

סאנסקי מוסט

SANSKI MOST

DERVENTA דרוונטה

TRAVNIK טראוויניק

BIJELJINA ביילינה

BRČKO זאווידוביצי' ברוציקו

DOBOJ דובוי

ZAVIDOVIC

ואגרב

TUZLA טוזלה

ZAGREB

VLASENICA ולאסניצה

ZENICA זניצה

VISOKO ויסוקו

ŽEPČE ז'פצ'ה

SARAJEVO

VIŠEGRAD

בלגראד

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WE MOSTAR מוסטאר

SURVIVED...4

YUGOSLAV JEWS ON THE HOLOCAUST

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Jonas FISCHBACH

LJUBO MILOŠ: „I WANT TO SHOOT DIRECTLY
INTO THE SERBIAN HEART!“



*Jonas was born in 1901 in Filch, in present-day Ukraine, of father Lav (Leib, La-
jbiš, Leon) and mother Sofija-Soša, née Fin-
kelman. In that village his father worked in a
saw mill.*

*He attended his elementary school in
several places, and grammar school in Vienna
and Travnik. He graduated from the Medical
Faculty in Zagreb.*

*Jonas had four sisters – Klara, Lota, Tila
and Berta.*

*He specialized in internal medicine and
worked in a number of medical institutions.
After the liberation he worked as specialized
doctor at the department of internal diseases of the Main Military Hospital
in Belgrade.*

From his marriage to Bjanka, née Sabo, he has a daughter Rut.

In the place where I was born there was no school and I went to a private Jewish school. Namely, there was a teacher, a Jew, who taught Jewish children the Bible. We all used to sit at the same table, the teacher at the top, and we children (about ten of us, of different age) on his left and right side. At that time I was about eight years old. By the time I was ten my father thought I should go to the grammar school. However, I did not speak Polish, which was the language of instruction in grammar school, so I had to quickly learn the language. Without adequate knowledge of the language I

still managed to enroll in the grammar school, and after attending for about a year I was speaking Polish quite well.

After that my father moved to another town, again in an Austrian province, Galicia, the town of Holodenka, where he again enrolled me in grammar school, but soon again he decided to move me to another, in the same town but close to our apartment. This grammar school was Ukrainian, so there was need for me to learn Ukrainian language. After I completed the second and third grade of this grammar school the war broke out and we all had to flee. All Jews, among them my father with the family, fearing the coming of the Russian army, fled westward.

That was 1916, and we were fleeing on an open horse-drawn wagon. My task was demanding: I was sitting in the back and when the wagon went downhill I was in charge of breaking. Doing this task gave me pride. After travelling for several days we arrived to present day Czechoslovakia, to the town Nikolsburg, where the Austrian authorities got us off the wagons and put us in barracks used for quarantine. I remember the wooden beds and straw mattresses full of bed-bugs. It was so hideous that I preferred to sleep on the floor, while my mother slept on the bare kitchen table, since she could not stand the bed-bugs. We stayed there for about eight days in quarantine, and afterwards the Austrian authorities packed us into railway carriages and unloaded us in present day Slovenia, placing us as refugees in different homes, mostly on the outskirts of the town called Konjice, in farming houses in the area and in small sheds that the owners had in their vineyards. That is where the family lived until the collapse of the Austrian empire.

But I was not there all the time. Father managed to get me to a grammar school in Vienna. For a while I lived with a family in Vienna, but the flat that the family lived in was in fact an old house again full of bed-bugs. Most of the night I would sit up at the window, because that was where there were the least bed-bugs. In Vienna I completed the fourth and fifth grade of grammar school.

The collapse of the Austrian empire came in 1918. In the meanwhile my father started working in Bosnia, in the vicinity of Travnik, in a saw mill, because he was an expert in saw mills. Thus we came to Bosnia and I enrolled in the Jesuit grammar school in Travnik. I did not speak Croatian, but knowing Polish and Ukrainian helped. The management of the Jesuit grammar school did me a favor and set a deadline for me to learn Croatian. In a matter of several months I managed to get some knowledge of the language. Initially, I just attended classes, as I could not answer in the Croatian language. But, in half a year, my knowledge was good enough for me to equally participate in the instruction. I graduated from grammar school in Travnik in 1921.

Subsequently I went to Zagreb and enrolled to study at the Medical Faculty, living most of the time in the students' dormitory. Near the end of my studies, my parents moved to Zagreb and the last year of my studies I lived in an apartment.

I went on to specialize internal medicine and did my internship as a volunteer. I never received any salary or compensation for my work at the Zagreb clinic.

At that time I managed to get citizenship in Sarajevo and I found a job there in a health insurance society „Merkur“, a society similar to the workers' insurance, but in this case intended only for civil servants. I worked as a doctor in this society until the war. When the war broke out, the society was not functional any longer, most people went to the army, although formally the society continued to operate.

It was exactly on 15 October, at night, when the Gestapo agents in civilian clothes woke up the whole family and got us outside.

They loaded my wife, my seven year old daughter and me onto an open truck. We waited there the whole night until the truck was filled with Jews who were also taken out of bed by the agents in the area where I lived.

At dawn I was taken with the other men to the railway station and loaded onto closed cargo carriages, completely empty. The same day I was taken to Jasenovac.

My wife and daughter were separated from me and were taken, with other women and children, to the women's camp, in Sarajevo. They were fortunate that the Partisans kept attacking the railway station, and there were not enough railway carriages. They spent several days in some barracks and were subsequently released, with the intention to be rounded up again soon. The women, of course, fled whichever way they could, and that was how my wife and daughter managed to get away. My wife pretended to be German, using the pretext of her German family name and she managed to get to Zagreb by train, leave our daughter with my relatives, and alone she fled to Split.

Once in Jasenovac, we were unloaded on the platform. We were made to walk on foot to the town itself, to the Christian Orthodox church where we were closed in. That church had been used previously also for an overnight for other transports, from other places. You can only imagine what it looked like, as it was used for overnight stay by some thousands of prisoners before us. Churches do not have toilets, no place for prisoners to relieve themselves, so they did it wherever they could. Once we arrived there, I had to look for a place to sit, not lie down, as everything was contaminated with feces, because people like us used to come there after a whole day's trip in closed

carriages and had to relieve themselves upon arrival as best they could. I do not remember how I managed this need. I did not defecate, but I must have urinated somewhere, probably against some wall, it could not have been different.

The second day they took us to the Jasenovac concentration camp. At the entry the Ustaša took away our belongings. Every one of us had a bundle of belongings, a small suitcase, or a package, bigger or smaller, with clothes, shoes, the basics. They took practically everything. I remember that I had a lot of things, and all they left was two shirts and socks. They also let me keep my doctor's bag with some medicines and bandages in it. I said it was a doctor's bag and they let me keep it. They had respect for doctors. I had no valuables with me or on me. Then they got us into the barracks.

The barrack that we were put in was a big two-storey building. The bunk beds had three levels: the first on the floor, the second about a meter and a half higher, and the third at some two meters from the floor. Those who had a blanket used it to lie down on, but most of us did not so we lay on bare wooden planks.

The barracks were large and housed several hundreds of inmates. When a new transport arrived, it would be packed full. I was on the bed of about one meter high. Everything was so packed full that we pressed literally next to each other. Later we were put also in other barracks, with more space. The number of inmates quickly reduced, they were either executed or died of starvation. After a month or two there was room for everyone.

When I arrived to the camp, there were many inmates who had come earlier and were already completely exhausted. They died of starvation at incredible speed. The number of inmates in our barrack after two months was cut to half.

There was much killing going on in the camp.

The food was utterly scarce. We were given some food once or twice a week and we had to work all day long. While I was in the camp there were no capos there. In every barrack there was one of the inmates which would be the equivalent of the capo in other camps. But in contrast to capos, that was just an inmate like the rest of us. The difference was that this person passed on the orders of the command or the camp management about what was to be done on a specific day. Otherwise, this person lived the same life as we did. He also starved, had the same accommodation, and suffered just like the rest. And he was full of lice, horrendous. Just like the rest of us. In the Jewish barracks there was a Jew, who communicated such orders. We were not mixed. Jews were in Jewish barracks, the Serbs in Serb barracks, and the Roma and Croats in other barracks.

I did not do any physical labor. As a doctor I was spared. I had a little card, attached to my chest, with the symbol of the Red Cross and the writing: doctor. That saved me. That is what I need to be thankful for staying alive. I could move around the camp freely. I was under no obligation to do any work, but I had to go with a group of inmates who were doing outdoor work. Thus, I too was on my feet all day long, like the others, the difference being that the others also had to do shovel work because they were supposedly building a river embankment. The inmates were building the embankment by shoveling earth near the river and moving it with the same shovels to five or six meters from the water line, to the embankment. The shovels were the only tools they had. As a doctor, I was obliged to be there.

I could not extend any help to other inmates, not because I was forbidden from doing so, but because I had no medicines or bandaging material whatsoever. I was just formally present there. I had my doctor's bag, which was empty. Only my stethoscopes were inside it. The only privilege that I had in the camp as a doctor was that I was exempt from physical labor. I could not stay or rest in our barrack, because whoever was found in the barracks during the day was liquidated immediately.

Every morning they would appoint people – inmates – to tour the barracks, and in return they were given some more food. Whoever they found there, lying, incapable of going to work, was taken out in front of the barrack. I had seen people who had come to the camp before me, terribly emaciated, skin and bone, many of them incapable of standing up – as they were being taken outside. Then the trucks would come. They would be piled on the truck one on top of the other and taken away, we did not know where. An hour or two later, the truck would come back, empty. Later we heard that those people, half alive, were thrown into the Sava river.

I did not see Jewish women and children brought to the camp. I did see Serb women and children. There were separate barracks for the Serbs, one or two. There were not many. Ustaša very quickly liquidated the Serbs who were brought to the camp. And they brought them in very often. In their barrack was a Serb student who acted as doctor. He would from time to time come to me to ask for medicines, but we did not have any either. I asked him – how come there is only one barrack for the Serbs and all the others for the Jews?

He said:

„My barrack also is not always full. They are all the time taken away and executed.“

As one never knew how many were alive in that barrack or how many were executed, they often received food even for those who were already dead; therefore in terms of food their conditions were better than ours. The

food was distributed by barracks, the same quantity for every barrack. They had enough food because they were fewer, my colleague medical technician would sometimes get for me some cooked beans intended for the Serbs. I was so hungry that I ate with a hearty appetite, although I had a sensitive stomach and was aware that I would later suffer stomach ache.

The inmates were building the embankment every day. As they were always digging in the same place, they had dug huge holes in the ground. At the time of rain those holes would fill up with water. The Ustaša would entertain themselves by pushing people working near those holes inside, into the water, and would not let them come out. The people would try to get hold on to the edges of the pit with their hands and the Ustaša would step on their hands and laugh. They would not let them come out, until they drowned.

Near the embankment I saw another horrendous scene. There was a newly arrived inmate, I did not know where he had come from. He was a Jew, tall, well built, strong. One of the guards felt challenged by the look of this tall and strong man, so the Ustaša got him on the ground and started jumping on top of him. He continued to jump until he killed him, just because he was so tall and well built.

I was all distressed and embittered so, forgetting caution, I asked the Ustaša who jumped on the man:

„Why are you killing the man?“

„I was ordered so“, he replied.

„Who ordered you?“, I went on.

„There, go there“, he said pointing his hand „over there is my commander, go and ask him and that will be the last you ever asked anyone anything.“

I was so excited and I started towards that commander, who was sitting on the bank of the river a little distance away and playing cards with another officer. When I came close and saw him I became aware of what the Ustaša had just told me – that that would be my last time ever to ask anything ...

I turned around and went back. I blended in with the inmates who were building the embankment. I took off the “doctor” sign, took a shovel, and started digging. That was how I hid because I was concerned that the Ustaša would come after me. I did see from some distance away that he was standing there as if looking where I was. But, there were hundreds of people around and he could not spot me.

One day, when I was in my barrack where, formally, the infirmary was also located, one of the guards came and asked me to go with him to the Serb barrack. I did so. The barrack was empty. There was the earthen floor

and on it, on some rags, there was a woman, half-naked. She was dying. On her naked breasts there was an infant. An infant breast-feeding on the dead mother. I turned to the Ustaša and asked:

„Why did you get me here?“

„Help, doctor“, he said.

There was nothing I could do. The mother was dead. There was nothing I could do and nothing to use to save the infant.

The camp that I was in was close to the brick plant. The inmates were lining up bricks and wood for heating, the brick factory burnt wood. One of the employees of the brick factory, later I learned that he was an engineer, entertained himself by killing people who worked there. He came up to an inmate and said:

„Turn around!“

The inmate would turn, he had to obey, and the man would take a log and kept hitting the man on the back until he was killed. I saw that with my own eyes. He could have killed me as well, but did not. I suppose he too was impressed by the cardboard plate on my chest with the Red Cross sign which gave me the wild courage to witness such events.

Once I went to the Ustaša command and asked them to give me the big box full of package wrapping material which I saw next to one of the barracks. The packaging was canvas used to wrap packages intended for us inmates which, regretfully, were never delivered to us. Later, I cut the canvas into strips and used them as bandages. On one of the wrappings I found my name. My sister from Zagreb had sent a food package for me. I was never given a single package and thus I concluded that other people were not getting their packages either.

Within the camp there was a small barrack. The people working in the brick factory kept their tools there. The barrack had an attic and some inmates, five or six of them, were hiding there. They wanted to skip the mandatory labor. I went there because I heard there were some sick persons among them. They were all Jews. They were lying down, all dressed, on the earth floor, although it was an attic. Inmates never took their clothes off. I too was dressed all the time, in a suit and a winter coat. None of us were given camp clothes. We were not even assigned numbers. No one in Jasenovac had an assigned number. When I got closer to them, one of them recognized me. He was from Sarajevo, just like me. He said:

„Doctor, I cannot open my mouth.“

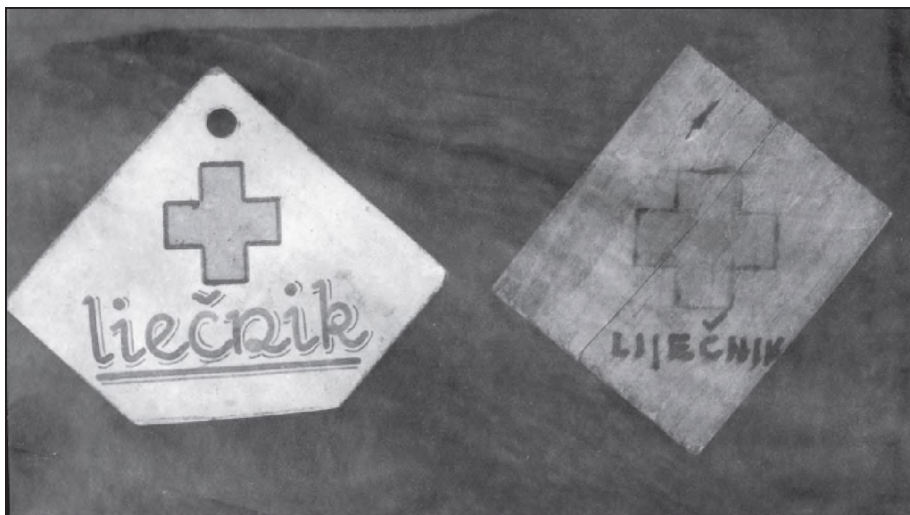
He was speaking through his teeth, I could hardly understand him. As a doctor, I understood right away that it was a case of tetanus. Tetanus is a disease acquired through wounds, and those working with earth are

especially susceptible to it. It is a horrible disease, resulting in death in dreadful pain.

The barracks were controlled every morning. There were so many people who were so weak, due to poor nutrition and exhausting work, that they could not get up from bed. They were all collected, put on piles and loaded onto trucks and thrown into the Sava river. There was no helping them.

It was impossible to escape.

I saw Maks Luburić, when he was inspecting the camp with a group of German and Ustaša officers. He walked through the camp and we were looking at him.



The mark for doctors worn in Jasenovac by JONAS FIŠBAH

One day, while we were doing outdoor work, a camp alarm sounded, signaling for all of us to go back. It was unusual, for us to return to camp in the middle of the day. The camp commander was Ljubo Miloš, an infamous butcher. He got all the inmates in one spot, in front of the barracks. Facing us he placed an army unit with machine guns aimed at us. Ljubo Miloš came in front of us and delivered a short speech. He said:

„Something unheard of has happened. An inmate shot at an Ustaša.“

The inmate was a Serb. Later we heard that it was the chief of the Serb barrack and that was how he was in contact with the camp management. He somehow gained the trust of the management and of Ljuba Miloš. He spent time with the camp command service. He was even allowed to carry a gun, to defend himself against his own people from his barrack, who threatened to kill him because he was working in the interest of the Ustaša. He drank

with them and played cards. And it happened that while they were drinking and playing cards they got into a fight, pulled their guns and the inmate shot at the Ustaša.

Ljubo Miloš said that it must not be allowed for an inmate to shoot at a Croat, an Ustaša, and that in retaliation they would execute twenty Serbs. He invited the guard of the Serb barrack to pick those twenty inmates for execution. The man said he could not pick anyone.

„If you cannot pick, than you will be among the twenty“, said Ljubo Miloš.

„Fine“, said the inmate.

So he added him to the group of twenty Serbs that he himself picked.

But, seemingly, this was not enough.

He invited the chief of one of the Jewish barracks and told him to pick ten Jews to be added to the group for execution.

The chief of the Jewish barrack said that he could not do it.

„In that case you come here“, he said.

So, he too was added to the group.

Then he remembered that there was more. He ordered that Jews who had arrived from Austria be brought there. It was a group of Jewish refugees that the Ustaša arrested across Croatia and brought there.

He lined them all up, took a shotgun and one by one executed all of them. He shot every single one at the heart.

Those men just fell one on top of the other. When he stopped, he said:

„Come on, doctors, check if they are dead!“

There were a few more doctors besides me. People were lying, shot, on piles. I watched them. You recognize a dead man immediately; it is not difficult to tell. All of a sudden from one of those piles a Serb got up and said:

„I am alive.“

He was hit but not dead.

Upon seeing this Ljubo Miloš was infuriated.

„Come here!“ he said.

He angrily got hold of him, started tearing his upper clothes off and said:

„I want to shoot directly at a Serb heart.“

He put the gun against his chest and fired.

I remember many of those who were with me. Near the end of my stay in Jasenovac I started writing down the names of those who had died. Most of them died of exhaustion, starvation, tetanus – the notebook with the names was left with my friends from Sarajevo, Kabiljo and Danon. God

knows if they are still alive. In the notebook there were many names of Sephardic Jews from Sarajevo.

In January 1942 I was transferred to Stara Gradiška.

In the Gradiška camp I met Emerik Blum. In Gradiška there was an infirmary and a factory in which the inmates worked. Those inmates were not killed, they were even fed quite well. I suppose they needed them. Among them was Emerik Blum. If they had known about him, they would have taken him away and killed him immediately, because he was a well-known communist. He was a good friend of mine.

There was a room that was furnished as infirmary, with five or six beds. We, doctors working there, would sleep in those beds at night. I let Blum sleep with me in the same bed at nights and during the day he hid under the bed. That was how I kept him alive for a while.

Blum knew about engines and was in charge of maintaining the boats. Once he managed to fix a boat and asked to do a test drive on the Sava river. They let him do it, gave him the boat and a guard, an Ustaša. As soon as he was out in the river he managed to overturn the boat and escape by swimming.

I was in Stara Gradiška until April 1942, when I was released from the camp, with the obligation to report to Banja Luka to the Institute for Suppression of Endemic Syphilis which was widespread in Bosnia among the rural population, especially among the Muslims. When I left the camp, I was lucky to get the typhoid. I was released from the camp at the request from the Institute for Suppression of Endemic Syphilis, thanks to the persistent appeals from my family.*

*See the testimony of Berta Postružnik on pages 283–290 of this book. According to the data known to the editors, dr Fišbah was assigned to work in the primary health care centre in Maglaj. When Maglaj was liberated in 1944 by the National Liberation Army, he was assigned the post of manager of the hospital of the 39th Krajina division. After the liberation of the country he worked as specialist doctor at the department of internal diseases of the Central Military Hospital in Belgrade.