
Dr Edo NEUFELD

PERSECUTION OF JEWISH LAWYERS IN THE INDEPENDENT STATE OF CROATIA



Dr Edo Neufeld was born on August 3, 1899, in Rzeszów, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, now in Poland. For some time his father worked as a judge in Tuzla. Edo Neufeld first attended school in Tuzla, and then in Sarajevo, where he matriculated. He began law studies in Vienna and continued in Zagreb, where he obtained a doctorate. In the meantime, his father had moved to Zagreb and opened a law office in which his son also worked. In the 1930s, Edo Neufeld opened his own office in Bauerova Street

in Zagreb. In 1924 he married Albina Spiller, with whom he had two daughters, Lea and Vera.

At the beginning of the war he was arrested by the Ustaša and this was the beginning of difficult and insecure times for him and his family. After a great many difficulties they reached Switzerland, where they remained until August, 1945, when they returned to Zagreb. Because they had neither employment nor accommodation in Zagreb, the family moved to Belgrade, where Edo Neufeld worked in his brother's bookshop. He died in Belgrade in 1947 at the age of 48.

WHAT FOLLOWS IS THE TEXT OF A LECTURE GIVEN BY DR EDO NEUFELD AT THE GATTIKON REFUGEE CAMP IN SWITZERLAND IN DECEMBER, 1943.

Sunday, April 6, 1941. We were awoken by the wailing of the air-raid sirens in Zagreb. We didn't know what was happening, whether this was an exercise in air raid defence, so we turned on our radios. There was little news. All we heard, every fifteen minutes, were the following words: "We are at war, move to air-raid shelters," and nothing else. At the same time the capital of Yugoslavia, Belgrade, was experiencing the worst tragedy in its history. At five o'clock in the morning, as dawn broke, with no declaration of war, the German Stukas swarmed over the city, pelting the sleeping population with their deadly bombs. People were fleeing their apartments in their night dress, barefoot, with no idea where to go. Nor did the German bombers restrict themselves to bombing ministries or war-critical targets, they opened fire from their machine guns on the fleeing population. According to subsequent reports, somewhere between 25,000 and 30,000 citizens, elderly people, women and children, were killed that day.

When it sank in that we were at war, I met my first obligation, to place myself at the disposal of the Yugoslav Army for the fight against the enemy. We were all certain that Zagreb would be taken over by the Germans in the shortest possible time, but as Zagreb and Belgrade had been proclaimed open cities, we were also certain that nothing particularly bad would happen to members of our families who stayed behind there. At this point we knew next to nothing about the inhumane deportations and killing of women and children, so even in our wildest dreams we could not imagine that these things would happen in Croatia which always prided itself on its thousand-year-old culture.

In fact I had my assigned place and was obliged, in the event of mobilisation, to go to Mostar. However the general mobilisation was never proclaimed for those of us who lived in Croatia, in the light of Maček's vacillation which meant that the Croats would meet their obligations to their homeland only to a limited extent. Thus a proclamation of this kind would have caused more harm than good. Meanwhile, general mobilisation had begun on the territories of Serbia and Slovenia.

Hundreds of my fellow believers, Serbs and Slovenes residing in Zagreb, and I among them, stood in long lines in front of the army command. The fifth column also operated in the same place. Most of us were told to report a few days later, despite the Germans being barely a hundred kilometres away.

Everywhere was the worst chaos and the most inconceivable helplessness. The Germans had aimed well on that historic morning, April

6, when they very precisely hit the supreme headquarters at the Labour Ministry in Belgrade, the nerve centre of the Yugoslav war machinery. From that point on every army unit operated without leadership, taking responsibility for itself, and the fifth column – ably led from Berlin – created problems and sabotage at every step. The Croatian regiments were already hesitating to board the army trains. I personally saw a situation in which a battalion of the local Zagreb regiment, the 35th, was sent on foot, with no weapons on a hundred-kilometre march towards an enemy which was well known for being well-armed and motorised.

I became aware of all this two days after the war began when I realised that there could be no talk of a well-organised defence of Yugoslavia. What seemed to be the only possible salvation was flight to the south, towards the British Army, which was fighting together with the Greeks.

I was preparing for this plan together with my brother and two friends, a physician, Dr Vurdelja, and a regular officer, Captain Tomić, and Tuesday was chosen as the day of our departure. Our necessities were quickly packed, after which we took painful farewell of our families, well aware that we would not see one another for a year or two (that's how we saw things then) or perhaps even never again.

At the time agreed I was standing beside my car, already prepared for the trip. Only the regular captain was missing, and he kept sending us messages that he could not leave the post to which he was committed by oath without an order to do so. After we had waited for three hours it became clear to us that he was not going to leave his post and we realised that there was nothing we could do but return to our homes, because it was he who was actually organising our travel. So, after a few hours, I returned to my very puzzled but pleasantly surprised family, who already thought that I had at least reached the heart of Bosnia. When I turned on the radio that evening and heard the news that Skopje, one of the most southern Yugoslav cities, had been taken by the Germans and that, after breaking through the Yugoslav lines, the Germans were advancing westward and thus disabling all contact with Allied troops, we were very happy that our adventure had not taken place.

Thanks to their superior tactics, and the disorganisation of the others, the Germans were successful on all front lines. We men were conscious that we needed to flee, yet we took no action, only wasted valuable time with useless thinking, calculation and discussion.

This was the kind of state I was in on Thursday, April 10, 1941, at about four o'clock in the afternoon, when I heard a grinding sound coming from the street.

The first four German tanks had entered the city without firing a single shot. Croatian and German flags were tentatively appearing on some houses, but in less than an hour the whole city became a sea of flags. An endless crowd in Croatian city militia uniforms came out to welcome the German Army with festive greetings and flowers. Zagreb was gripped in an enthusiasm the like of which had never been seen. Girls and women were kissing the soldiers and those who were arriving by car. This was the same mob of people who, in 1920, had passed through the city under red communist flags, who had assembled in 1925 when Radić, the greatest Croatian peasant leader had spoken against the Serbs, the same who had raised a storm of applause just a month later when Radić made up with the Serbs and publicly kissed the representatives of the most radical Serbian party, then wept bitterly and mourned pathetically in 1934 at the arrival in Zagreb of the train carrying the body of King Aleksandar, murdered by the Croats in Marseille. The sympathies of this mob belonged to the victor, or the unfortunate.

On this April 10, 1941, at the same time as the Germans entered Zagreb, the "independent" state of Croatia was proclaimed. At its helm was the Zagreb lawyer Pavelić, the head of the Ustaša and thus the assassin of the king in Marseille. Decrees followed one after another and, at the beginning, no matter how we interpreted them, they did have the characteristics of state authority and legality. As though public order was firmly in the hands of the executive branch. Although there were mobs marching through the city, demonstrating against Jews and Serbs, they restricted themselves to singing mocking songs and shouting, without doing anything to endanger personal safety or property, as had now and then been the case in Zagreb when the windows of Jewish shops were being broken.

Some men – Ustaša – took it on their own initiative to search Jewish apartments, threatening force and confiscating whatever they liked for their own use. One was a specialist in money and valuables, another in radio sets and a third, an 18-year-old boy, was satisfied with gold fountain pens, which he went from house to house collecting. The state police publicly urged the population to report such cases of unauthorised confiscation, even threatening grave prison sentences, but in very few cases were these incidents reported. This was because those affected were mostly intimidated and, in fear of retaliation, decided not

to report them. In addition the authorities had a very passive attitude to such reports and, in some cases, even threatened the accusers with charges of slander.

Thousands of citizens of Zagreb, Jews and Christians, who were members of opposition parties, ministers and employees, university professors, civil servants, judges, lawyers, doctors and other intellectuals, both men and women, were being taken to overcrowded police prisons. At the same time, the social scum, thieves, frauds, prostitutes and riff-raff were being released from prisons in order to "make room for the gentlemen" and would then be appointed to various state posts. The intellectuals were all at home, packing their bags for prison. So neither I nor my family were particularly surprised when a Secret Police agent appeared at our door on the evening of April 28 and arrested me. After saying my goodbyes to my family, I took my rucksack, which was already prepared, and set off on a journey to various prisons, concentration camps and adventures.

Although I was not afraid of anything in particular, I didn't feel comfortable because, at that time, arrests were already being made for the Gestapo and there was talk about people being deported to Germany. I felt a little better when, waiting in a political officer's vestibule, I met some colleagues of mine and more continued to arrive while we were there. Once we had given them all our vital data they took us – and for most of us this was the first time in our lives – to a police prison. By ten that evening every Jewish lawyer in Zagreb was there, a total of seventy-nine of us, prominent and unknown, rich and poor, young and dignified elderly men. Soon we were behind lock and bars.

The formalities such as body searches, confiscation of assets, photographing and fingerprinting lasted until two in the morning and we all endured this more or less calmly and even in a good mood. We were divided into two groups of forty and each group assigned one cell of six or seven square metres at the most. We barely had room to sit, let alone lie down or sleep. So all of us who, until that day, had slept in our nice apartments and fine beds now spent the night sitting upright, wondering what lay ahead.

When they came to get us out of our cells at six in the morning and returned our belongings, it was obvious to us that we were to be transported somewhere. Pale with anguish and lack of sleep, we tensely awaited the orders that would follow. The prison guards, who many of my colleagues already knew from professional contacts in the past, were very

kind and even went so far as to explain that they would rather be in our shoes than see us as prisoners, because they were unhappy about the current regime. All these people were old Yugoslav police employees who were forced to continue performing their duties although they had nothing in common with the regime. Because of this I believe to this day that they were sincere in these feelings they shared with us.

These same people also revealed to us the secret plan to transport us to a place twenty kilometres from Zagreb, to Kerestinec Castle, the property of Count Mihalović, who was also in a police prison. This was because there was no room in the police prison. The same evening we were arrested, there were forty people from the theatre also rounded up, opera managers, comedians, prima ballerinas and stagehands. They had all been put in the basement and were waiting for our departure so they could be moved to our cells. There was even one malicious person who, in an attempt to frighten us, told us that we were at the disposal of the Gestapo and that they would transfer us to Graz at nine o'clock. This had the effect of driving three of our elderly colleagues into convulsive sobs and then unconsciousness.



Dr Edo with his wife Albina Neufeld in Crikvenica, summer 1940

The news of the arrest of all Jewish lawyers spread very rapidly throughout Zagreb, particularly among the Jewish population. By that evening our wives were running up and down the stairs of our Aryan colleagues, new political leaders and friends to seek salvation and assistance for us. These people felt sorry for them and reassured them that

this was just a provisional measure which would be annulled very quickly once certain laws restricting the assets of Jews came into force. Meanwhile, in the prison yard, we were put into three open police cars. We were not a little surprised when we drove out onto the road and saw a crowd of people, among them our wives and family members, who had already been informed about everything and were waving to us and optimistically bidding us farewell.

The concentration camp in Kerestinec was already packed, so they put us younger ones in the basement rooms and the older people in a large wooden garage in the yard. Four of my colleagues and I were put into a dark basement, 3.5 or four square metres at the most, with walls covered in a metre-thick layer of dirt and cobwebs, with the damp dripping through all this and with one feeble light bulb which was on all day. There I spent forty days.

Our wives were working feverishly, running from pillar to post, and managed to be given the right to pay us one-hour visits each day and to bring us food. The food given to prisoners by the state was one litre of vegetable soup, usually beans, and 200 grams of bread. We were under the supervision of the old police guards who were on our side and who, despite their duties, found ways to be kind to us and give us a helping hand.

In the meantime, the terror in Zagreb was being stepped up. Many Ustaša soldiers who had suddenly returned from emigration and foreign parts began seizing Jewish apartments so, overnight, entire families were thrown out of the apartments they had furnished over decades with their love, hard work and savings. Whether those thus evicted would be permitted to take with them a chest or two of their most important clothing, or nothing at all, depended on the whether those who occupied the apartments were considerate or not.

A contribution of a minimum of 1,000 kilograms of gold was levied on the Jewish population of Zagreb. Those who, in the opinion of the authorities, did not give enough were arrested. After arrest they would be spoken to in their cell and, if they relented to the demands, would be released. I must say that a great deal was handed over, that some people voluntarily submitted in the hope that after this there would be an end to the arrests and that they would be released. They were greatly mistaken because, once the established quota was reached, the amount was again raised and the arrests would also begin again.

The most disgusting Jewish identification tags in Europe were forced on the Jews in Zagreb. Two yellow bands, each ten centimetres long, with the Star of David and the letter Ž (short for *Žuden*, Jew), once across the heart and the other over the left shoulder, which each person had to wear, with no exceptions. However, once babies in carriages began to wear them, along with Catholic priests and nuns who wore them in the streets, the measure produced quite the opposite effect of that intended. Instead of inciting hatred and mockery, people found it unpleasant and gave priority to people wearing the symbols. Because of this, the authorities very soon withdraw the order to wear the signs.

Then began mass movements of people on a scale never before seen in Zagreb. By decree of the authorities, Jews and Serbs were banned from residing in the northern parts of the city and were given 24 hours to vacate their apartments. Many were glad to withdraw from the centre of the city, hoping for a more peaceful life in the suburbs.

Although there were mass arrests in Zagreb every day, things were a little easier among our ranks as first our elderly colleagues then those who had friends or connections in high places were being set free. However what also sometimes happened was that a German car carrying a Gestapo officer would arrive at the concentration camp after which some of our colleagues would first be interrogated then taken away. We remained behind, pale and frightened. In these situations we would hold hands tightly, hug and speak encouraging words, but there were also some tears.

The difficult life in the camp and the even more difficult news from Zagreb was causing the greatest possible tension when, on June 10, after about forty days, two police cars came to drive us to the police administration, from where we were to be released. We were accompanied by so many of our friends and so many policemen that, on the way, the police cars stopped at a tavern so that we lawyers, formally still prisoners, could drink a glass of wine or beer with the policemen and wish one another a brighter and happier future. After our police officer had bid us the warmest farewell, he discharged us with a firm handshake and the promise that he would not lock us up again if we loyally carried out our civic duties. And so we went on to our freedom, although this was to be very short-lived.

On June 18, after barely eight days of freedom during which I had realised that all I could do was to settle my affairs as soon as possible

and flee, a police agent came looking for me at my home and left a message that I was to report to the police administration immediately.

To buy time in which to make some kind of decision, I hid in my sister's apartment for a couple of hours. The family held consultations. My wife and I were in favour of immediate flight, but my father's advice was to respond to the call because he feared that punitive measures would be taken against the family. I accepted my father's advice, returned home, took the rucksack I had previously packed and, without any escort, headed straight to the police prison. Many of my colleagues had gone voluntarily to prison the same way, not knowing that by so doing they were going to certain death. And that is what would have awaited me too, had I not been saved by extraordinary circumstances.

As long as I live I shall not forget the sight of my parents, my wife and my children on the balcony of our apartment, bitterly sobbing and waving as they stood and watched their son, husband and father walk away in the direction of the prison.



*Daughters Lea and Vera Neufeld,
1937*

This time there were twenty-eight of us, because our older colleagues, those over 55, had not been arrested, and many of the younger ones had already fled to Italy. Following formalities at the police administration, they transported us the following morning to the familiar Kerestinec. Only members of the Communist Party, mostly from the prisons still under Yugoslav control, were moved to the castle. We lawyers were put in a garage in the courtyard. Among us was Croatian Peasant Party MP Stjepan Kovačević, and it was thanks to him at one moment that we remained alive.

I was living far more comfortably. Just the fact that we did not have to live in a damp and dark basement was a relief. We were free to walk around the yard for four hours every day. We passed the time walking around, taking showers, playing handball and doing the various camp jobs they dragged us to.

For several days I worked in a group together with my university professor who had conducted civil litigation examinations. We worked on clearing a garbage dump, the work was satisfying and we were in a cheerful mood. It seemed as though this situation would continue until the end of the war.

Large numbers of our fellow-citizens who were still at liberty were preparing for flight. On June 22, 1941, war broke out between Germany and the USSR and the Ustaša pressure increased. The head of state in the new authorities was not ashamed to publish a proclamation in all newspapers for Jews and Serbs threatening that, regardless of age or gender, they would all be interned in open-air concentration camps in the mountains if they did not show loyalty to the new state. There is no doubt that this proclamation is one of the most shameful documents in the history of war in 20th century civilisation.

Without waiting for a response to the proclamation, they then began a hunt for men, women and children in Zagreb. These were then dragged off to enormous concentration camps in Gospić and Jadovno (an abandoned, uninhabited hilltop) and on the island of Pag.

The looting raids of the new Ustaša authorities continued, multiplying daily. Once during visiting hours my wife arrived in tears to tell me that these people had come and emptied the two rooms of my office. Records and documents had been hurled to the floor in the worst possible chaos. My office, which had been built up over years with love and a great deal of work, was completely destroyed so that the new ministries could be equipped with these items.

Each time my wife visited I tried to talk her into fleeing Croatia for Italy with the children. But at that time women whose husbands were prisoners of war or in concentration camps were spared deportation so she felt safe and did not want to abandon me.

On July 7, 1941, a police car arrived at our camp to collect ten prominent leaders of the Communist Party. We all immediately sensed that this boded ill. Sharing the same fate, we had formed warm friendships with most of these and I was particularly sad because my school friend, Professor Ognjen Prica, was among them. He had already served seven years in prison for his communist allegiance. It was also sad for me that those taken included our Zagreb colleague Dr Ivo Kun. All of these people were highly educated and good friends. Our parting was particularly difficult. We hugged and kissed and my colleague, Dr Kun, sensing what would happen simply said: "Tell my wife about this

tomorrow, gently, spare her feelings.” Although we had ways and means of getting news from the outside, we remained completely without information on the whereabouts and fate of our colleagues. Two days later, on July 9, another police car appeared, at about two in the afternoon, returning Krndelj, a school friend of the head of state, who had previously been taken away. Instead of him they now took a young man by the name of Kraus. I still remember we were playing handball at the time and Kraus was preparing to pass the ball at exactly the moment when they called him to drive him away. He blanched and headed towards his ill fate. Within two hours, the death sentence on all these people had been carried out.

The news of the execution was published on huge posters and we learnt about it from newspapers. The reason for the execution was given as follows: “Because the body of a police agent has been found in a swamp and those responsible could not be found, these ten people (and here their names were listed) have been taken before the court as intellectual instigators and been sentenced to death, and this sentence has been executed.” The fact that these people could not have had anything to do with this death is already clear from the juridically impossible explanation and more particularly from the fact that they had been in prison for months. The wives of these unfortunate men were running up and down the stairs of all possible institutions in an attempt to learn something about the fate of their husbands. It was their own fate to find out about this in the street, straight from the posters, among a crowd of curious onlookers.

July 13, 1941, was a beautiful, hot summer day and we sat out in the courtyard outside the garage until eleven in the evening, trying to cool off before going, unsuspectingly, to bed. We had barely fallen asleep when we were woken by gunfire and leapt to our feet at once. There were shots coming from all directions and the deafening noise was not abating. Our first thought was that we were being attacked from outside and that, in our helplessness, all we could do was lock the door on the inside and throw ourselves to the floor. We heard shouting: “We have seized power. A communist government has been established in Zagreb. Give yourselves up! Don’t fire! Don’t shed blood for no reason!” When all this died down, we climbed on chairs to peer through the small windows and see what was happening. In the pale light we saw a group of about twenty police officers being escorted from the first floor to the courtyard. Just as this finished, someone began to bang on

our door urging us, in the name of the new Soviet government in Zagreb, to open the door. We responded to this and a colleague of ours who had until recently also been a prisoner, a well-known newspaper editor, appeared at the door with a rifle on his shoulder, a hand grenade in one hand and his other hand clenched in a communist salute. With him were two other prisoners who were also militarily equipped. He told us briefly and energetically that a Soviet government had been established in Zagreb. He ordered us to stay calm behind the closed door and wait for a badly wounded person to be brought to our cell for us to help him. Outside, things had calmed down and it was only by the crackling of the gravel in the courtyard that we knew that the men who had been our fellow prisoners until yesterday were now leaving the camp.

A few moments later there was another knock on the door. When we opened it they brought one of the camp commanders into our room unconscious, a police supervisor who was bleeding heavily from the temples. They left, again asking us to help him. And so here we were in our prison with a seriously wounded and unconscious commandant on the floor. We didn't know what had happened and stood there completely helpless. Then we quickly took our towels and washed and bandaged him as well as possible under the circumstances. Although we expected him to die any minute, he regained consciousness and, in a voice which could barely be heard, complained that he needed help and to be taken to his room. A few minutes later a Croatian captain appeared in our room with a gun in his hand. He lived close to the castle and, having been woken by the gunfire, had hurried over to see what had happened. He asked us to obey the wishes of the wounded officer and take him to his room, so four of us did so. While carrying him we crossed the deathly silent courtyard to the guard accommodation where we put the wounded man down on a bed. In the guard dormitory we saw four police officers sitting on beds, with deadly pale and bloodied faces, with towels around their heads and their hands tied. It took a little time for the confused officers, who were now scared of us as well, to tell us that, while sleeping, they had suddenly been attacked with blows to the head from rifle butts. Then, before they fled, just to be on the safe side, the communists had tied them up and put them in shackles. We untied them, freshened up their bandages and, on the orders of the captain, set out to look for the police officers who had been taken out. We found them locked in the basement of the old castle tower. As the rebels had taken the keys to

the tower, all we could do was look for axes, hammers and iron bars. Once we found these we managed to pry open the heavy iron door. Slowly and nervously, these men who had been our guards yesterday and would again be our guards tomorrow came out of their cell with their hands tied. They could scarcely believe that liberation had found them in less than an hour. So before my very eyes unfolded the rare sight of prisoners untying their guards and setting them free. When we finished the job we went back to our room, where another three young men from the communist division unexpectedly appeared. They had been hiding in the dark side of the courtyard. They told us that they had not taken part in the mutiny because they were not communists. They asked us for protection, which naturally we were unable to give them.

In retrospect, the history of this mutiny may be reconstructed as follows: the imprisoned communists were aware that sooner or later they would share the fate of their ten colleagues who had been shot, because the camp was a kind of holding area from which people were taken for execution whenever the need arose. Because of this they believed it was better to run and fight for their lives. From that moment the new leaders feverishly decided to mutiny. However they did not want to harm the guards who, as I have already noted, behaved humanely towards us. The cars were to be ready at about midnight but this did not happen, so they left on foot, taking with them as hostages another two police officers, who were later released healthy and unharmed. It seems that only some of the men were involved in the preparations, along with a few leaders, because they were afraid of being betrayed by police agents, who could be found in every prison. This could also explain the sudden noise which woke their other colleagues and forced them to flee immediately. The next morning there were a lot of clothes and shoes found in the prison because people had fled in the middle of the night in shirts and bare feet. This was later confirmed by the two police officers. Apparently most of the shots fired were intended to frighten their own colleagues. The police sentry outside the castle was the only one to fire from the watchtower, and he fired into the air, in the direction of the first floor. The guards were overcome as follows: the police officer standing duty outside the prison was called inside on the pretext that an inmate had been taken sick. As soon as he put his foot on the stairs he was attacked and disarmed. Then the armed rebels (whether or not they had had other arms at their disposal could not be established) headed for the watch tower where they

attacked the guards, who were half asleep, and disarmed them. They took the machine gun they found there, along with ammunition and hand grenades which had been prepared. As soon as the news spread outside the castle among the police officers standing guard, a hunt began for the runaways (of whom there were about eighty), and so we heard machine gun fire not far away. Our castle had become the main headquarters for oppression operations. For the rest of the night, whole units of Ustaša, police officers, soldiers and gendarmes were coming and going, in cars and on motorcycles. Every now and then they would bring in a securely tied prisoner.

By five in the morning, the supreme Ustaša police chief, Kvaternik (the Croatian Himmler) began conducting an investigation. We were in an unenviable position. He informed us that our last hour was to have come that morning. It was our luck – or perhaps only mine, because this would have been an easier end for my colleagues than their eventual death after several months of inhuman suffering – that Kovačević, the farmer delegated by the Croats mentioned earlier, was among us and had declared all of us equals, thus ensuring we were spared this time round.

News of the mutiny and the earlier execution of Jewish lawyers had already spread to Zagreb. Thinking ahead about this we had sent information to our families that we were healthy, thus sparing them concern and suffering.

Even harsher conditions were now applied. All contacts with the outside world were banned, although we still learnt through secret channels that we and the Serbs interned in the farm buildings would be moved the next day, July 15, first to Zagreb and then to Gospić. And this was precisely what happened.

When we arrived outside the police prison we knew that our wives had already been informed about everything. They were standing laden with luggage, clothes and food, waiting for us to arrive. We spent the whole afternoon in the yard of the police prison. After great effort, our wives managed to give us the things they had brought for us. But even though they tried in every possible way, we were not allowed to say goodbye to one another or spend even a few minutes talking. It was sad watching them walk through the police hallways all afternoon, trying at least to wave to us through the windows, while they were being chased away the whole time. Nevertheless they continued trying to reach the forbidden places. In one lucky moment, thanks to a kind-hearted police guard who left the door ajar for a few moments, we managed to quickly

squeeze each other's hand through the open door and give each other a passing kiss goodbye. For my co-prisoners, this was their last meeting with their wives and parents.

At about midnight we were again put into police vehicles and driven through the silent city into the most horrifying night of my life. After driving a few minutes, the vehicles changed direction, heading away from the railway station. They drove us to a large courtyard in the Zagreb Fairground. When we 28 Jewish lawyers and 40 Serb intellectuals reached the large exhibition hall, the police guards left us and the Ustaša took command, sixty young men, all with fixed bayonets. Immediately a command rang out for us to sit on the floor in two rows, if we did not do so they would open fire. The Ustaša kept cocking their guns deliberately using the sound to make us fearful. Then an Ustaša commander approached us with brisk steps. I recognised him as a former waiter from the Corso tavern, where he had often served me. He was walking along our rows, looking at us without even blinking, then called one of us, Dr Branko Peleš, the son of a Yugoslav minister, to approach him. We were ordered to observe carefully, anyone not carefully watching would be shot, without exception. And then a disgusting performance began before our very eyes. The poor man was immediately given the order "Down!". He remained standing stiffly, staring at the man who had given him the order. He was a captain in the reserve and for him such an order was quite incomprehensible. After several blows from the rifle butts of Ustaša who were standing all over the place, he immediately understood the order. First the orders "Down!" and "Up!" came slowly, but the more he became exhausted from them the faster they came, so that as he was throwing himself on the floor he was already being ordered up, until he began stumbling and losing strength. When he was no longer able to keep it up, he said he would rather be shot. As soon as he said this the Ustaša and the captain-waiter began kicking him and hitting him with rifle butts. Gathering the last remnants of his strength, he managed to obey the orders a few more times. It was clear he would lose consciousness within a few seconds but, before this happened, the captain struck him with his fist in the jaw, so that blood poured from his mouth and then the unconscious man hit the concrete floor with his head. They moved him to the side by kicking him and then applied the same methods to two more Serbs, the commissioner of the Zagreb traffic police, Milo Sadžak, and the senior doctor from the health insurance, Dr Mrvoš, achieving the same results with them. Then it was

the turn of the bishop of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Sarajevo, Petar Zimonjić. He was an elderly man of 82. He was tall and dignified, wearing a clerical robe with a mitre on his head and a long white beard. He stood before us as a martyr. His appearance triggered diabolical howling from the Ustaša. As he could hardly bend over, the Ustaša contented themselves with just pulling at his beard and spitting on his mitre.

At about three in the morning, in the dead of a dark night, they loaded us onto a freight train in groups. As we climbed onto the train we noticed that we were not alone and that there were other people in there, women and children, whom we woke up. They turned on torches and we saw our new fellow-sufferers were Jews from Varaždin who had been torn out of their beds the night before and who were now to set off on the journey to Gospić with us. In one corner of the wagon was a woman dressed in black, sitting on the floor and weeping bitterly. When we shone our torches on her we recognised her as the doctor wife of our colleague Dr Ivo Kun who had been killed five days earlier. The unexpected arrival of her husband's colleagues who, until recently, had shared the same fate as him, the fact that we were all hale and hearty while he was in his grave, exacerbated the pain of this unfortunate woman. Seeing this, we all wept with her.

Once we were locked into the wagons from the outside, the train began its eight-hour journey. We hung on the barred windows and thus bade farewell to Zagreb and our remaining family members. Because the Italians had guaranteed the possibility of asylum to Jews, we were filled with hope when, about forty kilometres from Zagreb, we saw Italian soldiers standing guard. This hope faded along the way, however, because when we called on them to intervene, to have the wagons opened at least for a short while, they were unable to do anything. Physical needs had to be satisfied and, as shouting, banging and crying were no use, we had to do this in any way we could, while attempting to spare the others the embarrassment.

And so, at about noon, we arrived in Gospić, a new execution site for Serbs. Under the searing noonday sun, a sad convoy of six hundred men, women and children, led by the dignified bishop, walked down a three kilometre road to the city. Two women, a mother and daughter from Varaždin, dragged out of their house despite suffering severe angina pectoris, were part of this on stretchers all the way. The Italian soldiers and their officers watched and photographed everything. The civilian population was watching us from their windows, with disap-

proving faces. Here and there an old woman could be seen wiping tears from her eyes.

In the big yard of the prison within the Gospić District Court, we saw about two thousand Serbs, camped on the floor. We could see Ustaša with rifles aimed at us in all the first and second floor windows. At both of the entrances, beside the staff, there was also a machine gun aimed at the people. One Ustaša, some driver who was now a new commander, amused himself by forcing the bishop who had been harassed the night before to carry a large, heavy barrel of water past the women and children and sprinkle the yard with water.

A few hours later they transported us Jews to a cinema where we spent about fourteen days, in a large hall. There was no possibility of food for these six hundred people. We ate what we had brought with us and the better-off among us, those who had managed to stash away some money, were taken to taverns under guard. There were screenings in the cinema on Sunday evenings when all of us, even the small children, had to vacate the hall with all our belongings and remain in the yard until midnight. All this camp life took place in a rather small courtyard, about four metres wide. Because I had already been cooking for us lawyers in Kerestinec, and as those who ate this food were satisfied, I was chosen, with the advocacy of my colleagues, to be the cook of the newly established kitchen. In this capacity I celebrated there, on August 3, my 42nd birthday. The president of the Varaždin Jewish cultural community delivered a celebratory speech for me, the men's choir from Varaždin performed a song written specially for me and as a birthday present I was given a diploma signed by all the participants. I sent this diploma, as a memento, to my wife in Zagreb. Afterwards I learnt that it had appeared a year later as an exhibit at an anti-Jewish exhibition in Zagreb. The management gave us no food. We introduced compulsory taxation and management. As I was also in charge of obtaining supplies for the camp I had to go frequently into the city. There I had the opportunity to see many things.

There were new transports of Serbs and Jewish families arriving every day from all over Croatia. On the other hand, many Serbs would leave the prison yard every day, heading through the city to the mountains. It was sad to watch them. There was a long chain in the middle, with fifty people tied on each side of it, on the right and left. Old and young, urbane city people and simple peasants, post office and railway employees in uniforms, all were taken out of the city on the same chain,

to be killed there and thrown into some mass grave. I saw many such people. I could not say the exact number, but allegedly somewhere between 35,000 and 50,000 Serbs suffered this fate in one month. At that time the Italian occupation army in Gospić comprised at least 7,000 soldiers, while the executive power of the Ustaša was barely five hundred people.

The Italians, even higher-ranking commanding officers, would go for walks and watch all this without intervening in any way to save these people from certain death. The behaviour of the Italian Army at the time was quite incomprehensible. The Ustaša behaved extremely insultingly towards them. If an Italian officer dared to take a local girl out walking, the Ustaša would immediately arrest her and take her to their main headquarters where, as punishment, they would shave her head and then throw her out into the street. All this time the press in both countries was proclaiming their mutual friendship.

One group of internees, about 2,200 Serbs and three or four hundred young Jewish men, mostly between the ages of 17 and 22 were encamped in the open air on top of a hill called Jadovno on the Velebit Heights. They included my cousin Norbert and the sons of parents who had fled to the area. They had very inadequate food and were forced to perform the most difficult road building labour. Conditions were very strict. For example, the use of the toilet was allowed only until nine in the evening. One young Jew, eighteen years old, named Atias dared to exceed this time by five minutes and because of this was shot dead during roll-call the following morning. I was told about this by a Zagreb lawyer and several young men who were released from this camp by accident. The fate of this camp is shrouded in great secrecy. There were always new stories going round, that they had fled and joined the Partisans, that they had been saved by Italian soldiers, that they were interned in camps in Italy, and so on. Upon investigation all these stories proved to be pure invention. In Gospić itself there were horrifying rumours spreading about the disappearance of the camp. The fact is that there were no signs of life of any of these people from the beginning of 1941. At that time the Ustaša brought us several cauldrons and a quantity of kitchenware, claiming that they were from Jadovno, because the camp had been abandoned.

At the beginning of August were moved to a newly-established camp about two kilometres from Gospić in buildings, barns in fact, belonging to the stock-breeding school. Women, children and the elderly

were put in a barn which had formerly housed sheep while we men were sent to a hayloft which could only be accessed by climbing a ladder. As new transports kept arriving every day and the number of us went up to more than 1,600, we complained to the commandant that we had no room. The commandant was a trading assistant from Zagreb, a paralytic by the name of Pudić. Fear drove him to carry a rifle on his shoulder around the town, although the rifle was not a weapon for officers. He handled our complaint by calling all camp residents to assemble, with our luggage, in the courtyard at eight in the evening. At this point a storm began. The rain was pouring down in sheets. We stood outside, soaked through, until midnight, when he showed compassion by allowing us all into a room in which we could barely stand and in which we had almost suffocated by morning.

The next day, with fourteen of my colleagues, I was transferred to Gospić where we were supposed to be supplementary labour for the city's supply organisation. In the camp, until our departure, we worked on road building. Our food consisted of three or four potatoes per day. Because the camp was located outside the town and was strictly supervised we were unable to obtain anything else, so it was a certainty that most of us, particularly the children, would not survive for long.

My colleagues worked hard from morning to evening. They carried full bags of grain on their backs. Because my colleagues had appointed me as cook, for fifteen days, at our own expense, I prepared hearty and healthy food for them. We moved around freely in Gospić, which gave me the opportunity to learn many things of which others were ignorant.

Before the war the population of Gospić had been half Serbs and half Croats. The conflict between them had gone on for decades and when the Croats came to power the Serbs were their first victims. At this time their remaining families were rounded up for deportation. Then came a daring Italian officer who wanted to save these women and children and, because he was the commander of a vehicle convoy, he put them all in army vehicles and took them to Italy, with no orders from higher command posts and possible even contrary to a command not to interfere in these matters. Another hundred or so people were awaiting departure in the yard of the army unit. However, when further travel was banned, the people had to be turned over to the Ustaša.

There was a fratricidal war raging in the Gospić area. Every day we could see villages burning. These were mostly Serb villages, with a

Croatian village burnt in retaliation here and there. Rifle and machine-gun fire were daily music.

At one time I had to go to the hospital in Gospić to have a nail removed after my thumb became infected. In the hallway of the hospital I ran into about twenty Serb children between the ages of three and ten who were playing there. All these children had bandages on their heads, chests and arms. They told me that their houses had been set on fire and that when they tried to escape through the windows, the Ustaša jabbed them with bayonets to drive them back inside. They were saved by Italian soldiers who appeared on the scene and who also photographed them.

This is when information began to spread, and to be confirmed every day, that the Italian Second Army, which had remained on this territory as an Allied army, would take over the highest army authorities and supervision of the civil administration. Together with a colleague I visited the local Italian command to ask the commander, a major, whether this information was true and when the takeover would happen, and to inform him that if it were true we would seek Italian protection on behalf of everyone interned in Jewish camps in the vicinity of Gospić. After a long discussion he informed me, with regrets, that there could be no talk of any taking over of the Jewish camps and that the takeover of full power in the territory would happen only after the Ustaša left the field, along with all the existing camps. In any case, he said, no harm would come to the inmates because they would be released as soon as they reached Croatia. The Ustaša were spreading the same stories when the transfer of the camps began.

We decided to stay where we were, because no one cared about us at all. The main concern of the Ustaša was to move their families and their furniture to a safe place, to Zagreb, because they were afraid of retaliation. I had just returned from hospital and was heading to our accommodation when I found my colleagues waiting for me outside my building. All my luggage had been loaded into a vehicle. They told me about their chance encounter with the camp commandant who, rather surprised, established that there were a certain number more internees in the place and then asked them to go immediately to the railway station, where transport was waiting for them, because they would be liberated in Croatia. I made a split-second decision and explained to my colleagues that I would not obey. "I'm staying here and anyone who wants to follow me should do so." Because they did not agree with my

decision, I took my luggage from the vehicle and we said our goodbyes, embracing one another. And so our paths diverged, mine into freedom and theirs to the death that found them soon after this.

I hid for a few days in Gospić with a diligent baker woman then, when I received information that my wife and children had reached Sušak, a town annexed by the Italians, after a flight from Zagreb where they left everything behind, I boarded a train and set off for Crikvenica, near the Italian border. Because the Ustaša were no longer performing any services in this area I felt quite safe and so chose the far faster and more comfortable journey by train, rather than travelling on foot or by car as I had been advised to do. In Crikvenica I immediately found an Italian Army driver who said he was prepared to smuggle me over the Croatian border to Italy for 500 lire. He hid me among empty wine barrels he was driving to Sušak, covered me with a blanket and, for my protection, stationed a soldier with a fixed bayonet over the barrels and me. And so I crossed the Croatian border, without ever seeing it at all. I arrived in Sušak soaked in sweat and there, overjoyed, was met by my family. The news of my arrival from Gospić immediately spread throughout Sušak where many refugees from Zagreb were living. Many people would approach me in the hope of learning a little more about members of their families who were in Gospić. I had been in Sušak for only a few days when, without warning, I was arrested by the Questura, the Italian police. At that time in Sušak there were mass arrests of Jews who would either be sent back across the Croatian border or put into prison in Rijeka, from where, in four or six weeks, they would be free, interned in Italy.

A day later police agents came for my wife and children to transfer them across the border with me, as was customary at the time. They claimed that we were to be interned as free people in Padua, but we had already been warned that no Italian police agent ever spoke a single true word. Because of this, my wife lay in bed, claiming to be ill. But they took my daughters Lea and Vera from my wife anyway, and brought them to me in prison. For Vera, who was six at the time, this was all fun and excitement. As soon as I had a chance I whispered to her that she should immediately start to cry and ask to be returned to her mother. This she did so skilfully that all the police clerks and supervisors ran over to us, then after discussing it, felt sorry for the child. They could do nothing but take the child back to her mother. Lea and I were put on a bus back across the border to Croatia. Incidentally, the Italians were

not given to behaving so bestially as to separate a family across the border of two states, but Pilleri, the Sušak quaestor was an evil creature who subjected Jews to much unpleasantness and misery. By the following morning I had found an opportunity to head back to Italy, for 1,500 lire, in an army medical car, however this time not to Sušak but to Rijeka, which was separated from Sušak by a bridge. I made this journey with Lea, both of us in Italian regular army alpine uniforms. We crossed the border without even being stopped and spoke with a sick Italian soldier who was very kind. I made arrangements to meet the driver in town to talk about when and how he would also drive my wife and Vera over. As luck would have it, in the street we now ran into the same agent who had escorted us over the border the day before. Because Italian agents were known for their susceptibility to bribes, I offered him 500 lire to allow me to remain free. Had I offered him more, or had his colleague, unknown to me, not been standing nearby watching, this would no doubt have had a positive outcome. But now he was forced to arrest me. Lea, who was immediately freed, went to her mother, but I went to prison where I remained for five months.

I was charged with attempted bribery. This was very stringently punished in Italy, but such cases seldom reached the courts. A month later, on October 6, 1941, the case was heard. On my way to court, for the first time in my life, I had my hands were shackled. My defence lawyer spoke beautifully and was very moving. Two women in the public gallery wept during his presentation of my position. I was given the lowest sentence, sixteen months in prison. In its October 7 issue, the Trieste newspaper *Il piccolo di Trieste* published a report on the court proceedings under the title *Peripezio di un avvocato ebreo* (Adventure of a Jewish lawyer) which was written with rather a lot of sympathy for me. After this court decision I was in quite a difficult psychological state, which was understandable. My only consolation was the letters I received from my mother and my wife who wrote that they were in fact happy because they knew that I was safe while the lives of my colleagues were hanging by a thread. At the first hearing I had barely understood Italian and was so stupefied by what I had experienced in the preceding few months that I was barely able to give my lawyer any mitigating information. Now I diligently learnt Italian, studied Italian law and prepared my defence speech in Italian. At the appeal hearing I emphasised that, at the time of the alleged violation, I had no command of the Italian language and therefore could not have communicated with

the agent, and so could not have committed the violation. This position was made easier for me by the agent's rather unclear statement.

I sighed with relief on December 19 when they read me the decision of the appeal court, saying that I was acquitted because of lack of evidence. A journalist who heard about my acquittal immediately jumped up and approached me and introduced himself, congratulated me warmly and wished me all the best for the future. The newspapers did not publish any report of my acquittal, probably to save the agent's face. Although acquitted, I spent five more weeks in prison, first in Rijeka and then in Padua. I learnt Italian in the prisons and in Rijeka I worked as a nurse.

I was filled with happiness when I was released on February 5, 1942, with a travel warrant to go into internment in a health resort in Aprica where I would be reunited with my family. This relieved me from the serious nightmare of possibly being sent back across the Croatian border.

Life with my family now proceeded normally, first in Aprica and later, because of my health, in Sondrio. We lived pleasantly and well for a year and a half, while the authorities treated us with tact. I missed my profession and we were burdened with concern for our cousins in Croatia, from where the news continued to be worse and worse. My parents and my three brothers and sisters saved themselves in the area occupied by the Italians. After the events of September 8, 1943, I lost touch with them. My mother-in-law, a lively, sensible and good woman of 77, refused to take my advice. She was receiving a state pension and lived in her own apartment and favoured this state of affairs over the uncertainty of emigrating. To all our letters she replied: "Leave me be. I rely on God and He will not abandon me." But she faced misery anyway when, five days after her 77th birthday, on August 10, 1942, at two in the morning, she was taken, without any of her belongings, in an unknown direction, probably to Poland. After that there was no more news of her, although we appealed to various assistance campaigns and to the Red Cross. We were particularly worried and tormented over whether to believe her words and hope she would return soon.

At the end of 1942, the war was not going to Italy's advantage. Although the entire Italian population, almost without exception, was against the war, and most of them were also against Fascism, the fall of Mussolini did not surprise or excite us, nor did it fill us with the hope of liberation in the near future. Not unexpectedly, Italy capitulated on

September 8, 1943. At first we rejoiced along with a large crowd of excited people, but quickly realised that we must pack and flee.

Before I fled I also took on the obligation of seeing to the fate of two hundred Jews interned in Aprica by demanding from the authorities that they be released from internment. The supreme head of the civil administration of the Italian province, the quaestor, the police chief of the province and the authorised military territorial commanding officer all received me kindly, but to no avail, because they were unable to act without instructions from the Interior Ministry to release them. They sent telegrams and tried to telephone, but as all communications were cut they received no response. Meanwhile, the majority of the internees had fled Aprica. When I learnt this I set off on my own flight and was almost too late because of this delay.

We were going on foot from Sondrio to a hill 3,000 metres high close to the Swiss border. After being cheated by smugglers and wandering around for three days we returned and were twice arrested by the Italian border guards but then released because we had no documents.

On the fourth time we finally successfully travelled the road to the border, after the smugglers had already let us down. We crossed the Swiss border with great relief. Emotion brought tears to our eyes when the Swiss border guards, who had been watching us from afar through binoculars, came towards us with grapes and helped us to get down and carry our luggage.

After being in a number of transit camps, we finally reached this one, Gattikon. We've been here now for two months and are basking in the warmth around us which is generated by our dear commander, Lieutenant Ernst Morgenthaler, our friend and ally.

Through the Swiss Children's Aid, accommodation has been found for our daughter Vera with the family of a secondary school teacher, Dr Hans Waertli, in Zurich. There she has found a new and warm home, better than we could have hoped for. It is moving to see how Mrs Waertli takes care of our child, in spite of the fact that she herself is the mother of two even younger children, and all this at a time when, in Europe, the wild hordes of the "new order" are killing thousands of children or burning them alive.