
Mirko NAJMAN

DESTRUCTION OF THE OSIJEK JEWS



Mirko Najman was born in the Donji Grad quarter of Osijek on May 11, 1921, to Mavro Najman (Max Neumann) and Gizela Najman, née Kraus. He had two sisters, Nada and Vera. His father, mother and sister Vera died in Auschwitz. He also lost members of his extended family in the Jasenovac camp. His sister Nada, married as Fisher, lives in the USA.

He completed his primary school and the first grade of secondary school in Vienna, where the family had moved and where his father had a grocery store. In 1932 the family returned to Osijek.

From 1950 until his retirement in 1974, he worked for companies in the military industry.

He married Margita Lovrenčić with whom he has a son, Vladimir, and grandchildren Vera and Branko.

In June 1945, after years of active service in NOVJ, the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia, I was given leave to visit my hometown of Osijek. I had hoped to discover something about the fate of my parents: my father Mavro Najman (Max Neumann), my mother Gizela, née Kraus, and my sister Vera. Since I had escaped from the Tenje camp and from Osijek in June, 1942, I had heard nothing about the fate of my family. People I knew had told me that the Jews from Osijek were taken to Jasenovac in August 1942 and had perished there. In

1946 I received official death certificates for both my parents and for my sister, according to which they had been killed in Jasenovac on August 31, 1942.

The book *Yugoslavs in the Auschwitz Concentration Camp*⁵ lists Yugoslav nationals who were inmates of Auschwitz, including the names of my parents and sister Vera and a great many Jews from Osijek and the surrounding area. Since reading this book I have begun collecting material on the destruction of Osijek Jews in order to present my feelings and the feelings of others about the suffering of our Jewish compatriots.

This is something I owe to my parents, my relatives and my friends who died in the Holocaust of Croatian Jews.

From 1935 to 1940 I was a member of the Zionist Hashomer Hatzair and Akiba Agudat Hanoar Haivri. After I completed the State Commercial Academy in Osijek, I enrolled in the Economics Faculty of Belgrade University and made a connection with Akiba, the Zionist organisation in Belgrade.

In October 1940, the Government of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia passed regulations which, among other things, introduced discriminatory measures aimed at Jews. One of these regulations was the *Numerus Clausus* under which the proportion of Jews enrolled in secondary and technical schools could not be more than the proportion of Jews in the population. Because this regulation applied to me, I instead found employment with the Osijek company Štajn i Drug and later in the Silk-Teks factory. After the March 27, 1941, demonstration in Belgrade, when the people protested at the signing of the Tripartite Pact, I returned to Osijek on April 4, at the urging of my parents. I had a premonition that the Germans would soon attack Yugoslavia. On April 12, 1941, the German Army entered the city.

OCCUPATION

In fear and shock we Jews and Serbs watched the feverish delight and applause of our Croatian neighbours when the German troops arrived in the town. They made no attempt to conceal their delight because, in the arrival of the Germans, they saw their centuries-old

⁵ *Jugosloveni u koncentracionom logoru Aušvic, 1941–1945*, Tomislav Žugić and Miodrag Milić, Institut za savreminu istoriju, 1989.

dream of the Independent State of Croatia coming true. Together with the Ustasha, the *Kulturbund*, the members of the German minority association, armed with the weapons of the former Yugoslav Army, immediately began enforcing the regime of “order, work and purity of the race”.

The former Yugoslav Army weapons and other military equipment were collected in the former officers' residence in the Tvrdava area of Osijek. As soon as the occupation began, about twenty or thirty of us, Jews and Serbs, were sent for forced labour. Jews were also sent to other kinds of forced labour and various forms of plunder were introduced. One special method of looting the Osijek Jews, and Jews rights across the Independent State of Croatia, was the “contribution”. This was described by my uncle, Dr Lavoslav Kraus, in his book *Encounters and Destinies*⁶:

“In April 1941, I was taken by night at the point of *Kulturbund* bayonets to a Jewish school, to an empty apartment in which my wife's parents (Chief Rabbi Dr Simon Ungar) had lived for 53 years and in which my wife had spent her childhood. About forty or fifty of the ‘fancier and richer’ Jews were rounded up here and kept under guard. One evening a rumour spread that we would all be executed by firing squad at two in the morning.

“These first detentions ended a few weeks later in extortion, which they called “contributing”. From some they received 500,000 dinars⁷. From me they got just 25,000. I heard that the *Kulturbund* split these “contributions” with the Ustasha organisation.”

As I recall, there were a few more contributions. The “authorities” would prescribe an amount of money which the Jews had to collect, and the Jewish Community would have to divide this debt among individuals, taking into account the material resources of its members.

The desecration of the Jewish cemeteries in Gornji Grad and Donji Grad began in the first days of the occupation. I also remember the Gornji Grad synagogue being burnt down, along with a building which housed Jewish social organisations. *Kulturbund* members Franjo Kolar and Anton Piler were behind this arson. While the crowd

⁶ *Susreti i sudbine: sjećanja iz jednog aktivnog života*. Osijek, Glas Slavonije, 1973.

⁷ Author's note: A secondary school teacher's starting salary at the time was about 900 dinars a month.

around the synagogue screamed at the top of their lungs at the Jews watching the synagogue go up in flames, a number of fire engines stood by. The firemen were making sure the fire didn't spread to other, non-Jewish buildings.

Eight days after the occupation began, anti-Jewish demonstrations were organised in Osijek by the *Kulturbund* people. The demonstrators carried placards with anti-Jewish slogans. According to the recollections of Vladimir Kon, the former deputy head of the Jewish Community in Osijek, and those of Dr Vinski, about 250 young Jewish people were taken from Osijek towards Zagreb in the first weeks of August 1941. They were taken to Gospić and killed above the yawning Jadovno Gorge.

In his book *The Jews of Yugoslavia, 1941-1945*⁸, page 92, Dr Jaša Romano lists various ways in which the plunder of Jewish assets was legally justified. In Osijek, also, local regulations against Jews were passed for the district. Thus, among other things, Jews were in principle forbidden to take trams, to bathe in public places in the city or travel by boat (so they would be unable to cross the Drava River to Hungary). Jews were not allowed to move anywhere outside their own homes without the yellow armband. They were forbidden to shop at the market before 10.00 a.m. (very little could be found after 9.00 a.m. during the war years), and they were permitted to enter shops only between three and five in the afternoon. Jews were also forbidden to go to the theatre, the cinema, taverns, cafes or bars and were not permitted to sit on public benches or enter parks. They were also forbidden from meeting in private apartments and moving around the streets of central Osijek, unless they lived there. They were permitted in the streets outside the city centre but were only allowed to walk in twos, not in larger groups.

It's very difficult to list everything from which Jews were barred. They included going to barber shops except between 10.30 a.m. and noon, meeting or getting together with "Aryan women" and owning radios or cameras, which instead had to be handed over. When Ustasha or German events were being held, Jews were not even allowed to leave their homes. All these bans were accompanied by fines or prison sentences for breaking them.

⁸ *Jevrei Jugoslavije, 1941-1945: Źrtve genocida i učesnici narodnoslobodilačkog rata*, Jaša Romano, Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia, 1980.

During the housing crisis, one of the worst measures was the eviction of Jews from apartments in the city centre to the suburbs. This was accompanied by various ways of robbing from the Jews – by paying “redemption costs”, the costs of moving both their own belongings and the belongings of those who “relinquished” small apartments in exchange for a larger, Jewish apartment, and other methods.

A “commissioner” was appointed to every Jewish-owned shop. In practical terms this meant that the Jewish owner could not dispose of his assets and, if he continued working in the company or shop, he would work as an employee.

The anti-Jewish propaganda in the daily newspaper *Hrvatski List*, in which all the anti-Jewish regulations were proclaimed, also included publication of an anti-Semitic article every two or three days. Under pressure from the authorities, particularly Ustasha and *Kulturbund* people, shops began putting up signs reading “Jews not welcome” and restaurants displayed “No Jews admitted” signs.

I first heard about the Jasenovac camp in the summer of 1941. Until the proclamation of the Independent State of Croatia, a man called Đuro had worked for my father as a shop assistant. He was a *mačekovac*, a follower of Vlatko Maček⁹, and later an active Ustasha. One day in August, Đura turned up in my father’s shop wearing his Ustasha uniform and asked me to go with him to the warehouse next to the store. There he told me about the horrors happening in Jasenovac and advised “if they ever want to take you to Jasenovac, run! It would be better to get killed on the run than to reach there alive.”

Some time later orders came for us to move out of our apartment to a smaller one next to the store, so we had to get rid of some of our furniture. After another two or three months, while I was at work in Tenje, the Ustasha authorities ordered my parents to move once again, this time to a one-room apartment somewhere in the suburbs. Again my father had to give some of our things to people he knew. I learnt about the move a few days after it happened and managed to get permission to visit my parents. This was the last time I saw my grandmother, my mother’s mother, who lived with us. She died suddenly, a few days after they moved. I was unable to attend the funeral

⁹ Vlatko Maček, leader of the Croatian Peasant Party, the strongest elected party in Croatia at the time of the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia.

because they wouldn't give me time off from work. During this last visit I found my mother in bed; she had had a stroke. She was unable to speak to me but squeezed my hand in hers, her right hand which she was still able to move. This was the last time I saw my grandmother, my mother, my father and my sister Vera.

THE WORK OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN OSIJEK DURING THE OCCUPATION

During the period of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the Jewish Community in Osijek had mainly devoted itself to religious matters and charity work. With the Independent State of Croatia, everything changed. Religious services were no longer held and there was chaos among the Osijek Jews. The *Kulturbund* seized all the Community's documents and the records of Jews and members of the B'nai B'rith Lodge. The also, naturally, took all the Jewish Community's money. The existence of the Jewish Community suited the *Kulturbund* people because it gave them control over the Jews as they carried out their plunder and the subsequent destruction of the Jews.

The *Kulturbund* members bypassed the Jewish Community to collect their first round of "contributions". When the Ustashas saw how much money the *Kulturbund* people had taken from the Jews they clashed over who would get control of the Jewish Community. So the Ustasha political authorities appointed Ivo Hočevar as commissioner to seize control of the Jewish Community from the *Kulturbund*. They appointed a new management for the Community, headed by Bela Fridman, with Slavko Klajn as secretary. The Ustashas then demanded a new contribution of twenty million *kunas*. Commissioner Hočevar allowed the Jews to deal with this new obligation imposed on them as they saw fit, on the condition that they would do what was being asked. Under a decision of the Independent State of Croatia authorities, a Jewish religious tax was levied and funds were raised this way to support the Community, operate the Jewish school and provide aid for Jews in camps. Because Jewish children had been expelled from the normal schools, a Jewish primary school was set up in Osijek, together with a six-year secondary school. Classes were conducted by Jewish teachers who had been dismissed.

Various committees were set up within the Community to deal with contributions, social life, schools, tax, finance, forced labour and assistance for camps.

When Jews were evicted from the better apartments, a number of families found themselves practically in the street. For this reason the Community also set up a committee to solve housing problems by allocating other apartments to these people or by moving several families into one apartment.

Meanwhile a battle was raging in the Ustasha ranks for the position of Jewish Community commissioner. The status of the committee members in the community, and that of Jews in general, depended on the commissioner and on the prevailing anti-Jewish policy in Osijek. Nevertheless, the *Kulturbund* members still managed, de facto, to have the last word.

Despite the constant changes in policy on Jews, two Community institutions survived all these changes right up to “the final solution of the Jewish issue in Osijek”. These were the camp assistance project, also known as the flying squad, and the “people’s kitchen”.

According to the recollections of Vlado Salzberger¹⁰, the flying squad was active from October or November 1941 to May 1942, when Vlado left Osijek, but he believes that some other team members remained active until they were deported to camps. The team moved in when people lost touch with deported family members after they had been taken from Gospić to Jasenovac. It was no longer possible to send parcels of food or clothing to these deportees. When people found out that parcels could be sent through the Red Cross, the camp assistance project was set up as a special institution. But, according to the reports, the inmates often didn’t receive these parcels, or they were stolen. Still, through Commissioner Hočevar, contact between the Jewish Community committee and Maks Luburić, the notorious head of Jasenovac, was made possible. Jews offered their help in providing supplies for the Jasenovac camp and then the Jewish Community of Osijek (and its Zagreb counterpart) established connections with the Jasenovac “supply office”. At the invitation of the Ustashes, committee members Andrija Rip and Vlado Grinbaum went to Jasen-

¹⁰ *The Osijek Flying Squad*, Nada and Vlado Salzberger, in *We Survived...*, The Jewish Historical Museum, Federation of Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia, Belgrade, 2004.

ovac for negotiations. Thanks to the agreement on supplies for Jasenovac, many human lives were saved by these supplies to the camp in these worst times in the winter of 1941–42.

This operation suited the Ustashas nicely, because it meant the job of supplying food staples was largely taken over by this organisation, thus saving money for the Ustashas.

This care for camps project was headed by Andrija Rip, a young man who was tireless and absolutely devoted. In August 1942, he and the other young people involved, who never stinted with their time, were taken to Auschwitz where they were killed. The other permanent members of this small flying squad who should be mentioned are high school students Ivo Šoten, Rik Frem, Herman Haberfeld and Franko Vajs, the locksmith Zvonko (Levi) Smit and Zvonko Drajzinger.

In mid-December, 1941, this team began hurriedly preparing for the accommodation of Jews in the Đakovo camp and for Jewish refugees from Bosnia in the Cerealija mill. The team arranged the mill so that the ground floor could be used as shared space, while the upper three floors were used as living space. By agreement with the Ustasha authorities, the Jewish Community in Osijek took over the job of supporting this camp financially. There were about 1,900 people accommodated there, including bedridden elderly people who had to be carried. Thanks to the activities of the Osijek Municipality, a large number of children were placed with Osijek families and with families in nearby towns, including Našice, Vinkovci and Donji Miholjac. My aunt, Julija Kraus was very involved with this work. Members of the flying squad took these children to their new homes. Because there was so much work to be done in a short time, the team, often known as the Đakovo team, was expanded to include the following young people: Dragutin (Haim) Kon, Švarc Rojbek, Zdenko Volf, Janoš Kon and Nada (Rahela) Grinvald (married as Salzberger). Those who worked on washing and mending clothes were Ljerka Adler, Mina Fišer (married Montag), Melanka Inselt, Lola Atijas, Zlatko Vamošer, Vlado Raus, Branko Polak and Branko Mautner. The Jewish administration of the camp was managed by Vlado Grinbaum and working with him were Ladislava-Lili Grinbaum, Ladislav Lederer and Dragutin Glaner. Until February 1942, living conditions in the Đakovo camp were tolerable, but on February 24, 1942, the evacuation of the Stara Gradiška camp began and this was followed by a typhoid epidemic and an epidemic of the

dysentery which had ravaged Stara Gardiška. This needed the energetic and persistent work of the medical group, which was led by Dr Laci Lederer and included Dr Miškolci, Dr Nada Jurković and Dr Atijas. The whole flying squad worked on the disinfection of the camp with the help of several older people and medical professionals from Đakovo.

On March 29, 1942, the Ustasha authorities took charge of the camp. The Ustashes immediately banned the flying squad from working there and so, from April 17, none of the team members were allowed to visit the camp.

The Đakovo camp was closed down at the beginning of June 1942 and the women and children inmates were transferred to Jasenovac in three trains. The first transport was sent on June 15, and the last on July 5, 1942. There were a total of about 2,800 women and children on these trains and they were all killed immediately on arrival at Jasenovac. There are 569 victims of Ustasha bloodlust and madness buried in the Đakovo cemetery.

ROUTES TO SALVATION FOR OSIJEK JEWS

After the introduction of anti-Jewish laws in the Independent State of Croatia in May and June, 1941, Jews from Croatia mainly emigrated to Italy. The next most common destination was Hungary, while some managed to reach Switzerland and beyond. Others fled to those regions of the former Kingdom of Yugoslavia occupied by the Italian Army: the Dalmatian coast, south of Sušak and the greater part of the Dalmatian hinterland, all the way to Ogulin in Croatia and Mostar in Bosnia, as well as the Adriatic islands scattered along the Dalmatian coast. The exact number of refugees has never been established, but it is estimated that there were about ten thousand.

After the deportation of Jews from Osijek, it was clear to everyone that the Jews could save themselves only by fleeing the Independent State of Croatia. It was not safe to hide in the houses of Croatian friends and, at the beginning, very few Jews opted to join the Partisans.

As well as fleeing towards the Italian-occupied zone of the Dalmatian coast, the other direction particularly favoured by the Osijek Jews was towards Hungary. Though anti-Jewish laws had also been

passed there, a large number of Jews managed to survive in Budapest under false names.

The River Drava separates Osijek from Baranja which, at that time, was part of Hungary. Many emigrated by renting a boat and crossing to the other bank of the Drava at night. Having reached the other side they would somehow get to the nearest train station, from where they usually travelled to Budapest. Hungarian rail workers helped some people cross into Hungary by train. Control on the Hungarian side of the border was not rigorous.

According to a poll conducted at the end of 1945 by the Jewish Community in Osijek, about three hundred people emigrated from the Municipality of Osijek to Italy, to the occupation zone where power was held by the Italian Army (Independent State of Croatia territory) and to Hungary. The same poll indicated that a total of about 450 Jews from the surrounding area had managed to escape the horrors of genocide in various ways: illegally, by emigrating, by joining the Partisans and by other means.

The Croatian authorities constantly insisted that the Italian authorities treat Jews living in the Italian occupied zone of the Independent State of Croatia in the same way they were treated by that state itself. In the end a compromise was reached in which the Italians committed themselves to putting all Jews from the occupied zone into concentration camps. In this way the camps near Dubrovnik, in Makarska, on the islands of Brač and Hvar and in



Najman next to a monument on the place where the Tenje camp stood

Kraljevica were established. Later a Jewish section was set up in the Rab camp. Jews in these camps, however, were treated humanely.

BUILDING THE TENJE CAMP

Sometime in early March 1942 I was sent to forced labour in Tenje, as was Kalman Vajs with whom I spent most of my time. The construction site was on the Osijek-Novi Grad road towards the village of Tenje. We had to walk seven or eight kilometres from our homes to the construction site and the same back again. The authorities had given orders for a settlement to be built on this site for the Jews to move into. Jews were given a choice, either they could build this settlement and live there, more or less in a ghetto, or be sent to Jasenovac. Obviously the Jews chose the first alternative. They were required to move into the settlement by June 1942. Representatives of the authorities had allegedly promised that construction of this settlement would be the “final solution of the Jewish question in Osijek” and that the Osijek Jews would not be deported to camps.

We later learnt that this eviction from the city was a result of pressure exerted by the *Kulturbund*. Signs had been appearing around the town in German, such as “Our patience is running out”, “Jews must leave” and so on.

Believing in what the representatives of the local authorities had said, the Jewish Community worked out a plan for building the settlement. All members of the Community were even asked to apply if they wanted a separate room built for their family (everyone else would be accommodated in shared rooms for a larger number of people). Those who took up this option had to provide funds needed to purchase building materials and pay the workers. The Community members really believed that by building this settlement the Osijek Jews would avoid the fate of Jews in the Independent State of Croatia. This was an illusion!

Until mid-June, 1942, everything went more or less according to plan. But then *Hrvatski List* published an article on “the insolent behaviour of two Jewish women towards a disabled German”. The Jews were to take collective responsibility for this lie. The Hitler Youth were organised: they waited for Jews passing through Novi Grad on their way to work in Tenje and whipped them.

At the end of June 1942, the foremen from Tenje, Volner and Mautner came to the settlement early in the morning, very agitated, with the news that the notorious Ivan Tolj had arrived in Osijek. Tolj had been the chief of police in Vinkovci and had been responsible for the fact that the majority of the Vinkovci Jews were among the first to be deported to Jasenovac and Stara Gradiška. It was obvious that Tolj had been brought here to get the Osijek Jews moved to the Tenje settlement as soon as possible.

I presume that my father knew, through Žiga Volner, what lay ahead and so asked my cousin Ernest, the son of an “Aryan” father and a Jewish mother, to prepare documents which I could use to flee to Split. Ernest came to me in Tenje so that the two of us could plan my escape. I insisted that he also obtain a pass for Kalman. At that time Ernest was a non-commissioned officer in the Home Guard and worked in the headquarters of the *IV Obskrbiski Zdrug* (an engineering unit). Accompanied by Ernest in his Home Guard uniform, Kalman and I walked through a gap in the unfinished fence and headed for Osijek. We hid for about two weeks with

Ernest, who managed to obtain a Home Guard pass each for me and Kalman. With these passes, and a lot of difficulties, we reached Split.

In 1942 I was arrested in the street in Split because I had no documents. I was taken to the notorious local Firule prison. One day, from inside the prison, I heard the Hashomer Hatzair whistle, *Hazarak veemac*, coming from the outside and it occurred to me that it

REGIA QUESTURA
SPALATO

Forma per il rilascio della legittimazione personale

Mi chiamo _____ di _____
e _____ nato a _____ li _____
di professione _____ residente a Spalato, dal _____
anno con stabile dimora a Spalato via _____

Foto

Statura _____
Occhi _____
Capelli _____
Barba _____
Baffi _____
Naso _____
Segni particolari _____

Stampa: I. QUESTURA DI SPALATO

Stampa: CUESTURA

Facsimile of an application to the questura and of the uncompleted identification form with which Najman was able to leave Split to join the Partisans

could be my roommate, Zvonko-Levi Šmit. A prisoner in my cell had a mirror and I used this to look out and see Levi in the street. I replied with the same whistle. A few days later I was taken to the port where Jews without documents were being loaded onto a boat. Levi was standing there: he had brought me some things. Hidden in a cap he gave me was a forged, blank personal identification document, *legitimatione personale*, which I was to use to escape and join the Partisans. I didn't even manage to use it because I couldn't establish a connection. Kalman Vajs and Teo Polak were put onto the boat along with me. We disembarked in Novi Vinodol where we were in "free confinement". From Novi Vinodol they transferred us to the Kraljevica camp and from there to the camp on the island of Rab. After Italy capitulated I joined the Rab Jewish Partisan battalion as a volunteer. When the battalion was disbanded I was assigned to the Seventh Banja Division where I stayed until demobilisation in November 1945.

MY PARENTS' FATE

With Tolj's arrival in Osijek, the process of moving Jews into the Tenje settlement began. About 1,600 Jews from Osijek and another nine hundred from the surrounding area were accommodated there. At the same time, four hundred Jews were moved to the Vukovar Road and a hundred people were put into the Jewish retirement home. Many people in the Tenje settlement had no roof over their heads because construction was not finished. There were Ustasha guards at every assembly point so that prisoners could only leave the settlement with passes. My mother, my sister Vera and the parents of my aunt, Julija Kraus, were accommodated in the retirement home, as were the former chief rabbi, Dr Simon Ungar and his wife, Fani. Dr Ungar had been appointed to his post in 1901 and, up to his retirement before the second world war, in addition to performing his normal activities he also studied the Talmud, the comparative philology of the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmud, the Midrash and other Hebrew and Aramaic texts. Before he was taken away as part of the last group of Osijek Jews on August 22, 1942, all Dr Ungar's works were handed over, by agreement, to the Catholic parish priest, Bezecki, who kept them and saved them. After the war, Ungar's daughter Julija sent all his works to Israel where they

are now in the Jerusalem University Library. Dr Ungar's letters from the camp have also been saved and are with his granddaughters, Judit and Eva Kraus. In a number of these letters, Dr Ungar had received offers of crossing into Hungary, but had refused because he wanted "to stay with his people", with the other Jews of Osijek.

The former chief rabbi celebrated his last religious service in the Tenje camp, on about August 10, 1942, at the wedding of Sonja and Herman Singer (who survived Auschwitz).

Journalist and writer Zora Dirnbah was the daughter of an Austrian "Aryan" mother and a Jewish father. She wrote about the day before the residents of the retirement home were taken on the journey from which they would not return, August 21, 1942.

"People walked, weeping, through the rooms, the yard and the hallway of the retirement home from the early morning hours, bidding farewell both to those they knew and those they did not know. How the information that the camp would be closed down and the deportations would begin spread among the people remains unclear."

Among those who managed to fight their way through into the retirement home and who brought their Jewish relatives and friends some things for their departure was Mitzi Friedmann, an Austrian "Aryan" married to a Jew. Zora helped her get into the retirement home.

"In front of Mitzi Friedmann," wrote Zora Dirnbah, "in that dark hallway, a woman appeared unexpectedly carrying a tiny, skinny little boy in her arms. Just a few steps separated us from the gate and the Ustasha guard. Luckily the guard had his back turned to us. Approaching Mrs Friedmann, the young woman desperately extended her arms with the little boy, whispering a few words, quite out of breath, stuttering from fear that she would not have time to say them, that the guard would turn around and take her last hope from her: 'Take him, please, save him. His name is Kardoš, he's not even two, he's sick, he has dysentery. At least save my child for me.' Mrs Friedmann took the little boy, Branko. One human life was saved."

The Jewish Community tried to ensure that life was as good as possible in all three places. But then came a new blow: Jews from the surrounding towns – Valpovo, Donji Miholjac, Podravska Slatina, Našice, Đakovo – were also brought to the Tenje camp, taking

the number of inmates up to three thousand. The situation became unbearable.

The Jews of Osijek and the surrounding towns were taken from Tenje to Jasenovac, Loborgrad and Auschwitz in August 1942. At that time I had already been in Split for two months. So the section which follows is based on the letters of my father, the Rausnic and Kon families, the recollections of the Auschwitz inmates who survived and other documents and papers to which I have had access.

THE FINAL SOLUTION OF THE "JEWISH QUESTION" IN OSIJEK AND THE INDEPENDENT STATE OF CROATIA

The decision on the solution for the "Jewish question" was taken at a conference in Wannsee on January 20, 1942. A photocopy of the minutes is held in Yad Vashem.

In a supplement to *Politika* published in 1996, Božidar Dikić, the newspaper's Bonn correspondent wrote: "The only state which, shoulder to shoulder with Germany's Third Reich, carried out its own pogrom, the eradication of the Jewish population, was Pavelić's puppet state." According to Dikić's research, the deportation of Jews to Auschwitz was carried out in direct collaboration between the Nazi Germans and the Independent State of Croatia. He backs this up with a number of documents such as "directives to the state railways management for the provision of strict security for these transports, their routes and timetable."

The Independent State of Croatia even paid the costs of transporting Jews to Auschwitz.



Inscription on the monument where the former Tenje camp stood

The first group began boarding the wagons on the afternoon of August 15. There were seven hundred children in this group. There has never been any reliable information on the fate of people from this group. They are believed to have been taken to Auschwitz and killed there. This is what Arnold Kon, an inmate who survived, claims.

The second transport, between a hundred and three hundred people, set off for Jasenovac on August 18, 1942. None of them returned, a conclusion which is also supported from the testimony of the only survivor, Miroslav Auferber.

The third train set off on August 22. On board were all the Jews from the retirement home, together with those from Vukovarska 77, the Jewish Community Board and all the remaining inmates from the Tenje camp. Even those who had to be carried on stretchers were sent off. From the statement made by the witness Kon, we can conclude that the elderly, the sick and the helpless who had no family members in the Tenje camp were taken off the train in Jasenovac and liquidated there.

A postcard from my father dated August 22, 1942, confirms that date of the last transport's departure.

Dear Son,

Osijek, 22.08

A few words before our departure. All of us, including Mother, are going to Germany. To Graz they say. We're in a good mood. We're not despairing at all and neither should you. Your aunt is sending you everything! Many kisses, Dad.

The Ungars, too, the whole of the retirement home is going.

Of about three thousand Jews sent from Osijek during August 1942, either to Auschwitz or to Jasenovac, only about a dozen returned (they include Arnold Kon, David Perlštajn, Jelena Grinbaum, Olga Heler, Herman Singer, Ljudevit Rosenberg and Miroslav Auferber). According to information obtained from Yad Vashem, 2,445 Jews from Osijek and the surrounding area were killed.

About 115 Jews from mixed marriages remained in Osijek as well as a few others who managed to hide or who the Fascists forgot about.

With the departure of the last train, the "Jewish question" in Osijek was largely solved, because 92.6 per cent of Jews from Osijek and

the surrounding area had been destroyed. A monument has been built on the Osijek-Tenje Road where the Jewish ghetto-camp Tenje stood in 1942. On it is written "On this spot stood a Fascist camp through which thousands of patriots from this area passed. The people of this area have raised this memorial stone as a token of gratitude and in memory of these fallen patriots."

I have never heard that in the Tenje camp there were inmates of any other nationality than Jewish.