

## IF ONLY THEY'D REALISED THE DANGER



**J**aša Almuli was born in 1918 and is a journalist by profession. He comes from a Belgrade Sephardic family. His mother, Sofija, was a Jewish activist, and his father, Isak-Žak, from Šabac, was a merchant.

In his early youth he was a member of the leftist, Zionist youth organisation Hashomer Hatzair, but left the organisation at the age of sixteen with a group of young people who believed that Zionism was redundant because the international nature of Communism would also solve the Jewish issue. He again

became active in the Jewish Community at the end of the 1980s, when excerpts from the anti-Semitic publication *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* were published in the book *The Mysterious World of the Masons*, for whose banning he immediately fought. He then turned to research and writing on the suffering and salvation of Serbian Jews during the occupation. In 1989 he was elected president of the Jewish Community in Belgrade. During his three years in office, major work was done on the synagogue and the cemetery chapel and a monument to the victims of Nazism in Serbia by sculptor Nandor Glid was erected on the bank of the Danube on his initiative. He was very actively engaged in the work of the Crisis Staff of the Federation of Jewish Communities of

*Yugoslavia. Reserves of food and drugs were established several months before the outbreak of civil war in Yugoslavia. In the early spring of 1992, about four hundred Jews were evacuated from Sarajevo to Belgrade.*

*In the 1990s, Jaša Almuli focused on creating documentation on the Holocaust. He interviewed about 170 surviving Jews in Yugoslavia and Greece, recording their testimonies on videotape for the Fortunoff Video Archive of the Yale University Library and for the American memorial Holocaust museum in Washington.*

*He worked as a journalist for Tanjug and Borba and was a correspondent in Rio de Janeiro and Washington.*

*The testimony which follows was written by Almuli in the early summer of 2002 using, in some passages, the testimony he gave for the Fortunoff Video Archive at the beginning of the 1990s.*

## JOURNEY TO THE COAST

I left Belgrade on April 6, 1941, at about noon, after the first major wave and second minor wave of German bombing had stopped. The beginning of the attack had found me on Sunday, April 6, at seven in the morning with my friends in Krunska Street (known from after the war until recently as Proleterskih Brigada Street). There we were awaiting the beginning of a rally called urgently by the Communist Party over the pact of friendship between Yugoslavia and the USSR which had been signed in Moscow the previous evening. Now, instead of joy and hope, bombs were falling on us. For the first time ever we felt the horror of being unprotected during an air raid. As soon as it quietened down I hurried home with my university friend Feliks Gorski, a Sarajevo Jew. There I met my sister, Šeka, and my aunts' sons, Žaklen Ruso and Mirko Davičo, who lived in the same building.

We packed a few necessities in rucksacks and hurried through the streets full of rubble and corpses to get out of the city. We headed for Dalmatia, knowing that the Allied forces were in that direction and that the Germans would not immediately go there. There were six of us in the group because, near Senjak, we stopped to pick up Feliks' girlfriend, Dada Konstantinović, also a technology student, a Serb from Sarajevo who was later killed tragically in Belgrade during

the occupation. None of the six of us even thought about returning to Belgrade until the bombing was over. We travelled through Ostružnica from where, with great sorrow, we saw the burning sky above the city, and then continued via Ub, Valjevo, Zvornik and Sarajevo towards the coast.

We travelled almost six hundred kilometres without catching a train. Twice, once in Hercegovina and once just before we reached the coast, we were given a ride in army trucks. Mostly we walked, although now and then we ran into some horses and used them to carry our belongings. We took a break in Sarajevo. Dada took us to her house. We were at her place in Marin Dvor when they bombed Sarajevo. Sarajevo was not bombed as heavily as Belgrade but, because we were going through it all for the second time, it seemed even worse to us.



*Sofija Almuli with her family: Zlata Almuli, Ela Almuli Flajšman, Vesna Korać, Šeka Almuli Korać, Žarko Korać, Jaša Almuli (from left, standing), Žarko Almuli (sitting), Sofija Almuli, Zoran J. Almuli*

In Sarajevo we turned a deaf ear to Betika Romano's call for all Party members passing through to stay in the city. We didn't want to be there when the Germans arrived. After Sarajevo we ran into a

writer and Communist, Radovan Zogović, and his friend, Vera, who joined us. Ten days after we left Belgrade we arrived in the Bay of Kotor. In this bay, in a place called Prčanj, the Jewish Women's Society in Belgrade had a summer resort called Karmel, where many underprivileged children from Belgrade and Bitolj had free summer holidays. For years my mother, Sofija, was the administrative secretary and the vice-president of the society and was already in the home in Prčanj when we arrived. She had left Belgrade a few days before the German attack, with my elder sister Ela and my sister-in-law, Mara Blasbalg from Vienna, who had been rescued from a Šabac camp thanks to her marriage to my brother Mončelo. My mother's two sisters and their families had also left Belgrade before the attack.

### DRAMA AT THE TRAIN

The departure from Belgrade hadn't been without drama. This was something that we began discussing in our house immediately after March 27, because it was obvious to us that the Germans would attack. It was understood that my sister and I must stay in the city to be available to the Party, as members. The discussion was about the departure of my mother and my elder sister and sister-in-law. Ela wasn't a member of the Party but she was an intellectual, and worked for the leftist paper *Woman Today*. She was wounded at a demonstration in Valjevo where she worked as a teacher of French and she didn't want to become a refugee now. My mother, on the other hand, didn't want to leave without at least one of her children, but my elder brother Mončelo, already in the uniform of a reserve cavalry lieutenant, insisted that the three of them go. It took quite a lot of persuasion but eventually he managed to take them to the railway station where, outside the wagon door, there was new hesitation, new resistance. Ela again refused to leave and my mother followed suit until my brother, desperate and determined, at one point drew his officer's revolver from its holster. He didn't point it at them but, having seen it they were dumbstruck and climbed into the wagon. My aunts, Rea Talvi and Sara Ruso, also left with their husband at about the same time and they all met up in Dubrovnik where there were a few more families from Belgrade. Among the others were the family of Enriko Josif, whose mother was also forced to produce her little lady's revolver and tell her sons she would kill herself if they refused to go with her. The

family of Dr Margulis, who had a prosperous private medical practice, had left Belgrade earlier. They were advised to do this by Egon, a German military spy, who later became the master of life and death for Jews in Tašmajdan. At the time he was claiming to be an anti-Nazi refugee and was studying medicine with Margulis' sons, who later became doctors in America.

There were a lot few Belgrade Jews who were wealthy enough to have left Belgrade, even Serbia, and avoid the Germans if they had been fully aware of the danger they were in. We were a politicised and well-informed family, unlike many others. My mother's uncle, a paediatrician who had graduated in Vienna, said when his nieces asked him to join them "The Germans can't be that bad; I know them, they're civilised people."

There were other examples which also testify that full awareness of the danger was often the decisive element rather than someone's material situation. The family of Matilda Baruh, whose elder son was fighting in Spain, fled Dorćol almost without a single dinar in their pockets and went to Đeram to hide under false names, while the wealthy family of Boža Rafajlović did quite the opposite. Keen to join the army, Boža got as far as Boka and then returned to Belgrade with fake Italian passes to get his two sisters out, but returned alone after his father, a merchant, refused to let them go, saying "Well, they're not going to kill all of us!" It wasn't easy for Belgrade Jews to foresee what was about to happen to them. The German activities still unknown in this country at the time had been introduced to Europe virtually only in the remote conquered areas of Ukraine and Russia.

Belgrade was the first city in Europe which the Germans declared "cleansed of Jews". This was in the spring of 1942, at the very beginning of the "final solution" to the Jewish question. All our adult men had already been shot as Serbian hostages during the Partisan uprising in October 1941, at a time when the German Jews had only just been made to wear yellow stars. There were still no death camps in the East in the summer and autumn of 1941. Even when our women and children were interned in the camp at the Belgrade Sajmište, in December 1941, in order to be killed later in gas chambers, it wasn't easy to foresee that a civilised European state would hand down a collective death sentence on an entire people, that it would kill six million European Jews. The uprising in Serbia in July 1941, and the heavy battles against the Germans up to the proclamation of the Užice Republic

lic, brought the destruction of the Serbian Jews forward, ahead of all others in occupied Europe.

## UPRISING IN MONTENEGRO

My mother, sister and sister-in-law went from Dubrovnik to Prčanj, where my entire family soon gathered. apart from my older brother who was captured during the short war and deported to a camp for officers in Osnabruck, Germany. There the Germans observed the Geneva Convention and didn't kill the Jewish officers of the Yugoslav Army, although they put them in segregated barracks.



*The Karmel home in Prčanj, where underprivileged children from Belgrade and Bitolj had free holidays every summer*

Veljko Korać, my sister Šeka's future husband and later a teacher, and Erih Koš, a Communist and later a writer, soon arrived in Prčanj also. I went to Cetinje to join my friends from Belgrade University. I went with one of them, my Party comrade, architecture student Sveta Pejanović, to his village. However, on our way through the rocky country between Cetinje and Podgorica, I collapsed and fell. An infection that I'd contracted while travelling in an open army truck through Hercegovina in rain and sleet had caught up with me. They took me to the Cetinje hospital where, at the time, the only treatments they had

for pneumonia were caffeine and glucose injections and the body's own resistance. When I recovered, I went to Prčanj to convalesce.

Veljko Mićunović, who later became the post-war head of OZNA, assistant foreign minister and ambassador to Moscow and with whom I had worked much earlier in the Belgrade SKOJ and at the university, was working in the Bay of Kotor at the time as Party instructor. Together with him I prepared a small Partisan detachment in Prčanj. These potential fighters were a group of new arrivals from Belgrade and a few young people from the local area. There were fifteen of us, but we had only three rifles and very little ammunition, and only one of us had previously served in the Yugoslav Army and so acquired at least some military skills. Prčanj is a place with just one row of houses along the coast, squeezed in between the sea and the hills where the Italians had their positions, so there was no suitable place for the training which almost everyone needed, because they had never once fired a rifle. The uprising in Montenegro began on July 13, 1941, and the Italians soon brought in reinforcements who sailed into Boka in seagoing passenger ships.

Eight days after the uprising began in Prčanj, we prepared for our little detachment's operation. Veljko Mićunović set off for a destination unknown to us, we gave him our courier as escort and the courier returned with the plan for the operation we were to carry out. To this day I don't know whether it was Veljko who made this plan or someone else, but I do know that it was megalomaniacal and, in a military sense, impossible to carry out. With just three rifles and one soldier in uniform, our group was to attack the Italian artillery positions on a hill above Prčanj, seize their cannons and use them to open fire on a captured Yugoslav war ship anchored in the Kotor part of the bay. No one in our detachment knew how to fire a cannon. I sent the courier back where he had come from with objections to the plan and asking in what direction the detachment should withdraw once the operation was carried out, who would wait to meet them and where, because there had been no mention of this in the original orders. I don't know if there were any other unrealistic plans of action at the beginning of the liberation struggle. I know about the Kosmaj detachment's unsuccessful attack on a group of gendarmes with military experience stationed in a village in this area which, according to Dr Maksim Šternić who took part in it, was reckless and cost many young Belgrade Communists their lives in vain. While I waited for the couri-

er to bring me a reply, we were informed by the Prčanj Municipality that the Italian police would come to our holiday home to check on Jewish refugees who were registered with the authorities. The manager, a local woman named Tone, was also the secretary of the Municipality, so we were all registered in the home apart from Korać, Koš and Feliks Gorski, who lived elsewhere. We gave the three of them the summer home's dinghy and they sailed out to the middle of the bay and waited for the Italians to finish their inspection. However instead of an inspection, this turned out to be an arrest. That day about two hundred Jews who had fled to the Bay of Kotor were rounded up from various places, most of them from Herceg Novi. They put us all on board a ship and, a few days later, on July 25, took us to Albania, to a military camp near a place called Kavaja. While our ship stood at anchor off Kotor, the courier who had returned to bring me the reply came out by boat. He couldn't get to me and I didn't hear the message he had brought. I only know that much later, after the war, Veljko Mićunović told me we would have been killed and that he, knowing the terrain, had barely managed to get himself out of Boka. The Italians had blocked all exit roads.

### CAMP IN ALBANIA

In the Kavaja camp we were treated as civilian prisoners of war. Even now my friends and I have no idea why the Italians rounded us up and took us to Albania – whether it was to get the Jews out of the war operation zones and so protect them, or to evacuate us as suspicious elements. I don't know what the real motive was, but when we arrived in the camp we were given a lecture by the commandant, an Italian major. I would say that he had been mobilised, that he was not a professional soldier. He told us that he was very sorry about our women and children and that they were “deep in his heart”. The camp was surrounded by a barbed wire fence, but we were free to move around in the narrow space between the wire and the huge concrete building in which we were accommodated. This looked like a disused warehouse with no windows or door and three-tiered wooden beds. We were given some coarse blankets full of fleas. The food was completely tasteless, mostly dark beans with macaroni, but there was a canteen in which we could buy sheep milk cheese and excellent canned Italian jam from the Albanians. The Italians didn't search us when we entered the camp, nor did they take our money and valuables. Those who had



only known a comfortable life in the city found the filth and lack of comfort in the camp very difficult, but we younger people adapted more easily, particularly those who had gone camping and slept in tents with the scouts or with Hashomer Hatzair. At the very beginning of our life in the camp we saw for ourselves that the inmates weren't all angels and that not all inmates displayed solidarity and loyalty.



*Jaša Almuli, Mirko Davičo and Lala Ivković-Nikoliš on Mt Goč, 1936*

An engineer from Sarajevo, whose name I don't remember, and one middle-aged Belgrader whose name isn't worth mentioning both spoke Italian and they carried favour with the command. They thought they would win some advantage if they said there was a group of young Communists and leftists among the Jews in the camp. We found out about this denunciation and for some days we were worried what the consequences would be, but nothing happened to us.

## TO ITALY

Our commandant, an Italian major, told us at the outset that we would not be staying there long and that they would show us how civilised the Italians were. And, in fact, we arrived in Kavaja at the end of July 1941, and by the beginning of November, before the winter and

the heavy rains set in, they put us back on board a ship again in the Albanian harbour of Durres. From there they took us to the southern coast of Italy, to Bari, and we continued by train to Calabria, to the southernmost part of the Italian boot, to the Ferramonti camp near the village of Tarsia. Before we arrived they had already brought Jewish refugees from Austria, Germany and other countries.

Basically they treated us well in Ferramonti. There was no harassment, no arbitrary punishment, no psychological pressure. The camp was surrounded by a wire fence and the local rural people kept guard outside. They were members of the Fascist militia, wearing black shirts, and we were able to trade with them. They brought olive oil, garlic, even turkeys from their villages and sold them to us across the fence. There were about two thousand of us in the camp, from various countries, most of us Jews. We had freedom of movement on the inside, we had cultural, educational, religious and sporting activities. I was 23 at the time and played right fullback in the Yugoslav team against the Polish and other young Jews. A Jewish teacher from Austria gave me English lessons, while we all learnt and mastered Italian along the way. But there is more to this pleasant part of this story. Yugoslav composer Lav Mirski was also in the camp and organised a choir and there was also Fingesten, a cubist painter from Germany who had his own studio in which some of the inmates learned to paint or improved their painting skills.

## MIRKO EXTRADITED TO THE USTASHAS

Despite everything there was always a feeling of uncertainty hanging over us, some unexpressed fear of being turned over to the Germans or some other Nazis in Europe. But only one inmate was so unfortunate, Mirko Davičo, my cousin, a talented 27-year-old lawyer. Mirko was eloquent and intelligent and, here, in this relaxed atmosphere he spoke, among other things about Marxism and other delicate topics. It seems that this talk of his had reached the ears of a Croatian woman who had arrived in the camp together with a respectable Jewish family from Belgrade for whom she had worked as a nanny. At the beginning of 1942 she was released to return to Croatia and there, we presumed, they had obviously asked her about the camp and the people in it. They didn't know about Mirko Davičo in Zagreb – he had been a Communist from before, but in Belgrade. However they knew

very well about his older brother Oskar, a writer who, prior to the war, had moved to Zagreb because he had come into conflict with the Party over literature and his writing and there he had joined Miroslav Krleža and *Pečat* magazine which wasn't to the Party's liking at the time. Oskar was a Communist who had spent five years behind bars in Lepoglava and Mitrovica. The Ustashas knew all about him and probably thought that he was the Davičo in Ferramonti.



*Ferramonti, 1942: (standing, left to right) Ernest Laub?; Mara Almuli; Viktor (Morica) Levi; Ela Almuli; unknown; Šeli Alkalaj, married Laub; Nina Jakovljević-Furht; Moric Levi; Rebeka Amodaj; Bojana Jakovljević; Sofija Almuli; Cana Mošić; Avram Mošić; Natalija Munk; Dr Moša Munk; (front) unknown; unknown; Oskar Munk; Olgica Jakovljević; Kaponi; Pavle Furht; Bata Jakovljević;*

When the Italians were asked for and agreed to Mirko's extradition, Oskar was living in fear in a small place in northern Italy, in free confinement with his wife from Zagreb, Dr Ruta Lederer and their small son Kolja. However nothing happened to Oskar. After Italy capitulated in 1943 he headed south, crossed the front line and joined the Partisans. All in all this seems to have been a tragic case of mistaken identity. In the camp Mirko was a member of our family and we did all in our power to save him, but nothing helped, not the intervention in Rome of Delasem, the forerunner of Joint in Italy, nor the Ital-

ian Jewish lawyers, nor the connections established with the Catholics, nor the gold coins given to the camp administrator. He was escorted from the camp prison to the border with the Independent State of Croatia at Metljika and disappeared without trace. There was some information that they had taken him to Jasenovac and slaughtered him there, but we couldn't believe that.

In Ferramonti the single men lived in their own part of the camp in separate barracks, while families were put into different barracks partitioned into miniature apartments with two rooms with beds and a small entrance in which there was some kind of primitive stove for cooking. The barracks were crawling with bedbugs and the whole camp swarmed with mosquitoes because the camp was built on what used to be a swamp. However, all in all, I would say that everything was tolerable given that this was a concentration camp.

### HALF-FREE IN MIRANDOLA

At that time the Italians decided to allow the larger Jewish families to leave the camp and move to free confinement (*confino libero*) in places chosen for them by the Ministry of Internal Affairs. They assumed that members of these families would not attempt to escape for fear of endangering those who remained behind. The inmates who didn't have families didn't have the option of leaving the camp unless families which went out declared some single man was their relative. Many resorted to this ploy of joining up with families because the Italians didn't bother much about checking who was related to who.

We applied for permission to leave the camp as a family and were sent north to a small agricultural town called Mirandola, near Modena in the fertile Reggio Emilia region whose capital is Bologna. We lived and ate in a small hotel, the Aquila Nera (Black Eagle). We still had some of the money that we had brought from Belgrade. The only limitation on us was that we weren't allowed to leave the town without the permission of the authorities and that the men had to report to the chief of police every day at noon and he would record that they were present. Otherwise we had unlimited freedom of movement around the town and the local population had a positive attitude to us. I remember that the owner of the tobacco shop in the main square would always tell me what he had heard on Radio London. If someone fell sick they would go to the local doctor, who had once been a

social democrat and was really friendly to us. An elderly retired civil servant who used to eat at the hotel restaurant would point at the photograph of Mussolini on the wall and say "What a clown!" There was also a secondary school teacher who ate there who would appear every Sunday in a Fascist uniform with a black shirt; apparently he was only a Fascist on Sundays. He knew who we were and where we came from and was kind to us. I remember that I would often listen to the radio with the hotel owner, Vetruvi, and that we had heated arguments during the battle for Stalingrad. I used to tell him that the Germans would lose the battle. He had the opposite opinion, but didn't hold anything against me. The police chief, to whom we reported every day, behaved correctly in a civil servant kind of way. He once allowed the tobacconist to take me hunting mallards. As a Jewish internee I was even allowed to use a hunting rifle. I also used to tour the city and the surrounding area by bicycle with some Italian girls.

Despite the relaxed atmosphere, after what happened to Mirko, I was afraid they might come for me, too. Mirko was registered as a member of our family, and I was known to the police in Belgrade. I had spent a month in the Glavnjača prison and my photo appeared in the anti-Masonic and anti-Communist exhibition in the autumn of 1941 in Belgrade. We still didn't know the story behind Mirko's extradition to Croatia and I would often sleep restlessly, listening carefully to the drone of every truck which approached the hotel. So when my family and I had an opportunity to leave Italy we leapt at it. At that time, the beginning of 1943, the Italians began allowing Jewish refugee families to leave Italy if they could manage to get a visa for a neutral country. Such visas could be obtained from South American countries, on the condition that the potential immigrants had to prove they were Catholics. It wasn't difficult to obtain such proof from the local priest and we applied for departure to Paraguay. Thus in February 1943 we arrived in Rome, where we stayed for two weeks until we got all the documents, the entry visas for Paraguay and permission from the Italians to leave the country. It was then that I saw the Roman museums and archaeological discoveries. And then, at the end of February 1943, in the midst of the war, with everything still hanging in the balance, the five members of my family and the families of my aunts boarded a white Alitalia civilian airliner and took off for Madrid. I had never flown in a plane before and not in my wildest dreams did I think I would sit in an aircraft for the first time in order

to leave a cursed part of Europe which was sinking in the blood of our people and other peoples. I must say that the Italian authorities allowed all Jewish immigrants to exchange Italian liras for American dollars at the National Bank at the official exchange rate, which was several times cheaper than on the black market. Every person was allowed to buy 1,500 dollars under this privilege, and that was quite a sum at the time. We no longer had enough liras to buy all the dollars we were entitled to.

### TRANSIT IN MADRID

And so we arrived in Madrid, which was both geographically and diplomatically our transit point on the way to South America. Our plan certainly wasn't to go to Paraguay. The important thing was to get out of the region controlled by the Fascist powers. My elder sister Ela and her Zagreb husband, Albert Flajšman, whom she had met in the Ferramonti camp, decided to go to Canada with their newborn son, Juan, now Johnny. My aunt, Rea Talvi, also went to Canada with her husband Moreno, an exporter, and so did Samuilo Davičo, his wife Luiza and their son Leon, who later became a journalist for *Politika*. My other aunt, Sara, her husband Nisim Ruso, also an exporter, and their two adult children opted for Argentina. Urological surgeon Dr Soloman Davidović obtained entry visas for Britain for his family after being invited there by the Yugoslav government-in-exile. There were a few more Belgrade families in Madrid who scattered everywhere. Moric Demajo, who had been the director of an Italian insurance company in Belgrade, also went to Argentina with his wife and son. His daughter Bonka went with her daughter, Svetlana, and her husband, Jaša Davičo, a doctor of law, to London because Jaša had got permission to enter Britain as a former activist of Dragoljub Jovanović's Agricultural Party. In Belgrade we had once been a harmonious and, I would even go so far as to say, an idyllic community of more than twelve thousand Jews, and it was there, in Madrid, that I was a witness to the final breaking up of this. Hitler had thrown a heavy bomb at us, killed almost everyone, and those who escaped with their lives scattered all over the world. After the Madrid group, many of those who survived the capitulation of Italy and the German occupation moved out to various countries.

Almost all the Belgraders stayed in Madrid for about a year, living in modest hotels while they decided where they would go and obtained the necessary documents. Franco's regime had already hinted at who would win the war and didn't put any limit on the time Jews could remain in exile in Spain. My sister, Šeka, and I didn't want to emigrate any further and we looked for a way to get closer to home. Together with our mother we joined a convoy of about seven thousand Jews who had fled to Spain and Portugal and which was heading for Palestine, still under the British mandate at the time. The British gave us permission to enter the country. They took us from the Spanish port of Cadiz to Haifa on a passenger ship from neutral Portugal. There were some fears as we sailed south of the Greek islands from which the Germans had not yet withdrawn. In Palestine I found a temporary job in a small experimental chemical plant in the village of Kfar Saba, which was surrounded by orange orchards, but three months later moved to Egypt in the uniform of a lieutenant of the National Liberation Army. Pavle Melamed helped me with this; he was one of the few Belgrade Jewish playboys and was then a technical officer in the First Partisan Tank Brigade, which had been equipped and trained by the British in the Egyptian desert. Pavle had come to visit someone in Palestine, heard I was there and invited me to come with him to Egypt. He lent me his reserve uniform, had National Liberation Army identification documents printed, forged an identity for me as an officer and took me on a train to Cairo with him. The British were already hot on our heels because their suspicions had been aroused by the printing of army identification documents. Pavle joined the Partisans because he had previously, in Egypt, been in the Royal Army and he talked a whole battalion of coastal Slovenians into crossing over to the National Liberation Army. Pavle didn't last long in the new Yugoslavia. He moved to the United States, where he died.

## IN THE PARTISANS

With Pavle's help I joined the tank brigade on May 1, 1944, in the Egyptian desert. With them I travelled to liberated southern Italy. They continued their journey and I was sent to the island of Vis. There I worked on propaganda in the headquarters of the Second Dalmatian Brigade, of which my university friend Mirko Novović was deputy commissar, Party leader, of the 26<sup>th</sup> Division. Then I asked to be sent

to Serbia. I arrived on a Russian transport plane and landed at the Partisan airport at Bojnik in Pusta Reka on August 25, 1944, my 26<sup>th</sup> birthday. It's difficult to describe my excitement at getting out of this plane, on which I had travelled sitting on sacks full of ammunition. The first thing I noticed was the familiar smell of the land, the soil and the vegetation of Serbia which I had never forgotten, which was different from everything in the past three years.

I was in the Army until the end of the war. I had to start from the beginning, first as a fighter, then as a sergeant in the Eleventh Serbian Brigade which was somewhere around Leskovac, trying to impede the evacuation of German troops from Greece by rail to the north. Later, when I was in Arandelovac conducting guards around the Main Headquarters for Serbia, it occurred to me that I should go to the front line, so I went to the headquarters to speak to Koča Popović who was the headquarters commander for Serbia. He was really pleased to see me and said "Well, where have you been? We received a memo a while ago asking for you to report to the Propaganda Division of the Supreme Headquarters."

I arrived in Belgrade in December 1944 and, for some months, worked on the publication of propaganda brochures under chief Stefan Mitrović, a tragic figure of the Yugoslav Communist movement (later, after being on Goli Otok, he went mad). I was transferred from the Propaganda Division to the division for liaison with foreign military missions and then, in September 1945, to the news agency Tanjug. And so, under orders, I became a journalist. I soon learnt to love my vocation, it helped me exorcise the technology I had studied fairly unenthusiastically before the war. I also know that I was sent to the Supreme Headquarters Propaganda Division, to Tanjug, and on my first major assignment as a special Tanjug correspondent at the peace conference in Paris in 1946 by Agitprop. Milovan Đilas was at the helm of Agitprop and he had known me from before the war. During my career I was a correspondent in Latin America, in Rio De Janeiro, and correspondent in Washington in the USA, but my favourite period was when I was foreign political commentator for *Borba* at the end of the 1950s, when the paper played an important role and had a high circulation.