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*Dorde ALPAR*

## MY VOW TO STAY OUT OF GERMAN HANDS



**D**orde Alpar was born in Pécs, Hungary, on January 28, 1922, to Andras and Erzsebet, née Weiss. He had one brother, Oton (Gad), who emigrated to Palestine in 1939 and was one of the founders of the Gat Kibbutz. The family moved from Pécs to Belgrade in November 1922. Dorde's parents also survived the Holocaust and moved to Israel in the first Aliyah. After four years of Belgrade's quarter Palilula primary school and another four of secondary school in the Second Boys' High School, he went to

Modling, near Vienna, where he finished first year of secondary technical school and was there when the German Army occupied Austria.

On his return to Belgrade he continued his education in the secondary technical school until it was interrupted by the war when he was in fourth year. In July, 1941, he fled to Šibenik and, after the capitulation of Italy, joined the Partisans. He was demobilised in 1945 and returned to Belgrade, where he became the head of public services for the city's Second District. He subsequently took charge of the directorate for the Belgrade building and timber industry. When he declared himself in favour of the Cominform, he was dismissed and sent to the Belgrade Public Services Division and later to the Komgrap building company. He was arrested on February 22, 1949, and, after fourteen months of investigative prison and three years imprisonment on Goli Otok, was released on July 22, 1953. He was again employed

*at Komgrap, where he began as a technician on building sites, before becoming head of construction, then head of the Karaburma Sector, then technical director of the Standardbeton factory and finally chief engineer. In October, 1965, he was sent by Komgrap to open a branch in West Germany.*

*In Frankfurt he became manager of the Dikom-Bau company, where he remained until retiring on his war veteran pension on February 1, 1977.*

*He then continued to work on his own until the age of 80. He is now living in Frankfurt with his family.*

It all began at about 6.00 a.m. on Sunday, April 6, 1941. I was then nineteen years old. I was awoken by the bombing. I walked out to the terrace, heard explosions and saw the puffs of smoke from the anti-aircraft guns. Manoeuvres, I thought. I woke my father and he came to look but we didn't know what it was. We turned on the radio and heard that the Germans had made a surprise attack on Yugoslavia, with no declaration of war. It was a reprisal for the coup of March 27 and an attempt to secure themselves from the south-east. Not knowing what to do, I decided to go to the clubhouse of the Hashomer Hatzair, the left-wing Zionist youth organisation of which I was an active member, to find out what we should do. As I walked through Dalmatinska, Knez Miletina and Dušanova Streets I saw the horrendous effects of the bombing: the milkman's horse and cart blasted to pieces on the walls of buildings, demolished houses, and power lines hanging down. Although the bombing was still in progress, especially in Dorćol, I reached the *ken*, the Hashomer Hatzair clubrooms. But, and this was worst of all, there were no instructions from anyone about what to do.

Benko Demajorović and I agreed that he should go home, collect a few essentials and come to my place and we would then flee together. Our plan was to make our way to Kotor in the hope that the British Fleet would be there so we could volunteer.

I had survived the *Anschluss*. When the Germans had entered Austria I had been sixteen. I was then at a boarding school at Mödling, near Vienna, where I was in the first year of technical secondary school. Everyone knew that I was Jewish and they chased me to smear me with boot polish and spit at me, but they didn't catch me – I ran

into the infirmary and stayed there for a week until the situation calmed down. The Jewish teachers were immediately thrown out of the school. I also saw books being burnt in the school courtyard. On visits to Vienna I saw the savagery of the Germans, and the Jewish merchants in front of their shops putting up with insulting slogans, being spat at, sworn at and humiliated. I swore then that I would do anything rather than fall into the hands of the Germans.

### FLIGHT FROM BELGRADE

*(Between April 6 and May 23, 1941, I kept a diary, which I later gave to the Jewish Museum in Belgrade, together with my employment record which had been issued in Dubrovnik. What I went through in this period of less than two months can be seen in these excerpts from my diary.)*

I prepared to leave Belgrade. When Benko arrived, our next-door neighbour Đura Kraus also joined us. The three of us left the city at about 6.00 p.m. We arrived in the village of KaludERICA, but there were thousands of refugees there and we were unable to find a bed, so we slept beside a pig pen.

*April 7:* At the break of dawn we move on and are soon on the road to Ralja. We still have some of the food we brought with us, but there is nothing to be bought anywhere. At noon we arrive in the village of Vrčin, eat a little and rest, then continue on towards Ralja. At about 5.00 p.m. we arrive in Ripanj and are given beds in our own room in the house of a farmer, Jeremija Mitrović.

*April 8:* We awake refreshed after a restful sleep, eat breakfast and, in the morning, continue on towards Ralja, arriving there at about 8.30. We wait for a southbound train and, at about 1.00 p.m., set off, settled in a baggage van. At Mladenovac we are joined by eight schoolboys, who get off in Adrovci the following day. Eventually we arrive in Aleksinac. The air raid alarm sounds there on April 9 and the train sets out for Stalać. We spend the night there in a primary school.

*April 10:* In the morning we set off, tramping through the snow, for Kruševac. From there by train to Čačak and from Čačak to Prijepolje, standing on the running-board of the wagon. From

Prijepolje we catch another train to Požega, again standing outside, and freeze. Finally, a little after midnight we arrive in Sarajevo where we spend the night.

*April 11:* We go to the Sarajevo *ken* to see what we should do. There are no instructions of any kind. Some people say we should go to Mount Romanija, others want to push on to Kotor, because the English Fleet is sure to come and we can go to Palestine with them. We opt for Kotor.

*April 12:* There are four of us now, we leave Sarajevo by train at 2.15 p.m. We stop at Konjic and spend the night there. Later we learn that the train had stopped to allow a train with the royal suite to pass.

*April 13:* We push on by train. Again we spend some time at Vojno. Đura Kraus meets his parents there and, after speaking to his father, parts company with us. We arrive in Mostar where the father of my school friend Žarko Gačić has a construction company. We find him and sleep on straw in a shed in the company's yard. There are now seven of us.

*April 14:* We go back into town and discover that the railway line has been cut because of a skirmish between the Ustashas and some Communists who have been released from a nearby prison. Then the Italians bomb the town. We go back to pick up our things and discover that the house in the yard has been hit. We help clear up the rubble, then leave Mostar. Traveling in a little bus we reach Blagaj, then Nevesinje, where we sleep on the floor of a Muslim house.

*April 15:* We leave and meet the Krauses in the bus. We travel by bus to Gacko (tickets cost 42 dinars) and spend the night in a hotel.

*April 16:* We travel in army trucks from Gacko to Bileća. There we learn that Yugoslavia has capitulated. We look for transport and again find army mobile workshops which take us to Trebinje. We feel as if we are suffocating in these closed and airless vans and have to keep opening the rear door.

*April 17:* Army trucks again, but open this time: we head for Herceg Novi. We have a few officers with us. Just before Grahovo we come across Italian *bersaglieri* who are coming from the other direction on motorcycles. When the officers see them

they dump their pistols and take off their badges. We go down the serpentine and finally arrive in Herceg Novi. The Italians are already seizing power: they arrest the officers as prisoners of war. We spend the night on the stage of a SOKOL cinema.

*April 18:* We take the little railway to Zelenika. We somehow manage to get onto a train packed with sailors, some standing on the steps, some climbing onto the roof. When the train comes out of the tunnel we are all black with soot. We arrive in the port but there is not a soul in sight. Someone in our group knows that in Prčanj there is a Karmel, the holiday home of the Jewish Women's Association in Belgrade. Some of us go to find a boat to take us across, others go looking for something to eat. I am in this group. Across from the harbour we find a large steel door with a sentry box outside. We go up to it and call out, but no one answers. What have we found? It's a big army warehouse which has been abandoned by the Yugoslav Army but not yet been taken over by the Italians. We go in and find cardboard boxes full of biscuits, tins of meat, jam and other things. We also find large quantities of equipment: we take a tent, chairs, army mess kits, pots and pans. To this day I have an officer's bag and a folding leather stool from there. We take all these things to the shore, making a great heap of our rucksacks and the other things we are now carrying. Meanwhile the other group has found a two-master boat to take us across. We load everything up and set off for Prčanj. Calm sea, we pass flying boats moored at buoys and in the distance we can see warships surrounded by boats. We later learn that these ships have been abandoned and the locals are taking whatever they can lay their hands on. The day before, a captain had scuttled his warship. Finally, at 9.30 p.m., we reach the shore at Prčanj.

We unload our things, carry everything to the Karmel and prepare to sleep. There are eleven of us: Braco Alkalaj (later a doctor, lived and died in Nahariya), Marko Alkalaj (now living in Zagreb), Žarko Alkalaj (Marko's brother, also now living in Zagreb), Đorđe Alpar (now living in Frankfurt-on-Main), Jaša Almuli (now living in London), Benko Demajorović (went on to join the Partisans on Korčula and died

there), Avram Papo (died in the Gat Kibbutz), Cipora Papo (also died in the Gat Kibbutz), Finci, whose first name I don't remember and another two whose names I don't recall.

*April 19:* We can't stay at the Karmel because the Italians have requisitioned it for themselves so we move to the Czech pavilion. We get the things we need from the Karmel complex. We are busy all day moving, organising accommodation and in the kitchen.

*April 20:* Sunday. We cook for ourselves, listen to the radio, wait for the news, but there's nothing happening.

*April 21:* We go to Kotor to buy food. It's full of refugees from all sides. We see bundles of charred thousand-dinar notes and discover that the National Bank has been evacuated to Montenegro where they tried to burn the notes. We hear that Moša and his girlfriend Inge have gone to Belgrade to see how things are. We send a telegram to my house. The Italians are taking over everywhere. We return from Kotor with food.

*April 22-24:* The days pass monotonously. We go for walks and do all the usual things, go shopping, play chess, wait to see what is happening, losing that hope the English will come.

*April 25:* Marko arrives from Dubrovnik. He tells us that Miša Štajner is there and that there are a lot of Jewish refugees. The Italians are in power but they are negotiating with the Ustashas and will probably hand over to them. A card arrives from Moša Mandilo from Herceg Novi. Nothing happens during the next two days.

*April 28:* I go to Dubrovnik to see what's happening there. There I meet the Kraus family. They take me, in give me a bed and something to eat. I write to my parents: I have had no news from them. I have no more money and am looking for a job. The landlady who rents the apartment to the Krauses tells me about a building firm in Lapac which might give me a job.

*May 4:* I go to Prčanj to collect my things. In the meantime we all decide to go to Dubrovnik, which is where we split up.

*May 9:* I begin work as a carpenter. The company wants to see my employment booklet, which I don't have. All this time I have been carrying my student record from technical secondary school, which has no column for religion. Again the landlady helps me and goes with me to get an employment booklet.

I'm at the counter giving my personal details when they suddenly ask me where I'm from. "Split," I say on the spur of the moment, because most of the Jews were getting ready to go to Split if the Ustashas take over power in Dubrovnik.

*May 19:* I hear from my parents. They tell me that the fourth grade of my school has resumed and that they're getting ready for final examinations, so it's best that I come home and continue with my schooling.

*May 23:* The day before the Ustashas are to take power in Dubrovnik, I return to Belgrade.

### A LITTLE LUCK, A LITTLE COURAGE

When I arrive in Belgrade I find a dreadful situation. My parents, like all Jews in the city, are registered. My father goes to forced labour, clearing rubble from buildings destroyed in the bombing. I decide not to register. From then on I live in Belgrade without papers.

I take a tram to Dorćol, although Jews are not supposed to use the trams. I go to the Jewish Hospital, which is in Visokog Stefana Street, directly opposite my school. I put on a yellow armband borrowed from my mother (the only time I ever wore it) and go into the school, into my classroom. It was as though a ghost had appeared. Everyone is astonished: what am I doing here? I announce that I, too, wish to prepare for the coming final examinations. I sit down and listen to the teacher. After finishing the day at school, I am called by my teacher, Đura Bajalović, who tells me that I had better not come to school. Instead I should prepare at home and just come to school for the examination. And that's what I do. My school friend Mile Jovanović from Umka, who they call "peasant" because he wears traditional village shoes, comes to my place and keeps me up to date with what they're learning. In this way I prepare myself for the final examination and prepare my end-of-year project.

There is a German motorised unit staying in our yard, where my father's building business is based. They listen to the radio and from this I learn on June 22 that the Germans have attacked the Soviet Union. A few days before my examination date I am told that the Ministry has prohibited me, as a Jew, from sitting the exam. My father knows the minister, Granić, and decides to go and see him and ask for an exemption. Somehow he pushes his way into Granić's office, but

when he insists on being allowed to see the minister, he has his face slapped and was thrown out. I have done my end-of-year project and prepared for the examination in vain.

In a dilemma about what to do I decide to go to the village of Babaljić Ljig, where I know a villager named Dražić. For years he has been coming to Belgrade in his cart every Sunday. He would sleep in our yard and then go early in the morning to the market, which is where my mother got to know him. I spend a week in his house. The family invite me to stay with them but I refuse and, instead, return home with food.

In the meantime my father has been in touch with an acquaintance and business competitor from Zagreb, Mr Fišbajn, who has a big contract in Šibenik and is prepared to give me a job. The condition is that I should go to Split.

Fate and chance have always played a large role in my life. The main post office building in Belgrade houses the Croatian representative office which issues permits. I go there, show my employment booklet. They want to see my birth certificate. I pretend that I have forgotten it and must go to get it. Then have an idea. I go to the Croatian military office, which is at 5 Terazije, on the third floor. There is a long queue stretching up the staircase. I wait patiently and, when my turn comes, I say that I am volunteering to join the home guard but that I would like to visit my home in Split before I go. I show them my employment booklet, according to which Split is my home town. I get an army pass and a free train ticket. I can take my things and report to the military command in Split and they will then assign me wherever they need me.

Preparations for my trip begin. My parents have resigned themselves to my departure. My father makes a small wooden chest (which I still have) which can hold all the tools needed by a bricklayer.

Meanwhile I witness a tragic event. The Germans order all male Jews to report to Tašmajdan on July 27, 1941, at 10.00 a.m. I tell my father not to go. He stays in bed, as though he is sick. I put on *lederhosen* which I brought from Austria, go to Tašmajdan and stand up on the high ground to watch what's going on below. Those who are there are being lined up in groups. Later I learn they are being sorted according to qualifications: doctors, engineers, merchants, tradesmen, students and so on. Every tenth person is removed from the group, 122 of them, and taken to be shot as a reprisal for the burning of a



truck. Among them is Raka Mandil, a 16-year-old schoolboy, a wonderful companion from the youth group of which I had been leader.

Thanks to my pass I reach Split on August 5, 1941, via Zagreb, without encountering any problems. In Split my father's school friend, Filip Kolin, meets me and his home becomes my official place of residence. It isn't easy to get to Šibenik, which has become a navy harbour, because the Italians aren't letting any foreigners enter the city. After waiting a week the SOLFAC company, which is prepared to employ me, obtains the *lasciapassare*, the official pass which allows me to travel to Šibenik. While I am waiting I walk around Split and even go swimming. Finally, on August 12, I manage to get to Šibenik by bus.

### TO ŠIBENIK, ONE BY ONE

As soon as I arrived in Šibenik, I looked for a room, finding one with the Petković family, sisters Nevenka and Katica to be precise, at 149 Kralja Tomislava Street. The sisters were extremely kind and we remained friends throughout my stay in Šibenik, although I later moved elsewhere.

On August 14, 1941, I began work for SOLFAC, on construction of its new ferroalloys factory. This had begun before the war and was now being resumed. We made large concrete window frames which we mounted in the walls of the factory buildings and then installed glass panes. We worked as we were able, depending on the weather and the availability of materials. We had special passes to enter the factory. There was a restaurant in the factory where we ate and when we weren't working we took food home in mess kits. There was also a shop where we were allowed to buy food and other groceries.

Four Jewish families were saved thanks to SOLFAC, which was owned by Herman Fišbajn. First of these was his brother Janko Fišbanj and his wife Beba, who are now in Israel. Then came a married couple named Günz and their two children, Duci, now David Genez and Braca, now Josef Genez, both of whom now live in Haifa. There was another married couple, Rudi and Ester Simsaj and our family. All the men in these families worked in the factory from time to time. Another of the workers there was Moric, from Split, who later joined the Partisans and was killed. There were also a few locals. I was made a kind of foreman because of my training and experience.

Life was fairly tolerable under the Italian occupation in Šibenik. There was a kind of passive resistance from the locals, which was best seen during the *coprifuoco*, the curfew. The Italians prohibited movement in the town after a certain hour, usually starting between 5.00 p.m. and 8.00 p.m. Before the curfew time, when the Italian flag was lowered to music, the square would still be full of people out walking and then, ten minutes before the flag came down, everyone would disappear. Only a small group of Fascists would be left. There were illegal Communist Party and League of Communist Youth organisations operating in the town and Partisan units in the surrounding area. There were also a large number of Chetniks. I remember on August 7, 1942, there was a funeral for about thirty Italian soldiers and, on November 1 of the same year the Partisans blew up part of the power station. We had no power for days after this. As a reprisal, on November 5, the Fascists beat the locals and wrecked and looted shops belonging to local Jews (Druter and Berger) and arrested them. On November 6 there were again battles outside the town, with gunfire, earth-shattering explosions and, again, no electricity.



*Workers in the ferroalloy factory*

Through our landlords we made a large number of acquaintances, mainly among the Serbs with whom we socialised. There were also the local workers with whom we worked. In our leisure time, between finishing work and the *coprifuoco*, we went visiting, listened to the news, played cards and just chatted. In good weather, especially on Sundays, we would go swim-

ming. We had no idea whether our friends knew we were Jews, but the main thing is that no one betrayed us. We spent a whole two years in this uncertainty, fearing all the time that we might be discovered.

In mid-November, 1941, my father, Andrija Alpar, arrived in Šibenik. He was registered in Belgrade, wore a yellow armband and did forced labour with the other Jews. When I insisted that he come to Šibenik, he procured forged papers and left Belgrade before they

took all the male Jews to the Topovske Šupe camp. He left my mother in Belgrade and managed to reach Split via Albania. There his school friend Kolin took him in. He waited almost ten days for SOLFAC to secure the employment documents which allowed him to obtain a pass to come to Sibenik. Of course we immediately let our mother know through one of our connections that our father had arrived safely.

On February 7, 1942, police agents came to my landlady to enquire about me and my origins. Because my only identification was my academic record from technical high school, which had no reference to my religion, I was required to produce my birth certificate. I was helped now by Branko Pudar, a former sergeant in the Yugoslav Army, through the daughter of the local Orthodox



*Dorde with his father, fitting windows  
in the factory building*

priest. They arranged for me to meet this priest and, because I was born in Pécs in Hungary, where there was a large Serbian minority, he issued me a certificate stating that I was a member of the Serbian Orthodox Church. This was enough for me to normalise my status and, on April 11, 1942, I obtained identity papers.

My mother, who had stayed in Belgrade, went to Vrnjačka Banja to hide. We had relatives also hiding there, Ela and Laza Lajtner from Belgrade, originally from Osijek, who had taken the name Jakšić, because they were born in Jakšićevo. My mother would occasionally return to Belgrade, hiding under a Muslim veil, to see what was happening to the house which her parents had built with so much hard work. She was unable to part from her property. She used to sell firewood and coal while my father had a construction business. On our insistence, she also decided to leave everything and come to Šibenik. She bought false papers, sent her luggage from Zemun on April 17, 1942, and arrived in Split herself on June 5. She also found accommodation with Mr Kolin, but we were unable to get her the documents

needed to come to Šibenik. She tried various ways of obtaining a pass in Split but was not successful. Then she made a very courageous move. On July 27, 1942, she got into a taxi carrying passengers from Split. When they arrived at the checkpoint in Šibenik, while the Italian was checking the taxi driver's papers, my mother, who was sitting in the back, left the car saying she was going to the toilet and vanished. She took another taxi and came to us. Soon after she arrived, on September 15, 1942, we moved into a one-room apartment in the house of a tailor named Goretta, in Crnica.

Among the many local people I met in Šibenik, there was also a young married woman who worked in a law firm whose owner had been interned after the Italians arrived. After some time we fell in love. Because she was the only employee in the office, we often met there. Because we had various documents with us (property deeds to our houses and building lots, insurance policies and so on) I put them all in a folder and concealed it among the documents and files in the overcrowded office cupboards.

Suddenly, on July 25, 1942, at about 11.00 a.m., three police agents broke into the office and began ransack it. My friend was very frightened and tried to get closer to the open window so that she could get rid of a pamphlet which she had in the pocket of her smock. One of the agents, who had been watching her closely, jumped on her and took the pamphlet. They continued their search but found nothing and left. They also searched me, took my details and ordered me to come to the police station the next day. Meanwhile they took my friend with them and kept her in custody for investigation. The next day I came to the *Questura* and was interrogated by two agents. Because I really knew nothing about the pamphlet they let me go. I learnt later that my friend occasionally mimeographed leaflets but was not herself a member of any illegal organisation. My problem now was how to get our documents which were hidden in the office so that they should not fall into the hands of the Italians if they continued their searches. They had taken the keys from my friend and locked the office; I had never had a key. I then remembered that the cleaning lady also had keys, so I found her and borrowed them. The afternoon after I was interrogated, I took a risk and went to the office, took our documents, left and returned the keys. Thus this operation turned out well.

I visited my friend several times in prison before October 31, 1942, when she was sentenced to three years' imprisonment. Shortly after this, on December 10 of the same year, she was taken to Italy to serve her sentence. We corresponded regularly until I joined the Partisans.

On April 8, 1943, at about 11.00 p.m., there was a loud knocking on our door. We opened the door and agents charged in to conduct a search but found nothing. They arrested my father, the first time in his life this had happened to him, and took him away. They next day I went several times to the *Questura*, taking him breakfast and lunch, and was interrogated along with him.

The previous day someone had sabotaged the long-distance power lines nearby and the Italians thought my father might have been involved. He was able to prove that he had not been and they released him on April 10.

When they searched our apartment we were lucky that they did not discover the hiding place where our documents and pamphlets were, because I was collaborating with SKOJ. They were hidden in the top of the door frame, which had a vent above it to ventilate the toilet. I had cut part of the top board out with a fine saw and put it back again as a cover. Our documents and leaflets were in the hollow of the door frame. The agents went into the toilet, climbed on the lavatory seat, and checked in the cistern, but they had their backs to the opening so they didn't find our hiding place. After they left my mother and I fell into each other's arms weeping from the tension of the search.

After this search, because they hadn't discovered the leaflets and I had not betrayed anyone, the youth organisation arranged to meet in our apartment. My mother stood guard and, on May 10, 1943, I was admitted to SKOJ. My induction was carried out by the secretary of the Crnica branch of the organisation, Boško Jurišić who was later arrested and shot after a break-in and raid. From that time on I was even more involved in this illegal work.

Meanwhile the volume of work at the factory was dwindling and finally, on August 3, 1943, everything was completed. I began selling fish in a fish shop and would sometimes go fishing at night. I did all kinds of things to survive.

Soon after this, on September 8, 1943, Italy capitulated. Partisans arrived in the town from the surrounding areas and began to take over. The next day there was a rally in the town square and a great

celebration of the town's liberation. But, to our great surprise, German motorised units arrived in the town three days later, on September 11, and began arresting the Partisans there. I decided to flee and join the Partisans. I left my worried parents and, with a few friends, took a boat across the bay to Vodice where we joined the Partisans.

## WITH THE PARTISANS TO THE END OF THE WAR

About a hundred volunteers gathered at Vodice. We headed north and slept at Bukovica. There we were welcomed by the local people, especially the poor. We then turned towards Lika and arrived in Donji Lapac. We were welcomed by the local committee and put up in the homes of local residents, three or four volunteers per home. They brought us warm water to wash and freshen up. The next day, refreshed by food and a good night's sleep, we were allocated to our units.

I was sent to the Fourth Battalion of the Eighth Brigade of the Nineteenth Dalmatian Division. I quickly found my feet in Partisan life, thanks to my boy scout experience and that of the Hashomer Hatzair camps. We fought our first battles with the Italians during the attack on the Krško power station. The battle took place in one of the open fields full of rocks which are typical of that area. A message had to be taken from our commander to another commander on the other side of the field, across the open space. I volunteered to do it and succeeded in my task, while the bullets whizzed all around me. We took about thirty Italians prisoner on this occasion.

In the meantime we learnt that the parents of the volunteers from Šibenik had left the town to find shelter in the hills so that they would not be taken hostage by the Germans as a reprisal for what we were doing. My parents joined them, taking only the bare necessities with them. They remained on the island of Vis, where the headquarters of ZAVNOH, the World Antifascist Council of the National Liberation of Croatia, was situated. My father was engaged in building fortifications for the defence of the island, which was never taken by the Germans, while my mother worked for the tailors. After the Germans withdrew from the south of the country in 1944 and Split and Šibenik were liberated, my parents returned to Šibenik where we were reunited.

## AS A PARTISAN OFFICER

Because of my good record in the fighting and my education, I was sent to a basic political course and then attached to the Livno area command to work as a technician on the building of fortifications. After Livno fell to the Germans I was sent to the Partisan unit in Mosor and appointed secretary of the unit headquarters and assistant head of the activist group within the headquarters. My unit was active in the area of Mosor and Biokovo, around Driniš, Siverica and the surrounding territory. In this area we saw the German Sixth Offensive which left a horrific sight in its wake: the entire population of the village – men, women and children – were assembled in a church and killed. The only survivors were a few individuals who were out of the village tending their herds.



*With the Partisans until the end of the war.  
Đorđe with his father during the war days*

Later I was sent to the Third Company of the Second Battalion, first as an ordinary soldier and then later as a platoon delegate. By the order of the Supreme Headquarters on April 24, 1944, I was promoted to the rank of lieutenant and, immediately afterwards, on May 25, accepted into the Communist Party. From then on I performed various command and political functions in a number of military units. In August 1944 I was made assistant commissar of the Second Battalion

and remained in this post until the Mosor detachment was disbanded, when I became assistant commissar of the Second Battalion of the Twentieth Dalmatian Division. We took part in the attack on Knin and the siege of the town until it was taken and then continued with preparations to attack and liberate Gospić. A few days before the attack I received orders to attend an advanced Party course at ZAVNOH, in Šibenik. The course was from April 5 to May 15, 1945, and so I was in Šibenik when Germany capitulated. However the fighting continued in Yugoslavia. At the end of my course I became assistant commissioner of the First Battalion. I took part in the battles for Trieste and, after the partition into Zones A and B, I was moved to the divisional headquarters in Ilirska Bistrica. Early in July, 1945, I was assigned as an administrative officer for the political chiefs in the personnel department of the Twentieth Assault Division of the Fourth Army. I was decorated with a medal and a citation for bravery. As soon as the war ended I was assigned to the military engineering academy in the USSR. Although I met all the conditions for this, the notorious dispute between the two countries intervened and only two of the six candidates eventually went to the USSR. I returned to the headquarters of the Fourth Army and lodged a request for demobilisation in order to continue my civilian education. This application was approved and, on October 24, 1945, I was demobilised and returned to my parents in Belgrade.

My parents had travelled from Vis to Šibenik together with the ZAVNOH councillors after the Germans began their retreat from the south. They remained there for a short time before returning to Belgrade in November, 1944.

And that is how we survived the war.