

סאנסקי מוסט

SANSKI MOST

DERVENTA דרוונטה

TRAVNIK טראוויניק

BIJELJINA ביילינה

BRČKO זאווידוביצי' ברוציקו

DOBOJ דובוי

ZAVIDOVIC

ואגרב

TUZLA טוזלה

ZAGRE

VLASENICA ולאסניצה

ZENICA זניצה

VISOKO ויסוקו

ŽEPČE ז'פצ'ה

SARAJEVO

VIŠEGRAD

בלגראד

וישגראד

BEOGRAD

WE MOSTAR מוסטאר

SURVIVED...4

YUGOSLAV JEWS ON THE HOLOCAUST

סקופייה

SKOPLJE

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Josip ELAZAR

WITH A RIFLE AND A GUITAR THROUGH THE STORM OF THE WAR



Josip Elazar was born in Dobož (Bosnia and Herzegovina) on 16 April 1916, of father Salamon, trader, and mother Estera (Erna, Zlata) Nahmijas, also born in a trader's family from Banja Luka. She came from an old family Elazar which had moved five centuries earlier to Bosnia after the Jews were expelled from Spain at the time of the Inquisition. Father Salamon perished in the Jasenovac concentration camp. His mother Erna took her life during the attempt by Ustaša in 1942 in Dobož to arrest her. The eldest brother Mordo (Bukus), a trader, was taken with wife Flora and daughter Sida to the Banjica camp in

1943, and they all perished there. Sister Berta, married Danon, was taken in 1944 to Jasenovac. Brother Moša with his wife and two children were taken to Jasenovac, where they were killed. Brother David, watchmaker, died while in a Partisan unit in 1943. Of the ten children by Salamon, only Josip, his sister Sida (Ida), a teacher, and the sister Klara, a tailor, had survived the Holocaust.

Josip completed his elementary school in Dobož, and the public Leather Processing School in Visoko in 1937, supported financially by his uncle and the scholarship from the Jewish society „La Benevolencia“. He was engaged in arts from his early youth, especially painting and music. He played the violin and sang well. Throughout his life his guitar was always with him, even during wartime years. He was very active in sports, specifically gymnastics, within the youth sports movement “Sokol”. After he completed his education

he lived and worked in Belgrade and Split. At the beginning of the war he was in Dobož, fleeing to Split, and subsequently, in 1943 he joined the fighters of the National Liberation. After the liberation he pursued the career of a professional soldier, and was promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel. He received outstanding military decorations, including the Order for Courage. After the war he matriculated and in 1952 completed the quartermaster-financial school for officers in Trebinje. He was subsequently employed in the Logistics Administration of the Yugoslav National Army (JNA). He worked for many years as quartermaster of the regional Military Hospital in Belgrade, until his retirement in 1965.

In Belgrade he was an active member of the Jewish Community. For two consecutive years he was manager of the Jewish summer camp in Zaton Mali, near Dubrovnik.

He was very enthusiastic about painting, especially water-colors and gouache paint technique. He started learning painting in 1950 with teacher Đorđe Ilić, a Belgrade academic painter. He was among the founders of the Painting Group of the Army Hall, with which he exhibited his works in more than a hundred exhibitions. His first independent exhibition was staged with Rafajlo Talvi in 1971, organized by the Jewish Historical Museum in Belgrade. His paintings were also exhibited in exhibitions on Jewish topics. He was member of the „Painting Club Đuro Salaj“ from Belgrade with which he exhibited in the country and abroad, individually and as a group. He had 12 individual exhibitions and won numerous painting awards and prizes, the most important being the Grand Prize of the „May Encounters Đorđe Andrejević-Kun“ in 1990.

In 1948 he married Milka Ratković, with whom he had a daughter Vesna, Ph.D. and professor of the University of Belgrade, married Radoman, who gave him two grandchildren, Dina and Đorđe. He also had an adopted son Radoje Tatić, translator and journalist, and grandchildren Sava and Jova. He passed away in Belgrade after a brief illness in 1994.

*Fleeing Ustaša-administered Dobož and illegal work in Split.**

When the war began in 1941, I was living in the town of my birth, Dobož, working on the construction of the Sarajevo–Dobož railway, in the accounting department, as accountant. I was under the influence of communist and socialist ideas along with some of my friends, especially Vlado Kalezić, land surveyor (later to become a general in the JNA), as well as Josip Jovanović, Uzunović, and Eraković. In the “Sokol” youth sports

*The author wrote this text on 21 April 1982 in Belgrade, and his daughter Vesna made some additions to it

society, where I was a member from age of 6 until the age of 20, I made many friends of all religions and nationalities. At that time, the country was under the influence of Fascist ideas, especially Hitler's national-socialism, advocated by some individuals also in Doboj. I remember Jovica Savić, son of the Doboj baker, who gave every penny to provide for his son who was studying in Prague to be an architect, and who instead came back to Doboj with his head full of Hitler's ideas. I got into a fight with him once over a hearty dispute that we had, in which I was advocating the independence of our country and confronting the ideology of Fascism.

The arrival of Ustaša and the Germans meant the arrival of lawlessness, murder, forced conversion of people to Catholicism, denunciations, and rounding people up to concentration camps. The relations among people and neighbors changed overnight. The "Cross" organization gathered around the Catholic Church was becoming increasingly active and aggressive. Jews were taken by force to work for the German army behind what used to be the "Sokol" home, and were also taken away to camps. The tragedy of those hard-working petty traders, doctors, shoemakers, carriage drivers and so on was only that they were Jews. Under such circumstances a trader in construction materials Renert and his wife, and old couple, in order not to be taken to a concentration camp, consciously took their lives by poisoning themselves in their room. The most high profile Ustaša that I remember was Glavanić, from the barber shop at the old railway station, and Mahnić, who was the key person in charge of distributing yellow Star of David armbands to Jews, and also an old man from Doboj whose name I have forgotten. An outstanding organizer of the Ustaša administration was a bank clerk Dusper, experienced Ustaša activist. He stopped me one day in the street and instructed me that I have to report every day at 11 o'clock to the Ustaša commissioner's office. Once he moved to a new post, I had to keep on reporting to the new Ustaša camp master, the Catholic priest with two Ph.D.'s, the perfidious dr Kamber. While reporting to the two of them I was subject to brutal interrogation, I was spit on and humiliated in different ways; this made me understand the bitterness of being tortured. When the yellow Star of David armband was attached to my arm, I went to the old railway station and in front of the „Maks Griza“ hotel, with many people assembled there, I was slapped by a German with such a blow that I will never forget it. That was the last drop. I made a resolute and irreversible decision to leave Doboj and fight against Fascism.

It was not at all easy to leave Doboj. Under a false name, with counterfeited documents, together with my sister Ida, I set out on an uncertain journey. In the train I was approached by a soldier wearing a uniform of the former air force. I did not recognize him right away, but he reminded me

of who he was. He said: „I realize that you are in a difficult situation, but do not think that I have forgotten that some years back you saved my life when I was drowning in the river Bosna. If I can help you, I am willing to do so“.

Seeing that I am facing a courageous young man I proposed to him, instead of leaving the train as intended in Rajlovac, to continue with us to Sarajevo and to escort my sister and me through the military exit of the railway station, which was the place where Ustaša agents were waiting for suspicious passengers and taking them to camps. Mustafa, that was his name, safely escorted my sister and me by the guards and thus most likely saved our lives.

The same day we continued by train to Mostar and, after many difficulties, arrived to Split on 12 September 1941, where the Italian authorities put us in prison. We were released from prison so that we could, supposedly, continue our trip to Klis, in the Independent State of Croatia, although in fact we stayed on illegally in Split. Our sister Klara was living there, married to Mento Altaras, a trader from Split. They took us in and helped us settle down. I got a job as trade assistant in Mento's shop in Bosanska street number 6.

I was under the impression that the Italians were much less consistent in enforcing Fascist ideas than the Germans. This impression, however, was dissipated by the acting of local Fascists led by A. Hofman and Đ. Sava. I remember the anti-Semitic posters by Italian Fascists which were posted one morning along the Bačvice beach during the year 1941. That year the occupier expelled all Jewish pupils from primary and secondary schools in Split. The situation was similar with clerks and traders. I witnessed crimes committed by a “Black Shirts” group led by the notorious Split Fascist Giovanni Sava. They stormed the Split Temple in the middle of prayer, beating up people, injuring them, destroying sacred objects and temple property. They threw out all prayer books, old books and documents through the window and set them on fire. At the same time they broke the windows of the Morpurg bookstore and used the books from it to keep alive the burning fire.

I immediately made contacts with the National Liberation Movement through Jozef Danon, watchmaker's assistant, Cadik Danon, and Izidor Finčić. One day they told me that I was tasked to take a package of bombs to a conspirational person. At the set time, on the top of the Bosanska Street, I received the package and on the coast I handed it to the said person. After the war, when I once told my then commander, Đorđe Lisica, about it, he told me: „Dear friend, that is how we tested people for the National Liberation Movement (NLM). What you were carrying was not bombs, but stones“. Once I won the trust of my comrades by my attitude and my actions, at the beginning of 1943, I became part of the NLM of trade assistants and clerks and subsequently became the chief of three underground groups which I

led until I joined the Partisans. The groups included Jozef Pesah, Jure Radić, David Memez, Albert Eškenazi, Fanika Grof and others. I met many underground activists, exceptional people, such as my superior Šime Krstulović, active, conspirational, with deep faith in our ultimate victory, and from my side I passed on these features to my associates; there was also dr Silvije Altaras, a physician from Split, great humanist, knowledgeable in Marxism, an outstanding speaker. Many times I encountered him at the warehouse of his brother Mento, and in his “infirmery” treating and healing wounded Partisans. My older brother David and sister Ida, with whom I lived together in the center of Split, were also involved in underground work, but we kept this secret from each other due to high level of conspiracy and risk, although we assumed it. For the first time I was sure of this when I saw David moving about hastily and throwing some papers down the toilet while the police was in front of our apartment. Subsequently, they both joined the Partisans, but only Ida came back alive. David was killed in combat near the village Jabuka, in the vicinity of Sinj, as fighter of the Mosor Partisan detachment. He was an excellent watchmaker, diligent and committed worker. He was also a dear, patient, peaceful and tolerant man.



*JOSIP ELAZAR attended the officer's logistics – financial school in Trebinje.
The photograph was taken in June 1952*

By the end of 1941 Ida, Klara, David and I were very much concerned for the destiny of our parents who stayed alone in Doboj. We did not know

much about our other brothers and sisters. My sister and I at that time decided to engage a woman from Split, a Catholic, and pay her to go to Dobož and try to help us in some way, possibly by getting them out of Dobož and saving them. When she came back to Split she told us the following: „Your father Salamon has been taken to Jasenovac. An Ustaša captain has moved into your apartment at the old fair grounds. Your mother had to be his servant and she was subject to harassment. When I arrived in Dobož, your mother had already died“. She took her life before being arrested by the Ustaša. Her funeral and burial was organized by Muslims from Dobož. Later on Branko Popović, a survivor from Jasenovac, also from Dobož, told me that he witnessed the moment when my father was killed in Jasenovac, with a blow to his head. I was desperate and I cannot find words to express that sadness in words. I let my beard grow in mourning and wore it for a long time. My guitar at that difficult time was a source of comfort and spiritual healing.

Split played a big role in accepting numerous refugees, especially Jews, and strongly supported the underground activists, the Communist Party, and the National Liberation Movement. I am deeply convinced that very few towns had such a patriotic, heroic, exceptional and well organized population as was the case with Split. This was mostly so among the young. The illegal work was very dynamic despite the presence of many Italian agents. At the meetings of illegal activists actions were planned and tasks assigned: writing slogans with oily paint, desecrating Fascist symbols, spilling ink on tables with street names written in the Italian language, distributing leaflets, collecting clothes, shoes, bandages, bottles (for tanks) for Partisans, collecting weapons and information regarding enemy warehouses. I will never forget how very welcome, confident and trusting we felt, as illegal youth activists, regarding the success of the national liberation struggle on 1 May 1942 when the red flag was put up on the church of St Dujo, or when the Italian music was played on the Split waterfront with the accompanying chaos which is difficult to describe, after which the music did not parade around town for months.

So, I put on an army uniform and took a rifle into my hand

When life in Split became too risky because arrests happened on daily basis I decided to join the Partisans. In September 1943 I left the town with a group of illegal activists. We went to Žernovica with our weapons, intending to get in contact with the 18th unit of the Mosor detachment in Dubrave, which we then joined.

I always had with me, along with my backpack and my rifle, also my guitar which pacified myself equally as it pacified the tired and hungry souls of my comrades in arms during intermissions and rest. One evening, by the

fire in the forest, I was playing and singing everything that I knew, starting from Bosnian traditional melancholy songs to Sephardic ballads. The fighters appreciated the music, many shed a tear. One of them came to me with tears in his eyes and from his shabby military coat took a cube of sugar, wiped it carefully with his sleeve, and gave it to me as a present. That present I will never forget.

*During the war, along
with his rucksack
and gun, he carried
with him his guitar, to
relieve his soul and the
souls of his exhausted
and hungry comrades.
Even later, when
freedom came, he was
always inseparable
from his guitar.*

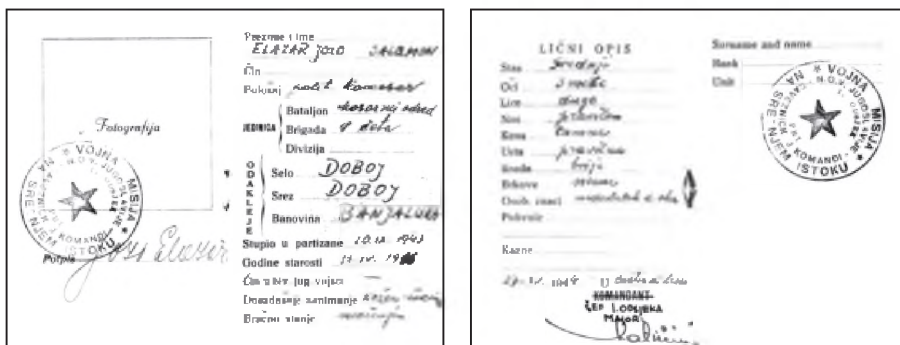


I was later transferred to Stari Grad on the island of Hvar, in the Fourth Operational Zone. Subsequently I went to Italy, to be political commissioner of the operational unit in the Partisan camp Castro di Lece. My task was to gather our confined comrades and establish a cross-border brigade in Castro di Lece.

Later I was transferred to Gravina, as commander of the logistics unit. The arrival to Italy meant that life became much easier, no more fear of hunger or death. Mussolini capitulated, the Allies arrived, and freedom was not too far away. I was also engaged in cultural activities (as secretary of the committee for culture), I painted and designed posters, organized ceremonies, played the guitar and sang. I also successfully completed the automobile driving course.

The road that I had taken was leading me to membership in the Communist Party in 1944. I was admitted to the party by Nikola Dotlić and Mate Raos, within the party unit of the auto school Gravina (Italy). In Gravina I was in charge of many responsible tasks: assistant chief logistics officer and deputy commander of the fourth auto-school. In February 1945 I was appointed commander of the transport auto-line consisting of 36 trucks, the then popular „Dodge“ trucks, and military equipment, as well as medically treated veterans who were to be transferred from the port in Bari to Belgrade. We started on our journey on 9 February from Bari, via Dubrovnik, Montenegro, Tirana, Ohrid, Skopje, all the way to Belgrade. The section through Albania was the most difficult one. We were attacked by gangs, es-

pecially at night, which disrupted our progress. Finally, after great efforts, without heavy losses, we happily arrived in Belgrade at the end of March.



The Partisan ID of JOSIP ELAZAR, issued in November 1943

When I arrived to the liberated Belgrade, I was made part of the III battalion of the motorized formation, as political commissioner of the accompanying detachment to the head-quarters of the motorized command. I was happy to once again be back in this town, I had friends and relatives in it. I decided to stay and work for the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA).



Painting by JOSIP ELAZAR „The Gloomy Scenery“, gwash

I started a new life in liberated Belgrade, happy to be alive and with great hopes for the future. Of course, the sorrow for my lost parents and many relatives never stopped and could never be forgotten.

So, even after the liberation, the rifle and the guitar remained always with me.

U MOJIM SLIKAMA I CVETOVIMA

Još u meni živi uspomena
u slikama i cvatovima
na mrtve drugove...

Sretnem njihove
oči, lica, grč, osmeh
u pupoljcima i vrbama,
ja živ, a oni mrtvi
razgovaramo...

Koliko je rasuto grobova
zemljom,

koliko hrabrih i nevinih...
ko će na sve humke staviti
belu hrizantemu...

Lutam cvetnim poljima,
razgovaram sa drugovima
i kolonama,

koje mi se vraćaju
u slikama i pupoljcima.

Josip Elazar

ATTACHMENT BY JOSIP ELAZAR

Population, victims of Fascism, and fighters of
the National Liberation War of Jewish origin from Dobož, 1941.

Red. broj	Prezime i ime	Srodstvo	Zanimanje	Žrtva fašizma	Učesnik NOR	Primedba
1.	Levi Boja	supruga pok. Isaka (Kuče)	domaćica	logor	-	-
2.	Levi Donka	kći	domaćica	-	-	udata Skutari
3.	Levi Rifka	kći	domaćica	logor	-	
4.	Levi Jakica	sin	trg. polj. ?	-	-	umro
5.	Levi Binjo	sin	krojač	ubijen	-	-
6.	Levi Moni	sin	trg. polj.	-	učesnik NOR	živ
7.	Elazar Salamon		trgovac	ubijen u Jasenovcu		
8.	Elazar Ema (Zlata)	supruga	domaćica	nađena obešena u kući		
9.	Elazar David	sin	urar	-	poginuo 1943. u selu Jabuka kod Sinja	
10.	Elazar Ida	kći	učiteljica	-	učesnik NOR	živa
11.	Elazar Josip (Joža)	sin	kožar. tehn. p. puk. JNA	učesnik NOR	živ	
12.	Pesah Simha	udova pok. Davida	domaćica	-	-	-

13.	Pesah Majer (Buki)	sin Davida	trgovac	logor	-	-
14.	Pcsah Angclina	supruga	domaćica	logor	-	-
15.	?	kći	dete	logor	-	-
16.	Pcsah Jozef	sin Davida	trgovac	-	-	-
17.	Pcsah Sida	supruga	domaćica	ubijen	-	-
18.	Pcsah Rita	kći	dete	-	-	-
19.	Pesah Albcr	sin Davida	trgovac	-	-	-
20.	Pesah Sofija	supruga	domaćica	-	-	-
21.	Pcsah Cita	kći	dete	-	-	-
22.	Pesah David	sin	dete	-	-	-
23.	Trinki Moric		štampar	logor	-	-
24.	Trinki Aneta (rođ. Pesah)	supruga	domaćica	logor	-	-
25.	Atijas Blanka	udova Salamona	domaćica	logor		
26.	Atijas Berta	kći Blanke	krojačica	logor		
27.	Atijas Mordo	sin	fijakerist	logor		
28.	Atijas Micika	supr. Morde	domaćica	logor		
29.	Atijas Mikica	sin Blanke	obučar	-	-	umro
30.	Atijas Mirta	kći Blanke	domaćica	logor		ud. Flajšer
31.	Atijas Mošo	sin	urar	-	poginuo 1943.	
32.	Flajšer Jakob		gostioničar	logor		imao dva sina
33.	Flajšer	?????	hotelijer	logor		imao sina i kćerku
34.	Flajšer Elza	kći Maksa	domaćica	logor		ud. Ščeta
35.	Flajšer Josip (Joži)	sin Maksa	knjigovođa	?		
36.	Abesberg Emil		dir. banke	logor		
37.	Abesberg Julka	supruga	domaćica	logor		
38.	Abesberg Anita	kći	bank. čin.			
39.	Isković Adolf		gostioničar	logor		

40.	?	supruga	domaćica			
41.	Isković Joži	sin	porez. čin.			
42.	Dr Ileš Vojislav		veletrg. drv.	logor		
43.	Ileš Ilona	supruga	domaćica			živa
44.	Ileš Stjepan (Pišta)	sin	zubar			živ
45.	Ing. Levi Mojsije		šef sekcije	Jasenovac		
46.	Levi Flora	supruga	domaćica	logor		
47.	Levi Mario	sin	učenik			živ
48.	Altarac Majer		trg. pomoćn.		poginuo u borbi	ud. Ščeta
49.	Altarac Lorica	supruga	domaćica		učesnik NOB	
50.	Altarac Lonika	kći	dete		učesnik NOB	
51.	Altarac Santo		trg. pomoćn.	logor		imao dvoje dece
52.	?	supruga	domaćica	logor		
53.	Lesić Zvonko		činovnik	Jasenovac		
54.	Lesić Rahela (Micika)	supruga	domaćica			živa
55.	Angelus Puba		veletrgovac			umro
56.	Skutecki Greta		domaćica			udata Ick- ović (živa)
57.	Renert Leopold		trgovac građev. mat.	otrovaio se		
58.	?	supruga	domaćica	otrovala se		
59.	Renert Etelka	kći	domaćica			udata Saračević (živa)

Primedba: – Prezime i ime štampano masnim slovima znači daje reč o glavi porodice ili samcu.

- Menahem (Davida) Elazar („Mento“) rođen je u Doboju. Činovnik ureda za osiguranje radnika u Sarajevu. Upućen u Jasenovac. Iz logora pobjegao i stupio u Četvrti krajiški odred NOV. Poginuo maja 1942. godine kod Čememice. U Doboju nije bio 1941. godine.

Beograd, septembra

Sastavio
Josip Elazar
p. pukovnik JNA u penziji (S.R.)