
Dorde FIŠER

DEATH MARCH FROM BOR TO CRVENKA AND BEYOND



Dr Đorđe Fišer was born in Titel on March 6, 1920, to Leo and Irena Fišer, née Štajnic. He had a sister, Vera, born 1922.

He finished secondary school in Novi Sad and enrolled in the Medical Faculty of Belgrade University, but interrupted his studies in 1941, when the war broke out. His entire family first hid in Serbia. On his return to Novi Sad he was taken to forced labour and, from July 1943 to September 1944, was in forced labour in the Bor mine.

From there he had to withdraw with the other inmates on the "death march" through Belgrade and Crvenka to Baja. There he was admitted to hospital because of a wound on his leg.

After the liberation he joined the Yugoslav People's Army. He completed his medical studies in Belgrade after the war. He specialised in otorhinolaryngology, with great achievements in the field. He settled in Novi Sad and worked there. As head of the ORL Clinic in Novi Sad he took part in many scientific conferences both within the country and abroad. He was a full professor in the Medical Faculty of the Novi Sad University.

He lost his closest relatives in the war. His mother perished in Auschwitz, his father was deported from Auschwitz and died on the way, while his sister died of typhus after being evacuated from

Auschwitz on January 27, 1945. His son, Dr Aleksandar Fišer is also an otorhinolaryngologist. He had two grandchildren.

Dr Đorđe Fišer died on April 25, 1989. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Belgrade.

A convoy of Jews passed along the roads of Bačka in late September and the first half of October, 1944. The "final solution" was applied to about 2,500 of them in Bačka. That was the number killed on this "death march" alone.

UNWORTHY

Overnight on October 6, 1944, the premises of Glaser-Welker-Rauch in Crvenka was the scene of a hideous crime. This is where the journey ended for many of the Jews on the march from the Bor mine. The echoes of cannon fire mixed with the shots fired by Fascist soldiers. The front line was already too close not to hear them, but the SS criminals went on regardless, killing innocent Jews throughout the night on the gentle Bačka plain by the old brickyard.

Just a few days before that night and again on that night itself, 2,500 innocent people were robbed and killed. However their march towards death had begun much earlier, on the day at the beginning of 1942 when the Horthy Parliament adopted a new law on national defence, which obliged all Jewish men to do labour service. In Bor they did the hardest jobs. They were abused and died of exhaustion.

EVACUATION

The autumn of 1944 came. On September 16, in Bor, they rounded up the Jews who were there for involuntary work and told them to go home, that is to say they would evacuate them. They were told that those who could not go would stay in the camp, but that no one would take responsibility for their personal safety. They were warned that no one in the column must fall behind, because the column would be escorted by Kosta Pećanac's Chetniks.

A group of about 3,600 Jews from the Bor mine travelled via Mala Krsna and Smederevo. They travelled for eight days, sleeping in mud and water. Their food ration for the trip was one kilogram of

bread. At the head of the column and providing security were mounted Hungarian soldiers, while the officers rode on bicycles.

Throughout this exhausting trip, ridiculous commands rained down on the column. Echoes from the right and the left interwove and intermingled, both in front and behind them.

“Faster!”

“Walk!”

“Don’t lag behind the column!”

“Anyone disobeying commands will be shot!”

The first victim fell in Smederevo. He was hit in the stomach, the wretched man was dying under torture. Attempts by inmates, doctors, to help him were brutally repelled. The column continued on, deafening commands rang out, people lined up listlessly to continue the journey. When they crossed the Danube by ferry and reached Pančevo, they all looked like ghosts.

The people of Pančevo who happened to be there realised who the people in this inhumane convoy were and tried to bring them food, to refresh them for the rest of the journey. These noble attempts by the locals met with disapproval from those leading the column.

“Step back!” shouted a soldier, raising his rifle butt to hit someone.

Many people ignored the orders and continued to give food to the marchers.

“Why won’t you let them take some bread?” they dared to ask the soldiers.

“There should be no food given to those who are to die!” a German barked back.

There were also those among the people of Pančevo who wanted to help the quite large team of armed and cruel soldiers and guards. The *Volksdeutsche* from the town bolstered the guard around the convoy. The dull thud of rifle butts was heard, along with curses and insults. The journey went on.

“HOW LOVELY IT IS TO DIE BY MOONLIGHT”

Those who were exhausted began to fall behind. The Germans rounded them up and took them to the Zvezda tavern in Pančevo. And there were quite a few of them, 133 in all were assembled there.

The Germans wanted to put their bloody plan in motion as soon as possible. By October 1 they were looking for inmates to volunteer for work. This actually marked the beginning of the massacre. Twenty of them volunteered. They took them to the adjacent room, searched them, took their documents and valuables and made them go further on.

They were heading for a place called Jabuka. Three kilometres from Pančevo, where there was a road worker's hut, they were ordered to turn. When they were about five hundred metres from the road they were ordered to dig a trench, five metres long, two metres deep and four metres wide. In the meantime, night had begun to fall. A German wearing an officer's epaulettes turned to one of the soldiers.

"I'm going to Pančevo. The trench must be finished by the time I return."

He got on his motorcycle and rode off.

Soon enough the trench was finished. On the orders of the officer present, the Jews left their work and headed down the road to Pančevo. They hadn't got far when they met the officer on the motorcycle and another two Germans. He ordered them to return. They took them to the trench and lined them up in fours. They tied their hands with rope and ordered them to form a circle to the right of the trench and walk towards the little road worker's hut, facing it. First they took the last group of four away. A little later shots and cries were heard. Then it was the turn of the second group, and then the third.

Engineer Malek told me later that before his turn came he managed to untie his hands, but kept them in position as if still tied. He moved with his group as soon as they received the order. When they reached a pit on a rise towards the Tamiš, facing the river, they were stopped by two German soldiers pointing sub-machine guns at them.

Half a metre in front of the people from the convoy a wire was stretched across, behind it was a fairly deep pit covered in bushes.

The moment was more than ominous. Malek realised what the intention of the Germans was. He turned to the officer standing on his right and spoke to him in German.

"Where is your great German culture? What have we done wrong for you to kill us like dogs? We worked in Hungary in the camp for eight months, with no bread, clothing or wages. We worked in

Bor. Our families had nothing to eat. We worked for fourteen months for you Germans! As an engineer I received recognition from your Engineer Supervisor Zajle. And now you want to kill us! You promised to let us return to our families, our homes, and now what? Let me go! My wife and my two children are waiting for me at home! You have no heart! You have no God!" he shouted finally.

The German officer looked at him coldly, then said:

"How lovely it is to die by moonlight."

They were ordered to make a left turn. They obeyed. At that moment Malek turned towards the officer standing next to him and threw himself at him, knocked him down and jumped into the pit. With no more than a few scratches and bruises he continued running towards the sunflower field about ten metres away. He was already in the shelter of the tall sunflower plants when he heard shots behind him. He dropped to the ground. He could tell the Germans were firing blind, so he crossed to the bank of the Tamiš and stepped in. He was afraid he wouldn't have the strength to swim. Nevertheless he managed to swim across to the other bank of the river before he staggered and fell from exhaustion. Meanwhile the Germans were scouring the terrain with their torches, searching for him.

He was too exhausted to go any further. He crawled into a haystack and spent four days there. Hunger forced him to leave this shelter and seek a new one. He headed for a house; from its façade he guessed that it wasn't German. He was not wrong. The farmer, Stevan Milošev, gave him refuge. A few days later Jabuka was liberated. Malek remained alive.

THERE'LL BE ENOUGH FOR THE FIELDS AND THE WORMS

The Jews continued their journey. Between Prelez and Titel, they came across watermelon rinds scattered on and around the road.

"Eat!" one of the guards shouted.

About thirty people from the starving column who were closest to the rinds hurried towards them. Suddenly they were sprayed with fire. Their cries rang out.

"There'll be enough of them for the fields and the worms," one of the non-commissioned officers said.

The column continued on. The contorted bodies of the dead remained, like piles of rags which had been strewn around.

The convoy arrived in Novi Sad, via Titel, on October 2. After a short stop they continued on in the direction of Srbobran. Passing through Sirig, where the occupying forces had colonised the entire population, a number of inmates tried to escape. They were betrayed by some of the locals, caught and shot. As they passed through Sirig, a group of children from Fascist families jeered at them.

“Jews are all degenerates. Whatever they are, they earn their bread by swindling.”

In Novi Vrbas, the convoy was intercepted by a group of *Volksdeutsche* leaving a church. “Halt!” the order rang out.

The column stopped. The camp inmates, exhausted and starving, their faces unwashed for days, could hardly stand on their legs which were like stone from the endless walking. The Germans surrounded them, spat at them, insulted them and laughed in their faces.

In the middle of Vrbas the prisoners were ordered to lie down in a pit, piled on top of one another. As the guards looked on and smiled approvingly, the *Volksdeutsche* plundered them for anything they still had which took their fancy. Then the column moved on, farewelled by the roaring *Volksdeutsche*.

“It will be the happiest day of our lives when Jewish blood starts flowing through the streets!”

THE LAST ASSEMBLY, GENTLEMEN

The death march continued. Having failed to find accommodation in Crvenka, on the way to Sombor, the Jews, their number now considerably less than the original 3,600, thinned out along the way by the murders, the deaths from starvation and exhaustion, left the road and entered the abandoned hall of what had once been a brickyard, very close to the town. Exhausted from the journey, the inmates just threw themselves on the ground. Early in the morning they arose, expecting the order to move on, but none came. The day passed in uncertainty and, eventually, night fell. Nothing! A second day and a second night passed. Still nothing! As the hours and days went by they were in a state of restless expectation.

It was not until October 7 that they saw the guards in action again. They separated a group of about eight hundred Jews from the

others and continued on with them to Sombor. The majority stayed behind in the brickyard. At about nine in the evening, a Hungarian junior sergeant burst in among the inmates and addressed them.

“Hand any valuables and money over to me, the Germans are going to shoot you anyway!”

The broken bodies stirred, dishevelled heads were raised and turned in the direction of the command. Some got up and handed over whatever they had. The sergeant took everything and said:

“This is the last assembly, gentlemen!”

His job done, he remained for a while, watching the Jews, enjoying their discomfort and fear.

Not long after a group of furious SS men burst into the yard. There, before everyone’s eyes, they killed five Jews with their rifles. Angrily, without a moment’s thought, as though they wanted to kill even the last ray of hope for salvation, if any of the inmates still had any.

Late in the evening, about eleven, the commands echoed around the brickyard.

“Up! Quickly! In ranks of ten! Hand over all your money and your valuables! Anyone who fails to do this will be shot! If you don’t obey you’ll be decimated.” They moved them into the next yard in groups of twenty, explaining that they had to search them there to see if anyone was hiding anything.

VILIM POTESMAN from Subotica was in one of those groups and described it this way:

“When my turn came I gave them everything they had asked for. What I still had left, that is. Then I was moved to the neighbouring yard. Although we could hear shooting now and then, I couldn’t have suspected what was happening. There was a pile of earth in the yard and a long trench in front of it. There were about twenty SS men standing next to the heap of earth, light machine guns at the ready. There were bodies and blood in the ditch and around it. We were ordered to stand up. Each of us had a butcher facing us and a body or two in front of us. We were given orders by the executioners to throw the victims into the trench. We were allowed to say goodbye to one another. We embraced and then each of us picked up a dead friend, dragged him to the trench and threw him in. I picked up the body of a

Jew I didn't know. But when I threw him into the trench, I jumped in as well. Shots rang out. I fell down to the bottom and the body of one of my friends fell on top of me. Later I lost consciousness.

"Meanwhile the German soldiers were bringing new victims, lining them up along the edge of the trench and mowing them down with machine-gun fire. Groups came one after another. They were also killing Jews in the yard of the brick-works. A revolver shot would be heard now and then, settling accounts with those who were only wounded and trying to save themselves.

"I don't know how long this went on. When I began to come to I saw only the dead around me. There were so many I couldn't count them. A shudder went through me. Now and then a clump of soil would slide down into the grave. My nostrils were full of the cloying smell of bodies and blood. From time to time there would be a moan or a rasping breath.

"I thought there were no longer any guards around. I tried to get up, but someone turned a torch on from some distance away. The beam of light walked along the trench. The guards were looking for survivors. They were coming closer to me. My face was covered in blood. The skull of the corpse beside me was split in half. I smeared myself with his brain. My breath froze. The light fell on me, passed over me. I felt relief. There were cries from the other side. Then the light went off and again it was dark. The Fascist began throwing hand grenades. I don't know how many, about ten, perhaps even more. I was wounded in my right hand, but I was saved from death by the bodies of my dead friends. The butchers decided that there was no longer anything for them to guard, so they left the execution site. I was overcome by sadness because I would never again see those with whom I had been joined in suffering, but I soon threw this feeling off: I had to run far away from this trench of death.

"When I had gone some distance I turned towards the brickyard. It was dark and horrifying. Antal Nanai from Crvenka took me in and hid me until the liberation."

After this twentieth century St Bartholomew's Massacre, the remaining Jews from the Bor mine, about 1,600 of them, were moved

on in their journey of death, under the burden of this terrible massacre. The column left the brickyard. The last group left at about six in the morning. They left behind their unburied friends and a mass of belongings, books, school certificates and letters as a sign that a whole mass of people who no longer existed had been there, as evidence of a bloody crime committed by Hitler's men. A few days after the massacre, the Seventh Gendarmerie of the occupying force ordered the locals to bury the bodies.

DORDE LAUFER was among the group which survived the massacre. As they were leaving the brickyard, he managed to escape from the convoy:

"I was in the last group to leave the brickyard. Entering Crvenka we walked past a field sown with corn. It was morning and the local Volksdeutsche were already up and about. They watched us. I took advantage of the guard's recklessness and managed to get to the corn. One moment more and I would have been out of sight, unnoticed, but I was struck with fear by shouts in German: 'There's one, getting away! Kill the rat!'

"I turned. There was a German running after me. He took the rifle from his shoulder and fired. I continued running, down through the field, but he caught up with me and knocked me to the ground with his rifle butt. I heard a shot. Unbearable pain flashed through my head. There was blood pouring down my throat. I swallowed it so that it wouldn't suffocate me but it seemed to be pouring from a source that would never run dry. I sank into darkness.

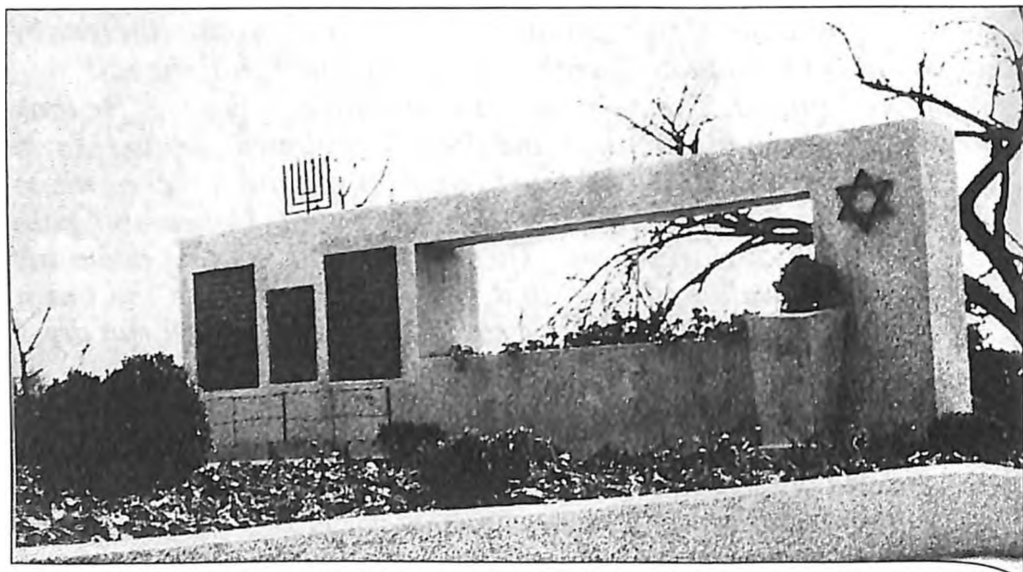
"I was awoken by pain in my chest. I shuddered and opened my eyes. There was a Hungarian soldier standing over me. He ordered me to get up and led me to the brickyard where I found a group of Hungarian soldiers. A non-commissioned officer approached me, kicked me a few times with his boot and knocked me to the ground with his fists. He ordered a soldier to keep an eye on me until he returned. After a few minutes he went away with the others. I gave as good an imitation as I could of being asleep. I breathed as evenly as I could manage. Each moment lasted an eternity. The soldier stared at me for a while then began to approach me. I froze in anticipation. Suddenly I felt his fingers on me, sliding into my pockets. He rolled me on

my side, searching my trouser pockets. Then he pushed me away, swearing: the pockets had already been emptied. Disappointed, he moved away.

"When I sensed he had gone, I looked around, got up and, on hands and knees worked my way out of the brickyard. I ran like a madman, through the corn, with no idea where I was, but after a few minutes I had to stop and catch my breath. The Bošnjak family hid me until the liberation."

"SAY A PRAYER BEFORE YOUR EXECUTION"

A group of inmates who had left Crvenka before the mass killings on the night of October 7 were sent towards Sombor. The leader of the convoy was a non-commissioned officer from the SS Handžar Division, Alija Sentešić from Sarajevo. There were about another thirty SS men with him.



Monument in Sombor in memory of the Jewish forced labourers from the Bor mine killed by the Nazis in Crvenka in 1944

All the way from Crvenka to Sivac the commands rang out:
"Double time! Head down!"

Anyone who raised his head was struck with a rifle butt or whipped by the SS men.

In Sivac, the men from the column were ordered to dig two trenches. When both were finished they got their orders.

“Say a prayer before your execution! You are all to be killed. Lie down on the ground.”

Talk was forbidden. The guards focused their attention on finding a victim and convincing him, by hitting him with a rifle butt, that he had to obey orders.

They made three Jews climb a tree and sing religious songs.

Night fell. Rain began to fall. Sleeping was allowed only in a sitting position without blankets. People sat, enduring terrible suffering. They were soaked to the skin and the entire area was a massive mud-pit.

Orders to move were issued at dawn on October 8.

Killing followed killing, all the way from Sivac to Sombor. Anyone who didn't walk fast enough was killed by the SS men. About 150 victims were left behind on this road.

In Sombor the inmates were all put in the synagogue and, three days later, the march continued, via Bački Monoštor to Mohač.

Another ten Jews were killed on the bridge over the little Kodoš river on the road between Bački Monoštor and Beždan.

In Mohač, the Hungarian soldiers took the column over.

At the same time, the 1,600 Jews who had survived the massacre in Crvenka, their numbers now reduced by the roughly 160 who had been killed in the meantime, headed further towards Sentskiraljsabađ. This stretch of the death road was also accompanied by murders. Anyone who stopped to drink water or relieve himself was killed. In the end, the Fascists no longer bothered with a reason to kill.

Near Stari Sivac, the convoy was intercepted by a cyclist with a Schmeisser. He stopped, looked at the column, reached for his Schmeisser and began shooting.

There was a commotion in the column, but it kept moving nonetheless. It looked like a column of ants that someone had cut off. The forced march continued for a day and a night. They came across bodies, evidence that the previous group had also been driven along this road.

Between Sivac and Krnjaja they came across the Sombor-Bečej railway. The roar of a train was heard. The column stopped. A train was approaching. As it came closer, they recognised the greenish uni-

forms. This was a transport of German soldiers on the retreat. The locomotive snarled ominously, accelerating. They were in a hurry.

Shots rang out! From inside the train the Germans had opened fire on innocent people, killing about sixty of them.

The exhausted marchers arrived in Krnjaja and found accommodation on a farm owned by Adam Džinić. They lay down in a field of clover and were ordered to face the ground. All around this oasis were fields of sugar beet. The starving men rushed towards the beets, pulling them out with their hands and wolfing them down.

But the shots rang out again. The Germans killed about ten people and then backed off.

They picked out five people and ordered them to bury the dead, then killed them straight away. They killed them with a shot in the back of the head or the throat.

The farmer asked the soldiers to return his spades and shovels. The soldiers feigned surprise.

“Haven’t they been returned to you?”

They turned to the column and ordered ten people to step forward. The men backed away, knowing what was coming. The SS men approached them, pulled about four of them out of the crowd and shot them dead.

At about four in the afternoon they set off towards Sombor. There they were placed under the command of Sentešić’s SS men. Later in the march about another forty people were killed. The Bosnian SS men left the dead behind only after cutting their gold teeth out with a razor.

Both groups reached Sentkiraljsabađ via Baja, where this writer was detained in hospital. There the men fell into the hands of Lieutenant-Colonel Maranyi, who proclaimed his power by ordering seven Jews to be executed by firing squad. The Jews who survived, just over a thousand of them, were deported from Sentkiraljsabađ to various concentration camps where they shared the fate of their countrymen.