

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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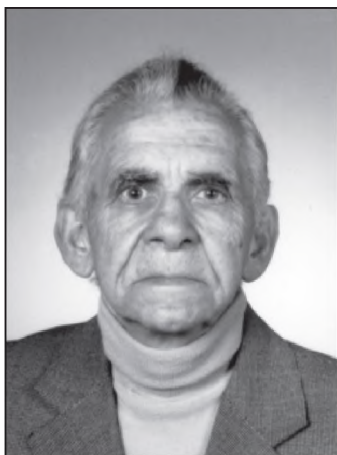
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*Eliezer KATAN*

## THROUGH FORESTS AND MOUNTAINS



*Eliezer Katan was born on 22 February 1920 in Rogatica (BiH), of father Eliša, born in 1888 in Rogatica, and mother Mazalta (née Katan), born in 1890 in Goražde. During the occupation, his parents and his younger brother Izidor, born in 1932, were hiding for a while in the surrounding villages. In autumn 1943 they were captured by Ustaša, slain and thrown into a well. The elder brother Albert, born in 1915, survived the war.*

*After the war he stayed in the Yugoslav Army. He graduated first from the Military Sanitation College, department for assistant pharmacists, and subsequently continued his studies at the Faculty of Pharmacy. Within the Pharmacy Service of the Yugoslav Army he worked in different positions and lectured at the School for Reserve Sanitation Officers. Some years before retirement he was appointed head of department for history of the military sanitation service, with the task to collect and process documentation regarding the sanitation service during the National Liberation War (NOR), publishing about twenty papers on this topic. He was a regular member of the Yugoslav Scientific Society for History of Public Health.*

*He lived in Belgrade and was married to Marija (née Fijal), with whom he had a daughter Matilda, doctor of molecular biology, working in London. She is married to Robert Muller, and has a son Alexander.*

*Eliezer Katan died at the beginning of 2007.*

I completed my elementary and lower public grammar school in Rogatica, a town between Sarajevo and Višegrad. Until World War Two there was a small Jewish Community there. With the exception of one pharmacist and one lawyer, all Jewish families were engaged in trading. They had small shops, mostly catering for the village population. My father also had a shop like that with a modest assortment and quantities of products.

My elder brother Albert went to the technical secondary school in Sarajevo, thanks to the assistance of our relatives who took him in and provided for him a place to stay and food, and thanks also to the scholarship extended by the society „La Benevolencia“. Thanks to the support of the family of my mother's sister it was also for me it was made possible to continue my education in Sarajevo (1934–1938). I attended the boys' apprenticeship school, trade for metal workers.

Upon my arrival to Sarajevo I joined the Youth Zionist movement Hashomer Hatzair. I was aware of the objectives of this society since my brother was previously a member as well.

After completing my schooling I tried for several months in vain to get a job. Therefore I asked to be invited for hahshara, preparatory apprenticeship and I received the invitation in January of 1939 to go to Novi Sad, where there was hahshara for trades. I worked in the Vojvođanska Foundry. In April 1939 we moved to the agricultural hahshara in the village Golenić, in the vicinity of Podravska Slatina, where I stayed until February 1941, when it was closed due to the risk of war, and I had to return to Rogatica.

The German occupation of the country in April 1941 and the proclamation of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) happened overnight. At the beginning, the garrison in town consisted of a German unit, with some 300 to 400 troops. There was no Ustaša organization in the Rogatica district at that time, but soon it was established. The decrees and racial regulations put in place by Ustaša authorities had to be enforced. In June, the German army and garrison were replaced by the “home guard”, and an armed Ustaša formation was founded. Right away they assigned commissioners to Jewish shops. Younger members of the Jewish Community were sent to do forced labor in their barracks, and this was done more in order to humiliate them than it was actually necessary.

During the summer, in July and August, the situation in the Rogatica region suddenly changed. The resistance in the villages grew and soon turned into an armed uprising. Resistance units took control of many villages and attacks on roads interrupted the traffic. In the first week of September Rogatica itself became the target of attacks. One morning the rebels walked into the town but stayed in it for only a couple of hours. The “home guard”, with back-up from Sarajevo, was back soon.

A couple of days afterwards retaliation started. Late in the afternoon, “home guard” patrols, led by Ustaša, suddenly and hastily, were taking from houses all men, Serbs and Jews, including my father and myself, rounding them up in the church courtyard, subsequently placing us all in the church residence. We spent the night in the church hall. Needless to say, we were overwhelmed by gloomy thoughts. In the morning, through the back streets, they transferred us to the Public School, located across the street from the military barracks. They put about 140 men in two classrooms on the first floor, and about twenty women, mostly teachers, in another room intended for teachers. They said we were detained as hostages. They allowed blankets and pillows to be brought for us from our homes, saying also that subsequently we can receive clean clothes from home.

The following day, the town commander, the home guards’ chief and the head of civilian town administration came to visit the prison. Looking more closely into elderly detainees, the town commander looked at my father Eliša and told him he could go home but must not leave it. The reason for this was that the two of them served together in the same unit of the Austria-Hungarian Army during World War One. The food, tasteless and always the same, was brought from the home-guards barracks. Practically every day we were taken out for an hour to walk in the school yard.

One afternoon, at the beginning of October, the guards stormed in. They ordered us to run across the street and go the area in between military pavilions. Many of us were only in our shirts, barefoot or in socks. They lined us up in pairs. After some waiting, the radio was turned on. We were listening to the speech by general Milan Nedić inviting the Serbian population to obey the occupier’s authorities.

As I was putting on a clean shirt brought for me from home I found in it a postcard sent from Sarajevo saying: „Daviko and Šmuel went to Jaar to visit their aunt“. The message was clear: they had gone to the woods and joined the Partisans. They were my haverim with whom I did hashara in Golenić.

In mid October the attacks of rebels started again on locations surrounding the town. The discipline in prison became stricter at that time. There were five guards with us detainees in each room. Previously it was just one guard per room, in the hallway in front of the room. Food was brought in only once a day, at night. That was when we started having concerns about what would happen to us as hostages. It went on like that for about a week. One day, after midnight, the men guarding our rooms were called to come downstairs to eat. For a while we could hear them and then everything became silent. About an hour later a guard came into our room saying that the home-guard had abandoned the military camp and that he had decided to stay and join the Partisans.

Right away, one of the prisoners, carrying a white flag, went to the position of the rebels and notified them. Soon some five or six fighters came and told us to go in groups to surrounding liberated villages and wait there until the town is completely liberated. It was early morning, 24 October.

About ten of us, in a group which I joined, went to the village Gučevo, about two hour's walk away. There was a numerous group of fighters from that village who were with the Partisans. Our hosts were very welcoming and after a hearty breakfast there was a surprise – a copy of the „Borba“ newspaper, printed some days earlier in Užice.

The following day we returned to our homes. About five or six younger Jews right away made contact with a Partisan unit. They put us in the security unit to perform guard and patrolling duty. Chetniks also had a unit for the same purpose for other guard locations in town. The patrols were mixed, made of fighters of both of these formations.

In several villages in the region of Rogatica there were hospitals established with a significant number of wounded fighters. The only pharmacy in the district was in Rogatica, with considerable stock of supplies, for that time. The pharmacist managed to prepare and pack for us packages and therefore asked the commander of the guard unit to assign an assistant to him. I was allowed during the day to work in the pharmacy, provided that every second night I do my four hours of patrolling. Above the pharmacy, on the first floor, was the apartment of the doctor, manager of the district hospital in which at that time some Partisans were treated. He told the pharmacist that in the hospital there is a wounded Jew from Sarajevo. He also mentioned a name which sounded familiar to me. I went to visit him. I had seen him before and knew him as a very active member of the „Matatja“ society. It was Salamon Konforti, a clerk from Sarajevo. He died on 19 June 1943 near Goražde.

At the end of November, Rogatica was stormed by groups of Chetniks, local rural folk, with cargo horses and, along with shooting, immediately they started robbing shops. Thanks to a swift intervention by partisan units the robbery ended and they were all sent back to their villages. Parts of the First Proletariat Brigade, founded in Rudo, came to Rogatica on 24 December, in early afternoon. Two days later my haver from hahshara, Pajki, who was also with us for a day in April, at the time of capitulation, came to see me. At that time he managed to change parts of his uniform for civilian clothes. (Valter Koen-Pajki, worker from Belgrade, fighter of the First Proletariat Brigade. Killed at the end of 1942 in Pjenovac, near Han Pijesak. His younger brother, Erih, who was also at hahshara in Golenić was also killed as fighter of the National Liberation War.)

In mid January 1942 the Germans, together with the home-guard, launched a major offensive in eastern Bosnia. In the vicinity of Višegrad, their fight against the Partisans was joined also by the Chetniks. The units withdrew from Rogatica towards the areas around the Romanija mountain in the afternoon on 14 January. That was the day when I last saw my family. The links with the Jewish Community of Rogatica were severed. At the end of December 1941 there was a total of 10 Jewish families in Rogatica, with 38 family members. Nine of them have survived, either by living in hiding or joining the National Liberation War.



*ELIEZER at hahshara of Hashomer Hatzair in Golenić, March 1940*

The units which withdrew from positions were temporarily accommodated in the barracks of the Podromanija region. The guard unit of the Romanija detachment was disbanded and we were sent to different parts of the detachment in the surrounding villages. That is when I was given my Partisan name – Lazo.

The enemy offensive got the Romanija Partisan Detachment into a very difficult situation. Taking of great parts of territory and getting control over practically all communication routes meant practically full disintegration of units into smaller groups. The detachment suffered a heavy blow with the killing of its commander *Čiča Romanijski* (Slaviša Vajner). The severe winter, with heavy snow, further aggravated the communications as secondary roads and forest roads became impossible to use. Many individuals left the units, and some detachments just disbanded. During the offensive, under pressure, the detachment withdrew from its position near the road. At that time there were



about 60 of us. During the initial days we could not get far, we only launched minor attacks on patrols and remote guards. Later we moved towards western Romanija, to villages that most fighters of the detachment were from.

A turnaround happened in the first half of March, when the HQ of Partisan detachments ordered all Partisan units to gather in the town Srednje (about 30 kilometers north of Sarajevo) for re-grouping purposes. Within a couple of days about 200 to 250 fighters came. Apart from the Partisans from the region of Romania villages, there were many young people, students and workers from Sarajevo and the surrounding industrial settlements. I had known some of them before. We were regrouped into new formations and preparations were underway for the establishment of a strike battalion, modeled after the battalions of proletariat brigades. Right away a group was set up and a choir of about twenty fighters for a celebration. The direct organizer of these activities and the author and composer of the song of the strike battalion as well as the choir conductor was our then deputy battalion commander Jovo Cigo. (Oskar Danon, the Sarajevo composer and conductor, decorated with the Partisan Commemorative Medal of 1941, the deputy of the First and Second ZAVNOBIH.)

The First Eastern-Bosnia Strike Battalion was a highly mobile unit with capable commanding staff, high degree of political maturity and self-discipline among fighters. I was sent to the first battalion unit, of about 50 fighters, mostly from villages around the village Pale, and some pupils and workers mostly from Sarajevo. I stayed with this unit as a fighter full fifteen months without any interruption. During that time we crossed the country far and close, from Romanija and Zvijezda, Ozren, via Konjuh to Birač, then Majevisa, again via the Sava and the Bosut forest to Fruška Gora and Iriški Venac, and back again to Semberija, Trebava, across rivers Spreča and Drnjača, along the Milan mountain to Romanija, and back to Šekovići.

When I contracted the spotty typhoid in May 1943 I was admitted to the Partisan hospital in the village Aščerići. That is how I was separated from my Partisan unit and comrades with whom I spent a long time and shared difficulties but also aspirations.

When I was leaving home I was quite well dressed and had good shoes. Things became difficult after one month of walking on foot, when my boots (which kept me warm and dry in winter) completely fell apart. The only thing that I could get at the time was folk shoes made of unprocessed raw hide. If it rained, the shoes would get a bit softer, but they would also become slippery, as if you were walking on ice.

I remember well one dark April night. We were descending down a muddy hill. I could not do ten meters without slipping. I got bruises all over, but I had to get up right away and keep up the pace with the line ahead

of me. Early before dawn we arrived to a village near Vareš, wet and dirty with mud.

The commander, as usual, distributed the fighters into local homes. I was put up with three more men to a small house, and we were told that we are not planned for any guard or patrol. When we entered the front room, where the fire place was, we noticed the great poverty. When asked about food, we said that we were not hungry, that we want to lie down somewhere. In the little room there were three children sleeping and the woman put them to one side while in the other she arranged some more straw and a cover on top of it, making a place for us to sleep. We took off our wet clothes, took off our shoes and socks, and put everything around the fire place to dry. Several hours later, when we got up, we were pleasantly surprised. Our host had cleaned our clothes as well as our shoes and socks and had it all dried. She cooked for us a plain pie (soft mixture of barley baked on a thin oiled baking casserole, baked under a baking lid). She was apologizing for not having anything else to offer. She borrowed a cup of milk from neighbors to put on top of it to make it taste better. Also, of the four colored eggs (it was Easter) that she had for the four of them (her and the three children, the husband was taken as prisoner) she gave us two. So, we each had half an egg along with the pie.

In mid April we arrived to the region of the Ozren Partisan Detachment, holding position in the direction of Doboje and Maglaj. In the villages around there were big groups of Chetniks threatening to attack. After our arrival we went with a part of the detachment to visit the villages and talk to village commanders in order to avoid conflicts. They all promised to come the following day to the detachment HQ in order to work out an agreement.

So, they arrived the following morning, but with a different agenda. Overnight, they collected all their forces and staged an attack on us which took us by surprise. In the first blow they arrested about ten fighters in a house at the outskirts of the village. They stormed the school which was home of the detachment hospital with some wounded fighters and the detachment doctor, dr Roza Papo, who had a big cut that was still healing on her face as a result of a broken window of some ten days ago when the hospital was bombed. We quickly withdrew to the nearby hill and regrouped and went into a decisive counter-attack. The Chetniks were chased away, the wounded and the arrested fighters set free.

At the end of May a group of striking brigades started a move across the mountain Konjuh. We were moving across a totally uninhabited forest terrain. The march took long because we had two or three times to go back and search for the right track to the top. We were without food for more than four days, and we could find no drinking water along our way. We would tease our hunger with a few leaves of wild garlic, when we came across it on

the grassy plateau clearing. Thirst was eased by “acid” glass, similar to clover or other types of leaves found under oak tree bark.

On the very top of the Konjuh mountain we were resting for some hours. The sunny May day gave us the pleasure of enjoying the forest panorama in front of us. The march continued and the following day we arrived to Drinjača, near Šekovići. We made contact with the Birčanski detachment. In the Drinjača river we washed and refreshed ourselves after a long time. The detachment HQ in Šekovići welcomed us with a hearty lunch after which we slept in the school classrooms.



*ELIEZER KATAN was with the fighters of the first battalion of the 6th East Bosnia Brigade (the second one on the right, with the fur hat)*

The battalion's attack on the stronghold Han Pogled (on the road Han Pijesak–Vlasenica) was made around 3 AM. The resistance of Ustaša was very fierce and lasted about half an hour. Making use of the morning semi darkness they started withdrawing towards the nearby woods. Right away we went after them, moving from one tree to the next. It was already daytime when I, hastily and carelessly, suddenly found myself face to face with an Ustaša some fifteen meters away. It seems that we spotted each other at the same moment and reacted instinctively: throwing ourselves on the ground and shooting. You cannot be accurate in such a situation, but I was not touched by his bullets. When the detachment got together again afterwards we found out that two of our fighters were killed in the morning combat. One of them was Buki. His grandfather and my grandmother were brother and sister. (Alkalaj /Merkuš/ Mošo „Buki“, born in 1920 in Bjeljina, worker.

He was with the National Liberation War since 1941, Rogatica, fighter, killed on 15 June 1942 at Han Pogled.)

During the summer of 1942 we spent most of the time in the region of Birač, which became our standing base for combat. Usually it was attacks on minor Ustaša or home-guard strongholds or traps along the road, more or less successful. We would go back to the base for short breaks to make use of the sunny days, to wash and get our clothes clean at the little brook by the Lovnica monastery.

Food was always scarce and what was there was always the same. Breakfast: a thin cooked browned flour, sometimes coffee substitutes or tea; lunch: a small piece of cooked meat with some cooked vegetables or corn-bread. Dinner was often skipped.

The group of battalions was transformed into the Sixth East-Bosnian Strike Brigade on 2 August 1942, in a field near Šekovići. The order of the General Staff was read in front of the lined up battalions. The ceremony was attended by many people from neighboring villages. Within the Sixth Brigade ... „there were as fighters the best representatives of Serbs, Muslims, Croats, Jews ... workers, farmers, and the inteligencia of eastern Bosnia ...“

In the area of Majevisa, Trebava and Semberija there was a number of isolated Chetniks, under the command of different self-proclaimed commanders. For some time we avoided conflicts among us. A group which called itself the Military Chetnik Detachment, under active officer Subotić (after the war he received the rank of general in the Yugoslav Army) put itself at the disposal and under the command of our brigade. The key goal was to strengthen the Majevisa Partisan Detachment in the region.

At the beginning of October the Brigade HQ decided that two of our battalions should move across the river Sava into the region of Srem. Boats were boarded near the village Brodac. There were only 6 or seven boats of small capacity so the transfer took until dawn. On the Srem side, at the embankment, there was minor resistance by local home-guard unit. Beyond the embankment there was a huge complex. One day, around noon, we were near an abandoned hunting lodge (the place was Dvorac), along a very wide cut. Patrols sent a message that a big formation of the German army was moving along it towards us. The order was for us to take positions on both sides in the forest by the road and wait for their formation to come within the reach of our trap. Soon they were there. Our shooting took them by surprise. To protect themselves they could only use the trenches by the road.

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\*THE FIGHTING OF THE 6<sup>TH</sup> PROLETERIATE BRIGADE, „Naša riječ“, Zenica 1973, Pg. 12.

The battle lasted for about three hours. They suffered great losses and started to withdraw. We also lost about ten fighters.

The following day, while we were resting on a distant forest plane, there were four wagons coming to collect wood. The wagons were kept by the afternoon when boxes of shells were loaded on them along with some wounded fighters. It was all covered with blankets. We arrived to a road where there was already a car and our battalion commander standing by. He took from the line-up a number of fighters, including me.

He noticed that the ten of us who gathered around were all wearing German army coats and other parts of uniforms from which we had not yet managed to remove the identification marks. Our task was to escort the wagons through a village which only had a village guard. It was getting dark while our leader dressed in German uniform was telling the village guard that they should all move, including the villagers, until we pass through the village. We got through smoothly. We were soon by the river, and loaded the wagons on the river ferry which was standing there and we were soon on the other side of the river. And the ferry driver, by calling out in German, got the ferry for us to board. We moved on right away and during the night we crossed the road and railroad Belgrade–Zagreb. The following afternoon we managed to crass the road Erdevik–Ilok and arrive to Fruška Gora, place called Ležimirska Kapija.

We were resting in Fruška Gora for about two weeks. We stayed in dugouts dug about two meters into the hillside. We were so used to going without food that the food there was more than good enough. That was an opportunity for full recovery. The unit was also filled with new fighters from Srem, and the brigade now had another, fourth, battalion – Fruškogorski.

During our stay in Srem, the Chetnik units in Majevisa region got better connected among themselves. After we crossed over we clashed frequently with the increasingly strong Chetnik groups. They were preparing for a major strike on our units. At end of November there was fierce and decisive battle with their key group near the village Maleševci (northern Majevisa).

In order to mislead the Chetnik intelligence, the battalion moved at night before the combat, after going through a number of villages. In every village we would do preparations for overnight, stay about an hour and move on. Thus, during that one night we changed seven different places to stay overnight and in the morning we were on position for attack.

In the combat which lasted almost until noon I was assistant to out machine-gun man. He had a coat with well stuffed shoulders. One moment I heard a blow and the next moment I saw his coat shoulder shattered to pieces. The bullet fortunately just missed us. The outcome of that battle was the arrest and the surrender of many Chetniks who were mostly let to go

home, and the ultimate result was the total disintegration of Chetnik forces in that area.

We stayed in the region for another two weeks during which the Majejica detachment was fully reorganized. By mid December the brigade completed its transfer across the road Zvornik–Tuzla and went south to Birač, where the Chetniks from Romanija were located. When they found out about our arrival they started withdrawing immediately. We arrived in Šekovići on 19 December (St. Nickola's Day) and in a line-up we crossed the river Drinjača, about half a meter deep. Along the right river bank we continued uphill, for more than four hours, without stopping, in order to keep our clothes from freezing. In a village we had our clothes dried and spent the night. The following ten days we were catching up with Chetniks and going into intermittent combat with them, until we got closer to Romanija, where the snow was quite deep and we gave up further chase.

On the way back to Šekovići I walked tormented by the pain in my joints. I was given a cargo horse to ride on. I cannot say what was more difficult – the pain caused by walking or the freezing on horseback. Much of the road I was holding the horse by its tail.

By the end of April 1943 the brigade was moving practically across the same area of central eastern Bosnia as the year before, constantly on the move, frequently getting into combat with Chetnik or home-guard units and strong-holds and intermittent resting in different locations.

It was probably the end of April or beginning of May when our Sixth and the newly-established Fifteenth Majejica Brigade started a major march towards the area south of Sarajevo. On the second day, while climbing up the Milan mountain, I got a high temperature. Due to suspicions of spotty typhoid I was immediately transferred to hospital in the dormitory of the Lovnica monastery near Šekovići. The high temperature subsided within four or five days. It was in fact a severe flue and the exhaustion which lasted for another ten days, therefore I stayed on in the hospital.

At that time the frequent movement of enemy units in the direct surroundings posed a threat to the wounded and the sick in the hospital, due to which the patients were evacuated from the monastery dormitories, with practically all the wounded and doctor Roza Papo leaving for the area of Majejica to the village Trnava. Those with lesser wounds, the sick and the convalescents moved to the village Aščerići, situated on a small plateau about two hours' walk above the monastery. After another two or three days I again had a high temperature, I had contracted spotted typhoid. I was lying down in a room, on the floor and all the medical assistance consisted of taking my temperature twice a day, mornings and evenings.

Due to the immediate threat posed by the enemy we moved into the woods. A few of us sick with the typhoid were put up in a sinkhole covered with branches where we stayed for four days. A few days after our return to the hospital, the danger was over.

During my recovery from the typhoid, especially during the first days, I was just silent all day long, sitting by the fire and staring at the cooking pots, waiting for time to pass from breakfast to lunch, from lunch to dinner. I have only scattered understanding of what was happening during that period.

By the end of June the wounded started to arrive who managed to break through after the battle of Sutjeska. Their number was increasing every day and the task of receiving, accommodating, and recording them required the involvement of all, including convalescents, so I too was given certain tasks.

While receiving a group of severely wounded fighters who were brought in on oxen driven wagons I had an interesting encounter. The wagon driver was from Seljane, a village close to Rogatica, who went to elementary school with me. For a year we even shared the same desk. After greetings, we started talking about how it was in Rogatica. He told me that most Jews were rounded up by Ustaša already in February 1942 and taken to the area around the Romanija mountain, where they were executed, but that my parents and my younger brother were still alive and hiding in some surrounding villages.

With the constant inflow of the wounded and the sick their number exceeded 150 and their care in the first half of June required a restructuring of the hospital so that it was divided in a number of villages in the area, which were all on a plateau at a distance from each other of 500 to 1,000 meters. All of these small villages could have had some thirty households scattered in small groups. This created many difficulties in setting up parts of the hospital and accommodating the wounded. There was very few qualified sanitation staff; as I remember, only three or four doctors and about fifteen nurses, mostly those who came with the wounded.

In July 1943 a number of home-guard members threw some shells into a cave housing about ten heavily wounded persons and most of them were killed. The cave was located in a narrow and steep gorge, about 50 meters from the Lovnica monastery. Some kilometers further, in a forest, in the direction of the river Spreča, the enemy found a number of hiding wounded fighters and with them a doctor Sidonija Lipman, and killed them.\*

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\*Dr Sidonija Lipman-Polak, born in 1893 in Baja, Hungary, a Jew, doctor. She joined the NLM since 1941 in Šabac, manager of the hospital of Mačvanski detachment, fell in July 1943 near Tuzla.

By mid July I was well recovered and I asked to be sent back to my brigade, but was not allowed to do since they had very few staff to work in the hospital with such a big number of the wounded and that was why many of us who had recovered were kept there to help.

I was put in a group which was bandaging wounds, to assist in handling severely wounded persons. My additional task was to collect from all groups the used bandage material and take it to persons in charge of washing the material. I was also in charge of collecting from all departments their lists of medicines needed and taking the lists to the pharmacist. The subsequent day my task would be to collect the clean bandaging material and distribute it to groups and departments. The stocks of bandaging material and medicines were very scarce. The hospital pharmacist was mr. ph. Bruno Finkelštajn from Prnjavor. These tasks took all my time during the day, being all the time with the heavily wounded I witnessed their suffering and their courage. Surgeries in the hospital at that time were performed by dr Ivo Herlinger from Osijek.

At that time, in September 1943, the Third National Liberation Army Corps was active in the territory of eastern Bosnia. The hospital that I worked in was named the Hospital 1 of the Third Corps. We had control over a big territory. In October the town of Tuzla also became part of this territory. New casualties arrived to the hospital along with a number of doctors. A significant quantity of medical supplies came from Tuzla. Another arrival was that of the pharmacist mr. ph. Vladoje Grabarić from Zagreb. At that time I was assigned to prepare and arrange the premises and store the received sanitation supplies. That storage was used to supply the hospital and other units of the army.

Some days later when the above tasks were completed, the pharmacist Vlada used a small room with a wooden floor and improvised in it a desk with pharmacy scales and some instruments for preparation of medicines. All of this was brought from Tuzla along with other supplies. Along with a Pharmacopeia, there were also some manuals – practical guidelines for preparation of medicines. Using these Guidelines, Vlado started teaching me some basics of pharmacy.

In December a new enemy offensive was launched against the liberated territory of eastern Bosnia. The hospital was to be evacuated. The most serious wounded people were put into digouts in the forest that were prepared in advance. Some staff and those with lighter injuries were moving along with the combat units. A part of supplies from our storage was distributed to the hiding places with the wounded, to have some reserve stock. Everything else was moved to two separate digouts.



I remember one specific situation. An older engineer, a nurse, and her ten years old son (who had arrived a month before from Tuzla) were moving in the line with the hospital staff. Then, one moment, they stopped and went to a tree. The engineer started calling out: „Friends, let us go this way to this attractive restaurant and refresh ourselves“. A fighter went to them and came back to the line. That was the only time that I have ever seen a person having hallucinations, which happens with persons who are extremely exhausted.

At end of December 1943 the wounded were taken out of the digouts, the sanitation staff came back, and the hospital continued in the same little villages as before. At that time the pharmacist Vlado had an assignment to go to the hospital Trnava in the Majevisa mountain. I was ordered not to get the sanitation supplies out of the digouts. Specifically, I was told to get from the digouts a small quantity of supplies and with them to settle in a small solitary house in the woods, close to the digouts. In that house there was an old man, solitary, father of the regional commander. I did as told.



*ELIEZER in Sarajevo, July 1945.*

The hospital was at a distance of an hour's walk along a forest track. Every second day I would go to the hospital, get my food supplies, and receive from the hospital the list of needed sanitation materials. I would then get the material out of the digouts and the following day take it to the hospital. So it was for two months.

At the beginning of March 1944, when Vlado came back, we got all the supplies out of the digouts and stored them in a small house close to the hospital. Here again we improvised a pharmacy preparation desk. Not far from the house there was a stable, and beneath its floor we dug a space for storage of supplies, covered it and placed manure on top of it.

At end of April the Allies seconded a team of surgeons to assist the sanitation service of the Third Army. Major Dr Colin Dafoe, a Canadian surgeon, and his two assistants were parachuted to us. This team brought with it a significant quantity of sanitation supplies. A small portion of this was given to us, and the team retained most of it for their needs. The head of the

sanitation service, based on our experience, suggested that they keep their supplies in the dugouts. The surgeon initially rejected it, but over time he allowed it. We placed their supplies in two separate dugouts.

In September 1944 Tuzla was finally liberated. During October the hospital and the sanitation supplies storage from the region of Šekovići were moved to Tuzla. At that time the Hospital Centre of the Third Army was established in the town, comprising a number of surgical hospitals, as well as hospitals for internal and infectious diseases. The sanitation storage was placed in a big civilian pharmacy. Another major consignment of medical supplies was parachuted to Tuzla in December and we also placed it in the storage. A portion of it, mostly bandaging materials, was located in the hospital's basement.

By mid January 1945 I was working in the storage, after which I was appointed head of hospital pharmacy in the newly established surgical hospital.

At that time I received very sad news. In the street I met a tailor from Rogatica, whom I knew well. We were taken by surprise when we saw each other and we stopped in the street. I told him what I heard the previous summer about my parents from my school friend Veljko Stakić. The tailor told me that what Veljko said was true at the time, but that he had to tell me about what followed. In autumn of 1943 Ustaša had caught a group of Serbs in the surrounding villages, with women and children, who were hiding there. Among them were my parents and my younger brother. They were all taken to Rogatica, to the house of a painter, and they were slaughtered one by one and thrown into a well. After the war, bones were taken out of the well and buried in a common grave of the Partisans' Cemetery in Rogatica.

At end of March I was given a new assignment in the storage of sanitation supplies, with orders to go with a pharmacist from Belgrade to Zemun, to the main warehouse and collect from it sanitation supplies for our corps. There were no major difficulties in doing this task, but I remember one thing. In the train Loznica – Koviljača I was sitting close to a group of prisoners of war released from camps in Germany. While talking with them, I mentioned that my brother was arrested during the April war as reserve officer in the vicinity of Skadar and that he contacted us from a camp in Italy. One of the group asked me about my brother's name, as he was also arrested there. Hearing the name, he said that he knew him and that they were in the same camps in Italy and Germany. He then continued to tell me that two days before the red Army liberated them, the Germans had evacuated a group of prisoners, including my brother, to the west. This gave me hope that I could possibly soon see my brother Albert.

In mid April, after returning to Tuzla, I was notified of being promoted to the rank of sublieutenant and head of the sanitation warehouse of the Third corps.



*ELIEZER celebrating the New Year 2000 with his family*

The news of the end of the war caused spontaneous enthusiasm. At end of May I arrived to Sarajevo to my new post. In this town where I used to have many relatives and where I spent the best years of my youth with many of my haverim from Hashomer Hatzair, I did not find anyone I knew. That is when I became aware of the complete emptiness. I was thinking about how to try to find if there is anyone in Sarajevo that I could find. I do not remember exactly who told me that there is an office of the Jewish Community with a register of those who are still in the city. I found just one piece of information – about my aunt Regina, my father's sister, with the names of her husband Šandor Samokovlija, her daughter from her first marriage – Rozika, and her husband's daughter – Elica. The stated address was the same as before the war. I soon found them. During one of my subsequent visits to them, I also found another of my father's sisters, aunt Roza, with her daughter Lunčika. Her husband Jakov and son Jozef were killed in February 1942 in the region of the Romanija mountain. I was very excited by this encounter, because they also came from Rogatica. They were saved by hiding in the surrounding villages, for a while together with my parents and my younger brother. They confirmed what I had heard about their persecution. It was only thanks to lucky coincidence that they did not end up in the same group.

My brother Albert came back from PoW camp at the beginning of August. He stayed in Sarajevo only a few days. He was sent to Drvar, assigned to be the manager of a saw mill there. He stayed in Drvar for two years. After that, he was working for three years in Bosanska Krupa, after which he moved to Banja Luka to a new assignment where he settled with his family and lived permanently. He died in August 2003. His daughter Gordana and son Aco live in Banja Luka with their families. For a long time after the war I was preoccupied with how to determine the number and names of family members and relatives who had perished. I made a list. I have determined that the number of victims of genocide in our family including relatives was sixty-three, with names of all of them.