

# Rifka Vostrel

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Zagreb

Croatia

Interviewer: Silvia Heim

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*A friendly, tiny elderly woman welcomes me in her room.*

*From the very first moment it is clear that Rifka Vostrel is a very open and approachable person.*

*We connect immediately and the interview takes place in a very pleasant atmosphere.*

*Rifka is very fluent in her stories, and her spirits are wide awake as she speaks and recalls her past.*

*I am very pleased and honored that I have had the chance to meet Rifka to learn so much about our history through her stories.*



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- **My family background**

Both my paternal and maternal grandparents are from Sarajevo, Bosnia. Unfortunately, I don't know much about my great-grandparents, but I believe they also came from Sarajevo. The families were large on both sides. My father told me that my grandmother, his mother, had sixteen children, but only six of them were still alive when World War II started, and then they too perished, were killed in the Holocaust.

My paternal grandfather's name was Avram Altarac. He was born in the 1860s and a plumber by profession. He did all kinds of installation work and also owned a little shop on Bascarsija [1](#) Street, where he worked alone. It's a long street, very famous in Sarajevo and known as a market place; all kinds of craftsmen used to have shops there.

My grandfather was one of those craftsmen and sold all kinds of products made of sheet metal in his shop. It was my grandfather who passed on the trade to his family. On my father's side everybody was a craftsman. They were plumbers, traders or innkeepers, and my father was a barber. The women in the family were mostly housewives.

Jews in Sarajevo were mostly known as tradesmen and craftsmen. There were no Jewish quarters, but there was a Jewish school called Maldar. Life in Sarajevo was very active and the relations between people were very good. National minorities were friends and socialized, but marriages between them were very rare and mostly not approved by the families.

My grandfather was married to Belja Altarac, nee Atijas, born in the 1860s. They had a nice Jewish wedding. Everybody used to call my grandmother Bea. She was a housewife and took care of their six children; one of them was my father. My grandparents were around eighty years old when in 1941 they were taken along with other family members to a death camp and killed. For neither of them, I know exactly where and when they were killed.

My paternal grandparents were religious. They kept the Jewish traditions. They celebrated every holiday, and that's how my father learnt how to pray and read in Hebrew. Grandfather often attended services. They observed Sabbath and the kashrut as best they could.

We visited them very often, especially during the holidays. I'll never forget when my grandfather recited the Kiddush. I remember it so vividly because he never drank; he was an outstanding non-drinker. Between themselves my grandparents used to speak Ladino.

There were no mixed marriages in the family for a long time. It couldn't have happened that someone of their family was married to a non-Jew at the time. Later, it did happen. My father's cousin, Erna Altarac, was the first one to marry a non-Jew. He was a Russian emigrant and the family wasn't very happy about it.

There was another cousin, who married an Orthodox Serb, and she wasn't very welcome in her family home afterwards either. My sister and me struggled and fought for our right to freely choose our husbands and not be married off to someone. It wasn't an intentional revolt against our parents; it just happened that we fell in love with non-Jews.

The environment and surrounding had an impact on most of the Sephardi Jews from Bosnia. My grandfather was wearing pes [Muslim covering for the head], a little bit modified, while my grandmother was wearing tukada [covering for the head that only Sephardi women wore]. I remember that these tukadas were different for married and non-married women.

My grandparents' house was in the old part of Sarajevo city. They lived in a very modest house with a little courtyard. They didn't have much money and thus took care of the housekeeping themselves, without the help of servants or maids. After we moved to Split we didn't see them very often, only during the holidays when we visited them and when the whole family got together.

My grandparents' eldest son was Mose Altarac. He worked as an innkeeper and was married to Estera. They had two children: Jozsi and Blanka. Jozsi was the only one of them to survive the Holocaust; he later died in Israel. Blanka and her parents were killed in World War II.

My father's second-oldest brother was Izrael Altarac. He worked as a tradesman. He was married to Hana and they had two children: Avram and Moric. Moric was my uncle's child from his first marriage and was killed during World War II.

Avram, mostly called Avramcic [little Avram] is still alive. He lives in Israel, has two daughters and five grandchildren. Isidor Altarac, my father's third brother, worked as a tradesman. His wife's

maiden name was Flora Finci. She died after World War II.

They had two daughters: Simha and Belja. Simha is still alive and lives in Sarajevo. She has two daughters who live in Israel. I think she has a grandchild or maybe even more than one. Unfortunately, Belja didn't survive the war; she and her father were killed.

Estera Altarac was one of my father's sisters. She was married to a certain Mr. Pardo. They had two daughters: Flora and Rena. All of them were taken away and killed somewhere during the war. My second aunt was called Regina Altarac. She was married to Mr. Gaon. They didn't have children.

Aunt Regina had more luck than the others. She was interned in Vela Luka on the Island of Korčula. She was allowed to move without a permission by the Italian authorities, and from her stories we found out that the situation wasn't too bad there. They didn't have much food, but they were never hungry.

My father used to tell me that he had two more sisters, Sara and Rikica, after whom I was named, but they died before the war and I don't know anything about them.

My maternal grandparents also came from Sarajevo. I don't remember much of my grandfather, but I do remember my 'nona' [grandmother], that's how I and my sister Lea, who was named after her, used to call her. My nona Lea Atijas, nee Abinun, was married to Avram Naftali Atijas, my grandfather, who died young of tuberculosis.

My grandmother Lea was a housewife. Hers is a sad story: she was very young when she became a widow, never remarried, and supported her children on her own. She was very poor. In order to support her children she had to work in other people's houses. Once, my sister Lea asked her, 'How come you are illiterate?', and she said, 'Every time I wanted to go to school, a holiday would approach!'

Apart from being humorous, she was very diligent and known to be very good at her job. She made all kinds of noodles and taught other women how to make them. She used to say, 'Do it like this...!', as she was cutting the noodles. That's how she practically supported her family.

I remember how nona Lea saved her life by running away: From Sarajevo to Mostar she traveled under the false name of Aisha Muslich, dressed in Muslim clothes. How terrible this must have been for a 60-year-old woman! While sitting in the train, waiting for the ticket-collector to come and check the tickets, she forgot her new name. What now? Ustasha [2](#) men will come, look at her ticket, ask her name and she won't know it!

While she was sitting there, she felt like she knew the man right opposite her from somewhere. And yes, he indeed was a Jew, and he looked at her as if he knew her, too. Full of fear, she gave him permission to read her pass and remind her of her new name. 'Aisha Muslich, Aisha Muslich, Aisha Muslich', she repeated silently to herself in order not to forget her new name.

In Mostar, a Muslim woman waited for her and took her to her uncle who was already there. My grandmother took off her Muslim clothes and became Saveta Kojo, a Serb. Under that name she joined us in Split. Soon after her came my uncle with his family, but Italians interned them to the Island of Brač and then to the Island of Rab [3](#).

My nona Lea lived to the age of 96. She died in 1978, long after my mother, my father and my uncle. Unfortunately, there was nobody to take care of her after my mother's death in 1968. In the end she could hardly move, was completely blind and had to be put in a Jewish old-age home.

My grandparents had three children: Naftali Buki Atijas - he was the first-born son and it was a Sephardi custom to call all first-born sons Buki, whereas first-born daughters were called Bukica. Naftali was a tailor. He even had his own shop, in which my mother worked when she lived in Sarajevo.

During World War II he was in Mostar, Split and on the Island of Rab. Luckily, he survived. He died after the war. My mother Rosa, or Rahela in Yiddish, was born in 1908. Regina Atijas, my mother's sister, was married to Moric Moshe Albahari. He was a prisoner-of-war. She was a milliner. During the war she and her son Albert, also called Albi, were with us.

My father was called Leon Altarac; officially Juda. He worked as a barber in Sarajevo. When we moved to Split in 1934, he worked with a master in a famous barber's shop for a long time. Later he became a nonkulo [attendant in a synagogue]. His duty was to take care of the synagogue, the arrangement of the 'sfarim' [prayer books] and tefillin. When he became a nonculo, we moved to the apartment of the Jewish Community which was in the same building where the temple was.

### • Growing up

My parents had two children: I was born on 12th October 1929 in Sarajevo and my sister Lea, or Lilika, was born on 10th April 1939 in Split. She is the only one in our family who wasn't born in Sarajevo. My mother was a dressmaker by profession, but she worked as a housewife. And of course she also took care of my sister and me.

Our mother raised us in a traditional way. We observed the holidays, but not in a religious way. Every holiday was celebrated: For Pesach we had the seder and ate all the traditional food. There was always fish on Friday evenings.

My parents didn't demand of us to go to the synagogue or to pray; maybe that's a pity because therefore we don't know much about the traditions. Neither my mother nor my father influenced our opinions. They gave us the opportunity to choose and decide for ourselves how much we wanted to know about Judaism.

At home we spoke Croatian, but sometimes, when our parents didn't want us to understand something, they spoke Ladino, and they did especially so with Grandmother Lea. She lived with us and was a great help to my mother.

My sister and me had no duties or obligations except school. Most of the day we spent playing with our friends. Because we lived in the building of the Jewish community, we had the opportunity to participate in and attend all the cultural, religious and sports events. 'Jarden' was a Jewish Cultural Association, where all the Jews gathered. We went there very often. We liked it very much and most of our friends were from this group.

### • During the War

Before and during World War II we lived in Split. Looking back, I have to admit that Italians were relatively gentle to us, Jews, especially in comparison to the Ustashas and the Germans [see Italian occupation of Yugoslavia] [4](#). The Jews of Split didn't have to wear a yellow star, but they were restricted in their personal lives.

Some of the shops had a sign stating: 'E vietato gli regresso agli Ebrei' [It is forbidden for Jews to enter]. But nobody stuck to it, on the contrary, there were many good people who wanted to help us and indeed did help us. Unfortunately, I didn't go to school because it was forbidden for Jews [see anti-Jewish laws in Croatia] [5](#), but I finished the 2nd grade of high school [today the 6th grade of elementary school] privately, in a school that was organized by the Jewish Community of Split.

It was in June 1942 when a group of young fascists came to Split. At that time Split was under Italian occupation, but these were local fascists. I remember it like it happened yesterday. I was thirteen years old. I was swimming and playing with my friends on the beach, when I realized it was time to leave in order to be home in time for Sabbath.

On my way home, when I reached the center of the old city, I saw many people standing and staring at something. It was the place where today's synagogue is located and where the old one used to be. We lived in the same building.

All of a sudden I heard my friend Ines' voice: 'Rikica, Rikica, come quickly, something is happening!' In a shock, I looked to the windows of my apartment and saw angry and wild fascists throwing out everything they could find. Ines grabbed my hand and took me to her place. She wasn't Jewish but she lived in the same street, in a building right opposite mine.

I still remember how scared I was, and that her mother tried to calm me down. The hardest thing was when Ines' brother came home and told us that my father had been wounded and taken away by the fascists. Luckily, it turned out that wasn't the truth.

Until late into the night robbery and animal-like behavior was taking place. Everything was burnt and destroyed in front of the citizens in the center of the old city. I tried to fall asleep, but couldn't. Around 4am I looked out of my window, and what did I see: my father in a nearby apartment.

With his finger on his lips he indicated me to be quiet. Somehow, with gestures, he explained to me that my mother and Lea were in a safe place. That was when I finally calmed down and managed to fall asleep. We were left without anything, but at least our lives had been spared. Next day we met at the National Square, the same place where our possessions had been burnt and destroyed the night before.

After some time we found an apartment with the help of friends. My family stayed in Split in that modest home, and I went to Vela Luka. My aunt Regina and her son Albert were there. She lived there like all the other refugees. The Jews were interned there by the Italians and lived in the homes of the locals.

I stayed with my aunt for a few days and then returned to Split to my family. In 1942 I became a member of a Zionist cell. I was very young and angry with the world and everything that was happening so I desperately wanted to do something to stop it.

After I joined the Zionist cell, my Jewish friend, who was also a member, introduced me to Bosa. Bosa was a strong, happy and very friendly girl. She told me stories about the partisans, illegal work in order to help the partisans, Comrade Tito [6](#) and the Communist Party.

I was hoping to become one of them, but unfortunately she didn't accept me, but told me to become a member of the SKOJ [7](#) instead. At first I was sad, but later I found out what a great honor it was for a young girl like me to become a member of the SKOJ.

In 1943 after the Italian capitulation [8](#), my whole family and I joined the partisans. The Jews who stayed in Split and didn't want to leave were killed by the Ustashas and the Germans. Because I was in the youth organization and doing illegal work, I knew that something would happen. In the youth organization we were very well organized.

We were divided into groups of several girls each. From time to time we used to meet, but every time in a different apartment. There we read literature that was printed on unoccupied territory ['Omladinski borac' - 'Youth Fighter'], exchanged experiences about books and which books should be read - we mostly read Soviet literature - and finally addressed concrete problems.

Once, I was obligated to distribute flyers - I don't recall what they were about, but I remember, in one house that I went to, the door was open. It was rude of me to just enter, walk in and leave the flyer on a small wardrobe. Who knows if it was or wasn't a pleasant surprise for the family.

There is one more incident I remember. I had a meeting with a girl from my group in her apartment. Fifty meters before her house, a comrade, who had seen that the officials had got into her apartment, stopped me and told me that they were searching her home.

She didn't know I was going to that particular apartment, but seeing me in the neighborhood she had thought of it and prevented me of getting into a dangerous situation. If I remember correctly, the friend I was going to see was even imprisoned for a short while.

When I came home I said to my parents, 'I'm leaving. I'm going to join the partisans and that's it!' They didn't say a word; they were speechless. I collected my things and went to my friend Hana Montiljo's house, to take her with me. When I came to her home, her mother asked me, 'Where is your family?' I replied, 'They can't go.

They have my little sister Lea and nona with them, it's too hard for them.' She told me, 'Go back home and take them with you!' When I came back home, they were still speechless, so I just told them, 'Get ready, we don't have much time!' They started to pack. My dear nona took some kind of a bundle and put a few of her belongings inside. My father also took some things and packed them in a makeshift suitcase.

We went from Split to the village of Zrnovnica on foot along with a large number of people. It was a mix of people, not only Jews but also others who were afraid of the Ustashas and the Germans. There were also Italian soldiers; since Italy had capitulated, it was better for them to be with us than to be caught by the Germans.

At one point, in Dubrava, I separated from my parents and joined a partisan group. We were passing through the passage called 'Hot Stone' in order to get to Dugopolje. I remember that I even got a small gun which, of course, I didn't know how to use. We were sneaking into Dugopolje in

order to find out who was there, whether it was the Ustashas or the Germans; we didn't know.

We managed to move freely in Dugopolje because nobody was there. In Dugopolje the partisans started to form new groups, and I very much wanted to be included. In the end they didn't want children to join because we were too young, and so they sent a group of us back to Dubrava. Dubrava was a reception shelter where all the refugees were gathered and organized to be sent to different places.

When I came back, my parents weren't there anymore. They had been evacuated to the village of Srinjine. I just went to visit them and held a lecture for the youth when they opened a youth house there. I told them about my illegal work in Split. Afterwards I came back to Dubrava where I carried out the duties of a political youth worker.

After some time we had to leave Dubrava because it was the time of the 6th offensive. I was evacuated to one side, my parents and Lea to the other. I, along with my group, went from Dubrava to Jesenice where the boats, which we called trabakuli, were waiting for us [trabacullo is an Italian expression for fishing boat].

They took us to the Island of Brac [one of the Italian internment camps] [9](#) first and after three months we were transferred to the Island of Vis [another Italian internment camp]. On Brac I was a member of the Kotar Committee for United Youth and took care of the pioneers. The Germans were following us so we had to leave Vis and were evacuated to Italy. All this time I had no idea where my family was.

In Italy many people were waiting for us; actually it was a partisan refugee camp in Bari. There I met a familiar face and she told me that my parents were in Carbonara camp, also in Italy. I wrote them a letter and told them that I was in Bari and that I didn't know where I was going to go. I was following the refugee groups.

As soon as they received the letter my parents joined me in Bari. They came with my aunt Regina and her son Albert, who had met up with my parents in Lastovo when they took a break on their way to Italy.

My sister recalls a story our father used to tell her when she was younger. It was about the communists in their boat. When they were on their way to Italy, riding in those trabakuli, in which there were many wounded people, firing started. Nobody knew why 'our people' [the partisans] would shoot at other partisans.

Later, we found out that we had the old password and that's why they thought we were enemies. The trabakuli had left the port before the password was changed. Later, our father practically saved the captain's life: He went to court and testified as a witness at the trial that nobody had known about the change of passwords.

The most interesting part is that the moment the firing started all the communists began to pray to their God. In that moment you give up everything and everybody, just to stay alive and rescue yourself. The shooting didn't last long, luckily, and everything turned out fine in the end.

When my family was finally reunited, we continued on our way to El-Shatt in Egypt. As my father had told us, El-Shatt had 27,042 refugees, out of which 0.9 percent were Jews. There were refugees

from all over Croatia there. There were some from Belgrade and Sarajevo.

All the refugees who wanted to leave Italian territory went to Egypt, America or Brazil. We didn't have enough money to leave for America so we went to Egypt instead. Looking back, it was good that we couldn't afford it; if we had left, our lives would have been completely different. Life in the camp in El-Shatt was very well organized. Every camper had his/her own duty. I was responsible for taking care of the shelters. I was also very active in the youth organization.

My father worked as a barber and was a member of a religious section; he was responsible for all the Jews who were there. He made sure they were buried in the proper religious way. Unfortunately, many children died because they weren't used to the hot climate. We lived in a kind of commune. The sound of a bell announced breakfast, tea, lunch and supper time.

We were never hungry there. We had so much food that sometimes we didn't even go to eat with everybody but stayed in our tent and my mother prepared the meals for us. We received clothes from the Red Cross, but skilful hands made dresses and skirts from nightdresses.

In El-Shatt I finished my 3rd grade of high school. Every Sabbath my father held a service in one part of our tent. We celebrated every holiday there. That's how we lived in El-Shatt for 14 months.

We found out that the war was over in the night of 9th May 1945. We all came out of our tents and celebrated the end of the war. We were very excited and impatient to return to Yugoslavia. The return was organized in groups. We came back in July 1945. A new life, and lifestyle, reconstruction, hope and enthusiasm in a free homeland was about to start.

#### • **Post-war**

After the war, in 1948, we returned to Split, but I went to Zagreb to work in the Central Youth Committee. Because I was still very young, my parents felt that they should be close to me. My father moved to Zagreb in 1949 whereas my mom, Lea and my grandmother only came in 1950.

At first, my father worked in a Jewish old-age home, which was housed in today's Community Center. He was working as a caretaker and later, when the old-age home was moved from the community building to another building, he became an employee with the Jewish community.

After Dr. Gruner, who was a cantor, died, my father took over his duties. He became a 'non professional' cantor because he wasn't educated in schools. On the contrary, everything he knew he had learnt in his parents' home. In the community, every holiday was celebrated and it was my father who led the ceremonies.

Sometimes even rabbis from abroad came and celebrated holidays with us. Since we are Sephardim my father read the prayers in Ladino. He didn't only lead the holiday celebrations but did everything else that was required, such as burials and the like.

When Rabbi Menahem Romano from Sarajevo died, he used to go there and help out in the community. Unfortunately, my parents died very young. My mother died when she was only 60 years old and my father at the age of 69. They were buried in the Jewish cemetery in Zagreb.



Jewish life after the war was very active. It's not true that communism forbade us to attend services or celebrate holidays. Many people came to the community to socialize.

I got married to Eduard Vostrel in the late 1940s. I don't want to talk about my husband's life before our wedding. He isn't Jewish. He worked in politics and in diplomatic services, and because of that we lived in many places in the world: in Chicago, USA, where he was a consul for four years, in Stockholm and in Goteborg, Sweden, for another four years each.

We have two sons: Rajko and Emil. Rajko was born in Zagreb in 1950. He works as a professor, and has a daughter, Iskra. Emil was born in Belgrade in 1954. He studied law and has a son, Vjekoslav.

My sister worked as chemical technician and is retired by now. She is divorced, but has a son named Srecko, born in 1963, and also a grandson, Tomislav.

Jewish religion and religions in general don't have an impact on our daily lives. My sister and I are both atheists. We are aware of our roots and are very proud of them, but don't practice religion. Our children and grandchildren know that they have Jewish mothers and grandmothers, but how they live is their own choice. We told them the truth about their origin and they can do with that whatever they want to!

- **Glossary:**

### **1 Bashscarssija**

An old and well-known street in the old town of Sarajevo. It was the street of craftsmen with small workshops, where artisans made and sold their products. The word originates from the Turkish 'bash' meaning main and 'scarssija', the business part of town, which was separate from the 'mahala', the residential area.

### **2 Ustasha Movement**

Extreme-right Croatian separatist movement, founded by Ante Pavelic in Zagreb in 1929. In 1934 he issued the pamphlet Order, in which he openly called for the secession from the Yugoslav federal state and the creation of an independent Croatian state.

After the assassination of the king of Yugoslavia on a state visit in Marseilles, France, the Ustasha movement was outlawed, and Pavelic and his colleague Eugen Kvaternik were arrested in Italy.

After the occupation of Yugoslavia by the German, Hungarian, Italian and Bulgarian armies in April 1941 the Independent State of Croatia was proclaimed with German backing. The new state was nominally run by the Ustasha movement with Pavelic as head of state.

He created a fascist regime repressing all opposition. Ethnic and religious minorities, especially Serbs and Jews, were ruthlessly persecuted. Serbs were massacred or forcibly converted to Catholicism. Under his rule 35,000 Jews were exterminated in local concentration camps.

### **3 Rab**

Northern Adriatic Island, today in Croatia. After the occupation of Yugoslavia by the armies of several countries in April 1941, the Italian authorities built an internment camp on Rab, primarily for opponents of the Italian rule. In June 1943 more than 2,500 Jewish inmates of other Italian camps on the Adriatic coast were deported there.

Living conditions were very harsh and close to one third of the prisoners died in the camp. After the Italian capitulation in September 1943, Tito's partisans evacuated 2,000 of them, many of whom joined the partisans. About 300 people, especially the old, sick and small children, remained in Rab and were deported to Auschwitz in March 1944 after the Germans invaded the island.

#### **4 Italian occupation of Yugoslavia**

In April 1941 Yugoslavia was occupied by German, Hungarian, Italian, and Bulgarian troops. It was divided into several parts. Italy extended its rule over Dalmatia and Montenegro, as well as part of Slovenia and Macedonia.

Compared to the other parts of occupied Yugoslavia, the area under Italian control was a haven for Jews and soon became a refuge for Jews from fascist Croatia.

In spite of constant pressure by German diplomacy the Italians refused to deport Jews. The Italians established camps for Jewish refugees in Kupari (near Dubrovnik), Kraljevica (near Rijeka), the Island of Rab and other places. The Italians extended humane treatment to Jews in all their camps.

#### **5 Anti-Jewish laws in Croatia**

Nuremberg-style laws were enacted in April 1941, followed by the removal of Jews from all public posts and the introduction of the yellow star. Soon all Jewish-owned real estates, as well as all other valuables in Jewish possession were expropriated.

Synagogues, cultural institutions, and even Jewish cemeteries were destroyed by the Ustashas. After May 1941 a number of concentration camps were established in Jasenovac, Drinja, Danica, Loborgrad, and Djakovo. In Jasenovac, which was the largest Croatian concentration camp, tens of thousands of people, including 20,000 Jews, were murdered during the 4 years of the existence of the Independent State of Croatia.

#### **6 Tito, Josip Broz (1892-1980)**

President of communist Yugoslavia from 1953 until his death. He organized the Yugoslav Communist Party in 1937 and became the leader of the Yugoslav partisan movement after 1941. He liberated most of Yugoslavia with his partisans, including Belgrade, made territorial gains (Fiume and the previously Italian Istria).

In March 1945 he became the head of the new federal Yugoslav government. He nationalized industry but did not enforce the Soviet-style collective farming system. On the political plane, he oppressed and executed his political opposition.

Although Yugoslavia was closely associated with the USSR, Tito often pursued independent policies. He accepted western loans to stabilize national economy, and gradually relaxed many of

the regime's strict controls. As a result, Yugoslavia became the most liberal communist country in Europe.

After Tito's death in 1980 ethnic tensions resurfaced, bringing about the brutal breakup of the federal state in the 1990s.

## **7 SKOJ (Alliance of the Communist Youth Yugoslavia)**

The organization was established in Zagreb in 1919 and was closely tied to the Yugoslav Communist Party. During World War II many of its members were imprisoned, others joined Tito's partisans and participated in the anti-fascist resistance.

## **8 Italian capitulation**

After Italy capitulated in 1943 Yugoslav partisan units took part in the disarmament of Italian troops in Slovenia, Dalmatia, Herzegovina, Montenegro and Macedonia. After the capitulation the partisans occupied previously Italian territories, Istria and the cities of Fiume (Rijeka today) and Trieste.

They also regained the Italian-occupied Yugoslav territories in Slovenia, most of the Adriatic litoral, as well as parts of Montenegro and Macedonia. Many Italian soldiers joined the Yugoslav partisans and created an independent division called Giuseppe Garibaldi.

## **9 Italian internment camps**

After the creation of the Independent State of Croatia, a fascist puppet state which also included Bosnia and Herzegovina, an increasing number of Jews tried to find refuge on Italian- controlled territory. In 1941 and 1942 Italy created several interment camps for Jews on Adriatic islands and the costal litoral, which it had seized from Yugoslavia in April 1941.

The Italians refused the demands by Croatian fascists to send back Jewish refugees but interned them in 'concentration camps for war civilians' instead to protect them from the Croatians and the Germans. The main camps were on the islands of Korcula, Brac, Hvar and Lopud and in the villages of Gruz and Kupari.