

# Elvira Kohn

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Zagreb

Croatia

Interviewer: Lea Siljak

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*Elvira Kohn is a tiny and very lively 89-year-old woman who vividly remembers details from her young days.*

*She recalls and tells stories passionately and with humor. Elvira is very modest and self-effacing in her accomplishments.*

*Once a professional photographer and an active photo-reporter, Elvira is retired today and lives alone in her quiet apartment in central Zagreb.*

*There are many Jewish accessories present in her apartment, of which Elvira is particularly fond and proud.*

*Even though her apartment is small and modest, it gives off warm feelings.*

*Ms. Kohn died in August 2003.*

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## • **My family background**

I don't know where my paternal great-grandparents came from. According to my surname Kohn - a German surname - I assume that they probably came from Germany and settled in what today is Croatia.

I don't know much about my paternal grandparents either. They moved a lot around the towns in Eastern Slavonia and finally settled and lived in the small town of Golinci, near Osijek. My grandfather, Ignatz Kohn, born in 1859, was a storekeeper; he sold groceries and textiles and cloths in his store in Golinci.

My grandmother, Berta Kohn, nee Deutsch, born in 1865, was a housewife. They died young at the age of 56 and 51 respectively, and I don't remember them. I was still a small child when they died.



The whole Kohn family, the paternal side of my family, lived in East Slavonia: in Osijek, Petrijevci, Donji Miholjac, Belisce and the towns around. The Kohn family was a large family: my father had two brothers and three sisters. The two brothers, Sandor Kohn and Emil Kohn, left Golinci to live in the larger town of Podravski Podgajci.

In Podravski Podgajci, Emil, my father's oldest brother, had a grocery, a butcher's shop and an inn. The butcher's shop wasn't a kosher shop; it was a regular shop that sold non-kosher meat. He was a well-off and prosperous man, but not very rich. Although I don't know much about the paternal side of my family, I know that they weren't religious.

They didn't follow the kashrut, but they fasted on Yom Kippur and celebrated Rosh Hashanah. That was about it. When I was very young, I used to visit them during school vacation. I remember I always had a very nice time with my father's family, although I don't remember much any more. Sandor never married, but Emil had a family: he and his wife adopted a girl from Zagreb, but I don't remember her name.

My father's oldest sister, Malvina Kohn, died before World War II. The second sister Olga Cvjeticanin, nee Kohn, married a non-Jewish man, an Eastern Orthodox Serb named Jovan Cvjeticanin and lived in Belgrade. Nobody in the family was against the fact that Olga married a non-Jew. There was never any argument. Everyone in the family loved Jovan very much. The third sister, Elza Fischer, nee Kohn, lived in Donji Miholjac. Elza was married to Ignatz Fischer from Brcko; they had no children.

The two brothers, Sandor and Emil, Emil's family and Elza and her husband were taken to Auschwitz and murdered. Olga survived in Belgrade. Because she married a non-Jew, she converted to his religion and became Eastern Orthodox. No one in the family opposed. Jovan's father was an Eastern Orthodox priest and he was the one who baptized Olga.

I remember that someone once told me the following anecdote: Jovan's father, while baptizing Olga told her, 'Even though you are now accepting another man's faith, never forget who and what you really are.' Olga survived because she converted. She died in Belgrade around 1990. She had no children.

My father, Bernard Kohn, was born in 1887 in Koska, near Nasice. He was a salesman and met my mother in Vinkovci. For a short time, my parents lived in Vienna, Austria, where my brother Aleksandar was born in 1912. I think they lived in Vienna because of the nature of my father's work. He was a salesman and a manager in a firm that dealt with the production of textiles. From Vienna they moved to Rijeka, again because of his work, where I was born in 1914, just when World War I started.

In the war, my father was an Austro-Hungarian soldier [in the KuK army] [1](#) and was imprisoned by the Serbs in Nis in 1915. In the place where he was captured, there were many typhus patients and my father was also infected with typhus. He died in 1915 in Nis and was buried there. I was only one year old when my father died and I practically never met him. All I know about my father is from the stories that my mother told me and from a few pictures that I still have.

After my father died in 1915, my maternal grandfather, Leopold Klein, came to Rijeka to take my mother, my brother Aleksandar and me to his house in Vinkovci. I remember my maternal

grandparents much better than the paternal ones because my mother, my brother and I lived with them in their house in Vinkovci, and with them I spent my childhood.

My grandfather was born in Ruma in 1872. I don't know how his family came to Ruma. My grandfather had a brother, Matijas Klein, who lived in Vukovar, and a sister whose name I don't recall. I only remember that she was married to a man named Soper and lived with him in Vienna.

They had one son, Alojz Soper, but I don't know anything else about them. My grandmother, Rozalija Klein, nee Weiss, was born in Velika Kopanica in 1877, and the Weiss family lived in Slavonski Brod and the towns around. I don't know how my grandparents met, but after they married, they eventually came to live in Vinkovci, and they stayed there until they were taken to Stara Gradiska [2](#) in 1942.

My maternal grandparents had five children: my mother, her two sisters and two brothers. The two brothers, Samuel and Dragutin Klein, were taken to Jasenovac [3](#) in 1942 and murdered. The older one, Samuel, had two sons: Mirko and Vlado.

Vlado died of some illness in Vinkovci before the war, and Mirko was murdered in Jasenovac when he was 15 years old.

The other brother, Dragutin, married a Catholic woman and they had one son, Mirko. Even though Mirko was from a mixed marriage and it was said that children from mixed marriages would be spared, he was nevertheless taken to Jasenovac in 1942 and murdered.

One of my mother's sisters, Adela Klein, left her hometown Vinkovci in 1929 and went to live in Brazil. One of her childhood friends had moved to Brazil before her, contacted Adela from there, and suggested that she should also come.

There, Adela married a German Jew named Erich Stiel and had a daughter, Estera, with him. Because she lived in Brazil, Adela never experienced the war tragedies directly. Adela came to visit me in Zagreb twice after the war, and one time she came with Estera. I kept in touch with Adela on a regular basis and we were always in very good relations until her death in 1983.

Her daughter Estera is still alive and lives in Sao Paolo, Brazil. Estera has two sons but is divorced.

The other sister, Tereza Klein, married a Jew named Marko Ruzic; Marko was murdered in Jasenovac in 1942. They had two daughters: Zlata and Zdenka. Zlata moved to Dubrovnik before the war started and worked as a hairdresser. During the war, she was taken to the camp Feramonti in Italy but she survived.

After the war, Zlata went to live in Israel where she stayed until her death five years ago. Zdenka was married to a Jew who was murdered in Jasenovac.

She was taken with my grandparents and her mother Tereza to Stara Gradiska in 1942. Zdenka was pregnant when they arrived in the camp. When Ustasha [4](#) men saw that she was pregnant, they killed her, opened her womb, took the child out and put stones inside. I don't know who told me this but unfortunately someone always stays alive to tell the truth.

My grandfather Leopold had a store in Vinkovci. It was a grocery where you could get sugar, flour, bread, milk, and other food products. It wasn't a very large store, but it had a variety of food

products, and household goods were sold there, too.

My grandfather completed some kind of vocational school; it was obligatory to finish that kind of school in order to obtain a permit to open a grocery. My grandfather himself worked in the store and there was one employee. The store was open on Saturdays but my grandfather didn't work on Saturdays since he always went to the synagogue then. It was always the other worker, a non-Jew, who worked in the store on Saturdays.

My grandfather was a big joker, and I think I inherited that from him. He was always in a good mood, always smiling and happy, just like I am. He was very interested in stars and astronomy, and was very curious how stars and the sun evolved.

I remember he had this one book, very old and already yellow, written by some prophet about what will happen. It was some kind of prophetic book, not Jewish I think, but still he was preoccupied with what was written in there. He gathered us children and read out loud from the book. I don't remember what was written in this book, but I remember that my grandfather was very much preoccupied with astronomy, which interested him very much.

Grandmother Rozalija completed the obligatory elementary school and was literate, but she was a housewife. At that time, it was usual for a woman to be a housewife and not to work. My grandmother was a hard-working woman, a provident and caring housewife, a mother and a grandmother, and an excellent cook. She was a kind and gentle woman.

### • **Growing up**

My mother Gizela Kohn, nee Klein, was born in Vinkovci in 1892. She was a wonderful woman. She was always smiling, even though she had a very tough life, and everyone loved her for her smiles. My mother was a tall, slim, dark-skinned, brown-haired, beautiful woman.

Although she was a housewife, she worked in a small shop close to the railway station in Vinkovci for a while, where she sold newspapers, candies and similar things. But she didn't work there for long. She mostly helped my grandmother around the house and took care of my brother and me. My mother lost her husband when she was still a young woman with two small children.

She was a wonderful mother to us, caring and supportive, always understanding and loving. After her husband, my father, died, my mother had to face yet another tragedy in her life. In addition to losing her husband, she also lost her son.

My older brother Aleksandar completed a trade academy in Osijek. My father's sister Olga Cvjeticanin, married and living in Belgrade, had no children. She and her husband loved my brother very much and they invited him to come and live in Belgrade.

They helped him find a job as an accountant with a British company called Konac in Belgrade. After the first month of probation, my brother was accepted to work in the company full time, as they were very satisfied with his work. He received his first salary and sent 100 dinars to my mother. Very shortly after that, my brother had an accident and died.

A young boy, riding on a bicycle, ran into my brother and knocked him down. My brother fell, hit the curbstone with his head, and died. That was in 1937. It was a terrible shock for the whole

family. He was buried in Belgrade in a Jewish cemetery. Although this was a tragedy, I know where his grave is today; had he lived a little longer, the Germans would have killed him and I wouldn't know.

In Vinkovci we first lived in a house close to the railway station on Kolodvorska Street. When World War I was over in 1918, I was only four years old. Because Vinkovci had a large railway station, many trains passed through the town and the soldiers returned to their home.

The war was over and the soldiers fired shots in the air: they were celebrating the victory. I remember standing by the window with my mother and looking out at the soldiers. As we were looking, I told her, 'They are not going to do anything to us because they know we don't have a daddy.' I remember this so well, I even now hear myself saying it! I was only four years old but I always lived with the awareness that I didn't have a father.

After Kolodvorska Street, we moved to Daniciceva Street, and then to King Aleksandar Street, that was the name then, I don't know what it's called today. We lived in a one-story house with three rooms, a kitchen and a bathroom. We didn't have running water but we had a well in our backyard. Vinkovci had a gas plant, so we had gas and not electricity. We used it for heating and cooking. Apart from a few fruit-trees and a small garden, we didn't have anything else in the backyard.

My grandfather wanted us to speak German in the house since that was his mother tongue. My grandmother spoke Croatian with us and he was displeased when we spoke Croatian and didn't speak German. However, we mostly spoke Croatian in the house. For Jewish expressions we used the Yiddish pronunciation; for example, we said Shabos [Sabbath] barhes [challah], matzos [matzah].

In our house in Vinkovci where I lived with my grandparents, my brother and my mother, the family respected Jewish customs and traditions. We weren't very religious, but there were certain elements of the Jewish religion and traditions that we respected. There was no pork in the house; that was strictly forbidden. We never had pork.

Otherwise, the meat we ate wasn't kosher; at least I don't think it was slaughtered according to the strict kashrut rules. My grandmother and mother cooked on Friday for Saturday so we didn't cook on Saturday. They prepared challah for Friday night and for Saturday. We lit candles Friday night and had a festive meal, usually fish, chicken soup and chicken. We had red wine.

On Saturday, we always ate cholent, which was prepared the day before. Most of the food was kept in the well in the backyard because otherwise it would have gone bad. We had a young servant girl named Ivka from Brcko who didn't live with us, but occasionally came to help my mother and my grandmother. She wasn't Jewish so she mostly helped us on Fridays and Saturdays. For example, on Saturday she went to the well where the cholent was kept, brought it in and heated it up for us for lunch.

We also lit candles on Chanukkah. For Pesach, we ate matzot, and I remember that my grandmother made delicious matzot cake. We had a seder dinner. Of course, we celebrated all the holidays, like Rosh Hashanah, and we always had a nice lunch or dinner. We fasted on Yom Kippur. It was more of a tradition than strict religion in my family. Like it is said: the customs have kept Judaism, and not the prayers.

There were many young boys who were in the army in Vinkovci since there was an army base there. It was a custom that Jewish families invited Jewish soldiers for a meal to their home on Rosh Hashanah or seder or some other holidays.

The Jewish community in Vinkovci sent a letter to the army base informing them that on a certain date it was a Jewish holiday and kindly asking for permission for Jewish soldiers to leave the base that day. There was a list of all the Jewish families who invited soldiers to join them for holidays. Not every Jewish family invited soldiers, only the ones who wanted. My family always had soldiers over for lunch or dinner on Rosh Hashanah and other holidays.

There was a large and beautiful synagogue in Vinkovci. We called it the temple. Men and women sat separately: men downstairs and women up on the balcony. Downstairs in the middle, there was the bimah where the rabbi stood, and in front of the bimah there was a built-in closet and inside were the scrolls of the Torah.

The synagogue was full with people. Jews came to pray on Saturdays and holidays. My family went to the synagogue on every holiday. We went to the synagogue more often on Saturday mornings than on Friday evenings. When they were in the synagogue, my grandparents covered their heads.

My grandfather wore a small cap on his head. My grandmother had a black scarf made of lace that she just wrapped over her head. Otherwise, they didn't cover their heads, only during the services in the synagogue.

In Vinkovci, there was one rabbi and one cantor. Somehow I don't remember the cantor that well. The rabbi was called Dr. Frankfurter. He had a large beard. I heard that when the Germans came to Vinkovci, they tied his beard and put a large red ribbon on it. Then they gave him a broom and made him clean the streets. I'm not sure if there was a kosher store in Vinkovci that sold kosher food; I don't remember. But there was one man who slaughtered the meat according to the kashrut rules. He went to people's houses whenever somebody needed him and slaughtered chickens and poultry. I don't think there was a mikveh in Vinkovci.

I attended public school, the regular elementary and high school in Vinkovci. There was no Jewish school. There were pupils of all kinds of religions and nationalities in this school and my friends were Jews and non-Jews alike. In my class in particular, there were 30 pupils, of which 13 were Jews, around 10 Eastern Orthodox because there were many Serb villages around Vinkovci, and the rest were Catholics and maybe some Evangelic.

Although there was no Jewish school, there was Jewish religious instruction, which was obligatory. Every Sunday we had religious classes and received grades; it was part of the school curriculum. We had a religious instructor whose name was Pollak. He taught us Hebrew, the Talmud, the Torah, some Jewish history and traditions.

On Saturdays we didn't have to attend classes in school, but we had to go to the synagogue. We also had to obtain a written statement signed by Rabbi Frankfurter saying that we were at the service on Saturday morning, and we had to bring this statement to school. It was like a confirmation that we were in the synagogue instead of being in class.

There was a Jewish community in Vinkovci and in general there was a rich and lively Jewish life. We celebrated Chanukkah and Purim together and had parties on holidays. Those took place in the

cultural center in Vinkovci, not in the community building.

I assume that there wasn't enough space in the community building for such celebrations because a lot of people came to celebrate. The Jews were the ones who organized and participated in the celebrations, of course. We gave performances on Chanukkah and Purim. It was customary to dress up and put on masks for Purim. We danced, sang Jewish songs and socialized with other Jews, our friends, and always had a good time.

Within the Jewish community there was also a Jewish Youth Club and I was a member. We used to meet in the community building and talked, learned some Hebrew and some Jewish history, exchanged knowledge and ideas, or just spent time together. Sometimes we had visits from the youth of the Jewish Community Vukovar or from other Jewish communities, or we went to visit them.

Then we interacted with our fellow Jews and spoke about Jewish life in other places. That was always interesting and I enjoyed meeting with Jews from other places. We had many lectures and discussions on ideas about creating a Jewish state. I suppose that we were Zionist-oriented and nurtured the Zionist ideology. There were no summer camps, not that I remember, but we organized inter-town visits and exchange.

In Vinkovci, I completed the public elementary school, four grades of public high school and after that I learned photography in a private photographer's shop called Seiler. In this photo studio, I learned the trade and became a qualified photographer. I was very much interested in photography and I learned to love this art form very much.

At the beginning, of course, I only worked in the photo studio but with time I became less interested in taking static pictures and telling people to turn left, right, smile, and so on. After I learned the profession and gained experience. I wanted to become a photo-reporter. I wanted to work outside the studio, take photographs of events and people.

Many traders and photographers came to the Seiler photo studio where I worked, and once one of them asked me if I would be interested in working in a photo studio in Dubrovnik. He said that they needed someone with my qualifications and that I could work as a photo-reporter.

I left for Dubrovnik in 1932. At first I lived alone but later I found a bigger apartment and settled in, and my mother came from Vinkovci to live with me. In Dubrovnik my mother didn't work. She wasn't employed anywhere. She took care of our house and of me. Apart from my work, I didn't have to take care of anything because my mother was there.

I worked in a photo shop called Jadran, which was on the corner of Zudioska Street where the synagogue in Dubrovnik was and still is today. The owners weren't Jewish. The name of the owner was Miho Ercegovic, and his son was called Velimir Ercegovic. Within the shop, there were three sections: a book store, a stationary and a photo studio.

I worked in the photo studio. My main duties were to take photos of various daily events that were taking place in Dubrovnik and its surroundings: cultural happenings, political events, events related to the church, such as mass, baptism, or other church-related events.

Sometimes people asked me to take photos of their children at birthday parties, or when a child was born. I always liked taking photos of children. Sometimes I took photos for newspapers and journalists wrote a story related to the photo. I never wrote for newspapers, I only took photos.

I recall well one event in Dubrovnik: in April 1942, the NDH was proclaimed an Independent State of Croatia [5](#). On this occasion, a great ceremony and celebration took place in Dubrovnik. All the high-ranking officials of the NDH came to Dubrovnik and requested that this ceremony be photographed.

Apart from me, there were two more men in Dubrovnik who worked as photo-reporters; however, that day they were already busy working elsewhere. By then Jews already had to wear a badge. Everywhere else in Croatia, Jews had to wear a yellow star but in Dubrovnik we wore on the left side of the chest a brass-like yellow badge within which was the black letter 'Z' [Zidov=Jew].

My boss told the officials that other photo-reporters were busy but that signorina [Italian for Miss] Elvira - that's how they used to call me in Dubrovnik - was available to take photos. 'If you don't mind that is. You know, she is Jewish', my boss said to them, and they replied that they didn't mind as long as the whole event was photographed.

The main ceremony took place in front of St. Vlaho church, and all the officials stood on the stairs of the church. Professor Kastelan and his sister were among the officials and many other functionaries and deeply religious Catholics. The ceremony began and I started to take photos. I had a Leica then. I stood there and took photos with my Leica on one side and the badge on the other.

After a short while, I noticed that the sister of this Professor Kastelan whispered something into his ear and they both looked at me. They stared at me for some time, and, as I noticed this, I slowly started to move back towards the crowd.

I wanted this to be unnoticed, and I moved slowly and disappeared into the crowd. Soon the sister came down the stairs, walked through the crowd, came straight up to me and asked me to stop taking photos immediately. At her request, I stopped and left the event.

I told my boss everything about it. He put the already-taken photos aside and never published them in the newspapers. A few days later, some of the NDH officials came to the studio to collect a few of the photos that I had taken and to ask why the photos weren't in the newspapers. Velimir, the son of the owner, told them that it was impossible. He explained that the shopkeepers had destroyed all the films since signorina Elvira was ordered to stop taking photos and that they believed that it was forbidden to develop even the few photos that signorina Elvira managed to take. The NDH officials were furious, of course, but there was nothing they could do. Those photos were never developed.

In general, I have great respect for the citizens of Dubrovnik in how they treated the Jews during the war. They were very fair to us. I never hid the fact that I was Jewish. There's a well-known Croatian actress from Dubrovnik whose name is Marija Kohn.

Her father married a Catholic woman and converted to Catholicism but didn't change his name. For this reason, the name Kohn was well known in Dubrovnik and when someone heard that my name was Kohn, they automatically considered me a Catholic as well. I always emphasized that I was



Jewish though.

There was a Jewish community and a synagogue on Zudioska Street. I think there were about one hundred Jews in Dubrovnik. I didn't take part in the life of the community that much. I always attended the services and celebrations on main holidays but that was about it. It was a Sephardi community.

Dubrovnik was a small town and everyone intermingled; I didn't feel that I needed to be part of the community life. I felt Jewish, declared myself Jewish, had Jewish friends but didn't feel that I had to do more. On Saturdays I worked so I didn't go to the synagogue but sometimes I went to the services Friday night. My mother was more involved in the community life because she had more free time. She was very friendly with other Jewish women and they often visited one another.

I had many friends both Jewish and non-Jewish. It was a small town and we all knew each other. I don't know how I drew people towards me, but I had many friends and they all liked me.

When I arrived in Dubrovnik it was January or February 1932, a season when less foreign people come, and whoever comes is noticed. And so was I noticed. I met one nice young man who worked in the photo studio. He introduced me to a few people, who then introduced me to a few more, and so it goes.

My good friend was Mara; she was from Dubrovnik and she worked in the book store that was part of the shop where I worked. She wasn't Jewish but she was a very good young woman. Many people were very good and very kind to me.

### • **During the War**

I didn't feel much anti-Semitism in Dubrovnik before the war. Perhaps right before the war started, anti-Semitism was felt more individually than collectively. My boss, Miho Ercegovic, had one partner named Gesel. This Mr. Gesel told my boss that he must fire whoever was Jewish. He knew I was Jewish.

So my boss, who was very inclined to me, had to fire me but he did so only officially so that he wouldn't get into trouble. He still let me work 'unofficially' for him and I continued to do my job and take photos and that way I could earn my living. This was just when the NDH was proclaimed a state and the Ustashas came to power.

We were forced to wear a badge since the NDH was proclaimed in 1942. There were other discriminating laws implemented against Jews: in addition to wearing the badge, we were forbidden to work in state and public services, and we were deprived of the freedom of passage. We were allowed to go to the beach or to the market only until a certain time of the day; a curfew was imposed on us.

In Dubrovnik, the state power was in the hands of the Croats, i.e. of the Ustashas, and the military power was in the hands of the Italians. It was our luck that the Italians were in power there. The Germans, in collaboration with the Ustashas, tried to take us to their concentration camps, but the Italians made clear to them that they were in power in Dubrovnik and that it was Italian right to do what they wanted to do with us. And because the military power was greater than the state power,

we were, in a way, put under the protection of the Italians.

The Jewish community informed all the Jews living in Dubrovnik, the Jews who by accident happened to be there, and the Jews who came to Dubrovnik to run away or hide, that on a certain day in November 1942 we would be taken away and that we could take with us what we thought was necessary. I was with my mother. We were taken aboard a large Italian passenger ship and many people of Dubrovnik came to see us off.

Among them was my boss Miho Ercegovic. When I saw him, I approached him and returned his camera. And he said, 'No, you keep it, and whatever happens will be captured on film.' We were first taken to the hotel Vrek in Gruz, a few kilometers from Dubrovnik. There we stayed for two months and at the beginning of January 1943 we were taken to Kupari. There were around 1200 Jews.

Kupari is about twelve kilometers from Dubrovnik and there we were interned in a Czech hotel that was situated on the seaside. It was a large hotel that was delimited with wire. We were only allowed to walk within the wired fence. The Italian soldiers were all over; there were also Italian guards who kept their eyes on us all the time.

They didn't allow us to go beyond the fence or to the coast because they thought that someone might swim away. So we had to stay inside the hotel or walk just a little bit around it. We received food but I rather not recall that: it was dried vegetables in oil and a piece of bread.

Then we had to cut this piece of bread in three parts, one for breakfast, the second for lunch, and the third for dinner. A friend of mine from Zagreb sent me a package with some food; we were allowed to receive one package per month. But even the food she sent me had to be dry so that it could be preserved.

In May 1943, when the internment camp on Rab [6](#) was built, we were transferred from Kupari to the Island of Rab. There were no religious or observant inmates and no one observed any Jewish traditions or laws. At least I don't remember anyone doing so.

The Island of Rab was also under Italian rule. There were two camps: one for Slovenes and the other for Jews. Slovenes were imprisoned by the Italians just like we were. The two camps were strictly separated and no communication or contact between the two camps could take place.

There was one man, a Slovene, who was an electrician and who was ordered to fix some electric failures or something similar in our camp. He was the only one from the Slovene camp that we had some contact with but even that was very rare and limited since the Italians kept their eyes on him while he carried out his duty.

The Jewish camp, called Kapor, was divided into two camps: the Dubrovnik camp, where I was with my mother and other Jews from Dubrovnik, and the Kraljevica camp. Jews who managed to run away from Zagreb, Karlovac, and the surroundings arrived in Crikvenica and were interned by Italians in Kraljevica, just a few kilometers away from Crikvenica.

After a while, they were transferred from Kraljevica to Rab and were interned in the camp next to ours. The two camps, Dubrovnik and Kraljevica camp, were separated and each was enclosed with a wired fence. We were allowed to meet with Jews from Kraljevica camp during the day but only

from 12 noon to 2pm, during the hottest time of the day.

At other times, it was strictly forbidden to meet. There were cases of parents being in one camp and their children in the other, depending on who was where when the war started, and at least they could meet for a short time during the day. I was lucky that I was with my mother.

There were around 1200 Jews in Dubrovnik camp and perhaps the same number or maybe a bit more in Kraljevica camp. We were accommodated in the barracks; in Kraljevica camp, there were wooden barracks, and in Dubrovnik camp they were made out of bricks.

The barracks were long and somewhat narrow. There were some 30 people in one barrack. The beds were bunk-beds: one person sleeping on the top and one on the bottom. The beds were one next to the other, on both sides of the barrack.

The toilets were outside, far away; to go to the toilet was like going on an excursion. The toilets were in one place and everyone from our camp used the same facilities, but there were a few toilet bowls, not just one. There was water in the camp, but for some weeks the central unit that supplied water was broken so cisterns with water were delivered to the camp. We received one liter of water per person per day, and that had to be enough for drinking and for personal hygiene.

We got a small amount of food which wasn't enough to keep us for the whole day. It was also disgusting. For breakfast, we got coffee that wasn't real coffee but some mishmash that tasted awful, and a piece of bread for the whole day. That piece we divided into three parts so that we also had a little piece for lunch and a little piece for dinner.

For lunch, we were given some soup, dried vegetables brewed up with old and foul-smelling oil, or pasta with oil. Pasta was usually served for dinner; thick black macaroni with oil. Even today, when I see someone pour oil over his food, I feel disgusted. Sometimes we were served goulash with meat and potatoes, but only small amounts of meat.

Every one of us had his turn to work in the kitchen; it was like a duty call, an obligatory call, perhaps once or twice in a week. We only helped around the kitchen to prepare the food, but the cooks cooked; we didn't. I remember once it was my turn to work in the kitchen and that day goulash with potatoes was served. The soldiers brought large baskets filled with already cooked potatoes and we were supposed to peel off the skin.

When the soldiers came to collect the potatoes, they looked inside the basket, then looked at us and asked: dove sono gli patate? [Italian: where are the potatoes] They gave us cooked potatoes to peel, and of course we ate more than half of the amount, who wouldn't have? We were hungry! The soldiers were very upset and from then on they always gave us raw potatoes to peel, and it was impossible to eat raw potatoes.

We usually woke up around 6 or 6.30 in the morning. The breakfast was brought to our barracks by the soldiers at 7am and by then we already had to be up and ready for breakfast, that is that horrible coffee and a piece of bread.

After breakfast, we each had our obligations that had to be fulfilled during the day. In the camp, everyone had to work or do something else during the day. The Italians weren't forcing us to work in a particular place; we could choose where we wanted to work. It looked as if it was voluntary

work whereas we were actually forced to do something, it was just the place that we could choose. But sometimes even the place of work was determined.

There was something like a tailor's place where women who wanted to work there went. Buttons fell off from soldiers' uniforms or other things like that, so women went to do these jobs. Whoever worked there would be given an extra portion of food; this was like voluntary work, we weren't forced to do that.

Out of pure spite, I refused to sew buttons on soldiers' uniforms and never went to work there. Then, the Italians always built some roads and men usually went to dig and build these roads. That was hard physical labor. Men who worked there were also given an extra portion of food.

There was also a medical clinic in the camp, and usually the imprisoned Jews who were doctors worked there. In addition, there was a school for small children to teach them how to read and write so that they wouldn't remain illiterate. The inmates who were teachers worked there and taught children the basics in language and mathematics, the elementary things. The Italians allowed this.

I worked in the hospital. On the coastal side, in the town of Rab, which was four to five kilometers from the Kapor camp, there was the Hotel Imperial, which served as a hospital. Whoever wanted to work in the hospital could do so, and I volunteered. Every morning, Italian soldiers took a few of us on the truck to the hospital and brought us back in the afternoon.

We usually helped nurses in sterilizing bandages and preparing medical utensils. The patients who were treated in this hospital were the inmates from the Kapor camp. My mother sometimes worked in the tailors' place but most of the times she helped in the kitchen.

Lunch was served between 12 noon and 2pm. We had to go to the kitchen to collect our portion of food and then return to the barrack to eat there. During that time, we were also allowed to meet with the Jews from Kraljevica camp. We usually had the afternoons off. Depending on the nature of the work, sometimes someone had to work in the afternoon as well, but usually we had time off. Sometimes the Italians took us to the beach; they allowed us to go swimming.

They allowed 20 or 25 people to go to the beach, so we rotated. If more people went, it would have been more difficult for them to keep their eyes on us, so only 20 or 25 went at a time. It was around one or two kilometers to the beach and we walked. The Italians watched over us and guarded us very strictly and rigorously.

It was one of the Italian specialties to count us; they counted us again and again. We always had to line up and they counted and counted, before we left, while we were walking, while we were on the beach, when we walked back; they permanently counted us!

After we came back from the beach, we had off until 9pm. We usually walked around, many of us knew each other from before or we became friendly during our imprisonment so we walked and talked. At 9pm, the lights went off and we had to be in our beds in the barracks. The barracks weren't locked during the night.

The guards guarded them and walked around the camp during the night so that no one would even try to escape. It was very hot in the barracks especially during the night but the worst were the

bedbugs. Our barracks were full of them and they drove us crazy. Those bugs bite and are very annoying so it was difficult to sleep at night.

Today people say that the Italians didn't really kill anyone directly in the camp. My answer to that is: the Italians did and didn't kill in the camp. They killed indirectly. They killed by forcing us to work, by giving us small amounts of food, by giving us orders, by treating us like a lower race. They were cruel.

Often the inmates who had small children were given half a liter of milk for a child. The commandant of the camp who was among the worst, saw a mother with her child in one hand and a bottle of milk in the other, approached the mother, took the bottle from her and spilled the milk. They were cruel in these ways: starving us, mistreating us, scaring us, forcing us to work.

Throughout the whole time of our imprisonment in the camp, I had my camera with me. I managed to hide it when we arrived in the camp even though we had to submit all of our belongings to a detailed search. But, apart from the initial search, I had to continue to hide the camera because the Italians searched our barracks almost every day.

We, the inmates, figured out the system although it was very risky. We informed each other when and where the search began so if the search began in barrack number 1 that meant that barrack number 1 was clear.

One of the informers ran to let the others know, who then let me know, and then I sent the camera through others to barrack number 1 that had already been checked. So my camera was always in a different place and the Italians never found it, thanks to good communications and good relations among the inmates.

I didn't take any photos during our imprisonment because that would have been too dangerous. I wasn't, of course, allowed to do it and, had they caught me, I could have been in great trouble so I never even tried.

Italy capitulated on 8th September 1943 [see Italian capitulation] [7](#). The Italians were running away from the Island of Rab by boats; some managed to escape, others didn't. A group of young Jewish boys caught the main commandant of the Kapor camp and forced him to return to the camp.

I don't know his name; we used to call him colonello [Italian for commandant]. Since Crikvenica was already liberated, there was a military court there, so the Jewish boys wanted to take colonello to court. On the way there, colonello somehow found a razor blade and slashed his wrists. The boys then took him back to the Island of Rab and buried him, not in the cemetery as such, but in front of the cemetery.

When the partisans arrived from Crikvenica on the Island of Rab, whoever wanted to join the partisans could join them. A group of young Jewish boys registered and was sent to Korski Kotar. Most of them didn't know how to use weapons so many of them lost their lives soon after they were liberated from Rab.

I immediately decided to join the partisans. They asked every one of us individually what we wanted, where we wanted to go, which brigade we want to join, what our profession was. I told them I was a professional photographer, and that I had a camera, that I had a Leica.

They were very surprised to hear this, and very glad, so they invited me to join the advertising and public-relations department of ZAVNOH [8](#), which was situated in Otocac at the time. They asked about my mother and what her profession was. So I said she was a housewife, and they replied that she should also come because we would need her around the kitchen. And so we left the Island of Rab; most of the inmates from the camp decided to join the partisans.

We got aboard a large boat that had both motors and sails, and arrived in Senj. Senj was completely bombed and destroyed, the whole town except for a church. We stayed in the church for several nights and slept on the wooden church benches. From Senj, we left on ox-drawn carts across Velebit and reached Otocac. For a while we stayed there. My mother worked in the kitchen, and I was part of the public-relations department of ZAVNOH. Apart from this department, there were other departments, like the educational, cultural, technological one and others.

My job was to take photos of various events that took place within ZAVNOH. They had board meetings, conferences, workshops, exhibitions, concerts; all kinds of events were taking place. It was like a government so many activities were going on, and I had to take photos of all the events. All the high-ranking officials of the government were there.

Within the complex of ZAVNOH was also a hospital and a pharmacy, and my mother soon joined the pharmacy. My mother and I weren't always together. Depending on our duties, we had to separate and go our own way: my mother with the pharmacy department of the hospital, and I with the government. As the government moved, I moved with them.

While I was with the partisans, I always emphasized that I was Jewish. I've never hidden the fact that I am Jewish. There was also no need; as soon as I said that I had been on the Island of Rab, it was known that I was Jewish. I said I was Jewish so that I wouldn't put anyone or myself in an uncomfortable position.

I wanted to let everyone know so that nobody would say anything against the Jews. There were other Jews with me in ZAVNOH in other departments. Some were typists, some clerks, and so on. Nobody treated us any different than the rest. There were Croats, Serbs, Slovenes, Jews. Everyone was treated equally, and the relations among us were fine. We all had a common goal: to liberate our country and bring about peace.

There was an offensive in Otocac, and we were forced to move towards Slunj. From Slunj we had to move towards Plitvice. It was snowing and the trucks could hardly move through the snow. We reached Plitvicki Leskovac, and were informed that the Germans were arriving. We managed to dig the trucks out of the snow, moved quickly and ran away.

That was at the beginning of January 1944. I remember that on 13th January 1944 we were in Glina. I particularly recall that day because it was sunny and clear, and when the days were sunny and clear, the Germans would bomb. And exactly on that day, the Germans bombed. I was inside a building, and the first thing we were told was to open all the windows. We opened the windows so that they wouldn't break and disperse in all directions. There were some kind of stairs and we hid underneath these stairs until the bombing was over.

From Glina we reached Topusko where the supreme headquarters of Croatia was, and for a while we stayed there. Maybe all together we were a hundred people that formed various departments

within the headquarters and who always moved together.

Each one of us had his duties and knew what he/she was supposed to do. I knew exactly what took place when and where, in terms of meetings, conferences, events, campaigns, and I followed the schedule. I was the only female photo-reporter within ZAVNOH. There were two other male photo-reporters, but sometimes there were called in for other duties, so there were times when I was the only photo-reporter for ZAVNOH.

After the supreme headquarters formed their own public-relations department, I started to work for them, and I stayed there until the war was over.

For a while we stayed in Topusko and were about to start the preparations for celebrating 8th March [International Women's Day]. However, we received the order to move to Zadar. Zadar was terribly bombed, but liberated, and so we were given orders to reach Zadar.

After we packed our belongings, we set out on our journey from Topusko to Zadar. In front of us was a Russian military mission, the English and the Americans, and each had flags on their trucks. And, again, the day was sunny and clear, the Germans saw the truck convoy and started bombing. When we were forming our convoy, each truck had a number; each department received a number and had to load the truck with the corresponding number.

When it came to truck number 13, nobody wanted to load it, since that's an unlucky number. In the end, the artillery department agreed to be on truck number 13, and all the artillery and guns were loaded onto it as well. Call it fate, or I don't know, but exactly that truck number 13 was bombed. All of the men who were on that truck managed to jump out, except for one man from Rijeka who didn't and was killed.

We reached Zadar, which was completely destroyed. The army barracks were still somewhat functional so we stayed there. All the buildings were demolished, the main street, the main square; all was destroyed. There wasn't a single soul in the town, everyone had run away. And I still have an image in my mind that I will never forget: an old woman sitting in front of the church, with a rosary in her hands, praying.

I approached her, looked at her and said, 'Nona [Italian for grandma], what are you doing?' And she said, 'Praying, praying, praying. Is there anyone left in this world?' I will never forget the image of that old woman sitting in front of the church and praying in this empty and destroyed town.

From Zadar, where we stayed for a considerable amount of time, we returned to Otocac. The supreme headquarters of Croatia was there, and they prepared a celebration. It was the beginning of May 1945 and, as we started walking towards the woods to where the celebration was to take place, a courier quickly approached the commandant, whispered something into his ear, and the commandant called the celebration off and we were to return to the headquarters in Otocac. Then we were told that we should pack our belongings and move towards Zagreb. We moved slowly, and reached Karlovac.

There was a rumor, which the Ustashes spread, saying that the partisans went around and killed innocent civilians. When we reached Karlovac, it seemed as if there wasn't a single soul in the town. We were very tired, hungry and thirsty, and we entered the backyard of a house that had a well, and wanted to drink water.

Suddenly, an old woman came out of the house, looked at us, approached me, and started touching my face, my hair, my arms. I asked her what she was doing, and she replied, 'I want to make sure that you, partisans, are humans made out of flesh and blood, and not savages.' After she realized that we were humans made out of flesh and blood, other locals who were hiding in the houses around came out, gave us more water and some food.

We reached Zagreb on 9th May 1945 around 5pm. We crossed the Sava bridge and arrived at the main square. The welcome was amazing. People were standing on the streets all over the city of Zagreb, waiting for us to come, clapping their hands, waving the flags. The atmosphere was magnificent, full of emotions, people were delighted and excited. Everyone knew that the war was over, that the Ustashes and the Germans had left the city, that Zagreb was liberated.

After the celebration on the main square, a group of us partisans, who had been together throughout the war, went to Zvonimirova Street, where the headquarters of Pavelic [9](#) used to be. We decided to sleep in the headquarters of Pavelic, as a statement of victory over the Ustashes. We were warned not to touch anything because there was danger that the Ustashes had left bombs and munition.

There was still a smell of smoke in the backyard of the headquarters; the Ustashes must have been burning the documents and papers just the day before when they were driven out. My first night in Zagreb, I slept on a table in Pavelic's headquarters, with an army coat and a gun underneath me.

#### • **Post-war**

My mother came to Zagreb, along with the hospital and the pharmaceuticals, three weeks after me. In the meantime, I stayed with a friend from Dubrovnik, a non-Jewess, in a house on Buliceva Street. When my mother came, I found a bigger apartment for the two of us, and we moved to Stanciceva Street. After the war, the defense and army headquarters of the JNA [10](#) was formed, and I was appointed by the supreme headquarters of Croatia to work in the newly established defense and army headquarters.

At first, I had to organize the photo laboratory, collect the necessary equipment, cameras, and so on in order for the photo department to function. I also gathered the people who worked with me, as I soon became head of the photo department. I supervised the work of others in my department but I also took photos myself. My love for photography and for capturing important and interesting moments was still very strong.

I usually attended party meetings and took photographs; there were various events that took place, like meetings or celebrations of 8th March, 1st May, 25th May [11](#) and other party celebrations or commemorations. I had to travel a lot and I was really quite busy, but I enjoyed doing my work. I was very lucky to having found a profession that I loved.

In my work, I often met JNA officials and important people; once I met Josip Broz Tito [12](#). The photos that I took were mostly published in local newspapers, such as Vjesnik and Naprijed. Often, I took photos for my own pleasure: shots of nature, the people that I loved, my friends.

I continued taking photos of small children, usually my friends' or just children that I saw on the streets. Even after I retired in 1964, I continued taking photographs privately and enjoying



photography as an art form. I donated my photographs and negatives to the Croatian History Museum, and they are still kept there today.

I never married. It is my love for photography that should be blamed for this. I was always away; I spent three days in Zagreb, then five days on a trip working, then I was in Zagreb again, then working away again. It was hard to find someone who would have tolerated this! One suitor once told me, 'You love your camera more than you love me!' True, I loved my work, and I dedicated myself and my whole heart to it.

During the communist times, I was in the JNA, I was a member of the Party. I worked and socialized with others who were in the Party; that was my life, that was my world. Today people say terrible things about communism, but it wasn't so bad after all. Maybe in certain aspects it was better than it is today; only, we aren't allowed to say that, it just doesn't sound right.

Immediately after the war, I went to the Jewish community on Palmoticeva Street to become a member. Through the community I re-established relations with my aunt Adela in Brazil and my cousin Zlata in Israel. I've never been to Brazil, but to Israel I went several times.

The first time I went in 1950 to visit Zlata. It wasn't easy to get permission to leave the country because I was among the high-ranking officers in the Party. At last, after many attempts and rejections, I spoke with one officer-general who helped me get a permission to go to Israel. I left from Rijeka on a boat, and arrived in Haifa. It was an amazing trip because there I met with Zlata and her family and I also saw many people who had been interned on Rab with me. But, I never developed any deep feelings for Israel. I was also invited to Zlata's son's bar mitzvah and I went.

Then there was her son's wedding, and I went again, and I think I visited Israel another couple of times. Had I not been in the JNA and the Party, I would have considered to move to Israel. But I was in the army, and I was very much connected to it, and I couldn't help myself. In addition, my mother wasn't so young any more, and it was a risk to go because I didn't know what kind of job I could get there. The Party never criticized me for going to Israel. Everyone always respected me because I always openly admitted that I was Jewish and never hid my origins.

Both my mother and I became members of the Jewish community. I attended celebrations for holidays, if I was in Zagreb. Because I traveled a lot, I couldn't become more active in the community. The fact that I was in the army and went to the community at the same time had no consequences. I never directly told anyone in the army that I went to the Jewish community; that was my personal and private business. If I was in Zagreb for Chanukkah or Purim, I went to the celebrations.

I took my mother to the synagogue for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and waited outside. I didn't enter because I didn't want the wrath of the Gods, so to speak. There were services for holidays that my mother always attended, and I know that there were people who went, and the people who conducted the services, but I'm not in the position to say much more about it. When I went, I mostly went to the afternoon meetings and tea parties, or to the meetings organized by the women's department.

I lived with my mother until her death in 1977. The two of us were very close, and it was difficult for me when she died. I was left alone; I had no relatives, no family of my own. I was also in a

dilemma as to how to bury my mother. It was a very difficult decision for me to make.

Many JNA officials and my co-workers came to my mother's funeral. Some gave a speech. I couldn't have a rabbi bury her in front of the party members. And I couldn't have the party members speak in front of a rabbi. The two don't go together. So at last I decided not to have a rabbi at the funeral. It wasn't easy, but there was no other choice. I wasn't allowed to have a Jewish funeral for my mother.

But I did something else. I arranged with the community that for the whole first month after my mother's death, the Kaddish was recited for her every Friday and Saturday. That was something I could do. Even though all the officials knew that I was Jewish, and that my mother was Jewish, I couldn't have both, the Party and the rabbi, at the funeral. And even though I had been retired since 1964, and my mother died in 1977, I was still in the same circle of people, shared the same spirit, and thus wasn't allowed to. That was the spirit of the time.

When the war broke out in Croatia in 1991 [see Croatian War of Independence] [13](#), I wasn't afraid for some reason. I wasn't afraid of any catastrophes and disasters. Once someone called me on the phone and said threateningly, 'What are you still doing here, why don't you go where you belong?' I replied, 'I live in my apartment! Where should I go?' And he said, 'You have lived long enough!', and hung up. That scared me and disturbed me. But he never called again. He must have found my last name in the phone book and wanted to scare me.

When Zagreb was bombed in 1991, a friend of mine who lived in Frankfurt, Germany, called me and told me I should immediately leave Zagreb and come to Frankfurt. The airport in Zagreb was already closed so I had to take a bus to Graz, Austria, and from there I took an airplane. While I was there, my neighbor from Zagreb called to say that someone had come a couple of times asking about my apartment.

Perhaps they saw that no one was there, and wanted to move in. It happened a lot that people moved into empty apartments or houses of the people, especially Serbs, who had left Croatia. And so I returned home quickly, and nobody came any more, and no one disturbed me. I was away only for a few weeks, maybe a month but not any longer.

My friends in Zagreb were Jewish and non-Jewish, even more non-Jewish than Jewish. I didn't grow up in Zagreb; my childhood and my youth days I spent in Vinkovci and Dubrovnik, so I didn't know many Jews from Zagreb.

There were a lot of Jews in Zagreb who were on Rab with me, and with them I had contacts. Most of the people I socialized with were my work colleagues, or neighbors, who weren't Jewish. What deeply affected me was that Tudjman [14](#) and his government didn't financially valorize participants of the National Liberation Army.

The government reduced material incomes that we received during the communist regime. The partisans were all of a sudden not recognized any more. And I claim that, if it hadn't been for the partisans, there wouldn't be a Croatia today. And I'm not afraid to say that.

I am Jewish and feel Jewish, and I always say that. I'm a member of the community and pay the membership fee. Nowadays I don't go to the community because I'm a bit old, and I walk slowly. I'm not religious because I wasn't brought up that way, and now I'm too old to change my life. Most

of my friends have died, but I still have dear people who care about me. And I still have memories that I cherish and that help me in my old days.

- **Glossary:**

### **1 KuK (Kaiserlich und Koeniglich) army**

The name 'Imperial and Royal' was used for the army of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, as well as for other state institutions of the Monarchy originated from the dual political system. Following the Compromise of 1867, which established the Dual Monarchy, Austrian emperor and Hungarian King Franz Joseph was the head of the state and also commander-in-chief of the army. Hence the name 'Imperial and Royal'.

### **2 Stara Gradiska**

A subcamp of Jasenovac camp, the largest and most infamous Croatian concentration camp. Women and children were deported to this camp and no less than 6,000-7,000 children were killed there.

### **3 Jasenovac**

Town on the Sava River in Croatia. The largest and most infamous Croatian concentration camp was opened there, after the creation of fascist Croatia in April 1941, and operated until the end of the war. It consisted of several subcamps in close proximity. Tens of thousands of people were murdered there, among them about 20,000 Jews.

By April 1945, only about 1,000 Serbs and Jews in Jasenovac camp were still alive. When they were crammed into a single factory building to await their death, some 600 prisoners broke the gates and attacked the Usthasa guard in a final desperate effort to escape. Only 80 people, among them 20 Jews, survived.

### **4 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.

## **5 Independent State of Croatia**

Fascist puppet state also known as NDH. It was proclaimed in April 1941 with German backing and it included most of inland Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The new state was run by the Ustasha, the Croatian fascist movement, with Ustasha leader 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.

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 Ustashes.

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 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.

## **7 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. [8](#) ZAVNOH (Anti-Fascist Council for National Liberation in Croatia): Croatian anti-fascist movement established in June 1943, comprising the Communist Party and non-communist anti-fascist parties. ZAVNOH played a major role in creating the second Yugoslav state after World War II.

## **9 Pavelic, Ante (1889-1959)**

Founder of the extreme-right Croatian separatist Ustasha movement (1929). He openly called for the creation of an independent Croatian state and was therefore forced into emigration in Italy and Germany.

After the occupation of Yugoslavia by the German, Hungarian, Italian and Bulgarian armies in April 1941, the Nazis appointed him Leader of the Independent State of Croatia. 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. After World War II Pavelic found refuge in Argentina.

## **10 JNA (Yugoslav National Army)**

Established from anti-fascist partisan units during World War II, the JNA was the strongest army in communist Eastern Europe. With a predominantly Serbian leadership, the JNA was instrumental in maintaining Serbian supremacy in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. From the end of the 1980s, the JNA played an active part in Serbian expansionist aspirations.

In the Croatian and Bosnian wars, which lasted from 1991-1995 and were the bloodiest armed conflicts in Europe after World War II, the JNA represented Serbian national interests (the inclusion of all Serbian lands into a Greater Serbia) and fought alongside Serb irregulars. After the Dayton Peace Accords in 1995, the JNA withdrew from Croatia, although the Serb irregulars continued fighting.

## **11 25th May**

'Youth Day' in Yugoslavia, commemorating the president of communist Yugoslavia, Josip Tito's birthday. The day is celebrated with a range of sport and cultural programs. [12](#) 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. [13](#) Croatian War of Independence: In 1991 Croatia declared its independence from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, with Franjo Tudjman, a former general, as president. Fighting broke out immediately with the Yugoslav National Army and the Serb irregulars in the Serb populated parts of Croatia. The UN sent in a peace-keeping force in February 1992.

This force froze the territorial status quo, which left 30% of the Croatian lands in Serbian hands, and also left as refugees many Croats who had been displaced by Serbian "ethnic cleansings". Croatia was recognized as an independent state by the European Community in January 1992, and was accepted into the United Nations.

During 1995 Croatian forces recaptured most Serb-held territories, leading approximately 300,000 Serbs to flee into Bosnia and Yugoslavia. Croatia had supported and directed Bosnian Croats when fighting broke out in neighboring Bosnia in 1992, and Croatia played a role in the negotiations for a Bosnian peace treaty, which was signed in 1995.

#### **14 Tudjman, Franjo (1922-1999)**

First president of Croatia (1991-99). He was a member of the Yugoslav partisan movement after 1941 and remained in the Yugoslav National Army after the war, where he was appointed major general in 1960.

He turned towards Croatian nationalism, lost his position at Zagreb University (1963) and was also imprisoned (1972-74 and 1981-84). In 1990 he founded the Croatian Democratic Union and became president of the new republic. He was reelected in 1992 and 1997; his rule grew to be more and more autocratic and his reelection was criticized for not being utterly democratic.