was also camp IIb, in which there were inmates – craftsmen or experts. They worked in the chain plant, carpentry, brickworks and in sawmills with other detainees. In this part of the camp the food was somewhat better than in camp IIIc. Probably because the camp authorities needed skilled inmates to carry out the work.

The day after arriving in the camp you had to go to work. The order was that all inmates must take off their upper part of their clothing with their shirt and work half-naked. We worked on the embankment. We raised an embankment from the railway line Jasenovac–Novska to the Sava river. The camp had to be protected from possible water spillage. When I came to the embankment there were a lot of inmates. There were several hundred horse-drawn carriages with carts on two wheels which were used to transport the soil. There were several thousand inmates. The Ustasha guards were walking on the embankment and we were working under them. Horses and carts passed by us and each inmate had to put 4 shovelfuls of soil into them. If one of the camp inmates failed to do so he was pelted with dirt (sod). He would be pelted by an Ustasha guard. Many would fall to the ground from force of those blows. Regardless of the fact

that the inmates were exhausted and had difficulty moving they had to throw the soil. There were cases when some fell on the embankment and could not work. The Ustashas would order the inmates to take them by the legs and arms and throw them on the embankment. Then a cart with dirt would come by and the dirt would simply be thrown at them and they were buried alive in the ground. Probably thousands of inmates were buried like that.

I worked on this embankment for fifteen days. I reckoned that I could not endure it any longer. My father also worked there, Miloš Marjanović and others. As I was very exhausted, I fell down and fainted. My father and Miloš Marjanović picked me up and took me under a willow tree. The foreman on the embankment was inmate Pekić from Aginac who was a roadman before the war. Since he was an expert the Ustashas let him manage the affairs. He was not privileged. He was with us in the camp, he ate with us, but he had the task of managing the affairs on this part of the embankment. When I fainted they called Pekić and he brought some water from somewhere and left me there until we went back to the camp.

The following day I did not go to the work site on the embankment. I tried to transfer to a wood cutting plant on the banks of the Sava. There I had more food and I ate well. From there I could go to the slaughterhouse. Blood was released from the slaughterhouse into a nearby lake. As I was exhausted from hunger I decided to drink blood from the slaughterhouse. It was summer time and there were worms in the blood, with water, but that did not prevent me from drinking. When I drank this blood, I seemed to be much stronger. In addition, I also collected bones around the slaughterhouse so I boiled them, because the guards allowed us to boil the laundry. While cooking the laundry, I also cooked the bones at the same time and ate the unsalted soup and broke the bones looking for the marrow and leftover meat.

I was the youngest in a group of inmates. I was not quite 22 years old. I was assigned to bring water to the inmates who worked with me. One day, while I was carrying water, I came across camp inmates

Stevo Perković, Ivan Šemen and old Šajković. There were ten of them. They were from Krstelnica near Sisak. They were sitting under a willow tree and talking. I heard them talking about the people of Mt. Kozara, calling them Chetniks. I was surprised that they talked about the people of Mt. Kozara like that. I assumed that these comrades might have been members of the Party. I had found out earlier that Ivan Šemen was a commissar in the Spanish war.

I decided to approach them and start a conversation with them. I told them that it surprised me they talked about people from Mt. Kozara as Chetniks. Stevo Perković, my group member (I worked in his group), warned me to keep quiet, he said we would talk later. They parted, and I went to the group I was carrying water to. It was time for lunch. Soon, Stevo Perković came and talked with me about the fight at Mt. Kozara. They were not properly informed because they were driven to the camp as hostages in 1941. I told him how there was an uprising and what kind of struggle we were waging, that there were no Chetniks there, etc... which surprised Perković. Then he told me that he and a group of his comrades were sent to the camp in 1941 and that was why he did not know what was happening at Mt. Kozara. He told me to show him the people from Mt. Kozara that I knew in order for them to pick them out for easier work, depending on the opportunities. Thus, it was. In a short time they managed to transfer Miloš Marjanović, Mirko Balaban, Bogdan Zec from Petrinja and others to their group. Work was easier there and you could get food. Usually ships from Bosnia brought looted food from our villages which the inmates unloaded. We would take this food and hide it: potatoes, corn, etc. Conditions were better there than when we had worked on the embankment.

Perković and Šemen were withdrawing the people of Mt. Kozara to easier places. They even knew when the Ustashas were going to take the inmates away because it seems they had people among the guards who informed them. Thus, on one occasion, Perković told me that the following day the people of Mt. Kozara would be picked

up and taken away. Something should have been done to transfer as many Mt. Kozara residents as possible to camp IIb. I was well dressed, since a Jew died next to me, and I took his suit. I went to the camp and saw a camp inmate from Slavonia who had received a food package. He was wearing a very thin and torn suit. I wanted to exchange the suit for a food and his suit. I wanted to suggest to Slavonian that we trade, but I was afraid that he might ask why I was asking to exchange a better suit for a worse. So, I decided to ask him for food and offer him a suit. He looked at me and said he could not give me all, but he would give me half of it. He cut off half a kilogram of bacon and gave me some roux to put in the soup and another half of white Slavonian bread. In addition, he gave me a box of "Ljubuški" cigarettes.

I took the food and gave Slavonian a suit. I went towards my father and uncle Miloš who were standing with uncle by the wire in the camp. I brought them food wrapped in a torn coat that I got from Slavonian. Uncle Miloš pointed to my father to see how I was dressed. Father was surprised that I gave a good suit for a torn one. I gave them the food and we gathered around it and finally a pack of cigarettes which they were especially happy about. I told them to have a smoke and listen to what I was going to suggest. I told them that the line-up would begin then (the Ustashas called it the performance) which Perković and Šemen informed me about. I recommended that they report that they knew how to carve, build, etc. during the line-up, that they were masons, carpenters, etc. and that I would say that I was a blacksmith. They did not accept it even though I told them that they would be picked up and taken away in the evening. We did not finish the conversation, and a "performance" was ordered, the line up.

After the line-up, Commander Maričić came by. He went from one inmate to another and asked what his religion was and what his occupation was. If any of the inmates said he was a craftsman, no matter what kind, he was singled out for camp IIb. In true, we did not know it then, but they singled us out in the so-called "Gypsy camp"

because there was a special camp in which Gypsies were placed and this camp continued on to camp IIIc. Since the Gypsies were among the first to be killed this camp remained empty. Then craftsmen, regardless of nationality, were singled out and put in a Gypsy camp.

Stevo Perković told me it would be so, so I was not afraid and that was why I said I was a blacksmith. However, some assumed that they would be shot, like the Gypsies. They thought that their turn would come. Thus, my father, uncle Miloš and uncle did not say that they were craftsmen so they remained where they had been put and perished.

The following day we were given other suits and then we were transferred to camp IIb. Those who remained were later forced across the Sava and placed on their stomachs in Gradina. They lay like that for two days and two nights. They were not allowed to move. Graves had already been dug for them (there were about 800 of them). They chased one by one, the Ustashas waited for them and hit them on the head with a mallet and the victims fell into a grave. Some remained alive, but they were sprinkled with quicklime and then buried. (That was what the inmate who worked with me in the chain plant told me). He had the opportunity to see what happened to the inmates who were taken to Gradina. He also told me how one camp inmate, thrown into a grave, managed to get out and escape.

In camp IIb I started working as a blacksmith in the chain plant. There I found Dušan Balaban who previously worked in a locksmith shop and Gojko Balaban who worked in economics. There was also Marko Bajalica who was cleaning the yard. There were a lot of people from Mt. Kozara, but I do not remember many. Chain plant was located next to the brick factory. The brick factory had one long corridor. There was coal. That corridor was partitioned with a board. One day I went to get coal for the chainsaw. There I heard moaning, screaming and wailing. I climbed onto the coal to look towards the brickyard. I had a good view. I noticed about 200 inmates and Ustashas around them. They had their guns pointed at them. Next to each

opening in the kilns of the brick factory there are two executioners who are waiting for the inmates whom the Ustashas were forcing forward and are throwing them into the kiln. It was the most terrible scene I saw in the camp. It was more terrible than when I watched the killing of inmates in front of the lineup. They were throwing living people into the fire.

I hung out with Gojko and Dušan Balaban because I knew them well. I was also friendly with an engineer from Zagreb who suggested that I pass the exam in the camp, because there was a possibility of him sending me to Germany. Allegedly, camp inmates with professional qualifications were supposed to be sent to Germany because there was a need for workforce there. I was surprised by that proposal. I said I did not believe it. He told me: "Don't be like that, son. You will take the blacksmith exam". I repeated that I would not do it, but he remained adamant. Indeed, the following day he told me to make a mace and a horseshoe. The blacksmiths who were there were: Cvijo Todorović from Hrvatska Slabinja and Dušan (I forgot the last name) from Sisak or Petrinja. The engineer told them to help me. Otherwise, I would not know how to make a shoe and a horseshoe. They did it for me so the engineer took me to the commission around 11 o'clock. The office was located above the carpentry. When we got there he said that he had given me the task of making a mace and a horseshoe. The committee accepted that and entered me into the records as if I had passed the blacksmith exam. On that day, in accordance to the order of the commission, I received double ration.

I came to work the next day. I found some potatoes so I got up early to cook them on the fire by which we forged. After I ate the potatoes, I walked around the workshop waiting for the others to come to work. Cvijo Todorović did not come. He was sick so he went to the doctor. I went to the engineer to tell him that Todorović did not come to work. I said that I would export the garbage that Todorović exported every day to the Sava coast. We were expecting a commission. The engineer said that it should be my job for the whole day. I did everything with

the aim of establishing what kind of security was on the banks of the Sava and whether there was a boat there. That is why I asked to take the garbage out because normally we were not allowed to go to the bank.

While taking out garbage to the Sava coast I noticed a larger boat under the bunker, in the immediate vicinity. That boat could accommodate up to thirty people. I went back and told the engineer that I had taken out the trash and would continue with another job. He paused and spoke to me quietly: “Listen, Marjanović. Am I a good man?” I answered that he was like a father to me because he had saved me until then. His eyes teared and then he spoke directly: “Will you take me with you?” I acted surprised and asked him: “Where?” He quipped: “Wherever you are going!” He sensed that I was preparing an escape.

I could not make a decision. I went to Gojko Balaban because I had discussed it with him and Dušan before. It was just an idea, with no prospect of implementation. One day it was raining. I was with Gojko and Dusan and suggested that we try escaping that evening. We agreed on the escape. I asked them if we should also bring the engineer from the chain plant. They agreed to take him and inform him of the departure. I went to the engineer and told him that we had decided to go. In our group were: Gojko and Dušan Balaban, Jovo Marjanović, son of Petar, the engineer and me. When I told him about our intention he was very happy. He agreed to go. Towards evening, he found me and said that he was going to a meeting, to which group and plant managers were invited, and that he believed that he would be finished by 7 pm. I said, “If we don’t manage to escape by 7:30 p.m., we won’t be able to do it later, because they are forcing us into the barracks at that time.”

That day we waited for the engineer until a certain time. We could not wait any longer. We started. We slipped between the bakery and the guardhouse. It was a space of about thirty meters. We crawled slowly. There was also a pit with slaked lime there. There was a plank put over it. I fell into the mud, but Gojko and Dušan helped me get out. We went further in order to cross the road. The

Sava River was a few tens of meters from the road. There was still an opening towards the Sava to pass and a high wall was built around the camp, in addition to the wire.

We managed to cross the road. A lumber where we took shelter was there. We noticed that Ustasha guards were coming towards us. We leaned against a tree as they passed. In the middle of the road between the road and Sava, Jovo Marjanović, who was crawling behind me, started pulling my leg, whispering that we should go back. He believed that we would not pass and that we would be captured and killed. Certainly, he, like many other inmates, was affected by the fate of the inmates who tried to escape and their shooting in front of the others. I told Jovo that I had made up my mind to run away and that I did not want to turn back, and if he was afraid, let him go back; and in case of him staying alive he would tell what happened to me and the comrades who run away. Jovo returned to the camp. Gojko, Dušan and I headed towards Sava. We arrived near the bunker when the guards were changing. The wind was blowing hard and it was raining. The weather was in our favor. We came to a boat tied to the shore. Somehow, we untied it. We got into the boat. We used one board instead of an oar. I knew how to row so we went down the swollen Sava. Unfortunately for us the water carried us towards the small boat anchored on the Sava. Inside, the Ustashes are drinking. In true, it was night time, but we could see them by the light. Gojko and Dušan pushed away with their hands in order to prevent our boat hitting theirs. We sail on. We are already on the middle of the Sava. Then, the Ustasha guards began to illuminate the Sava with searchlights. We were lucky. We were far away and were not noticed. We moved on and reached the other bank of the Sava, not far from Gradina. When we went towards the road Bosanska Dubica–Orahova, to switch to Mt. Kozara, we lost our way and came across a guard in Gradina. Something was shining in the dark, maybe the guard was smoking, so Gojko noticed him. We returned and wandered almost all night and only crossed the road the next day and broke out under Prosara.

We came to a crossroads. We hear: pigs are squealing. We thought that the Ustashas were looting. We instructed Gojko to find out what was down there. When he approached the house, he noticed a man with his wife and two girls. They slaughtered the pig. Gojko came back and told us what he had found. Then we also went towards the house. The host welcomed us very nicely. He was interested in where we had come from. We said that we managed to escape from the camp in Jasenovac. We were free in the village under Prosara.

There we rested and ate. We were full, so to speak, because during the night, when we crossed the Sava, we passed through unhusked corn and ate it.

While we were resting the host came running and told us that the enemy from Mt. Kozara was coming. He gave us food and a match to light a fire, if needed, and then showed us way to go. We went up the hill. There we entered the house and watched the enemy columns from Mt. Kozara. We waited there until the evening. We saw that there was no enemy army left.

We moved on. At night we broke out on Kruškovac above Dubica. We were walking by memory choosing a direction roughly. That was how we walked more unnecessary kilometers. Before dawn, we could not get our bearings so we decided to wait for the day light. When it started to get light I went forward and stumbled upon the Bosanska Dubica–Knežica–Prijedor road. We were around Aginci or Kruškovac, five or six kilometers from Bosanska Dubica.

We moved on. We crossed the road and arrived in the village of Čelebinci. We stopped at a woman's house, I think her last name was Kos, who gave us something to eat. We were interested in whether there were Ustashas in the vicinity. She said that there was none, but that sometimes they went to villages of Bosanska Dubica to loot. She told us that partisans came to the village, that councilors work in the village, etc. We started on from her house. And as soon as we started we encountered armed men who shouted at us to stop from behind the fence pointing their rifles at us. We ran away. I jumped into the river and hid

in a bush. I remained silent for several hours. I pulled the branches over me and my body was in the water. I could not stand it. I heard a little girl chasing a cow. I assumed there were no enemies in the village. I called the girl and asked her if there were Ustashas in the village.

She said that there are no Ustashas, but that three poor people who escaped from the camp had appeared that morning that the guards from the village had drawn their weapons on them so these three had ran away. She added that one of them was in the village. It was Dušan Balaban. Gojko fled further towards Dvorište and later came to the village. I found Dušan. Lunch was also ready. Porridge had just been prepared. I had lunch, dried my clothes and headed towards the village before evening. I arrived home late at night.

I found my mother in the house. When she saw me she could not speak. She just froze. She could not believe I returned alive. I recovered a bit and went back to work. I went to the brigade and then I was sent back to the village and appointed commander of the relay station for the connection between Mt. Kozara and Croatia. At the same time, I was the president of the People's Liberation Committee in the village. Then the following men escaped from the Jasenovac camp: Ostoja Vika-  
lo from Dizdarlije, Janko Bajalica and Dragutin Zlokapa from Bačvan.

I had a very pleasant encounter at the relay station. One night, Stevo Perković, who was with me in the camp, arrived. He also managed to escape. He told me that Ivan Šemen from the camp was exchanged for captured German officers as well as old Šajković and others. Stevo stayed with me for a few days and then, with the approval of the Mt. Kozara command, he was sent to Croatia. More comrades crossed to Croatia from the Jasenovac camp through this channel.

Ljuban Marjanović

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*Ljuban Marjanović, "The Horrors of the Jasenovac  
Concentration Camp", Kozara III, 635–650.*

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## FROM REFUGE TO CAMP IN NORWAY

I was at home at the time of the Kozara Mt. Offensive. I was the deputy commander of the rear detachment. I was visiting our guards because we expected the enemy to move towards the liberated territory. My job was to warn the guards to inform the people about everything on time. When the enemy set off from Bosanska Kostajnica, the Balj Company offered resistance, but the enemy was superior so the company had to retreat. The people went ahead of the army. Thus, we were retreating to Mt. Kozara.

After arriving to Bokane, I applied to the Balj Company and was given the task of gathering people for the front and to be in contact with councilors, from Bokane to Sastavci. There were many people there, women and children.

While the breakthrough was in progress I moved the wounded company commander Gojko Kukavica to Vitlovska. I also found a wounded Vasan Đaković whom I moved to a place near Vitlovska and covered him with the branches. I reached the Moštanica monastery. I found 5 seriously wounded partisans near the river Moštanica. Neither could move. They wanted to cross the river, but they could not. I transferred them. The enemy was already rushing towards the monastery. I went to the right and the wounded walked towards the woods on their hands and feet. One of them told me: "Come on, comrade, you will not die". I went towards Pucari. I spent the night there and the next day they caught me and drove me to Bosanska Dubica.

There were about 700 of us. My father Stevo was also in this group. They chased us through Prosara and when we got to the village of Draksenić, they lined us up and counted us. We stood in a column of three. Milan Miljaković was bound to me. We were chased by the Germans and Ustashas. The Ustasha officer, tall and with a mustache, turned to me. He said: “Commissar, tell me where your unit is and I will not hurt you.” I was silent. He demanded several times that I speak, but I remained silent. Then he began to threaten me: “I will rip your heart out with my teeth until you start talking.” In the meantime, a German officer approached us so the Ustasha went with him, but he returned again and continued to shout at me, asking me to tell him where my unit was.

They driven us away to Bosanska Dubica. One Ustasha, from Herzegovina, tried to persuade me to run away. Saying that I would be separated in Bosanska Dubica, the Ustasha suggested that I run away and that he would help me. I thought he was urging me to try to escape so he could kill me. If not by him I would have been killed by the others who were escorting us. He then swore on his mother’s name that he would help me to escape because he thought that I would not pass through Bosanska Dubica alive so he wanted to help me. Still, I did not believe him. I decided to go with the others. Nikola Krnjajić, from Hrvatska Slabinja, was with me. My father was also there.

We came to Bosanska Dubica. They stopped us in the courtyard of the then-county headquarters. They lined us up again. One man, named Drago, who was captured in Mt. Kozara, went with the Germans and denounced people. He would usually point the finger at the one who should be singled out. So, he pointed at me. Then Ustasha sergeant Ibro grabbed me and pushed me aside. Then they tied me up with wire. I was standing on the right side, my left arm was tied, and Milan Miljaković was tied to my right arm. 126 of us were separated there. They were expecting the German commander. Three groups (240 in the first, 180 in the second) were taken to the firing squad. None of them came back. Some greeted me when they were

leaving, e.g. Milan Stojaković. He was cheerful and laughing even though he knew he was going to be shot. He was from Slabinja and he was a waiter in Bosanska Kostajnica.

Since the German commander had not arrived a group of 120 people were put in prison. We spent the night there. There were 18 of us in a small room. We lay on top of each other. The room was dirty and full of lice. We were hungry, but the worst thing was thirst. July month, heat. However, fear overcame all difficulties. We were expecting to be taken to the shooting range every hour.

During the night, Nikola Krnjajić fell ill. I heard someone moving through the corridor so I decided to bang on the door. The door-keeper, a Muslim, gendarmerie sergeant, opened the door for me. He asked me what I wanted. I said that one of ours was in a serious condition, that he was dying; I asked him to take him out into the corridor and give him water. He said he would bring water if there were no Germans there. He left and soon brought a bucket of water so I washed Krnjajić and gave him water. I gave the rest of the water to the others in the cell. We asked him to bring us something to eat, but he did not because he was afraid of the Germans.

On the second day, they took us out to the yard. It was July 19, 1942. And then we were waiting. We reckon that we are going to be shot. We were bound to each other by a wire. Meanwhile, I took a look at the gate and noticed gendarmerie sergeant Vidović from Bosanska Kostajnica. We had been well acquainted before. He was walking straight towards me. When he came, I asked him to save me if he could. To this he added: "Why did not you come to Tavija last spring when you were told that your brother Dušan had come and to go see him." (Then I remembered that 25 Ustashas were looking for me in Tavija. At that time I sent Rajko, a 12-year-old boy, to investigate whether my brother Dušan had really come to meet me. When the little one came down to Tavija, the Ustashas asked about me. It seems that my capture had been prepared and Sergeant Vidović was probably there as well.) When I repeated my plea to Vidović to save

me he said that I had been at Balj which meant that he did not want to help me.

Shortly they ordered us to put everything away and to keep only the handkerchief. So, we are going to be shot. I had a shaver in my right pocket and my left hand was tied with a wire to Milan Biljaković's hand. I gave the device to Vidović and asked him to hand it over to one of my people so that they would have a memento. He took the device, but did not hand it over; when my mother had returned from Slavonia he went to her and told her that I had been slaughtered. He kept the device.

We waited bound together in the yard. From the head of our group they took away ten people who did not return. They sent 110 of us back to prison. There were Croats and Muslims among us. Jusuf Travljanin from Bosanska Dubica was with me. (There were other Muslims from Dubica.) On the third day, we were taken out to the yard, but we were not tied. The German commander, whom we had been waiting for earlier, also arrived. He told us that we would be sent somewhere else. He did not say where. Milan Miljaković was beside me in the yard. Stevo Čolić from Babinac or Petrinja, who as a partisan fled from Balj to Bosanska Kostajnica in 1941, was walking towards him. Čolić was Miljaković's godfather. When he saw Čolić, Miljaković said to me: "Here comes the godfather. I am done." However, he did not do anything. He approached us and asked why we surrendered to the enemy. We shrugged because we thought that Milan was in the greatest danger from Čolić who would probably try to take revenge on him for Milan trying to catch him when he escaped. Čolić went to the Germans and the Ustashas. Soon he returned and brought bread (a loaf), salami and a pack of cigarettes. Čolić said he was going to ask the commander to let us go. He came back and told us that he could not do anything because we were going to the camp. That was the first time we heard about the camp.

We stood in the July sun. A tall, beardless German commander arrives. He spoke Serbo-Croatian well. He told us that we would

not be shot, but would go to the camp. Shortly we were taken under guard to Cerovljani. We spent some time in Cerovljani where thousands of women and children from Mt. Kozara were gathered in a field next to the railway line. They put us in train cars and took us to Zemun.

At the Sajmište, we found the first inmates from Mt. Kozara. They were sunburnt. Guards who were naked up to the waist chased and beat them. As soon as we passed through the gate of the camp they started hitting us with sticks. They beat us wherever they could on the head and body.

We were divided into companies. I was in the Ninth Company. The German officer, the camp commander, said that our group was the most dangerous. In the first days, we “trained” on the sand, half naked. The skin on the stomach, elbows and knees had already disappeared after three days. People started to fall. Commanders were appointed who were in charge of “training” us. For the first three days an aviation officer was my commander. On the fourth day Al-ija Pašagić from Bosanska Dubica became our commander. He was a sergeant in the partisans. During the first days he was holding up well and was telling us that victory would be ours if only one of us remained alive. I was at the head of the company with Pašagić while the commander was an aviation officer. The commanders had batons half a meter long; in addition, they received more pots of coffee. After a few days Pašagić drifted apart from us. I noticed that he had a meter-long police baton and a white band around his arm. So, he had transferred to the service of the camp authorities. Pašagić called me and told me that I should be the company commander. I refused and suggested that they make Nikola Krljajić commander.

I do not know the exact figure because people often died and were killed, but I believe that there could have been several thousand people in the camp at that time. We were divided into groups. There were about 4,000 of us in the group of middle-aged people. There were about 3,000 children aged 11 to 15. A group of old people lived sepa-

rately from us; my father and uncle were also in it. They were killed there. Groups were put in special pavilions. We stayed at the Sajmište for a month. They started singling us out. Around 2,500 inmates, including me, were separated into the so-called Tot's barracks. In about three weeks there were only 700 of us left. Others were killed or died of hunger, disease and wounds – sunburns. We were given a pot of black coffee a day. I lost weight and dropped from 80 kilograms which had been my weight before arriving, to 35 kilograms. I weighed that much in the camp in Norway. Tot's barracks were next to the Danube surrounded by wire and no one could approach them.

In these barracks I met Mustafa Burazorović, a barber from Prijedor, and Safet Mujić from Sanski Most. I had met Mujić when I worked in Sanski Most. He was a merchant in Stari Majdan. I was surprised to find him there, in the camp, so I asked him about it. He said that he had been sending goods to the partisans so he had been discovered and interned. Both Mujić and Burazorović were holding up very well in the camp. We were together in Norway too.

Rade Ećim, Spasoja Miljatović and his son Nikola from Ševarlije were also with me. They were exhausted and wearied and died in the most painful agony.

Unfortunately, some of our ranks went to serve the camp authorities. In addition to Alija Pašagić a camp inmate from Tuzla done the same. He became the chief of police in the camp. And Pane Vujanović did the same. His two brothers did not enter the service of the camp authorities.

We had a committee in the camp which had the task of persuading people not to join the enemy's service. Because of fear work of committee was carried out in whispers, under blankets. I was on that committee. I remember Milan Korica being there as well. Former inmates were very dangerous and worse than the official camp authorities. Brother killed brother.

A group that was to be sent to Germany for labor had to be picked out from the inmates in Tot's barracks. I was chosen as well. I

found myself in the first group (there were two). Thus, 300–400 inmates were sent in two groups to Krems near Vienna. There, we remained in quarantine under the greatest torture. We were exhausted and sick. From here we were driven to Szczecin in the Baltic. Another 200–300 inmates joined us there. Exactly on January 27, 1943, we were shipped to Norway. We traveled on the ship “Bremen”. This large ship was transporting war material. When we got on the ship a German officer, who spoke Serbo–Croatian, told us that we were going to a place from which we would never return. Only political criminals went to Norway. The Germans also shipped political criminals of German nationality, Russians and Yugoslavs here. We traveled under the sign of the Red Cross (Yugoslav and Russian prisoners).

The ship “Bremen” had a precursor and support. While we were traveling to Oslo the precursor and protector were bombed and sunk. Our ship could not sail for 24 hours. We were waiting to be hit and sunk, too.

When we arrived in Oslo they packed us into the train cars. We traveled north to Narvik for fourteen days. There we found inmates who had been sent before us from Serbia, from Banjica and other places. We arrived at night. On the way from the ship to the barracks many were killed. It was a harsh winter. In the two and a half years I spent here, I did not see land. We were constantly in ice and snow.

When we got to the barracks the camp inmates who had come there earlier talked to us. They were interested in who we were, where we were from and then they told us that they were from Niš and some other places in Serbia. There were none from Mt. Kozara. Many inmates tried to escape from there so we were transferred to another camp. There I found Osman Zubović from Bosanska Dubica. He worked in the NOP camp committee so he also talked to me. In truth, we worked as hard as we could, because we were followed by the police who were assisted by informants.

At the beginning of 1944 an Ustasha officer, a military attaché of the NDH in Berlin, came to the camp. We were so exhausted that

we looked like skeletons. The Ustasha officer asked us how we were doing so Boško Obućina, a tinsmith from Bosanska Dubica, replied that he could well see how we were doing. Because of this answer Obućina received many beatings and was tortured. The Ustasha officer then said: “Croats and Muslims who want to, can go.” Some answered and left (Roko, a waiter from Zagreb, was the first to answer and leave). However, Mustafa Burazorović, a barber from Prijedor, and Safet Mujić from Sanski Most said that they would not leave the group and that they would share its fate.

There were several camps in Norway. My camp was in the north. We were on a cleared area. We worked on the construction of the road that connected the town of Polar with the railway station in the south on the sea. The railway was supposed to be 500–600 kilometers long, if not more. Russians and Yugoslavs worked there. We were in that camp until the liberation.

I was in the Wasser Command. Marko Burazor from Bosanska Dubica, his brother Živko and Mustafa Burazorović were with me. We worked on bringing water to the barracks, to the bakeries, to the camp and our kitchen. We were guarded by a guard Max. We called him: “Leba, Leba” (\*Bread, Bread). He got that nickname because the people were hungry so they were constantly asking for bread and he would shout at us and say: “Leba, leba” (\*Give us some bread). He himself advised us to steal bread. When we got bread we would bring it to the kitchen and barracks and shared it among ourselves. After the capitulation of Germany he returned to Germany with us.

We were hauling water from behind the hill. Usually, six of us put on the hams and four hold barrels of water. When we get behind the hill the guard Max asks us where we are from, from which place and area. Then he tells us about the battles, where the allied units are located, etc. At that time we already perceived that the German troops were retreating and we reckoned that Germany would collapse.

Usually the guards came there because they had been punished. Before our liberation I was in barracks called Tent. There were three

barracks like that. (Twenty of us were in one). In front of our barracks there was a barrel for urinating. In other barracks, barrels like this were located in the corridor. One night I went, but I came back. I had a premonition that I should not go out. When I lay down and fell asleep automatic and machine gun fire was heard. I jumped. My friend Nikola Radunović from Hrvatska Dubica was gone. He was killed when he went out. He was shot in the head. I jumped up and stood at the door telling the others to stay where they were. We waited all night like that. The guards came and ordered Nikola to be removed so our men took him away and buried him. Later, guard Max told us that previous night their commander was looking for a volunteer, a guard, who would kill one inmate so that the others would rebel. The guards were ordered to shoot with automatic weapons at the barracks when the camp inmates start a revolt. Since there was no rebellion, because we stayed in our places, they did not shoot at the barracks.

Some guards killed inmates almost every day. Such was the guard we called Ćoro. In addition, the guards beat us with stones. Those who killed more people were also given ranks. We stayed there until May 6, 1945.

Milenko Budimir

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*Milenko Budimir, "From Refuge to Camp in Norway",  
Kozara III, 655–661.*

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## IN THE NOVA GRADIŠKA CAMP

They drove 123 of us to the Orthodox church in Hrvatska Dubica. One of the Ustashas started counting us. He cursed our Serbian mother and told another Ustasha to take a rifle and hit us in the back with the stock. When I came in front of the Ustasha, he hit me. I hit my head against the wall and hurt myself.

The prisoners were mostly Serbs. There were communists and other progressive people among us. Many were killed. We agreed to organize an attack on the Ustashas, but the elders who were afraid prevented us. We were without food in the church.

On the second day, Ustashas entered the church. They brought in a heavy machine gun. We were all sitting. One of the Ustasha officers yelled asking why we do not get up. Some were saying they were afraid they would be killed. The officer ordered us to stand up and stand at the altar. They set up a heavy machine gun in the middle of the church. Four Ustashas stood on the side with submachine and machine guns. We all thought they were going to kill us. Some started crying.

Then they started taking pictures of us (those photos do exist). While they were photographing us they singled out older people with a mustache for whom they later wrote that they were “crew leaders”.

After forty–eight hours spent in the church the door opened and the guard Ivan Papa, my sister’s godfather, appeared. He called me outside. When I came out, I saw my sister Stana. She told me she asked the Ustasha camp commander in Hrvatska Dubica what would

happen to us and that he told her we would be sent away tonight. After talking with my sister I returned inside and told the others that we would be sent somewhere tonight.

With Voja Šiljegović and a few others I made a deal: if they take us to the firing squad we will attack the guards, disarm them and run away. We thought that way at least someone would stay alive. However, when we told others about it the elders started to object saying that it would be impossible. We gave up the plan, but the smaller circle of people agreed we would still attack the guards who were well-armed when we approach Una.

In the evening, the Ustashas came and lined us up in a formation of three taking us to the train station in Hrvatska Dubica. Along the way, we were joined by a group brought from Bosanska Dubica. When entering the train cars we would be hit by two Ustashas who were standing on the side. When we passed through Jasenovac we thought it would be easier for us because we heard about the conditions there. We were brought to Nova Gradiška. Everything was blocked. They lined us up in front of the composition and then the Ustasha headquarters came and gave us a speech. He said the reason we were arrested and brought there was that we were opposing the NDH ideology. He warned us not to cause trouble because they are merciless to those who do not obey.

They lined us up in a formation and took us to the town. At that time, the Nova Gradiška camp had not yet been formed. There they locked us in the beer cellar. For 176 of us, it was a small and tight space. When we passed through the courtyard guards stood on both sides with knives on their rifles. There was not enough light in the basement with only four small windows and near each one a machine gun was placed.

The basement was deep in the ground and therefore damp. There was no fresh air. As a result, many prisoners, especially older ones, became immobile the next day. A committee with the doctor came. He said: “If you brought them in to use them as labor you have to

move them from here and if you brought them in to perish they can stay in this place". They moved us to the old granary. From there we were taken to work. We were demolishing Jewish buildings and the Orthodox church, stacking bricks, digging trenches, etc. But not all of us went to work. People at risk of escaping did not go to work. I was one of those. I was young.

Meanwhile, my sister who was married to a Croat came from Hrvatska Dubica. She tried talking with the headquarters several times, but could not find him. She begged him to let me out of the camp but he said I was not on the release list. She returned to Bosanska Dubica. At that time, after some finished labor, they began to release individual prisoners. However, they would be arrested again in Bosanska Dubica. Even then not everyone was released. Some stayed until the creation of a real death camp. They built fences, installed wires, etc.

Finally, I managed to get out of the camp. I came to Hrvatska Dubica. Milan Malkoč, who I think was Communist and later during the war died in the camp, helped me there. Malkoč got me a pass to Belgrade. The Ustashas found out about my stay in Bosanska Dubica and I would probably be arrested. However, Enver Tabaković told my aunt to tell my sister about my likely re-arrest, so I left for Belgrade soon.

Shortly, I was denounced and arrested in Belgrade. They took me to the Gestapo prison. After the interrogation I was sent to the Banjica camp. There I found many who were in prison with me in Bosanska Dubica and Nova Gradiška. The prisoners looked like real skeletons and were unrecognizable. I had the opportunity to observe the killing of inmates while cleaning the yard. They would simply push them against the wall and kill them. Those were mass shootings and they buried them in the Jewish cemetery. One night we heard gunshots in the women's room. The next day we found out that the women were being killed. They took a group of women the night before and shot them so they came to get another group. However, the women learned about that and decided to resist. Firstly the roll call was done and then they took them out into the corridor where they

were tied up and taken before a firing squad. They could no longer go to Jajinci and Bujanj Potok because they were afraid of partisan ambushes so the prisoners were taken to the Jewish cemetery for liquidation. The women agreed to attack the guards. As they walked past Krieger and the policemen they attacked them and were killed. There could have been a hundred or more of them.

I stayed in the Banjica camp until the liberation of Belgrade.

Momčilo Rakić

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*Momčilo Rakić, "In the Nova Gradiška camp",  
Kozara III, 662–664.*

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## **THE GERMANS CAPTURED US IN MT. KOZARA**

Mira Cikota, Julija and I wandered together. I was carrying medical supplies, a newsletter and canned coffee in my purse. I have no idea what we ate. I only know that we wandered around Mt. Kozara for a long time.

We had a feeling that we were surrounded. We agreed to dig a dugout. The three of us dug for the shelter all night with our bare hands and before dawn it had been dug so much that only our heads could fit in. Our hands were bloody so we could not work anymore.

In the morning we were captured by the Germans. We saw that they were approaching us. There were a lot of them, but the three of us were alone. I had a high fever. Prior to that we agreed that we could not let our enemy capture us alive. I had a gun and we agreed that the first one would commit suicide, then the second one would take a gun and then the third one. I had three bullets in the gun and we were counting on that. But, my gun failed. When I realized that, I threw the gun away. In that, the Germans came and ordered us to raise our hands. And that is how we were caught. I think it was near the village of Vojskove.

They searched us and found medical supplies and a newsletter with me, but they found nothing with Mira and Julija. Mira knew German so she translated. I had a fever so I started laughing. One German said to another: "Can you see she's laughing in your face?" They tied us with string around our necks: Julija ahead, then me, then Mira Cikota. Mira was carrying a little girl maybe 4 or 5 years

old then. She carried this little girl through the entire Kozara offensive.

I had German officer's boots on my feet and a ring with a hammer and sickle that was made for me in Božići while I was in the hospital. We were passing by Ustashas and home guards. They stopped us. A soldier, an Austrian, approached me and told me to take off my boots. I did what he asked and he left them in the bush. I also took off the hammer and sickle ring and pushed it into the ground.

When we started off I was barefoot. They chased us further. It was noon. The sun was scorching. We are thirsty and hungry. The first hearing began while still in Mt. Kozara. At that time they confiscated the archive of the III Battalion in which they found my letter. I asked for food for the wounded. They showed me this letter claiming that it was my handwriting, but I denied it. They had photos from the headquarters of a partisan detachment. I am in the photo with my colleagues from the headquarters. Slavko Havić photographed us once. The German who was questioning me showed me these photos, but fortunately they are small so it was difficult to recognize anyone. I said that it was not me in the photos.

After the hearing they said they would shoot us. We waited two hours for the execution of the death sentence. They took us to the shooting range and brought us to the end of the forest. I thought of my mother and sister Mira. We were already before the firing squad. They will shoot us in the back. However, at that moment, a soldier on horseback appeared and shouted to take us back. They took us back and brought us to a village. We stopped at a clearing where we will spend the night. They gave us blankets. The German who came on horseback and ordered us to be brought back from the shooting was there. He was sitting with us and watching us. He asked if we were hungry and brought us tea, bread, butter, and jam.

In the morning that German told us that he saved our lives. I told him that it was in vain because they are going to kill us anyway. He said we are going to the commander for questioning. I made up a sto-

ry I was going to tell. During the hearing I said that I am an Italian citizen (I was born in Bovac which belonged to Italy before the war). The surname Kaus is of German origin. I said I came to Mt. Kozara for a Serb boy and that he was killed. I was thinking about which guy to mention and because I heard that Rade Bašić was killed in the Kozara offensive I came to the idea to name him as my boyfriend. They still did not know that I was a member of the Party. They laughed at my story and did not believe in it. Mira Cikota said she is a Serb and she escaped because the Ustashas persecuted and killed Serbs. Julija took the surname Zec and said that her whole family was killed and that she had to flee to Mt. Kozara. Such were our first hearings.

It was raining heavily. In one village we got white sheets and they put us in an ox cart and drove us to Bosanka Dubica. We were not tied up but were driven under guard. Upon arrival in Bosanka Dubica the three of us had to go through the town with those sheets and shout: "We are the People's Liberation Army."

In Bosanska Dubica they put us in a truck and drove us through the town. The people gathered to see us because we looked horrifying: I was barefoot and Mira and Julija had kunduras on their feet. We came to Prijedor. They left us in front of Henić's shop. The people also gathered here. The children started throwing stones at us. Some shouted and cursed us. That is how two of us, Marija and I, women from Prijedor arrived at the prison covered in blood. The prison is in the building previously occupied by the court.

Upon arrival at the prison the interrogation began. The Germans questioned us with an interpreter. They were persistent in finding out through which connection I joined the partisans. I said that I voluntarily went to the partisans to find my boyfriend in Mt. Kozara.

But one day three people arrive from Zagreb posing as journalists. They said that they were from the Ministry of the Army and that if I gave them all the information they would release me. They wanted to take a picture of me. When they questioned me about how I joined the partisans I repeated the story about the boy. They

said they were not interested in that: “Tell us about the connection through which you joined.” I repeated that I joined by myself. They asked me about the attack on Prijedor. I told them that the attack began at twelve o’clock at night and that I was in the immediate vicinity so that I know that the home guards had put down their weapons or turned them against their own. Then they asked me: “How do you know that?” I said that the courier Mišo had told us that. They wanted to know if I was a communist. “I am not.” They told me to think about it, that they would come again tomorrow and I should tell them everything.

Upon the return to the cell I talked with Mira and Julija about the hearing. Soon the German who had interrogated me earlier came to the cell. Through the interpreter he wanted to know what those three from Zagreb had asked me. I told him. He informed me that I am not obliged to answer them because they are journalists.

On the second day, “journalists” called for me again. They asked if I had changed my mind. I was silent. They offered me a cigarette. I have not spoken. One was so furious that he shouted: “Take her away. She will never be free.”

I stayed in the prison in Prijedor for some time, but I can not remember for how long. (I was captured around July 7, 1942.) Later, I was transferred from prison to Ciglana camp (\*Croatian death camp system subcamp also known as IIIc). Mira and Julija were transferred to Banja Luka. They are located in the „Crna kuća“ (\*Black house).

During the interrogation Julija stuck to her statement that her name is Julija Zec and that her whole family was killed and she was forced to run away. (Julija is from Belgrade, Jewish.) Therefore, she defended herself as a „Serb“, whose family was killed and she had to flee.

Mira Cikota also said that as a Serb she had to flee from the Ustasas massacre. Otherwise, I do not know what else she was saying.

I was transferred to the Ciglana camp. In the summer of 1942 there were about 12,000 people, women and children from Mt. Kozara. Only 20 kg of corn flour was cooked for 12,000 people. Dys-

entery prevailed. The patients lay motionless. They put me in the attic. With me are two other Jewish women from Prijedor (with a small child). They are merchant's wives, but I do not remember their names. Food was brought to them from outside.

One day, Ana Veličovska, her brother Rudi and a German paid me a visit. Anna is elegantly dressed. I heard that she was in Rome on specialization, etc. I was sitting in the cell next to the window. I was barefoot, uncombed and starving. Ana's brother Rudi addressed me: "Marija, whose fault it is that you are here today?" I said that it was nobody's fault, but mine. They asked where my mother was. I said that I know nothing about her or Mira. They answered that both mom and Mira were caught. That was very hard for me.

Another question followed: "Will you accept the Independent State of Croatia if you are released?" I answered: "No, never." They asked me if it was Havić or Midžići's fault that I am here. I said again that no one is to blame. Then I told Anna that I heard she was in Rome. We talked for a while and they left. She never asked if I needed anything.

"Journalists" are coming again. They said they have three questions: "Where is your child?" I looked at them and said I do not have a child. They told me that I have a three-year-old son. I claimed that I did not have a child. The second question: "What is the morale in Mt. Kozara?" This disturbed me so I insolently said: "Please, contact the headquarters of the detachment in Mt. Kozara. You will get accurate information there." And the third question: "Will you accept the Independent State of Croatia if you are released?" I answered same as before: "No, never." I gave them a cheeky look and they left.

I stayed some more in the Ciglana camp and then I was transferred to the "Black house" in Banja Luka. I was with the Feldgendarmarie. There I found Mira and Julija. They told me that they were going to the mobile harsh Ustasha court. I also asked to go to court, but they did not let me.

Mira was sentenced to death. She was pregnant at the time. She was waiting for a pardon. Gendarme Marko told us one night that

Mira had not been pardoned and that she would be killed. She was in another cell at that time. Mira heard it, too. I gave her a belt so that she could hang herself and not allow the Ustashas from Prijedor to hang her. She tried it, but failed. In the same cell was a Slovenian woman (I do not remember her name), a traitor and an informant. Mira put a noose around her neck, but they found her and saved her. On that day she was supposed to be taken to Prijedor. I remember she dressed nicely. She was wearing a black costume. Dressed like that she was taken to Prijedor. That is how we parted.

I stayed in prison with Julija. One day, while I was walking around the prison, the commander of the II Battalion from Vitlovska, Stanko Milić, was brought in for questioning. I knew him. I was afraid that he would recognize me and tell them who I was and what I was doing.

I was transferred to the Ustashas police station on the floor above. There I found myself in a cell with Rade Bašić's mother.

They took me for the interrogation and said that they killed my mother. This news hit me hard. I found Julija again at the Ustashas police station. She was also transferred here. They put me in solitary confinement. Julija found out I came. I met her. She told me: "Marija, I told them at the interrogation that we were together in Podgradci, that we met there, that Šoša gave a speech there, that we both knew each other from there."

Julija was taken for interrogation every evening. She was a very beautiful woman. I do not know what she said. They gave me a good beating. They took me under the roof where there were torture devices. There they tied me and tortured me. Afterward, they poured water on me because I lost consciousness. They photographed me.

I know I was not admitting anything. Among the prisoners of the "Black house" it was rumored that the Germans had killed Stanko Milić. Allegedly they told him: "You betrayed the home guards then joined the partisans. Then you betrayed the partisans so you will betray us, too."

I was transferred to the camp without a court decision. I was guided by two agents. When I came to the camp I met Miša Stupar's mother. She came to visit her son. However, I was not admitted to the camp because the decision to send me here was not issued. Agents need to bring me back. They are furious that I am being sent back so they are saying they will throw me into the Sava. They sent me back to the Ustashas police station. When the decision was made it was said that I was sentenced to three years. I was sent back to the Stara Gradiška camp (\*Croatian death camp in Jasenovac system subcamp). It was November 1, 1942. New sufferings began.

Marija Kaus-Škundrić

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*Marija Kaus-Škundrić, „The Germans captured us  
in Kozara“, Kozara III, 665–670.*

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## **FROM KOZARA TO THE JASENOVAC CAMP**

When the Kozara offensive began I found myself in Slabinja. We are assigned to the youth work unit. When the enemy started advancing from Bosanska Kostajnica we were informing people that they had to withdraw. We withdraw towards Mt. Kozara. I went to Baljska troop with some friends.

They gathered the youth in Mt. Kozara so we went to Pogledovo to carry the wounded to Vitlovska. In addition to youth the wounded were also carried by women. Sometimes we even went to the front-line where the fighting was happening and pulled out the wounded from there. We participated in the operation in Jelovac when the cannons were confiscated. We even reached the Jelovac road.

I sent one brother to the shelter near the hospital. He was 12 years old. I met my father in Mt. Kozara and asked him who my brother was with. He told me: "My child, we should all go in different directions and maybe someone will survive." Those were the last words my father told me. I never saw him again. My little brother stayed with me even when I joined the partisans in Slavonia.

The order came for the breakout. I was assigned to take care of the seriously wounded who were driven on horsecarts. We headed down Široka Luka and Mlječanica. It was the last night of the breakout. During the war this was the scariest night for me. Grenades and mines were falling everywhere around us. We did not go any further. The day was dawning. I watched the retreating partisans. I thought they were crossing the river for repositions. It has never oc-

curred to me that we were left behind. When it dawned I realized that happened. More mobile wounded started leaving carts and taking shelter in the forest. I also went to hide. The two wounded men, lying immobile, begged me and Anđa Karan to kill them. I could not even imagine doing that. We found a hollow where we hid them. We left them some bread, meat and a bottle of water, covered them with dry leaves and then rolled a tree over them and buried them with branches.

After I found my little brother I hid with him in the fern. There were more young women there. We expected the enemy to slaughter us all. We lay hidden in the fern until the mother of the two girls was caught. She started calling her daughters. I told them not to go, but they got up from the hideout and left. I stayed in this place with my brother hoping not to be noticed. Suddenly I saw a German soldier calling me to get up. I got up. My headscarf and bandage fell off. I was actually wounded. My younger brother picked it up trying to hide the fact I was wounded.

They picked us up and drove into the Mlječanica. We are passing by the dead women and children. We left a brick mill behind us where we heard they put people, women and children and killed them. All this was done by the Germans. They killed Steva Karan from Slabinja right in front of us. He must have been over 70 years old. The wounded were killed and slaughtered. The Germans are acting arrogant. Every one of them is cheerful and smiling. They lined us up and then a German plane passed by. They chased us and told us to drive the cattle towards Pogledevo. We pass by butchered and wounded people. The Germans handed us over to the Ustasha.

At Pogledevo, they separated the men from women and children and chased us towards Bosanska Dubica. Previously, they took almost everything we had, even hairpins. Along the way to Bosanska Dubica, I watched children and women die exhausted from hunger and thirst, fatigue and disease. In Bosanska Dubica they gave us injections, I do not know what for.

From here they took us to the Jasenovac death camp. They transported us to Jasenovac by truck. The Home Guard who followed the truck addressed us with the following words: "Women, I know that some of you have someone in the forest, in the partisans. You who have no one. Do not betray those who have someone. Say that you have no one and that you have surrendered." He warned us not to betray each other to the Ustashas.

When we arrived at the banks of the Sava we were transported to Jasenovac by ferry. I watched a woman (I think she was from Strigova) throw her two children into the Sava and then she jumped after them. She did this when she heard we were being taken to the Jasenovac death camp.

I stayed in the camp for 7 days. The Ustasha picked up girls and women who did not have children and drove them to Germany for forced labor. They picked up male children first, from 7 to 13 years old. They wanted to take my brother as well, but I wrapped him in blankets and hid him.

When the Ustashas separated girls and women without children for work in Germany, I took one child from Persa Šteković who had two small sons. I said the child is mine so I stayed among the women and children. During my stay in the camp I watched how the Ustasha took the men away at night along the embankment next to the Sava. I saw a lot of people I knew. None of them returned. They tried to get some girls out of the camp and take them somewhere. They wanted to drag me off the train too, but Cvijeta Karan and mother of Miloš Čibić were in the train. They said that there were only women and children in the train cars. I had to hide in the train car even though it was unbearable heat.

From the camp we went to the villages of Slavonia. I was in the village of Kukunjevac. The village was inhabited by Serbian families. The Ustashas were in the school, next to the house where I lived.

I tried to get in touch with the partisans. This is where I heard about "foresters" for the first time. That is what they called the par-

tisans. One day I went to the village of Jagma to look for someone from my hometown. That is where I found Milja Karan from Slabinja. She told me there are some partisans nearby. I told her I would like to stay there and join the Partisans. I went back to take my brother with me. I previously informed Mileva Kusonjić that there are partisans there. I also told one of my friends who was from a village near Knežica and part of the partisans in Kozara that he too could head towards the forest and find partisans there. Then I went and joined the partisans. They asked me who I knew from the Bosnian partisans, whether I knew Mirko Bašić as well as some others. I got a pass and went to Psunj.

I was at the command. Here, I was accepted again into the League of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia. I was accepted by Slobodan Tomić, assistant commissar of the battalion. At that time, our proletarian battalion, which came from Bosnia, was in Slavonia so I wanted to go with them but I was not allowed. However, at the end of 1942, I left for Bosnia with Slavonians who were going on a course in Bihać.

That is how I came back and joined the First Proletarian Brigade.

Stana Petković

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*Stana Petković, "From Kozara to the Jasenovac camp", Kozara III, 676–678.*

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## **I LOST MY HUSBAND AND TWO CHILDREN**

Before the war I lived in the village of Johova with my husband Milan Knežević. We had two children: six-year-old Milorad and three-year-old Mileva.

We spent the first year of the war at home. In the summer of 1942, when the enemy army started from Bosanska Kostajnica towards the villages, we also went to Mt. Kozara with the rest. We did not know what was waiting for us there and how long we would stay. We knew we should run away from the enemy's army. We had done it before because the Ustashas went into the villages and killed and slaughtered whoever they caught.

The people left their homes and went for Mt. Kozara. We took only what could be carried. Many also chased the cattle. That is how we arrived in Mt. Kozara. We first settled not far from Potledevo, but when the enemy army arrived there and was stopped by partisans at the entrance to Mt. Kozara we retreated deeper into the forest and settled near Palež. A difficult life began. We struggled a lot. We had nothing to eat. We were not allowed to light a fire because planes were constantly flying over and dropping bombs and they also attacked with machine guns. If we started a fire to prepare food for children we had to do it quickly and put out the fire. We settled under the trees. There, each family (or several of them together) made a hut out of trees in which we lived. It was tolerable until it started to rain. Then the huts would leak and it was cold. We had summer clothes and many failed to bring blankets so the cold tormented us in addition to other difficulties.

We were most afraid of the plains that often flew over Mt. Kozara. When they came across there would be a commotion. We all cried. Mostly children. The enemy had no mercy even towards women and children. They threw bombs where they could see fires because they assumed that people were there. They knew there were no partisans in Mt. Kozara, that they were in positions towards their army.

In shelters, we were used to victims. It used to be unusual, but now we see it every day. Wounded and dead partisans were carried away, many of whom we recognized. Victims of the bombing also fell near us. One day, not far from us, Mićo Ćibić was killed and some girl with him (Pilipović from Slabinja). They were hit by a bomb. They were young, in their twenties.

The cattle that the people brought to Mt. Kozara also perished.

Life in Mt. Kozara was getting harder every day. We had run out of food and we were all exhausted, especially the children. Mothers did not know what to do anymore. I watched an unknown woman who threw her small child into the beech tree. There was crying and screaming. The child was dying there.

We spent about three weeks in Mt. Kozara. One day we were told to go home. We followed the partisan route to get out of the ring. It was raining all the time. We went through Široka Luka. There were partisans in front of us fighting with the Ustashas and the Germans to clear the road for us. During the night many people died in Široka Luka.

The next day, the enemy army moved to Široka Luka so we ran away. It is difficult to run away and carry children. The enemy was moving rapidly through Mt. Kozara. They were capturing and killing people in Široka Luka.

As we retreated towards Vitlovska we saw many wounded people. They were lying on carts. They were left on the cattle carts. Many carts were overturned on the side of the road we were passing. Cart to cart, along the river. When we passed by the wounded would ask for a knife to end their lives. No one could give them a knife or help them. They had no weapons to kill themselves. One wounded man

found a knife and tried to slaughter himself. We cried watching him; he could not slaughter himself. He did not want to fall alive into the hands of the Ustashas and the Germans.

We continued through Mt. Kozara. After a few days we came to the villages on the other side of Mt. Kozara, towards Bosanska Dubica. In the village of Sefarlije, I heard that Đuro Knežević, my husband's son from his first marriage, was wounded in the stomach. His aunt Nevenka Vikalo told me about him. She told me that girls tried to carry him to the village of Sefarlije. He told them to leave him behind. They put him in a bush and covered him with branches. He probably died there because we know nothing more about him. My little boy Milorad started to cry when he heard that Đuro was wounded and left behind. I could not do anything because we did not know where he was left.

We went through the village in front of the enemy army. We arrived in Bosanska Dubica. There were many soldiers in the town. Those who first arrived suffered the most. The Ustashas took them to the place where the market used to be. There they separated men from women. They ordered everyone to lie down on the ground and put their hands above their heads, looking at the ground. Then the Ustashas started slaughtering the men. Women were scared to watch what the Ustashas were doing. There were only cries. Blood began to flow. Soon the order came to stop the killing. The slaughtered victims were taken away and thrown into the river Una, and the blood was cleaned. A similar thing happened later when they escorted us across the bridge to Hrvatska Dubica. Three Ustashas (with the knives) were waiting for men. They would stop them in some yard, order them to take off their clothes and then slaughter them. Dozens of men, who were captured in the villages below Mt. Kozara or when they arrived in Bosanska Dubica with their families, were slaughtered there.

We arrived at the train station in Hrvatska Dubica. There were many people there. Men were separated from women and children and taken to Jasenovac, Zemun and other death camps. One day they

started separating the children. It was said that the “Red Cross” organization was doing this in order to take care of the children. They took my little boy and girl. There, I was separated from my husband Milan who was sent to a death camp. I heard no more about him. My heart was breaking with pain for the children. I begged to go with them. Finally, I was allowed. Many children were taken from their parents.

We were sent to Jastrebarsko. About 500 children were with us. Further on, there was another children’s gathering place (in Jaska). There also were a lot of our children. We heard later that the Ustasha government wanted to raise these children in the Ustasha spirit. I saw boys in uniforms: on their caps, they wore the Ustasha insignia with the letter “U”.

I worked with children for about three months. I took care of them, bathed them and cleaned them. Many children soon fell ill with typhus, scarlet fever, dysentery and measles. A lot of them died from these diseases. Both my children died there: son Milorad and daughter Mileva. Branka Vujanović, daughter of Mladen and little Đoko Bursać, son of my sister Jela, also died. They were taken to the hospital in Jaska for treatment. I did not let them take my son Milorad from me; he died in my arms. That’s how I lost my husband and two children. I was left alone.

There were children from many villages in Mt. Kozara – from Međuvode, Brekinja, Komlenac. Most of them were up to ten years old. For male children they put the letter “U” on their caps. I often wondered if our partisan children would become Ustashas. All children in Jaska had Ustasha insignia. I watched the teachers leading them lined up in a column of four, and each child had a “U” on their cap. We women hid and cried as we watched this.

After some time the partisans liberated the Jaska and took the children away. They also captured the doctor who worked here. They released him later so he came back and told us about the partisans. He said that the forest is full of partisans, that there is a partisan in

every bush. He told how the partisans ordered him to take good care of the children entrusted to him for treatment. Afterward, this doctor was better towards the children; the food has improved.

We stayed there for about 3 and a half months. Then the women who worked with the children were sent home and the surviving children were sent to Koprivnica. They stayed there, according to some stories, until the liberation of the country. There weren't many of them considering that a lot of them died of disease. Children were the most affected due to poor nutrition. We cooked pumpkins and cucumbers for them and fed them oat bread. They told us that the bread was from Mt. Kozara. My children could not withstand this way of life and diet. It was hard for me when I was left alone. I cried all the time. I wanted to go back home, but the manager wouldn't let me. She told me that the Ustashas said that they had cleared Mt. Kozara and that fighting was still going on there. Later in the hospital in Zagreb, I met a woman who asked me where I was from. I told her that I was from Bosanska Dubica and she wanted to beat me saying that she was in Mt. Kozara. At all events, the staff treated us inhumanely.

Usually, all children who die are stuffed into a chest and when the chest is full they are buried. I heard that all the children who died there were buried in three places. So it remained unknown where which child was buried. I could never go to this place. Even now, I often remember how my children, Branka Vujanović and Đoko Bursać, gathered around me and called me mom. Branka and Đoko were separated from their parents and sent there. They kept crying and saying that I was their mom. It is difficult to endure children's cries and calls. However, the disease reached many so they died far away from their parents.

After more than three months I was sent to Zagreb to work in a children's shelter at Kulićeva street no. 19. There were children from Mt. Kozara, without parents. This shelter was supervised by professor Dr. Camille Bressler who worked at the "Red Cross". He treated us very humanely. I went to his place. He gave me a remittance for

shoes. Every month he gave me one thousand kuna (\*NDH currency). I found out that he also helped families some of whom were in the partisans. I told one nurse how Prof. Bressler helped me. I did not know she was a Ustasha. She was born in Dalmatia and her name was Šimica. She later reported him to the Ustashas so he was imprisoned. I do not know if he survived the war and if he is alive.

I stayed in the shelter until the spring of 1943. Then I was forced to work in Germany where I stayed until liberation in 1945 when I returned home to Johova.

Anka Žujić

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*Anka Žujić, "I lost my husband and two children",  
Kozara III, 681–686.*

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## TO SLAVONIA AND BACK

In the ditch around us people are worried and scared. They do not have tobacco so they roll up a dry leaf and smoke. The suspense begins. Some say we should lift our shirts and show the enemy we surrender. However, it is too late. We are surrounded by a ditch. The enemy is at all heights. He is shooting at us. He is coming towards us. We are waiting. We can not go anywhere. Ustashas in helmets are coming. They are searching for us. One man from Brekinja was with us. He had a brother in the partisans. They found two bullets and a red five-pointed star when they searched him. One Ustasha slapped him and said he would be shot. I remembered that I also had a five-pointed star in my pocket. (I got it in the Youth Company at the end of May when I went to the assembly in Prijedor. Young men and women wore five-pointed stars on their coat lapels at that time.) I quickly threw it in the grass. I tore the red thread from the lapel where the five-pointed star was attached. So I removed the doubt from me. After searching everything the Ustashas took us away. They led us down a ditch where there were dead people. They lead us to the clearing. I see a lot of people there. There are familiar families.

While we were still moving towards the clearing the Ustashas caught a hidden partisan. They are chasing him. On the other side, they found another armed partisan; they are also chasing him. Ustasha stabs him in the stomach with a bayonet and another stabs him in the back. A woman's voice and a cry were heard. One woman was carrying a child in her arms. When she noticed what

the Ustashas were doing she shouted to kill the partisan, but not to torture him. It is probably her husband, brother or someone in the family. He defended himself with his bare hands. They hurt him and hit him with butts and then shot him. They also killed a man with whom they found bullets and a five-pointed star near the hill. They also killed a partisan who did not manage to take off his uniform in front of us.

When we reached Luka they told us to sit down. There are guards with machine guns around us. They ordered the elderly people, my relatives, to drag the three murdered men behind the house. There were many human corpses in a heap there. When we left that place a pile of corpses was doused with gasoline and set on fire. We noticed a big blaze not far from us. Near a small house lay dead children and an elderly man with a mustache. They were said to have been killed by a shell. An enemy plane was circling above us. They were signaling it. There were more enemy soldiers there. They come from the nearby forest and say how several partisans hid there. We headed towards a hill. I saw a lot of German soldiers. All are well-trained and armed. They are young and rested. I thought and wondered how the partisans could resist them so successfully and for so long. Three thousand partisans resisted strong German, Ustasha, and Home Guard forces. And there were also Chetniks.

They chase us across the village towards Bosanska Dubica. We came to Kruškovac. There we were greeted by five Ustashas in short pants; they wore fezzes on their heads. They are armed with rifles and bayonets. They sharpened them by the side of the road. There were more troops there, but they took us over. They brought us to Dubica where we would spend the night. The night was difficult. They separated people and killed them. This went on all night. Killed people were thrown into the Una. We are in the courtyard, on the main street. A soldier came. He wore a white shirt. He told us that the following day we would all be slaughtered. Fear crept into people. Women and children were slaughtered. The crying is getting louder

and the enemy soldier is saying that tomorrow we will all be dead. The women wanted to go first, then the children.

It was decided that we would go together. They transported us by truck to the village of Gradina, next to the Sava River in the morning. Ustashas were waiting there with bayonets. They are all in short pants. We were convinced that they would slaughter us. Meanwhile, the raft arrives. We were boarded. We think that they will slaughter us on the other bank, up to Jasenovac. Some women jumped into Sava because they were convinced that they would be killed there. They were jumping so as not to watch the death of their children. Ustashas shot after them. When we landed on the other bank of the Sava we saw many people there. They lined us up in a column. We headed towards the death camp. They took us out to the field. There is a large camp surrounded by wire. They forced us inside. That was where they separated us. All men aged 12 and over are separated on one side and women and children on the other. My mother hid me among women and other children because I was 14 years old. The people they separated were shaved and told they were going somewhere. A lot of people remained in the death camp, in Jasenovac, for 8 days. During that time they cooked us beans three times and several times we were given a piece of bread. Most of them vomited this food. We had no drinking water. Thirst is worse than hunger. They poured water into the barrel and only a few buckets. The water is cloudy and lukewarm, and worms swim in it. But even such water is hard to come by. There is always someone waiting and pushing to get closer. My aunt was pregnant; on one occasion, she wanted to grab water and the Ustasha beat her with a branch.

After eight days, after they wrote down our information, they told us we were to go to Slavonia. The train arrived and we set off. The Ustasha in our train car asked me if I was a partisan courier. My mother replied that I am still a child and I do not know what that is. This was confirmed by the other women and the Ustasha left. We reached Daruvar. They disembarked us there. We were hun-

gry. A woman, beautifully dressed, brought a basket of bread. We were scrambling for bread. From there we went to Pakrac where we were collocated. They took us by coach to the village. In the coach in which there were: my mother and sister, me and some other people, the Ustasha also sat down. They drove us towards Badljevina. The coachman and Ustasha were talking. The Ustasha said that he had arrived from Mt. Kozara and described our people as savages. He talked about how we were going to attack the tanks with pitchforks and hoes. He said that they killed a lot of that people; but as some fall, others rise. While he was talking the coachman was amazed. Ustasha talked as if we were not present.

We reached the village of Badljevina, the church. We were unloaded and collocated in the yard. Coachman Ilija Ljevar, who drove us, took me to look after his cows. I went to the neighboring village of Omahovac. My mother was taken by some people. And sister, too. So we were all spread out. When I arrived at Ilija Ljevar's house they gave me something to eat, but I could not eat. I was throwing up. For eight days the stomach could not receive food. I started looking after cows. Whenever I went out to the meadow with the cows I heard the booming of cannons in Mt. Kozara. I stayed there for 3 months. Ilija Ljevar's son-in-law was a blacksmith. He suggested that I learn the blacksmith's trade with him. I was glad. I thought it would be good for me. I even loved it. I used to go to the forge and help the master. However, he was soon drafted into the Home Guard. In the vicinity of this village there are villages inhabited by the Serbian population. One hamlet in Omahovac is also inhabited by Serbs. One day a fierce battle took place in Španovica not far from the village, which was a surprise. The locals did not assume that the partisans were nearby.

I was happy. I watched the columns of Ustasha flee from Španovica. The news spread through the people that the partisans were moving from Španovica. One evening the people gathered in the village: they are talking about the fact that they have to flee because the partisans are coming. My boss asks me about the partisans: do they

move in columns, groups or in firing squads, how can one hide from them; he asks me if they kill and slaughter, etc. I said that the partisans do not slaughter, but move around in firing squad and search everything so it is hard to hide. This scared him so he did not stay at home. They left me. I slept in the barn and looked after the cattle during the day. I woke up one morning and saw that Ustasha, my boss's neighbor, was sleeping with me. He was not in uniform, but he was armed. He was the Ustasha commissioner.

After a few days, the family I stayed with, returned home. Soon the Serbian villages around were burned. Ustashes and civilians from Omahovac went to loot property. From there they brought cattle, poultry, fruit, etc.; they brought in furniture, bedding and other things. In the evening the partisans in these villages would burn fodder and grain. One day, the Ustashes chased away the Serbian people from some villages. The population that was brought from Mt. Kozara was also collected. I saw many women, children and old people. The Ustashes chase them and shoot them. I did not want to go home. I did not come until the afternoon. At home, I found the wife of a blacksmith who joined the Home Guard. She started yelling at me. She asked where I had been until then; the Ustashes were looking for me. I made excuses, but she did not believe me and she said that I had to be here because the Ustashes were looking for all Bosnians. And really, all the Bosnians from the neighboring houses were driven away. I was scared and I did not know what to do. But I stayed there anyway.

The blacksmith's wife received a letter from her husband. He wrote from the Home Guard that he was in Sanski Most; that there were fierce battles there, that there was nothing to eat, that he was surrounded and that he was eating fodder; then that the partisans attacked them and jumped into their trenches. She cried and said that she could cut us, that she could cut off my ears, that we Serbs are all like that, etc. I had to keep quiet. By the way, I was glad that there were partisans around Sanski Most. During the deportation of the

Serbian population and people from Mt. Kozara my sister was also taken away. She lived in a neighboring village; a lawyer took her to Pakrac. Then they picked up the Serbian population in Pakrac as well as those from Mt. Kozara. They were all sent to the Stara Gradiška death camp (\*Croatian death camp system in Jasenovac subcamp). Since then, none of them have returned or called. That is how my sister disappeared.

We soon learned that some women were coming from Mt. Kozara and were looking for their relatives. My mother also came. Since we were in danger there we decided to go to Mt. Kozara. The women came to the village of Sredići, not far from Badlješina. Families gathered there, mostly women and children. There are many people from several villages. I am a grown boy; there was also one boy with me from the village of Kalendar, from Bosanska Kostajnica. We were noticeable. Because of this, my mother and some women decided that the two of us should wear women's clothes. We set off and came to Banova Jaruga. There we had to wait for the train to Novska. The two of us in women's clothes moved a little further. I even forgot that I had a scarf which almost fell off my head. In the meantime, some elderly women from this place came by and were surprised to see us. It is obvious that we are men dressed as women. Soon the Ustashes came and asked who was sitting there, but the women answered that they did not know anything about it. We are in the mass of people. Everything ended well because soon the train arrived and we set off. We arrived in Sunja and waited for the train to Kostajnica. We arrived in Bosanska Kostajnica where we stayed in a house. There we also found acquaintances from the village. They told us what it was like there. By the way, while we were in Slavonia we were constantly told that there was no one there. We knew that many people remained in the Jasenovac death camp and other death camps so we thought that there was really no one in our villages.

The following day we left for Balj. We went out to the edge of the forest. We think that we have successfully escaped and that we

are free. Three armed men are coming towards us. They have five-pointed stars on their caps. We were scared because we believed that the enemy soldiers had disguised themselves as partisans. One of them recognized me and said I was a man even though I was wearing women's clothes. He said he was glad I escaped and that I was not the only one who came dressed as a woman. They said that we should not be afraid. They are partisans. One of them talks about how it is in the village, who is alive, etc. My mother asked him where he was from and what his name was. He said that his name was Budimir and that he was from Slabinja. He says that he was with me and my father at the celebration in Mandići. He also knows my mother. Then he told us that we could go to the village. He said that there were people there and that there were no enemy soldiers. We went home. We reached our homes happily. We found my uncle there.

Velimir Tubić

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*Velimir Tubić, "To Slavonia and back",  
Kozara III, 705–709.*

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## **BAJIĆA JAME (\*BAJIĆ'S PITS)**

Summer of 1942. The summer of war in Mt. Kozara. End of July. The great Stahl offensive was coming to an end. Our overripe and unharvested wheat on Knešpolje was trampled by the endless shooting machines of the Teutons and Ustashas. The endless line of shooting machines of green uniforms. That great chain of steel and green and black uniforms moved slowly, for days, from the east of Mt. Kozara to the Una River to the northwest, systematically checking every part of the land. Aware of the fact that they did not win over the partisans this time either, they vented their anger and hatred on the bare-handed civilians. That chain killed everything in front of them. With the proverbial German meticulousness, a crazy plan to eradicate all life in this area was put into action, in order to prevent the survival and any activity of the partisans.

Until that dreadful day many people from the village of Strigovo survived the offensive. Many of them were on the run in Mt. Kozara and came back when the ring was broken. Now, the problem was how to survive in the wake of this new and total reshaping of the terrain. All kinds of stories circulated among the peasants about the fact that it was impossible to stay anywhere in front of the enemy's killing line. Some suggested that it would be best to go to Kostajnica, report to the authorities of the occupiers and see what happens. Some of the wavering ones kept saying that nothing would happen, that this was the only way out. In order to attract as many people as possible the Germans and the Ustashas let some of the peasants, who had been captured

until then, go home. They served as bait for the others. Many people from Strigovo and the surrounding villages were caught fraudulently. Among them was Dušan Banjac. That group numbered about 500 peasants, mostly elderly people: Đuda Ostoja, Mile and Petar Banjac, Trivun Sarajlija, Ilija Đukić, Mikan Stojnić, Ostoja Zec, Milan and Pero Garača, Pero Zec, Mirko and Mićo Savić, Cvijko Čopić, Đoko Sarajlija, Teja Janjuz, Stojan Lukač, Mikan and Rade Đoković, Stanko Basrak, Mikan, Milenko and Mirko Samardžija, Cvijko Kovačević – all from Strigovo; then Kuzman Borojević from Gornja Slabinja, Stanko and Stevo Babić, Kosta and Mićo Grbić, Joja, Dušan and Lakan Babić, Mihailo Slijepac, Ostoja Tešinić, Marko, Ostoja, Vaso and Pero Vukliš, Mićo Marin, Ostoja and Dušan Bjelajac, Mikan and Cvijko Tomić – all from Čitluk and many more whom I knew only by sight.

Dušan forgot the dates. He remembers that they were kept in Bosanska Kostajnica for two days. On the third day, he only remembered that it was Tuesday, they were taken across the Una to Hrvatska Kostajnica and imprisoned in a death camp. The camp was located in an open field under the road leading to the railway station. The camp was hastily set up. When they were brought in they were still setting up the barbed wire. The next day, on Wednesday, the Germans came to the camp – ten of them. With them was only one Ustasha, the fat one, whom the guards addressed as “Mr. Camp’s Official”. The line-up has begun. A German asked those who were in Mt. Kozara to get off the train. Silence. After he repeated the same command for the third time and was met with general silence, the German, red with rage, yelled at the present soldiers after which they attacked the lined-up peasants like mad dogs. A group of Ustashes came from nowhere. They were beating peasants with everything they could find. Elderly people with walking sticks got the worst of it. The Ustashes took their sticks and beat them until they were unconscious until the sticks broke on the old men’s backs.

After the beating, lining up again. This time more peasants, those who were on the run in Mt. Kozara, came forward. They lined them

up separately. One of the Germans counted them and reported that there were three hundred of them. They took the others somewhere and ordered those who remained to sit down. Although there was barbed wire around them they were surrounded by armed Ustashas from all sides. The beating began again. One of the Ustashas, the fat one, writes down the names. They take away their documents and money. Some of the peasants tear up everything they have with them in front of their guards. The Ustashas get angry and swear. They regret the money that the peasants are splitting.

A certain hope of salvation existed for some until the moment when they took those who were not in Mt. Kozara somewhere. The last glimmer of hope disappeared with them. From the behavior of the Ustasha it is clear to everyone what awaits them, even if no one told them anything. They don't even talk to each other. Not because their guards forbid it and they forbade it and punished every violation with beatings, but simply because they have nothing to say to each other. Hence the silent and senseless resistance – the tearing of documents and money. And for all questions – silence. There are some who won't even say their name. As if that makes any sense, being shot nameless. Maybe it makes.

For the third day, they do not give them food or water. However, there is neither hunger nor thirst. It seems to them that is it useless anyway – to eat and to drink. They are only surprised that their guards are still waiting. And the wait dragged on all day and night. And tomorrow, too. The July sun is scorching and scorching. And the three hundred peasants from Podkozarje, huddled on a small piece of land surrounded by barbed wire, are waiting.

Around noon, they knew the time by the bells ringing from the nearby tower, they started lining up again. This time there are only Ustashas. Their masters are not there. Again beatings and curses. More than yesterday. It's Thursday. One Thursday in July 1942. Dušan Banjac cannot remember the exact date. He forgot. He only knows that it was in the afternoon. And that it was Thursday before Ilinje (\*St. Elijah's festive day). The sun was burning straight into his head. And there was

a piece of trampled land surrounded by the wire. There, over the Una, you could see Balj, distant and unreal. They were tied with wire. Individually with hands on the back, then four in a row for each other. Then they took them. Group by group. In each hole, there are a hundred people entangled with wire. Dušan is in the third – last group. As soon as they tied them, they moved. The Ustashas in the camp would tie up the remaining ones. The work was done quickly and organized. It was obvious that the executioners were well-trained in this.

Dušan, followed by Mile Banjac, Ostoja Banjac and Đuda, his brother, are walking in one line, tightly linked to each other. Dušan and Mile are next to each other. Then Ostoja and then Đudja. Four by four. They quickly reached the shooting range. Here, too, the work was done quickly – without a hitch. When Dušan's group arrived they had already finished with the first two groups and the executioners were resting. However, not far from the place of the killings the gravediggers are still digging a huge quadrangular pit. A tomb for them all. The entire area is surrounded by armed Ustashas. The execution is carried out in a way that a group of four bound men steps forward, they are ordered to lie face down and four executioners shoot them in the back of the head at close range. For that time the others are waiting. With each subsequent four tied people the executioners change.

It was our group's turn, says Dušan. We went to lie down like the previous one. Plotinus and – nothing!?! The Ustasha behind me was a bad shooter. Or maybe he was already tired. I had a hat on. When I lay down the hat was still in this place. The bullet only went through the brim of the hat and slightly burned me above my right ear. I was completely sober. So I'm not even wounded. As I was facing the ground, I no longer saw anything, but I heard everything. It shoots constantly. The next group comes. Mile Ostojin also had a hat. His flew away. His blood splashed me. And the brain. The others near me – Mile, Ostoja and my brother Đudja – were dying. They were dead. And I'm alive. The sun was still burning. In the head. At one point I thought I was dreaming. And then that I'm dead, too. Everyone around me was dead.

Plotinus and July sun. Ilinska sun. Blood clots quickly in the sun. Flies. The Ustashas, flies and we were dead. No, I'm alive. But tied by a wire to the dead. I'm dead after all. I lie with them. Should I call the Ustasha? Will he spare my life? Maybe he will. I heard somewhere that they release the person when shooting fails. Why wouldn't they let me go, too? He will have mercy. I was lucky. That one missed. And what if he missed on purpose? No, that's impossible. He is a Ustasha after all. I will call. No, I won't, I will – and so on for hours.

The shooting has stopped. Ustashas are talking. One grins for no reason at all. Another sings a mocking song about the partisans and Russia. He sings to us, dead people. They insult us. They think we are partisans. Partisans captured at Mt. Kozara. Even dead, they mock us. No, I am not dead. I am alive. Behold, another one is alive. So, it is possible. Then I am alive, too. He is just wounded. I am not even wounded. He called to the Ustashas. He begs for his life. One shot and – he fell silent. He managed to utter just half a word. He did not even utter a whole plea. No! I will not call them. And what if they bury me alive? So be it, I will not call. I open my eyes to the ground. I see a piece of land. One sod. Sod land at Bajića jame. I am really alive. And I will not call the Ustashas. I firmly decided that so what happens, happens. Shots again. They are still shooting. No, those are single shots. One Ustasha with a shrill, childlike voice, steps out of line and fires a bullet into the head of each of the dead. Another Ustasha from the side, the one who was singing, shouts at him to stop it. A lull. Then the shots again. The same one. He moves closer to me. Another Ustasha shouts at him to stop. It seems to me that time stands still. I wonder if I am alive again. I am confused. Darkness in the head. Just darkness and nothing more. The one who is shooting is getting closer. A few more dead and it will be my turn. So, this is the end. No, it is not. The one who is singing, obviously older than the one who is shooting, yells at him and swears badly: Stop it, you brat, you are getting on my nerves with that. And this one stops. But again, he does not rest. Now he is moving the dead. He robs them. He

was joined by others whose voices I had not heard before. They sniff around us dead like dogs. They take off their suits as well, ones that are in better condition. Now what? They are closing on me. I am not breathing. Will it pass? And what if they were ordered to strip us all? Impossible! Then I am done after all. They will see that I am alive. They are so stupid, that they did not strip us alive. No luck though.

I look out of the corner of my left eye. No, they do not strip everyone, just some. The sun has set. I feel better. They take Mile's coat off. He has a nice new coat. Two Ustashas started onto him. They argued about who would get the coat. In order to take it off they are untying the wire with which Mile and I were tied together. The smaller Ustasha is holding my hand. I am not breathing. He looks into my pockets. He pulls out a tobacco box. He pushed me aside and cursed me. I guess because I am a wretch. It is good to be in tatters sometimes. They have nothing to rob me of. And there are opanci (\*traditional Serbian peasants shoes) on my feet. That is why he swears. They took Mile's coat off and moved him on me. Good. But he is very heavy. His body will suffocate me. His blood splashed me, too. I can see better now. His head is smashed in – Mile's. Dusk. There is a lot of plundering going on. That little Ustasha, with a squeaky voice, shouts that he found 930 kunas (\*NDH currency). I already know his voice. I also recognize other Ustashas by their voices. We have been together for hours. I can not see them all. Only some boots. And I recognize their voices.

Why are they not throwing us into the pit caves? It is night. There are few guards. I guess others will come. One of them, the one who was singing, says: "Let us go to the station and have a drink. There is nothing to guard there. They are all dead".

They left. Is it possible? I raise my head. Well, yes! I am alive and it is me. Everyone around me is dead and I am alive. The Ustashas went to drink. The Ilin (\*St. Elijah's festive day) moonlight is white. And the dead. Those who Ustashas stripped off of their clothes. I am scared. I am alive among so many dead. No, I am not alone. There is one Ustasha still sitting above dead. He guards us. I look again and – it is really

a Ustasha. He is sitting with his rifle on his lap. But is he? Or do I just see things? My head is spinning again. I am thirsty. I am trying to get out from under Mile. He is heavy. I feel stiff all over – both my body and mind went numb. Mile moved. No, I moved and he fell off me like a sack. I get up on my knees and take a closer look – there is no Ustasha. Well, yes! It is a bush. I thought that the bush was a Ustasha.

I need to get out of here! To escape this death and whiteness. I crawl on my knees. My hands are tied tightly with wire. There is no one here. I am alive and the dead are with me. There are no Ustashas. There is no trace of them. Only the moonlight, the dead and me. I dared and rose to my feet completely. I took one – two steps and fell to the ground again. My legs can not hold me. They are heavy. Numb from lying down and fear. It is not fear, but something nastier than death itself. The ground sways before my eyes. The hills float like on water. I try again. My legs carry me in a zigzag, but now they listen to me – in a way. I have to just run away anywhere. I have to squeeze through and just think about being alive. I have to convince myself of that. I have to live. And remember Bajića jame.

And Dušan ran away. He ran away from dead countrymen and from the Ustashas. Him alone. The others were all dead. He escaped from Bajića jame – that horrible place which in 1942 was the synonym for death. And a humiliating death at that. Because before the death of the victim Ustashas turned their faces to the ground so that they could see nothing but the sod of the ground on which they died.

The dead were buried in a mass grave only the following day. Dušan wandered around the area for days. He was afraid to contact anyone. He could not untie the wire from his hands for a long time. According to his account he wandered and hid in the forest like that for about ten days – dirty and bearded, in tatters, hungry and tired to the point of exhaustion. He looked scary. Several times he fell into despair and lost his composure. He saw all kinds of things that happened to him. In moments of crisis he thought that there was no escape after all and that he would end up killing himself. When he looked for a ra-

zor to use for slaughtering himself. It was no longer there. He dropped it somewhere while running away. After that, he wandered for days in an unknown area thinking that he was going to Una with the firm decision to drown himself and thus end his suffering. In that wandering he accidentally encountered Božo Kuk. It was night. They met unexpectedly in the immediate vicinity of Božo's house. Both were distrustful. The conversation began with great difficulty. However, Dušan was lucky. He came across Božo who knew some members of the illegal committee in the village of Rausovac in Trokut.

Even today, Dušan Banjac fondly remembers the village of Rausovac and its wonderful people. He rightly says that partisan councilors Nikola Medić, Dušan Batinović and their other friends from Rausovac brought him back to life. They accepted him as their man, fed him, cut his hair and shaved him and nursed him for days because he was out of strength after everything he had suffered. They hid him a little short of two months in the house of the Ustasas. During that time Dušan became friends with a well-known partisan commander from that region, comrade Putnik. When he talks about these wonderful people Dušan does not separate them from his closest relatives. While he was in recovery a connection was established via the Una with Bosnia. One night, it was already the month of September, Dušan was transferred back to Bosnia. So he, having gone through all that, arrived home alive and well.

After the war, the mass grave at Bajića jame was tidied up and a monument was erected to the victims who were killed there. Dušan was also present at the monument unveiling ceremony. He was the only survivor.

Ljubomir Borojević

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*Ljubomir Borojević, "Bajića jame", Kozara III, 710–716.*

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## **A BOY IN THE MT. KOZARA REFUGE**

For me, the war began on the day I saw smoke rising over Pastirevo from the doorstep of my home. My father told me that it was the burning barrels of gasoline near Volinja. "The war has started. It will be difficult," my father said. That spring of 1941, I saw soldiers and tanks, those monsters I had never even dreamed of. It was the first time I saw an army in columns, saw the enemy, not knowing what kind of enemy they would be and how they would treat the people. As a child, it was interesting to watch the armed forces. It was fascinating so us children gathered around these peculiar machines and armed soldiers.

After some time, stories started circulating about the killing of people and the brutal treatment of the military towards the people from the villages. We children no longer took our livestock down to the plains and marshes because the German army had built bunkers around the station, guarding the road and the railway track. There was no more freedom in our fields. Hills and forests were dearer and safer for us. In the evening, my father would sit with the neighbors for a long time and they would talk about the war. They spoke about how the Ustashas were taking people from the village and killing them. When they heard gunfire coming from the direction of Bosanski Novi they would talk about how people were being killed. They say they killed Mila and Ilija, and they kill anyone progressive or suspicious. I perceived stories of these killings as something terrifying. I was most afraid of gunfire and stories of killing. I was afraid for my parents and for myself.

My father and the neighbors would go somewhere during the night. They started talking about going into the woods. Nikola, Milan, Branko and many others went. They went there through Cerovica and Pastirevo to Berin Gaj. They said an uprising was beginning. The days passed. Summer came. We children expected to go to the Una river to swim again, but this summer that happiness did not smile upon us. Everything was interrupted. There were talks of massacres of people, even children, in Vodičevo and other villages, and of the uprising.

They say the gendarmerie station in Dobrljin was attacked, attacked by the Lješljani insurgents. These were our people from the village who had risen up in the rebellion and were in the woods. Later, there were talks of Partisans and Chetniks. We had to leave the village and the house beneath the big ash tree and often hide with relatives in Cerovica, Žuljevica, Prusci. We had to flee often because the enemy army was coming into the villages, burning and killing. As a child, I didn't know the difference between the German army, the Ustashas, and the Home Guard. All that was known is that when they entered the villages, they burned houses and killed people.

So, one morning in the summer of 1942 a new movement was announced. The enemy was coming again. We had to flee once more. We headed towards Mt. Kozara, that vast and peaceful forest of which I knew nothing until then. The war had already lasted for a year and it was no longer unknown to us children. We had already learned a lot. Nights were no longer peaceful. We knew the enemy was in Bosanski Novi with fortifications along the railway and road to Volinja and Bosanska Kostajnica, towards Prijedor. Behind us was free territory towards Pastirevo, Berin Gaj and then across Mt. Kozara. We children also knew about the Germans, the Ustashas and the Chetniks. We heard stories that they were our enemies, that they wanted to burn, kill and slaughter. They took everything they came across. We often saw Partisans. They came from the villages – Nikola, Milan, Desan and many others. We had already heard of Šoša,

Žarko, Ratko, Boško, Mikan, Mladen and other Partisans. We loved the Partisans and we eagerly awaited their arrival in the village.

My friend Drago, who was the same age as me, when the Partisans arrived greeted them with “Death to fascism, freedom to the people.” That’s how we established contact with the Partisans.

In the village of Ravnice, even before we left for Mt. Kozara, a pioneer squad had been formed among the refugees. We gathered at a stream called Lilovac. Our neighbors Slavko and Nedo lined us up and told us that from now on, we were Tito’s pioneers. We learned to write letters. Slavko and Nedo were trained similarly to the Partisans. Both of them had guns with holsters which especially attracted and interested us children. During these pioneer meetings we learned more about our struggle, about Tito and the Partisans, but it was very brief because the enemy army didn’t give the people peace. They often came into the villages, chased and burned. We were often on the run.

Then, one morning in June 1942, we were awakened by gunfire coming from the direction of Bosanski Novi and Ravnice. Columns of people began to form and we set off towards Mt. Kozara. As usual, when leaving in the morning there was shouting and commotion. We gathered anything we could take with us. Columns started moving. We were informed that the enemy was coming so we had to hurry. Cattle were led and we took whatever we could carry. We walked on the paths that were the safest. We usually fled towards Žuljevica and Berin Gaj. Before, when we would flee we would usually stop if the Partisans intercepted and repelled the enemy forces. However, this time it was said that the enemy was advancing so we had to keep moving forward. We crossed Žuljevica and passed by Lješljani. There, for the first time I saw burned-down houses and destroyed machinery. It was the Lješljani mine which the insurgents had previously set on fire and disabled. We stopped in Prusci at the Mačaka family. Families usually stopped at their friends and acquaintances. We stayed the night here. In the morning we headed towards Karan, through Dumbrava, passing by the marine church. The journey was

becoming increasingly arduous, particularly for us children who weren't used to this kind of strenuous traveling. Even younger children than me had to walk. The elders had to carry food and everything necessary including the younger children.

One evening we arrived at Planinica. We prepared something for dinner by the fire, some kind of porridge. We spent the night there and in the morning we set out descending to the road connecting Prijedor–Knežica–Bosanska Dubica commonly known as the Jelovac road. We were heading towards Mt. Kozara. This was the first time I had laid eyes in Mt. Kozara. Behind us, we could hear heavy gunfire and now, on our left, we heard more shots. Dust clouds were visible on the road. It was said that tanks were coming from Bosanska Dubica and the Partisans were constantly engaged in battles with the enemy.

We reached Mt. Kozara. For a while, we traveled through the forest to find a place deeper in Mt. Kozara to settle. It seemed we had reached somewhere near Pašini Konaci, by a road and a small river. It was probably the Mlječanica river. Here, above the river, they selected spots for making huts to accommodate families. These huts needed to be closer to water and the road. Typically, families in flight would gather and cooperate with neighbors, friends and others. These settlements were formed according to earlier settlements, villages and hamlets. People wanted to be close to one another.

We managed to bring some food in our bags. Our cattle were herded along as well. My family had a cow which we brought with us. We mainly survived on milk. Often at night we would hear gunfire toward Patrija, the Jelovac road, Poglede, even though at the time I didn't know the names of these places. Older people, women and children remained in the refuge. The rest were at position on the front lines. During the day they talked about how and where the battles were taking place. Some people, likely members of committees, visited, as did Partisans, and they discussed what needed to be done. They gathered everyone who was younger and stronger, and

they went to the front lines at night. I heard that Mirko Vukojević (my cousin), and later Milan Knežević, were killed. News arrived that battles were fought every night.

After about eight days on the run, old Petar Đurašinović came to us so that evening I went to him to bring some food. My younger sister Danica accompanied me. My older sister was also there. Her husband, Milan Đurašinović, was with the Partisans. We spent the night at old Đurašinović's cabin. That night was when the first breakout of the enemy's encirclement occurred so we left to escape it. We walked through the dark. We passed through Široka Luka and continued toward the Jelovac road. However, something in the dawn hours made us hear someone shout "the enemy" and that we couldn't go further. In the midst of this commotion we heard gunshots. We had to turn back to Mt. Kozara. I can't remember if we ended up in the exact same place we had been before. Perhaps we stopped a bit closer to our previous refuge. Later, I found out that my parents had managed to leave Mt. Kozara and return home. They seemed to have gone ahead of us, allowing them to pass. In this way, a certain number of families who were closer to our positions managed to escape from the encirclement that the Partisans had broken.

Now my younger sister Danica and I remained in Mt. Kozara, with old Petar Đurašinović, where our older sister was as well. This night had separated us from our parents. Several times later we attempted to break out of the encirclement, but we were unsuccessful. One day, old Petar told us to go through the forest somewhere. We reached a place above the village of Palančište. That was the first time I saw Prijedor. I watched it with great interest.

We arrived at a partisan kitchen where the cook was Ljiljak Jovo. He had worked for Peter earlier so they knew each other. He was a pleasant man (he later died during the offensive). He gave me a portion of beans with a piece of meat and a slice of bread. Since I was very hungry this lunch was particularly enjoyable for me. Ljiljak also gave old Petar some beans. We returned, satisfied.

Soon we set out again. It was our last night in Mt. Kozara. We were awakened by gunfire. It was said that everything we could carry should be taken. We heard that the enemy was penetrating Mt. Kozara so we fled in advance of them. We passed by the dead and wounded people, Partisans. We went toward the village of Vojskovi. At dawn, we descended to a village by a small river. Here, we encountered wounded Partisans. They said they had been brought from a hospital and left here. They were bandaged and covered in blood. Here we found our neighbors Džaja and Nikola Pašić as well as one Vojnović and an unknown Partisan girl. Džaja was severely wounded in the stomach and chest. Nikola was wounded in the legs. Both were quite strong. They were happy to meet us. They decided to go with us. I know that Nikola went with us because he was not severely wounded and stronger. Vojnović, the Partisan girl, and another partisan also joined us. We descended toward the Monastery of Moštanica. Later, we went through the village toward Prosara. People were moving, rushing, not knowing where to go. Everyone wanted to get rid of the burdens they carried, throwing away bags and anything that was weighing them down. Panic and confusion were taking over. Our strength had almost entirely abandoned us due to wandering, uncertainty and hunger so we had become almost indifferent to what might happen to us.

When we started. Old Peter was talking about how one column of Partisans was heading up towards Mt. Kozara to confront the enemy. Our wounded neighbor Džaja Pašić told us the same, encouraging us by saying that the Partisans would confront the enemy, organize resistance and so on. We set out towards Prosara. We walked for a long time. It was exhausting, but we knew we were fleeing from the enemy, thinking that this would somehow help us avoid capture. It was a group of people who had decided not to surrender. We exited Prosara and entered a village. We arrived at some orchards and sat down to rest. There were also a group of wounded fighters with us. I overheard what they were saying. Partisans interested me because they

had weapons. Here I heard the wounded say they would stay there, hide and attack any approaching enemy – they had prepared bombs and talked about throwing those bombs at the enemy. So we parted ways with these Partisans. As the gunfire drew closer from the other side we had to turn back. We passed through the Potkozarje villages, I think, through Prijedor and descended towards Bosanska Dubica. We had nowhere else to go. I think we were among the last groups of people heading to Bosanska Dubica. Those who had left earlier were already in death camps.

We descended onto the plain, passing by abandoned houses. Old Peter reassured us. He generally acted calmly and steadily. He had been that way in the village and during our time in Mt. Kozara. As we passed through the villages we entered houses and searched for bread. I think we found a loaf of bread in one house which we grabbed and fled with. Even children found it unusual to be without bread and hunger had already exhausted us.

As we approached Bosanska Dubica we encountered enemy soldiers for the first time, the Ustashas. They had bayonets on their rifles. They started shouting at us and herded us into formation. They walked alongside us, driving a column of people, men, women and children. That's how we lost our freedom. Behind us was Mt. Kozara, our free territory. We knew we were abandoned to the enemy's mercy. At the entrance to Bosanska Dubica, I noticed barbed wire, hedgehogs, on both sides of the road. We were ordered to drop everything we had, bags, pocket knives, anything from a needle and onwards. It was to be thrown on a large pile where many items were already deposited. I was carrying a small bag inside of which was a small axe that we used to cut firewood in Mt. Kozara. I didn't surrender it because the enemy soldiers weren't searching children. So I managed to bring the small axe.

When we arrived in Bosanska Dubica they ordered us to sit next to the Una river. Their weapons, rifles and machine guns were pointed at us. I heard Old Peter say to some people: "Now we're finished;

they'll kill us here." So we sat for a long time with the enemy's weapons pointed at us. Some uniformed figures came among us, possibly officers, with some civilians who began talking to people. They were conducting interviews. They were probably looking for certain people, trying to determine who was a Partisan and so on. We were ordered to move further. When we stepped onto the bridge they started separating the men from the formation and kept them in Bosanska Dubica. One of our friends who was considered a very brave fighter was led out of formation onto the bridge. The Ustashas immediately began beating him and took him to Bosanska Dubica. They only released older people, women and children. Since Peter was an older man he continued to travel with us. I don't know what would have happened to my sister and me otherwise. My older sister carried a small child in her arms. We were still satisfied that we were not separated from our families.

We crossed the bridge over the Una river and continued further. Along the road we saw fences with barbed wire. Many people were inside these fences. It seems we were among the last to fall into captivity. The fields were full of people, mostly women and children, and the elderly. We walked along the road and reached the Bosanska Dubica railway station or Cerovljani. Again, we were ordered to sit. Enemy soldiers came among us. They initiated conversations with the older people. They selected the youth, younger women and girls and took them away. It was said that they were being sent to work in Germany. As for those who stayed behind there was talk that they would be killed. The remaining group consisted mainly of older women and children. Even though there was talk about going to work in Germany many women didn't want to be separated from their children, to leave them. Older women hid their daughters in some way to protect them from going into captivity. My sister was separated, but she hid and ran away. She returned to her child who was still very young. She somehow managed to save herself.

One evening, they separated us children into some barracks. I don't remember how it all looked. They kept us separated for some

time. However, we were not completely separated from our families. We were only separated for a while in a separate barrack. They fed us with leftovers. In the evening, they brought bags of crumbs and bones. Judging by everything, this was the food that remained on the tables of the enemy soldiers. They threw it among a pile of children and we kept fighting over whatever we could get. This was good for us. I don't remember how we ended up with our families again because it appears we were released from the barrack where the children were separated. I found myself again with Old Peter and my older sister. Then we were crammed into some train cars and driven away, but I don't know where.

We arrived in Banova Jaruga. There, the train was stopped. They didn't allow us to exit the closed train cars immediately. The conditions inside the train cars were unbearable. We were so tightly packed that you couldn't sit or stand. We had no water. July is the hottest month. If they had kept us inside for just a little longer we probably would have died. Later, when the train cars were opened, some people were carried out unconscious and dead. Among them were children and older people. The time spent in these closed train cars was the hardest for us.

We got out of the train cars and sat down beside the railway track. Soon, local villagers, peasants, came near us and threw corn at us because they could see how hungry and exhausted we were. The soldiers didn't allow them to do so, but they took advantage of the moments when the soldiers were not around and gave us some food. There was an apple tree nearby and we, the children, tried to get to it and harvest its fruit. We ran despite the warnings of the enemy soldiers and grabbed apples. Some soldiers would catch us and beat us, but we still managed to grab a few apples which somewhat refreshed us. We were held here for about three days. It was said that the Partisans had sabotaged the railroad or attacked the enemy somewhere nearby which was why the train had been delayed.

We continued on our way. I don't remember exactly whether it was Novska or Lipik. When we got off the train, us children were

gathered under a tree, sitting on the ground. At that moment, a civilian and a uniformed man, probably an Ustasha officer, came to us and started lecturing us. They told us how we came from Mt. Kozara, where the Partisans or as they called them, bandits, had been defeated. They also spoke about Ante Pavelić, praising him. However, we children already knew that Pavelić, with the Ustashas, represented a butcher who killed people, and so on. He claimed that all Partisans were killed and mentioned some of them by name, including Šoša, about whom we children in Mt. Kozara had heard a lot. Then he said that we children shouldn't think that we would have a good time with them. While the Ustashas talked about all Partisans being killed my friend Borko, whose father was with the Partisans in Mt. Kozara, sat down next to me and whispered, "See how he's lying." We children loved the Partisans a lot so we didn't believe the Ustasha's stories even though much of it was unclear to us in the chaos of war. Our trust in the Partisans and our love for them were great especially because many of them had fathers, brothers and relatives with the Partisans. So, we didn't believe the Ustasha tales about the Partisans being destroyed. We hated the Ustashas because we had seen how they treated the people. We saw how they herded people in formations and beat them with rifle butts.

After the lecture, we continued. We reached Čaglić which is located between Lipik and Pakrac. Here, many people came out to meet us and brought us food. We were surprised. There weren't many enemy soldiers with us anymore, just a few guards. Older women didn't allow us to eat too much, fearing illness, as we hadn't eaten regularly for a long time.

Some people came here who were listing something and making a schedule. They separated me and my sister Danica and handed us over to some people. They took us with them. We came to the village of Subotska. I was assigned to a family whose last name was Varićak. My sister was with another family. She was about a year older than me. Now we are not only separated from our parents, but they also

separated us. There was an elderly woman with three sons in the Varićak family. The sons were still at home then. Later, there was an enemy offensive and they were also taken away. We also ran away when the army came. This family was quite rich so now I was much better off. I started to get used to the way of life there. They adorned me in elegant attire and even gifted me a small Slavonian hat. In contrast to my previous, often tumultuous existence, I now found myself in a much improved state. I was taken aback by the abundance of nourishment, including white bread, milk and more. It marked the beginning of a new chapter in my life following the challenges I had faced during my escape.

And here I started to hear stories about Mt. Kozara again. It was in the evening when they returned from work. There used to be an old man from the neighborhood who was very happy to talk about Bosnians. The old man emphasized how brave the Bosnians are, how they grab “by the knife”, that’s how people talked about their fight in Mt. Kozara. There was even talk about Šoša, about how Bosnian children must be protected and looked after because Šoša had said that he would come to Slavonia to see how Bosnians are treated, to see how they live. We children were especially glad to hear that Šoša was alive. Otherwise, the family I stayed with treated me very nicely. Later I found out where my sister was. I also found out about old Petar Đurašinović so he came to visit me. I saw my sister often. Several times we ran away from the enemy army and sometimes in the evening I saw Partisans coming to the village. They were Croatian partisans. I knew they were Partisans because they had three–cornered hats.

Towards the end of 1942, old Petar came to me and told me that we were going home. Allegedly, a man came to walk us to the houses. We got together and set off. The family I was staying with simply did not allow me to go. They wanted me to stay with them. We arrived first in Novska and from there we went further by train. It was said that during the night the Ustashas found out about our departure and wanted to kill us. Nevertheless, we managed to leave and come to our

village. There was an enemy army at the railway station in Ravnice, but they did not disturb us.

When I got home the first person I saw was my mother who started crying. She was surprised by our arrival. Both she and my father thought that my sister and I had perished in Mt. Kozara. That's how I found myself again at my home together with my parents. There was no end to mutual joy.

Nedeljko Đenić

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*Nedeljko Đenić, "A boy in the Kozara refuge",  
Kozara III, 731–740.*

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## I WATCHED WHEN THE USTASHAS KILLED MY MOTHER

In the summer of 1942, I was turning eleven years old. Just then, a large enemy offensive raged in Mt. Kozara.<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup> It seemed to us that

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<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup> The heavy battles of Mt. Kozara and other Krajina units against the Germans and Croats during an offensive in Mt. Kozara are discussed in the report of the Operational Staff for Bosanska Krajina from July 26, 1942.

“Our forces have been in combat with the enemy for nearly 2 months. The enemy, who had moved into Krajina with significant forces estimated at 30–35,000, well-equipped and armed, operates with a German division alongside the Hungarian army. The main battles have taken place in the area of Mt. Kozara. There has been a systematic and strong blockade of our army and the population which, numbering 80–90,000, had fled from slaughter and killing in Mt. Kozara. The enemy’s losses in Mt. Kozara are estimated at 5–6,000 people. A considerable amount of weapons was captured, but our forces, engaging in frontal combat to defend the people in Mt. Kozara, suffered significant losses. It is estimated that around 400–500 partisans were killed or wounded. Our forces were in battle from the June 1 to the July 3, when, under intense enemy pressure and a tightened enemy encirclement around Mt. Kozara, they had to break through and transfer to the terrain of the I KNOJ Detachment across the Sana river. Battles continued in the area between Kostajnica, Prijedor, Bosanski Novi and Dubica, but of lesser scale, until the July 15. The battle in the Mt. Kozara region was the fiercest of all the battles fought with the enemy. Mt. Kozara and its surroundings were constantly bombed by aviation and all sides of Mt. Kozara were shelled by artillery. The enemy, under the command of German General Stahl, as well as non-commissioned and commissioned officers, was very persistent. They were tough soldiers, raised in Germany, well-fed and well-trained. The enemy paid no attention to any actions we took to relieve Mt. Kozara. With the forces (from Mt. Kozara) behind the encirclement and the forces of the I Detachment we attacked Bosanska Krupa, Sanski Most, Bosanski Novi and Dobrljin. We captured and looted a significant amount of weapons in Krupa and Dobrljin, while in Sanski Most and Bosanski Novi we inflicted significant losses on the enemy. In the battles we destroyed several enemy units completely, but the enemy constantly replenished the front gaps with fresh forces. In this offensive our weaponry was not damaged; in fact, we have more weapons than before the start of the offensive. However, in these fierce battles we lost many fighters and a considerable number of political leaders. We could not evacuate some of the wounded

the battle was taking place there, nearby because the roar of enemy cannons, mortars and machine guns reached our village. Every day the fight was getting closer to our village Pucari. Enemy planes flew over the villages below Mt. Kozara. We saw them well. As children, we no longer looked forward to them, but feared them because we knew they were throwing bombs and sowing death. They also started throwing out leaflets telling the people to surrender to the German–Croat authorities with false promises that nothing would happen to us.

There were eight members in our family – my father Marjan, my mother and three children (two younger brothers, Ostoja, aged five, and Tomo, aged three). Our grandmother Milka lived with us as well as two uncles – Đuka and Dragutin. Uncle Đuko went to the Mt. Kozara with the partisans in 1941. He would occasionally come home. His visits especially delighted us children. The last time I saw him was in July 1942. He talked about his mission to evacuate wounded soldiers and weapons from Vitlovska. While working on this task he couldn't break out of the encirclement with parts of his unit and remained in Mt. Kozara. One day, he came to our home, crossing Mt. Kozara. He slept in the attic of the barn. He told my mother that he would head towards Prosara the next day and stay

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during the breakout and the enemy committed terrible atrocities against them. The population of the Mt. Kozara region suffered greatly. The enemy was furious that our armed forces had broken through and turned against the civilian population. They sent the men to work in Germany and took the village girls to public houses in Prijedor and surrounding towns. It should be noted that the enemy conducted thorough searches of the forest when they entered it, they cut down rotten trees, machine–gunned tree crowns, searched ravines and marched in formation through the entire Mt. Kozara. It was very difficult to move the civilian population and a portion of the army that could not break through the enemy encirclement. Now the enemy has left certain areas around Mt. Kozara and concentrated their troops in garrisons in Prijedor, Sanski Most, Bosanski Novi, Dubica, Kostajnica and Gradiška. Occasionally, enemy units roam Mt. Kozara for looting and forest searches.”

(Excerpt from the report of the Operational Staff of the NOP (\*National Liberation Movement) and DV (\*Volunteer Army) for Bosanska Krajina, July 26, 1942, to the Supreme Staff of NOP (\*National Liberation Movement) and DV (\*Volunteer Army) of Yugoslavia about the situation in Bosanska Krajina).

in the Tramošljanska forest which was about one kilometer away from our house.

The enemy was already marching through Mt. Kozara in formation. They were moving toward our village. My family decided that my mom should take out a white sheet and place it on the clover behind the barn. It was assumed that the enemy wouldn't open fire then and we hoped that this would help protect our family.

I found myself in front of our house when the enemy army reached the village. It was the first time I saw a German uniform. In front of our house there was a German officer with one soldier, his escort. They were talking to one of our neighbors. The German officer was looking in the direction of Prosara.

Mom called me into the house giving me the white sheet to spread it on the clover. When I returned the German officer had left.

That day, our father slaughtered a lamb and our mother prepared a good lunch. It was as if he knew it would be our last meal together at our home. We all had lunch together except for uncle Đuko who had already left for Prosara. Later, I learned from my uncle that our father had considered killing all of us and then himself. He confided in his brother Dragutin and cousin Mirko, but they were not in favor of it. They believed that someone from our family might still survive. My father told them that he couldn't bear to watch the enemy kill his family while he was alive.

As the night approached the enemy army was getting closer to the village. The first enemy tanks arrived. The soldiers began to force the people out of their homes. Large columns of people, facing Bosanska Dubica, were formed. Father harnessed the horses to the cart. We all sat in it and joined the long column of people. The enemy soldiers shouted at us to move faster. You could hear the crying of women and children. People cried even when they were leaving their homes. It looked like a funeral procession. Everything was sad and tearful. Even the livestock that we were herding became agitated due to the heavy shelling. Grenades were falling around us, even at close range.

While we were traveling we didn't speak at all. My father observed all of this and saw that we were frightened. He approached us and comforted us, saying not to be afraid although he, my mother and grandmother were also worried.

On the way to Bosanska Dubica we encountered enemy soldiers and tanks. We reached a road leading from Moštanica to Bosanska Dubica and crossed a river. On both sides of this road enemy soldiers were standing. One soldier stopped us and he recognized my father. He cursed his Partisan mother and asked how long he had been in the Partisans. He was also interested in where his brothers Đuko and Dragutin were, mentioning that Dragutin had driven Partisans. Father told him that they had left with their families, just like he had. The soldier sternly replied that Đuko had no family which was true. This enemy soldier either knew our family or had been informed about it. He then took out a box of cigarettes and told Father to smoke one for the last time. He said that we had come to the right place and wouldn't return from here alive. He threatened that we would leave our heads in Dubica.

Our frightened father took the cigarette that the enemy soldier had lit for him. He asked Father to put down the knife and ax if he had them. Father replied that he had nothing although he had a small ax hidden inside the cart. Along the road there was a considerable heap of knives and axes that people had left here on the orders of enemy soldiers. Listening to this conversation I thought we were all going to be killed.

Behind us there was a large column of people who were supposed to continue their journey towards Bosanska Dubica. Enemy soldiers demanded that they put down their knives and axes, too. We had no choice but to continue on the path where the enemy soldiers were pushing us.

We arrived in Bosanska Dubica. There, in the main street, my father stopped the horses, took a blue pot and went to the tavern. He brought us a full pot of some yellow drink. He drank and gave it

to us. It was as if he wanted to make us drunk to help us better endure suffering and fear. The enemy soldiers urged us to move further across the bridge over the Una river. We were driven to a detention camp in Cerevljani. We stopped under a willow tree. My father let the horses go and after digging out a piece of wood from the cart he made a fire. He took care of us.

In Cerevljani, there were many people, a vast open field. It seemed to us children as if all the people from Bosnia had gathered here. Instead of a barbed wire fence around us there were guards – Germans, Ustashas and the Home Guard. Several meters away from us, across the road from the camp, there was an enemy plane.

As soon as we arrived enemy soldiers began hunting people. They went from family to family, separated and took away the adult men and put them in a special formation away from us. They were forced to undress down to their waist and kneel, facing the sun. The July sun was scorching even in the little shade which was scarce. I thought about how those men, our fathers, must feel as they gazed into the sun. As a child I occasionally glanced at the sun, but I couldn't bear it so how were they managing? I knew that they must have been in great pain.

I noticed my father kneeling in the left column. My grandmother and my mom were crying concealing their teary eyes from the sight of us children. They were cooking pie and wanted to bring it to my dad. My grandma was the first to attempt to give him some food, but when she came near the the formation the Ustashas started shouting at her.

After some time, my mom went to give food to my dad. She paid no attention to the Ustasha's threats. When she was far from us, perhaps fifteen meters away, one enraged Ustasha fired a burst from his machine gun at her. She fell to the ground. Her body was riddled with bullets on the left side. Two of her friends, I think they were from Knežica, rushed over, took her by the arms and carried her towards us. We, three brothers, and our grandmother watched all of this. Our hearts sank. We were simply stunned.

Our grandma signaled to these two good friends to place my mom on a blanket where we had put a white sheet. The blanket was woven by our mother who was now dying on it. We watched my mother sitting in the cart. She was covered in blood. I was so frightened as were my two younger brothers that I couldn't cry. Something was choking me. I thought we would all perish. Our mom looked at us, her three sons, but couldn't say anything to us. She whispered. She was battling with death. How much it would have pleased us if she could have said just one word to us. A warm word from our mother. We were left without that word. She couldn't. She was on the verge of death. As we looked at her, her eyelids were rapidly fluttering and big tears streamed down her cheeks. I experienced what I feared most, like any child, which was watching the death of a parent. I experienced it. I watched an Ustasha shoot my mother and she was dying in front of my eyes taken away to a place she would never return from.

In the meantime an Ustasha officer arrived. My grandma addressed him with these words: "Sir, my daughter-in-law is seriously wounded." He called over an Ustasha who brought a cart. He stopped it behind my mother's head for the length of the stretcher. He got into the cart and kicked the stretcher out of the cart with his feet. My grandma and a few other women placed the stretcher next to my mother. They put her on the stretcher. Ustasha officers and the driver stood beside the cart. Grandma asked the Ustasha officer to kiss her daughter-in-law one last time. The officer angrily replied that she couldn't. My grandma knelt down and kissed my mother. We, my two younger brothers and I, watched all of this.

We waited for my mom to say something. We heard her, choking on blood and tears, say, "Dear mother, take care of my children." Those were the last words of my mother. She went somewhere. They put her in the cart and drove her away in an unknown direction. I believe she didn't emerge from the cart alive. She lost a lot of blood. From our mother, we were left only with a bloody sheet and blanket.

My father, who was in the formation and looking into the sun, witnessed all of this. He wasn't far from us. A few hours after that they took the formation of men in which my father was and walked them away. As they passed by us on the road my father cried. He gazed at us waving his hands. The Ustashes beat them with rifle butts. It was the last time he laid eyes on his children and the last farewell to our father. So, we were left without parents. The Ustashes killed them.

Instead of the joy and pleasure that children usually expect on this day, the July 12, when a famous fair is held in Bosanska Dubica, we were left inconsolable and alone with our grandma — Ostoja, who was five years old, Tomo, who was three, and I, who was eleven. Our dear parents, our father and mother, were no longer with us. We watched them being led to their deaths. Our grandma took care of us. She cared for us and made an effort to, as much as possible, replace our parents. She had bitter experiences from World War I when she raised her sons Marjan, Đuka, Dragutin and daughter Radosava. Now her grandchildren remained: Vlatko, Ostoja and Tomo. They also needed to be raised. Only our grandma could do that and there were many grandmas like her in Mt. Kozara.

Vlatko Dimić

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*Vlatko Dimić, "I watched when the Ustashes killed my mother", Kozara in the National Liberation War. Records and memories, book IV, Military Publishing House, Belgrade 1978, 359–364.*

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## **SEPARATION OF CHILDREN FROM THEIR PARENTS IN THE JASENOVAC DEATH CAMP IN THE SUMMER OF 1942**

After several days of continuous battles over Mt. Kozara and its surroundings an eerie silence fell. The fascists arrived and gathered all the people from Sreflije and the surrounding villages of the Bosansko–Dubički district into large columns, herding them into captivity. They chased us through Bosanska Dubica toward the railway station in Cerovljani. Many people from Mt. Kozara were gathered there. They separated the men from their families and drove them somewhere. Then they drove us, a larger group of children, to Uštica, not far from Jasenovac. We stayed there for about three weeks. We spent this time with practically no food. What we brought from home didn't last long. The living conditions under Ustasha guard and violence were unbearable.

One day, our long column was set in motion from Uštica towards the Sava river and from there to Jasenovac. As soon as we crossed the river the Ustasha began separating older boys around fifteen years old. They separated my brother Boško, who was slightly older than me, and me. I was thirteen at the time. Boško was separated along with a group of peers into a courtyard. That's how we said our final goodbye. They also separated me into a formation with my peers. At the moment when a column of women and children passed by us I discreetly joined them.

As we moved away in the column of people I looked sadly toward the group of separated boys where my brother Boško was. I also saw Sava Krneta, Stanko Banjac and a boy from Bjelajac who lived with a family in our village of Sreflije. I saw them crying for their parents. My mother tried to approach my brother, but the Ustashes didn't al-

low her. None of these boys who were separated and held here returned to their parents. They disappeared somewhere in the camps. All of them were under fifteen years old.

While traveling in the column I thought about the grim fate awaiting us. First, they took away our father Mikan and all the neighbors: Jovan Miljuš, Sretko Miljuš, Svetko Miljuš, Pero Sekulić, Živko Sekulić, Rade Burazor, Marjan Burazor, Jovo Burazor, Milo Sekulić, Simo Sekulić, Marjan Sekulić and many others. Then they took away my older brother and all of his peers.

They crammed us into cattle cars. There were many of us in one car – up to 80 women and children. It was even hard to breathe. There was a strong July heat and the cars were completely closed. We couldn't get any water. The smaller children were continuously calling for their parents and water. We were suffocating in the sealed cars.

We traveled in an unknown direction. We reached Pleternica where we stayed for a few days and then we were distributed to various families in the surrounding villages. I ended up in the village of Latinovci with Trivun Bogojević and I looked after the livestock. One of Trivun's sons was with the Partisans. He welcomed us warmly. His son, who was with the Partisans, would sometimes come home at night and visit his parents. Otherwise, the Ustashas were present in the village.

There were other families from our and neighboring villages. They worked for the locals, took care of livestock and performed other tasks that were in progress. We constantly thought about how to return home even though we didn't know what it was like there. Women with small children had the hardest time. They were the first to decide to go home into uncertainty. My mother and I also left. At the Cerovljani railway station we encountered many women and children going home to Mt. Kozara. The Ustashas welcomed us again. Somehow, we passed through. My mother wrapped me in an old blanket so that the Ustashas wouldn't notice me. We continued on foot toward Bosanska Dubica. A difficult journey lay ahead.

In Croatian Dubica, Lucija Kolareva, originally from Božići, a

Croat, met us and warned us not to go to Bosanska Dubica because we would be killed. This information was a lifesaver for us because all those who went to Bosanska Dubica at that time were killed. Among them was our neighbor Anka Sekulić with her son, Marta Sekulić and Savka Burazor with five children. They were returned to the Jasenovac death camp from Bosanska Dubica with their children.

We didn't know what to do. We couldn't go back and we weren't allowed to go home because it was impossible to pass through Bosanska Dubica. Lucija Kolareva accepted us and we stayed with her for some time in Croatian Dubica. My mother went to work for farmers, picked peas and did other jobs. In the evenings, she brought us a little bread and that's how we survived. I also picked apples and brought home whatever I earned for work. We spent a month and more days this way.

One day, I decided to return to our village. I crossed the bridge in Bosanska Dubica unnoticed and arrived in a deserted village. Živko Burazor came along with me. The enemy army was in Pučari and in our village of Sreflije near Marić's house. It was October 1942. Only a few chickens could be seen. They ran away from us as if they were wild animals.

There was no one in our house. I spent the night in the wilderness and the next morning gunfire erupted. Partisans attacked the enemy position in our village near Marić. The battle lasted for about an hour. It was during that time that my mother arrived home. On the way she came across a dead enemy soldier, an Ustasha.

It was very dangerous to stay here caught between the two fires. We returned to Bosanska Dubica. After about fifteen days we came back home again. It was already late autumn in 1942.

Živko Indić

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*Živko Indić, "Separation of children from their parents in the Jasenovac camp in the summer of 1942", Kozara IV, 368–370.*

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## WE GOT OTHER NAMES

Shortly after the attempt by the NOP (\*National Liberation Movement) unit from Mt. Kozara to break through the fascist encirclement of Gornji Podgradci and contact my father who was in the unit was severed. We heard that he had been wounded. We stayed at home for a short time. In the meantime, enemy planes were dropping leaflets in which they emphasized the strength of the German and Ustasha authorities, called for obedience and spoke of the destruction of the Partisans.

One day the fascists rounded us up in the villages and took us towards Bosanska Gradiška. We spent the night in a field close to the town. We took our livestock with us and carried what we could and considered necessary. It was a very long column of people, mostly women, children and the elderly. It was a few days before Petrovdan (\*St. Peter's festive day).

In the morning we continued our journey through Bosanska Gradiška. The Ustashes began to mistreat us, insult and curse us. They took our cows that we were leading with us. At the old bridge, which was demolished, they took pictures of us from various angles.

When we crossed to the other side of the Sava river into Stara Gradiška we were met by Ustasha guards from the concentration camp. Here, we witnessed a terrible scene. An older man was leading an ox. It was obvious that he had poor hearing. He was originally from a village in the sub-Kozara region, I believe from Turjak. An Ustasha ordered him to release the ox, but the old man didn't hear

and continued on with the ox which made the Ustashas start yelling. When the old man realized what was happening he responded that the army had never taken livestock from the people. In response, the Ustashas hit the old man with some stick which scared the ox and it began to run. Since the old man didn't have the strength to run alongside the ox, he fell. The rope with which he was leading the ox was tied to his wrist. So the frightened animal dragged the exhausted man along the road. Behind the terrified and strong animal and the dying man there was a road splattered with blood in the direction of Okučani. This tragedy of the old man caused general laughter among the Ustashas.

Here, in the field in Stara Gradiška, we had to leave our livestock carts behind, let go of the cows and other animals and proceed toward the detention camp. Before entering we had to surrender all personal belongings we had: money, knives, papers, watches and more.

After we deposited our belongings we were quartered in the camp. A few days later the separation of children from their mothers followed. From my family they first took my two older sisters Petra and Draginja. They said they were taking them for forced labor in Germany. Immediately after that they separated the four of us: me, my brother Vaso and my sisters Živka and Mara. In this way they took all of my mother's children away from her. Another separation followed: the sisters were divided among the girls and my brother and I were grouped with the boys. However, I didn't stay with my older brother for long. That's how I ended up alone.

In our group there were about 600 children mostly from the villages around Prijedor. Here in the concentration camp in Stara Gradiška we stayed until the end of November 1942. We lived in barracks that the Ustashas called "dwellings". We slept on straw and covered ourselves with old blankets. Living conditions were very harsh. The food was meager – mostly turnips, pumpkins and thin porridge made from cornmeal without added fat. We drank water from a well in which human hair could be found. The memory of the infamous

Ustasha camp guard Ante Vrban stands out. One day he delivered a brief speech to us full of threats and insults. He called us cattle, cursed our Serbian mother and threatened our parents in Mt. Kozara. He asked us if we were Serbs or not. We were scared and remained silent. Among us was Olga, reportedly one of the older inmates from Dalmatia, who whispered that we should confirm that we were Serbs. So, we replied in unison, hesitantly “Yes”. Ustasha Vrban left angrily. According to Olga, if we hadn’t confirmed this at least ten of us would have been slaughtered here because the Ustasha would participate in the killing of camp inmates after every drinking party.

Once, Ustasha Vrban brought an elderly man from a village near Prijedor to be shot in front of the children. Vrban tormented him in front of the frightened children. He pointed a gun at the old man who, when he put his hands on his forehead and mentioned his six children, Vrban laughed. In the end he killed him. Gravediggers came and carried the body towards the river. Sava swallowed another victim.

The Ustashes tried to turn the children from Mt. Kozara into Pavelić’s Janissaries. Olga, whom I previously mentioned, was responsible for working with us. She moved freely through the courtyards, visited us and conducted some physical exercises with us. We had religious education classes where we learned Roman Catholic prayers in formation and aloud. We had to sing Ustasha songs.

Poor nutrition and an unhealthy lifestyle caused various diseases to appear. Every day we witnessed the deaths of our closest friends.

There was not a day that we didn’t, while hiding, climb up to the attic of the building where we were housed to watch the slopes of Mt. Kozara. We longed for Mt. Kozara and in our daily conversations we mentioned our parents. We were always with them in our thoughts believing they were in Mt. Kozara and that one day they would come for us. Children often called their parents in their dreams.

We didn’t know how to hide anything from one another. We talked about the Partisans and when the Ustashes would pass by our barracks we would stop talking.

One of the most striking moments while I was in the death camp was a meeting with an Ustasha from my village of Gornji Podgradci. I recognized him among the Ustashas who were exercising in the camp circle. It was Nikola, the son of Marko Franić. Before the war he attended elementary school with my older brother Vaso. I told the boys in the camp who were with me that I knew him and that he was from my village. Some of them told him about it. He came to me and asked for my name. When I told him who I was he coldly said that he had killed my father. I couldn't believe that someone could kill my father. This young Ustasha, to convince me of the truth of what he was saying, took out a knife and informed me that he had used it to kill my father. There were traces of blood on the knife. My neighbors Zdravko and Veso Guskić from Donji Podgradci, Marko and Dušan Berković from Turjak and Desimir Ristić from Grbavac saw it. Ustasha Nikola asked about the Partisan Milutin Rajšić adding that he only wanted to catch him. He looked at me for a long time and asked if I was sorry for what happened to my dad. I was almost speechless with fear. I separated myself after that, cried for a long time and then washed my face so the Ustashas wouldn't notice. Ustasha Nikola Franić brought apples several times and gave them to the children. Each time he ordered me to step aside, not giving me the apples he brought for the other children.

Towards the end of July or the beginning of August 1942 the Ustashas brought a larger group of prisoners into our camp, about 250 people from the villages around Prijedor and ordered them to dig up the remains of the old fortress with shovels. They worked all day in the July and August sun without food and water while the Ustashas sat in the shade and feasted. The goal of this pointless work was to exhaust and torment people.

One day I received two pieces of bread. One morning, as the column of Kozarans passed by us, I threw it to Milan Zeljković, nicknamed Šalaja, from Barajevo.

Ustasha Ante Vrban asked the group of camp inmates who among them had been in the Partisans. No one wanted to come forward and

everyone remained silent. But one day, Milan Zeljković stepped out of the formation and said: “I was in the Partisans”.

I knew Milan from before; he was our neighbor. He had a wife and six children. He was tall, strong and handsome. He had been with the Partisans from the beginning of the uprising.

Vrban approached him and asked why he had joined the Partisans. Zeljković replied calmly and without fear, not answering the question but asking why the Ustashas had killed several hundred people in Jablanica and where are our children who were slaughtered in the camp. “I joined the Partisans to fight against the enemy and don’t want to die”, Milan continued. To that, Vrban told him that he would kill him.

One day in early November the Ustashas tied up this group and led them outside the camp. They were already so exhausted that they looked like skeletons. Some of us boys climbed up to the attic of the building to see where they were taking these people. They were killed not far from the wall. Among them was Milan Zeljković who was also killed.

In late November 1942 a commission visited us and shortly after that we were gathered and taken to Zagreb. Even at the train station we were pleasantly surprised because a crowd of citizens welcomed us with expressions of sympathy and friendship. They threw us bread and postcards with addresses. The tears of some citizens who observed us, especially the women, moved us deeply. They shared some clothing and footwear with us. I had a high fever so they transferred me to a hospital along with several other boys. I stayed in the hospital for about twenty days and then returned to my friends.

Initially, we were in the Institute for the Deaf–mute in Zagreb, Ilica 83, and later in a home on Vlaška Street, no. 37. It was the Archbishop’s residence, just below the cathedral. We were accommodated in a room that had central heating. We slept on straw. On Sundays they took us to a Roman Catholic church. Here in Zagreb the living conditions were far better than in the camp. Here we were given

different names: Ivan, Mate and others. Even though I was a child I remember that this was very difficult for me as it was for the others.

One day a civilian entered our home in Vlaška 37 and greeted us with: “Death to fascism, boys!” Then he added: “Don’t be afraid; there are Partisans in Zagreb, too”. We all thought that the Partisans had arrived. However, this unknown man disappeared. He was probably one of the associates of the movement in Zagreb.

We stayed in Zagreb for about two months. In early 1943 they loaded us into trucks covered with tarpaulins and took us to Zelina near Zagreb. Here, they placed us in a primary school. Shortly after they communicated to the public through posters that they were planning to put up the children from Mt. Kozara for adoption. Zagorje peasants came and took us with them.

A man named Florijan Banovac approached me, took me by the hand and drove me to his home. He was from Donje Orešje, house no. 115. I didn’t understand him very well because he spoke Kajkavian so on the first day I asked him if he was “Švabo” (\*a derogatory term for the Germans). He smiled at my question and made an effort to speak more understandably, in simpler terms.

Florijan’s family was inclined toward the Partisan movement. His son, Franjo, was a young communist. They treated me very nicely. I spent the first ten to fifteen days lying down because I couldn’t move. They gave me milk and did their best to help me recover.

Out of our group only five of us came to the village of Donje Orešje. The others were placed in other nearby villages: Kalinje, Vrbovec, Gornje Orešje and others. In Donje Orešje, besides me, there were Mirko Majdanac from Turjak and three other boys whose names I have forgotten.

There was another Banovec in the village, nicknamed “Šnajder” (\*Tailor), a pre-war communist who cooperated with the son of my host Franjo Banovec.

When I recovered this group of supporters of the liberation movement started using me in their work to distribute various materials. They knew I was from Mt. Kozara and from a Partisan family.

The village had quite a few Ustashas, but despite that, this group that worked with “Tailor” were very active. They maintained connections with the Partisan detachment in Zagreb. They used me to deliver reports to the detachment. I was still very young so the Ustashas didn’t suspect me. Once, the Ustashas caught me when I was carrying a letter to the detachment. I hid the letter in my shoe while leading a cow to pasture. When I reached a vineyard I noticed a large group of Ustashas. One of them called me to come to him. I approached and greeted him with “Praised be Jesus”. The Ustashas were furious and uttered curses. He asked where I was going and I replied that I was taking the cow to graze. Fortunately, I had already learned to speak like the locals in the Kajkavian dialect. They asked me to take off my clothes for inspection which frightened me a lot. It seemed like an eternity to me. When I started to undress one of the Ustashas came over and said that I was a child and let me go. That’s how I managed to deliver the letter I was carrying. I told my friend, whom I met, where the Ustashas were. When I left them the Ustashas ordered me to return the same way. So, I did, and everything ended well.

Everything went well like this until the autumn of 1944 when I got injured in the forest called Agacija. When I was returning from an assignment I stepped on an object that exploded causing me serious injuries.

After the liberation I returned to my home area. It was deeply saddening to learn that only a small number of my approximately 600 friends from the death camp returned to their native region. The fate of the rest was lost forever in fascist camps.

Duro Ivetić

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*Duro Ivetić, “We got other names”, Kozara IV, 371–376.*

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## CHILDREN – USTASHAS' PRISONERS

As a fourteen-year-old, in the summer of 1942, during the offensive in Mt. Kozara, I ended up in the Ustasha concentration camp with my parents and other people from Pucari and surrounding villages. In July 1942 the Germans and Ustashas moved us out of our homes and forced us to go to Bosanska Dubica, then to the Cerovljani station. From there they drove us to the Jasenovac death camp.

We entered the death camp through a walled gate. There were many women and children. The Ustashas surrounded us. There was an older man in civilian clothes, carrying a stick, who asked us where we were from and if we were thirsty. We thought he wanted to get us some water because we were truly thirsty. Even though we had no food we felt the most urgent need for water. This unknown man started cursing and insulting us, mentioning the King (\*King Peter II of Yugoslavia) and those we fought for. Even though I was young, like the others, I knew that the battle in Mt. Kozara wasn't for the King so this surprised us. We were aware that we were in a Ustasha death camp. Here, we saw the cruelty firsthand when they separated our fathers and older brothers from us as we passed through Bosanska Dubica. Just being from the Mt. Kozara area was enough for the Ustashas to label us as Partisans. Therefore, they treated us ruthlessly.

The man with the stick told us that this wasn't Mt. Kozara where there's water in every ditch. He gave the stick to one of the Ustashas and told him to show us that this was Jasenovac, not Mt. Kozara. The Ustasha started pushing us and hitting us with the stick. It was prob-

ably an Ustasha who was familiar with Gradina as he asked if anyone among us was from Gradina. If there was, they should come forward and he'd give them money and let them go home. Not knowing what the Ustasha intended with this one boy came forward saying he was from Gradina and provided his parents' names. But the rest of us either remained silent or claimed we weren't in Mt. Kozara and didn't know anything. The boy had escaped from Gradina and the Ustasha asked him where he was when the Ustashas were massacring people in the Draksenić church. They later took the boy into a cellar for interrogation.

From here the Ustashas took us towards the railway station and loaded us into cattle train cars. The train cars, filled with women and children, departed from the Jasenovac railway station and we had no idea where we were going. After some time, we arrived in Sirač near Daruvar. There was some shooting and we didn't know what was happening. The women and children were sent into the villages. Those of us who were in the locked train cars managed to open them and join the women and children. We went to the villages and I ended up in the village of Bijela.

To our great surprise and relief the Partisans welcomed us there. They looked unusual to us because they wore caps known as "horns". We hadn't seen this in the Partisans in Mt. Kozara.

Among us was an older man, Milač Dimić from Pucari, who had a letter with him. He gave it to the Partisans and I believe it was intended for Croatian nobles to distribute people to families in the villages.

We were poorly dressed and many of us didn't even have the most basic clothing. What we were wearing was already worn and tattered. We looked very destitute which surprised the Slavonian Partisans. Among them the people were dressed neatly in white outfits. For a moment we started to question if these individuals were truly Partisans.

Here, in the village of Bijela, near the school and church they prepared a meal for us. When we received our food we became cer-

tain that these were, in fact, Partisans and that we were now in a secure location. After a few days we moved to the village of Bastaje. We were placed among families in the village, but rarely did entire families stay with one host. Sometimes it was a mother with one or two children or older children on their own and so on. We were closer to Sirač where we had first arrived when we were chased by the Ustashas.

I was accommodated with a man of German descent who had two sons serving in the opposing army. We didn't know what happened to our parents from whom we were separated in Jasenovac. We were worried. One day we heard that our parents were in the village of Bijela. We went there immediately, but we didn't find our parents.

From there we went to the village of Pakrani. We hoped to find someone from our area there. To our great joy we found a group of Krajina proletarians (\*Partisan elite military unit soldiers) in Pakrani. They welcomed us kindly and didn't allow us to go back. We stayed with them. We were usually in the kitchen, helping out. In addition to the Krajina proletarians. There were also Slavonian Partisans here. There was also a group of armed Gypsies who had civilian rifles. They were also Partisans and they had their families with them. The leader had a carbine while the others had civilian hunting rifles.

We stayed here for some time. It was already the autumn of 1942. Meanwhile, there was an enemy offensive. The Partisans were forced to withdraw from the positions they held. We moved with the Krajina proletarians. I remember that they were somewhat discontented and, I would say, angry. They said they were going to Bosanska Krajina to fight. So we crossed Slunj and headed towards Novska. The proletarians were trying to establish a connection and transfer to Mt. Kozara, but they didn't succeed.

Our group of boys stayed in a village, I believe it was Grabovac, with a partisan committee member. There, we established contact with some families from our area. Their members told us that we

could go home and that some families had already left. We decided to go back to our homes even though we didn't know what we would find in the village.

We arrived in Bosanska Dubica where we were welcomed by the Ustashas and placed in prison. We were young and didn't know what to do. We regretted having come. The Ustashas didn't believe that we were coming from Slavonia; they thought we had escaped from some death camp. We had no documents. So, once again we ended up in the hands of the Ustashas even though we had been with the Partisans in Slavonia. Our desire to return home, to reach Pucare, led us.

We spent several days in the Ustasha prison in Bosanska Dubica. An unknown enemy soldier or perhaps an officer with three stars on his military uniform ordered the prison guard to release us to go home.

We arrived in our village of Pucari. Only a few families had returned. Mostly women and children. I found my stepmother at home, but my father was nowhere to be found – he was killed in the Zemun death camp. My stepmother, along with my two sisters and younger brother, was in Slavonia. They were imprisoned there again and then expelled to the Sisak death camp where my brother died. He was only four or five years old at the time. It was around October or November of 1942.

It was late autumn and we had nothing to eat. The Ustashas had looted all the crops and anything they could use. We would go to the villages of Jablanica and Bijakovac gathering remnants of wheat and corn to somehow feed ourselves.

In the village, there was a Home Guard unit. They soon left and the Ustashas arrived. However, they didn't stay for long either. The Partisans attacked them and they dared not linger further.

By the end of 1942 there were no more enemy units in the villages of Potkozarje. The enemy was located in Bosanska Dubica and Orahovo. The Partisans began to come back into the villages. We were safer now although we lived cautiously expecting the Ustashas to suddenly raid the village.

We noticed the Partisans passing through the village. Among them was Milan Pilipović from Sreflije. Later, I saw a group that included Žarko Gubić who was carrying a submachine gun.

Individual families were still returning from the camps. Mostly these were women and children. They came and settled on their properties. Some houses were left standing but all were overgrown with weeds. Life began to renew in the village. There were no adult men; they had been taken to camps, and we were unaware of their fate. That's how our village of Pucari looked at the end of 1942 and the beginning of 1943 – ruined, burned with a few families who had returned and started to rebuild life in the village.

Živko Sirovina

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*Živko Sirovina, "Children – Ustasha prisoners",  
Kozara IV, 377–380.*

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## **CHILDREN OF SREFLIJE IN USTASHA CAMPS IN THE SUMMER OF 1942**

One year of war had passed. We were already accustomed to the enemy forces from Bosanska Dubica and surrounding enemy strongholds entering the villages of Mt. Kozara, but we always felt secure that the Partisans would confront them and fend them off.

I was a fifteen-year-old boy. My father was with the Partisans. Alongside my mother and other families from our village we left our home and set out for Mt. Kozara. The enemy was advancing from the direction of Bosanska Dubica and Orahovo. The Partisans put up resistance.

After about ten days on the run my father came to us. We noticed that he had a bandaged arm. We were thrilled by his arrival, but it was short-lived. He said something, but as children we couldn't fully grasp what was happening. We couldn't even imagine that something would happen to us because we believed in the strength of the Partisans. We hoped our fighters would fend off the enemy and we would return home. There had been similar enemy incursions before, but they never stayed long and always returned to their strongholds.

We found ourselves on the move, at a place called Stolin Jarak, above Vojskova in Mt. Kozara. One day it was decided we would head back home. People were afraid of losing their crops and they were eager to cultivate the land. My father, Milinko, was supposed to stay in a hospital somewhere in Mt. Kozara, but all the hospitals were full of the wounded who were immobile.

We returned to the village. No enemies were present. Gunfire could be heard coming from Bosanska Dubica. Every day we expected the enemy to appear in the village. My father was powerless with just one arm, and he had one bomb. He said it was for himself. His arm was already infected, and there were worms in the wound. He cleaned the wound with gasoline and killed the worms. I felt sorry for him.

The next day my mom woke me and my younger brother up urging us to get up and bid farewell to our father because he had to go somewhere. It was a tough moment for my brother and I. We went down to the lower house and said goodbye to our dad. He told our mom to take us home and that he had to go. Our mother shouted: “Milinko, you’re leaving, and you might die. What will I do with our children?” He turned to our mother and said: “If I die, my children will live. I’m dying for them and their freedom.”

That was our last goodbye, the last kiss between a dad and his children. He left and never returned. He died.

Shortly after that we had to leave the village again. The enemy’s firing squad was advancing from Mt. Kozara towards Una and the Sava. Those days the enemy dropped leaflets from airplanes calling on the people of the Potkozarje villages to surrender.

My grandfather Mile, my father’s cousin Rade, a young man in his twenties, led us along with other families from the village. We reached the neighboring village of Klekovci where we would spend the night. We stopped, thinking we shouldn’t go any further. People assumed the enemy wouldn’t go any further. However, the enemy army covered several kilometers during the day, fortified themselves towards evening, dug trenches and stayed there until the next day. They thoroughly searched the entire area.

Early the next morning we continued our journey to Lipova Greda. There were many people and a lot of livestock especially draught animals. Families brought whatever they thought they needed from their homes. Most of the people were women and children. We were

all frightened. We moved into uncertainty. At any moment we expected to fall into the hands of the enemy and we knew they were ruthless. We were already familiar with the Ustashas due to their atrocities and massacres in the villages. We thought the same fate awaited us as the massacred people in the Serbian Orthodox Church in Draksenić in January 1942.

I was constantly haunted by the thought of my father. I loved him very much. I often dreamt of him. Now I thought he was somewhere dead, torn apart by birds of prey. I cried. However, I endured everything because no one could tell us what would happen to us. We were all consumed by one thought – what would happen to us, when would all of this end.

One day the enemy army arrived, surrounding us. We saw German and Ustashas uniforms. These were the people who brought death.

There were many of us from our village, from Donje Sreplije. Families from Krneta were there: Milos Krneta with his family, Ilija Stakić, Mile Glumac, almost all the villagers from Sreplije and surrounding villages. We stayed briefly. The enemy soldiers set us in motion. We saw them laying telephone wire to Bosanska Dubica and Orahovo. We, the young ones, were curious about what the German soldiers were doing.

We were ordered to move toward Dubica. We herded the livestock. Families who had draught animals transported some clothes and food as well as small children. Most people carried everything they had on themselves. Our seventy-year-old grandmother was with us. She was immobile and could only travel by cart. We moved alongside the Una river towards Bosanska Dubica.

We approached the bridge over the Una river. There was a shed known as Betova Magaza. It was a large wooden barn. They stopped us there. They ordered all the men who were capable of fighting to be separated from the women and children who would continue to the camps. The Ustashas began to remove the men from the group, forming them into a separate unit. We noticed Đuro Gavrilović from

Kadin Jelovac who came with two Ustashas. Our mother stood beside the train cars while my brother, our grandmother and I were in the cart. Đuro asked: “Where is my godfather Milinko?” Our mother replied that he had died somewhere to which Đuro responded with scornful words.

The Ustashas had separated all the men. They took my grandfather Mile and my cousin Rade. Milovan Jekić appeared with the Ustashas pointing to certain people who had been with the Partisans or had cooperated with the liberation movement.

A certain Kraus, an Ustasha who knew my father, approached us. He asked my mother where her homeland was and how she felt now. Fear overwhelmed us, wondering what would happen to us. The whole column of people was now reduced by half. All the adult men were separated and taken somewhere. We were led further across the bridge spanning the Una river leading us to Croatian Dubica.

They brought us to Cerovljane. Here, there were only women and children. There were a few elderly people, those who were immobile or had difficulty moving, whom the Ustashas considered unable to participate in the fighting as Partisans. In any case, all capable men were separated in Bosanska Dubica. They later brought them to Cerovljane, but separately from women and children. In Bosanska Dubica, only those the Ustashas learned were Partisans and active collaborators of the liberation movement were kept. They imprisoned them and later executed them.

The men who were separated and brought to Cerovljane were subjected to severe hardships. I approached them and brought them water. There was intense heat. People were thirsty and July was scorching. I watched a German soldier beat a peasant who had a hole in his cap so it was suspicious that a partisan five-pointed star might be hidden there. The poor man couldn't prove that the cap was only torn.

From this group of people, a smaller group of about twenty of them was sent back to Bosanska Dubica. The rest were surrounded

by German soldiers and machine guns on all sides. At night, enemy soldiers fired their machine guns over us. No one dared to lift their head.

Women and children were separated from the group of men by several tens of meters. We were a few hundred meters away from the train station. Many women and children were from our Bosansko–Dubički district. Neither the people nor the livestock had any food. Women had an idea and started tearing apart pillows and gave the feathers to the animals. The hungry livestock ate these feathers. There was little water a bit further from us so I brought it to both us and the separated men. The Ustashas noticed this and they didn't allow me to carry water anymore.

Several days passed like this. I don't know how, but orders for movement came. We were moving toward Bosanska Dubica. A large column of people with livestock and baggage on their backs started into uncertainty again. We could see that we were moving backward, toward Dubica. We wondered what would happen to us. It's hard to believe that they would let us go home. Still, there was a certain mood and hope. Maybe they would let us go home? The news was spreading that women and children would be released home "as soon as Mt. Kozara is cleared of Partisans."

We arrived at a crossroads in Hrvatska Dubica. To the right there was a bridge leading to Bosanska Dubica and to the left it went toward Jasenovac. The column, driven by Ustashas, didn't turn right but proceeded on the road to Jasenovac. It became clear to all of us where we were going – we knew what Jasenovac meant. The women started to cry.

We reached a place called Donjani in the lower part of Hrvatska Dubica. There, a civilian man came out in front of us and took away our oxen. We asked if he would allow our grandmother to get out of the cart and he said: "Let that bastard get out". Grandma got out and we took her by the hand and led her. My aunt was carrying about twenty kilograms of corn. We had nothing else to eat. She was pregnant so carrying this corn was very difficult for her.

We arrived in Uštica. We arrived in Uštice. They stopped us in a field. We would spend the night there. The Ustasha began to select and take away younger girls. The Sava river, which we couldn't escape across, was nearby. We were surrounded by Ustasha guards. Food was indeed scarce. I watched Sava Milosević, a man with disabilities in both legs, take a wheel from a cart and try to grind corn with it. Our neighbor, Old Ilija Štakic, slaughtered one of his cattle and shared the meat with the people. We spent five to ten days here. Then they set us in motion. Destination: Jasenovac. Greater fear took over. Women cried while hugging their children.

We reached the first bridge toward Jasenovac. We came to the place where a merchant Bakić used to have an iron store. It was a junction. One road led to the death camp, the other to the train station. The Ustasha were standing there. Our grandma was carrying a bag of corn and a child. I was walking beside her and carrying some luggage. My mother and grandmother told me to bend down so I'd appear smaller. They hoped I'd stay with them. When I passed by the Ustasha one of them took me by the hand and asked how old I was. I replied – nine, and he pushed me forward. I fell with the luggage. I got up and continued, but another Ustasha grabbed me and pushed me behind him. Behind me, Živko Indić, his brother Boško, Vajko Milosević's son, Sava Krneta and a few more boys were separated. That's how the Ustasha separated boys from their parents and directed them to the other side. I took advantage of the Ustasha's carelessness and since the column of women and children continued I entered that column and came back to my mother and grandmother.

We arrived at the train station in Jasenovac. There were only women, small children and very few men there. They herded us into cattle train cars and locked us in. I noticed that Živko Indić was among us. He managed to infiltrate the column of women and children and avoid separation. It was rumored that we were heading to Stara Gradiška, to a death camp. However, since it was already overcrowded there the decision was made to send us to the villages in Slavonia.

They started moving us by train in an unknown direction. We arrived in the village of Latinovac near Požega in Slavonia. Most of the villagers were of Serbian nationality. They were poorly informed about what was happening including those of us who were brought here from Mt. Kozara. I was placed with the Sava Kotrljanović family. My mother and younger brother were with another family.

Even though I was still young I thought about everything that was happening in the war. I wondered how it was possible for one people to be persecuted and killed while others lived freely as if there were no war. In the family where I was placed there were five brothers. The older ones, Pavle and Petar, later joined the partisans. They were interested in what had happened with us. I told them as best I could saying that the Partisans would continue to live in Mt. Kozara even after the offensive. They were surprised when I told them all this especially when I mentioned that my father was a Partisan and had stayed in Mt. Kozara.

There were many families from our and neighboring villages in this village. Everyone was placed with peasants. They started going to the fields to work with them. We stayed here for about three weeks. In the meantime my father's sister came to us and told us that Partisans came to the village at night. We were thrilled to hear that there were Partisans here as well. After some time we were determined to return home to Mt. Kozara. And we indeed set out. We arrived at the Cerovljane train station. The most challenging part of the journey was going through Bosanska Dubica, passing the familiar Ustashes.

When we arrived in Hrvatska Dubica my mother suggested that we go to Đuro Gavrilović who had settled here. My grandmother, with her sister and children, went to Bosanska Dubica. At that time, all families that had arrived in Bosanska Dubica were sent back to the Jasenovac death camp where they suffered. My mother, younger brother and I went to Đuro Gavrilović's place. He was surprised to see us but helped us stay in Hrvatska Dubica. He arranged with the Ustasha Idriz Bejtović, who had a tavern in Hrvatska Dubica, for me

to work at his tavern. I had to get a new name as I wouldn't have been able to stay there otherwise. They gave me the name Ibro. This was an agreement between Gavrilović and Bejtović who knew each other well. Only they knew my real name. Idriz had a wife of German descent who knew about me but couldn't do anything against my employment because she was afraid of her husband.

I continued to work at the tavern. Ustashas, legionaries and other enemy soldiers often visited. One day Gavrilović came to the tavern in the company of a Home Guard officer, a sub-lieutenant, I think. I noticed that the sub-lieutenant was crying. Later, I heard that he was crying because the Partisans had attacked his unit yesterday and annihilated them in Mlječanica. Only three soldiers returned. When I heard this I was overjoyed. I thought that among these partisans might be my father. I had a desire to see him. I kept thinking about how to go home, to the village. But how to pass through Bosanska Dubica where the Ustashas welcome families returning from captivity and send them to the Stara Gradiška and Jasenovac death camps?

I woke up early in the morning because I had to clean the tavern and the area in front of it. Almost every morning, a policeman named Ivo passed by, asking: "How are you, Ibro?" It was as if he knew I wasn't Ibro but a child from Mt. Kozara. Despite being an enemy soldier Ivo treated me quite nicely. He was a middle-aged man.

The tavern owner Bejtović told me that I would no longer work for him and that another boy named Uzeir from Foča would replace me. I went behind a haystack and cried. I looked towards Mt. Kozara and my village, but I couldn't go there. I knew the Ustashas would be waiting for me and send me to a death camp. Gendarme Ivo, who was the guard on the bridge, noticed me crying and came over asking me what was wrong. He asked if I had any family in the Partisans. I couldn't bear it anymore so I confided in him saying that I had a father in the Partisans and that he was in Mt. Kozara. Ivo then said he would come to me one day and bring me clothes and we would go to Mt. Kozara together. I believed in his promise. I waited for several

days, but Ivo didn't come. He was no longer there. I don't know what might have happened to him. It's possible that he was discovered by the enemy as a sympathizer and collaborator of the resistance movement or was transferred elsewhere.

When I informed the tavern owner that I would go to my mother's village in Kraplje that day, where my brother was with her, Idriz said that I should ask Đuro Gavrilović. Still, he let me go. I promised that I would return quickly. I went to Hrvatska Dubica to Dragoje Goronja who knew my father. He gave me a piece of cornbread which I took and went to Gavrilović's house. I knew that almost every day train cars departed from his house to collect the property from villages under Mt. Kozara. I found Gavrilović's son Gojko and asked him to let me join them in harvesting corn. I wanted to somehow reach our village. I spent the night here and the next day, when they were preparing to go to the village, I went with them. They had permits and could freely pass through Bosanska Dubica, go to the sub-Kozara villages and return. Gojko warned me not to escape because he would be held responsible if I didn't return. I promised him that I wouldn't run away, only that I wanted to see my village and my house.

We arrived in Klekovci, at Đuro Hrnjak's house, with the intention of picking corn. We worked quite hard, collecting corn and piling it up in one place. I kept the corn I received from Goronja. At one point I decided to leave and just called out to Gojko Gavrilović that I was leaving. I ran towards the village. I stumbled upon the road they forced us onto for the camp. This is how I oriented myself in the direction I should go to reach our village.

I finally arrived home. I didn't find anyone alive in the village. The corn has grown well here, too. I'm thinking about what to do. I went to the orchard and picked plums. I looked towards the Dimić houses and saw Home Guard officers who were securing the collection of crops and other belongings of the people who were driven to the death camps. Upon noticing them I hid in the

grass in the orchard. They passed by without noticing me. Nearby, they killed a cow and then a truck arrived and took it towards Bosanska Dubica.

Night was approaching. I was alone. The house was empty. It had become overgrown with grass. There was nowhere to lie down. The windows were broken. I didn't dare stay inside the house. I found some ladders and climbed up to the attic, then pulled them up after me. I might have fallen asleep for a little while. Fear had taken hold of me. I got up when I felt the cold. It was still night. I moved on. I thought I was going in the direction of the Moštanica Monastery as I knew it was located below Mt. Kozara. I had never been there, but I assumed that it might be in the direction I was heading.

I went toward Mt. Kozara. I hoped to find my father and other Partisans. I wanted to see him at least one more time. I passed through the village past the Šukundin houses, then took what they called the “monk's bridge” and reached the road. Only then did I truly feel what fear meant. Whom would I encounter on the road? Possibly enemy soldiers and end up in captivity again, that hell from which I had barely escaped.

I'm heading towards Moštanica. I come across a water mill. I notice that it's grinding. I think about whether to stop by the mill or not. I hesitated. Yet, I decided to enter the mill. I hoped to warm up inside because I was poorly dressed and almost barefoot and it was the autumn of 1942 when there was already frost.

I went inside and found an older man with a large mustache. I think his last name was Đerić. He was surprised when he saw me – it was unusual for him to see a boy at this time. He began hugging and kissing me. He had his own children whom he had probably lost during the offensive. At the same time I asked him about my father Milinko Burazor from Sreflije. I thought everyone knew him. The old man told me that he was not in our unit.

Rade Burazor from Odžinci, a young man in his twenties, came quickly. He was well-built and strong. He was also delighted to see

me and gave me food including some meat. I showed them the corn I had brought from Dubica.

I joined the III company which was located in the Moštanica sector. There I found Uroš Petrović, our neighbor, as well as Božo and Stanko Često, Rade Konjević and some others. The company commander was Đurđe Vučen and the commissar was Vaso Petrović. The leader of one platoon was Ratko Krneta, my uncle. The next day they went into action and in that action Vaso Mitrašinović was killed. I knew his son Milinko who attended school with me in Bosanska Dubica before the war. Vaso used to visit him so I knew him that way. I felt sorry when I heard that the father of my school friend had been killed.

I stayed in the company for some time. I slept with Uroš Petrović and he covered me with his overcoat. He treated me as his own. I spent about a month here and then I got sick and was moved to Boro Janković's house. This is how I separated from the fighters of the III company and remained in the village for recovery. However, I didn't learn anything about my father whom I so desperately wanted to see.

Živko Burazor

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*Živko Burazor, "Children of Sreftlje in Ustasha camps in the summer of 1942", Kozara IV, 381–391.*

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## **PRISONER IN A CABBAGE CRATE**

It happened in early spring 1942. My village, Donji Jugovci, the neighboring village Cikote along with part of the village Volari was burned and looted by the fascists. The population, in order to save their lives, fled wherever they could. Most of them were left without any property or means to live.

My family fled to Dragotinja, to the house of Rade and Milja Knežević. Rade later suffered in the war. They took us in as their own, my mother, my little sister Milija of three and a half years and me while my father and brother were with the Partisans. When we fled from the fascists we took a small cow with us and only a bundle of clothes. Everything else was left behind and lost. It was during a severe winter. Snow was falling and the cold seeped in everywhere. Everything was destroyed and plundered and we had nothing to eat.

At that time I was only eleven years old and I had already felt the harshness of life, the scarcity of everything, dangers from all sides and hunger. Bullets were flying in all directions and every day we ran and hid in the woods. I found it very difficult to endure hunger.

In search of food one day I smuggled myself and crossed the river Sana on a ferry and found myself in our burned village. I couldn't find a single walnut in the snow. The search lasted all day without success. I was sad because I had nothing to bring joy to my mother and sister. Since it was already getting dark I couldn't go back to Dragotinja where my mother and little sister were. The ferry didn't operate at night. It was dangerous and death lurked everywhere. I

was left completely alone in the night, in the burned village, very lightly dressed and even worse shod. Silence reigned everywhere among the ruins. I was frightened for a moment and I ran away. I sneaked into a burned-down barn. It was further from the road so I thought it was safest here. I found a bit of straw in the manger. I burrowed into it and awaited the dawn there. The next day I continued the search, hungry, freezing and tired. A person completely despises danger when they're hungry. Their thoughts are solely focused on finding something to eat even if they have to expose themselves to the greatest danger. I managed to find something, though. In the basement of a burned house there was a large cabbage barrel. I think I smelled the scent of sour cabbage. I looked around carefully and made sure there was no living creature nearby. Then I crept into the basement slowly. I stood next to the barrel, but it was high and I was small. I couldn't even touch the top with my hands. Several times I jumped trying to reach the rim of the barrel with my chest, but each time I went back without success. The scent of the cabbage enticed me even more. Once I leaped and managed to grab the rim of the barrel. I hung there for a long time, using my body and legs to swing, until I could hook my foot around the rim and pull myself inside. However, I awkwardly directed my body when I ended up on the other side and fell headfirst into the barrel. I barely managed to turn around, strained and stood on my feet. I was submerged in brine up to my neck. My ears were full of brine and I was pale and soaked. I searched with my hands through the brine, but there was no cabbage. However, I felt a small head at the bottom. I pressed it with my foot, grabbed my nose with one hand, dove in, and with my other hand, pulled it out. It was small and I ate it with relish. I found another cabbage head and ate it. I think I've never eaten anything so delicious in my life. That strengthened me. But then I started to feel the cold. I felt that I had to get out of the barrel and what's more, quickly. I jumped and tried to reach the rim of the barrel, but I was short. I tried that many times. Fear overcame me. Death in the cold

water inside the barrel. I started crying. Just when I thought it was over, while going around the high rim of the barrel, I spotted the tap. I climbed onto it, and after several attempts, I managed to reach the edge of the barrel. I held on tightly with my fingers. There was a lot of splashing, stomping with my feet, until I finally managed to pull myself out on top of the barrel. I fell from above and then lay there for a long time resting and watching the high edges of the barrel. I was wet and pale, but my stomach was full and I was free again. Out of the barrel and to freedom of any kind. Because there can be different kinds of freedom. Lying down I remembered that I had to go on a long and dangerous journey to the village where I had left my mother and sister. I left the ruined basement of the burned house and walked as if I had wings.

Milorad BOROJEVIĆ

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*Milorad Borojević, "Prisoner in a cabbage crate",  
Kozara IV, 402–403.*

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## COMMON GRAVE IN THE FORESTS OF PREDORA

On the left side of the railway track Suva–Jasenovac–Novska, near Cerovljani, specifically near the Dubica railway station, there is a place called Predore. It's a wooded area. In its vicinity, on the other side of the railway track, there was a detention camp for the captured people from t. Kozara during the summer of 1942. Tens of thousands of people, women and children spent several days here surrounded by Ustasha and German bayonets until they were transferred to the infamous death camps: Jasenovac, Stara Gradiška, Sajmište, Norway and others.

Many people from Mt. Kozara didn't even make it to the well-known Ustasha–German camps but were shot right here, near their families – wives, children, parents, sisters and brothers – in the woods of Predore. Their closest ones helplessly watched as the Germans and Ustashes led them to the execution site. They heard machine gun fire which took the lives of these people. Several hundred people from Mt. Kozara were killed in the woods of Predore. Mutilated by machine gun fire they spilled their blood in the immediate vicinity of their families.

Along with the rest of the population from the Potkozarje region my family ended up in captivity. We were taken to Bosanska Dubica. Due to the circumstances that my stepmother was a Croat, Liza Mihaljević, originally from Hrvatska Dubica, our family – father Dušan, stepmother Liza, my sister Bosa and I – managed to stay with Ivica Mihaljević in Hrvatska Dubica for a while. I was fifteen years old at

the time and took care of Ivica Mihaljević's livestock. In the woods of Predore, on the other side of the railway track in Cerovljani, there was a barn with livestock that I took care of. Almost every day I carried milk to the owner of the livestock, Ivica Mihaljević, in Hrvatska Dubica. This allowed me to pass by the captured people who were temporarily accommodated in the fields near the railway station surrounded by Ustasha guards.

One day I was passing by with an elderly woman Jelica Đukić from Hrvatska Dubica. When I crossed the railway track near the Cerovljani station I saw that there were still people from Mt. Kozara. That's when the elderly Jelica Đukić called out to me, saying: "Come, Stevo, let's see where they're executing your Partisans". I went towards the forest. I felt sick when I saw piles of executed people in a ravine. They were lying on top of each other all covered in blood and they were unrecognizable. I looked for people from my village, Komlenac, but they were unrecognizable. Most of the executed were older, aged between twenty and forty years. For some time they kept them in closed train cars and then separated them in the forest of Predore and executed them. When I came back to the place where the Kozarans were being executed, hoping to recognize someone, an Ustasha noticed me. He probably thought I had escaped from the camp where the people were being held. He ran after me, but I managed to escape calling out to the elderly Jelica Đukić.

I heard local villagers talk about how, in the woods called Gaj, not far from Stevo Dmitrović's house, the Germans and Ustashas brought captured people from Mt. Kozara and executed them. They estimated that around 900 people from Mt. Kozara were killed there. They lay there for several days and were later buried in a mass grave on the edge of the forest in Predore. Whenever I passed by that place while taking care of the cattle I thought about my fellow Kozarans who had perished there. Once I found a livestock passport in the name of Tode, whose last name I have forgotten, and he was from Rakovica, below Mt. Kozara.

Soon, my father Dušan was also taken by the Ustashas. He came to Predore from Hrvatska Dubica with Ivica Mihaljević for a wedding. I was bringing them their lunch. One day four Ustashas came and arrested him. They suspected that he might try to escape so they surrounded him. One of the Ustashas approached him, rolled up his sleeves and tied his hands with wire. The others, the other three, had their rifles pointed at my father. It was very hard for me to watch them tie my father up. I thought that his fate would be the same as the people from Mt. Kozara who were shot and buried nearby. One of the Ustashas noticed my fear, approached me and asked who I was. I quickly responded that I was Jovo Đaćina from Predore. That's how they left me.

The Ustashas tied up my father Dušan and placed him in a cart, fastening his hands to the shafts. I saw blood flowing from his hands because the wire was pulled tight. As they departed he looked at me discreetly and nodded his head as if he wanted to convey that he's gone or to signal that I should be cautious and escape. I left the scene shortly after this happened assuming that the Ustashas might come for me as well.

The Ustashas, during the trip, learned that I was Dušan's son and regretted that they hadn't taken me as well. My father was accused of being a Partisan even though he wasn't part of the Partisan forces. Before the war he had worked abroad in Germany, Netherlands and Belgium as a laborer. He returned from abroad in 1941. There were some disagreements between him and Joza Ferić from Hrvatska Dubica and Joza accused him to the Ustashas of being a Partisan, even a Partisan commander.

In the group of Ustashas who arrested my father was Ivo Zorović. My father was taken to Jasenovac concentration camp where he suffered. They also sent my stepmother, Liza, to Stara Gradiška camp. She was accused of carrying a Partisan flag in Mt. Kozara in 1942. It's true that in 1941 she had been involved with Nikola Luketić, a teacher from Mrazovac, who died as a battalion commissar dur-

ing the breakout of the enemy encirclement in July 1942. She spent some time in an Ustasha camp but managed to escape and join the Partisans.

After the arrest and imprisonment of my father and stepmother I found myself alone and in a difficult situation. Joco Kramarić from Cerovljani took me in. I looked after livestock for him. I stayed there until May 1943. At that time there was a danger for me here as well. Specifically, the Ustasha authorities issued an order that all Serbian children from Mt. Kozara who were staying with Croatian families must register. One day, when I came home, I noticed a list on my host's door containing the names of all the members of his family with a note that they were of the Roman Catholic faith. Below that, it was separately stated that Stevo Vrebac from the village of Komlenac, county of Bosanska Dubica, of Orthodox faith, was taken in as a servant.

The village elder was going from house to house, recording all households. I found this suspicious and I was afraid that the Ustasha raids would round us up and send us to a death camp. There were still other boys from Mt. Kozara in this village. Mile and Dragoja Crnobrnja were from Komlenac and there were others from neighboring hamlets. The prospects for further survival here were grim. I began to think more and more about my native place and yearned to return there. Although I didn't have parents, nor did I know the fate of the rest of the people, something drew me to go back to my hometown of Komlenac. However, it was difficult to get there. Passing through Bosanska Dubica was impossible because the Ustashas would receive and send all Kozarans to death camps. The river Una presented a major obstacle, with the Ustashas guarding its left bank. Towards Kostajnica, not far from Hrvatska Dubica, there was an Ustasha unit stationed in Baćin. On the other bank of Una from Baćina is my native region – Komlenac.

One day, despite all the dangers, I set out for Komlenac. I was accompanied by Mara Premasunac from Komlenac and Indija Bižić

from the village of Vrioca. We managed to reach Una. We waded into the water and when we were just a few dozen meters from the right, Mt. Kozara, bank, two Ustashas noticed us and ordered us to turn back. We were afraid that they would shoot us or even take us to the camp at Krečane and burn us there.

They searched the bags of Mara Premasunac and Indija Bižić, but they didn't find anything suspicious. They paid attention to me and asked whose child I was. Indija came up with a story and said that I was her child and that I had been taking care of cows for her brother for some time. To our great surprise and relief, Stojana Tepić from Komlenac, who was married in Bacina, was nearby and approached the Ustashas. She told them: "Let the poor ones go. You're not going to kill them all". Although the Ustashas pulled their guns out a few times, they stopped, had some discussion and let us go.

We set off again towards Una, crossed it and reached the village. While wading through Una, right next to the Ustasha soldiers, we kept thinking that they would kill us. At that time, Komlenac was empty, a year after the enemy offensive in Mt. Kozara. Everything that hardworking households and their families had built for years was destroyed. All the houses were burned down. Only one building, Božo Vrebac's, was left. There, survivors from the Vrebac families, mostly women and children, gathered and continued to endure the difficult days of the war.

Stevo Vrebac

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*Stevo Vrebac, "Common grave in  
the forests of Predora", Kozara IV, 404–407.*

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## **PROTECT OUR CHILDREN — PROTECT THE BORN**

I was born in Miloševo Brdo which, like all the other villages in the Podgradač municipality, suffered greatly, especially during the large offensive in Mt. Kozara in the summer of 1942.

After breaking through the encirclement, a short-lived calm and the dark premonition that crept into the soul of each of us, the enemy army pressed the village leaving behind the smell of burning. Immediately, a manhunt began for everything living under Mt. Kozara. The Ustashas drove us out onto dusty roads along with our cattle. They used rifle butts to straighten our long column. My grandfather Marko managed to put only the strongest, children of his sons, in his horse-drawn train car. Shortly after that, Stara Gradiška, “Ustasha Camp Number 3”, became our hell. There they took everything from us and separated mothers from their children. They formed groups by age: boys above 14 years and young women and girls were immediately sent to the Okučani train station. They separated the elderly and took them deep into the forests of Struga. They started measuring us children by age.

Then came the long, winding line of mothers with children in their arms and a commotion that cannot be forgotten. My eight-year-old brother Rajko was separated first, and then my six-year-old sister Savka. They took three-year-old Marko from my mother’s arms and they didn’t even take the tag with his name and birth information. They even collected the children who were in cradles and carriers, seven-year-olds and bags. Deafened by the cries for their

mothers, who had been taken away earlier, the children waited for the transport to be formed in the July sun.

Mika Mandić from Turjak was with us. She did not allow them to take her two-year-old grandson Luka from the line of mothers with children. So, they shot them both. And Stoja Čekić from Grbavac, a Bosnian Muslim woman, first begged and then she resisted strongly, not giving her son Mirko to the Ustashas. They shot them together in front of the torn-up line. Jovanka, my aunt, seemed as if she did not resist her fate when they took away her five daughters one by one: Gospava, Zorka, Draginja, Stajka and Jelka, but she did not give away her only son Đoko. They shot her with him in their arms. They killed our grandfather, too.

And so, one by one, along the river, from Stara Gradiška and Jasenovac to Cerovljani and Sisak, who knows how many were killed. No one made lists of the dead.

The crimes could not be hidden. So, the truth about the tragedy of the Mt. Kozara people, especially the children, quickly reached the public. It was learned about the mass destruction, hunger and diseases that took thousands of weakened, especially those helpless, the youngest who couldn't even say their own name.

They pushed me into one of the lines, extended next to the pig barns in Stara Gradiška, in which there were young men of the same age, and some were from the same grade of the Miloševo primary school – Slavko Kotur, Ljubo Danilović, Rajko Borjanović and that made it easier for me. The Ustashas told us that we would be their janissaries and sent us along the Sava river towards Jasenovac.

Behind me remained the muffled cry of my mother. That image of her pain for her lost children will never disappear. It's a part of me.

Then the events started to unfold, one after another. I was liberated from the largest Ustasha death camp for children, Jastrebarsko, on the August 26, 1942, along with 727 boys and girls. It was a great achievement and the most beautiful action of the Fourth Kordun Brigade. I grew up in the Fifth Kozara Brigade. And when the war end-

ed my village was almost deserted. Life in it seemed to have overgrown with weeds. Some older people and women raised huts made of reeds. My mother had one such hut which she managed to return to after surviving the camp. How, she couldn't explain even to herself. Our father also returned from German captivity.

Then I went in search of my sister and brothers. In one file, which hid the hopes of many families, I found myself. I found my one-year-old sister in Staza near Sunja, in the lap of the wonderful woman and mother Marija Tomić, and my brother Rajko in the family of Ivan Sremić from Mala Gorica. However, I found my youngest brother Marko 12 years later, after the war had ended.

But I can't talk about that now and who knows if I'll ever be able to tell everything that I carry in my memory and what I later learned while searching for the fate of Mt. Kozara's children. It's not easy to talk about these wartime dramas, as it revives the pain.

And yet, with the feeling of a researcher and a witness, I cannot help but tell something about one of the most humane actions in our national liberation war, about the long and persistent battle to save Mt. Kozara's children.

Someone once said: if there were no children, wars would certainly be less terrifying. This applies to the Mt. Kozara epic and its children. In the camps where only death prevailed during the war, 23,858 Mt. Kozara children were killed, torn away from their mother's embrace.

It was precisely then, in July 1942, when the tragedy of Mt. Kozara became known, that the illegal committee of the People's Liberation in Zagreb initiated and developed a plan for rescuing Mt. Kozara children through the "Red Cross Association". The action was especially aimed at extracting children from Ustasha assembly and concentration camps which were affected by hunger and mass epidemics that were claiming many lives.

This extremely humane action was led and initially managed by Professor Ivo Marinković, a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Croatia and a national hero, who, by chance, ex-

perienced Mt. Kozara personally. After the offensive, Ivo, according to the Party's task, was sent for illegal work in Zagreb as the secretary of the Commission of the Central Committee of the Communist Party for northern Croatia, under whose leadership the illegal committee of the People's Liberation operated. He held this position, as well as half of February 1943, when he was arrested and killed in the Ustasha police in Zagreb.

Then, the question of saving a large number of children whom the Ustasha had sentenced to death by separating them from their parents and imprisoning them in concentration camps where there were no living conditions became the central issue for the Zagreb party organization and its activists who primarily worked in health-care institutions, the Red Cross, and the railway station. The organizers of the action, with the help of Professor Kamilo Bresler, a high-ranking official in the Ministry of Associations of the Independent State of Croatia, and their other connections, managed to obtain permits for the legal collection and extraction of children from concentration camps such as Stara Gradiška, Jablanac, Mlaka, Koštarica, Uštica, Jasenovac, Novska, Sisak, Gornja Rijeka and Jastrebarsko.

Thus began one of the most extraordinary battles in our war in July 1942 where the successful outcome of the operation depended on the lives of tens of thousands of children from Mt. Kozara, Slavonia, Banija, Lika and other insurgent regions.

For this purpose, the first reception "sorting" stations of the Red Cross were established at the Zagreb railway station. Among the early groups and prominent figures in this operation, Tatjana Marinić (illegal alias Josipa) could be found. She was an experienced illegal activist, a member of the KPJ before the war, and a social worker. Her work took place under illegal conditions within the ranks of KPJ, the Red Cross and its youth sections. Through the Department for Public Health and Social Policy, she organized the first institution for pre-school children in Rude near Samobor, which played a significant role as an illegal sanctuary for the Party and the place from where, in

the summer of 1942, Tatjana, along with her proteges and children's caregivers, went on the mission to save the children from the Ustasha camp and the "wing of the Sisters of Mercy" in Jastrebarsko.

"She was an indefatigable worker, constantly busy, always in good spirits. She had a wide circle of acquaintances in Zagreb, from proletarians and modest housewives to intellectuals, many of whom, I am convinced, contributed to help because Tatjana asked for it. There were not many women in our Party like Tatjana Marinić", wrote Rodoljub Čolaković in his book "A Narration about a Generation".

In addition to Tatjana Marinić and Professor Bresler, there were activists, doctors and Red Cross volunteer sisters who organized groups to visit the death camps to take over the children, maintain records and escort the transport. Their names, which will never be forgotten in Mt. Kozara, include:

Jana Koh, a writer, Vera Jurić Olenković, Anka Maleš, Nataša and Ana Vodopija, sisters, Jana Ilijanić (arrested in 1944 and hanged in Sveti Ivan Zelina), Dragica Habazin Majka, Katica Jambrešak, Vera Đekomati, Jožica Baki, Vera Černe, Anka Šepić, Branka Neferović, Vanda Koroša, Ivka Vrkljan, Zora Školić, Nevenka Kuštera, Terezi-ja Pintarić, Helena Breslav, Tereza Homota, Valpurga Augustin, Diana Budisavljević, Jelena Loboda Zrinjska, Hatinka Fabijanić, Erna Krajač (arrested in 1943 and killed in Lepoglava), Manja Haževački (shot by Ustashas in 1944), Staša Jelić, Doctor Desanka Štampar, Vera Luketić, writer, Doctor Hermina Miler, Doctor Olga Bošnjaković. Other collaborators also displayed extraordinary activity in various roles demanded by this endeavor, including Vladimir Broz, Engineer Drago Kralj, Aleksandar Jureković Šanji, Robert Horn, Marica and Mićo Vašarević, Franjo and Anka Friščić, Mišo Gomerčić, Eugen Pusić and the wife of painter Vladimir Bečić, sisters Breda and Verena Kogoj who kept records of the children in the camps. Though incomplete, it brought immense joy to some families under Mt. Kozara where, long after the war, the most-read sections in newspapers and advertisements were the ones that read "Searching for!"

The authentic documents and harrowing testimonies of the activists who rescued them eloquently speak about the children's condition in Ustasha camps.

With a Red Cross armband and other mandatory permits Professor Kamilo Bresler was among the first to enter the Ustasha camp. Here are just a few fragments from his memories that he shared in 1958 with the author of this contribution.

*I saw thousands of women and children in Stara Gradiška, Jablanac and Mlaka, and the youngest, even from two months old, were lying in masses, dying. Some slightly older children were still moving and plucking at the grass, but there were no more of them in that circle.*

*In Stara Gradiška, piles of small children were crammed into attics or those large pigsties with cement floors. Their small bodies, from which only bones and skin remained, due to the total lack of any hygiene conditions, without food and water, were affected by a number of infectious diseases such as typhus, scabies, diphtheria, measles, scarlet fever and smallpox. For days, both the dead and sick and the little living children lay together on the same pile.*

*There were the children between the ages of one day and 14 years. Maks Luburić, a camp official, separated several hundred of the strongest among them, aged 10 to 14, and dressed them in Ustasha uniforms, stating that he would give them special attention as his janissaries.*

*Our group, mainly consisting of private doctors and Red Cross volunteer sisters often went on missions to rescue those children from the camps who could still be saved.*

*In early July 1942, another 16 Red Cross sisters from Zagreb arrived at the Stara Gradiška camp to take charge of the children. The sisters were shocked to see the children sitting in groups in the camp yard, exposed to the sun. More than half of them could not walk so we had to carry them to the trucks that would transport them to Okučani and from there by "G" train to Zagreb. In the first transport that arrived on the "Senjak" railroad track in Zagreb on the July 10, 1942, there were 850 children. When*

*we opened the doors we pulled out 47 dead bodies from the train car. The surviving children were as scared as birds; only faint cries could be heard or they remained silent looking with disproportionately large childlike eyes. On the first night in our reception hospital 37 more children died. When we thought the accommodation work was complete, late at night, the sisters discovered another train car with 250 infants under one year of age who lay helpless, turning blue from crying. While one group of sisters washed the children the other went around the city gathering diapers and milk. However, following the Ustasha orders, they were loaded back onto the transport and at the Zagreb train station, they waited for another four hours locked up before departing for Jastrebarsko. The health conditions of the children who passed through the Zagreb reception center can be seen in Dr. Franjo Permuš's report which states that 5,612 children between one and 14 years old suffered from 30,264 various diseases.*

The dramatic nature of rescuing children from the Stara Gradiška camp is also revealed in the recollections of Jana Koh:

*The most challenging work in my life was rescuing the Partisan children from Mt. Kozara whom the Ustashes had brought to assembly and concentration camps. This, our most significant action, required superhuman strength, bravery and self-sacrifice. Furthermore, it was connected with dangers to our own lives. And yet, voluntarily, one day, in the early twilight of July 1942, 15 Red Cross sisters with Diana Budisavljević at the helm arrived at the Ustasha camp Stara Gradiška. However, we were not allowed into the camp until the second morning. After very unpleasant and numerous identifications we found ourselves behind the camp gate, covered with children. When we showed the permit issued with the approval of the leader, Vjekoslav Luburić, the camp chief, shouted at the top of his voice: "I am the chief here, and I give the orders". When we asked for a doctor to help us the Ustashes pointed to a man who stood nearby as if dazed. When we called him, he seemed to come to life, muttering and constantly repeating: "I will show you everything, everything*

*- the hospital, the attic, the tower, the cellar. Everything you see, write it down and give it to the public. Every person should know this . . .”*

*We managed to enter the first room by pushing together. ‘Hospital Room I was five by five meters in size. On the floor, one beside the other, and one on top of the other, lay immobile children’s bodies. They were tiny skeletons with large, burning, inflamed eyes. The same scene was present in ‘Hospital Room II’ and ‘Hospital Room III’. The children were condemned to a horrible, slow death from starvation. A decision was made: to release these children from the camp hell, empty this dreadful ‘hospital’ and save whatever can still be saved. In the basement many women and children were either sitting or lying motionless. We reached the tower as well. Inside, there were about 300 boys aged 7 to 14 dressed in black suits with caps marked with “U”. These were also children from Mt. Kozara. It was said that they were “the chief’s proteges”. In the camp, children received – we found out – not every day, only a handful of raw grains. Until they reached the so-called “hospital” they pulled grass in the yard, collected various scraps and put them in their mouths, drank contaminated water from puddles during the summer and every day about fifty children died on average.*

*Today, I am narrating this seemingly easily, but it always deeply shakes me. Back then, it was more than terrifying, more than awful. It was so overwhelming that it cannot be fully told or will never be. It would take more strength for that, which we, having survived those horrors, can hardly gather.*

*We brought the first transport of children to the Zagreb train station on the July 11, 1942. As we were traveling by train from Okučani decorated convoys filled with soldiers and weapons passed by us. They were Ustasha reinforcements for the offensive in Mt. Kozara.*

*In this terrible transport, which lasted much longer than usual, many children died on the way. When we pulled out 750, including living and dead children, Bresler said, ‘Jana, there must be a thousand of them’. Then we went through all the train cars and in the last one, hidden under straw, we found another 250. We couldn’t take it anymore. Bresler and I*

took one each, five or six months old, “under our coats” and went home. Bresler’s Ivica and my Duška grew up. Ivica also has children now.

Another camp for children, equally horrific, was in Sisak. At the beginning of June 1942 I went there with Vera Luketić, a writer, and reported to Ante Dumbović, a teacher who was appointed by the Ministry of Association, based on Bresler’s recommendation to work on the colonization and registration of children. From his report, which he submitted on the August 25, 1942, it can be seen that in the Novi Sisak camp, in the Reis Saltworks, the Saint Vinko Monastery, Teslić’s glassworks and Kupalište over 6,500 children were registered. The Sisak death camp was in the hands of the Ustasha supervisory service, headed by the infamous Faget and the physician Antun Najžer (both convicted as war criminals).

“The destiny was so”, Jana Koh continues her testimony about Sisak, “that we first encounter Dr. Najžer in the camp and ask him about the children.”

“Here, there is no children except for a few sick ones in the school clinic and about ten healthy ones in the saltworks”, Najzer replied.

He did everything to ensure that no child came out of Teslić’s glassworks alive. He was truly a monster.

However, in an old building that he called the “school clinic” we found 160 sick little children and some infants lying in high temperatures and swarms of flies. Desperate and without anything we began to clean the space and separated the living children with whom Dragica Habazin Majka remained, while the rest of us continued to the “saltworks”. The same scene awaited us here: around 400 children, aged 3 to 5, lay on bare concrete next to walls saturated with salt. The children’s cries echoed horrifyingly through these cold corridors.

Najžer agreed to transport the children to Zagreb because he knew, better than we did, that few of them would survive in this condition.

Our group soon found itself in Sisak again and witnessed a sight that will never be erased from our memory. First, we encountered women who lay in barracks, some of them pregnant and some afflicted with smallpox or other diseases. Only a day earlier their children had been

*taken from them and thrown into the barracks nearby so they could hear the cries of their children who also lay on the bare floor – newborns, children of a few weeks, months and years old, both alive and dead together.*

*To prepare them for transport we begged the Ustashas, who guarded the area to allow the mothers, perhaps for the last time, to breastfeed their children. The joy of both the children and the mothers cannot be described. Tiny hands wrapped around necks, greedy mouths attached to breasts and large tears flowed down the children's faces. For a long time only deep sobs could be heard. These were heroic mothers. When even the last child, exhausted from grief, fell asleep, the mothers left them quietly and, going back to their barracks, whispered to us: "Take care of our children, take care of our own".*

*We led this transport of 550 children to Zagreb and the only comfort we could offer the mothers was the address of our records where they could look for their children if they returned from abroad...*

*During July and August 1942, 53 transports of children were brought to the Zagreb railway station. Several colleagues, including Vera Luketić, Vera Loboda–Zrinjska, Breda and Verona Kogoj, secretly documented the children from the Ustashas. They left a trace for 12,779 Mt. Kozara children. However, there are over a thousand cards with no information because there was no information to provide. Thus, the sections that give life are filled with only numbers, question marks, crosses and other marks or simple entries like these and similar: "Gradišić" (children taken from mothers in Stara Gradiška) – "number 35, female, about 7 months", "Gradišić 499, black eyes, chestnut hair", "female, about 7 months with a freckle on her cheek", "male, well developed"...*

*The only camp for which the Ustasha Ministry of Association took children from other concentration and assembly camps was Jastrebarsko. It was possible through the anti-fascists working in this Ustasha ministry, primarily through Professor Kamilo Bresler and Dr. Velimir Deželić, to insert an organized group of about 30 health and educational workers including 18 students from the school in Rude near Samobor.*

*The camp for children in Jastrebarsko was founded on the July 12, 1942, and consisted of three buildings not counting the stable next to the*

“hospital” in the Erdödy Count’s Palace which saw about 1,500 mostly older children pass through it. The decline of the Jastrebarsko camp was in the village of Reka, three kilometers away, and consisted of a former brickyard, stables and a lean-to through which over two thousand small children passed. It was enclosed in wire and, initially, under the guard of the Ustasha crew and later under the Ustasha supervisory service just like all other camps for adults.

Jastrebarsko was filled exclusively with children gathered from below Mt. Kozara in July 1942 and transported in groups from Stara Gradiška, Jablanac, Mlaka and Cerovljan in this order: July 12 – 850; July 13 – 36; July 14 – 750; July 31– 850; August 5 – 800 and August 15 – 100 – a total of 3,386 from newborns to 14 years old. They were in a desperate state, many completely naked, even 12-year-old girls suffering from various infectious diseases in combination with typhus and dysentery, measles and pneumonia, scurvy with tooth loss and jaw necrosis.

Under unusual circumstances in mid-July 1942, Tatjana Marinčić infiltrated her group of girls into the Ustasha camp in Jastrebarsko with the determination to stop the death that was raging among the Mt. Kozara children. They were: Regina Drame, Ankica Čegec, Danica Čendak, Mira Debeljak, Anica Horvat, Anka Korošec, Marija Ivanković, Dubravka Dolenc, Ruža Herceg, Dragica Vitko, Julka Marinić, Marija Ratković, Ivanka Glavan, Zita Pušić, Blanka Kolar, Olga Dupalo, Branka Takač and Ivka Sremec (arrested in 1944 and killed in Jasenovac). In addition to them, those who participated in rescuing children in Jaska included: Dr. Branko Dragišić and his friend Nina, Vinka Šoljan, Mira and Anica Šlehta, Vera Luketić, Lina Padovan, Dr. Glumac, Mica Tomić, Tanja Černozubov and Mica Škaberna (arrested and killed in Lepoglava). In their work, they relied on the anti-fascists in Jasterbarsko: Dr. Branko Davila, a member of the illegal People’s Liberation Committee in Jaska, Mirko Merle from the village of Reka as well as Staša Jelić whom her comrades did not allow to come to the camp because she also had a small child and Delka Prosoli (arrested in 1944 and killed in Jasenovac).

*When they arrived in Jaska they encountered resistance from the nuns of the Order of Saint Vincent de Paul led by the infamous Puhleria Barta, the camp director in Jasterbarsko. The Sisters treated the children inhumanely. They openly stated and acted upon the belief that helping Partisan children meant raising their enemies. They did everything to ensure that as many children as possible would die.*

Ivo Lonžar, the camp's coachman, attested to this:

*As the children were poorly fed and slept in damp and cold barracks they were dying every day. As a coachman, at the order of Sister Puhleria Barta, I brought dead children from the barracks every day into the Erdödy Palace, where they stayed until evening. Then, the servants with Franjo Ilovar packed them in dozens, or if they were smaller, in crates, and buried them in previously prepared pits.*

Mira Debeljak, married to Rafaj, recalls the “Fight for Children” in which she participated as an 18-year-old girl:

*The children were dying in our arms, on the beds we made ourselves, on the floor in the barracks and we were alone and helpless. We cried together with them and all you could hear was: “My Perica has died”, “My Milka is dying”, “The little one with a bruise on his cheek won't make it until morning”...*

It was Thursday, July 23, 1942, when the newspaper “Nova Hrvatska” published an article titled “Children, Liberated from Partisan Captivity, Recovering from Suffering on State Property in Jastrebarsko” along with three propaganda photos. It read: “They wear black caps with the Ustasha emblem. The Sisters have taught them to pray to God. They sing folk songs, learn the history of Bosnia and practice physical exercises. There are almost no sick children among them. The children who were in partisan captivity are in poor condition. The parents of the children, who have left the camp and come here

to their sons and daughters, are very happy to see how their children are taken care of...”

In Jastrebarsko, 25 women from Stara Gradiška were smuggled with the children; they had been declared unfit for work in Germany. Among them was Anka Žujic, from the village of Johove under Mt. Kozara. Here’s what she experienced in Jastrebarsko:

*With my husband Milan, I had two children: Milorad at the age of six and Mileva at the age of three. When they took our children from us in Cerovljani, I managed to smuggle myself into the column to Jaska, formed by the Red Cross. Both my children died in my arms before anything could be done to help them. Branko Vujanović and Đoko Bursać, whom I embraced along with my children, also died.*

Staša Jelić also speaks of Jaska:

*There were transports in which children arrived, poisoned from Stara Gradiška. They had given them water with dissolved soda in the scorching July sun. When we realized that this caused intestinal diseases we could only treat them with fresh cheese. But how could we get it? We found various ways and people brought us food surreptitiously and left it by the camp fence, behind the camp wire ...*

Each of them recounts their perspective on Stara Gradiška, Sisak, Jaska... And now it is a substantial book of harrowing testimonies about Mt. Kozara’s children.

Dragoje Lukić

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*Dragoje Lukić, “Protect our children - protect the born”,  
Kozara IV, 408–418.*

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## **DESERTED VILLAGES IN POTKOZARJE, SUMMER OF 1942**

The village of Gornji Jelovac and its surroundings were on the main route of the enemy's offensive during the Mt. Kozara offensive in the summer of 1942. This is where the II Kozara Partisan Detachment had its strongest defense.

After penetrating Mt. Kozara, the enemy continued to comb the area, destroying everything in its path. They killed the wounded and exhausted and took the people, mainly the elderly, women and children, to camps. Mount Kozara and the surrounding villages were left deserted. In some villages closer to Mt. Kozara the enemy left their outposts. Their goal was to eliminate a smaller number of residents who had fled ahead of the looting and had started returning to their homes or ruins. One enemy detachment was stationed in Gornji Jelovac, at a place called Studena, right next to Mt. Kozara and another in Donji Jelovac, near Čad. The fascists from these two enemy strongholds committed unimaginable crimes against the remaining part of the population that managed to stay behind the looters. During a sudden raid in October 1942 in the villages of Palančiste and Gornji Jelovac, they gathered all the surviving people, mostly women and children, several hundred of them and brutally killed them. They committed massacres in several other villages on several occasions. They penetrated the villages of Bosansko Dubica area as far as Mlječanica and beyond. This continued until our renewed forces liquidated these enemy posts.

In October, the enemy launched another offensive, the so-called autumn offensive, against our forces in Mt. Kozara. The newly formed

V Krajina Kozara Brigade moved to the Podgrmeč area, preventing the enemy from achieving its goal: to destroy and inflict greater losses on the partisan forces in Mt. Kozara. After the enemy's withdrawal some of the outposts were also withdrawn leaving the area free. However, there were very few survivors.

As soon as the enemy forces, the looters, passed through Mt. Kozara and the Potkozarje villages, we, as activists, members of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and committee members, gathered again in the village of Božići. During the meeting we analyzed the situation and discussed what needed to be done next. The most important and urgent task was to gather the surviving population, provide them with first aid and help them escape from the enemy.

At night, we worked on collecting and burying the deceased victims. It was very difficult to reach the places where the victims were located. Due to the unpleasant odor of decomposing bodies we had to cover our mouths and noses with wet towels and fabric before approaching the victims moving them from the paths and roads and collecting them for burial. Bodies were everywhere, at every step, in meadows, cornfields and thickets. It was simply impossible to collect everything, only what could be found beside the trails and roads. Nevertheless, we managed to collect the bodies or rather the skeletons and buried them in several locations. Most of the deceased were buried in Gornji Jelovac and Palančiste.

Shortly after the passage of the enemy forces, the looters, I went to Palančiste to find out which comrades survived the offensive. There I found the late Ilija Bursać, the then secretary of the party organization, and Boško Simatović, the commander of the Palančište municipality, and some other comrades who had remained behind the Partisan units. In our village, there was Blagoje Vila and some other comrades as well.

Although the villages were empty, the people driven into camps and their property destroyed, the surviving comrades showed no signs of wavering or morale decline. Many lost their families, but

they all remained dignified. Even the people who survived the offensive remained committed to the liberation movement and ready to continue the fight. The awareness of the justification of the liberation struggle was very high. We all realized that there was no other way but to continue the fight. We put all our efforts into normalizing the situation in the villages where there were survivors.

Already in September, a certain number of surviving people, mainly women and children who were in the villages in Croatia began to return home in various ways.

We organized a broad action to create shelters where the people could be temporarily accommodated. We started building the most necessary makeshift accommodations. Winter was approaching and we had to work quickly. I believe that we successfully completed this task due to the engagement of the surviving people.

Simultaneously, we worked on renewing political work among the surviving people. We managed to renew the work of the party and the Communist Youth League of Yugoslavia organizations by the end of 1942 and the beginning of 1943. People's liberation committees in the villages were also renewed.

Pero Gajić

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*Pero Gajić, "Deserted villages in Potkozarje, summer of 1942",  
Kozara IV, 431–434.*

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## **THE VILLAGE OF NOVOSELCI — AN ABANDONED VILLAGE**

The village of Novoselci is located about three kilometers from Bosanska Dubica. It is situated to the south of Bosanska Dubica and borders the villages of Aginci, the road connecting Bosanska Dubica, Kneževica and Prijedor as well as Čelebinci and Jasenje across the Mlječnica river. It also borders the village of Verija to the west. Before the war, specifically before the uprising of 1941, there were 85 households in the village. They were good and respected farmers mainly making a living from their agricultural properties. Occasionally, especially during the construction season, some of the men would leave for work in search of earnings. Households were numerous and some had as many as six or seven men. Due to its proximity to the urban settlement of Bosanska Dubica, Novoselci had the advantage of selling agricultural products to the town which allowed the village to develop more rapidly compared to more remote villages. However, this favorable situation would contribute to the unprecedented suffering and destruction of the people and their property in the very first year of the war. By 1942, the village had already been devastated with houses and other household structures burned down and over 40% of the population had been killed or taken to death camps.

The year 1941 brought occupation to the land and uncertainty prevailed among the villagers about their fate. Various problematic individuals donned Ustasha uniforms in Bosanska Dubica and fear became widespread. Fewer people were going to the town. The Ustasas were receiving certain individuals, especially those who were

returning from the former Yugoslav army, mistreating them, confiscating their uniforms, demanding weapons and similar actions.

The Ustashas began conducting violence and, under the threat of forced conscription, called upon adult men to participate in forced labor. They also called for visits. We didn't know what to do and although it was very difficult we tried to avoid going to the town as much as possible. We had to respond to calls for roadwork and in this uncertain situation my brother Dušan suggested that I go to Boško Šiljegović's for advice on what we should do. One day, I went to Mirkovac, to my acquaintance Miloš Ručnov, with whom I had served in the former Yugoslav army, to try to get in touch with Boško. I was not successful so I went with Miloš to his uncle Dragoje Ručnov who told me to return home and that someone would come to us during the night. He advised us to be wary of the Ustashas. However, no one came. We had to go to Bosanska Dubica for a visit. The commission found that we were fit for labor.

Soon, we received calls to go to work on the road. Veso Čelica, Mile Čelica, Ljuban Bašić, Boško Bašić, Milinko Bašić and some others whose names I have forgotten received these calls.

We began working on the road from Bosanska Dubica to Knežica. There were quite a few of us. The Ustashas brought people from other villages to join us. One day, the Ustashas placed a heavy machine gun in front of us. At any moment we expected them to open fire and kill us. Anton Kostrlac, the village elder to whom we had always complained, said not to fear anything as long as he was with us.

Later, we were transferred to the road in Aginci. Pero Luketić, a prominent Ustasha, inquired if there were any rocks nearby. I told him that there were plenty in the stone quarry in our village of Novoselci. He asked among us who knew how to extract the stones. It was in our interest to return to the village. Those who volunteered were Mile Čelica, Vaso Čelica, Milinko Bašić and I. After a few days, Luketić came back and told us we were not working well as we had dug very little stone which was indeed the case.

One time, when he came to us he was in a good mood and during our conversation he told us that the Ustashas and the armed groups had gone to Mirkovac to apprehend Boško Šiljegović. Indeed, soon after Luketić left us we heard gunfire in Međuvode.

I set off through the village towards Kruškovac and met Ćirić who told me that the uprising had begun and the insurgents were launching an attack on Bosanska Dubica. In the morning, my brother Dušan went toward the home of Slavko Lukač who was the military commissioner for preparing the uprising in our village and its surroundings. When he got closer to Slavko Lukač's house he found out that the Ustashas had already killed Slavko and burned down his house.

When Dušan returned he informed us that the Ustashas were coming to the village and killing everyone they caught. We headed towards Mlječanica where we met Mirko Bašić from Ševarlije, Tomica Španović from Johova and others who were heading to the uprising. I found a civilian rifle which I had hidden in the straw. Unfortunately, I didn't manage to find the bullets that my brother Dušan had hidden somewhere.

When we were closer to the village towards Košuća, Mirko Bašić told me that the Ustashas were in the village, near a house. We approached the house of Pavo Bundalo and heard the Ustashas banging on the doors. We started to surround them. Mirko had a carbine. The Ustashas noticed us and began to flee. We chased after them. We met an old man named Stojan Bošnjak who had been tied up and driven by the Ustashas towards Bosanska Dubica. He told us that two Ustashas were nearby. When they emerged into the fields towards Aginci and started moving diagonally, Bašić noticed them, leaned his carbine against the fence, fired and hit one of them. We ran to get his carbine because it was the most valuable and necessary item. I heard Bašić call out: "Let Tomica take the carbine!" We continued on toward Bosanska Dubica. We didn't manage to take the town. We turned back.

On that day, in the morning, the first victims fell in Novoselci. The Ustashas killed: Slavko Lukač, Mila Čelica, Jovan Čelica, Ilija Šekerović, Jovo Bakić, Peru J. Bakić and Milorad Dozet.

Jova Bakić's wife, Ljuba Bakić, watched as the Ustashas killed her husband and their son.

That morning, the Ustashas managed to capture 24 people in the village and take them to Bosanska Dubica. Their fate was never known.

On the same day the Ustashas took and killed in Bosanska Dubica: Dušan Milutinović, Dušan Krivda, Milo Krivda, Tom Orlić, Rado Kalembo, Dušan Kalembo, Jovo Bašić, Mića Čelica, Dušan Bakić, Rado Bakić, Rado Čelica, so-called. Adžija, Pavle Kos, Ilija Čelica, Milorad Čelica, Peru Čelica, Branka Čelica, Milinka Čelica, Boža Dozeta, Dragoja Dozeta, Rado Čelica, Vesa Čelica, Gliša Čelica and Milo Čelica. They hid Jelena Šekerović and Stojan Vakić who managed to escape. All of this happened on the first day of the uprising, before noon.

The insurgents started holding the front towards Bosanska Dubica. Among the people from our village, Dragoja Dostić, Dušan Stojnić and Dušan Bašić stood out. They later became the first committee members of the People's Liberation Committee in the village. Dostić was the village elder of Novoselci.

On the second or third day after the uprising they captured Teodor Čelica, his son Mirko Čelica and Stojan Raković. They went to the front towards Kruškovac. The Ustashas intercepted them, captured them and took them to Bosanska Dubica where they were killed on the way. New victims from Novoselci fell every day.

Soon after that, the Ustashas unexpectedly entered the village again. They captured Isa Lovrić, Boško Dostić and his father Jovo Dostić. They took them to the forest where Isa Lovrić and Boško Dostić were completely butchered while Jovo Dostić managed to escape. Jovo recounted how the Ustashas had gouged out the eyes of these two.

Due to the proximity of the enemy stronghold, Bosanska Dubica, and the frequent arrival of Ustashas in the village people abandoned their properties. Later, when the frontal fighting ceased, some of the

people returned to the village, but only to the lower part of the village. They lived in fear and caution. Guards were set up towards Bosanska Dubica, tasked with monitoring the enemy's movements and informing the people in the village so they could hide in a timely manner.

In the village, there was a committee that took special care of the families that had left their homes and properties. Many families moved to neighboring villages (Mrazovci, Jasenje, Tukličane and other nearby villages). Some even went further, to their relatives, especially those with small children.

After leaving the front-line combat some villagers from Novoselci joined the Partisans in Mt. Kozara: Ljuban Krivda, who was captured by the enemy during the Mt. Kozara offensive in 1942, Milan Bošnjak, who died as a battalion commissar in 1944, and Svetko Bašić, who died as a corporal after the Mt. Kozara offensive.

In the meantime, while the village was not completely deserted, they maintained contact with the members of the resistance movement who were living under very difficult conditions in the enemy stronghold in Bosanska Dubica. I remember cooperating with the Hatipović family. One night, in January 1942, old Hasan Hatipović, the father of Husein, who was with the Partisans in Mt. Kozara at the time informed us that the people from Novoselci and Verija should find a safe place to hide because the Ustashas from Bosanska Dubica were preparing to massacre the people. At that time, about ten Partisans, including Ljuban Aćimović, were staying at Rade Bašić's house in Novoselci. We informed them about the Ustasha's intentions. When the Ustashas came the Partisans welcomed them and sent them back to Bosanska Dubica.

Knowing the Ustashas's intentions the people would hide in time. Whenever the Ustashas set out from Bosanska Dubica the people would retreat into the hills. They fled into the forests or across the Mlječanica to neighboring villages.

The houses were burned in the winter of 1942. In the spring of 1942, the people left their properties and settled in the Novoselci for-

ests between the Košuče and Mlječanica rivers. These refugees built shacks which they covered with boards or, if any remained from the burned houses, with roofing tiles. They lived in these huts in the Novoselci meadows.

Here they would encounter the beginning of the enemy offensive in Mt. Kozara in the summer of 1942. I was in the Pogledevo hospital at the time and I recall that the people from Novoselci passed through Pogledevo. I heard from many that they demanded to go to Mt. Kozara because they knew they couldn't stay here. There were individuals who didn't want to go to Mt. Kozara so the majority demanded to go. That's how the entire population of Novoselci and neighboring villages retreated to Mt. Kozara. I am aware that no one from the village stayed behind; they all went into exile.

After the Mt. Kozara offensive I passed through Novoselci. Everything was overgrown with grass and weeds. You could only traverse some of the paths. The roads were overgrown with weeds. The yards and courtyards, where houses and other structures once stood, were overgrown with grass taller than a person. That there used to be life here could only be discerned from the remains of the burned houses. All that remained were black stones from the burnt structures. What wasn't burned, the looters, primarily civilians, who came together with the Ustashas to deserted villages, had carted away for their own use.

I remember that in Mt. Kozara, Dušan Lukač remained with his two daughters while the other five members of his family (wife, three sons, and daughter) perished in Široka Luka in Kozara. At the same location, the five-member Lukić family also lost their lives. About 60% of the residents of Novoselci died in the enemy's offensive in Mt. Kozara. Some families were completely destroyed by the end of the war. These were the families of Janko Gligorić, Stanko Ćurić, Rajko Ćurić, Nikola Dostica, Jove Bašić, Jove Barudžija, Branko Čelica, Ostoja Stolić, Petar Dostica, Pera Čelica, Stojka Čelica, Milan Lukić, Božo Nikolić and Milorad Čelica.

Around 1943, several families returned and in the lower part of the village. They built huts to live in. I know that Anika Bašić, Mara Ćurić, Joka Krivda and some others had settled there. One day an Ustasha named Ilija Ivašković from Bosanska Dubica came by and slaughtered Mara Curić and Joka Krivda. Mara was around 70 years old and Joka was about 50. Vajka Čelica had hidden and witnessed this atrocity.

From this small village there were 59 fighters in partisan units. Out of this number, 33 fighters died during the war.

Ljuban Bašić

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*Ljuban Bašić, "The village of Novoselci – an abandoned village", Kozara IV, 437–442.*

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## **THE DESERTED VILLAGE OF PUCARI IN THE SUMMER OF 1942**

The people of the village of Pucari, a peaceful and fertile settlement in the Potkozarje region, situated between Mt. Kozara and Prosara, not far from Bosanska Dubica, experienced a harsh wartime fate. This industrious and close-knit community, like the inhabitants of other Potkozarje villages, rose in mass rebellion against the enemy. They wished to live in freedom and contribute to the war effort against the occupiers.

The first year of the war passed during which the residents of Pucari actively participated. Everyone had their own way of contributing; everyone played a part. It was in the midst of this intense war in Mt. Kozara, with its fighters and people, that a major enemy offensive was launched. Thus, the Potkozarje village of Pucari experienced a fate similar to that of other Potkozarje villages.

The most challenging days befell us in July 1942. We had to leave our homes, abandon our possessions and, under the threat of Ustasha and German bayonets, head into uncertainty. Each of us thought we were going to our death; no one expected anything else. We were all driven from our homes – men, women and children. They herded us toward Bosanska Dubica where Ustasha beasts had been residing for a year. We knew them from countless atrocities against the people, the massacre in the Serbian Orthodox church in Draksenić and many other victims – killed men, women and children.

We reached Bosanska Dubica where the Ustashes detained us in a prison. All adult men were separated from us and taken away

somewhere to be beaten. Fear gripped us all about what would happen to us. They drove us toward Cerovljani and then to the Jasenovac death camp. The camps were overflowing so a certain number of women and children were sent to the villages of Slavonia and Croatia. I, along with part of my family and other now-few families, arrived in a village in Slavonia. We stayed there until the fall of 1942. Every day we thought about Mt. Kozara, our village. We were increasingly restless wanting to return home. Finally, we decided. We set out, possibly in October, and in small numbers reached Pucari. My brother Čedo Blagojević, whom the Ustashas detained in Bosanska Dubica and shot at the cemetery, did not return with us. Another brother disappeared in the Zemun camp and a third died in captivity in Germany.

When we arrived in Bosanska Dubica the Ustashas once again detained us in prison. There, we managed to find Miloš Jošanović who was living in Bosanska Dubica at the time. He told us that an enemy unit was in Pucari. I don't know how he obtained permits, but he got us permits and we went to Pucari. Passing through villages from Dubica to Pucari we saw complete devastation. We only encountered civilians from Herzegovina who were returning from the villages, transporting and carrying plundered goods.

We arrived home. The house had been completely ransacked. Before going to the death camp we had buried some fat and other provisions. Everything was discovered and taken away. The house was in ruins and livestock roamed through the premises.

Milka Blagojević also came to the village with her five children. There were other women and children who arrived at that time, but from different parts of the village. Many other families were missing. What is most tragic is that among the arriving families there were no men, no adults, only a few boys around ten to twelve years old.

The village was relatively populated before the offensive. Now, there were hardly any people. In our house there were my four brothers. Čedo, Ognjen and Aleksandar were killed. My uncle Vaso and his

son Dragoje, old Milić and his sons Obrad, Pantelija and their sons Mirko and Milan, all our relatives.

The Topić family members who didn't return include Milan, Svetozar, Mirko, Rajko, Manojlo (who died with the partisans), Pero, Ljuban, Đuro Stanar and his son Mile (who was with the Partisans).

The Trubarac family members who didn't return include Živko, Ostoja and his son. Many fathers and even more sons suffered. Families were large, with several sons.

Mostly men suffered. The following people didn't return home: Stojan Gligić and his sons Milan and Nikola, as well as his wife Milja. Only one daughter remained. Đoko Tepić and his son Rade, who was a fighter, didn't return. Rade was detained in Bosanska Dubica and shot by the Ustashas. In Jasenovac, Đoko's son Vlade suffered, as he was stopped by the Ustashas in Jasenovac when we were passing through the death camp. Rajko and Đurdija, a husband and wife, were also detained. Their daughter Anka returned from the Sisak death camp, but died. She couldn't cope with the loss of her brothers and parents. Their house remained empty.

Pero Lazendić's home had been abandoned as well. Now, an elderly woman resides there who lost her husband and two sons during the offensive and the suffering of the people.

In the village of Kukunjevac, in Slavonia, Dušanka Topić, my peer, and her younger sister Marica were slaughtered. They were slaughtered in the church when they were driven from Mt. Kozara to Slavonia.

The family of Milan Maričić also suffered; he disappeared somewhere in a death camp. His wife Stojka, with two children and her mother, were slaughtered in the village of Bjelanovac in Slavonia. Many people from Mt. Kozara who found themselves in this village were driven to death camps. Many elderly, women and children suffered. Two children of Mirko Dimić, along with their mother and grandmother, were killed. Only two children somehow managed to survive in Slavonia.

The village was devoid of families; houses were overgrown with grass and weeds. It looked as though we had been absent for years, not just months. There were only paths where those who plundered the villages passed.

All the harvested grain was collected; wheat, which was ripe when we were driven away, had been harvested, as had the corn because we arrived in late autumn. There was nothing to eat. We received some supplies from Jablanica. The potatoes, which were just about to be dug, had already been excavated. In some places you could find some crops, but almost everything had been either purchased or destroyed by the livestock which roamed freely until enemy soldiers took them.

We had hidden some corn, but it was discovered and taken away. Nevertheless, we managed to gather some. However, the Ustashas from Orahovo started plundering us again. Almost every day they would come with train cars, buy everything they found and drive us away. They continually harassed us. We had to flee and hide to avoid being captured, killed or driven to camps again. We lived in constant fear. We fled to the neighboring village of Vojskovo, closer to Mt. Kozara.

Immediately before our arrival in the village the Ustashas came to the Bijakovac village and captured the Kos family, slaughtering a woman, a girl and two children there.

In the village of Pucari, an enemy unit was located. They built trenches and bunkers to secure themselves from the Partisans. There were Partisans in Mt. Kozara, but they did not come to our village. When we were heading to Vojskovo we would get in touch with the Partisans. There was Boško Čade with a few other comrades whom I did not know. They were interested in their families, their parents, brothers and sisters. Everyone wanted to find out something about their families.

The Ustashas began burning our houses again and destroying our property. They sensed the presence of Partisans so every time

they came to the villages they would set houses on fire. We had nowhere to stay.

Food was very scarce. It was particularly challenging to obtain fat and salt. Winter of 1942/43 was approaching and we were without a roof over our heads. We had to collect some food. Even though the Ustashas were plundering us we managed to gather and hide some supplies. Each family made some shelter where they concealed food. We lived in constant fear. We had to be cautious. It was difficult. We had to do something to take care of our families, but at any moment we could expect the Ustashas to come to the village, surprise us and capture us.

This situation persisted until the end of 1942. In the meantime, the enemy unit that was in our village left. It was a bit freer now and many families arrived. Everyone gathered around their hearths.

Radosava Blagojević–Sirovina

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*Radosava Blagojević–Sirovina, "The deserted village of Pucari in the summer of 1942", Kozara IV, 443–446.*

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## **THE SUFFERING OF THE PEOPLE IN THE VILLAGE OF KIJEVAC IN 1942**

In February 1942, the people of the village of Kijevac were forced to leave their homes and escape to villages in the Potkozarje region. They had to flee because they faced the daily threat of being killed or sent to Ustasha concentration camps. It was a harsh winter when we fled to the village of Podgradac. My mother and us three sisters fled while our father and brothers were with the partisans. Those who couldn't escape were killed by the Ustasha.

Thanks to the hospitality of the families where we were sheltered, we felt well here.

When the offensive began in Mt. Kozara we started moving as refugees. We didn't know what was happening in Mt. Kozara and its slopes where the Partisans were fighting daily battles against the enemy and protecting the people there. Life in Mt. Kozara was becoming increasingly difficult. Some families united and our family joined forces with the Veljko Popović family who were Partisans. When the enemy reached Mt. Kozara we were together. We headed to the village of Dragelje. We were captured there. In our village there were the families of Šokčević, Đurđević, Davidović, Stojnić, Adžić and many others. There was hardly a house that didn't have someone in it. Mostly there were women and children. There were very few adult men and a few fighters who hadn't managed to break through the encirclement or hide. That's how Ostoja Kusić from Romanovac, who was with my father among the Partisans, was caught and executed later to avoid enemy torture. My brother Danilo died during the

breakout from the encirclement while my father and another brother, Rajko, were captured somewhere in Mt. Kozara and taken to Banja Luka where they were executed along with Atif Topić.

The Germans captured us and took us to Bosanska Gradiška. They said we were going for questioning and would be returned home. However, in Bosanska Gradiška, we were handed over to the Ustashas. We spent one night near the hospital and the next day. They transported us to Stara Gradiška, to a death camp. We stayed there for two to three days.

In Stara Gradiška, they started separating men from women and children. They had lists that they were calling from. They called Dragan Šipka and then Father Pilja Stanišljević and some others and shot them immediately. We watched it.

Later, they took us to Jablanac and Mlaka where we spent a longer time. There, they separated men from women. In the death camp they tortured Mila Šinik and his wife who were originally from Podgradac. Their cries and pleas could be heard. It was hard to listen to. They didn't return them to us and we concluded that they had died in the most severe suffering.

They also separated young women and girls for labor in Germany as well as children whom they sent to various death camps. It was heartbreaking to see mothers whose children were taken away. They separated hundreds of children from their parents. We watched as the Ustashas forcibly took babies from their mothers some of whom were no more than a few months old.

It was difficult to witness the Ustashas in the Mlaka death camp separating and taking the children away in about 150 horse-drawn train cars. The usual July heat was scorching. The children cried and called for their mothers desperately seeking water, shouting: "Mom, water, water."

We spent the most time in the Mlaka death camp, about a month and a bit more. We didn't receive proper food. From our relatives, the Perović family, who remained in the village, we received some corn-

meal which we shared. The village of Mlaka, where we were accommodated, was deserted. Empty houses and unpicked crops were all that remained. We found a little corn, cabbage, occasional grapes or plums in the abandoned houses in the village and that's what we ate.

In the camp, an epidemic of various diseases broke out. People died every day. We usually found more than 40 dead among us every morning. Those who were physically weaker couldn't endure and died. Mile Đorđević, our neighbor, was sick for a long time. One day he jumped into the Sava river with the intention of drowning himself. When they noticed this someone jumped in after him. At the last moment, they pulled him out of the water. My mother approached him and asked: "Mile, would you like to eat something?" He replied: "Why are you asking when I know we have nothing to eat." A friend from Bistrica gave him a little rakija. He died soon after. The problem arose of how to bury him. We were all exhausted, but we barely managed to bury him.

Before our departure from this death camp the Ustasha collected all the boys over 12 years old. This was the last group they could separate. Otherwise, they kept taking someone away and driving them somewhere. Sometimes they took young boys; other times middle-aged men. That's how they collected everyone capable before our departure from the Mlaka death camp. Eventually, they took the young women and girls. Every time they took women and girls, I hid and when they took children my mother hid my younger sister who was seven years old. I couldn't hide this time. One day, they came in and took me. My mother came up with an excuse and told the doctor that I had caught a fever and was seriously ill. To my surprise and happiness they let me go. I returned to my mother again. We heard the next day that all the women and girls who were taken that day were raped and killed in Gradina, near Jasenovac. We were told that we were going to Germany, but none of them ever returned. Savka Šokčević begged my mother to give me to her because all her children were taken. We ended up in captivity somewhere among the last

groups of people from Mt. Kozara so we fared a bit better. Those who were among the first suffered even more.

One day, we were driven to Jasenovac. To protect myself, I took a neighbor's child and carried it. I dressed in old and worn-out clothes to blend in. When I passed by the Ustasha guards they began trying to take the child from me and separate us. My mother rushed over and told them I was sick and had a child. One of the Ustasha guards hit me with a shovel and let me go.

They packed us into cattle cars. They kept us at the railway station, in sealed cars, for three days. We couldn't get out. It was unbearable. The worst part was the lack of water. We were suffocating. There were about 50 or more of us in one car. One mother with four children had a nervous breakdown. The Ustashes wanted to torture us in this way, to exhaust us with hunger and thirst, to make us suffocate one after another. It seemed like we wouldn't make it. It was hardest with the small children who found this unbearable life very difficult to endure. We sat and waited to see what would become of us. Many women passed out. We lifted the unconscious towards the small openings in the cars. In such a situation, we barely waited for the train to start. We didn't know where we were going. Only when we got out, after a long journey, did we realize we were in Slavenska Požega. Then they distributed us in villages. Judging by everything they didn't know what to do with us anymore. The camps were already overflowing.

The village landlords, known as "elders", came to our villages. They inquired if we could work. Some women from the villages came and took children in. One woman took my younger sister and another took the youngest. My younger sister Danica was 13 years old. The woman who took her was interested in whether she had gone to school. Everyone avoided my mother and the seven-year-old as she wasn't capable of working having a small child. Eventually, the woman who took me in also took the youngest with us. We stayed in this village for a short time, possibly around eight days, and then we were sent to the village of Migalovci.

The people of Migalovci had also been driven from their homes. They placed us in abandoned houses. The grain was still there. Wheat had been harvested so we threshed it and prepared food. Soon, the people began to flee from here as well. We didn't know where they were going. One day Milan Suvajac from Bosanska Gradiška came here. He was looking for his sister Gina who was married to Veljko Popović. We begged him to take us with him, but he couldn't. Somehow, he obtained a pass for his sister Gina and he wanted to take her. We noticed that others were gradually leaving. So, we joined him, my mother and the three children, along with the Šipka family.

We arrived at the railway station in Okučani. Anka Šipka had some relatives in the village of Cage, near Okučani. She was going to them and invited us because we hadn't separated until then. Since we heard that our father was alive we hurried to get home as soon as possible. Because of that, we didn't go with Anka Šipka and her family to the village of Cagama. Upon their arrival there Anka's family was captured by the Ustasha and killed.

We arrived at the bridge over the Sava river to Bosanska Gradiška. There, we met Milan Suvajac again. He was waiting for his sister. He warned us not to go to Bosanska Gradiška at all as the Ustashas were arresting people there again.

We remembered our acquaintance Bogdan Stanišljević from Turjak who lived in Bosanska Gradiška and went to him. He was surprised when he saw us. He told us that, despite his best intentions, he couldn't take us in. He recommended that we try to obtain passes. When we went to the designated place we met a gendarmerie sergeant who had previously served in Turjak. I went to him and asked for a pass for our relative Ilinka Perović from Romanovac and myself while the two younger sisters didn't need passes.

With passes in hand, we headed to Aleksandrovac, to Jovo Perović's. Although we were previously informed that our father and brother were alive, he now told us the truth – our father and brother were executed in Banja Luka. Later, we learned that our brother

Danilo was killed during an escape attempt. As soon as we arrived, we started thinking about how to go to Kijevci, to our home. We were constantly drawn to go there. Our village was about twenty kilometers away from Aleksandrovac and in that direction there was also enemy forces. Nevertheless, we decided to go and set off.

One Sunday, we set off in a cart to the village. We arrived at an abandoned estate. In the village, we had an uncle, Peko Perović, who had survived the offensive. It was September 1942.

Only a few of the villagers were present in the village. One part of the village was completely devastated, especially the families who had someone in the Partisans.

We stayed in the village on Sunday and Monday. Already on Monday, landlord Ostoja Gajić came and told my mother that she had no right to “live in the Independent State of Croatia” and couldn’t buy plums which we had started collecting as they were no longer ours. He told my mother to report to the police station in Cerovljani the next morning. We promised, but we escaped to the village of Romanovac with our relatives.

We sought refuge with our relatives in Romanovci. Peko Perović sheltered us for a while in his barn. His house had also been burnt down. Later, we moved to our uncle Vaso Perović’s house in the village of Viluse where we spent some time. We were still drawn to go back to our home. So, one evening I sneaked into our village. I was noticed by Mara Kutlača, our neighbor, who told me that Partisans Stevan Matavulj, Mira Šinik and some others were coming to our village. This filled me with joy and I felt safer.

In the autumn of 1942, we returned to our village and continued to live there – my mother with the three of us children. We worked around the house and lived cautiously. Whenever we spotted enemy forces we fled into the woods.

The village was deserted. Many people had perished including 43 fighters who had joined the Partisans back in 1941. A considerable number of men were captured and driven to death camps where

they perished. From our family alone, three – our father and two brothers – had died. In the Šokčević family, four brothers – Lazo, Tode, Milan and Jovo – had perished. Lazo, a fighter, was wounded at Draganji before the Mt. Kozara Offensive. We saw him wounded in the legs in Mt. Kozara when we were moving towards Vitlovsko. He couldn't move any further. His wife hid him in a shrub, covered him with branches and left him with a little corn. He suffered when the enemy forces passed through Mt. Kozara. My schoolmate Stevo Desančić, who was also a fighter, perished.

After their release from the death camps the survivors from Kijeveci, especially the youth, resumed their efforts in support of the national liberation movement. This dedication began towards the end of 1942 and the start of 1943, and the village's sacrifices only further motivated them to persist in their fight against the enemy.

Mileva Perović Dakić

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*Mileva Perović Dakić, "The suffering of the people in the village of Kijevec in 1942", Kozara IV, 447–452.*

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## MASSACRE OF THE MT. KOZARA PEOPLE IN HRVATSKA DUBICA

During the offensive in Mt. Kozara the people of the village of Donji Jelovac were in flight in Mt. Kozara for nearly a month. Shortly before the breakthrough of the enemy encirclement a few of us were carrying wounded from the so-called Grabov jarak to Velika Gradina. From there we proceeded past Dragoja Čupić's house towards Studena on the road from Knežica to Prijedor. I was carrying a wounded person named Boško Maćura. The wounded were handed over to one of the Partisan units responsible for their care.

During the night the Partisans managed to break through on this sector and, along with some of the wounded, left the encirclement. Many people followed them, but not all managed to escape. It happened between Velika and Mala Gradina. We intended to retreat further into Mt. Kozara. However, the enemy cut off our escape route and we were captured.

This time many people from our village of Donji Jelovac were captured. There were eighteen from the Čado families: Boško, Rade, Jefto, Dođa, Dušan and others; five from the Vučen families: Jovica, Mićo, Mićo's son Vujo and Dragoja. Dragoja was separated from our group in Bosanska Dubica because he was wearing parts of a uniform. He was killed on the cemetery in Bosanska Dubica as a Partisan.

In addition to families from Donji Jelovac there were also families from the villages of Čitluk and Strigova, Slabinja and Ševarlije. I remember the Čubić families.

We were captured by Germans and the Ustashas who attacked us from several directions. There was no way to escape. They drove us

onto the plain and began to beat some of us. In the group there were people who were supporters and background workers.

From there they took us down to the Mlječanica river to the Latiновиć houses. There, they awaited us with trucks. They loaded up to 80 people, women and children included into each truck. There were six trucks in total. We could hear the cries and weeping of children, but none of the enemy soldiers paid any attention.

It appears that we were among the first captives from Mt. Kozara. When we entered Bosanska Dubica we were met with a big surprise. They poured scalding water on us from the windows of some houses. Some in the trucks were injured by the boiling water.

We arrived in front of the former district building. When the trucks stopped we heard cries of: “Kill them! Where are you taking them?” We waited to see what would happen to us.

They soon ordered us to move further, across the bridge, into Hrvatska Dubica. They took us to the “Ustasha home” which was located near the Roman Catholic church in Hrvatska Dubica. Here, they separated women and children to one side and men and older boys (12 years and older) to the other side.

In our group, there were around 80 or more men. We were in the yard of the “Ustasha home”. In the evening two German officers arrived with an interpreter. The German officers informed us that we would be sent to work in Germany. Women and children would be sent to Croatian villages, where they would stay “until Mt. Kozara was cleared of Partisans”. Afterward, they would be returned to their homes. To this, Milica Čađo, the wife of Đođa, shouted: “What are we going to do at home when everything we had is burned?” They replied that their state is strong and they would fix everything and put it in order. The German officers, along with the Ustasha interpreter, soon left. We contemplated what would happen to us. None of us believed what the German officers had said. We could see that the Ustashes were guarding us and we knew well what the Ustashes did in our sub-Kozara villages. They killed everyone – men, women and children.

They made no distinction between adults and children, the weak and the helpless. They killed them equally, stabbed them with knives and slaughtered them. Our fate was in the hands of such evildoers.

As soon as the German officers left a large group of Ustashas arrived. There were more than eighty of them. They entered the yard. They had small flashlights. We waited to hear what they would order and what they would do to us. They ordered us to sit down. They asked who had led us and incited us to rise up against the Ustasha and German authorities. They demanded to know who among us was the most literate. We all remained silent. Nobody said a word. We did not know what they wanted to achieve with this. The Ustashas persisted and continued, telling us not to be afraid and to tell them who was the most literate among us. Without thinking that it would make his difficult situation even worse Dragić Balaban addressed Đoda Čađo with the words: “Đoda, why don't you announce yourself as literate? You were a village headman for seven to eight years.” Đoda replied that he was the headman before the war, not now. The Ustashas ordered him to step aside. Đoda stepped out and stood several meters away from us, adding that Dragić was a blacksmith and a hunter and knew something so the Ustasha ordered him to come out and stand with Đoda. They then singled out Radovan Čađo, Kosta's son, and placed him beside Đoda and Dragić Balaban. They found two more men and singled them out. I don't recall who they were. The Ustashas then announced that these five would go to “trial” and that they would reveal everything they knew about who led us against the Ustasha and German authorities.

In the meantime, another group of women and people had arrived here. It was already night so we couldn't recognize them. I noticed Ruža Čađo, D Mitar's wife from Donji Jelovac and Svetko Cvijić's daughter from Gornji Jelovac. Ruža Čađo had something of clothing with her and she placed it beside her. One of the Ustasha approached her and, cursing her Serbian and partisan mother, said: “You were a Partisan cook and you even have golden teeth”. They ordered her to

come to them. They separated her and Svetko Cvijić's daughter. They told them that they were Partisan cooks and that they had persuaded the Home Guards to surrender to the Partisans. They also separated several more women mostly younger ones. They started beating and trampling on them right there in front of us.

They began to cry, calling for help, but no one dared to approach them. The Ustashas separated from them at one point and moved towards the group they had singled out among us. They started beating these people mercilessly. Miloš Stupar, originally from Ušivac, tried to escape. He had nowhere to go because we were in a high-fenced courtyard. The only way out was through the gate, but there were Ustashas there. Besides, the gate was closed. There was a stone fence around. Only in one place, towards the Una river, there was a small gap where the stone wall had collapsed. The Ustashas came after Stupar and simply stabbed him with knives. They also killed the three of them – Đođa Čado, Dragić Balaban and Radovan Čado, Kosta's son. Radovan Čado was holding a small child in his arms so he appealed to the Ustashas to let him leave the child before they killed him. The Ustashas snatched the child from his arms and threw it into the crowd of people. They pushed them into a corner and then one of the Ustashas picked up a big stone and started hitting them on the head. Muffled, unintelligible voices could be heard.

They returned from them and continued to discuss something. Then they lined up in front of us. Jovica Vučen was on our right side. They ordered us to sit on the ground. Jovica was smoking a pipe and he had asthma so he often coughed. One of the Ustashas taunted him: "What, are you coughing? You caught a cold in Mt. Kozara shouting 'hurray', your Partisan mother." "Now shout 'hurray'!" Everyone rushed at us at that moment. There were more Ustashas than us. Before that, they took off whips and pitchforks from some train cars that were in the yard and then they started beating us.

Dušan Čado was in front of me in the first row while I was behind him in the second row right next to the carts. I saw when they

hit Dušan on the head. His head burst and he fell over the cart. His legs were above me because I had crawled under the cart. Someone met me there. It was someone from our side who had also tried to hide under the cart. I couldn't crawl further under the cart because of his legs. Dead Dušan Čađo was lying above me. The Ustashas continued to beat and kill and people were falling like mown grass. They killed everyone. It started to calm down. I found myself under the cart, hearing what was happening. I hadn't been hit by the Ustashas yet. There was silence. People around me were dead or if someone accidentally remained alive they had calmed down. There was only the Ustashas murmuring something in the silence.

Soon, I heard the voice of an Ustasha saying: "Let's see if someone is still alive, damn them". A bit further from me someone was moaning: "Oh, my mother". It was Sava Čađo. I knew him well. An Ustasha approached him and jeered: "What are you moaning, your Serbian mother". Sava replied heavily that he was dying but couldn't die. Then the Ustasha told him to say he was Serbian and then they would slaughter him. Sava replied shortly: "I am, I'm Serbian from the bottom of my socks so kill me or don't!" The Ustasha approached him and stabbed him with a knife several times. I heard Sava, the unfortunate one, gasping.

On the right side, someone else was calling and crying out. It was Jefto Čađo. An Ustasha approached him, saying: "You won't go any further" and then he stabbed him with a knife. It seemed that everyone was dead now. Again, the Ustashas agreed to move on and check if there was anyone else alive. They went from one to another shining a flashlight on them. If they thought someone was still alive they placed a hand on him to confirm and if they showed signs of life they finished them off. If the Ustasha with a knife found them he would stab them several times and if the Ustasha had a pistol he would fire a shot or two and finish them off. They went one by one searching for those who were still showing signs of life.

They reached the carts under which I was hiding. I had calmed down as if I was dead. The Ustasha placed a hand on me and realized

I was alive. Then they stabbed me in the hip area with a knife. When they withdrew the knife, I don't remember how, I turned to the other side. At that moment, Dušan Čado, who was already dead, fell off the cart and landed on top of me. The Ustasha stabbed dead Dušan several times through his body and the knife barely reached me five or six more times. I survived this wave of Ustasha attacks as well. I don't know what will happen next. I'm no longer able to think. Ustasha knives are constantly before my eyes. In my ears, it's as if I can hear the blows. Dull strikes of whips and pitchforks and the stabbing of knives into helpless people, falling on top of one another.

Grave silence had taken over. This was a true cemetery. The Ustashes had moved away a bit. I could hear them laughing, rejoicing. They spoke to the women and asked them how they felt after witnessing everything they were forced to watch. These women were in the same circle, about ten to fifteen meters away from us. There were children who had seen everything, including when the Ustashes killed their fathers, brothers and grandfathers. Someone replied to the Ustasha's question telling them that it was as they wanted it and they had nothing more to say.

The Ustashes continued to pass by the dead, pushing them and kicking them uttering derogatory words and cursing their Serbian and partisan mothers. They said things like: "Look, this one spilled brains and that one teeth", and so on. They reveled in their actions and cruelty toward the corpses.

I can hear them talking again. One of the Ustashes suggests that they should stage something because someone might be held accountable for all the killings. Another adds that it would be a good idea to throw one of the dead toward the open part of the walled fence, fire a few bursts of machine gun fire and claim that the prisoners had tried to escape and they had to be shot. They proceeded to do just that. They took one of the deceased and threw him toward the opening in the wall which faced the Una river. Afterward, they began launching rockets and shooting. At the same time, from the

other side of the Una river, from Bosanska Dubica, near the Agricultural School, we could hear gunfire. This lasted for some time and then everything quieted down. All of this continued until around one hour past midnight.

Sometime before dawn a truck with Home Guards arrived. The gate was opened and they entered passing by women and children. Orders were given to collect the corpses and load them onto the trucks. Some of the Home Guard officers began to express their reluctance to do this, but the Ustashas threatened to kill them if they didn't comply. The Home Guard collected the bodies and loaded them onto the truck. When the truck was full they drove the corpses somewhere. I later found out that they were taken to the village of Predore, not far from Dubica, toward Jasenovac, and buried. Over forty corpses were thrown into the Sava river, most of them from the villages of Donji Jelovac and Kozarci. Today, there are no markers to indicate that a group of people from Knežpolje and Kozara, whom the Ustashas had liquidated in the beginning of July 1942, lies there in Hrvatska Dubica.

I'm waiting to see what will happen to me. I have lost all hope of survival. I know that I will be discovered and killed. I even think that it would have been better if I were already dead. In these moments of life-and-death struggle various thoughts come to my mind including the notion that it might have been better if I hadn't hidden as I would have faced death sooner. Now, with the dawn approaching they will take the killed somewhere and all of this will enable them to discover that i'm alive. What will the Ustashas do to me then? My nerves are already beginning to fray. I can no longer endure this uncertainty, waiting for when an Ustasha will approach me with blood-stained hands and a knife.

The night continued. After the corpses were collected the doors in the hallway of the house were opened. I saw the light. It was moving towards the place where the corpses had been. I noticed the same two German officers with their interpreter. They were the ones who

had come right after we arrived here. I could hear the interpreter expressing his astonishment at what he saw. The Ustashas explained that the executed had started to flee pointing towards the corpse located near the opening in the wall and then at the mutilated Miloš Stupar who had gone to keep watch. Even the Ustasha guard confirmed that.

The interpreter asked how it was possible for some of the corpses to be so badly damaged with their heads shattered when they were shot. The Ustashas found an explanation here as well saying that it was due to explosive bullets. The German officers and the interpreter left. A truck arrived for the remaining corpses.

Just as the Home Guard entered the gate with a truck German officers and an interpreter reappeared. The interpreter started calling for anyone who was still alive to come forward assuring that nothing would happen to them. He did this a few times. Soon, an elderly man named Petar Macura from Donji Jelovac responded; he must have been over 70 years old at the time. I heard him calling for Boško Čado, followed by Rade Čado and then Rade Čado (Jelin). I decided to call out as well, but I couldn't due to the pain from my wounds. They sensed that I was alive and urged me to come forward. I spoke with great difficulty explaining that I couldn't because the Ustashas had beaten me. One of them took my hand and helped me up. Meanwhile, the Ustashas began beating some boys. The one who was leading me rushed over there while another Ustasha grabbed a dead child and struck me with it, taunting that I wouldn't survive and insulting my mother.

The Home Guard gathered the bodies and took them away. Among the nine of us who were alive amid the corpses I remember that there were Petar Macura, Boško Čado, Rade Čado, Rade Čado (Jelin), Dragoja Mijić, Đoko Mijić and three others whose names I have forgotten. Five of us, among the nine, had gone to fetch water and were not present during the Ustasha killings while the remaining four of us who had been stabbed remained among the corpses.

We were taken into a room. It was open. We addressed the interpreter asking for protection. He locked us in and secured the door. A doctor came providing us with medical care and putting bandages on our wounds. After that I lost consciousness or fell asleep. I was no longer aware of what was happening to us. I regained consciousness when I was transported to the Ustasha death camp of Jasenovac. I looked around and saw my family, my wife and children. There were other families there, too. I remember Desa Grbić from Čitluk spreading a sheet on which I lay, covered in blood. My daughter and granddaughter brought me cornmeal soups. I ate a little of the warm soup and started to recover. I stayed there until the next morning.

On the second day they herded us into an orchard above the brickyard. There, they separated the older men from the twelve-year-olds on one side and the women and the rest of the children on the other side. The women and children were sent back to the camp we came from while they drove us, the men, to the so-called “Camp IIIc”.

Đoko Mijić

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*Đoko Mijić, “Massacre of the Mt. Kozara people in  
Hrvatska Dubica”, Kozara IV, 499–505.*

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## **FROM JASENOVAC, THROUGH SLAVONIA, TO MT. KOZARA**

In the Ustasha death camp “IIIc”, where I arrived with a group of people from Mt. Kozara in July 1942, there were Jews and Roma. During my eleven-day stay in this part of the camp over 1,300 people from Mt. Kozara were brought there. Later, there would be significantly more, in the thousands.

The “IIIc” death camp was considered the strictest. It housed inmates who were sentenced to liquidation. There were nine rows of barbed wire around the camp and there was also a wire fence outside. We were placed in an open area surrounded by wire, with no buildings, barracks or the like.

The very next day we were forced to work. We were digging willow trees by the Sava river on the embankment. Young boys, around ten years old, were with us carrying water in containers. They assigned one person out of every twenty inmates a long rod. Their task was to watch over their group and use the rod to strike any camp inmate who stood up. If they refused to do so the Ustashas would beat or kill them. We worked on digging willow trees all day. Each night we brought bundles of willow branches that we had collected during the day. We used these bundles as makeshift beds to sleep on. On St. Peter’s Day, the July 12, it rained and water was running beneath us. Those who had brought willow bundles from work could somewhat protect themselves from the water. Since my unhealed wounds were hurting I was sent back to the death camp. I was ordered to clean the death camp of waste. I couldn’t move so I had to crawl on my hands and feet. That’s how I reached the

Roma group. There were quite a few Roma people in the camp. A Roma woman invited me to stay with them because “the killers” were coming. Until then I didn’t know that some Ustashas roamed around the death camp and liquidated inmates. The Roma woman told me that I was covered in blood and the Ustashas would ask about it so it’s better to stay with them. I remained there until the Ustashas passed.

The first evening here in death camp “IIIc” they held a speech about how we should behave. Then the Ustashas called a death camp inmate to the front. While talking about how we should behave they added: “Those who refuse to work and obey will be like this”. They ordered the inmate to bow his head and shot a magazine into his head. They ordered the body of the murdered man to be thrown into the Sava river. They reiterated that we would all end up like this. On the eleventh day of my stay in the camp, early in the morning, gunshots were heard coming from the direction of Gradina, from Mt. Kozara. All the gates were open at the time and the Ustashas were preoccupied with something. I decided to escape. A friend from Herzegovina joined me. I called my brother Dragoje Mijić to join us, but he was indecisive and told me that we would die.

I quickly left the death camp gate. I was with another person from Herzegovina. We didn’t know where to escape. We reached the railway tracks and hid in tall grass, reeds, where there was water. We stayed there until night. In the evening we went to sneak into the woods. We walked alongside the railway. We encountered a railway guard who didn’t allow us to continue on the path. He handed us over in Novska.

In Novska, there was also a death camp with people from villages around Prijedor. Here, there were no killings, but many people died daily. A significant portion of death camp inmates died possibly due to poisoning. It was rumored that they put live soda in the food causing many to die. The death camp was enclosed by a quadruple row of barbed wire.

I met Ilija Ćibić from Ševarlije here. He managed to make a connection with one guard by giving him three gold coins to save the three of us from the death camp. This included Ilija Ćibić, Simo Bal-

aban from Slabinja and me. I remember that this guard was named Ivica. Before the war he used to trade in cattle so he knew Ilija from there. We agreed that one day when he was on duty, around three in the morning, we would escape. This Ustasha mentioned to Ilija to bring the “bloody one”, meaning me, as my wounds from Ustasha knife stabs in Hrvatska Dubica were still bleeding.

At the appointed time the three of us met at the gate. I felt weak and my wounds were hurting. Two more death camp inmates, Kojo Bijelić from Knežica and Mirko Bućma from Dvorišta, joined us. Ivica directed us on which way to escape.

We headed in a particular direction. Along the way we encountered an Ustasha who asked us to get him shoes and told us to wait for him. He advised us not to go to the right, as there was a “band” there, but to go left towards the village of Mali Grabovac. He suggested that we wait for him and we “agreed”, promising to wait for him. However, as soon as he left we went on one side and then turned left. We did the opposite of what the unknown Ustasha had explained believing that we would find Partisans on this side.

We first walked alongside the road and then through the forest. We walked for almost the entire day. We set out early in the morning and somewhere after noon we arrived in the village of Bair. Here, two young men greeted us with knives in their hands. We were scared about what would happen to us. The young men asked us where we were coming from and we told them that we were coming from the Jasenovac death camp or Novska. One of the young men went somewhere while the other stayed with us. Soon, three Partisans appeared with the young man who had left earlier. They were well-armed, with five-pointed stars on their caps. They first questioned us about where we were from and how we had come here. Once they were convinced of the truth of our stories they embraced us. It was a relief for both us and them to have found each other.

We continued to the first houses and were arranged in homes to have lunch. We were so tired and exhausted that we couldn't eat. We

set off again towards Popovac. We walked from one contact to another. From Popovac, we went to Brezovac. Ilija Ćibić found his family there and stayed with them. In Brezovac, we arrived at Simo Bajić's house, the president of the National Liberation Committee. His son-in-law was a communist. We told them everything we had experienced, from Mt. Kozara when we were captured, to the Jasenovac and Novska death camps. We were kept there for some time while Simo went to the local command located in Gornje Kričke.

A group of fighters, Partisans, arrived in the village. They invited us to join them. These partisans wanted us to tell them about how the Mt. Kozara Partisans had fought. We shared everything we knew. They were impressed by the courage and determination of the Mt. Kozara Partisans. These Partisans also shared stories of their successful battles with us. We told our comrades that we wanted to find our families.

Mirko Bućma, Kojo Bijelić and Simo Balaban found their families and went to them. I stayed in the local command for medical treatment. There, I learned about my family's whereabouts. They were in Rajići so I went to join them. Here, the Ustashas found out about me and they were looking for me. I fled back to the village of Kričke near Brezovac. At that time, there were also Proleterci (\*soldiers of the elite Partisan troops) from the First Krajina Proletarian Battalion there.

I was soon chosen to represent the people of Mt. Kozara in the National Liberation Committee. I would travel to villages with Vojo Popović and Gojko Vučinić. There, we would hold meetings with the locals. These meetings were mainly conducted at night while during the day we would hide with the supporters of the National Liberation Movement.

One day, I was told to prepare for a journey back to Mt. Kozara. A group of Proletarians from Banija was escorting an "old Spaniard" (\*participant in the Spanish Civil War) to the Supreme Headquarters so we joined them. The journey was very long and dangerous. We had to cover many kilometers through enemy territory. We reached

the town of Crkveni Bok just before dawn. There, they handed us cushions which we would place over our mouths when we coughed. We had to remain inconspicuous.

When night fell we continued our journey. We reached the Sava river where boats were waiting for us. We crossed safely and set off further. In the village of Hrvatska Slabinja we learned that the connection across the Una river to Mt. Kozara through Bačvani had been cut off. We had to move upstream towards Babinac and Petrinja. It was already December 18, 1942. We arrived at the Una river, heading towards Petrinja. There were already agreed-upon signals for our arrival. Jovo Marjanović and Milovan Rodić welcomed us.

We parted ways with the Proleterci from Banija and crossed the Una river. I spent the night in the village of Babinac and then continued towards Donji Jelovac. Finally, after almost six months of staying in Ustasha camps and on the liberated territory of Slavonia, I returned home. When I entered my house everyone was surprised because they didn't know I was still alive. They were immensely happy. In the village, I found Dušan Vučen, Risto Vučen, the elder, Miha-jlo Čađo, Velimir Čađo and others who had survived the Mt. Kozara Offensive. For me, it meant a new lease on life, a return to my native land, Mt. Kozara, on the free territory.

Doko Mijić

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*Doko Mijić, "From Jasenovac, through Slavonia,  
to Kozara", Kozara IV, 510–513.*

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## **SON, RUN!**

We lived in the village of Sreflije, in a joint household, with my father Stevo, my mother Anka, my brothers Milan and Rajko as well as my only sister Desa, all older than me. They all worked and my father, in addition to household chores, was involved in the profitable buying and selling of livestock. When the war began I was fourteen years old, had completed elementary school and finished one year of high school.

My entire family, in a way, participated in the uprising. The attack on the gendarmerie barracks in Jelovac was prepared during meetings in our home. Regularly, Boro and Rade Gaćeša, the organizers of the uprising in our region, would come to our house. Since this part of Potkozarje was quickly liberated and my father, sister and oldest brother went to join the Partisans, I became involved in the People's Liberation Movement. In the spring of 1942, during the liberation of Prijedor, as a member of the People's Liberation Union of Youth of Bosnia and Herzegovina, I participated in actions conducted by our youth organization.

Before the offensive in June 1942, we were forced to retreat to Mt. Kozara as refugees. Unable to pass during the breakout of the encirclement on July 4 and 5 of the same year my father and brothers dug a well, not far from our home, and cleverly concealed it. I believe there were nine of us hiding there. After a few days, when it seemed that the enemy had passed, we emerged. My father and my three brothers planned to check the situation and bring back some

food and water which we were running out of. Just near the yard of our deserted and looted house we fell into a Ustasha–German ambush. Bound with wire and ropes, lined up in a single file, we were marched to Hrvatska Dubica and imprisoned in a school and churchyard. We joined other refugees from different villages and spent the night here. The next day, when they drove us further, I saw my mother. However, at the Cerovljani train station they locked us in large train cars each holding about a hundred people and the women were taken somewhere else. Confined in the train cars under heavy Ustasha guard, without food and water, we spent one day and two nights. Then, they forced us out with the butts of their rifles and lined us up three rows deep. Surrounded by the Ustashes on horseback we were driven, often at a run, toward Jasenovac.

I cannot describe what I experienced with my father and brothers in the Jasenovac concentration camp, camp IIIc. It would be impossible for anyone to do so. Therefore, I will try to relate just some of it. Our camp, under the open sky, was enclosed by high barbed wire, with a row of elevated guard towers, in reality, machine gun nests, trampled, muddy and knee–deep in filth. We had to sleep and live together with the dead which were rarely removed. I was terribly hungry. Once, I found a large bone of unknown origin in the garbage dump and broke it, not knowing what it was. I gnawed on it for a long time while the other camp inmates watched me sorrowfully. Another time, I dug up some edible roots by the wire and ate them with my brother Rajko, relishing the taste.

After spending several days in the camp they began giving us one meal a day, a few spoonfuls of cooked cabbage without salt and bread and then forcing us to do labor – digging a wide canal about six meters wide and quite deep, stretching across fields from the railroad embankment to the Sava river. The work was hard and the brutal treatment by the guards was unbearable. I pushed loaded carts of earth, but it was impossible to push them through the mud. We were all covered with filth to the point that we couldn't even recognize

each other. If someone fell from exhaustion they were immediately killed and buried in the embankment, covered with mud.

Then they removed me from working with the carts and gave me a different task. I carried water to the guards with two large buckets. I replaced a boy who was killed because he had tried to secretly give water to one of the camp inmates. The guards who I carried water to mistreated me in various ways. The abuse went to the extent that I found it unusual if one of them or the one guarding the well did not strike me. I could hardly keep on my feet. Besides, one of the guards would always threaten me with words like: "If you give that water to him before you give it to me, I will kill you" or the other way around. Once, they forced me to lie down and they poked me with their twisted, bloody knives as if they wanted to slaughter me.

On another occasion one Ustasha grabbed me by the legs and another by the arms. They threw me into the Sava river from the bank, among the corpses that mud and water had preserved. When I emerged they beat me again. The most challenging thing was to endure the abuse when my father and one of my brothers were working on the canal nearby. Any attempt they made to protect me was severely punished.

Nonetheless, we endured all the suffering until the end of August 1942 and managed to survive. Then, more than a hundred inmates, including us, were transferred to Koštarica, a place not far from Jasenovac, for another labor camp. It was a bit easier there because it was a smaller camp. We transported wood, repaired train cars and could find food more easily even if it was just foraging for roots or some wild apples.

After spending fifteen days in Koštarica, one night, under the moonlight, they lined us up in groups of four and marched us to the bridge in Jasenovac. This bridge was used exclusively for transferring inmates marked for execution and that's what happened to us. In the reception camp in Gradina which was, in reality, an enclosed space on an open field, about 400 people could fit. The high wire

touched the roof of the only house around with two gates, one for entry and the other for the final exit. When we were herded into the camp we were ordered to lie down. Standing or sitting was immediately punishable by death. We remained in this position for three days and nights all the while the Gypsies were digging large mass graves a couple of hundred meters away from the camp. During this time every night the Ustashas killed inmates as a warning in various ways and they remained there, dead, lying alongside us. They killed with clubs, strangled with belts and wires and stabbed with bayonets. The corpse of a Partisan from Sarajevo lay next to me throughout this time. Due to circumstances we were grouped around my father and other acquaintances from our village so we could communicate in a whisper and plan what to do when they took us for execution.

On that day, September 21, 1942, it was a sunny afternoon when around a hundred Ustashas gathered near us. The only thing separating us was a tall wire fence. At that moment the Gypsies brought cauldrons of soup and poured them into metal plates. People ate hungrily and then immediately began to writhe in pain. My father warned us not to eat as the food was poisoned and we discreetly spilled it. When we were ordered to stand up we got up with great difficulty. Some people continued to lie motionless. They began tying people with wire to a bar at one of the gates and led groups of around twenty to the execution site. Then, my father shouted: “Assemble!” – our signal to charge – adding, “Son, run!” Others were shouting: “Get up, people!” We rushed to the gate, pushing through with the Ustashas, clutching at the wire and falling. For a moment, the right gate was blocked by a crowd of people that was impossible to cross. My brother Rajko sprinted for it and fell. My father stood there and called out to my other brother Milan. He pushed me forcefully toward the other gate through which I passed and found myself by the Sava river, shielded by the bank. Instinctively, I ran along the river towards a willow tree. Meanwhile, in the camp there was chaos; sporadic gunshots, screams and dull blows could be heard. I ran

through fields, stumbling in the vineyards and blackberry bushes, falling and, with some strange strength and willpower, I tried to run further and escape. I caught up with three others who were running in the same direction. Among them, I recognized only Sima Kotur. I was almost certain that my family had managed to escape and I kept turning back to see if I could spot them. I didn't want to believe that when my father pushed me away. He had leaped in the opposite direction, towards the Ustashas, sacrificing his life to protect mine.

However, as I later learned, only the seven of us managed to escape from the execution site in Gradina.

In the village of Brljug, near the Moštanica monastery, began the second part of my life. First in the Partisan company led by Đorđe Vučen, and later in the V Kozara Brigade and eventually the XI Krajina Brigade.

Mihailo Dragaš

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*Mihailo Dragaš, "Son, run!",  
Kozara IV, 540–543.*

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## **I LOST MY ENTIRE FAMILY IN THE CAMP**

During the enemy offensive in Mt. Kozara, I was fourteen years old. I had heard about the war, but I never believed that such a terrible war would be fought here in Knešpolje and in my village of Sreflije.

One July day in 1942, I saw timed grenades exploding in the air, creating a ball of smoke. My aunt Milja Mijatović told me that this black smoke would drive us away from home. Soon, I realized that my aunt was right.

When the grenades started falling around our house my father ordered my younger brothers and me to go to Jošik, below the house, and hide there under the trees in the creek. Just then, very close to us, in our garden's potato patch, two artillery grenades exploded. The three of us, still children, clung tightly to each other. We suddenly heard a strange whistling and the sound of something crashing through the branches of Josik and then something fell to the ground. We thought it might explode again. I remembered my father's stories about the battles in World War I about grenades that whistled and bullets that brought death. Such a bullet was carried by my father in the back area, from the Salonika front.

When the enemy artillery fire subsided my father called us to come back home. Our garden was still smoldering from the pit created by the grenade just moments before. The earth and shrapnel were still hot. The second grenade had hit the hedge and shattered the toolbox.

Suddenly, we heard the loud rumble of motors on the road not far from our house. It didn't take long for enemy tanks to enter our village. The fascists began rounding up the terrified people, women, children and a few adult men.

On the way, down Sreflije, continuous columns of Mt. Kozara's people began to form. One soldier who wore white pants asked my mother to find him some civilian pants. She found and gave him my father's pants while his white pants were rolled up and hidden in the haystack. We heard people talk about a man who had killed himself rather than fall into the enemy's hands.

In general uncertainty all of us in the family looked to our caring and experienced father for guidance. We had faith in him. It was clear he was upset and frightened. He let our cattle loose in the uncut meadows and cornfields. He told me to release our dog, Lise, from her chain. My older brother Vaskrsija prepared the oxen with the train cars and luggage. When we started my mother began to cry and wail. It looked as if we were burying someone and now we were saying our goodbyes.

We joined the column where cries and lamentations echoed. The entire column resembled a huge funeral procession. We were moving together with aunt Stanka Sekulić, her family and our relatives, Marko and Đoko Mijatović.

Beside Petrović's and Dimić's houses a man was hanging from an old walnut tree branch. He had hanged himself to end his suffering.

We arrived at the place called Široka greda in the village of Draksenić. Around us were enemy patrols and guards. The forced marches and torture had already begun. The July sun tormented us with thirst and hunger.

One morning we set out towards Bosanska Dubica. Ahead of the bridge, over the Una river, a large group of Ustashas awaited us. With them were a few traitors who recognized the partisans in our column. All identified Partisans were separated and kept in Bosanska Dubica. Among these traitors was Jošanović from Prijedor.

We crossed the bridge over the Una and continued through Hrvatska Dubica towards Cerovljani. People from houses along the road watched our long column.

We arrive at Cerovljani where a multitude of people had already gathered on the left side of the road. To the right of us, at the airport, were biplanes that had frequently flown over Mt. Kozara, dropping bombs and strafing us. On the left side, at the entrance to the camp, next to a willow tree, stood an Ustasha with a heavy machine gun mounted on a tripod. The rows on the machine gun and the Ustasha adorned with them glistened. Just as we arrived, pressed close to one another, long bursts of heavy machine gun fire began to pass over our heads. The machine gun's fire was followed by a command that no one was allowed to attempt to escape or leave the camp as anyone who did so would be shot on the spot. Then came the order to separate all males over 16 years old. In the crowd there was suddenly wailing and weeping. Mothers, wives and children sobbed. Lamentations and mourning similar to those in funeral processions and at burials could be heard. These were moments that can never be forgotten—moments of farewell and parting. In fact, it was the first parting, the first tearing apart of families. It is hard to imagine how many tears were shed that day. There was no one who didn't cry. Everyone was separating from someone and someone was leaving for everyone. There were mutual embraces and kisses moistened with warm tears. Mothers kissed and bade farewell to their sons, wives said goodbye to their husbands, brothers to sisters. Careful fathers gave advice to their young children. Children hugged their fathers tightly around the neck with their little hands.

Our mother, with screams and tears, bid farewell to our father and brother Vaskrsija. "Will we ever see you again?" she lamented. That was when I hugged my father Milovan and brother Vaskrsija for the last time. Tears welled up in my eyes. The Ustashes forced their column to move. Father and brother each carried a blanket and a bundle of food in their hands. Tears followed tears. Our mouths were

as if frozen, as if we were dumbfounded. We were speechless. Father waved to us for a long time as the departing column moved toward the railway station. They were gone forever.

Only when the column had disappeared I remembered my father's last words to our mother: "Pava, take care of the children. They might send you women with children back home." He held back his tears, but it was clear that his eyes were filled with them. He was afraid that his tears might further agitate us and perhaps discourage us.

Many of the taken men hadn't even had a chance to bring a piece of bread with them. This was the case with Marijan Dimić from Pucare. His wife, Kosa, ran to give him a piece of bread. An Ustasha who was standing there pulled his automatic rifle and fired a whole burst at the unfortunate woman. We were mute witnesses to the shots, screams and the spilled blood of a young mother, all while her children looked on, utterly horrified.

We were held in the assembly camp at Cerovljani for about eight days. Then we were informed that we should pack up and head home to Bosanska Dubica. Only women and children remained. Despite all the difficulties and suffering we had endured we were somewhat relieved when we heard that we would be able to return home. We received this news with some uncertainty, but soon realized it was merely enemy propaganda.

A long column of people, women and children indeed set out toward Bosanska Dubica, but when we reached the crossroads they redirected our column toward Jasenovac. An even deeper sadness began to well up in our chests. We kept looking back toward the bridge over the Una, facing the Bosnian side, where our Mt. Kozara was visible. The knowledge that we were going farther away from our villages and into an Ustasha camp made us increasingly powerless to move. Our legs felt as though they had stiffened and we were running out of strength. The Ustashes followed us with bayonets on their rifles hurrying us along and shouting.

We passed through the village of Tanac and Jasenovac was already becoming visible. They settled us in Jasenovac and placed us in camp no. V. This camp was also called the Gypsy camp as they said that Gypsies had been here before us.

Camp V was located at the confluence of two rivers, Una and Sava, in the village of Uštica. It was surrounded by barbed wire and bunkers with Ustasha guards were built around it. We were placed in an open field, exposed to the elements, like livestock in a pen. I remember one night a storm hit accompanied by heavy rain and hail. We children gathered around our mothers and they covered us with straw mats. Below us streams of water flowed. We were wet and freezing. We anxiously awaited the sun to come out and at least partially dry our clothes which were completely soaked.

We received no food and the supplies we had brought from home were already depleted. Our godfather, Sava Milošević, also from Sreflije, stayed with the women and children. He was incapable of moving as his legs had frozen in the winter of 1941. He walked with the help of crutches. He was very witty, resourceful and would always say something to lift the spirits of the distressed mothers with young children. He removed a wheel from a train car and crushed corn from the cobs. The women would buy the larger kernels for soup and the smaller ones were used to make cornbread. Despite his disability the Ustashes killed him in the camp. Miloš Krneta from Donji Sreflije was also killed.

The Ustashes started taking away the younger women and girls, subjecting them to violence and rape. Girls from our village, Lepa Milošević, Stanka Mijatović, Nada Sekulić, Seka Gavrilović and others tied black scarves around their heads and pulled them down to their foreheads as older women did and they wore black skirts. When they came among the women they would take someone's child and thus appeared as mothers with little children.

On one side of our camp flowed the Una river and beyond it was our Bosnia. We often gazed in the direction of Mt. Kozara. We

fetches water from the Una. Women did some washing and children cooled off by the shore. One day we waded out deeper and swam to the middle of the river. That's when we heard a stern male voice: "Back!" followed by gunshots. They were shooting from the other side, from the bunkers that were camouflaged. We were no longer allowed to enter the water.

Sitting in a small group, we, the boys, watched boys from the surrounding fields tending to cattle through the barbed wire. We had done that work until recently, but at the time we didn't feel it as much, nor did we notice it. Freedom, especially, wasn't something we missed. Through the barbed wire everything was different, everything beyond it was vast and unattainable. It was as though the world behind the wire wasn't our regular world, but something else, a world and life that were unattainable, fenced off and separated from us by barbed wire.

One day the Ustashas ordered us to get ready to move. We didn't know where we were going. The rumors and speculations started again about our destination. Mother carried the youngest brother Bogdan, who was a year and a half old, in her arms and she held the slightly older Branislav by the hand. Tomislav and Boro went on their own and my sister Bosiljka carried a pot with some cooked corn. I carried a larger bundle of clothes.

We arrived at the train station in Jasenovac. There, beside a junction, stood an Ustasha who separated boys over 10 years old to the left. In front of me, they separated my neighbors, peers around 13–15 years old: Živko Kukić, Marjan and Ljubo Sekulić, and others. In those moments I pulled the bundle over my head, bent over and pushed forward as much as I could. That way I managed to pass through together with the women. My peers who were separated here never returned to our Mt. Kozara. They disappeared in the mass graves of fascist camps.

The mother, carrying her children and the burden of exhaustion from the July heat and hunger, began to stumble. An Ustasha struck

her several times with a whip. I couldn't and dared not help her, but it was hard to listen to her cries. I feared the Ustashas would discover me and send me back among the boys they had separated.

At the Jasenovac train station they quickly loaded us into cattle cars and then securely locked them from the outside. The July sun was scorching our cars and we were without water and air. We waited for a long time at the Jasenovac station and the train didn't move. They wanted to exhaust and torment us in this way as well. In the evening rain began to fall. We held our spoons through the train car grates hoping to catch a drop of rain. Children helped, saying: "Mom, give us some water!" Mother thought of using the urine of young children which wasn't impure and so we began to catch it in a small pot cooling it by blowing on it thus relieving our unbearable thirst.

Finally, the train started moving. Speculation arose about where they were taking us. In this agonizing anticipation we arrived at the Pleternica train station in Slavonia. The Ustashas opened our cars and let us out onto a field. From here, we were dispersed to villages in Slavonia.

I was taken in by Mate Starčević from the village of Lakušije. He was a Home Guard officer, but an honorable and honest man. He condemned the Ustashas' actions towards our people. When I told his mother Margita about how our people had suffered she cried for a long time. It was easier for me to see that they understood and empathized with our suffering. Mother remained unallocated for a long time. No one wanted to take her in with small children. Everyone wanted to take someone who could work for them. I used to bring bread to my mother in that field. She got tired of waiting here and one day she returned to Bosanska Dubica with her children. She hid in Smail Ajvaz's hayloft. The Ustashas found her and along with her children sent her back to the Jasenovac camp where she was killed with her five children.

I somehow managed to transfer from Slavonia to my hometown Sreflje around mid-1943. I was looking forward to reuniting with

my mother, brothers and sister, but I was greeted by an empty village, looted and overgrown with weeds. I remained alone from my large family.

I couldn't find peace and tranquility for days. My parents, brothers and sisters were constantly on my mind. My dearest ones – father Milovan, mother Pava, brothers Vaskrsije, Borislav, Tomislav, Branislav and Bogdan as well as sister Bosiljka no longer exist. Can a person comprehend that? I didn't even dare to think about the martyr's death they suffered in the Ustasha death camp of Jasenovac. The war took everything from me. It cut short my parental love which could no longer be compensated for by anything. I had to grow up all at once.

After the war I expected some relief, but it was even harder for me. For years my peers received mail, in school, in the army and everywhere while my name always remained silent, without mention and without a call. I hid from my friends even as a grown man and cried in hidden places, cursing my fate and the luck of being the only one left alive from a large family. It was even harder when my peers went home during breaks to be with their parents, brothers and sisters.

Occasionally, I'd go to the train station and wander for a long time while thinking about where I would go.

Radomir Mijatović

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*Radomir Mijatovic, "I lost my entire family in the death camp", Kozara IV, 393–398.*

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## THE BATTLE OF MT. KOZARA

In a small room with one small window, in that eternally dark room with damp walls and the smell of musty bed linen a seven-year-old boy, little Marko, is fighting a great battle.

On the scratched and uneven earthen floor two armies are placed opposite each other: polished and darkened old hazelnuts, taken out of mother's chest – these are our people, the people of Mt. Kozara. A small and hard nut, placed in the middle of the hazelnuts, is Šoša, the commander of Mt. Kozara. Opposite them another army is standing, much less interesting, corn kernels, of different size and light. These are the Germans and all the others. An empty nutshell – it is the hated German General Stahl who commands the attack in Mt. Kozara.

– Here, Šoša is now going to hit this German so let him immediately fly away a thousand hundred meters, conspiratorially whispers the little one with excited bright eyes, then he lifts the walnut between the “Kozarčani” and hits a singled out corn kernel with it which bounces like a *Telestes polylepis* and hits the window with a squeal.

– That's right, yes, yes, death be upon you – you died.

The dark, cracked bedroom door creaks. Marko's good grandfather, an anemic old man who always feels the cold, peeks in.

– What are you doing, my dear?

– I'm at war – says the little one, engrossed in his game – I'm defending Mt. Kozara.

– Go on, go on, grandfather's smart child – mumbles the old man softly, closing the door again.

– It’s just that I am afraid you won’t be of any help to them.

And the old man, pensive, bows his head and listens.

From there, from Mt. Kozara, you can hear the benevolent and muffled clattering of a machine gun. Distant and powerless, it does not seem scary at all, nor does it resemble war and death. It is rare to hear the deafening and deep booming of cannons that shake the earth and make the heart tremble. People pause in their work and listen with a sigh:

– Listen to how it thunders in Mt. Kozara. Poor people of Mt. Kozara. They could not resist even if there were ten times as many of them.

– What a horror, folks, who prays to the living God... Todor, did you bury your grain?

For more than a month, a big battle has been fought in Mt. Kozara mountain. General Stahl, the commander of the “Western Bosnia” combat group, throws more and more reserves into the fight. The ring around the mountain is getting tighter and tighter.

Little Marko is the only one who does not care for Stahl’s deadly plan. Stahl doesn’t have enough reserves to beat him. All his reinforcements are in vain.

– You came in vain, even if there were twice as many of you – defiantly whispers the little one in the wintry coolness of the room and the hard hazelnut angrily hits the group of corn kernels – Germans, who scatter in all directions in fear.

– A–ha, a–ha, they escaped!! – mocks the boy maliciously and bouncing off his numb knees, brings the “Germans” back into the fight.

The sun has set behind the low compact hill heavy with shadows, long ago. Darkness begins to fill the room where the child plays and uncomfortably constricts the empty, cheerless space. Hazelnuts – the people of Mt. Kozara get lost and fall into the darkness. The boy remains alone and is afraid of the “Germans” who are still shining from the dark with the last effort, from the invisible floor.

At the same time, the battle in Mt. Kozara comes to life.

Entire batteries of cannons wake up at once and start to shower the mountain in volleys. The cannonade merges into a continuous powerful muttering which lingers in the distance without ceasing and fills the summer night with shivers. It is not clear to a man whether he is shivering from the dampness and cold brought on by a clear night or from that far-away thunder.

The lonely boy is getting lost more and more and the fate of the battle is no longer in his hands. The people of Mt. Kozara have sunk somewhere into the darkness. They are no longer with him and now he is alone. Alone against the whole night. Unknown and mysterious, full of distant thunder and unseen horrors. Something huge and winged threatens from every dark corner. The child expects that at any moment something will hover over him and, obscuring the whole world, whisper to him in a deafening voice:

– Uh–huh, kid, now you're mine!

With a tight heart, chained in a cold gap, the boy runs to the door, barely escaping before "it" from the room grabs him by the neck. The cheerful flame from the hearth is filled with a happy endless glow, the horrors retreat into the room and the little one, intoxicated with the bliss of salvation, throws himself headlong into his grandfather's lap.

– Grandfather, will the people of Mt. Kozara prevail?

– They will, they will for sure – grandfather assures him absently and lost in thoughts he looks into the flame and caresses the child's warm head which is buried in his lap.

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On one restless night full of increased machine gun fire and cannon thunder Ranko Šipka broke through the ring with a decimated battalion of Mt. Kozara people. His fighters spread the story about all the horrors and dangers of the battle in Mt. Kozara.

After that, the rumbling continued for a few days, but grew weaker and weaker and a cheerless winter whisper spread throughout the villages under Grmeč:

– Kozara Mount has fallen. The people of Mt. Kozara have perished.

No one said the news out loud, but everyone already knew and heard what happened at Mt. Kozara.

And little Marko heard what happened to his favorites.

Now the calm boy sits in an empty room and looks sadly at his battlefield.

He touched his favorite fighters several times in vain, the hazelnuts were cold and hard. He doesn't want to play anymore. How could he play, when the people of Mt. Kozara have perished? There is no Šoša either even he stayed there and must have perished.

– And look – the hated Stahl remained alive. The whole time the little one knew and believed that the dear people of Mt. Kozara would beat Stahl and his army and look what happened! Why did the one the boy doesn't love stay alive? Why did this unpleasant and strange thing happen that he cannot accept and understand?

The little boy is silent for a long time over the deserted and peaceful battlefield and then with a heavy heart he gathers the “Kozarčani” in his red Lika cap and slowly walks out into the garden. There, under a low stunted quince with brown tufted fruits he digs a grave with a sharpened piece of barren wood. Silently, without counting them, he buries his “Kozarčani” and places a small wooden cross over the raised mound.

– And now we should pray – the little one remembers kneeling on the dry ground that stings his knees. He crosses himself with dirty fingers once, then a second and a third time, but no words of prayer come to mind. Finally, the village churchman Jovo came to his mind. He remembered his words in the church choir so he started humming softly and tears came to his eyes from excitement.

– Ho-ly Go-d, Ho-ly Mig-hty...

He didn't know any more words so he repeated everything from the beginning a few more times. There was something grave and posthumous in those words. The shadow of death and funeral passed

over the small grave, lost among the sharp fragrant stalks of marigolds and the ashen vines of the melons, covered with tiny bright flowers.

When he returned to the room again the little boy picked up the hideous yellow and hard corns – Germans, shuffled with them up and down the yard and at last threw them in front of a lean sow with clipped ears, gray with crusted mud.

– Here, here you go, so you can smother them all!

As he listened to how the “Germans” were ground and crunched under the teeth of the voracious animal. The vengeful boy felt himself reawaken and with every beat of his heart, a roaring sunny joy grew more and more.

At the lime pit, a ruddy turtledove was gurgling and spreading its fan tail. The wind carried the warm honey scent of the blossoming linden. A bell rang from the low forest and a sheep bleated carefully and the little boy remembered the bright restless flock of lambs and his fellow shepherd Perica who was now returning from the watering hole so he smiled happily forgetting the lonely grave of “Kozarčani”, hidden in the marigolds.

Branko ĆOPIĆ



# DOCUMENTS



*MINUTES From the district council of the KPJ District Committee for Mt. Kozara, held on September 20 and 21, 1942 in Kozara mount*

All members of the District Committee, secretaries of battalion parties, bureau and delegates of all party units are present. (total of 55 members).

Comrade BRANKO BABIĆ, secretary of the District Committee, opens the Council and proposes the following agenda:

1. External and internal political situation 6 changes in the party line.
2. Critical review of the last enemy offensive in Mt. Kozara.
3. Reports of the secretaries of County Committee battalion parties, bureau, and party units: at Detachment Headquarters, Detachment Hospital and Palančiste.
4. Tasks:
5. Miscellaneous.

The proposed agenda is adopted by the Council.

Comrade BRANKO has pointed out that this is the first time a district council, attended by delegates from all party units, is held in the area of this District Committee. He draws attention to the need to follow the session with great care and for all comrades to take an active part in the Council work.

1. Item

Comrade BRANKO BABIĆ, secretary of District Committee, reports on the first agenda item:

At the recently held battalion and county meetings, the political situation and the party line were discussed at length. Recently, we have received new directives from above that contain changes made in the party line. On that note, it has turned out that we discussed the new party line earlier in our meetings. The new directives that have arrived allow us to see even more of all the changes that have occurred. You have received the latest party material as soon as it arrived and it is expected that you have at least read it before this session, if not already going through it so that following these presentations will be easier and more understandable.

What characterizes today's political situation in the world and here?

The struggle on the Eastern Front is taking place as both sides strive to achieve decisive results. Hitler is trying to achieve as much success as possible in the offensive he is now leading before winter so that he can extend his war operations. This effort of his is related to the opening of the Western Front, which Hitler wants to welcome with certain successes in the East. There was a lot of talk about the difference between his offensive last year and the current one. While last year's offensive took place on the entire front this current German offensive is limited only to the southernmost sector of the Eastern Front.

From the spring offensive, it turned into a summer offensive. It turned out that the promises made by Hitler to the German people regarding this offensive were not being fulfilled. Although it was a limited goal, which is the capture of the Caucasus and petroleum sources, it is already clear that the prospects for achieving that goal are weak.

Some comrades look with disbelief at the opening of the second front, doubting the sincere intentions of England regarding the obligations undertaken in the latest treaties. Such an opinion stems from ignorance of world relations and changes in those relations. The reasons that led England to assume the obligations from those trea-

ties were not only the threat to its empire but also the threat to the national survival of the English people themselves. The interests of England lie in the war in Europe ending as soon as possible so that it can fully engage in the war in the Far East. Its most important imperialist interests are threatened there. It is India – the heart of the empire. These are all circumstances that call for the opening of another front as soon as possible. However, let us not forget that in England itself there are reactionary forces that are holding back the second front. Despite this, England is in the block of all the democratic forces of the world that are actively fighting against fascism. The second front is becoming the main problem of current English politics. The English people demanded its opening as soon as possible as an effective means for the imminent destruction of Hitler's Germany. Undoubtedly, for all the reasons mentioned above, we are facing the prospect of opening that front, bearing in mind the military difficulty of carrying out that task.

The Anglo–Soviet Treaty has enormous significance for all other freedom-loving nations of Europe. Other items the Treaty contains: the opening of a second front this year, cooperation not only in the fight to destroy fascism, but also later in terms of organizing the future world and most importantly for us, non-interference in the relations of individual countries. The latter expresses guarantees regarding the success of our struggle. It guarantees us that other military powers will not interfere in our internal affairs. Earlier, during the meetings, there was talk of maintaining that Agreement on our internal relations. It gave strong support to our fight against the occupier and all his servants, it gave us the possibility of a broader and stronger development of our fight. On that note, it is necessary to point out some changes that have occurred in our internal situation. The first stronghold of the occupiers was the Ustasha gangs here. The later development of the situation and the change in the balance of forces led to the fact that today the basic stronghold of the occupiers is represented by Chetnik gangs that openly sided with the occupiers

in the fight against the People's Liberation Army. It turned out that the occupier could not suppress our struggle only with the help of the Ustasha. After a year of the uprising, the fact that the Chetnik gangs represent the basic stronghold of the occupiers has a huge meaning concerning the Croatian people who have ceased to be a base for the occupiers, and who are rising to fight today. The weakness of Ustasha Croatia becomes more and more apparent every day and this is the reason for the fraternization and reconciliation of Ustasha and Chetnik bandits under the cover of the occupiers. Ever since the November offensive in Western Serbia, Chetnik gangs have become the main stronghold of the occupiers. This necessarily led to an agreement between the Ustasha and the Chetniks in the fight against the People's Liberation Army. In this way, it turned out that Pavelić himself was paving the way for the Greater Serbian hegemonic policy of Draža Mihajlović and company. It is about the Yugoslav government in London. How is it that this government professes to fight against the occupier in words, while it is fighting together with the occupier against the people's liberation forces? Previously, we were inclined to take such a situation as a delusion of that government due to its lack of information about the situation in the country. Today, it is clear from the persistence with which this government-in-exile leads its anti-national and anti-insurgency policy that this is a deliberate, premeditated act. It is an attempt to break up our struggle. And it is no wonder. The government-in-exile in London represents those elements in our country that for 20 years implemented a policy of betrayal and robbery of the people. Today, it plays the Draža card and builds its future on it. To this end, today it is trying to deceive the entire world with the most disgusting lies and to legitimize itself in this way as a representative of the national liberation forces in the country. Such politics can no longer be tolerated. Our objective is a gathering of all patriotic forces. Our earlier relationship with London was also based on this. Today, we must break our silence and openly move on to debunking that government. It is a government of betray-

al and the world must find out who is leading the fight against the occupiers in Yugoslavia. We must expose that policy in our country as well to expand the base of our popular uprising. The fight against the government-in-exile is not waged on a class basis but on the line of patriotism. Our objective remains a national liberation struggle. It is imperative to recognize this in order not to make left turns. It is the most important change in our party agenda in the country.

At the end of his report, Comrade BRANKO invited his comrades to supplement his presentation if necessary.

Questions and discussion following Item 1.

Comrade TEO DRAGIČEVIĆ, I Company II Bat.; I notice that our comrades in England seem to be putting too much pressure in the direction of opening a second front. Bombings of Germany by England are not very frequent. How to understand all this?

Comrade BRANKO: On the contrary, the bombings of Germany by British aviation are very frequent and fierce. And the bombing of England does not occur as frequently as before because of the withdrawal of German aviation to the Eastern Front. The Communist Party of England succeeded in mobilizing the broadest masses of England who daily demand the opening of a second front as soon as possible. The government-in-exile in London enjoys the support of those reactionary elements in England who are blocking the opening of the second front.

Comrade BORO (GAĆEŠA illegible); HQ II Bat.; asks for an explanation about the military situation.

Comrade BRANKO: The fighting in Yugoslavia is being waged as a sign of a fierce and combined offensive of the occupiers, Usta-sha and Chetniks, as well as a sign of the further expansion of the popular uprising (Dalmatia, Slovenia, Croatia, Slavonia, etc.). great successes of the Shock Brigades in the battles in Bosanska Krajina.

Comrade JOCO MARJANOVIĆ: HQ III Bat.: I believe that in our agitation and propaganda, we should especially separate General Simović

from the London group considering his disagreements with them as well as his popularity during the events of March 27 of last year.

Comrade BRANKO: maybe Simović is not in favor of such a policy as led by the government-in-exile. However, Simović represents a person from those circles and his circumventing should not be given any particular importance. The main role on March 27 was played by the nations of Yugoslavia. The government did not organize the defense of the country from March 27 it betrayed the country and ran away cowardly.

Comrade DRAGAN MARIN: HQ I Bat.: how to explain to the people the traitorous role of the government-in-exile, given that it enjoys hospitality in England?

Comrade BRANKO: The government-in-exile can flaunt its patriotism in front of the world until it is unmasked as a servant of the occupier.

Comrade JOCO MARJANOVIĆ: What will be our position when the second front opens, considering our hostile attitude towards the government-in-exile?

Comrade BRANKO: The very opening of the second front will expose the treacherous policy of the government-in-exile.

Comrade RADE (BAIĆ illegible): HQ of the Strike Battalion: the strongest argument for exposing the government-in-exile is the role of the Chetniks in Yugoslavia.

Comrade BOŠKO ŠILJEGOVIĆ; member of District Committee (to Rade Bašić). Why is the Soviet government raising the Yugoslav government to the level of an embassy?

Comrade MIRKO PEKIĆ; HQ II Bat.: The Soviet Union will at the end recognize that government in which the true representatives of the people will enter.

Comrade BRANKO: Much depends on our struggle. Today, the government-in-exile is still regarded as the legal representative of Yugoslavia by the world. This is how it was possible to reach an agreement on the conversion of the mission into an embassy.

That treaty does not contradict and does not prevent the need for the strictest exposure of the government-in-exile.

Comrade BORKO ŠILJEGOVIĆ: The question arises: why exactly at the moment when we approach the debunking of the government-in-exile, it is being raised to the level of an embassy? I believe that by this the Soviet government wanted to obtain for itself the possibility of a more fundamental influence on our relations to help our struggle.

Comrade MILOŠ ŠILJEGOVIĆ: Detachment headquarters: I agree with the comrade Branko. When the people form a new government, the embassy will be theirs. While the Chetniks are in alliance with the occupier, we attack them and the government. When their attitude changes, we will not even attack them.

Comrade BOŠKO ŠILJEGOVIĆ: My interpretation is based on the moment when the agreement on the embassy is reached: the desire to find a way to act in support of our struggle. By the way, Stalin already put us on the international stage, and I believe that it would be necessary to develop a discussion on many issues, such as according to the one set by comrade Teo Dragičević, who even points to the possibility of some secret German-English communication.

Comrade ŽARKO (BUC A illegible): member of County Committee for Novi: I think that the government-in-exile will change its tactics due to the possibility of opening a second front and that this should be taken into account.

Comrade MILOŠ ŠILJEGOVIĆ: Can the question of difference, for example between the British and Yugoslav governments be raised, given that the latter did not sign the military pact in the Allied block? I mean concerning the obligations towards the Soviet Union. Could this mean, since it has not undertaken the obligations of military cooperation, that nothing changes in its relations with the Soviet Union despite its current cooperation with the occupier in the country? To develop a discussion based on that.

Comrade DRAGAN MARIN: We are told not to think about what will happen tomorrow. God knows we are not that strong to solve the

question of the total fate of fascism. The government is creating the ground for tomorrow, we have to think about tomorrow.

Comrade ŠOŠA: Detachment headquarters: It was necessary to point out the changes in the party line. Cooperation between England and the Soviet Union went through certain gradations in this war. The very need for military victory, conditions ever closer cooperation. Today we see how far-sighted Comrade Stalin's assessment which he gave much earlier regarding the importance of opening a second front, was. At the same time, we must not forget that the departure of the Yugoslav government from Yugoslavia represented a fighting gesture at the time which gave that government a place in England. We are on the national liberation line and on that line we expose the government. When a lie can use lies, we can also use the truth. There may be people in the English government who are willing to reach an agreement with Germany. However, England is bound by a treaty with the Soviet Union. Alliance. If it does not fulfill its provisions, there will be a crisis with the Soviet Union. And the internal relations of the English power itself is to follow the path of opening another front. We have to worry about tomorrow. Today, we are creating an army that will have a decisive say in certain moments. Unmasking the government is a little late.

Comrade MIRKO PEKIĆ: after the opening of the second front the Chetniks will change their tactics concerning the fight against the occupiers. Then we will also make a turn. The Yugoslav government uses London radio while we cannot use the Moscow one.

Comrade JOCO MARJANOVIĆ: It is still necessary to underline the disagreements within that government.

Comrade MILOŠ ŠILJEGOVIĆ: The latest instructions for a complete attack have arrived.

Comrade ŠOŠA: The government has to make a statement. On the international level, it is not excluded, in connection with the non-fulfillment of obligations by England, that in the resulting crisis in the relations between England and the Soviet Union, there comes a

new twist and a renewed agreement between the Soviet Union and Germany.

Comrade BORO GAČEŠA: The government is not militarily bound by an agreement to fight against fascism. Hence, its twists and turns are possible.

Comrade NIKICA, Agitprop: the opening of a second front became the central problem of Soviet politics. Today, on the international level, there is a struggle to isolate those reactionary forces that hinder the opening of that front. The delay in its opening is presented today as a matter of England's disloyalty to the Soviet Union in connection with the assumed obligations. If the second front does not open, it would mean a crisis not only in the relations between England and the Soviet Union but also the internal crisis of England itself. The military conditions for the opening of that front exist, the military opening is achievable already this year, as proved by Mahin's article in "Krajiški Partizan". If the political conditions are not yet fully matured, this can be attributed to the efforts of reactionary elements in England, as stated in the article by Dilas-Ribar on the meaning of the Anglo-Soviet treaty. In that article, it is explicitly said that the English government itself did not show enough determination to suppress those elements that hinder the opening of the second front. A new moment is the fact that today in the Soviet public there is an open demand for the fulfillment of the obligations assumed by England in the Treaty and that even Churchill himself in his speech could not get over the expression of dissatisfaction he heard in Moscow due to the delay in the opening of the second front.

In addition to all that, the enormous, worldwide importance of that Treaty should be emphasized, which now represents the most important instrument of our policy, both on the international level and in our internal policy. The content of this agreement means the adoption of the basic principles of the policy of the Soviet government. It is also important for us because its provision on non-interference in the internal affairs of individual countries was one of the

main incentives for our government to speed up its treacherous work to secure its positions for the future, that is, to return to power in our country, in that sense, we are fighting and worrying about future by preventing the government's efforts, intensifying its exposure, only we do not and must not set this fight on a class basis as the government wants, but we lead a course to isolate it based on patriotism and betrayal.

It is especially necessary to emphasize the Greater Serbian hegemonic character of that government, which carries an open danger for all enslaved peoples in the former Yugoslavia, especially for the Croatian people, and hence the opportunity we are given to gather all oppressed peoples in the fight for freedom. The fact that Pavelić opens the way for the Chetnik gangs, those greatest enemies of the Croatian people, and all this on the order of the occupier, makes it easier for us to achieve the brotherhood of our peoples and is important for our practical attitude concerning the Croatian army.

Our relationship with the Yugoslav government has reached the stage of openly attacking that government since that leaflet of the Supreme Commander Comrade TITO, in which the government was ultimately asked to declare itself against Draža Mihajlović. The statements made here about the possibility of changing Chetnik politics are completely non-Marxist. In our latest party documents, it is predicted that this reaction of ours will not only not change, but will even more bitterly continue the policy of the People's Liberation partisan and volunteer army, and this determines our position – leading a course to isolate the domestic reaction and opening the door to all those misled or forcibly mobilized elements who were temporarily against us and today want to fight in our ranks. However, we must never forget that the main attack of our struggle is still directed against the occupier himself. The departure of the government to London was at the time a gesture that did not put it at the service of the occupier, but which was also not combative as Comrade Šoša says, but on the contrary cowardly and as such one of the many argu-

ments we use to attack that government. Comrade Joco, by insisting that Simović's removal from the government is particularly popular overestimates the importance of relations within that government, which we should present as a sign of weakness and rot in the ranks of the exiled. Of course, this fact regarding Simović is not without significance. Likewise, it cannot be said that we do not use the radio, which almost daily affirms our struggle before the world.

Regarding the latest agreement between the Soviet and Yugoslav governments on the conversion of the diplomatic mission into an embassy, I believe that it is true that the Soviet government could only conclude such an agreement with the Yugoslav government as a legal representative, keeping in mind, as always, the deepening of friendly relations between our peoples. It will also be true that the Soviet government was led to influence our relations in this way in favor of our struggle. It should be emphasized here that the duty and task of exposing the government-in-exile does not belong to the Soviet government but to us and the anti-fascist world public. The opinion that was heard here that maybe the government-in-exile can prevaricate and even serve the occupier because it is not bound by a military contract, is completely formalistic and cannot be set up like that. It is bound to the Soviet government by a treaty of friendship, and in practice serves the occupier.

In the end, I would like to highlight the special role of Bosanska Krajina in today's struggle, where our great forces are located today and which is today the main zone in the zones of the popular uprising in our country, from where support is now provided to the struggles in Dalmatia, Croatia, where great fights are being fought at the moment and what particularly obliges us here.

Comrade BRANKO: He gives the closing speech.

In today's presentation and discussion, quite a lot of things related to our politics were explained. It is necessary to emphasize in connection with the mentioned contract on the embassy, that this act of the Soviet government does not represent any discrepancy with

our struggle. It cannot in any way be seen as an act of rehabilitation of the Yugoslav government – it is, in fact, a deepening of hostile relations between the peoples of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. That provision of the Anglo–Soviet treaty, which foresees and guarantees non–interference in the internal relations of individual countries, actually provides an opportunity for the affirmation of our forces. And that affirmation can eventually manifest itself in the formation of a national government.

The note about the tacit agreement between the English and German general staff does not stand at all. There are certain people in England and its government who are blocking the opening of a second front. It is braking to gain political prestige.

The concern for “tomorrow” is outlined today by exposing and isolating the government in London and thus all those elements who have been the bearers of anti–national politics in our country for 20 years and more. “Left” mistakes and sectarianism would narrow the base of our uprising.

The possibility of an agreement between the Soviet Union and Germany, even from a distant perspective, cannot be established given the anti–fascist forces that are engaged and which form the basis of the current struggle. An example of the crisis in England that would be caused by the fact of not opening the second front. The English people are a force that will engage to the end in the fight against Hitler’s Germany.

Today’s discussion showed at the same time that all the comrades did not process the latest party material in their units as they should, so they might have asked some questions in the wrong way or out of place.

## POINT 2: A CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE LAST OFFENSIVE

Comrade BRANKO: I am opening this discussion with the events related to the past heavy offensive on our territory. The aim of this discussion is to learn from past events for our future fight. Criticism

should be objective, communist, party. You should know that at these consultations there are no differences among comrades like in the army, here we are all equal, party members. Criticism should be free, devoid of all non-partisan considerations and limitations.

Comrade BOŠKO ŠILJEGOVIĆ: As a member of District Committee I also urge that the discussion should be partisan and comprehensive. To include the work of District Committee in the background, in the army, intelligence service assessment of enemy forces, work of responsible comrades in the army, and more. I appeal to the independence of comrades in the discussion to be as great as possible.

Comrade GOJKO BJELAJAC: I Company of the I Battalion: Regarding this point here is my party unit opinion: I am going to start with the capture of Prijedor. We have become too engrossed in freedom. The full evacuation of seized items in Prijedor was not carried out. Enemy penetration followed suddenly. After losing the Prijedor, we should have immediately set out to capture other demoralized cities. No intelligence service (the case of the failed attack on Bosanska Dubica), non-conspiratorial (the case of earlier connection with Bosanski Novi which all the background knew about and that resulted in the killing of the friend and one family who kept the connection.) When it was discussed in the party unit and one comrade was found responsible nothing further was done. The mistake was that the printing press was taken to Mt. Kozara which proves that the inconvenient geographical location of Mt. Kozara was not taken into account. The once-buried printing press was dug out again because of one of our temporary successes which is why it fell into enemy hands. Regarding our wounded, we note their bad treatment. We point out the actions of Comrade Boro Gaćeša, who met the wishes of the commanding staff in everything and did not care about the wounded. We note that there was no understanding among companies and battalions that the fighting during the offensive should be evenly distributed. In many companies, there was a tendency to just break through and not to conquer further trenches and allow others

to pass through. Some companies, having joined the Assault Brigade after the breakthrough, did not return to enable the breakthrough on the second day. The cooperation of the forces that crossed after the first breakthrough was completely insufficient to enable the remaining forces to break through on the second day. A lot of it was about saving their heads. The actions of the Shock Brigade were insufficient in the days of the breakthrough on the enemy's line from the rear. In the breakthrough itself, the responsible comrades did not sufficiently attach importance to the breakthrough and the goal of extracting all forces. The objective of conquering the trenches and securing the passage had to be explained. The unit thinks that the background should not have moved towards Mt. Kozara and is looking for an explanation. The frontal battle that arose from that, holding the position at the cost of life, caused great losses, especially from aviation and artillery. It has been shown that our army and its leaders are not capable enough for frontal combat. The discovery of the warehouse as a consequence of the failure to conceal it. It had a particularly bad effect on the background. In this regard, they complained that they did not get anything, there was so much in Prijedor, the system of blocks, and stuffing in warehouses, all of this led to a large amount of goods falling into the hands of the enemy.

Comrade MILAN EGIĆ, Headquarters of III Battalion: The order to our battalion for breakthrough was not properly issued. The battalion was ordered to withdraw to Mrakovica. As a result, we had to leave some of our units on the field. It was only in Mrakovica, at the detachment headquarters, that we heard that we had to break through. We arrived at the very place of the breakthrough late at night. We did not know the terrain, nor sufficient reasons for the breakthrough, nor did we have a guide. The comrades started and, of course, could not break through. In the morning, instead of getting out of position to save people, we received inappropriate orders that we had to break through at all costs. We had heavy artillery casualties. We should have retreated, expanded our positions, and participated in the second breakthrough

with more prospects for success. The result of those mistakes is demoralization. Many were running away.

Comrade JOCO MARJANOVIĆ: A few days before the enemy's breakthrough into Prijedor, we had information about the planned offensive. We immediately forwarded this information to the Detachment Headquarters. I think that there was also a letter about the grouping of enemy vehicles in Gradiska and moving towards Banja Luka. Through our connections, we had notifications about the evacuation of the civilian population for one kilometer around the railways and roads in Slavonia. The character of the enemy's offensive was not properly assessed for the entire duration of the offensive. There was no consultation before, during the offensive, and before the actual breakthroughs. The breakthrough was late. Insufficient preparation. The most fortified place was chosen, although, as the comrades say, that was well known. The proposals of our military personnel were not taken into account. E.g. in connection with the battles near Bjelajac, the proposal of the commander, Toma Spanović, to break through behind Dubica. After the breakthrough, which was only partially successful, the forces of the detachments that did not break through were disorganized and panicked. All of this had a heavy impact on the fate of our wounded, backgrounds, and female comrades. During the visit of Comrade Obrad, the former commander, our battalion received our withdrawal plan from the terrain we held in order to prevent the enemy from dividing us. However, we were constantly informed that the situation is good. We even received false news from the Detachment headquarters regarding our loot which was later badly commented on in our battalion. Our battalion on the left and central wing did not have any battles. The roads were dug up to prevent the enemy's rapid penetration. During the entire offensive, our battalion was lying down. We made suggestions that our battalion, namely its parts, should be activated on other sides and help the fight. We had to judge the development of the situation only by the circumstances. The breakthrough code had the charac-

ter of an alternative. A directive was given to dig dugouts, following the example of Kordun, but it was also set in an either-or sign. There was fear present in declaring the character of the offensive, which should not have been the case, at least in front of the headquarters. The directive to dig trenches for the wounded was given a little bit before the breakthrough. We were not even informed about leaving the field and the battalion. We planned to dig two large dugouts. We tasked the background party group with that job. The wounded were placed in one dugout, but they were evacuated when they were called to break through. Because of the enemy's penetration towards Krajina we came to the field to form the operational headquarters of the III and IV battalions at the suggestion of the deputy regimental commander, Comrade Dušan Misireča. And that was sleazyly understood. We were told it was just a suggestion. The order for our battalion to take a position on Mrakovica was signed by our comrades Šoša, Obrad and Branko. Our forces were scattered. Orders late, evacuation. Disconnection of telephone lines.

We liquidated the fifth column in our bare hands. We released 52 captured Croatian home guards, although some asked the battalion to kill them. We received the order for the movement, i.e. for the breakthrough, through the IV battalion at 4 o'clock in the afternoon in Mrakovica and we had to be at the place of the breakthrough at 8 o'clock in the evening in order to participate in the breakthrough that same night. There was a pursuit of the lagging platoons. Only at Mrakovica did we get the right schedule. We don't have a guide. They correspond to us, navigate according to the terrain. One of our companies went to Pogledovo and the other three to Boksne. There we finally found the headquarters of the II Battalion. It was clear: we must push the battalion to death. Commander Comrade Mirko issued orders. We entered the fight late. It dawned. We didn't break through. Letters are arriving about what will happen to the wounded. A letter arrives from comrades from the Detachment Headquarters who did not make it through. Bombing.

Comrade Nikola Luketić says: it is impossible to attack the wall of fire across so much cleared space. Commander of the II Battalion Stanko cries and drives his comrades into battle. A new plan for a breakthrough on the second day in a tight space. Our only company is at Pogledovo. Tonight is to be or not to be. In the night, the background, the wounded, the party cadre of rear workers are pushed. Hurrah, the third company is charging, shouts commander Ljuban and we all follow him. When Ljuban stops, everything stops. We broke up. Machine guns mow down people, entire units. Comrade Luketić also died there. The dawn breaks. Planes and cross artillery fire right into the retreats. Čupića kosa. There, comrade (Biljo illegible) said: the direction of our battalion Crna Rijeka. There are more of us. We decided: to Vitlovska. Šoša and Miloš are missing. Someone says: they are preparing the way. I don't know who said that. Maybe I fell under that influence myself. The battalions, or rather the remnants of the battalion with the wounded who can go, are being pulled out from Vitlovska towards Živodar. Counseling of the command staff and party members. Someone asks the question: how come the Squad Headquarters goes on patrol. Letter: Šoša and Miloš are coming. Comrade Grga, commander of Slavonia, points out that some question Šoša's and Miloš's patrolling. It is passed over. I remember, back in Vitlovska, someone was talking about how Šoša and Miloš ordered some canned goods, cvibak and sugar. What cans – said Stanko. (Baniac Pirio illegible) then on Vitlovska constantly pushed and suggested: a breakthrough for the Sava. Comrade Milan Vrhovac brought Šoša and Miloš. I don't know if it was sabotage, listening to the enemy or, in a situation where trust is generally lost, someone constantly pointed out that Miloš and Šoša were separating and looking for an independent solution for themselves. This was a digression on Vitlovska. On Živodar the hungry, exhausted, despondent remnants of the battalion. Of our battalion, out of 650 fighters, only 157 comrades remained. Wounded, POD, liaison platoon. Nutrition problem. The deputy commander of our battalion, Comrade Pil-

jo, with the agreement of the confederation on Vitlovska, remained in Mt. Kozara with 50 men with the task of keeping everything there if we try to break through somewhere again. At the conference in Živoder, it was decided to send scouts to Mrakovica. The conference was conducted in a non-communist manner. There was sleeping. Few of them spoke. Comrade Milan was in favor of breaking through the terrain of the IV Battalion. The combination was primarily a breakthrough for Sava. Concluded that insecure comrades are disarmed. With 20 to 6 votes, Comrade Čočet's proposal to immediately break the squad into smaller groups was rejected. In the morning, the directive to dig dugouts arrived – late. We sent some party members to dig dugouts in Bukovica together with POB (\*Partisan Intelligence Bureau) members. We held a meeting with the fighters. We brought them to the conclusion that the best solution is to break them into smaller groups. Some of them are disarmed so that the weapons do not fall into the hands of the enemy. The weapon was buried. Then we parted ways. We dug a hole with several comrades and one female comrade. I think that earlier paery and military consultation would mitigate our defeat and save more of our lives. I gave a few words description of the events in which I was a participant and witness in the belief that this presentation in itself contains elements of criticism.

Comrade BRANKO: For the description, you should immediately give criticism and always indicate exactly who the criticism refers to.

Comrade BOŠKO: Do not justify only your battalion. This is not the Bolshevik understanding.

Comrade BRANE KOVAČEVIĆ: II Company of III Battalion: At first, we all got used to the force of II Krajina Detachment. It was not understood correctly from comrade Okrugla, where it was said what awaits us. Before the breakthrough we did not know where we were going. Only at Mrakovica did we find out what it was all about. We arrived at the position without a guide and we did not know the terrain. The day dawned and we were ordered to break through at all costs. Failure. Victims. Reordering. Victims again. It was a mis-

take that our withdrawal from the positions we held and the breakthrough itself were formed in just one day. The failure of the first day made it even more difficult to break through on the second day. In recent times, “deification” has prevailed. I note the poor preservation or storage of materials. There was a lot of space for it to stay in Mt. Kozara. Bad treatment of the wounded: Comrade Pane Došen, before breaking through, was hidden in a ditch without food despite so much cvibak and other food on Vitlovska. He stayed like that for up to 15 days. The wounded did not have sufficient care. We should have had more meetings. From the highest units to the lower ones, there were mistakes. We, 72 comrades, made our way to I Battalion’s field and later returned with the comrade Branko and were at Zidano mjesto where the first base for the conscripts was established. There we collected the wounded who remained alive. And then we went to our place and continued to work the best we could.

Comrade TEO DRAGIČEVIĆ: Comrade Radoja Miljatović, member of District committee started gathering us background workers and party members for the breakthrough. In Bokani, I saw 3 other commanders of our battalions and four had already left for their positions. Comrade Luketić called the commanders to move into position. I don’t know where they went. Comrade Luketić left. There were many wounded in Mlječanica. The artillery was pounding. We were crawling into the ditch. And after the second unsuccessful breakthrough, those who could go headed for Vitlovska and then at night for Živoder. Before the consultation at Živoder comrades Šoša and Miloš did reconnaissance in (Puosrima illegible). The consultation was dispersed due to artillery fire. I stayed in II Battalion. During the night, duty was performed in shifts. Commander Stanko was completely lost. In the morning there was a need for dry food. Later, everything exploded. Somehow everything without a definite conclusion.

Comrade BRANKO VIGNJEVIĆ: III Company of the III Battalion: Insufficient awareness of the leading comrades of the squad. It seems that they did not see through and foresee the intentions of the

enemy on time. We should not have waited for the complete encirclement of Mt. Kozara, but we had to get out earlier. In the first breakthrough, we were ordered to attack the trenches in the Mlječanica valley, in an inaccessible position. After the first breakthrough the enemy discovered our intentions and concentrated his forces. During the repeated breakthrough the leading comrades were unable to find a suitable place for the breakthrough. The unit staff of the company was uninformed. During the breakthrough itself (indecision on the road), as well as after the failed breakthrough, panic reigned. It is a mistake that after the breakthrough, the Partisans who remained in Mt. Kozara were not gathered so that our commanders and political commissars of both the detachment and the battalion pointed out to them “rescue and help”, as the Partisans used to say. The command staff was separating. Comrade Šoša slapped some people and cursed their mother which caused resentment among the partisans.

Comrade BORO GAČEŠA: It was necessary to foresee what to do if the breakthrough failed. The breakthrough had to be made in a smaller area and without the exhausted II Battalion which gave its best. The second breakthrough should not have followed in the same place. The tanks caused quite a bit of demoralization. The construction of such a large hospital on Vitlovska was out of place. At the most difficult time about 200 workers were engaged in this work which was a big inconvenience if our things were not prepared properly. Regarding the objections regarding the re-extraction of the printing press from the ground and its putting into operation I am of the opinion that the printing press would have been found in any case. Besides that, in the situation when we endured the biggest offensive, both because of the people who were in Mt. Kozara, up to 80 thousand, as well as the army and its morale, the printing press was needed. Background canceled the duty of transporting the wounded in the breakthrough because they were uninformed about the breakthrough and tried to save themselves somehow. The intelligence service was non-existent. The blame lies with all staffs. We have de-

conspired our forces too much. I don't know who is to blame for the downfall of the warehouse.

Comrade DRAGUTIN ČURGUZ: headquarters of II Battalion: Our battalion suffered the most in this offensive. The main enemy forces were directed at our terrain. In the frequent battles our command staff was killed the most. This affected the fighting ability of our units. The weakness of the rear companies unaccustomed to combat manifested itself. The weakness of the command staff in our 6 companies. From the battalion headquarters, Comrade Luketić and I were on the field and had to move everywhere.

Comrade OSTOJA MIJATOVIĆ, V Company of I Battalion: The mistake is the weak connection of companies and help in battle. Now people talk that no attention is paid to fallen comrades. The case of a wounded comrade (Puzova illegible) from the platoon at the detachment's headquarters who died in the hospital. Previously, we buried our fallen comrades with more attention with a speech over the grave. More consideration should be given to this.

Comrade RADE BAŠIĆ: During the offensive a large part of the Partisans did not participate in the battle. A lot of them were seen in the background. The breakthrough plan was essentially a panicked, hasty one, not discussed in meetings. The breakthrough was to follow only after the necessary preparations. All this was reflected in the fight. It was a drowning plan that we had to break through at all costs. There was never any official explanation of the nature of the offensive. Certain members of the squad were more observers in this fight. I mention that in connection with the comrade Obrad. Breakthrough front too wide. Narrower front – easier central command, better switching ability. No failure is foreseen. Everyone understood: not breaking through – death!

Insufficient care given to the wounded who helped in our fights tremendously. Like for example comrades: VLADO PEKIĆ, DUŠAN DRETIĆ, GOJKO KUKAVICA, RADE KONDIĆ and others.

Comrade MILAN BUDIMIR: I Company of II Battalion: After the capture of Prijedor commotion prevailed at our headquarters as

well. During the offensive orders were issued without the necessary preparation. The breakthrough showed the separation of the command staff from companies and units. The breakthrough was insufficiently prepared. Crowds of people and wounded, casualties from artillery. In the company that was supposed to stay in Mt. Kozara, even after our breakthrough, no volunteers were selected and the commander was a Chetnik sympathizer. The burying of weapons was not carried out conspiratorially. Comrades Miloš and Šoša took some of their female comrades with them while many remained helpless. For example, comrade Mira Cikota should have at least been advised how to save herself.

Comrade ILIJA BURSAC, Palančište group: Nothing was done to prepare against the known enemy offensive. Poor work of intelligence. The party group in Kozarac should have informed Prijedor in every possible way. Proof of our leadership's underestimation of the enemy: the evacuation to Mt. Kozara and to Vitlovska at that. It was said: the enemy will never come to Vitlovska. Many things should have been distributed to the people immediately. People should have been told to hide at home. To not use the frontal attack. If there were no people in the forest, the fight would have been easier. Better measures could have been taken regarding the wounded. All shelters on Vitlovska have been discovered. We should have chosen reliable people, not youths. The rear detachment is also influenced by the bad attitude shown by the Partisans after the offensive toward some civilians in the forest. Second Battalion shot several people (5–6). For example, Pera Matijaš should not have been killed at all. A lot of our rear was lost meaninglessly in battle.

Comrade Dr. ALFRED RŽEHAK (personally for himself): Improper assessment before the offensive, actually its failure to anticipate. The captured Ustasha near Orahovo said, among other things, that 7 companies of specially trained Ustashes had arrived at the Dubica area and that 7,000 infantry troops and motorized vehicles would arrive in Banja Luka. That was not taken into account.

The worst fate befell the wounded. A lot needs to be said about that. It was not handled properly. Otherwise, a greater number would have been saved. A close consultation was held before the breakthrough. Comrades Obrad, Šoša and Branko were there and I was invited. Comrade Obrad backed up his proposition for an early breakthrough, especially because of the 500 wounded. At the very beginning of the breakthrough it turned out that it was set in motion for everything rather than for the wounded. The departure of the wounded from Vitlovska was set for 7 o'clock. The wounded were ready. However, not a single soldier from the rear came to carry the wounded. Comrade Obrad came by with a pack (the surname is not legible), passed through the camp, continued to Bokani. I asked him what I should do with the wounded. He answered me: wait until 9 o'clock, if no one comes go with the nurses. Nine o'clock passed and it was 3 hours after midnight and no one appeared. Comrade Branko told me on the phone to leave the wounded and go to Bokani. I blame the District Committee and the Headquarters Detachment for the

fact that individuals did not come to transport the wounded. It seems that in that case a greater number would have been saved if they had been there in time. The Headquarters Detachment was not interested in this matter for the whole day. They did not single out any man out of those who followed them, to be at hand. Another example – the second breakthrough: the night before the breakthrough itself all the headquarters, including me, were gathered under Čupića Kosa. The wounded and POB (\*Partisan Intelligence Bureau) soldiers were sent towards Čupića Kosa. The headquarters went forward. The breakthrough was planned in a way to transfer people who could be transferred later. Thus, it could have happened that a large part of the rear, party members and POB members remained. The Headquarters Detachment should have taken care in advance to save the wounded in case of such an offensive and given the necessary instructions in time. None of that was done. No effective measures were taken to accommodate the material. No instructions were given that few people

dig shelters, that shelters are dug in various places and how to protect the buried goods from decaying. The Headquarters Detachment was unable to organize work during the offensive. The II Battalion was to do everything. There, work could not go normally: there were over 400 wounded, ammunition and other war materials were constantly arriving (the mass of workers, illegible), the printing press was working, etc. The II Battalion cannot be blamed for sabotage.

The Headquarters Detachment panicked on the field. Never has their demeanor been like in this offensive. The uproar of comrades Šoša and Miloš over the aviation and artillery, the uproar against civilians, all of that seemed disastrous. The Headquarters could not be found often. Couriers had trouble finding them. It's true. But earlier, the Mt. Kozara operational headquarters would have been on the field with one of the members of District Committee. Now the detachment commander mostly sat in the Detachment Headquarters (in the office). The Deputy Commander of the Detachment was on a field he was not familiar with. The comrades did not do the reconnaissance work. The headquarters of II Battalion was close to the position and the headquarters of the detachment was always behind us. It is strange that the management of the operations was handed over to only two people. Comrade Čoča, who was assigned to that operational headquarters, participated in the consultation, but as far as I noticed Comrade Šoša avoided even listening to their opinion. I am surprised that Comrade Šoša tried to take all the responsibility on himself. There were no collective consultations. One collective consultation was held just before the end. The party did not have enough influence in the offensive. A group of Detachment Headquarters: Miloš and Šoša, two to three couriers, two female comrades, Pero Mečava. If the headquarters had done something after the second breakthrough it would have been different. Instead, they started planning how and where to transfer and save people. Archives were burned so that nothing would be left behind while the army gathered on Vitlovska. Mečava said that he knows the passage near Dubica. Whoever

came to that group was rudely turned away. They swore at people. The headquarters wandered from peak to peak to save their lives, not giving advice to those to whom it should have been given. It seems that the Detachment Headquarters took the directive to guard the command staff most literally. I hold the Detachment Headquarters responsible for many things that were not done that would undoubtedly have mitigated our downfall and disaster.

Comrade DRAGAN MARIN: For everything that happened like that, more than the Detachment Headquarters, Miloš, Šoša, etc. our Party is to blame. The party allowed individuals to work on their own and sometimes, it seemed, to behave dictatorially. Before the fall of Prijedor we met before every action and everyone's opinion was heard. It should have been the same after the liberation of Prijedor. After the fall of Prijedor the people started to imagine themselves as some kind of commanders. The party was little mentioned. For example, the case with the printing press that was moved from Mrakovica to Vitlovska, back and again. Material evacuation in general. Everything was done, but not in a communist way. A kind of protectionism, petty-bourgeoisness became established. It was not done in the party way, but on one's own. Not only Šoša, Obrad, Miloš this or that one are responsible and when it got thick everyone then fixed their eyes on this and that Šoša. We should have consulted, shared the work. The party was supposed to lead. Before the breakthrough there was no time for collective consultation. But the breakthrough itself could have been better prepared. It was necessary to choose a more practical terrain for the breakthrough to distribute the tasks in the breakthrough at the close consultation of the battalion.

Comrade RADE RANILOVIĆ, I company of III Battalion: a consultation of party delegates could have been held at least. The same with regard to military advice. We should not have waited for the last moment to break through. There would have been fewer wounded. There was also fake news: 10 cannons, 40 machine guns, I don't know how many launchers were captured. People were brought from the rear to

collect weapons in the field of operations. Why didn't they arm themselves with those weapons. There was no notification of what to do in the breach itself. The command staff of the companies did not know where to go. Where was the Detachment Headquarters in the last breakthrough – that was the question asked in the unit of my company.

Comrade VID ĐUKANOVIĆ, I Company of the Shock Battalion: The political commissar of III Company of our battalion, Comrade Radovan Vujičić, as well as the commander of our battalion, are to blame for the loss of communication and the loss of one platoon. After the Shock Battalion returned from the Chetnik fields, without rest, constantly in battle, Ravan, Suhača, Karan, they had nothing left, fighters complain about that.

Comrade ĐORĐO VUČENOVIĆ, III Company of II Battalion: The District Committee did not take enough care to clean up the Party. In III Company of our Battalion, Sergeant Vukić, although Chetnik-minded, was a party member. Such elements had to be cleaned at least in the offensive itself. The Detachment Headquarters did not develop an intelligence service. The responsible comrades proved to be unprepared, relaxed. The way the enemy penetrated into Prijedor could be seen to be a serious offensive and there was no need to close the rear in Mt. Kozara. Breakthroughs should not have been attempted on the field where the action was performed for the third time. The biggest mistake of the Detachment Headquarters and District Committee was that they did not take into account that mobile units as proletarian units should have been created from our army even earlier. Units that would not be tied only to their sector. Many people were returning after they had already crossed the road. They were saying that they would like to die at home.

Comrade JOCO MARJANOVIĆ: was an order issued for the evacuation of the civilian population to Mt. Kozara?

Comrades BRANKO AND BOŠKO: In Novi district, the people escaped on their own. In Dubički they were ordered. Basically, the people first fled on their own, and later it was ordered.

Comrade GARAČA MILAN, rear group Novi district: On the ground of I battalion, a more active fight against the enemy could have developed. During the first destruction of one battalion it was possible to transfer many wounded and rear. They had two days. The lower units did not give good information, and the Detachment Headquarters itself did not conduct sufficient reconnaissance. The way the prisoners were killed: with knives and stakes is too much to the detriment of the line of brotherhood that we have to adhere to. People who were not worthy of it were accepted into the party. There were also Chetnik-minded people. Bringing women to the headquarters is to be condemned. In the hospital in Pogledevo a female nurse committed sabotage (Nada). Remarks were made among Partisans about the women in the headquarters of the political commissars: why (Sarža illegible) has women there, dressed well, etc. And we don't.

Comrade ŠILJAK MIRKO: II Company of II Battalion: the orders did not arrive on time. In the breakthrough everything was dim. They told me: throw yourself to the right. The platoon that was following me was going astray. I threw myself to the right, liquidated the stronghold, returned. In the morning the order again: breakthrough. The front was too wide in the breakthrough. There was no communist to tell the soldiers what needed to be said at the waste on Živoder. The soldiers were walking and crying: the command said that they are to go wherever. They should have been explained in a speech not to surrender. Because that offensive would also pass. Obrad was having fun with some girl on Karan when he was asked how the soldiers were to manage to get food. Comrade Dušan Misir-ača then asked some Partisans: why did you transfer here without a commander and he did not wonder why he had left without his detachment.

Comrade ŽARKO BUĆMA, member of District Committee for Bosanski Novi: Comrade Obrad only asked the courier about the female comrades. The resistance was not to be ended. When the people were pushed back to the villages, they had to resist in Mt. Kozara.

During the offensive there was a lot of immorality. The people should not have been withdrawn from Mt. Kozara. Disarmament of youth near Vojskova. The commander of II battalion told me: go, join the crowd, surrender! Everyone was killed or sent to Germany. It would be better for them if they died in Mt. Kozara.

Comrade SAVA GAJIĆ, rearguard I Battalion: Comrade Vladeta Radić behaved badly towards the wounded. He was hitting them. He hit me on the head with a barrel. He says: I thought you were wounded. The help of the Shock Brigade and I Detachment was not requested in order to successfully break through. Comrade Mladen Obradović, commander of the IV Battalion, did not perform well. He was sending some stuff home. The rear complains about it. They complain that they could not get anything in Prijedor. The story goes that the Partisans were left with nothing: they didn't even want to dress the army. The rear groups and the battalion should have informed the people to hide before searching the terrain again. About 60 civilians were caught in just one small thicket. Some female Partisans did not act accordingly when they were caught by the enemy. Many knew about secrets they were not supposed to know about. People say that many young people died because of earlier manifestations and gatherings in Prijedor.

Comrade DUŠAN VIDOVIĆ, secretary of the District Committee of SKOJ (\*League of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia) for Bosanska Gradiška: No intelligence service. The Detachment Headquarters did not take any action on the received intelligence about the offensive. Departure for the breakthrough was not prepared. When we came to Vitlovska we weren't even told who was there. Shelters should not have been built around the camp. When the quartermaster Comrade Bora Gaćeša, was asked to give something he would say that it was the stuff of II Battalion (and not the detachment). Couriers lingered while joking on the phone. It backfired on us in the breakthrough. Someone said that things should not have been entrusted to the youth, that they were betrayers. There was more betrayal among

the elderly than among the young. It is not correct to mark as a mistake the participation of the rear companies in the battle. In terms of cleaning up the party the units should have reported that someone is not fit for the party. Secretary of party units often send rosy reports.

Comrade STOJAN BAJALICA, II Company of the I Battalion: Motorized vehicles were passing, tanks were seen near Novi, reports were sent and an offensive could be anticipated, the people instinctively retreated on their own. And the hospital of the I battalion, which was able to go to Grmeč, went to Mt. Kozara. The experiences of Eastern Bosnia, Serbia and Zlatibor were not taken into account. The 48 hours of free passage after the defeat of III Battalion were not used.

We should have been more careful in the matter of appointing Stanko as the commander of II battalion. It was necessary to narrow the space of the breakthrough. The passage of two companies of the Shock Brigade with the comrade Pero Mečava was not useful. The company that returned did not perform any specific work. It was a walk with victims.

Comrade SMAIL ŠERIĆ, I Company of III Battalion: puts the blame on the commander, Comrade Bašić Mirko, who, in order to save his own life, disrupted the advance in the breakthrough so that the Germans came from behind them. More of a plan was needed to break through. Two Partisans who escaped from Jasenovac during the offensive say that when they were retreating to Vitlovska when they asked to go across the river comrade Čoča said to them: go and surrender to the soldiers and Ustashas there.

Comrade JOCO MARJANOVIĆ (interrupts) it seems to be a mistake, that they have replaced.

Comrade GOJKO ŠURLAN, II Shock Battalion Company: A considerable number of Partisans did not fight. They were taking walks and hanging out. Municipal militia as well. Only two men directed the offensive. The refugees from Prijedor smoked like crazy. Those

who lived at the expense of workers and peasants. There was live music in II battalion. Comrade Boro Gaćeša was unfriendly. He teased people. He gave sweaters to more attractive female comrades and fine soaps, but he didn't give them to comrades in positions, in combat, in the hospital...

Comrade PERO GAJIC, Palančište group: There was walking around with weapons instead of fighting. 15–20 people went with the kitchen (I battalion). Orders were issued late. For example, for the transfer of people and property after the destruction of III Battalion. In Prijedor, we showed off too much and exposed ourselves. There are plenty of fifth columnists left.

Comrade DUŠAN UTJEŠINOVIĆ, Secretary of the Battalion Party Bureau: The enemy swiftly advanced from Piskavica towards Prijedor because we had repaired everything that was destroyed. It was impossible to inform either Prijedor or Kozarac. It was a rapid advancement of motorized forces assisted by aviation. In Prijedor, there remained numerous elements that needed to be fought. The fifth column nullified the telephone connections. The mistake was in forwarding everything from Prijedor to Vitlovska. It was a chaotic situation there. Both the District Committee and certain groups are to blame for involving unworthy individuals in the party.

Comrade MILOŠ ŠILJEGOVIĆ, Staff of the Detachment: Both official and unofficial comrades made a mistake regarding the question: whether to engage in combat with the enemy or not, and the enemy himself attributes our inadequacy. As soon as it became clear that the enemy was surrounding us a decision should have been made. I do not question the sincerity of the statements heard here. But I believe there was unjust criticism of the command. And once we were already inside defeat was inevitable. Reports about the divisions moving against us did not reach us. With limited forces and encirclement such a siege could always be broken. That was the calculation. There was no precise knowledge about the arrival of enemy forces. Accepting frontal combat is considered the fundamental mistake. The

command, from the top down, completely failed. We were unskilled people who had to lead the army. The enemy properly organized and armed themselves, learning from the Germans. Our commanders led their units based on personal bravery. If even the shock battalion had fulfilled its duty correctly perhaps we could have all broken through. We were not an army in the true sense of the word. We fought as a large unit which had not been the case until now. Both the Shock Battalion and the Infantry made the most mistakes. It's not their fault but the command's. They completed their task, rushed through the enemy's encirclement. That was their mistake which wasn't even acknowledged as an error. The breakthrough needed to be expanded and secured. In fact, we were late in not conducting the breakthrough a few days earlier, as prepared. Comrades lay in positions for 20 days, hungry and exhausted. We had no reserves. It was known – one cannot endure for long. We allowed the army to become more than exhausted and then we went for the breakthrough. The breakthrough front was not too wide. By attacking even the smallest part we essentially attacked one battalion. The next time, we took a smaller sector, but it was difficult to pass through.

Why wasn't another sector chosen? No other was more favorable. Breaking through Palančište and the terrain of IV battalion was extremely difficult. The destruction of our forces was significant. The enemy battalions had their sectors with garrisons and reserves equally distant behind them. Reinforcement was possible everywhere. The breakthrough needed preparation. The Detachment Staff as a whole was out of combat. I was designated as a member of the Operational Staff in one sector. When we decided to leave that sector, I wasn't designated anywhere else, but I willingly helped wherever I could. In reality, only Comrade Šoša was an official figure. Why couldn't the breakthrough succeed? The II battalion lost the core of its command cadre. We all allowed Stanko to be the commander who had no support in the army, not to mention his military incompetence. The party as a whole is to blame for inadequate supervision

over individuals and their employment which also applies to military forums. When the decision for the breakthrough was made no one was there to help the wounded. Our army is far from being well-organized; in terms of discipline, it relies on word and trust. They are giants in heroism. The rear rejected the wounded, even though we engaged people to go among them and organize the transfer of the wounded. The rear was concerned about their own families. The IV battalion, acting as a protector, found itself actually on the front line. A large number of fighters returned back towards dawn because of their families. For the second breakthrough there were those who questioned why engage in combat. There was belief in the Brigade's aid and forces that managed to move. The Brigade showed poor performance. It was cloudy on the second day. It needed to be utilized. The entire army was concentrated in the breakthrough sector. The enemy needed just an hour to encircle us and switch to a decisive offensive of destruction. We were positioned from Vitlovska to Patrija. When it comes to large units, it's hard to issue orders to retreat. If the second evening's breakthrough had been conducted correctly, a larger part could have succeeded. This way, without combat, we lost many comrades. Upon returning after the breakthrough the army was no longer an army. There were no more commands. No one asked anyone anything anymore. Assistance was needed for the evacuation and withdrawal of people. Whatever could be done was done. There was a visible presence of the army, many civilians, many wounded. It was believed the enemy would closely follow us so that's how it had to be militarily assumed. It was necessary to flee from artillery and planes. Retreat as soon as possible. It was decided: one battalion to Vitlovska, one to Crna Rijeka, one to Živoder. It's said the pursuit was behind us: the command had left; it wasn't in place. The army knew about us. There was nothing to tell them. The decision was made to breakthrough towards the Sava. The army both performed and didn't perform its duty. We went to Pucare to wait for the army. Comrade Toma Španović, who was supposed to scout for

boats, didn't report. Morale was falling and our army's weakness had to be taken into account. The decision to divide into smaller groups was actually made in a consultation at Živoder. The consultation was concluded. Leave the best people armed. Hide the groups. We then withdrew and composed a letter on how to break into smaller units. People were tired, disheartened. The order wasn't carried out correctly. People cried without rifles. Commanders, political commissars and party members from the units were supposed to decide who would carry a rifle. The enemy's offensive forced us to hide; it turned fighters into weaklings including party members who surrendered to the enemy. Tragic. Mira Cikota's letter was not delivered to me. It only reached Comrade Mirko Pekić. I know she asked him for advice on how to save herself with the child. Regarding the remark that we behaved panicky, cowardly, I declare: the enemy was capturing our fighters and it's not excluded that some among them were revealing our positions. The enemy was striking more accurately. It was foolish to await grenades unnecessarily. Evacuating civilians due to the danger of aviation and cannons was not harmful; it was in their interest. Messengers didn't need to seek us. Sometimes we hid, but not far and it was known. Jest with danger isn't cowardice. I refuse to be called a panicker; I consider it an insult and such claims need proof. We separated civilians from the staff so that the crowd wouldn't be a target as the army needed to pass there. Separation of the staff after withdrawal – and it actually wasn't a staff but the creation of groups to hide – didn't exist. If there was rudeness in rejecting those who joined us on the road those were individual acts. At those moments people were somewhat abnormal; it needed to be experienced the collapse of the unit and the perspective of Jasenovac facing the people. The army was exhausted to continue the fight.

Comrade ŠOŠE: Here, a rare occurrence of mass participation in accurate criticism has manifested itself. All the mistakes during the offensive stem from an incorrect assessment of it, and that thread continued until the final days. We were convinced of the help

of the Shock Brigade. Comrades Branko and Šoša asked the Operational Staff for Bosnian Krajina for the Shock Brigade to pressure the enemy directly, not by conquering garrisons in the enemy's rear. During the conference at Živoder, I argued for breaking into smaller groups with plenty of arguments: that the army was more incapable of a breakthrough, which was only adopted later, and for that I blame all the comrades who didn't adopt that proposal earlier. Regarding Vitlovska, we informed the Operational Staff for Bosnian Krajina that it wasn't absolutely secure in the event of an enemy offensive. This was precisely when the issue of the printing press was raised. I think, once the people were already in Mt. Kozara that it had to be defended. Rear units were formed as military units and sent into battle because they preferred to die rather than wait for the enemy. They gave their all. But it should be noted that they didn't submit to the command's advice. The staff was near the battle. And there's no objection that disputes that. I support the things Comrade Miloš said: there were narrower discussions, but not everyone spoke. Only Comrade Šoša spoke at one such discussion. About the matter with the refugees from Jasenovac, I declare I neither met them nor spoke with them.

Comrade ŠOŠA: The main criticism that emerged here boils down to noting the inadequacy of the detachment staff in this offensive. After the action in Prijedor comrades Čoče and Miloš were called by the Operational Staff for Bosnian Krajina and Comrade Boško was appointed the political commissar of this detachment. This happened right at the time of the offensive in Mt. Kozara. We weren't deluded by the illusion of holding Prijedor in our hands. It's true that we didn't correctly assess the character of the offensive. It wasn't a real offensive against our detachment. Moreover, it came at a time when our forces had increased throughout Krajina. Comrade Boško and I were at the Operational Staff for Bosnian Krajina actually preparing the action on Sanski Most. That's where it caught up with us. We talked with comrades from the Operational Staff and

they said they would do everything to break the enemy. At that time there was talk about engaging Croatian Partisan forces. With such conviction I arrived at the territory of battalions and conveyed that conviction to other comrades. From the burnt enemy archives we learned about the enemy's plan to repair the destroyed railway within 20 days. Ten days had passed since the offensive started. The success in confusing their plans further lulled us into thinking we could withstand their assault. I admit, my military knowledge was insufficient for such large operations. On the terrain and among the battalions I realized we didn't have an army of maneuver warfare that would endure longer in a position and know what to do (trenches, tents, etc.). After three days we had to retreat and found ourselves in Mt. Kozara. Being expelled from the command cadre caused demoralization. The Operational Staff's plan for Bosnian Krajina was to take over unreleased Krajina towns to ease our position in the offensive. The intelligence service was at no level. The liberation of Prijedor put us in front of new tasks and there were different opinions and decisions because three detachments and the Operational Staff for Bosnian Krajina were involved in the action. I was in favor of a rapid evacuation of goods, confiscated items across battalions. The concentration at Vitlovskača was a mistake. For example, Comrade Doctor was responsible for concentrating the pharmacy in one place which I don't attribute to bad intentions. There was a frontal battle. During that battle we threw some of our forces into the enemy's rear to disturb them there. Evacuating the population to Mt. Kozara came as a result of a broader party consultation at Vitlovskača. Sentimental feelings prevailed: saving the wounded and the rear by establishing a front around Mt. Kozara. Thus came the most fateful decision in this offensive. The Operational Staff for Bosnian Krajina sent the Shock Brigade to our territory, somewhat weakened and a little late. At the same time they thought that attacking his other strongholds would confuse the enemy. It turned out that this didn't change anything in relation to us. We sent a letter to the Op. Staff for Bosnian Krajina.

The mistake was massive and mine for being brief and insufficiently supported for the Op. Staff to form the belief that they weren't using indirect attacks, only direct ones! I was on a narrower battle sector and faced the greatest enemy pressure. I was in our Mt. Kozara operational staff appointed to lead operations in that sector. So, I didn't lead the entire detachment. There, on the ground we worked on preparing the staff and battalions for tough battles. The command cadre needed to be supplemented.

Regarding the breakthrough there has been a lot of criticism here. The most severe comes from III battalion. I believe that in those situations where the enemy constantly exerted strong pressure and engaged our forces it was challenging to conduct discussions as before actions, thus separating the command staff from the units on the ground. The orders we issued were clear and the battalion staff was supposed to elaborate on those orders. The situation deteriorated by the hour. The breakthrough occurred when the encirclement tightened right up to Mt. Kozara itself. We were not accustomed to extensive maneuvers. It was reckoned that the enemy could urgently cut off some of our forces such as III battalion. I'm surprised that the order reached that battalion late. Otherwise, I believed that III battalion would, within the given time for the movement, gather its forces, ultimately sacrificing its smaller patrols. The movement of that battalion towards Mrakovica and further with the detachment staff. The army needed to be prepared for the breakthrough and clearly explain everything necessary because our army wasn't accustomed to maneuver warfare. Regarding the wounded and the rear, a humane, not military, viewpoint prevailed. If we had not insisted on the

extraction of the wounded our battalions would have been at liberty to break through where they chose with their own battalion forces. Looking at the force deployment it's evident that the breakthrough was primarily planned for the extraction of our wounded comrades. That is, the battalions were arranged so that one entire battalion's duty during the breakthrough was to protect the passage

of the wounded through the sector that the remaining battalions were supposed to create and secure. Regarding the breakthrough location extensive research was conducted. Before this, it was known that the wounded had to be extracted by the shortest route to liberated territory. We knew that there was a large mass, of about 500 wounded and 400 escorts. The shortest route to the Sana was through Patrija and Ravni Gaj. The entire detachment participated in the breakthrough with the Shock battalion, a total of 5 battalions. Due to the speed and limited time before the start of the breakthrough, orders could only be issued based on the map. The battalion staff was responsible for working out their tasks in the breakthrough; they were familiar with the terrain and could conduct reconnaissance more easily under such circumstances. As I mentioned, the tasks were set up to ensure the passage of the wounded and the battalions received orders in that sense. However, there was another issue: how it ended. It then highlighted the insufficient military capabilities of our units. Orders for daytime breakouts probably came due to the delayed engagement in battle by individual units, such as reports of partial successes so these orders probably aimed to extend the breakthroughs already achieved. Also, the couriers likely also delayed with the orders. Undoubtedly, a significant error was the detachment in combat and great damage resulted from it. We were aware of the difficult situation but not the true nature of the offensive. It should be noted that we could have coped more easily if the experiences of our units that had suffered similar offensives in other parts of the country had been provided.

Regarding the criticism I faced about slapping partisans at Živoder, I admit the mistake, which, frankly speaking, was repeated and is severe and, I admit, unbecoming of a communist. I say this: the situation on the ground was such that I didn't know the people, lacked support, yet I should have intervened. The psychosis during the breakthrough must be understood. It was one of those situations where you couldn't control everything. Later, the army faltered; it

didn't listen, the Partisans moved without commanders. It's true that many people were out of action during the battle while our best fighters were doing their utmost. The blame for this lies with the unit staff. The Breakthrough! – It was set as the battle slogan. It was necessary at all costs to ensure success. For an army whose morale was waning, an army with many fighters who didn't willingly leave their home, this was how the breakthrough had to be set. Criticism is also made about mishandling the wounded. That's true. But, I emphasize, in this and many other cases, the situation was at fault. You remember, comrades, that under no circumstances did we want our wounded to remain in place, with every action, we sought to minimize the casualties. What could be done when we had a mass of wounded? When destroying one of those Pavelić battalions. There were 100 Partisan wounded which was too many considering the perhaps 600 rifles and other weapons we had captured then. Our apparatus wasn't capable of handling that many wounded. The last meeting at Živoder – that was a conference on the brink of exhaustion. Comrades were barely present mentally and didn't understand what was being said. Nonetheless, after that conference we developed guidelines on breaking into smaller groups with the help of comrades Ivo and Grga. The panic of the II battalion concealed that these guidelines were not properly implemented. Disarming part of the fighters was decided because many rifles were present for surrender. With us, couriers and nurse comrades were retreating. We advised everyone who joined us to hide along the way. We shouted to prevent the crowd from clustering. I believe that involving the rear in combat wasn't incorrect. I believe that the rear Partisan groups should have agitated earlier for creating underground shelters at homes. Just like comrade Miloš, I consider the assertion of panic by our Mt. Kozara operational staff as an insult. Leadership was entrusted to me and comrade Miloš in one operational sector. Although I bear some responsibility there was still consultation, just not as extensive. I don't consider it an error, considering the inability to remove people from the field with-

out harm. I believe that a central operational command should have been established to lead all operations in Mt. Kozara. I agree with the statement that our party was exposed in Prijedor. The courier service genuinely fumbled, but I emphasize here the enormous value of the telephone connection in this offensive which allowed for faster maneuvering and reporting on the situation on the fronts. Many of the mistakes made in the offensive largely stem from our inadequacy, but it is necessary to critically reflect and identify the shortcomings of the lower command staff. A greater preparedness of the army was required in these most challenging battles we had, and before that, little had been done on that front.

Comrade ALFRED RŽEHAK: It seems that comrades from the headquarters did not expect criticism and interpreted it as if we were in a courtroom. In a few instances, comrades Miloš and Šoša said that it was unprofessional criticism. I'll overlook that. I ask directly: did our headquarters previously look like this and have such an attitude towards the units as they do now? I hope my comrades will answer that question directly. I note that criticism was received for points for which we are all responsible or for which no one is responsible. Some points were tackled by fabrications to undermine the criticism. I'll present some smaller matters since comrades didn't grasp the constructive nature of our criticism. Comrade Miloš replied: it's true that we knew about seven thousand enemy soldiers and tanks according to the statements of a captured Ustasha, Comrade Miloš said, but we could always overpower such strength. I ask, what was done to dig up the roads and prevent the offensive of those seven thousand? Comrade Miloš said the wounded were not carried by the rear because it had separated from us. This was noted too late. Necessary measures should have been taken earlier, even before noon, including anticipating the separation of the rear. Nothing was done. And comrade Šoša didn't answer this question at all. I insist on an answer. I believe a good portion of the wounded could have been saved. I didn't say that the command of the detachment was cowardly, but I said it was a

bit panicky and it didn't refer only to the case in Pogleđevu. On this matter, I reply to both. They constantly peeked into the hospital at Pogleđevu and called the guard to account for letting a few civilians pass, not particularly related to the bombings. The panicky behavior I refer to, for example, was during the action at Patrija where they slipped into some kind of trench. And the battalion headquarters in Bokani was far behind the units and the detachment headquarters were two hours away. During the withdrawal after the second failed breakthrough these comrades didn't withdraw as individuals but rather drove people, saying, "Here's the detachment headquarters!" Let Comrade Nikica testify to this. [Comrade Nikica: That's right!]. I recall a conversation with Comrade Čoče after the offensive during which he completely agreed with me. We said at that time that if we ever had the opportunity we would say everything necessary about the offensive and the mistakes made. Čoče didn't keep his word. On the contrary, I disclosed everything I knew. I think it was appropriate, my duty, and I hope the comrades concerned will understand that and we'll continue to be friends. Comrade Šoša holds me responsible for concentrating medical supplies in Vitlovska. In a party unit meeting in Palančište attended by comrade Boško, I was tasked with building a warehouse for all medical supplies evacuated from Prijedor. I agreed to that. It was a conclusion of the military partisan unit staff of II battalion. [Comrade Boško confirms this.] Medical supplies in boxes are different from boxes containing miscellaneous items. It wasn't easy to organize all that massive medical supply mixed up in boxes. I remind Comrade Šoša that we jointly made a plan for the hospital to be built within 10 days in Vitlovska and on that occasion he told me to wait until the hospital was built to sort the materials. Regarding the complaint that I was stingy with medical supplies, that probably refers to Dr. Žukanović's complaints. He asked for exceptional items that I couldn't provide because they weren't available, and in another case, I wasn't in that position. The key to the warehouse wasn't with me. Declaring Dr. Žukanović as the

unit's doctor and his hospital as unit-related was irregular in my absence. At that time, Comrade Šoša, you spoke to the non-party member Dr. Žukanović about me negatively. As far as I know, party members aren't criticized in front of non-party members those responsible aren't criticized in front of the irresponsible. This would then undermine both my and your authority. I can't be held responsible for you issuing orders while the MT. Kozara operational staff, District Committee and the Detachment Staff of comrade. Comrade Šoša says his authority and the authority of the headquarters were shaken. It's true that the authority was weak and couldn't be as it was before by actions. One should have been at the battalion unit meeting in Pogleđevu to hear what was being discussed: about a raid on hens in Pogleđevu in which couriers and civilians participated, about sending a special courier to Vitlovska for "esenes" and such. I didn't speak about it yesterday because I considered it nitpicking. Today, I'm saying this prompted. I think after all this, you couldn't have expected better authority. You'll admit this to yourself, honestly.

Comrade ČOČE: After Dr. [another individual], I will say a few words regarding my participation in the Mt. Kozara Operational Headquarters. It's about the relationship between Comrade Šoša and me. This has already been discussed earlier and I thought it was settled. The mentioned Operational Headquarters was formed at a meeting. Comrade Miloš and I entered it as delegates of the Operational Headquarters for Bosnian Krajina. Comrade Šoša signed it. It's true that the unhealthy relationship among us transferred to official matters about which I informed the Secretary of District Committee. I noticed this only when other comrades alerted me to it. I didn't react to the neglect from Comrade Šoša considering his illness and nervousness that manifested in his relationships with others. I can say Šoša's behavior towards me was actually unfriendly. To avoid conflicts I went to Vitlovska with Comrade Branko, who also thought it best that I distance myself. Comrade Šoša sufficiently explained his actions yesterday. I condemn shouting at civilians, slapping the

wounded at Živoder. I don't know where these unhealthy relationships between us originated. I suspect Comrade Šoša's involvement in the formation of this detachment from the first days and his understanding that he is more responsible than me because I arrived later. Regarding the doctor's remarks about some panic in the Mt. Kozara Operational Headquarters and fleeing, I think his departure to the hill at Pogleđevu was not an expression of panic but a military necessity. I can say this because I was there myself.

Comrade MILOŠ ŠILJEGOVIĆ: As the Operational Headquarters on the main operational sector in Mt. Kozara, regarding the wounded, we did what was necessary: sent them to Vitlovska where others were supposed to care for them. The question of responsibility for the fate of the wounded wasn't deepened. We had to know that the rear would fail. But we couldn't provide troops because they were needed for the breakthrough. We are accused here of panic. We weren't alone in the field; we were with battalion commanders in whose sector we were. The point was to isolate ourselves to be able to work. It's true that we weren't capable of managing such large operations. We shouldn't have been in the hospital where observing such a large number of wounded distracted us from focusing entirely on the operations. In the future, if civilians unnecessarily intrude around our camp I think I will shoot them and the guards; we will assign tasks to everyone first to know how to behave. It was also about not revealing our positions. I acknowledge the doctor's sincerity; he believes what he says. The other issue is whether his assessments are correct. Unhealthy relationships in the headquarters were concealed. Concerning the need to increase the members of our operational headquarters in this area, I think we didn't have capable individuals. Conferences wouldn't have been very useful; they would only relieve us of responsibility. If a conference like today's had been held during the offensive not much would have been achieved. Soldiers don't know how to think. They aren't to blame for not knowing. The connections were indeed weak so sometimes we had to establish them person-

ally. At the moment of the most intense air attacks and bombing we went to the position itself to hold the retreat of our people. During the retreat after the breakthrough, we lost power, people realized the truth, sought a scapegoat as in Kosovo. During the retreat, we said, "There is the headquarters" and it spread through the crowd that the headquarters had fled! Duty had ended; I could have started saving myself. The complaint that Šoša didn't know the terrain is out of place. We must fight even where we know nothing. Besides, I knew the terrain myself. In fact, the complaints about chasing chickens and similar things – here's the truth. A group of village girls, six of them, didn't want to be at the front. They were cooking. We all got food from the pot. Later, when there were no conditions for regular food we said (not legible) to manage! There was also a battalion there. Orders weren't given there. When the doctor heard such complaints and rumors he should have dispelled them. The request for dry food from Vitlovska was reasonable. That's why we got little and there was everything there. Complaints of this kind are malicious. There were complaints here about the relationship of the Mt. Kozara Operational Headquarters and our conduct in battle. There were accurate complaints. We were late in the breakthrough; we showed incompetence. It's true that I shouted, but not as it's being alleged.

Comrade MILOŠ STOJAKOVIĆ, Secretary of Regional Committee for Novi: In this consultation we didn't hear the voice of the headquarters and the battalions. That's because we are all new except for Comrade Žarko who couldn't attend this consultation due to battles in our battalion's area. I'm speaking as a member of District Committee (Operational Staff) and the Committee for the Defense of Mt. Kozara and Knežpolje. The District Committee didn't do what it was supposed to do; it was weakened. One member was outside Mt. Kozara. Apart from the District Committee Secretary, the other members who were in Mt. Kozara were not suited for the roles they held. While the District Committee was narrower, in most cases, decisions were made by comrades Boško and Branko. Even after the expansion

it was often so without an agreement with other comrades, which we allowed, knowing our own incompetence. For the disappearance of the District Committee, I blame both myself and the Secretary. We were at fault as the District Committee for not seeking and holding a party consultation which was possible. I worked as a rear worker and a member of the defense committee for Knežpolje and Mt. Kozara. The work in that sector boiled down to me, and I often had to make decisions alone. As far as I know and was told, all actions towards the Prijedor–Dubica road were aimed at extracting the rear from the encirclement. I remember that breakthrough when 7–8 thousand residents of Municipality of Novi passed through. Perhaps all the rear of the Municipality of Novi could have been moved if the population had been informed in time about the possibility of crossing. I was there at the time. I asked comrades Šoša and Miloš to issue a joint order to move the rear. At that moment, they weren't inclined to do so. I saw them as senior comrades and wanted to come to an agreement and share the responsibility. In Bokani, Comrade Šoša shouted at me like, I could say, a sergeant to a private which was not suitable for him, not suitable for a communist. The neglect of the rear persisted throughout the entire offensive. After III Battalion was broken, when the passage over the road was open for about 48 hours, I asked for security to cross and a company that would move together with the rear and protect it from minor attacks. Comrade Šoša replied to me that the companies were exhausted although each company from that area would gladly have gone to protect their rear. Regarding the Mt. Kozara Operational Headquarters, I say it was established and existed throughout the entire battle. The relationship between Šoša and Čoče was evident to the rear itself, let alone to party members. This reflected in the disconnection of unit actions in battle and the preparation of the actions themselves. Everything was broken in the headquarters of II Battalion. The headquarters couldn't manage. Many inappropriate comments were directed at this headquarters. There were mistakes. It happened that couriers came for ammunition

from the positions and didn't receive it. Comrade Luketić didn't come back to the headquarters while Stanko spent most of the time in the headquarters and not in the positions. (They say he was injured.) I didn't know Stanko; I think he was improperly placed because he had a petty-bourgeois type, Croatian; we should have considered the opinion of the Partisans. It's no wonder he had no authority and, afterward, disappointed, surrendered to the enemy and harmed us. We were late in assessing the character of the offensive. Until almost the end we were intoxicated, optimistic. Until the end, we didn't inform the people about the dire situation. We fed hope by the prospect of returning home. The morale in the rear was quite high until the end.

The most severe impression on the people was that we didn't prepare them and in the end we wanted to abandon them while we extracted ourselves with the wounded. The breakthrough came unexpectedly and rapidly, unprepared. In a conversation with Comrade Branko, I remember the issue of the people was raised. The question of safeguarding the cadre was also raised. Comrade Branko demanded that we inform the party member and extract him from the people. I knew many of our people and was convinced that this was impossible; it would also inform the people. I was not in favor of that. At that time, we encountered Comrade Veljko Zec, who is no longer with us today, and we decided to inform the people after all. Comrade Mile Rajčević was there, too. It was said that only the people should move with children, leaving behind cattle, carts, etc. The failure of the breakthrough wasn't anticipated, yet it indeed failed. Only a portion of the forces got through. The forces that dropped to the road were supposed to provide protection for the passage. Dugouts, the task of digging dugouts, wasn't set even after the failed breakthrough. Later, everyone acted as they could and knew how. The female comrades were told: put on village attire and go with the people. We all bear responsibility for all this. It's about bearing the responsibility for not managing to care for the cadre. It happened that District Committee member Radovan Miljatović, with his entire Partisan

unit, went to surrender probably because of this uncertainty about what to do. His surrender surely had a heavy impact on many who should have hidden but surrendered and faced death because of it. In the field of the Municipality of Novi the people themselves retreated in front of the enemy and actually fled from the enemy's brutality. I told the people then that it was better to stay in their homes and hide rather than go to Mt. Kozara. Later, even the residents of the Dubica Municipality started to flee. The command issued for the evacuation of the population to Mt. Kozara actually accelerated the departure of the entire population to Mt. Kozara. When we already had the people in Mt. Kozara we should have defended them. That's how the fight was imposed on us by the enemy. The party did not come to the forefront until the reorganization of the exodus. Then the party members did their duty. Much was done. The people saw the party among themselves. If the offensive had been broken that would have been a Soviet rear. The treatment of the captives was never like this. Two hundred and eighty five captives from one Ustasha battalion were slaughtered. There were female comrades involved in this. We evaded the people's opinion. We had to stay true to our fight. I also agreed with that wrong decision. Later, I heard that one of these Ustasha called around thirty of his comrades to surrender, then removed the bolts from rifles and handed them over to two Partisans. Reserve companies were mobilized in the exodus by the National Liberation Committee for the Defense of Knežpolje and Mt. Kozara. At that moment, everyone wanted to join the fight. In a short time I organized five such companies, each with 125 people. They deserve credit for destroying the battalions. After the battle, they received no attention. There was no consideration of how to feed them. After the fight, the Partisans had to scatter into the exodus. The companies were formed militarily; we immediately appointed commanders and political commissars, and they could receive weapons. Such treatment toward them shook their morale and enthusiasm. Assembly meetings were gradually avoided where the people were called to

join these companies. It happened later that groups were sent to take away shoes and trousers from the Partisans who had reached that state during the battle. Such orders were inappropriate; this must have led to the inability to later recruit people for anything. After the fall of Prijedor the headquarters and Partisans detached themselves from the people and treated them as the Cossacks did to the serfs. All responsible forums and comrades failed. Comrade Obrad Misir-ača and others around him left the impression that they were only interested in saving themselves. The District Committee was scattered. The most responsible Comrade Branko, who worked the most, switched to the other side when he was most needed here. That was his mistake. The work of others was no longer felt. A few words about the Mt. Kozara Operational Headquarters at the time of the breakthrough or retreat. We all found ourselves at Čupićeve Kosa.

Before comrades Šoša and Miloš, I asked what to do because the people were demanding an answer from me. Truth be told, I didn't dare speak to the people with the truth because I was afraid of causing turmoil. I sought advice from them – they didn't agree. We moved forward. I persistently tried to hear their answer. I felt that comrades Šoša and Miloš wanted to distance themselves from the people. The artillery started firing again in Mlječanica. Comrades Šoša and Miloš, with their group and the POB (\*Partisan Intelligence Bureau), went on while Comrade Šoša sent us to hell. There were quite a few of us including party members. I'm convinced that if we had followed him further he would have resorted to even worse things. Šoša and Miloš were in some kind of fear, lost their heads. They were contemplating hiding themselves and the complaints about their absence, which were heard, were valid. I heard from the Partisans about shouting and beating which Comrade Šoša should never have done. Responsible commanding comrades don't handle things Bolshevik-style, self-critically; they should step up here as communists and not always from a military standpoint.

Comrade MILOŠ ŠILJEGOVIĆ: The background didn't want to move without livestock. That was mostly why a significant part of it didn't cross after the destruction of III battalion. The Committee for the Defense of Knežpolje and Mt. Kozara should have compelled people to save their naked lives. I don't know why that wasn't done. When I spoke of the incomplete headquarters I meant the unit's headquarters. As a member of the Mt. Kozara Operational Headquarters, when we were detached from the sectors to which we were assigned, then it was only us as individuals, Šoša, Miloš, and I took it upon myself to help. If we had succeeded in breaking through we would have been celebrated and these mistakes that weren't major wouldn't have been mentioned. I can say that even Miloš Stojaković, as an District Committee member, appealed to us and asked to be saved. The background addressed the army instead of the other way around. In those moments, the background could and should have done more. Otherwise, the criticisms are valid. The reserve companies were initially armed but suffered enormous losses in battles and we lost rifles. I emphasize that in the situation of withdrawal, there weren't many opportunities to give advice.

Comrade ALFRED RŽEHAK: We're responding again with some military terms that I seem unable to understand and we're constantly treated here as non-soldiers. There were also some criticisms that I don't understand the issue of rations as if I needed to finish a military academy to ask questions about military rations. Regarding the matter of the meals I didn't criticize what they were preparing but the way they were prepared.

Comrade MILOŠ STOJAKOVIĆ: Comrade Miloš must have made a mistake when he said I asked for the army to dig a trench for me. I wasn't even thinking about myself at that time. And when I told the people to manage as best as they could, there was an uproar that has remained etched in my memory forever.

Comrade MIRKO PEKIĆ: Speaking on my behalf personally. I was previously the commander of the III Battalion. The question of

responsibility for our failure arises here. Some comrades are accused too much, some too little. The Operational Headquarters cannot be considered responsible for the wrong assessment of the offensive (I mean the Mt. Kozara one) but rather the Detachment Headquarters and the District Committee. They were more short-sighted than a layman on the street. We sent a detailed letter to the detachment headquarters like a bible stating that 70 trucks of clear German forces and 12 tanks from Gradiška to Banja Luka were moving, indicating an imminent offensive in Mt. Kozara. Comrades Dušan and Obrad in the detachment headquarters didn't even care about it. Determining the enemy line in our battalion's sector I understood as protecting the communication Gradiška-Banja Luka and I considered it as potentially creating a belt around Mt. Kozara. After the fall of Prijedor we suggested breaking the enemy belt Kijeveci-Dragejci. Everything was proposed and nothing was answered to us. Comrade Obrad found it appropriate to come personally due to an intervention for a nurse in our battalion, but comrades from the detachment headquarters didn't come when we asked for it. There was no response to our letters and orally there was no one to say. (Boško the nurse). There were unprofessional remarks. Comparing our Operational Headquarters in actions in Prijedor with this one set up in the offensive and their behavior. Such a comparison is not appropriate due to the difference in the scale of operations. It is entirely accurate that the operational headquarters made a mistake by assuming that the enemy would immediately press us after our first unsuccessful breakthrough. They should have assessed that after the first failure. There was time to prepare for a second breakthrough. The enemy had to make all their moves on a larger basis, moving even their heavy equipment and that took time. That was the mistake of comrades Šošić and Miloš. It's true that the attack plan was not detailed. It's also true that the operational headquarters cannot be where the battalions are. I was in the breakthrough, a sector only 2 km wide. We pushed forward 12 companies. Only Comrade Ljuban Aćimović deployed his company

correctly. The others just wanted to hide as soon as possible. We precisely detailed the plan. The II company crossed instead of enabling others to pass. The command staff of the company is responsible for such things to me. I blame Šoša and the operational headquarters. In battle, there were heroic individual feats, but not tactical, methodical performances. The army wasn't taught such military skill. Our human material was combative, excellent for an assault. Both the army and the command staff proved incapable for maneuver warfare operations. The mistake was that we didn't withdraw in time. The mistake of comrades Miloš and Šoša was that upon our return from the breakthrough they didn't tell us what to do. Somewhat vaguely and vaguely, they said – to "Crna Rijeka!" Only those two came to Vitlovska after an invitation. After the failed second breakthrough there were no more conditions for breaking through. I believe that Comrade Doctor was not up to the organization of medical support. When I asked for bandages he said it was all centralized and he took care of it. I know the order for digging dugouts for the wounded and personnel was issued at Živoder and we acted according to it.

Comrade ŠOŠA: I divide the criticism into two categories: one on the operational headquarters and me as a member of that headquarters and the other to my personal address, to my actions as a communist. I know that these two should not be separated from our population. In a public function me and Comrade Miloš did our best as we knew. Concern for the wounded was taken into account in a narrow consultation, a plan was made during the breakthrough, and that plan included everything necessary for the extraction of the wounded. We consulted with the battalions in whose sector we were. We functioned even when everything stopped functioning. During the withdrawal we didn't go towards Vitlovska. Only one battalion was sent there. Among the people who were following us we saw headless individuals. Why didn't they go to their own units? Consultation at Vitlovska could not bring fruitful conclusions. People were hungry, exhausted and eating something meager. People instinctively

tried to satiate their hunger. Consultation at Živoder was also marked by general exhaustion. The last order we issued, we considered as communists, it was our duty to take care of what no one was concerned about at that moment and that is safeguarding the party from the cadre. I won't respond to the subsequent things brought up by Comrade Doctor. Communists speak once and do not retain any reservations. Comrade Čoče and I didn't raise our questions because we considered it settled. The reasons that led to earlier bad relations, which are not exactly as Comrade Čoče presents them, I reserve the right to bring them up here.

Comrade NIKICA: Regarding the issues, if the detachment headquarters were aware of the true nature of the offensive, as well as the experiences of our Partisans in similar offensives, I will mention an important meeting held in the detachment headquarters immediately after the enemy breakthrough in Prijedor. Besides Comrades Obrad and Dušan, and Comrades Stefan Mitrović and Drago Mačar, who were sent from the Mt. Kozara detachment's operational headquarters to investigate the possibility of organizing the defense of Mt. Kozara in the IV battalion's area, Comrade Ivo, a member of the Regional Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, was also present at the meeting and so was I. Issues related to the offensive were discussed and consultations took place. At that meeting it was determined that it was a military-style offensive that would most likely encircle and destroy our forces in Mt. Kozara. Comrade Ivo shared experiences from the recent enemy offensive on Mt. Petrova Gora during which a portion of the local Partisans were surrounded and had to break through the enemy encirclement. Comrade Ivo advised urgent measures to relocate the wounded following the example of Mt. Petrova Gora by digging shelters not discovered by the enemy. Concerning the prediction that the enemy would tighten the noose and make our stay in Mt. Kozara untenable Comrade Ivo suggested developing a withdrawal plan which would be used in that case. There was also a discussion about what the Operational Head-

quarters for Bosanska Krajina could do most effectively to alleviate the situation in Mt. Kozara. This discussion was particularly relevant because comrades Stefan and Drago had just received an order from the Bosanska Krajina Operational Headquarters to immediately proceed to Grmeč intending to present the situation in Mt. Kozara and the opinion of this detachment's headquarters to the Bosanska Krajina Operational Headquarters to assist in the defense of Mt. Kozara. It was then established that this was an offensive of a nature that the enemy would likely not be deterred from their main goal by any indirect attacks on their garrisons in Krajina, but solely by direct attacks from the rear. Recommendations were made to the Operational Headquarters for Bosanska Krajina and a proposal that, in order to break the enemy offensive, the forces of Croatian Partisans, especially in the "triangle" beyond the Una, from where the main enemy forces later moved, should be engaged. Specifically, it was mentioned that even an attack on Sanski Most would not alleviate the situation in Mt. Kozara and Comrade Stefan said that he would advocate this joint opinion with full conviction at the Bosanska Krajina Operational Headquarters. Subsequent events largely confirmed these predictions. If practical measures advised at that time had been taken into account we certainly wouldn't have experienced such a defeat. Someone objected to the evacuation of the printing press from Prijedor to Mt. Kozara instead of Mt. Grmeč. This was indeed a mistake. Initially, it was planned to evacuate the press to Mrakovica. However, there was a decision from the Bosanska Krajina Operational Headquarters to immediately transfer the printing press to Mt. Grmeč so the Bosanska Krajina Operational Headquarters moved there. Nonetheless, the printing press from Mrakovica was taken to Vitlovsku. At that moment, I went there to concentrate all the printing material (paper, etc.) and returned the printing press from Vitlovska back to Mrakovica, informing the Bosanska Krajina Operational Headquarters again, suggesting to move the printing press to Mt. Grmeč. By Comrade Šoša's order, the printing press was returned to Vitlovska

again and I was informed by Comrade Ljepa that it would remain there temporarily because the comrades from Mt. Kozara assured that the Mt. Kozara terrain provided adequate security for its placement here, and in the worst case, a hole could be dug for it. A hole was dug, the printing press was installed and the first leaflets were printed on it, but with the enemy's approach to Mt. Kozara it was buried near Mt. Kozara. The shelter for the printing press was right in the building where the printing press was installed, providing no guarantee for its concealment. Recognizing the need for printing in this situation I and Comrade Branko agreed to remove the printing press and use it to the maximum for the needs of mobilizing our forces to break the enemy's offensive. It was indeed done. Work continued day and night and that work was not insignificant. However, I agree with Comrade Boro Gaćeša that under those circumstances the printing press would have been discovered anyway. Concerning our agitation and propaganda among the civilians in the evacuation it should be emphasized that things were presented too optimistically. A line that was followed on all fronts based on the information and suggestions received from responsible forums. As much as it initially boosted morale among the masses it backfired upon the enemy's advance into the forest. It wasn't until the end that a somewhat more realistic portrayal began. I note that our print never published false news such as the news about ten seized cannons. Our principle was to publish only that news that were verified by our headquarters. Certainly, our agitation and propaganda, which played a significant role in this offensive, would have been much better suited to its task if there had been military and party consultations attended by representatives of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. Based on the words of Comrade Miloš Stojaković it could be understood that the Operational Headquarters remained with the detachment when some Partisan workers dropped out. That was not the case. After the failed second breakthrough I joined comrades Šoša, Miloš, Čočić and their group with whom we, members of the Political–Oper-

ative Bureau, attempted the breakthrough. At that time, I specifically asked comrades Miloš and Čoče, as delegates of the Bosanska Krajinina Operational Headquarters, for advice on what to do considering that there were five female comrades, including Comrade Stari, who needed help. Comrade Miloš told me that he himself didn't know what to say, later mentioning the shelters that needed to be dug and saying he would try to hide them as well. At that moment, artillery started firing on Mlječanica, forcing us to retreat over some slopes, and we descended to Gračanica where we rested. Suddenly, without any explanation, a group from the Mt. Kozara Operational Headquarters started towards Vitlovska and to avoid being left entirely on our own, not knowing the terrain, we also moved to Vitlovska. I consider such actions by these comrades entirely inappropriate. At Vitlovska, some conference was held, where a few comrades strongly advocated attempting to break through to Sava at all costs. This advice was given at a time when there were few conditions for making acceptable decisions. I attended the conference at Živoder. At that time, the Political–Operative Bureau was assigned to the III battalion. I believe the greatest mistake made at that conference was the decision to instruct the female comrades to go to the villages, dress in peasant attire and save themselves as the notion of unaffiliated persons in that situation was irrelevant.

Comrade BORO GAČEŠA: There was not much ammunition left in Vitlovska that fell into the hands of the enemy. The distribution of cigarettes was concluded according to requirements while the wounded came every hour for a cigar. Zwieback was sent out and distributed. Regarding the objections that food items were not distributed I note that according to the order of the detachment headquarters dry food should have been stored in particular. I admit there were times when I lashed out at some people which was wrong.

Comrade LJUBAN KUKIĆ: party group at the Detachment Headquarters: A few days after the enemy's intrusion into Prijedor a meeting of the party unit of the Detachment Headquarters was

held at which it was decided to start digging dugouts for the wounded. This is what Comrade Obrad also said. It is emphasized that dry food should be stored. The battalions assured that dugouts could be dug. I was on that party meeting appointed to find a place to accommodate the warehouse as well as the wounded that were in the Detachment Headquarters. I found a place 5 km away from the headquarters of the detachment and that's where the work started. Later that work was stopped. The wounded were mostly assigned to battalions. Things began to be buried around the detachment headquarters camp itself. That's how it happened that they were spoiled.

Comrade BOŠKO ŠILJEGOVIĆ: During the offensive I was not on the field of Mt. Kozara; I was with the Strike Brigade, later appointed as its political commissar. Our District Committee will say at the end of this discussion an opinion as our unique position. I am speaking on my own behalf now. I note that people are speaking here today with the greatest sincerity that not a single remark has yet been made that could be qualified as an insult, that there was nothing that would mean the destruction of freedom of speech which should prevail at our meetings. Based on everything that has been said here I have gained a fairly clear picture of the state of things and relations – in Mt. Kozara during the offensive and I think I can critically assess it all even though I was not there. The District Committee of our party in Mt. Kozara tried to be organisationally and politically mature enough to solve the difficult tasks that the enemy's offensive set before us. Regarding the remark of Comrade Miloš Stojaković, a member of the District Committee, that I and Comrade Branko made many decisions without consulting other comrades I declare that since the expansion of the District Committee, I have not attended its meetings. That remark only formally falls away. Actual District Committee carries out broader consultations and does not empower people. There are few people in it to solve things independently. We do not have the District Committee bureau. There are a few members of the District Committee and they are members of county committees which narrows their

horizons. It is complained that the Strike brigade did not fulfill the tasks at the moment of breakthrough that would facilitate our crossing. It is true that not even a bullet was fired in that direction. After the first breakthrough, it was in Dobrljina. We did not have a radio to give as the only way to maintain contact with the Mt. Kozara detachment during the enemy's blockade of Mt. Kozara. The enemy was determining where we would be. After all, the Strike Brigade was significantly weakened after the losses on the other side and these losses in fact exceeded the losses of the Mt. Kozara detachment on the first days of the offensive. Only 350–400 of us fighters came to the field of I Battalion. With such force we were not able to help Mt. Kozara much. On that terrain we could barely hold our own, constantly manoeuvring in front of the pressure of a far superior enemy. Even before the transition to the field of I Battalion, while I was under Mt. Grmeč, I asked in the Operational Headquarters for Bosnian Krajina to transfer us across the Sana more urgently. They were of the opinion that we should move to other areas because it was clear that the enemy wanted to draw us where it was most convenient for them. As we can see, there was not enough understanding even with the District Committee for Bosnian Krajina. However, it was decided that I should move to the field of I Battalion. The rear army transferred again from Mt. Kozara to the field of I Battalion was ballast for our Strike Brigades. We asked you not to send it to us because we are not a guarantee for their successful defense. That was also our military immaturity. I want to point out some of my mistakes as political commissar of the Strike Brigades. Our retreat from Piskavica to Gomjenica was rather disorderly. Some Partisans did not want to listen to me in some moments, for example. Crossing the river to prevent the destruction of our forces in time. So, at that river crossing, I took out my revolver, cursed someone's mother and pushed him into the water. Later I jumped in myself. That was my worst mistake which I didn't think I could do in any situation. I later apologised, but it wasn't enough because the insult was done in front of two entire battalions. It was a mistake that does not characterize me

as a communist. The letters of the District Mt. Kozara headquarters and the detachment headquarters were optimistic. Their estimate of the enemy force was around 20,000 soldiers. My estimate was 30–40 thousand. Certainly, a more realistic estimate, but still below the actual estimate. I wrote to the District Committee for Bosnian Krajina showing the difficult situation in which Mt. Kozara was found. They accepted the letters from Mt. Kozara and marked ours as moaning. Stanko, as a Croat, could and should have been a commander. In this regard, we do not indulge and we will not indulge (not legible). Another question is what according to Stanko should have been (not legible). We must learn the spirit of internationalism and Leninism; we must (not legible) implement the line of brotherhood which represents one of the foundations of our political ideology. Comrade Miloš Šiljegović's opinion, according to which even our consultation today could not be of much use in those days of the offensive, represents the basic principles and methods of our work. His admission of his own military immaturity was Bolshevik. Suddenly he takes off his party clothes, puts on military clothes and gives non-Bolshevik speeches. He points to the example of the liberation of Prijedor as a victory for party discipline and organization. Whether or not there was a need for party and military consultations in that situation we will say in the joint report of our District Committee.

Comrade BRANKO: I will refer only to certain things presented in the criticism on this point of the agenda since my opinion on all those things will be contained in the closing speech. Regarding the remark of Comrade Miloš Stojaković that the District Committee: made some decisions inconsistently that Comrade Boško and I made some independent decisions without consulting the others I declare the following: there may have been cases when a decision was made on my part since Boško was not present at our meetings after the expansion of the District Committee without consulting the other members. Such behaviour was never the result of any dictatorial attitude of mine towards the other members, but the situation was such

that a decision had to be made quickly and I made it as the secretary of the District Committee. Comrade Miloš's remark regarding my transfer during the first breakthrough was right on point. In other respects, the higher forum will give an assessment. Despite the freedom that was manifested to a considerable extent at this consultation, the effort to defend themselves or to withdraw their battalion, etc. prevailed among some comrades. I particularly mention the case of comrades Miloš and Šoša who generally acknowledged their inadequacy to the situation, but tried to find justification for their personal mistakes or at least mitigate their responsibility for their actions by explaining the gravity of the situation in which their actions took place. Comrades were not self-critical enough. There is no justification for cursing and slapping and similar actions unworthy of a communist. About the rest in the closing remarks.

Comrade KALINIĆ MILAN: V Troop, I Battalion: The wounded were not treated properly. During the transfer across the Sana the wounded were not provided with medical assistance. These were the mistakes of the political commissar of the Strike Brigade. The deputy political commissar, Comrade Sava Kesar, confiscated tobacco from our company through Sana. The wounded who remained in Mt. Kozara should not have suffered if more care had been taken for them. The behaviour of the commander and commanders during the disarmament when breaking up our forces into smaller groups was not good. Comrade Vladeta Radić slapped Comrade Dušan Deretić, the wounded commander. It was necessary to take care of the selection of the command staff.

Comrade RADOJE BATOŠ, secretary of the League of Communists for Bosanska Gradiška and a member of the District Committee: the most important issue is the issue of comrades and political workers behind the scenes and their fate in this offensive about which only two or three others mentioned something here. During the first breakthrough in a ditch where many rear members of political workers and comrades and the wounded were gathered at a

meeting attended by me and comrades Miloš Stojaković and Nikica, when the latter suggested that we do something ourselves because there was a possibility that we would remain trapped in the breakthrough plan, I didn't believe that, but later I saw that he was right. Later we were told to go to Čupića Kosa and that we would be informed about further developments there. However, no one informed us of anything. Finally, we set off on our own to Patria and that was too late. Everyone thought of themselves. This was also the case later on at the conferences and during the dissipation at Živoder. No one took into account female comrades and political workers. Each battalion took a certain number of female comrades with them. Afterward, a few female comrades remained. After the offensive, only 6–7 female comrades showed up. There were many reasons to save our comrades who gave a lot of themselves for the cause of the national liberation struggle. I personally condemn myself for letting Nela and Mira go with the 4th Battalion, even though they wanted to. The consequence of such an earlier attitude towards female comrades is that today even a female such as Bora are reluctant to go to the hospital fearing that they will be abandoned due to their previous bad experience. Because of all these, we all need to condemn ourselves.

Comrade GOJKO BJELAJAC: Comrade Bora Gaćeša asks me to corroborate the accusations against him with facts. Those accusations were made by the deputy commander of my troop. And that is true. Finally, Comrade Boro also sent me 30–40 cigarettes to my position and on my friendship note from the school days while certainly many could not count on such favour from Comrade Boro – quartermaster. Comrade Obrad did not issue any order to either the First or the Strike Battalion to enable the others to break through. Both he and Dušan Misirača asked on the other side only about their female comrades, whether they had passed. The Strike and I Battalions performed the task as they were ordered. If it was predicted that we would have to leave Prijedor in that case deconspiracy of our party cadres in the city had to be prevented which is taking a nasty

revenge on us today. The accusation regarding Comrade Mladen Obradović is true and that case should certainly be investigated. Comrades Šoša and Čoča were in positions. And for the Comrade Obrad, it was known that he was not. The news about Comrade Stanko's surrender had to be hidden. Partisans say: you can't trust the Croats. Pursuance of civilians in front of the headquarters was also a justified matter. We pursued them and comrades Šoša and Miloš did the same. How many times only I pursued them: Comrade Šoša's anger was not justified. I blame Comrade Kalinić for not stating that Comrade Šoša shot a Partisan although it was correct, but it should have been mentioned here.

Comrade BRANE KOVAČEVIĆ, II Troop III Battalion: He explains that his troop did not just retreat through the enemy trenches on the other side of the encirclement, but on the contrary went forward with the fight overcoming enemy resistance and attacking the tanks themselves as many eyewitnesses can testify.

Comrade MIRKO PEKIĆ: Which objection in relation to II Troop was not meant the way Comrade Brane understood it. After all, I did not know before that my deputy, Comrade Piljo, came to that troop and issued orders to it.

Comrade RADE BAŠIĆ: Comrades Šoša and Miloš mentioned here that the Strike Battalion did not fulfill its task. The troop that I saw (comrade Rade Kondić, the commander of that troop was wounded in Mt. Kozara) completed the task already at 11:30 in the first breakthrough. Our task was: compel the enemy across the road, provide protection towards Prijedor in order to allow the passage of the wounded and the rear. 2–3 km away from us (not legible) we heard fighting. We held the cover until just before dawn. Then a courier came with an order to go to the place where the headquarters of the detachment was being transferred (the text is not legible). The commander of the Strike Battalion, Comrade Ranko, was informed that there was free passage by 1 o'clock at night. Comrades Ranko Šipko, Niko Jurišić and Obrad were informed at the crossing point. Every-

one told me: do what you know! I asked Ranko: do you know anything about the wounded? He answered me: I don't know anything about the IV Battalion and the wounded. Do what you know. Stay though, maybe you will somehow find the way to connect with them. I stayed until 9 o'clock in the morning. Then army tanks were heard. I consulted with my comrades. I was in favour of moving. Comrade Ranko let me decide for myself as appropriate. We changed the position just before the arrival of the tanks. The passage was open until 9:30 a.m. and then it was blocked again. Before the blockade, Planinica and Gradina were free as well as a large valley through which all our rear and wounded could pass. There was talk across the road that our remaining forces would probably try to break through again. In connection with that we were ordered to shoot from the other side at some enemy strongholds and thus facilitate the breakthrough. I told comrades Ranko and Niko that our fire without a courier connection could do more harm than good to our forces that would break through. And indeed, the fire we opened was detrimental. People who had already crossed the road were returning because of our fire. I believe that we could still link up with Mt. Kozara's forces through couriers and cooperate effectively in the second breakthrough. Later, it was concluded that we should break through for Mt. Kozara again and save what could be saved. Our transfer in connection with that task on the first evening was hampered by the premature fire opened by III Troop towards Ravni Gaj which was supposed to facilitate the attack of our forces towards Novo. I attribute the indecision of Comrade Branko that we didn't cross the second night. It was then concluded that we should stay temporarily and rescue families on the ground towards Kruškovac. I believe that it was more due to our fear of the unfamiliar Mt. Kozara. If we had crossed earlier we could have saved more of our squad's property. If necessary, we could save the looted warehouses later.

Comrade ČOČE: The manner in which the enemy prisoners were liquidated in this offensive has a weak effect on the Croatian Home Guards and it is greatly taking vengeance on us today. When we had

already made the decision to shoot the home guards for their liquidation, which was not carried out by shooting, our headquarters were to blame. We transferred several home guards to the field of III Battalion (57) and they were allowed to go home. I believe that the shooting of a Partisan deserter on Karan by old comrade Šoša was correct at that moment of fierce attack by the enemy that had to be stopped. For everything that was done to the prisoners, I blame the headquarters of II and the Strike Battalions which had the duty to liquidate the prisoners and for allowing irresponsible elements to commit massacres and unprecedented acts on them.

Comrade BRANKO: what Comrade Rade Bašić presented is correct. In fact, we looked at the situation of Mt. Kozara with obscurity, not having any data, and on the other hand, the morale of the Partisans was weak. Some separated, almost half of the Partisans who were designated for Mt. Kozara. On the first evening, as Comrade Rade himself said, we didn't cross because of a fire that was open too early on the flat Gaj. On the second evening, the mood of the Partisans for the journey towards Mt. Kozara was even worse; they preferred to go towards Kruškovac to defend their families. It is also true that there was too little determination. If we had crossed a little earlier we would have saved only a little material.

Comrade JOCO MARJANOVIĆ: It seems to me that about ten days before the breakthrough Comrade Obrad gave me a true assessment of the nature of the enemy's offensive. However, nothing was done. Comrades Obrad, Ranko and others who crossed during the first breakthrough should have informed us in order to make more efficient use of the achieved free passage.

Comrade BRANKO: He declares that now Comrade Boško, a member of the District Committee, will present a unique opinion and conclusion to the District Committee on all the issues mentioned in this point and invites the comrades to listen to this presentation with full attention since there will be the question of adopting the position of the District Committee.

Comrade BOŠKO: In front of our District Committee, I will present our joint and unanimous opinion on the second item on the agenda, that is, a critical review of the offensive. Comrades, I emphasise that this is our first district conference held in Mt. Kozara since the beginning of our national liberation struggle. The special position in which our detachment found itself after the offensive expressed and demanded the need for the broadest party Counselling. In our past counselling we have also had those attended by representatives of higher party forums, but we have never had a single consultation where all members of our district party organisation were present directly or through their delegates. The offensive in Mt. Kozara has a far deeper and broader significance than was shown in the discussion at this counselling. While the occupier with 80,000 well-prepared and armed soldiers stormed towards Mt. Kozara the entire other regions were burdened by military pressure and could be more active. In the current situation in which we find ourselves, it was not easy for us to separate the delegates and command staff from the troops, but considering that we have to determine the state of our party organization and set ourselves new tasks we believe that we must separate people from the troops and discuss our most important issues through the party procedures.

We note, comrades, among us a large number of our dearest communist comrades who in this great, glorious but uneven struggle died as national heroes and this very truth, above all else, urges us to be above all honest, impartial, truthful in this discussion, to pay due respect to our dearest comrades in that way as well.

First of all, I acknowledge, in front of the District Committee, the communist freedom of discussion which was at a decent level at this counselling. At our close meetings, critical and self-critical presentation of the mistakes and responsibilities of individual comrades was not usual and if it was – if it was half-hearted, it was considered that no one should hold a grudge against anyone or that serious mistakes should be described in gentle words. We believe that only the

one who did not say and criticize everything he had to say and criticize was resented by the communists. It was noted that all the comrades, not only the delegates, expressed their opinions, participated in the discussion, discussed unusually important and principled matters which in itself indicates the great usefulness and importance of such consultation the benefit of which is far higher and greater for the building of communists than can be ordinary silence. In addition to those undoubtedly good sides our counselling had several general and important shortcomings. The topic itself: a critical review of the offensive led the comrades to discuss more about military matters from a military point of view and not to talk about the role of the Party, its military organization, about the work of communists in charge of military work. In this regard, the consideration of Comrade Dragan Marin is accurate; he, assessing the achievements and failures in this offensive, spoke about the achievements and failures of the Communist Party itself. However, their starting point is quite correct, but the further development of that premise is incorrect. Comrade Dragan Marin, accusing the Communist Party of all the failures in this offensive wants to exclude the responsibility of certain communist comrades for their work. The responsibility of the party cannot be reduced and does not exclude the responsibility of individual comrades for some events and failures that were present in this offensive. It is true that the party proved to be inadequate in many occasions, but it is also true that there were many things and instances with certain comrades that not only could but had to be avoided.

Comrades, insufficient self-criticism of comrades in presenting the course of the offensive was noticed. A good number of speakers realized that when describing the course of events they should be the defender of their squad, troop or battalion. This self-criticism is particularly noticeable among the command staff, comrades-in-arms, commanders and commissars. In their presentation, few of them talked about personal mistakes, mistakes of their unit and those around them. Hardly anybody said what they did wrong or what they

could have done. The lack of discussion is also the fact that the rear army issue was seriously touched upon in one place throughout the whole time. The most striking thing is that through this discussion we did not have the political awareness to assess the political character and significance of the offensive attack in Mt. Kozara. According to the assessment of our Provincial Committee and the Operational Headquarters for Bosnian Krajina the importance of the heroic struggle of the Mt. Kozara Partisans is not only great for Mt. Kozara, but also for the entire Krajina. The heroic fight of Mt. Kozara contributed a lot to the fighting spirit of our Krajina and the whole country. While Mt. Kozara was fighting a big battle, our comrades in Krajina were fighting with smaller forces, liberating towns and villages, expanding the liberated territory, building plans in relatively easy circumstances, preparing to fight against the same forces that Mt. Kozara was fighting with. We must not forget that the fight of Mt. Kozara was celebrated all over the country. We ourselves are witnesses, from the captured enemy correspondence, that the offensive in Mt. Kozara was talked about all over the country. It is certain that our fight in many ways made it easier for our brigades that came to help Krajina to overcome the otherwise difficult journey. For the enemy, Mt. Kozara was a Partisan tower, a raised sword over his most important strategic points, economic and traffic arteries. One small detachment of only four incomplete counties attracted the most elite Ustasha army, German divisions and even the Hungarian monitors themselves. Pavelić flew from front to front, raising the morale of his army which also felt the weight of the battle. The struggle of Mt. Kozara did not go unnoticed in the international world. The Soviet newspaper “Pravda” dedicates an introductory article to the heroic struggle of the Mt. Kozara Partisans. The London radio station has been talking about Mt. Kozara’s struggles for several evenings. The enemy press also informs about the difficult battles of Mt. Kozara through radio and newspapers. In order to justify their bloodshed and the crimes they committed against our detachment, against the civilian non-combatant pop-

ulation, crimes equal to those committed by the fascists in the Soviet country, the enemy writes shameless and false articles and publishes books: Mt. Kozara has fallen. They want to completely pacify their petty bourgeoisie, the Ustasha and Home Guards – there is no more Mt. Kozara, don't be afraid, be sure for once. Due to its geographical–strategic position, due to its successful activity, the Mt. Kozara detachment was the first detachment at which a fresh and well–rested, trained and well–equipped enemy force of 80 thousand soldiers was aimed. Army group “Western Bosnia” with all its strength in clearing these terrains separated our detachment rushed at it like a dragon. The Ustashes needed one victory over the Partisans. They needed it in economical, military and almost even more political sense. The fall of Mt. Kozara was what the Ustashes and their mercenary press wanted to use for their sordid and hideous goals.

First of all, we must look back on some of our successes in this unequal struggle and then move on to criticism of our work.

We believe that in this battle there was unprecedented heroism of our Partisans. There were moments when the great military ability of our command staff came to the fore; it was an excellent, unique army and rear army. All this, comrades, is the result of the work and success of our party.

Lack of military vigilance. The attack on Prijedor meant the preemption of the offensive that was being talked about in our country although it was rather imprecise. The offensive was expected, not as it was, if for no other reason than for the harvest and other economic, military and political needs to attack us. The fall of Prijedor is one of our greatest victories. By liberating Prijedor, our forces of I and II Detachments, Mt. Kozara and Mt. Grmeč were connected so that Prijedor, which was an obstacle to connecting us with Mt. Grmeč, with its liberation, meant a very convenient traffic connection for us. Comrade TITO, our Supreme Commander, also noticed the importance of this connection who in a letter addressed to the Operational Headquarters for Bosnian Krajina, a few days before the

attack, emphasized the need and benefit of destroying this Ustasha stronghold. With the attack on Prijedor, the immediate coordination of I and II Detachments, the Banija and the Strike Brigade in a single military operation came to the fore. The fall of Prijedor in our Krajina meant the beginning of a large-scale operation. By liberating this city we freed our forces that had blocked the city for months, destroyed the fifth column in Prijedor and the surrounding Ustasha villages, obtained many weapons, military and medical equipment, entered Ljubija and finally showed the duality of our struggle. While one force of our Strike Brigade was fighting the Chetniks in the Brankovac–Piskavica sector other forces of the same brigade were attacking Prijedor, the slaughterhouse of the Serbs, the Ustasha Alcazar, an important enemy garrison. Even greater political significance of the fall of Prijedor comes from the fact that it is an important traffic hub on the Banja Luka–Sunja railway and, after all, it is the second largest and most important town in Krajina or the former Vrbas Province or Sana and Luka parishes. The fall of Prijedor reverberated all over the country at a time when the Ustasha and Chetnik alliances were already publicly and officially disclosed. Their downfall came as our best response to binding the occupier's servants. By releasing the prisoners from Prijedor we carried the glory of our weapons and confirmed our policy of brotherhood of Serbs, Croats and Muslims. We must not forget that in this fall we also used our second political preparation in the enemy's army by distributing leaflets and various other propaganda materials! The mere fact that such Prijedor was occupied was enough that the Detachment Headquarters had to reckon with the reaction of the enemy. However, we were oblivious owing to that victory. We were lulled into a certain freedom. Our military future was minimal. The facts told us about it. The Headquarters of the Detachment and the District Committee and all members were aware of Comrade Okrugla's letter about the preparation of a major offensive, however we were lulled by our offensive in Krajina to the situation and fighting on the Eastern Front,

so tanks and howitzers were on the road. One hospital in Kozarac, the other one uphill of Kozarac. According to the order of the Operational Headquarters for Bosnian Krajina road Prijedor–Piskavica undug. There was not enough readiness. In Novo, it was reported that the army and tanks were gathering. On the field of II Battalion, the first tanks and the best troops of Francetić, the motorized Ustaša “black legions” appeared. The III Battalion sent the statement of the captured Ustasha to the Detachment, about 7,000 soldiers and a column of tanks moving to Banja Luka. If there had been more vigilance a more correct evaluation of the offensive could have been taken from this data. The statement of Comrade Ivo, member of the District Committee of the Communist Party of Croatia, his correct and timely assessment was not noticed by the military leadership and neither were the experiences that he disclosed from a similar offensive on Mt. Petrova Gora passed on. The biggest lack of vigilance of the Operational Headquarters for Bosnian Krajina, the Detachment Headquarters, the District Committee is the fact that the Ljubija mine comes back into the enemy’s hands very slightly damaged. The significance of this mistake can be seen from the fact that at the first opening of the train passage near Volinje, General Stahl and Minister Bešlagić ceremoniously released 25 train cars of miners from Ljubija as the first transport saying that the new economic life that was now beginning justified all the efforts and losses they had suffered during cleaning up this area. The announcements of the captured officers spoke about enemy divisions and finally Stahl’s declarations about the army group “Western Bosnia” spoke about the existence of large enemy forces on our territory. Comrades, if we had collected and considered all this data we would undoubtedly have arrived at a more correct assessment of the enemy’s strength and probably would have assessed the character of the enemy’s offensive in a timely manner. Intelligence service. The almost common statement by all speakers that there was no organized intelligence service is correct. If someone had told us that an army of 80,000 with tanks and airplanes was

moving towards us we would certainly have acted differently than we did. But, unfortunately, we only learned about the enemy's forces a few weeks after the offensive from a letter written by Comrade Ivo, a member of the District Committee of Croatia. The question of the intelligence service was not properly raised in the entire Krajina, not even in the detachments across the Una and Sava rivers. For example, we still have no information from Slavonia and Banija about the condition of numerous enemy garrisons in Pakrac, Lipik, Sisak, Jasenovac, that is, in garrisons that can interfere with our actions during each of our operations. This means lack of intelligence and lack of organization of a proper and conspiratorial intelligence service, both in terms of military and political intelligence. The fact that in Novi the comrade who informs us, is known by the whole villages, only tells us how careless the organization of the intelligence service was.

The course of the offensive. Accepting a frontal battle for us is an objective military mistake. However, with us, that mistake came as an objective necessity. We know that we had to and should have defended our villages; we could not leave our liberated regions with little or no struggle, where we had our heroic background, our organized economy, where we finally had our reserves of manpower for the army. However, the Partisan fight that we are used to: a lot of sudden and heavy attacks, a fight in which we participated mainly as easily mobile units, our Partisan army could not accept a frontal fight for the reasons listed, and most importantly, the enemy was technically and numerically incomparably superior, so that it had to be known immediately that we would have to suffer heavy losses in this battle. On the ground, I Battalion retreated towards Mt. Kozara as was done during the earlier offensives. They were fleeing from an enemy with whom the people already had a dark and difficult experience. The enemy (not legible) with the criminal order of Kvaternik, the destruction and taking away of the entire population from 14 to 60 years of age. Kozara Mount, at that time, not knowing the character and size of the enemy's forces, was objectively a safe shelter. The evacuation

in Mt. Kozara was carried out in some areas by order and without orders. However, the hospital of I Battalion had to leave for Mt. Grmeč, not for Mt. Kozara. It is a mistake of the Headquarters of I Battalion, the manager of the hospital, who had to have a plan for the situation, and the District Committee of the Novi Municipality. It is a mistake that the detachment headquarters found disorganization of the military units on that field. Their arrangement began in battle. This disorder was caused by the new arming of untrained and young personnel with weapons from Prijedor and the fact that the Strike Brigade took with it the best complete companies and almost the battalion headquarters itself. These are mistakes that could have been avoided. We consider as a mistake this too short manoeuvre with the enemy on the ground of I Battalion. Despite all these reasons, that relatively large terrain was easily crossed by the enemy and almost without a fight in just 3 days. Although it is known that there were dugouts for the civilian population on that ground, which were practiced during last year's battles and offensives, those dugouts during this offensive, just when they should have been used the most, remained underutilized. This is where the responsibility falls on comrades from the Party from the field of the Novi Municipality. The enemy advanced on the slopes of Mt. Kozara where major battles took place. In these battles, comrades, there were great and skilful orders, great victories, the destruction of not only companies, but also battalions and even brigades! Enemy losses, according to official party information, range from 7,000 dead, wounded, captured and ejected from the line. These are great victories unremembered and unseen in our wider environment in the course of this national liberation struggle. In addition to these successes we must highlight some shortcomings that had to be avoided. The victory in certain sectors, the destruction of battalions and companies was not used enough. So, for example, after the destruction of the battalion at Patrija, the passage across the road to free terrain, that is, to the road to Mt. Grmeč, was not used enough. Only about 3,000 people, women and children

with livestock and cars passed, and it was possible to cross during that time while the enemy was confused and did not deploy his reserve forces – all the background from the field of I Battalion in the amount of 20,000 people, women and children. The wounded could also cross. If that was done we would have a huge relief. We would not have had such a large number of the rear accumulated in Mt. Kozara, we would not have had so many casualties from the bombing, we would not have suffered such a catastrophic loss of the wounded. And most importantly, a good part of that background would be mostly kept from the enemy. Why this was not used in this way is the fault of the Headquarters of the Detachment and the District Committee, which did not coordinate the mutual work. On the other hand, we note that there was no unity in the command of the Detachment headquarters. One order was issued by Šoša and the other by Obrad and Dušan. This prevented the arrangement of both the rear and the military units. The non-unity of the command as well as the joint, collective management of the entire headquarters in such large-scale operations were avoided and those two things in many ways harmed the development of events for us. The order to dig dugouts to hide our wounded was not issued in time. The wounded and their fate are the most terrible tragedies that took place in Mt. Kozara. It is the most terrible because there were around 500 people of the best fighters, many members of the party who were unprotected and bare-handed, and crushed to death by the enemy who were like a raging monster. Comrades, we know and there are experiences here and in Mt. Petrova Gora where the wounded suffered an offensive and were not found by the enemy. The lack of overview of the overall battles by the Detachment Headquarters is also a mistake resulting from the non-uniform management of operations. Thus, while Obrad and Dušan had extensive, as Comrade Pekić said, biblical information from the field of III Battalion about the scale of the offensive, Šoša did not have such information until then. There were also reverse occurrences. Not all the possibilities and all the forces available

in Mt. Kozara were used. Thus, throughout the entire time of the fighting III Battalion remained almost untouched. The big mistake was the non-conspiratorial and unusual work of the comrades of the St. Trtica headquarters at the detachment headquarters and Bora Gaćeša at the II Battalion headquarters on Vitlovska. The foreman receives the task of hiding some unusually important things, he passes them on bureaucratically, entrusting them to Nikola Majstorović and other unreliable people. Comrades, we have the experience that the warehouses that were built last year on Vitlovska and Mededak which were worked only by party members and no one else, were not found by the enemy even in this offensive. The material obtained from Prijedor was not handled properly. Some battalions did the right thing, but most of them acted improperly. We know that in terms of materials, we primarily meet military needs. However, plows, hoes, shovels, a number of other agricultural items, women's vests, children's toys remained in the warehouses and on Vitlovska, and all these were kept as if to open a store, until it finally fell into the hands of the enemy. That, comrades, is a grave mistake against that unprotected nation, that nation that, from the crust of the bread to its child, gave everything with blessing to the People's Liberation Struggle. It's a slap in the face! Rear army in runaways. Certainly, no squad in the country had the kind of rear army we had. Loyal to us to the end, it gave everything that was asked. Entire towns in Mt. Kozara were raised. Bricks for the construction of our camps were carried in kilos across the deepest snow. The best food was in our camp. All the best things were given to us by the people. The policy of brotherhood of Serbs, Muslims and Croats was in the blood of our people. Huge love for the partisans in the village. Even in such a big break and defeat, this rear that is left looks at us as the best of its sons. Do you remember the case when the mother, hiding her child, was wounded by a cannon shell, forced by the councillor to take her to the hospital, refused help: "No, children, I'm ashamed to waste medicine, that's what fighters need!" Do you know, and you also wit-

nessed what, when you were leaving the front in the most difficult situation, how they shouted at you: "Only you save yourselves, and it does not matter what will happen to us!" And our assemblies and conferences, the May Day celebration, the celebration of the October Revolution, St. George's Day, the youth choir in Prijedor, all of that outlined our most secure rear. Such is our rear, comrades, it is the result of our party work.

Arriving in Mt. Kozara, our rear party staff did not get along right away. Accustomed to working in committees, villages, municipalities, they came to a new situation, by organizing the normal life of 79–80 thousand people on the run. That initial difficulty in the work was later overcome primarily by the influence of the District Committee. There were organised municipalities, local communities, choirs, agitprop columns, the press, newspapers, all of which influenced the high moral level of our rear. However, serious mistakes were made there as well. The rear was not informed in time about the severity of the situation. They were kept in a harmful slumber even when our difficult situation was already known for sure. They had to prepare for the most difficult; tell them not to surrender. And finally, we had to inform the people and not leave that to enemy spies. If we had done it in a timely manner the result of the offensive would have been more favourable for us. The enemy made ample use of this lack of ours. According to the statements of those who escaped from the shooting, the Germans and the Ustashas said: we surrounded you, forced you along the Sava, and then promised you a little cheese, a little butter, a little meat, so hop into the mousetrap! This means that the enemy knew that with this agitation, promising work in Germany, enrolment in the Chetniks, they would be able to at least sway those who would not yield, to finally surrender.

The people, tired, starving, scattered in the forest, bombarded by airplanes and beaten by artillery, abandoned by the army, surrounded by many forces, were really a convenient source for instigators – panic makers. And yet something of that rear remains. With regard

to Comrade Bursać's remark that rear troops should not have been formed and sent into battle, we stand by the point of view that this is quite correct and common practice. It is only true that those troops were not taken into account.

A critical review of the struggle itself. Our Partisans in this fight gave a number of examples of how national heroes sacrifice their lives for the freedom of their people. Their heroic deeds and names will be unforgettable. Such heroics can only be done by a man who knows how to fight for a just cause. The cases of comrades Ljuban Aćimović, Nikola Luketić, Dušan Deretić, Raćan Simatović, Luka Stojanović, Ahmed Kalabić, Vlado Pekić and a number of others will always be the most beautiful example of unparalleled heroism in our history.

By the very acknowledgement of the comrades of the units, and by objective assessment, they were not up to the military situation in which they found themselves. However, in addition to that immaturity, things happened with the cause that did not come from the immaturity of the highest military command, that is, the Detachment Headquarters. There was not enough preparation for certain actions, such as for Mt. Gola Planina and the breakthrough itself from the Mt. Kozara encirclement. It is a mistake directly of the detachment headquarters. In this case, done by Šoša and Miloš. In these actions, the disunity of the command was also manifested, on the one hand Obrad–Dušan, and on the other Šoša–Miloš. The messenger service was weak. Throughout the longest period of the offensive, telephones were functioning in Mt. Kozara, which rendered enormous favours to the headquarters. However, when they were ineffectual, then the connection stopped functioning normally, and in all war operations, war experience: liaison, liaison and again liaison! If the liaison had worked, e.g. in the very breakthrough between the Strike Battalion and the Squad Headquarters, things would have taken on a completely different outlook. It is our experience that we must have young, healthy, trustworthy mostly party people as liaisons, to whom we will be able to entrust important letters, knowing in advance that they will

deliver them in a timely manner to the person to whom they are addressed. As for the place of the breakthrough of the District Committee, it stands on the opinion that it was correctly chosen, there was no more favourable place. The width of the front during the penetration is also competent and militarily justified. The location of the detachment's headquarters was properly determined. The breakthrough was delayed. It should certainly have been carried out a few days earlier than it was done. The very method of breakthrough as performed is not correct. Without wider military and party consultation, a panicked decision was made to break through as quickly as possible. It was not taken into account the enormity of the enemy's army, which cannot move so quickly through the forest with all its chamber, escort and heavy weapons, and therefore the decision was wrong – panicky. That is the most serious mistake of comrades Šoša and Miloš. Wider consultation was absolutely necessary. If it had been carried out, the breakthrough would certainly have been carried out (it is not entirely legible). Because of the weak connection, what was done in the breakthrough was not used. There was no withdrawal plan in case of failure which must be anticipated in any action. The slogan: to be or not to be is completely wrong. Such a position cannot be justified by any need to raise the fighting spirit of the partisans. Because “to be or not to be” meant losing one's head after the offensive. The transfer and release of the detachment by Comrade Obrad – Commander, Dušan – deputy political commissar, as well as Comrade Branko – secretary of the District Committee in the most fateful hour by detachment and the rear was a mistake. The very relationship between the army and the background during the offensive is irregular. The army had a very privileged position, maybe even like the imperial Russian cavalry, as Comrade Stojaković says, and it certainly had a relationship that was not usual until the offensive itself. We condemn the massacre of prisoners. The political commissar of the Strike Battalion, Comrade Niko Jurinčić, and the headquarters of II Battalion are responsible for this. Atrocities against prisoners are foreign to us, they do not correspond

to the spirit of political education of our Partisans, they are characteristic of the fascist army, they mean not only cowardice but also a lack of human feelings. Among the prisoners there were also home guards who, at the call of one man, as Comrade Stojaković says, 30 of them surrendered. Or the case of Banjec, where 54 soldiers in war gear surrendered. We are of the opinion that all those who lay down their arms without a fight should either be included in our ranks or, after political notification of the aspiration of our struggle, allowed to go home. No military justification can justify this action as was done with 283 captured enemy soldiers.

The discipline of the Partisans was not at a sufficient level. We place the emphasis of discipline on the effort of the Communist Party in the military unit. The party is the engine of the entire life of the company and battalion, its influence and work are maintained in spoken discipline. We do not want the discipline of the Yugoslav People's Army! That discipline was false, external, imposed, it was training and terror. That disciplined Yugoslav army was not capable of fighting very well equipped, not even as much as the Mt. Kozara partisans with rifles! We must keep in mind that our discipline is far higher and broader in content than in any other army. We are witnesses of robbery, violence, rape, drunkenness of the famous German disciplined army. And we know what our army is like in this regard, we just have to see that our discipline is formed in terms of military usefulness, and on the basis of party activity. Our partisans make up for it with their courage.

Not holding wider military consultations is a mistake, the consequences of which we talked about. That absence of consultations cannot be justified by any skill in fighting, but on the contrary, if the fiercer the fight, the more consultation is necessary. Committees as a commanding staff must be composed of soldiers, but such soldiers who will never, with their actions, stain their affiliation to the Communist Party. Just because they are communists they must be different from the officers and commanders of other armies! They are the

most disciplined, the best officers, but they do not lose their human qualities in any situation. There must be no wall between the partisans and the commanding staff! On the contrary, it is the greatest wealth, which must not be exploited again to the detriment of discipline and official relations.

After the breakthrough, the retreat was carried out in the most panicked, unmilitary, unpredictable and disorderly manner. It is an old disease with us, and to some extent almost a trait of our soldier. In this regard, we should strive to strengthen the military knowledge of our command staff as soon as possible. The disarmament of the partisans was carried out improperly. It was not explained to the partisans why this was being done, nor was it revealed to the former officials. Comrade Šiljak is right when he says that at that time there were no communists on Živoder, those who used to speak during the glorious victories, now could not be found anywhere. All the communists should have brought their authority to improve the situation, and in the first place the headquarters itself. The method of disarmament is irregular and panicky, while the decision is justified in principle. Weapons was hidden non-conspiratorially; most of that material was found by the enemy particularly because the responsible comrades did not bury the weapons.

The most serious mistake is that the Party did not function in this difficult situation. The District Committee met on June 15. The meeting was arranged by my friend Lepa and that was in a relatively peaceful atmosphere. That meeting was the only meeting of the District Committee throughout the offensive. Improper conclusions, surrender of the entire party group of Međuvođe and Radovan Miljatić himself, a member of the District Committee, is the result of exactly that failure of the District Committee. Had there been consultations and had the decision of those consultations been transferred to the party units, more personnel would have been saved, and many things would have taken place differently. Quick counselling under machine gun fire and cannon shells cannot lead to anything. The absence of broad non-party consultation, similar to the one we have today, is a

mistake from which almost all others have arisen. The party did not come to the fore, only the expression of individuals was felt. The consultations that were carried out were not party-based; but they were just impromptu called party-based, but in fact they were on a command basis. These were party consultations where the party spirit was not even felt. The District Committee made a mistake disrespecting of the party staff. Comrade TITO's articles in the last "Proleter" specially emphasise the clever use of personnel, however, what happened with us was that a number of honest and loyal communists were lost unnecessarily and worthlessly. Disrespecting Comrade Ivo, a member of the District Committee of Croatia, and the proposal of Comrade Branko, Secretary of the District Committee about the one-day postponement of the breakthrough to the Detachment Headquarters testifies that the relationship between the army and the party was not unique, close and sincere. The relationship between military and party forums must be full of the greatest trust, the greatest sincerity because without that there is no progress, there are no successful battles. Mistakes were made in the de-conspiracy of the party staff, which had a detrimental effect on the current positions of our Party. This is a mistake of the District Committee primarily. We do not allow the political legality of the party and its organizational illegality. By coming to Prijedor we compromised all our party members and sympathizers so that today we do not have any secure notifications and connections in that unusually important place. In terms of mistakes related to the purity of the party, examples of Stanko, Nikola Majstorović and Vukić are enough for us. This is the responsibility of the party units that accepted them into the party due to their insufficient group vigilance as well as the responsibility of the higher forums of the District Committee who did not control admission to the party. We have to take care of the purity of the party. The enemy was inserting their elements into our ranks: Rade Radić, Bitorjac, Vukić, etc. People who are measured only by the military standard cannot be accepted into the party. Not everyone can be a member of the party

and we must take that into account in the future. We note that many reports of the party's work were unrealistic, embellished, which only harms the overall development of the party. As for the behaviour of communists and their lives we stand by the population that communists cannot be womanizers (the case of Obrad and others), gamblers, drunkards and violent people. We must know that our every step and action is not something personal but related to our belonging to the party organization. The cases of Bora Gaćeša, second lieutenant, Vladeta Radić, Comrade Šoša, etc. are not acts that a communist may do. The District Committee is of the opinion that the mistakes Comrade Šoša and I made in Gomjenica (Boško) must never be made by any communist and they must not be repeated.

Criticism and self-criticism must be a constant trait of a member of the Communist party. Comrades, today we pointed out to each other a series of errors and mistakes, and that with the words that these errors deserve. This must not and cannot cause us any disagreement! What we did at this consultation cannot be done by anyone and no army, but only the Communist Party. We should educate our cadres along the line of criticism and self-criticism, that is the way to create Bolsheviks. If we do not do that, we will be a hindrance to our party, both today and tomorrow in its further work.

To finish. Let everything that has been said make a contribution to us, comrades, as experience, as mistakes that we can and must avoid in the future, that must not be repeated, as one huge experience that we will be provided to others and enable them act properly in the great and upcoming struggles that await us!

Guided by all these reasons, the District Committee took the position that in this difficult situation it was necessary to separate the most necessary comrades and the most responsible for a district consultation and to make all these necessary conclusions.

Comrade BRANKO: Comrade Boško in his report, which contains the joint position of the District Committee, exposed things the way our District Committee wanted. I just want to clarify some things

about that report. It was established that there was disunity in the detachment headquarters, that relations among comrades were not the best. Comrade Šoša has already stated that. This example is the best proof of how wrong it is to bring personal disagreement into our work, how much it is to the detriment of the things we are fighting for. Gola Planina Mount was mentioned here as an example of how insufficient preparation and weak organization of a military action can have a high toll. It was unclear to some comrades and which case it was. It is the mountain (Vis) and on the other side of Mrakovica where the enemy had occupied our positions. Due to an insufficiently prepared action we did not succeed in expelling the enemy, but in fact we increased their successes even more. The speed with which it was decided to make a big breakthrough made its complete success impossible. This led to the fact that remote units could not be on the ground in time when the breakthrough was to begin, as well as to familiarise themselves with the terrain itself, on which the success of the breakthrough naturally depended a lot.

My request and the proposal that I made to my comrades from headquarters to postpone the breakthrough for 24 hours came as an expression of the need to better prepare the breakthrough and to gather manpower to carry the wounded. Comrade Radovan Miljatović was in charge of gathering people to carry the wounded. As a member of the District Committee he had not done anything about that task until 10 o'clock in the morning on that day, and there were about 500 wounded. I suggested to my comrades from the headquarters to delay the breakthrough because there was really reason to believe that the forces of the III and IV battalions would be able to reach the place on time. Comrades Obrad and Dušan did not agree. Comrade Šoša was also asked over the phone. He replied that the situation is such that the delay is unacceptable. Perhaps with my more determined efforts my proposal would have been adopted, and I consider it my mistake that I did not demand the adoption of my proposal more vigorously. I believe that the adoption of my proposal, i.e. postponing the breakthrough for

24 hours, would allow us to transfer both our forces and the wounded and the party staff. When it is said that the breakthrough was made in panic, what is meant was not the cowardly behaviour of certain comrades. We realised that the enemy could break through from all sides and in our desire to get out of the encirclement as soon as possible, we could not assess the situation coldly. The Operational Headquarters for Bosnian Krajina also agreed with the physical destruction of the prisoners which was discussed here, in their subsequent letter, expressing the position that all enemy soldiers from Pavelić's and Marko's comrades should be destroyed. In this way the Operational Headquarters sanctioned our decision, which had already been carried out. Comrade Boško correctly presented the position of the District Committee in connection with the preservation of our personnel. However, it should be stated here that a decision was made and a directive was issued that all party personnel together with the army should withdraw from the field. It was given in that situation that developed rapidly and that led to the decision to break through. At least at the last moment, the directive was issued. As far as the comrades have any objections to these conclusions of the District Committee let them present them briefly and after that I will put these conclusions of the District Committee before the counselling with the proposal to adopt them.

Comrade BORO GAČEŠA: I don't want to defend myself because what was said about my actions is probably true. For the things entrusted to me to hide them with safe partisans I chose such Partisans and I was with them, one of them, who was later caught, betrayed.

Comrade DUŠAN UTJEŠINOVIĆ: The Headquarters of the Strike Battalion sent us a part of the prisoners to the Headquarters of II Battalion, since he could not liquidate them all at the position there. It is true that the liquidation also started in our battalion in a way that is absolutely reprehensible, and Comrade Nikica protested about it, and then I took steps and the rest were liquidated in the prescribed manner – by shooting. Stanko, the commander who received the prisoners, I believe, is also guilty of the mistake made.

Comrade ŠOŠA: It is true that Comrade Branko asked for the breakthrough to be postponed for 24 hours. In this regard, I would like to mention that in the army, especially when operating in larger units, it is difficult to change issued orders. An entire detachment had to be launched for the breakthrough action. After the orders to move were issued, our forces found themselves in a narrow sector directly exposed to the blows of the offensive and the destruction of our forces on the ground of Mt. Kozara itself was threatening, because the enemy could very easily and quickly be convinced of us leaving the position, that is why I was against delaying it.

For the proposal of Comrade Branko, Secretary of the District Committee, that the conclusions of the District Committee are to be accepted on this point, with these remarks; it is agreed that the council unanimously accepts them.

### 3. POINT

#### R e p o r t s

Comrade MILOŠ STOJAKOVIĆ: Secretary of the County Committee for Novi: Behind the last enemy offensive on the ground of this County Committee, quite a bit of the background remained, which returned home from the Mt. Kozara refuge, and also the majority of the party was preserved. Out of the total number of party members and candidates who were there before the offensive, 44 party members and 85 candidates left the offensive alive, except for those who went to Mt. Grmeč: 27 party members, 12 died and disappeared while 5 of them went to Mt. Grmeč. There are 42 candidates besides those in the army, while the exact number of dead and missing is not known. One of the dead and missing party members was a member of County Committee. 4 municipal councilors, 3 village councilors and 4 without public role.

Now there are a total of 35 party members, 42 candidates and about 60 male SKOJ male and female members in the background groups. 2 members of the party are from Dubica region and the others were accepted into the party during the offensive and after it. During the offensive, the background groups worked very well even though they were separated in the field. They helped organize life on the run, worked politically in the masses, helped organize reserve companies and participated in battles. After the offensive, some groups continued their work and realized their duty, while some, having lost a few members, stopped working, but for the majority of the background parties, it can be said that they came out of the offensive quite shaken and at first many looked to save themselves by hiding from the enemy and from our civilians. Two members of County Committee. They served the army, which prevented County Committee to immediately begin the reorganization of the background parties' group and putting them into operation. Immediately after the reorganization of our companies, more attention could be paid to the background. By moving some of our companies to their own terrain, it was possible to quickly establish a connection with the rear groups and start their reorganization. Two meetings were held with County Committee at which the situation we were in was examined and a work plan was adopted. Members of County Committee, they returned to the field and began to introduce the groups to work. The reorganization was carried out quite quickly and out of 10 rear groups from before the offensive 9 were reorganized and are now working.

The work of the rear groups for the time being mainly consists in helping to feed our companies and collect supplies, training them for work and holding small meetings with the rear. The background groups try to raise the morale of the background with their work, to restore it to us, in which they are quite successful. Likewise, the groups are reorganizing and filling up the NOO (\*People's Liberation Board). According to the reports of the secretaries of the groups, regular meetings are held, a plan and division of work is adopted,

and the material obtained is processed. This shows that the work of those groups has revived and is gradually returning to normal. The theoretical education of party members, on average is rather weak. Of the total number, about one third are capable of independent work in the community, while the rest need advice in their work. The reason for the weak theoretical education is the lack of time to work on the party materials as well as the lack of material itself. Some groups have some party and propaganda material while others have almost nothing or very little because, County Committee does not have the possibility to reproduce the same and from Region Committee it did not receive in sufficient quantity to be given to all groups... Until the correct distribution of the material is carried out, a list of the same will be submitted.

Through their work, the background party members manage to have a considerable effect on the crossed-out people. The people know from before that they are party members – communists and have confidence in them, which can be seen from the frequent turning to them with questions, asking for advice, meetings, etc. This shows that the people have confidence in the party because they were convinced that the only Communist Party remained with the people even in the most difficult times. As for the actual work with the background, it now mainly consisted of holding small meetings with the people, where the people were informed about the situation we are in, about the continuation of the fight, with regular reading of the radio news, and the aim of the meetings is to raise the morale of the people, restoring faith in us and our victory as well as establishing a connection with the people. At the same time, the reorganization of the NOO which is secret for the time being, was carried out.

The background itself, which bore the biggest part of the offensive is still mostly ours and with us. The enemy army and later the city robbers looted a large part of our terrain which put the people in a very difficult position. Most of the men were either sent to forced labor and death camps or killed. Most of the remaining men are hiding

from the enemy authorities. Women, children and old people are at home and the enemy has not pursued them so far. Lately, some background people started to come out from slavery. Of the total number of defenders on our field after the offensive, 60% remained at home. There are very few able-bodied men who could take up arms. In addition to all that they have endured, the majority of the background is with us and is willing to continue helping us, which is already partly shown by giving food contributions and preparing food supplies for the army. Even those who come from slavery mostly turn to us and seek advice from our people. There are also faint-hearted people who have lost faith in us and put themselves in the service of the enemy, but these are mainly wavering and unsympathetic people to our struggle from before. Most of them were *kulaks* (rich peasants) elements. Some of them were liquidated as enemies of the people's struggle. At the end of the offensive the people fell for the enemy's propaganda that served the Chetniks and some interest in the Chetniks began which stems from uncertainty and fear for their bare lives because many thought that they would be saved with the help of the Chetniks. However, the bad experience they gave themselves opened the eyes of others. The people saw the open betrayal of the Chetniks and their service to the occupier. The people saw that our fight against them was justified and abandoned the Chetniks. There were no Chetnik organized groups on our territory. The enemy has its own crews on the ground consisting of gendarmerie stations and military camps. The tasks of those crews are to strengthen the Ustasa authority, secure communication links and protect robbery.

The harvest has been fairly processed (about 70%) and if it manages to be gathered and preserved it would ensure the food for the battalion, the people who are at home and even those who would eventually return from slavery. The importance of fighting for the harvest was pointed out to the people.

The connection with towns is weak. With Novi, it exists, but it needs to be strengthened. There is also the District Committee of

Kostajnica Communist Party of Croatia, which is difficult to maintain due to enemy control on both sides of the Una. Now that connection is maintained because it is possible to cross Una River by foot.

Comrade BRANKO: The looting of our desolate homes by the urban poor caused a reaction in the rest of our village people in this regard.

Comrade DUŠAN STOJNIĆ, member of District Committee for Novi: The party gave the right advices. And our civilians and fighters themselves now correctly see that robbers should be killed not as Muslims and Croats, but as robbers.

Comrade GOJKO BJELAJAC: Current connection with Bosanski Novi, it has not been de-conspired by the new one. You only need to advise the party connection to keep the good conspiracy going.

Comrade DEJAN VIDOVIĆ: I remember from our earlier youth meetings, and this was not the case only with the youth, that the comrades from that region always talked about some danger and the need to fight

against the kulaks, so I say that we should pay a little attention to that, that would not deviate from the party line.

Comrade RADOJE BATOZ, secretary of District Committee for Bosanska Gradiška: Our District Committee it was decimated by one member who died in the offensive. The party in the background stands very weak. There is only one-party unit in Lijevo Polje for which we still have no firm connections. The work of this group is not yet well known. We sent them material and written instructions on how to work. The group that previously existed in Gornji Podgradci as well as the candidate group in Bistrica have disappeared. The group in Gornji Podgradci consisted of 12 party members and 9 candidates. And the group in Bistrica has 1 member and 5 candidates. Likewise, the Moštanica group no longer exists. Of the three others who survived the offensive, there are two in the Partisan units and one was designated as the supervisor of the civilian camp, with the fact that he belongs to the unit of III Company of the III Battalion.

The people of this county also suffered a lot and were taken to camps. Most of the victims came from those areas that were liberated even before the offensive. In the villages where the enemy used to be, most of the people remained, except for a part of the men who were sent to work in Germany. Although this section is known as the most backward section on our territory, the Chetnik gangs could not win the sympathy of the people either before or especially after the offensive. The majority of the people remained with us and hate the Chetniks because they saw them in action, especially on the field of the IV detachment across Vrbas. Some of the people escaped from all the places where the population was driven away and are now in a camp located right next to our military camps. Regular meetings are held with them.

A connection has been established with Banja Luka, through the party unit in Lijeve polje, but this connection has not yet been solidified. The connection with Slavonia is regular.

Enemy strongholds on this terrain: Gornji Podgradci, about 400 Home Guards; Pucari, 2 Home Guards companies, of which, according to the statements of captured Home Guards from that garrison, half are still on the run; Orahova 2 Ustasha companies. In addition, there are several gendarmerie stations. The crew from Jablanica, which numbered 40 gendarmes and 40 home guards, escaped and the patrol of our II company took over the school where they were located.

Comrade MIRKO PEKIĆ: Why the party's background groups suffered so much?

Comrade ČOČE. I will show you an example of the attitude of one-party member from that group and then you will see why they suffered. They were somehow convinced that they would be able to sneak in together with the people and that they would manage to save themselves. They had lost faith in themselves and in our strength. I personally invited one of them to hide together and it took a lot of time, but he refused and said that he would go with the people.

Comrade BRANKO: Are Chetniks coming to our territory from across Vrbas and what is the attitude of the population towards them?

Comrade RADOJE: The Chetniks in those villages do not have much support among the people and the people prefer the Partisans. One example: when the Chetniks ask for food and other things for themselves, they answer: we have everything, but we hide it and keep it for those who fight against the Ustashas and the occupiers, not for those who are messing with them. We have nothing for village cowards!

Comrade ILIJA BURSAĆ: Party secretary. Palančište group, Prijedor section: our group has 16 members, before the offensive it had 13. Candidates 15, before the offensive 37, both male and female. Two of our members are located in Mt. Grmeč. Politically and ideologically, we are not very well built. For a year of activity in agreement with our party and military leadership we did everything for the army. Everything we asked for from the people for this purpose, we got. We had a municipality that we managed. Until the offensive the work was easier. The people complied with all orders. During the offensive we tried to evacuate the grain so that it would not fall into the hands of the enemy. We were always among the people. It did not show any evil intentions due to perhaps our weak relations with the village, neither before nor after the offensive. We did not turn “to the left”, we did not make outbursts against God, glory, religion and folk customs, we were within the boundaries of the party line. The people did not know that we were party members, but they knew that we were the most trustworthy and that we maintained ties with our leading people and committees and yet they did not betray us. The people were satisfied with us. We could always show among them. Previously, we had almost all party and other propaganda material. We studied all that with party members and candidates. As the secretary of our unit, I ruined most of that archive because of the rain and wetness. We have little of that material today. We study what we have. After the offensive the people were quite scared and our work became quite difficult because of that. However, it is done secretly: leaflets and radio reports are read

and listened. The meetings and conferences after the offensive were not extensive. We lost 50% of the men in the village. We held on well though. There was no pressure like in other sections. Our people ran away and hid. It was combative. There were our people in Vojskova too. They hid and returned. Relations between the party members are good. We established illegal NOO in villages that were left without committees. There are also some women among them who have shown themselves to be more aware and more combative than some councilors before. We are using all our forces to prevent the people from handing over anything to the city and to help the People's Liberation Army. The offensive was very damaging to the grain.

The division of labor in our party unit: five comrades for the intelligence service. Permanent connections. We have no permanent connections with the city. Two others procure food for the Partisan hospital, and so on by business.

Comrade RADE BAŠIĆ: Before the breakthrough it was decided that some people would stay with the people. Did they timely advise the people who were in the camp near Prijedor to get out because it was possible?

Comrade ILIJA BURSAC: Yes! We told them to run immediately, that they would be slaughtered. And everyone ran away except those who were surrounded by Chetniks.

Comrade RADE BAŠIĆ: Since you say that a lot of grain was destroyed, does that mean that you can't count on the help for the army?

Comrade ILIJA BURSAC: Something could be removed from the lower villages, more should be added to the upper ones.

Comrade MIRKO PEKIĆ: It is known that the Chetniks came to Palančište and held their meetings there. What is their impact?

Comrade ILIJA BURSAC: The offensive was not over yet, and the Chetniks were coming all the way to Palančište. They took ten comrades to the Rakelić school and drew them into their ranks. They came back and today they are with us again. The people saw the traitors. When some of their Green cadres were brought to our headquarters, the people spoke and were in favor of settlement.

Comrade dr. ALFRED REŽAK: How does Palančište treat the traitor Mirko Drča now?

Comrade ILIJA BURSAC: Mirko is playing the role of a robber, the village is slowly seeing this and turning its back on him. He remained on the line of treason and he tries to cover it up with small favors he renders to the village.

Comrade DRAGAN MARIN, party secretary, Battalion Bureau, I Battalion: There are 7 party units in our battalion. 5 in companies and 2 in a battalion.

Party unit of I company has 12 members, 6 candidates. Out of that, one party member is temporarily in this party unit. Some party material she saved from before and she has all the other material that was sent after the offensive. Party meetings of this unit are regular where the material is processed.

Party unit of II company has 11 members, 5 candidates. It has all the material as well as the units of the I Company. Meetings are regular.

Part unit of III company has 9 members, 4 candidates. It has the same material as other companies. Party meetings are regular.

Party unit of IV company unit has 6 party members and 5 candidates. Due to various circumstances, this unit could not hold regular meetings, but for these 15 days, only 2 meetings were held where the state of the company was discussed. The material was read individually.

Party unit of the V company has 7 members and 4 candidates. The meetings are regular and it has the same materials as the other units.

Battalion party unit has 4 members. This unit did not maintain regular parties. meetings due to the division of the battalion. Party material is read individually. It has material like other units.

Party battalion unit has 3 members and 3 candidates. For the reasons mentioned above the unit did not hold regular meetings. This party unit uses the material of the battalion party unit.

The total number of party members in the battalion is 52 and 27 candidates.

The theoretical education of party members is not at a high level, but work is being done to build them up and it can be hoped that this will be improved in the future.

The battalion bureau was formed in this battalion party.

The morale and discipline of the partisans is not satisfactory, but it is felt that it will improve with the further work of the responsible comrades. It is felt that the Partisans are not sufficiently educated as soldiers. This was especially noticeable during the last action on the garrison. Partisans are mostly young people who have not served in the army, the Intelligence Service is not yet sufficiently involved.

Chetnik elements in this battalion were not noticed, but it is not excluded that there are no hidden elements, but a very small number.

Enemy strongholds on the ground of the I battalion are as follows: Knežica: 38 gendarmes, Dvorište: the rest of the company from which 40 home guards and 2 officers were captured, Slabinja: one company of home guards, Bačvani 40, Kalendari: 23 gendarmes, Dobrljin: 30 gendarmes. About the enemy forces in Kostajnica, Bosanski Novi and Prijedor could not be accurately known since the situation is always changing.

Comrade GOJKO BJELAJAC: What is the relationship like in the battalion and in the companies?

Comrade DRAGAN MARIN: The relations between the party members are satisfactory.

Comrade DUŠAN UTJEŠINOVIĆ, Party secretary. Battalion Bureau, II Battalion. There are 5 units in this battalion unit.

Party unit of I company has 11 members and 8 candidates. Meetings are regular. Mutual relations between the parties were not the best, but they have been corrected lately. The political awareness of the party members is quite high. Partisans listen with great interest to lectures on all matters, which are often held. The Chetniks and the Green cadre are completely unmasked. There are no Chetnik elements in the company. The relationship between male and female comrades is friendly.

Party unit of II company has 13 party members and 10 candidates. Meetings are regular. The mutual relations of party mem-

bers are good as is the relation towards female friends. The political awareness of the party members is not at a sufficient level, but they all show a lot of interest in work and are eager for knowledge.

So far, no harangue or Chetnik-minded element could be noticed in the company.

Party unit of III company unit has 11 party members and 7 candidates. Meetings are regular. The political awareness of the partisans is at a high level, because they are mostly older Partisans. At every meeting, the question of the Chetniks and their betrayal is raised. The relations between the party members are good.

Party unit at the battalion headquarters has 5 party members and 5 candidates. Meetings are regular. Relations between members of the party are good and friendly towards female friends. The influence of Partisans on Partisans at the headquarters is not the best. With increased work, this will also be corrected.

Party unit in the battalion headquarters has 4 members. Relations between the party members are good.

A battalion party bureau was formed in this battalion. All units have material that arrived after the offensive, except for some old material that was preserved during the offensive. The general state of political awareness among partisans is very good. There are no Chetnik elements.

Comrade MILAN EGIĆ: Party secretary. Battalion bureau, III Battalion. This battalion has 5 party units.

Party unit of I company has 12 members and 13 candidates. It holds meetings regularly. The political and ideological build-up of the party members is not very good because most of them are new party members. Relations between party members are good as well as between party members and Partisans. Political work in the company is quite good and there are no Chetniks in the company.

Party unit of II company has 19 members and 13 candidates. Meetings are held regularly. The relations between the party members are good. The political and ideological build-up is not very sat-

isfactory also for the reason that most of them are newly admitted comrades, but they show a great will to learn. The attitude towards fellow Partisans is good. The political work in the company is satisfactory and there are no Chetnik elements in the company. In the first days after the offensive there were several cases of desertion due to the fact that in those days the situation in Mt. Kozara was quite difficult and security was minimal. Partisans who escaped are not Chetnik-minded, but they escaped from the company in order, as they think, to keep their heads better at their homes. After the strengthening of our detachment there are no more such occurrences.

Party unit of III company unit has 10 members and 12 candidates. Meetings are held regularly. The political and ideological build-up of the party members is quite weak. The relations between the party comrades were unhealthy, but at the last party meetings they were discussed and corrected by removing two comrades from the party unit. The relationship between party members and partisans is good. Political work in the company is satisfactory. The political awareness of the Partisans is satisfactory, there are no Chetnik phenomena. In this company too, there were several cases of desertion for the same reasons as in II company.

Party unit at the battalion headquarters has 6 members and 1 candidate. This party unit was formed only in the last few days.

Party unit at the battalion headquarters has 4 members. Relations between staff members are not the best. There is an unhealthy relationship between the commander and the political commissar and between the commander and the deputy political commissar. The main reason for this is the second commander who behaves like a commander intolerant towards other staff members. In addition to the above, the cause of these disagreements is the commander's girlfriend who enjoys some special privileges. At the last meeting, all this was discussed and there is a possibility that the situation will improve because all the comrades admit their mistakes and especially the second commander is trying to improve. Battalion Part. The III company unit has 11 party

members and 7 candidates. Meetings are regular. The political awareness of the Partisans is at a high level, because they are mostly older Partisans. At every meeting, the question of the Chetniks and their betrayal is raised. The relations between the party members are good.

The party unit at the battalion headquarters has 5 party members and 5 candidates. Meetings are regular. Relations between members of the party are good and friendly towards female friends. The influence of the party members on the partisans at the headquarters is not the best. With increased work, this will also be corrected.

Party unit in the battalion headquarters has 4 members. Relations between the party members are good.

A battalion party bureau was formed in this battalion. All units have material that arrived after the offensive, except for some old material that was preserved during the offensive. The general state of political awareness among Partisans is very good. There are no Chetnik elements.

Comrade MILAN EGIĆ, Party Secretary, Battalion bureau, III battalion. This battalion has 5 party units.

Party unit of the 1st company has 12 members and 13 candidates. We hold meetings regularly. The political and ideological build-up of the parties is not very good because most of them are new party members. Relations between party members are good as well as between party members and Partisans. Political work in the company is quite good and there are no Chetniks in the company.

Party unit of II company has 19 members and 13 candidates. Meetings are held regularly. The relations between the party members are good. The political and ideological build-up is not satisfactory also for the reason that most of them are newly admitted comrades, but they show a great will to learn. The attitude towards fellow Partisans is good. The political work in the company is satisfactory and there are no Chetnik elements in the company. In the first days after the offensive there were several cases of desertion due to the fact that in those days the situation in Mt. Kozara was quite difficult

and security was minimal. Partisans who escaped are not Chetnik-minded, but they escaped from the company in order, as they think, to keep their heads better at their homes. After the strengthening of our detachment there are no more such occurrences.

Party unit of III company unit has 10 members and 12 candidates. Meetings are held regularly. The political and ideological construction of the parties is quite weak. The relations between party comrades were unhealthy, but at the last party meetings they were discussed and corrected by removing two comrades from the party unit. The attitude of party members towards Partisans is good. Political work in the company satisfactory. The political consciousness of the partisans is satisfactory there are no Chetnik phenomena. In this company too, there were several cases of desertion for the same reasons as in the II company.

Party unit at the battalion headquarters has 6 members and 1 candidate. This party unit was formed only in the last few days.

Party unit of the battalion headquarters has 4 members. Relations between staff members are not the best. There is an unhealthy relationship between the commander and the political commissar and between the commander and the deputy political commissar. The main reason for this is that the second in command who behaves like a commander is intolerant towards other staff members. In addition to the above the cause of these disagreements is the commander's girlfriend who enjoys some special privileges. At the last meeting, all this was discussed and there is a chance that this situation will improve because all the comrades admit their mistakes, and especially the second commander is trying to improve. The battalion party bureau took the view that married female comrades should be separated from their comrades by unit because this would eliminate many inconvenient occurrences both in the battalion headquarters and in the companies.

This battalion also has a battalion party bureau that meets regularly. All party units have material that came after the offensive as

well as some old material that was preserved in this offensive. In general, despite all the cases of desertion and similar phenomena this battalion is at a fairly good political and combat level which is largely due to the work of the party members and the joint parade of the detachment that was held recently.

Comrade RADE BAŠIĆ, Secretary of battalion party bureau of the Strike Battalion: There are 4 party groups in our battalion.

Party unit at the battalion headquarters has 3 members. The unit held a meeting where the offensive and then the situation in the battalion were discussed. Relations among comrades are quite good.

Party unit within the battalion headquarters has 3 members. The unit held one meeting because it was newly formed. The relations between the party members are satisfactory.

Party unit of I company has 14 members and 9 candidates. Meetings are held regularly. The condition of the Partisans in the company (politically) is good because they are mostly old Partisans and strikers who fought against the Chetniks. The relations between the party members are good.

Party unit of II company has 14 members and 10 candidates. Meetings are held regularly. The relationship between comrades is good. The political situation among the partisans is just as good as in the I company. The ideological build-up of the party members is weaker because most of them are young ones.

This battalion has a party battalion bureau. All party units have material that has recently arrived and almost all material from before the offensive has been preserved. In general, this battalion is politically very good because most of them are Partisans-strikers who fought against the Chetniks for a long time. The distribution of work in party units has been carried out.

Enemy strongholds on the field of action of our battalion are: Prijedor: changeable. From 150 to 200 Germans and some home guards. Kozarac: 10 Germans and 30–40 home guards, Mrakovica: one battalion, railway Prijedor–Kozarac: one company, Miljakovci: 22 gendarmes.

Comrade dr. ALFRED REŽAK: (in front of the detachment hospital unit): This unit was formed only 4 days ago. The secretary of the unit is comrade Bora Batos. The unit has 3 members. The latest party material was processed and political work with the wounded had been carried out.

Comrade MLADO GRAONIĆ, Party secretary of the unit within the detachment headquarters: This unit has 14 party members and 3 candidates. The unit has a party material that came after the offensive. Meetings are held regularly. Relations are good.

Comrade BOŠKO ŠILJEGOVIĆ, Party secretary of detachment headquarters: The unit has 3 members since the detachment headquarters does not have a deputy political commissar. Relations between comrades are good. All party and non-party material is processed regularly.

Comrade BRACO, secretary District Committee SKOJ: One of the most difficult consequences of the last enemy offensive, in addition to all others, is the loss of a large part of the youth in our field. Most of them were driven to work in Germany and most of the SKOJ members were killed. In our region there are some young people left on the field of the Novi section, then on the field of the Prijedor section (Palančište group). In one part of the Prijedor and Banja Luka sections across the river Gomjenica the people remained, but we have no firm ties with them, so the situation in those villages is not known. The Dubica section was all driven away.

The Strike battalion now has 23 soldiers in two companies. Both companies have a SKOJ asset. There is a battalion SKOJ committee, which has 4 members. The work is not yet satisfactory.

The I battalion has 63 soldiers. Battalion bureau of SKOJ was formed, but it has not fully met yet because the battalion is divided.

The II battalion has 68 men and 12 men. Battalion SKOJ bureau was formed and held two meetings. The Bureau has 7 members.

The III battalion has 51 men and 23 men. Battalion SKOJ bureau was formed and held one meeting.

There are 9 SKOJ soldiers at the detachment headquarters.

In total, there are 189 SKOJ men and 35 SKOJ women in these units. In the background are 90 SKOJ members (male and female).

According to the reports established so far, in the last offensive, 53 SKOJ members were killed, 11 wounded and 150 missing (the data is not complete). We don't have any material except for 20 pieces of "Tasks of SKOJ organizations". The distribution of work by sector was carried out in all companies. Military and political educational work exists in all companies. Work in the countryside did not exist after the offensive. The level of formation of our SKOJ members in military units is quite weak. From District Committee SKOJ there is only Comrade Dušan Vidović and me on our field. Comrade Anđa, comrades Dževad and Bodo, secretaries District Committee SKOJ of other counties are located in Mt. Grmeč.

### **Discussion by reports**

Comrade BOŠKO: I note that it is a pity that these reports came so late at this consultation when the comrades, as you can see, are quite tired. And it would be very important to discuss it as thoroughly as possible. I think that it is not a serious defense of Comrade Dragan Marin at the time when he is accepting new duties, that he was not familiar with the previous work of the battalion bureau. The humorous manner of stating some things in his report will make up for his lack of knowledge of things in his bureau. Second secretary of the III Battalion bureau, he said that the main cause of disagreements in that headquarters was the commander, both in relation to the political commissar and in relation to his deputy. I am convinced that this is incorrect. The main cause is the weak party life in that unit. I am just returning from that field and I can say that all those comrades are honest, well-intentioned, sincere. If the unit is functioning properly everything will be fine. We should not ask the question of the cause of that situation as another secretary did. The unit should meet as of-

ten as possible. The commander may be responsible for certain party actions and the reason for the situation lies in a weak, non-party life. In connection with all submitted reports I can say the following: the comrades did not report on company bureaus. Where it has not been approached and there are conditions for it, it is necessary to proceed with the creation of branches with the fact that only the bureau as a whole makes decisions on important issues. Furthermore, the division of labor by those units was not mentioned. Our cells must be alive the distribution of work must be carried out in them according to abilities. Individual comrades should be made responsible, for example, for military work, for health care, moral qualities, intelligence service, with candidate groups, for the commissariat. The responsible comrade can take associates from the candidate group as well. Someone should be in charge of SKOJ's work. From the report, one should see the inner life of the cell, to see how it lives. Most of the schematic reports were submitted here which does not show that. It should be noted that the work of the party group in Palančište is good and correct that its secretary showed its life a little more vividly.

Comrade DRAGAN MARIN: I don't know how my presentation turned out to be humorous in some points, that is, why my comrades laughed. I am sorry that I did not manage to deal with the issues of work in the bureau earlier. Here I solemnly promise that I will correct the situation in our battalion or I will not be there.

Comrade ČOČE: I would like to add a few points to Comrade Boško's presentation. I note that many comrades still do not understand the fact of separating party activity and political activity in relation to partisans. In some reports, the shortcoming was that it was not stated what kind of reputation the party members enjoyed among the Partisans. I agree with Boško regarding the relationship in the headquarters of the III Battalion where I myself was until the other day. Something should have been said about the mistakes of the political commissar and his deputy, because both of them have a share in the unhealthy state and relations of their battalion headquarters.

Comrade BRANE KOVAČEVIĆ: Partisans in my unit are in charge as follows: grain, cleanliness, mill, camp, military activity, education. Every party member is in charge, except for the candidates who have not yet been assigned.

Comrade JOCO MARJANOVIĆ: I state what Comrade Boško has already stated: weak party life and work in the headquarters unit of III Battalion. It was shown at our party meeting, where these issues were discussed, that in addition to the mistakes of the Comrade Commander, there was also our non-Bolshevik reaction. Solemn, comradely, Bolshevik promises were made to mend these relationships as soon as possible and correct mistakes as soon as possible. Since then, relief and a better condition have been felt.

Comrade RADOJE BATOS: Secretary of III Battalion bureau, he criticized the Comrade Commander a lot. He should have brought out his own mistakes as well, the Commander is noticeably removing his flaws. You should know that he is a former non-commissioned officer. When a misunderstanding arises it should be kept quiet in front of the Partisans and later liquidated in the first place.

Comrade dr. ALFRED: Such little time should not have been left for such an important discussion. We had to discuss the issue of health care, the issue of female comrades in companies.

Comrade GOJKO BJELAJAC: Comrade Dragan Marin should have submitted his report according to the party units reports by the company in order for this consultation to get a clear picture of it. E.g., the report of the secretary of the unit in my company was quite extensive.

Comrade DUŠAN VIDOVIĆ: I want to give an update on the work of the SKOJ in III Battalion. SKOJ members were given the duty that within a month all illiterate people must know how to write and within 15 days all young men should be able to handle a machine gun and female friends with a rifle.

Comrade BRANKO: I have spoken on many of these issues before at battalion meetings. Discussion on them is very important. However, the consultation dragged on quite a bit due to the massive

participation in the discussion on the II point and the comrades are quite tired. It is a lack of consultation that a longer discussion cannot be developed on this point. Regarding the situation in I Battalion, I should mention that while I was present at the last battalion party during counseling, criticisms and self-criticism on him were not personal and when I had to leave counseling for work, the discussion turned into personal criticism and went beyond the scope of party criticism. This shows the non-party behaviour of the comrades of I Battalion. I turn my attention to the new secretary battalion party bureau that it must try with all its might to correct such a situation. Furthermore, by force of circumstances, we have women in our companies and headquarters today who we could not leave to the enemy. We must not pass over the phenomena that occur in connection with their presence. On the contrary, we must take care of it. In principle, we are not against marriage. But we will not allow married life in our lower and higher headquarters as well as in our companies. This undermines the authority of the headquarters in the eyes of the Partisans. I am warning here that the headquarters of the battalion and the detachment itself should take this into account. Fraternity policy is a very important thing both in the army and in the rear. In connection with the offensive, a revolt was created among the masses of this region which carried the shadow of accusing the entire Croatian people for the crimes of Ustasha bandits. This should be taken into account, especially in connection with the Chetnik harangue. The policy of brotherhood of our peoples should be developed at every step, under all circumstances. This was not mentioned in the reports submitted here which means that it was not even taken into account. Finally, I would like to underline that party material should be processed at party units. This was seen in the report on the political situation as a result of which the comrades did not understand the latest party line and on some points they represented non-party points of view. Likewise, the reports did not mention how the comrades in the units understood the latest party line.

## POINT 4: TASKS

Comrade BOŠKO: In a few words, let me outline the military tasks that are set before our detachment in today's situation. I note that these tasks are an expression of joint consultation with other comrades from the squad headquarters:

Preventing looting by civilians or enemy armed formations. Such actions of ours will have a morally good effect on our population and they are also important because of our needs for food. For this purpose, ambushes should be made as far as possible from our camps and closer to the enemy's garrisons. Ambushes should be real ambushes, without the omissions that have been made so far so that our victims will not be any.

The question of the intelligence service is raised on a new basis. Special responsible comrades at all headquarters are charged with this task. The intelligence service is twofold: military towards the enemy and political towards us. It takes place along military and party lines. In connection with this we are asked as a plan and task to examine the smaller enemy barracks and garrisons around us in order to have an accurate overview even if by violent scouting. The patrols should militarily and politically cover the entire terrain of our detachment and beyond, especially towards Lijevče and towards Marička, that is, the earlier terrain of our detachment and if possible, expand it, using the sending of long patrols.

Conduct military exercises of smaller and larger units, possibly the entire detachment, in an effort to get the partisans fully trained as soldiers as quickly as possible. Find time for constant and systematic, daily military training. Learn how to handle all types of weapons and master command.

Regardless of the course, the creation of a mobile brigade from the forces of our detachment remains the task of building military camps because otherwise one cannot live a healthy, military life. Try to make the camps solid and strong and to have spare logs just in case.

Food supplies are extra important things. We should keep in mind the creation of supplies and for the eventual increase of our squad. Dry mushrooms, make dry jam cakes and brandy toast for which we can get important things for our needs in exchange.

To approach recruitment for our army in the most agile way which is especially the task of the Partisans from the background. On the field of I Battalion, there are those who are not allowed to sleep at home for fear of the enemy and do not join our units because they are not convinced of our strength and do not know about our struggle.

Access to the examination of warehouses in the places where they were located. Undoubtedly, there are more weapons and more materials, which we badly need, but have not been found. E.g. the party unit in Palančište knows about some material.

Construction of hospitals. Our current hospital was in a terrible state a short time ago. The staffs of I and Strike battalion did little to meet our institution needs in this respect. The construction of a hospital and a secret shelter for the wounded oblige each of our battalions. Now is the best time for that work.

Take all these tasks that are currently in the foreground very seriously and try to implement them as responsibly as possible.

Comrade BRANKO: Regarding the tasks of the party, I limit myself to the most important things, since there was a lot of talk about that at the battalion meetings.

The task of our party is its organizational and political consolidation and strengthening. Organizationally, our committees should be more closely connected with the party units and strengthen the control of their work. Politically, our party staff should be informed in detail about the changes in the party line, especially the fact that today the Chetniks represent the basic stronghold of the occupiers and our attitude towards the refugee government in London. To strengthen the party by accepting new party members who are capable and worthy to be its members.

Comrades, we should know, now as before, that what the party is like, our squad will be like that. In addition to all the shortcomings

that the party showed in the most difficult days it must be said that it was up to the task. It is up to all of us to respond to our task in today's NOB (\*National Liberation Combat).

Regarding the work in the background, in addition to what was discussed at the battalion meetings, I would like to mention that the fight should be waged so that the harvest of these regions does not fall into the hands of the occupiers, that the people hide, bury everything they can, do not take it to the city and do not sell it to the enemy. Let's not forget that our economic situation is now that we have no background, when the harvest has pretty much failed where there is some background, that we are forced to collect the harvest and reserves ourselves so that from that point of view our slogan should be everywhere: fight for the harvest! Our comrades should regularly explain the political situation both in the remaining background and in the companies. NOO's should be illegal so that the enemy who can pass through each of our villages at any moment, does not find out and destroy our people. This consultation showed how important the intelligence service is in our struggle. In addition to the detachment intelligence service there is also a party intelligence service that coordinates its work with the military. An intelligence officer must be a party member. You will be specifically informed about this through the circular letter. Most of you have heard about the forms issued by the Central Committee of our Party that all party members are required to fill out. I would like to point out that these forms should be filled out so that Central Committee get an accurate picture of the work, life and abilities of each party member. (Gives detailed step-by-step instructions on the form).

Comrade MILOŠ STOJAKOVIĆ: Many purely military matters are transferred to battalion headquarters so that they can manage them themselves. We need combat training rules. I suggest that the headquarters of the detachment, within its capabilities, draft rules on military training, on setting up an ambush with the entire detachment. It would be very useful.

Comrade ŠOŠA: It is not enough for the detachment headquarters to present military tasks in this situation, but it is also necessary for this consultation to give the detachment headquarters its suggestions considering the situation that arose after the offensive and the specificity of our terrain. For now, we have taken a course on minor operations, although Operational headquarters for Bosnian Krajina puts before us the possibility of larger actions, leaving it up to us to evaluate. In Krajina, a big fight is developing between united fascist gangs. Our units on the other side have the direction and goal of advancing towards the railway. Large units are fighting on both sides, both ours and the enemy's ones. Our forces are progressing in stages according to plan. In this regard, it is necessary for our patrols to control the entire terrain of our detachment, especially the IV Battalion. I appeal to the headquarters of the Strike Battalion and to the group in Palančište to make an effort to connect us with the rear around Kozarac, on Omarska, Bistrica and to coordinate that work. An attack on Dubica was also proposed. We are of the opinion that carrying out such an action also depends on the issue of the hospital and ensuring its safety so that the previous case does not happen again. With that, we are forcing the construction of battalion clinics. Our military position has not yet been defined. The reports do not include military data. And what was presented is about a narrow belt. We must branch out our intelligence service as soon as possible. The biggest obstacle to our domination of Mt. Kozara is the Stahl garrison in Mrakovica. A series of cases of our losses due to carelessness and ignorance indicates that it would really be necessary to publish a manual as suggested by comrade Miloš Stojaković, and we will do so.

Comrade RADE BAŠIĆ: I agree with the military tasks presented here. I am of the opinion that larger actions would not be opportune for now. Now the situation is not the same as it was after the earlier offensives in Mt. Kozara, when the enemy was leaving our rear, which was at our service and gave us information, and when the wavering of the enemy garrisons was obvious. In connection with the task of connecting the

Palančište group with the field that Comrade Šoša mentioned, I announce that there are partisans left on the field of IV Battalion with whom that group needs to connect. Regarding the task of recruiting new fighters from the background I point out the awkward relationship between the Comrade Commander of the Strike Battalion and the Palančište group. We were looking for people from the background to join our units. Our orders did not go through the board because of their new position. The whole group reacted to that because it was not done according to the agreement. That is correct. But then why did they keep certain comrades without motivating their point of view. It should be understood that there are moments when certain people withdraw from the background into our army and vice versa, according to the required work.

Comrade MILOŠ ŠILJEGOVIĆ: All the criticisms regarding the offensive came down to the fact that we were not up to the weight and tasks that it put us in front of. Now we face the prospect of a mobile war. Our partisans are not used to being in command. We need to make up for that. Let's remember our campaign on Miljača and the hunger we had to endure. We need to train soldiers in all aspects so that they can carry out tasks on the move. From the cook to the commander everything needs to get used to the new. We are in the position of homeless people who travel and are not allowed to take their own food. It is necessary to practice practically for new tasks, from unit training to detachment. In every company there is someone who was a corporal. You should not hesitate to ask such a corporal about things from military training. All this is possible under the conditions of our current overwork. One thing needs to be pushed: the completion of all our tasks related to the approaching winter.

Comrade DRAGAN MARIN: The brigades are fighting up there. The enemy is bringing in reinforcements, material, especially by rail. The task of tearing up the railway is set. The enemy left the population along the railway on both sides probably so that they would not tear up the railway out of consideration for the reprisals he would take against the population. Regardless, I'm in favor of tearing up

the track. Otherwise, I think that it is necessary to move with all our might to all construction tasks including the construction of our military and party cadres.

Comrade ŠOŠA: When driving away the livestock take care that it does not fall into the hands of the enemy from the wastelands and take care of the property of the few remaining population.

Comrade DRAGAN MARIN: We chase the livestock we collect in the abandoned fields to the field of I Battalion and distribute it to the population where the enemy does not penetrate. It is done according to the census with the people using it and handing it over to us if necessary.

Comrade JOCO MARJANOVIĆ: In relation to the tasks set in front of us by Operational Headquarters for Bosnian Krajina we are under three strong enemy strongholds: Mrakovica, Podgradci, Pucari. Much of the terrain remains uncontrolled. Enemy patrols walk quite freely on our grounds, in Pašini Konaci, Vitlovska, around Mrakovica and Mlječanica. Ustashas came to Podgradci instead of Germans. Ustashas come to Pucari. The enemy is consolidating its forces. Something needs to be done about it!

Comrade MIRKO PEKIĆ: My opinion is that we are not capable of clearing enemy strongholds that are being fortified. It would mean making great sacrifices. I am in favor of purely Partisan actions near enemy strongholds.

Comrade BRANKO: According to the current state of things we are not capable of major actions, battalion and detachment wise. Gradually, with smaller actions we are preparing for bigger ones and at the same time expanding our free territory. Otherwise, I agree with the points of view expressed by Comrade Šoša and the comrades from the Detachment Headquarters on that matter.

Comrade NIKICA: In connection with the proposal to create a textbook on Partisan combat training I suggest that the issue of training should also be resolved through instructors under the direction of the detachment's headquarters. Then to take into account the implementation of our propaganda in the enemy garrisons that surround us as an

important element of our current struggle. Furthermore, I point to an example of how one of our important tasks is not being accomplished as we would like it and as it should be simply because the party members are not engaged to the necessary extent in its execution. It is about the “Truth about Kozara” edition which we designed to be produced as soon as possible on a collective basis with the participation of the fighters themselves in order to really give the most direct truth from the great days of our struggle, in order to shed light on fascist crimes as comprehensively as possible and give a worthy answer to their vile and shameful slanders. I appeal that the work of collecting material for that book be intensified so that there is not a single communist who will not find something to contribute and write about this matter.

## 5. POINT

### AOB

Comrade BRANKO: The District Committee excluded from the Party for an unlimited time: TOMICA ŠPANOVIĆ, VASO TOMAŠ AND ĐUKA TRNINIĆ because they allowed them to be isolated for three months under Prosara without looking for us in order to connect and because of the relations that prevailed at that time between them. That exclusion is unlimited with the fact that District Committee make a definitive decision about it. Comrade secretaries of their party units must communicate this to them. I suggest in front of District Committee the commission of inquiry in the case of Comrade Mladan Obradović in connection with the accusations made here, with comrades: Sava Gajić, Dušan Stojnić and Gojko Bjelajac.

Some comrades requested that a circular letter be issued that would explain our organizational principles and forms of work. It will be done. The relevant party units are tasked with the remaining background that has not been included so far in the Dubica region, to designate one responsible and one comrade from II Battalion to

work with it. The party units in which the comrades of the refugees from Jasenica are located should hear them and send the hearing to District Committee. I appeal to my comrades to act in everything as Comrade Nikica explained in connection with the writing of the book "Truth about Kozara".

Comrade RADE BAŠIĆ: How should we convey the conclusions of the conference to the membership?

Comrade BRANKO: At the party unit, each delegate must inform the membership in detail about the course and conclusions of this very important consultation.

At the end with a minute of silence we will honor our fallen comrades in the last offensive.

THE END.



## I. LIVESTOCK COLLECTION

By decision of the Minister of Farmers' Economy, Dr. Joze Dumandžić dated July 7, 1942, number U. m. 706/42 was sent under my leadership to the General Warranty of the Croatian Government in Banja Luka, Minister Mr. dr. O. Turina, a special commission with 7 officers with the task, that under the supervision and instructions of Mr. dr. O. Turina organizes the collection of livestock from abandoned and vacant properties in the operational area of Mt. Kozara and Prosara.

During the military ventures themselves, on the occasion of the destruction of the communist fortresses of Mt. Kozara and Prosara, special commissions were set up to collect, sort and distribute livestock to the main collection points where the livestock were collected.

The main gathering places were: Bosanska Dubica, Jasenovac, Bosanska Gradiška, Banja Luka and Prijedor. Officials sent by the Ministry of Farmers' Economy were stationed in these places and with the help and cooperation of expert officials of local, state and self-governing authorities they took over the livestock.

Secondary livestock collection points were: Orahova, Ivanjska, Kozarac and Omarska. In these places the local municipal officials took over the livestock.

All collected livestock are classified into two main groups:

a/ cattle for further keeping and b/ cattle for slaughter.

Cattle for further keeping are further classified into three groups: 1/ breeding, 2/ dairy and 3/ beast of burden

Cattle designated for further keeping for dairy, breeding and beast of burden were distributed primarily to surrounding peasant owners for temporary keeping with special certificates. In our country, the above-mentioned authorities took particular care to ensure that the cattle got into the hands of hard-working Croatian peasants. Every interested person – a farmer who wanted to take this cattle for keeping – presented to the commission an official certificate from his competent municipality, that he has the possibility to keep such cattle on his farm i.e. to produce sufficient amounts of fodder.

Each interested party, who took over livestock for further temporary keeping, signed a special certificate in front of the commission in which the name and surname, place, ID number were indicated, municipality and district of the recipient of the livestock, number and type of livestock, brief description and value of the livestock. Receipts on the taking over of livestock are placed in two identical copies; one remained with the commission for recording purposes, the party received the second copy with which he had to report the seized livestock to his competent municipality recording it in a special livestock cadastre in order to prevent the arbitrary slaughter of these livestock and unauthorized replacement and resale – in short, prevented any smuggling with this livestock.

The commissions kept special individual reports on the distribution of livestock with all the data in the receipts for taking over the livestock. Those reports were kept by district and then by municipality of the recipient of the livestock.

It was not possible to distribute all the livestock determined for further breeding, milking and beast of burden purposes at a particular collection point to the surrounding peasant lords so the rest of that livestock had to be sent to other parts of our homeland and dis-

tributed there to the peasant lords for temporary keeping. The distribution of these cattle was carried out according to the schedules of the Institute for Colonization in Zagreb, which mostly distributed these cattle to Hrvatsko Zagorje and to new Croatian settlements / colonies/ in the northern part of our country.

The further disposition of this livestock, designated for further keeping as breeding, milking and beast of burden livestock, both those that are distributed at certain collection points to the surrounding Croatian peasants, as well as those that have been shipped to other parts of our country, is left to the Institute for Colonization in Zagreb which is the only authority to dispose of according to the upcoming legal provisions, the orders of the Main Headquarters of the Poglavnik (Head of State) and the Main Headquarters of the Croatian Home Guard.

That is why, after the completion of the work of collecting, sorting, distributing and shipping livestock the commissions arranged all the statements at individual collection points and submitted them to the central commission in Banja Luka and we delivered all these statements to the Institute for Colonization in Zagreb for a further and authoritative decision on disposition. Either to sell it to the keepers or to decide otherwise what to do with that cattle.

All the horses that were collected from the commission's operational area were handed over to the representatives of the Croatian Home Guard, who selected horses fit for military purposes, while the rest of the horses were distributed to peasant owners for temporary keeping in the same way as cattle.

Cattle for slaughter were picked up by the representatives of the Community for the trade of livestock and livestock products and shipped according to their schedule to various places in the country for supplying military stations and processing into cans.

The following number of livestock was collected at certain collection points:

No.	Collection point	Livestock figure	Remark
1.	Bosanska Dubica	10732	
2.	Jasenovac	3165	
3.	Ivanjska	226	
4.	Orahovo	292	
5.	Bosanska Gradiška	3664	
6.	Banja Luka	4705	
7.	Kozarac	306	
8.	Omarska	142	
9.	Prijedor	2131	
Total:		25,363	

AVERAGE VALUE OF COLLECTED LIVESTOCK

No.	Type of livestock pieces in Kunas (*NDH currency)	Quantity	Price	Value	Remark
1.	cattle	16352	5.000.	81, 760.000.–	
2.	horses	2408	6.000.	14, 448.000.–	
3.	goats	541	1.000.	541.000.–	
4.	sheep	4313	1.000.	4, 313.000.–	
5.	pigs	1749	1.000.	1, 749.000.–	
		25,363		102, 811.000.–	

At the end of this chapter of the report I would like to mention that the representatives of the Association for the Trade of Livestock and Livestock Products Šubarić Slavko, Šubarić Tomislav and Rupčić Vladimir committed a major irregularity at the collection point Bosanska Dubica. On the occasion of my supervisory trip to all livestock collection points I came on July 14, this year, in Dubica, where our commission did its difficult and tiring work at the railway station while the above-mentioned emissaries of the community for the sale

of livestock and livestock products were at the municipal fairground in Hrvatska Dubica, and a part of the livestock from the operational area was also gathered there, sold off that cattle. I immediately banned all sales. When I asked for a calculation of how many cattle were sold, to whom and for how much the aforementioned emissaries could not give me such a calculation and data.

No records were kept at all to whom the livestock was sold so that the buyer of this livestock was targeted for the illegal resale of this livestock, and besides that, it can also lead to assumptions of exploitative work.

The Livestock Trade Association, which was founded to combat cattle smuggling, supports this vice in these difficult times with this way of working. This kind of action is highly condemnable.

The case was reported to the Community which started an investigation, but I don't know what stage the case is at.

I doubt whether the culprits will be punished the most severely because the investigation is led by the head of the community's legal department, Mr. Vujaković, and I am quite skeptical about his expediency and impartiality.

All officials who were sent to this commission showed the greatest dedication, diligence, conscientiousness and professionalism during the entire period of work.

Special praise deserve dr Marko Čolak, ing. Branko Lovše and ing. Grozaj Silvije who were my closest and most valuable collaborators.

## II. COLLECTING OF CROPS

Having passed through the entire area of Mt. Kozara and Pro-sara during the operations against the outlaws I noticed that the land was sufficiently cultivated and sown. Therefore, it was necessary to quickly organize the harvest of white /oat/ grains followed by the harvest of potatoes, corn, beans, plums and apples.

Officials of the former Ministry of Farmers' Economy were assigned to the Institute for Colonization under the leadership of economic advisor Mr. Franjo Trstenjak and officials of the State Labor Service to organize the grain harvest.

The necessary workers were obtained by the Institute for Colonization from our passive and overcrowded regions. Work around the grain harvest was concentrated in Bosanska Dubica and Bosanska Gradiška.

The Office for Colonization in Banja Luka was particularly involved in the grain harvest which led this work beyond the demarcation line with its seasonal workers.

Zempro and the work battalions of the Croatian Home Guard participated in the gathering of the fruits of the earth and independently the Institute for Colonization under the leadership of its direct representatives Mr. Dr. K. Draganović and Mr. Ciril Križanac.

Here is the result of gathering the fruits of the earth

a/ Sector Bos. Dubica under the leadership of F. Trstenjak

Wheat .....	379.35 q
Oats .....	68.38 “
Rye .....	15.86 “

b/ Sector Bos. Gradiška under the leadership of F. Trstenjak

Wheat .....	554.19 q
Oats .....	475.09 “

c/ Sector Bos. Gradiška under the leadership of the Institute for colonization in Banja Luka.

Wheat .....	217.75 q
Oats .....	63.33 “
Rye .....	5.60 “
Barley .....	3.94 “

d/ Sector Prijedor under the leadership of the Institute for colonization in Banja Luka.

Corn on the cob .....	109.40 q.
Oats .....	7.67 “
Beans .....	8.58 “

e/ Sector of Prijedor under the leadership of Zempro.

Wheat .....	966.48 q.
Oats .....	72.62 “
Barle .....	5.77”
Rye .....	44.58 “
Millet .....	4.87 “

After the harvesting of autumn cereals was completed the Institute for Colonization started collecting corn, potatoes, beans and fruit under the leadership of its representatives Mr. Dr. K. Draganović and Mr. Ciril Križanac.

The result of that work is this:

a/ Sector Bos. Dubica.

Corn .....	5,500 q
Potatoes .....	400 “
Beans .....	350 “
Fresh plum .....	500 “
Plum for brandy .....	750 “
Plum for jam .....	550 “
Apple .....	500 “
Hay .....	700 “
Straw .....	1,200 “

In addition, the Croatian Home Guard collected about 80,000 q of hay in this area.

b/ Sector Bos. Gradiška under the guidance of Franjo Trstenjak  
 Plum for brandy ..... 428.50 q.

c/ Sector Prijedor under the leadership of Zempro  
 Corn on the cob ..... 249.37 q  
 Potato ..... 126.34 “  
 Plum ..... 213.56 “  
 Hay ..... 2,357.75 “  
 Straw ..... 1,575.58 “

Therefore, in the operational area of Mt. Kozara and Prosara the following quantities of earth fruits were collected in total:

Wheat ..... 2,117.77 q  
 Oats ..... 687.09 “  
 Rye ..... 65.04 “  
 Barley ..... 9.71 “  
 Millet ..... 4.87 “  
 Corn ..... 5,858.77 “  
 Potatoes ..... 526.35”  
 Beans ..... 350 “  
 Plum ..... 2,442 “  
 Apple ..... 500 “  
 Hay ..... 83,057.75 “  
 Straw ..... 2.775.58 “

The workers who were employed in these works were paid in grain and other fruits of the earth so this poor people were most effectively helped in the current difficult times. In addition, there will be among those workers a fairly large number of colonists for these areas, when the work is started, because they have seen the wealth of these regions.

In addition, fruits were collected in the Jasenovac and Stara Gradiška camps in this area. We have no data on the quantity, but it was certainly considerable.

During the grain harvest there was no disturbance whatsoever. The leader of these departments Mr. F. Trstenjak invested a little more effort and care certainly more winter grains had to be collected.

During the harvest of corn and plums there were very big disturbances. Outlaws attacked the work departments so that armed protection had to be provided.

There were human casualties. On the other hand, very nice results were obtained. The same professional staff worked as during the harvest of wheat and other winter grains, but under the leadership of Mr. Dr. K. Draganović and Ciril Križanac who, together with their associates, put in a lot of effort to save and collect as much as possible, and in that way, as much as possible to drain the supply of outlaws, and this is also very important for the military. The other sent officials, except for the officials of the State Labor Service, made a lot of sacrifices and they fulfilled all the expectations we set for their work.

A very nice number of valuable farm machinery and equipment was collected in this area.

For Homeland - ready!

Banja Luka, 25 October 1942.

Vrčković A. h. r.

Head of Institute for Colonization Department.

The accuracy of the transcript is certified by  
Clerk of the Central City Commission:

/Place of Stamp/ Signature illegible

That this transcript is faithful to the certified transcript of the Central City Commission is certified by:

The National Commission for the Identification of the Crimes of  
the Occupiers and Their Aids.

Zagreb, on October 12, 1945

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*Mrakovica Memorial Museum, F 24/27.*

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INDEPENDENT STATE OF CROATIA C. G. K. no. 194/3  
GENERAL ATTORNEY AT FACT OF THE GOVERNMENT  
OF THE INDEPENDENT STATE OF CROATIA  
Number: 1097/1942

SUBJECT: AWARD TO THE OFFICIALS FOR THE OUTSTANDING  
WORK IN LIVESTOCK COLLECTION. –

On the basis of the proposal explained above

I DECIDE:

that the officials, who participated and are still managing the work of collecting livestock from the operational area of Mt. Kozara and Prosara, should be awarded prizes for this extraordinary work, daily during their deployment as follows:

- 1/. Ing. Grozaj Silvije, Institute for colonization. HRK 200. two hundred
- 2/. Ing. Lovše Branko, Ministry for Economy. 200 “ two hundred
- 3/. Šumarić Stjepan, Institute for colonization. 200 “ two hundred
- 4/. Vorkapić Pajo, Institute for colonization. 200 “ two hundred
- 5/. dr. Bastalić Stjepan, veterinarian. 200 “ two hundred
- 6/. dr. Matija Kovačević, veterinarian. 200 “ two hundred
- 7/. Lastarić Zvonimir, veterinarian 100 “ hundred
- 8/. Mikić Franjo, veterinarian 100 “ hundred
- 9/. dr. Čolak Marko, veterinarian 250 “ two hundred and fifty
- 10/. Alojzije Vrecković, Institute for colonization. 250 “two hundred and fifty

The payment of these prizes falls under the burden of the deposit for the sold pigs at the Tax Office in Bosanska Gradiška, on the basis

of the official report on the duration of work, i.e. the dispatch of the individual clerk mentioned above.

For the payment of these awards we authorize Mr. Alojzije Vrčković, head of the Department of the Institute for Colonization in Zagreb, sent to this General Plenipotentiary of the Croatian State Government by the decision of the Minister of Farmers' Economy dated 7. VII. 1942 number U. m. 706/1942.

This decision is to be executed.

Banja Luka, on the 27<sup>th</sup> of VIII. 1942

Plenipotentiary Minister:  
Dr. O. Turina

That this transcription agrees with its original, is claimed by:  
Banja Luka, 27. VIII. in 1942

County Sheriff:  
/M. P./ Signature illegible

That the transcription is faithful to the original is claimed by:  
Clerk of the Central City Commission:  
/M. P./ Signature illegible

That this transcript is faithful to the certified transcript of the Central City Commission is claimed by:  
The National Commission for the Determination of the Crimes of the Occupiers and Their Aids.

Zagreb, October 11, 1945

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*Mrakovica Memorial Museum, F 24/28.*

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GENERAL ATTORNEY AT FACT C. G. K. no. 194/2.  
GOVERNMENT OF THE INDEPENDENT STATE OF CROATIA  
AUTHORIZED MINISTER

Number 2514/1942. Banja Luka, on October 21, 1942

SUBJECT: AWARD TO THE OFFICIALS FOR THE OUTSTAND-  
ING WORK IN LIVESTOCK COLLECTION. –

In regards to my decision number 1097/1942 of August 27, 1942 in  
the case of the above

I DECIDE:

that the below-mentioned employees working for this general  
representative of the Croatian state government and for their ex-  
traordinary work in collecting livestock from the operational area  
of Mt. Kozara and Prosara and considering the high cost and excep-  
tional circumstances will be paid in the name of a reward and that  
on a daily basis:

1/. dr Krupić Ibrahim, Veterinarian, HRK 120. /one hundred and  
twenty/

2/. Župan Luka, driver of the self-driving car. HRK 60. /sixty/

To dr Krupić starting from September 18, 1942, and to Župan  
Luka starting from August 18, 1942.

Otherwise, all other provisions of the aforementioned decision,  
no. 1.097/42. from August 27, 1942, applies to aforementioned indi-  
viduals.

Execute this solution.

For Homeland - ready!

AUTHORIZED MINISTER:  
MP Dr. O. Turina v.r.

That the transcription is faithful to the original is claimed by:  
In Banja Luka, on November 14, 1942

DEPUTY AUTHORIZED MINISTER  
M. P. signature illegible

That this transcript is faithful to the certified transcript of the  
Deputy Minister, is claimed by:

The National Commission for the Determination of the Crimes of  
the Occupiers and Their Aids.

Zagreb, on October 11, 1945 For the Commission:

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*Mrakovica Memorial Museum, F 24/24.*

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## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

**Babič Branko – Slovenac** (Dolina near Trieste, October 18, 1912 – Ljubljana, January 5, 1995), participant in the National Liberation War and political activist of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia. Since 1937, he has been secretary of the District Committee of the Party for its Maribor division. In 1940 he came to Banja Luka as the secretary of the local committee of the KPJ (\*Communist Party of Yugoslavia) for Banja Luka. After that, he became the secretary of the regional committee of the KPJ for Krajina. He was one of the organizers of the uprising in Bosnian Krajina after which he was appointed secretary of the district committee of the KPJ for Mt. Kozara. After the war he held high social and political positions. He is the author of the nonfiction works *Ljudi i bitke na Kozari* and *Primorska nije klonula*. Recipient of the Commemorative Medal of the Partisans of 1941, the Order of Merits for the People with Golden Star and the Order of Brotherhood and Unity with Golden Wreath.

In: *Vojna Enciklopedija, I, Beograd 1970, 423; Leksikon Narodnooslobodilačkog rata i revolucije u Jugoslaviji 1941-1945, I, Beograd: Narodna knjiga 1980.*

**Bašić Đoka Rade** (Donji Garevci near Prijedor February 21, 1919 – Belgrade April 22, 1991), a participant in the National Liberation War from the first day of the uprising. At the beginning of the uprising in Mt. Kozara Rade Bašić was among the first distinguished fighters of II Krajina Detachment, which was led by Dr. Mladen Sto-

janović, he became the political delegate of the platoon, then the deputy political commissar and after successful execution of the important operation in Mrakovica in December 1941 he was appointed for the political commissar of the company. In many operations carried out by Mt. Kozara Partisans, Rade Bašić stood out for his courage and skill in managing the unit. During the enemy's big Mt. Kozara Offensive, in the summer of 1942, he stood out in breaking the siege. Even though wounded, he remained in his position until the evacuation of the wounded and civilians was possible. They were being extricated from the ring in the direction of his company's advance. Rade Bašić's entire family participated in the National Liberation War from the first day of the uprising in Mt. Kozara, his two brothers, Đorđe and Slavko died as first fighters. He was declared a National Hero on December 20, 1951, while he held prominent military, political and economic positions after the war. He is the author of the chronicle books *Priča krajiških proletera* and *Kozara ljeta četrdesete druge*, the military-political study *Ustanak i borba na Kozari 1941 – 1942*, anecdotes collection from the National Liberation War *Anegdote iz oslobodilačkog rata*, short stories collection *Djeca Kozare*, the novelized biography *Doktor Mladen*, the script for the movie *Doktor Mladen* (dir. Midhat Mutapdžić), and he also collaborated in the development of the script for the movie *Kozara* (dir. Veljko Bulajić).

In: *Narodni heroji Jugoslavije, tom I, Beograd 1982, 63-64.*

**Bijelić Ostoje Jovo** (Jasenje near Bosanska Dubica, February 18, 1914 – Belgrade, May 25, 1986), a participant in the National Liberation War, political activist of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and National Hero of Yugoslavia. From the first day he was actively involved in preparing the uprising, participating in the first gatherings of the insurgents and the fighting around Mt. Kozara. Because of his exceptional courage his comrades nicknamed him “Joja Mitraljezac” and “Joja sa Kozare”. During the enemy's offensive in Mt. Kozara, in the summer of 1942, he was commander of IV company of

II Battalion of the Mt. Kozara Detachment which was trying to break the siege at Pogledevo, **Bjelajci and Patrija to get the wounded and civilians out of the refuge**. During the war Jovo Bijelić stood out for his bravery in many operations in Bihać, Bosanska Krupa, Sanski Most and Bosanski Petrovac. He is the recipient of the Commemorative Medal of the Partisans of 1941, the Order of Merits for the People with Silver Star, the Order of Brotherhood and Unity with Silver Wreath, two Orders of Bravery, the Order of Partisan Star with Rifles and the Order of Labour with Silver Wreath. He was awarded the Order of National Hero on July 23, 1952.

In: *Narodni heroji Jugoslavije*, tom I, Beograd 1982, 74-75.

**Vujović Ratko** (Čoče near Nikšić, December 16, 1916 – Belgrade, October 29, 1977), a participant in the Spanish Civil War and the National Liberation War, lieutenant general of the Yugoslav People's Army and National Hero of Yugoslavia. He went to Spain in 1936 as an agronomy student where he fought on the side of the communists in the civil war and stayed until February 1939. He came to Mt. Kozara in October 1941, while soon in November he was appointed political commissar of II Krajina Detachment. During the Mt. Kozara Offensive he led Partisan units alongside Josip Mažar Šoš and Miloš Šiljegović. In the further course of the war he was appointed deputy commander of V Krajina (Mt. Kozara) Assault Brigade in September 1942, and after that chief of the intelligence center of the Operational Headquarters for Bosnian Krajina, then intelligence officer of III Bosnian Corps of the People's Liberation Army and Partisan Detachments of Yugoslavia, and commander of XV Majejica Assault Brigade, and then Chief of Headquarters of XVII East Bosnian Division. He saw the end of the war as the Chief of Headquarters for Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija. After the war he held prominent military positions in the People's Army of Yugoslavia. He is the recipient of the Commemorative Medal of the Partisans of 1941, the Order of the War Banner, the Order of Merits for the People with Golden

Star, the Order of Brotherhood and Unity with Golden Wreath, the Order of Partisan Star with Silver Wreath and Order of Bravery. He was awarded the Order of National Hero on November 27, 1953.

**Grujičić (Slavko) Stojan** – Jaruga (Međuvode near Bosanska Dubica, December 19, 1919 – Belgrade, February 7, 1999), a participant in the National Liberation War and National Hero of Yugoslavia. At the beginning of the war he took the Partisan oath in II company on Vitlovska Kosa. He distinguished himself by his bravery in breaking the siege in Mt. Kozara in the summer of 1942 and getting the artillery division through the enemy lines. He participated in numerous battles fought in the area of Mt. Kozara and Podgrmeč led by XI Krajinina Assault Brigade since its formation on September 8, 1943. Because of his bravery he was declared a National Hero on November 8, 1944. Finishing the war as a military invalid, in peacetime he was active in the association of war–military invalids and in the association of National Liberation War fighters. He is the recipient of the Commemorative Medal of the Partisans of 1941.

In: *Narodni heroji Jugoslavije, tom I, Beograd 1982, 275-276.*

**Dragičević Teodor** – **Tejo**, political commissar of I company of II Battalion. During the war he participated, among other things, in the organization of youth military–political courses.

In: *D. Čurguz, M. Vignjević, Drugi krajiški narodnooslobodilački partizanski, (kozarski) odred “Mladen Stojanović”, Nacionalni park “Kozara” Prijedor, 1982, 439, 440, 445.*

**Dukanović Vid** (Kuljani near Bosanski Novi 1916 – Martin Brod near Bosanski Novi, December 12, 1942), a political commissar in IV Battalion of V KNOP (\*Krajina National Liberation Movement) brigade.

In: *Lj. Borojević, D. Samardžija, R. Bašić, Peta kozaračka brigada, drugo izdanje, Narodna knjiga, Beograd 1973, 254.*

**Egić Milan** (Brezičani near Prijedor, July 15, 1911 – Kotor Varoš, August 27, 1943), a participant in the National Liberation War and National Hero of Yugoslavia. With the uprising in Mt. Kozara he led the first insurgent groups in the village of Brezičani. Died in the battles between Kotor Varoš and Skender Vakuf (now Kneževo) on August 27, 1943, as commander of I Battalion of XII Krajina brigade. He was declared a National Hero on July 24, 1953.

**Zukanović Ishan** (Banja Luka, January 9, 1910 – Banja Luka, August 1942), a doctor and a participant in the National Liberation War. He was the attending physician of the State Hospital in Banja Luka from May 1941 and one of the signatories of the Banja Luka Muslim Resolution on November 12, 1941. He was a doctor in the Mt. Kozara Partisan Detachment from April 1942. Dr. Ishan Zukanović was the manager of the hospital in Alagić sawmill near Kozarac in May 1942. In June 1942, he was captured by the Ustashas during the Mt. Kozara Offensive after which he was taken to Banja Luka where he was shot the same year.

**Karabegović (Hasan) Osman** (Banja Luka, September 7, 1911 – Belgrade, June 24, 1996), a participant in the National Liberation War and a National Hero of Yugoslavia. Member of the KPJ (\*Communist Party of Yugoslavia) since 1932. The day before the uprising itself, on July 25, 1941, he attended a conference in Orlovci near Prijedor. Then, together with doctor Mladen Stojanović, he was sent to Mt. Kozara to organize the uprising. In August 1941, when II Krajina People's Liberation Partisan Detachment was formed, he was appointed its first political commissar. During the war he performed the duties of political commissar of the Operational Headquarters for Bosnian Krajina, political commissar of I Bosnian Corps and member of the General Headquarters of the People's Liberation Army for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Participant of the First and Second sessions of AVNOJ (\*Anti-fascist Council for the National Liberation of

Yugoslavia) and one of the initiators and organizers of both wartime sessions. After the war he held several responsible political duties until he was expelled from the League of Communists of Yugoslavia. He is the recipient of the Commemorative Medal of the Partisans of 1941 and other Yugoslav decorations. He was awarded the Order of National Hero of Yugoslavia on July 23, 1942.

In: *Narodni heroji Jugoslavije, tom I, Beograd 1982, 364-365.*

**Kondić (Mihajlo) Rade** (Jaruge near Prijedor, December 31, 1914 – Begov Han near Žepče, July 31, 1944), a participant in the National Liberation War and a National Hero of Yugoslavia. He was a company commander in II Mt. Kozara Detachment and Assault Battalion from the first days of the Mt. Kozara uprising. Two brave Mt. Kozara heroes, two inseparable comrades became company commanders: Ranko Šipka led the I and Rade Kondić II company. On Pogledovo and Patrija, Jugovića brdo and Ravni Gaj, during the Mt. Kozara Offensive in June 1942, his famous shout was heard in numerous invades: “Forward, Partisans!” „Forward Kozara!”. After the formation of V Mt. Kozara Brigade he was appointed commander of its IV Battalion. In September 1943, he was appointed as deputy commander of V Mt. Kozara Brigade and nine days before his death he began his duties as the commander of the said brigade. He was killed during fights with parts of VII German SS Division “Prince Eugene” between Topčić Polje and Begov Han. He was declared a National Hero on March 31, 1945.

In: *Narodni heroji Jugoslavije, tom I, Beograd 1982, 398-399.*

**Mažar (Nikola) Josip Šoša** (Derventa, September 18, 1912 – Travnik October 20, 1944), a participant in the National Liberation War and National Hero of Yugoslavia. In June 1941, Šoša was one of the most prominent communists in Bosnian Krajina. From the first uprising with the Mt. Kozara insurgents in Orlovci near Prijedor on July 25, 1941, he participated in the preparations for the uprising with doctor Mladen Stojanović. In the first year of the Mt. Kozara uprising

he was appointed deputy commander of II Krajina Detachment. Then he was the first commander of V Krajina Brigade formed on September 22, 1942. He was also the commander of IV Krajina Division. In January 1944, he was appointed chief of the operational department at the Headquarters of V Strike Corps from where he planned many victories of the Krajina divisions until October 1944 when he left Bugojno for Travnik where he wanted to check from the front-line how fights to conquer the enemy fortifications around Travnik were going. There he lost his life from a mortar shell. Four members of the Mažar family died during Second World War – three brothers (Ivica, Josip and Boško) and a 60-year-old mother Marija who contracted typhus in a Partisan column. He was declared a National Hero on July 26, 1949.

In: *Narodni heroji Jugoslavije, tom I, Beograd 1982, 526–527.*

**Marin Dragan**, deputy commander of I Battalion Karan, after that secretary of the political bureau of I Battalion. From the very beginning he actively participated in the organization of the uprising. He was declared a National Hero on December 20, 1951.

In: *D. Čurguz, M. Vignjević, Drugi krajiški narodnooslobodilački partizanski (kozarski) odred „Mladen Stojanović“, Nacionalni park „Kozara“, Prijedor 1982, 143, 217, 235, 346, 802.*

**Marušić (Ivan) Ivica – Ratko** (Grab near Sinj, March 6, 1912 – Drinić, September 3, 1942), a participant in the National Liberation War and a National Hero of Yugoslavia. He was the first commander of I Krajina Assault Brigade. Ratko Marušić usually went into battle with a rifle in one hand and a stick in the other. He was always where it was most difficult, in a decisive position, on the frontline. He did not like explanations. “Words should be replaced by fighting and explosion of bombs.” That is why there were sometimes misunderstandings, especially with the commissioners. Sometimes he would punish

an undisciplined fighter the most severely. And yet, it was never difficult for him to single out volunteers because he always led them. He was wounded in September 1942, in the village of Dujkovci in Manjača and he died a few days later in the Partisan hospital in Drinjići. He is buried in Bosanski Petrovac. He was declared a National Hero on December 20, 1951.

In: *Memorial Museum in Mrakovica; Narodni heroji Jugoslavije, tom I, Beograd 1982, 509-510.*

**Mećava (Todor) Petar** (Živaja near Hrvatska Kostajnica, June 22, 1914 – Travnik, October 22, 1944). After the capitulation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia he crossed the river Una and joined the insurgents at Mt. Kozara. He was the commander of a company and then of a battalion in II Krajina Detachment. During the Mt. Kozara Offensive, Petar Mećava and his company found themselves outside the enemy ring from where they broke through to Mt. Kozara and helped the besieged units. Many fighters remembered his battle cries: “Strike! Break it! May the corn grow big!” During IV enemy offensive he was appointed commander of XII Krajina Brigade and in September 1943, he became deputy commander of X Krajina Division. He died on October 22, 1944, on the streets of Travnik. He was declared a National hero on July 27, 1945.

**Dr. Ržehak Alfred** was the head of the medical service of II KNOP (\*Krajina National Liberation Movement) Detachment and with him were also Dr. Ishan Zukanović, Dr. Gertruda Štern and medical student Levi Moric.

In: *D. Čurguz, M. Vignjević, Drugi krajiški narodnooslobodilački partizanski (kozarski) odred “Mladen Stojanović”, Nacionalni park “Kozara” Prijedor 1982, 602.*

**Stojanović Mladen** (Prijedor, April 7, 1896 – Jošavka near Čelinac, 1942), a doctor, a participant in the National Liberation War

and a National Hero of Yugoslavia. He was among the first organizers of the Serbian uprising in Mt. Kozara in 1941. Before the war he was highly respected by the people of Bosnian Krajina. He was called “people’s doctor” because, for peasants who did not have money to pay for treatment, he performed examinations and treatment without payment and he even used to give his own money to those who needed it. In his youth, he was a member of the “Unification or death” and “Young Bosnia” organizations. He knew Gavrilo Princip, Mustafa Golubić and other members of “Young Bosnia”. He often ended his letters to comrades from secret Serbian organizations with the signature: “Serbian greetings from Mladen”. (*R. Bašić, Doktor Mladen, Prijedor, 1987*) He was admitted to the KPJ (\*Communist Party of Yugoslavia) in 1940. It is interesting that Mladen reluctantly agreed to become a member of the KPJ. His excuse was that he still had not come to terms with religion. Nevertheless, at the persuasion of the communists, he agreed to join. – (*B. Babič Slovenac, Ljudi i bitke na Kozarai, Prijedor, 1982*) Soon after the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia government in Prijedor, Mladen was detained. But, with the help of his friends he managed to escape from the prison to Mt. Kozara. In the villages of Podkozara (\*Area under Mt. Kozara) he gathered people ready to fight and when it started he was chosen as the leader of the insurgents. Apart from Mt. Kozara he also went to Mt. Grmeč to strengthen the insurgent organization there as well. He died in the village of Jočavka (Čelinac) at the beginning of April 1942, at a time when the conflict started and insurgents were divided into partisans and Chetniks. – (*R. Bašić, Doktor Mladen, Prijedor, 1987*). All the circumstances of his death have not been clarified to this day.

**Šiljegović (Blagoje) Boško** (Mirkovac near Bosanska Dubica, May 6, 1915 – Meduvode near Bosanka Dubica, March 2, 1990), a participant of the National Liberation War and a National Hero of Yugoslavia. The ninth youngest son of the clerical family of Knežopoljac by the name of Blagoje Šiljegović. He finished elementary school in

Međuvode, in Dvorište, and high school in Prijedor and Banja Luka. He finished teacher training school in Negotin and began studies of philosophy in Skopje, but due to his participation in the strike at the Skopje faculty he was forced to stop his studies and return to his homeland, to Mt Kozara in 1940. From the beginning of the uprising until the end of 1943, Boško was in the middle of the struggle of the people of Bosnian Krajina. Together with Dr. Mladen Stojanović he was one of the initiators of the meeting at Knežica on August 15, 1941, which, due to the far-reaching nature of its decisions – the abolition of fronts and the formation of mobile partisan units – is one of the significant events in the development of the Mt. Kozara uprising. He was the political commissar of the guerilla companies in Mt. Kozara until the reorganization of these companies and the establishment of II Krajina (Mt. Kozara) detachment when Osman Karabegović became the political commissar. He performed the duties of political commissar of V KNOP (\*Krajina National Liberation Movement) Brigade, a member of the KPJ (\*Communist Party of Yugoslavia) District Committee for Bosnian Krajina, political commissar of IV Krajina Division and political commissar of IV Army which he led through fierce skirmishes at Glamoč in Cazinska Krajina, Mrkonjić Grad and Sanski Most, and then, at the time of Italy's capitulation in Dalmatia, around Šinj and Split, Livno and Kupres. In January 1944, Boško Šiljegović was appointed political commissar of VIII Dalmatian Corps which, in the spring of the same year under the command of Vlado Četković, directed landing operations on Mljet and Korčula, Brač and Šolta which began the definitive liberation of Dalmatia. With IV Army commanded by Petar Drapšin, as its political commissar, Boško participated in the last operations for the liberation of Lika and Gorski kotar, the Croatian and Slovenian coasts, Istria and Trieste. He was a councilor of the Second Session of the AVNOJ (\*Anti-fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia) and councilor of the ZAVNOBIH (\*State Anti-fascist Council for the National Liberation of Bosnia and Herzegovina). After the liberation of the country,

he performed a number of important military and political duties. He was the head of the political administration of the Yugoslav People's Army, the head of the Cabinet of Supreme Commander Josip Broz Tito and the editor-in-chief of the first edition of the Military Encyclopedia (1958–1969). He was elected several times as a member of the Federal National Assembly. From the VII Congress he was a member of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia and a member of the Presidency of the Union of Communists of Yugoslavia from the IX to the X. He was declared a National Hero on December 20, 1951.

In: *Narodni heroji Jugoslavije, tom II, Beograd 1982, 252-253.*

**Šiljegović Miloš** (Mirkovac near Bosanska Dubica, December 29, 1909 – Sarajevo, November 18, 1952), participant of the National Liberation War. One of the organizers of the uprising in Bosnian Krajina. Battalion commander in II KNOP (\*Krajina National Liberation Movement) Detachment, then Deputy Commander of V Krajina Kozarac Brigade. He commanded the VII and XI Krajina Brigades and was appointed commander of X Krajina Division. Recipient of the Order of the Partisan Star with Golden Wreath and Order of the Brotherhood and Unity with Golden Wreath.

In: *Vojna Enciklopedija, IX, Beograd 1975.*

**Šipka (Jovan) Ranko** (Veliko Očijevo near Drvar, October 1, 1917 – Travnik area, November 7, 1944). When the assault Battalion was formed in Mt. Kozara at the end of March 1942 he was first the Company commander, then the Deputy Battalion Commander and finally the Commander of the Assault Battalion. The Assault Battalion participated in the battles during the enemy's big offensive in Mt. Kozara. Among those who went into the trenches, at night between July 4 and 5, 1942, and after the fierce clashes, hand to hand, on the Patrija–Planinica–Jutrogušta line, broke through the ring, was the Assault Battalion led by Ranko Šipka. He also served as Deputy Com-

mander of XI and then IV Krajina Division in January 1943. He died on November 7, 1944, in a car accident on the road between Travnik and Zenica as a Lieutenant Colonel of the army he helped create. He was declared a National Hero on July 26, 1949.

In: *Narodni heroji Jugoslavije, tom II, Beograd 1982, 259–260.*

**Španović (Vaso) Tomica** (Johova near Bosanska Dubica, April 1914 – Stara Rijeka near Ljubija, November 18, 1942). He was a sales assistant. From the first day of the uprising he stood out as a brave fighter and when V KNOP (\*Krajina National Liberation Movement) Brigade was formed on September 22, 1942, he became the Commander of II Company in III Battalion. In the battles on the Bosanski Novi – Ljubija line he was killed on November 18, 1942, near the village of Stara Rijeka. He was declared a National Hero on November 27, 1953.

**Šurlan (Marko) Gojko** (Devetaci near Bosanski Novi on July 12, 1909 – Belgrade on February 3, 1951). When the Strike Battalion was formed in Mt. Kozara he was appointed Deputy Platoon Commander and after the formation of V KNOP (\*Krajina National Liberation Movement) Brigade he was appointed the political commissar of the Company. When V Krajina National Liberation Movement Brigade went to central Bosnia in May 1943, he was appointed political commissar of the hospital of XI Krajina Division. He was declared a National Hero on July 24, 1953.





## ON THE AUTHORS

### *Bojan Arbutina*

Bojan Arbutina was born in 1993 in Glina (Republic of Croatia). He graduated in 2015 at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade, at the Department of History of Yugoslavia, having defended his final paper “Intellectuals in the Banjica concentration camp: the case of Dr. Mihailo Đurić and Dr. Đorđe Tasić”. He defended his master’s thesis “Kordun in the Cvetković – Maček Agreement 1939-1941” in 2016. He enrolled to doctoral studies at the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad in October 2017. During the studies he devoted himself to researching the culture of remembrance of the victims of the Second World War in Srem. Since April 2018, he has been working for the Genocide Victims Museum in the role of an expert associate on the projects *Crimes on the territory of the former Yugoslavia in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries* and *Encyclopedia of Genocide in the Independent State of Croatia*. Since September 2021, he has been employed by the Genocide Victims Museum on the position of curator – historian in the group for programs in the fields of culture, education art and publishing.

He is the author of several scholarly publications on the suffering of the civilian population during the Second World War, the culture of remembrance and the politics of memory. He is the author of the script for the documentary series *Serbian victims* of Hram television station, an expert consultant in the documentary-feature film *Serbia greater than fear: a lecture on the silence of Professor Pavlović* produced by the Genocide Victims Museum and a guest expert in documentary films and series: *Prebilovci, where even a stone has a scar* in

the production of the Radio Television of Serbia, *Church in Flames* and *Serbian Historical Reader* produced by the *Hram* television station. In the scope of the Museum's work he researches the suffering of the Serbian people during the Second World War on the territory of the Independent State of Croatia, organizes Museum lectures, scientific forums and round tables, and manages the Museum's collection of audio–visual materials where he collects, organizes, safeguards and promotes audio–visual works (films, series, multimedia and transmedia projects) related to the Second World War, but also to the all of the 20<sup>th</sup> century wars.

*Marina Ljubičić Bogunović*

Marina Ljubičić Bogunović was born in 1981 in Prijedor (Republic of Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina). She graduated from the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Banja Luka, at the Department of History. She has been employed on the position of curator – historian since 2012 as well as the Head of the Cultural and Historical Heritage sector since 2020 in the Memorial Museum in Mrakovica. She attained the title of senior curator in 2022. From the beginning of her work the focus of her research was on the suffering of the civilian population of Mt. Kozara and Potkozarje Region. She is the author of numerous professional and scholarly publications, published in professional journals, as well as the book *Ustasha massacre of Serbs in the villages of Veliko and Malo Palančište and Gornji Jelovac near Prijedor in October 1942*. She also researched the post-war period and the monuments heritage in the Kozara National Park and this research was presented through the catalog and exhibition of *Kozara, a monument of freedom*, a touring exhibition held in many cities throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. She participated in numerous conferences on the culture of remembrance and memory, as well as on museum practice – Workshop Mission: Open Museum management between daily routine, networking and visions (2016); as

a lecturer at the ICOM seminar – Social Inclusion and the Contemporary Museum (2015). She is also the author of a series of articles on cultural heritage and local history published in the newspaper *Kozarski vijesnik*. In addition, she also works on collecting oral testimonies of participants in the Second World War and is also engaged in working with primary and secondary school students on a daily basis – through lectures and history lessons.

*Boris Radaković*

Boris Radaković was born in 1986 in Prijedor (Republic of Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina). He graduated in 2015 at the Faculty of Philosophy in Banja Luka, at the Department of History, having defended his final paper “The Ethnic Structure of the Medieval Bosnian State”. Since September 2018, he has been employed on the position of historian in the Memorial Museum in Mrakovica. He is the author of the book *Ustasha strongholds at the foot of Kozara during the Second World War*. He is also the author of several professional publications on the wartime events in the area of Mt. Kozara during the Second World War as well as several works related to the civil war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992 – 1995). He was the co-author of the exhibition *Noble* about the Serbian medieval heritage in today’s Bosnia and Herzegovina. He wrote the script for the documentary *We Defended Prijedor* which follows the wartime events in the area of Prijedor in the period April–May 1992. The central issues he deals with in his research are the character of the 1941 uprising in the area of the Bosnian Krajina, the genocide of Serbs in the Independent State of Croatia, in the area of the Bosnian Krajina, the identities of the Ustasas and other criminals, the division of the insurgents into Partisans and Chetniks as well as the ideological propaganda of both resistance movements. He also dedicated his research to topics from period of the the civil war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992 – 1995), especially in the territory of town of Prijedor.

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