

RESISTANCE, IMPRISONMENT, & FORCED LABOR

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Introduction

Quot homines tot sententiae: suo quoque mos.

[There are as many opinions as there are people: each has his own correct way.]
(Terence, c. 190-159B.C.)

¹ The initial paragraph is taken from my first, very brief account of my war years, published in: *Slovene Studies: Journ. of the Soc. for Slovene Studies*. Vol. 16, no. 2 (1994), pp. 31-47, and in Slovene translation by Henrik Ciglič in: *Nova Revija. Mesečnik za kulturo*. »Iz mojih izkušenj v vojnih letih 1941-1945«. *Letnik XV* (Maj 1996), pp. 134-143.

My passage through the war was essentially no different from that of many others who survived the cataclysmic years 1941-1945, but the variety of my predicaments, my encounters with fractions of all major ideologies in this struggle, and my everpresent reminiscences of images, events, and consequences are some of the reasons why I decided to record my personal history. Though over fifty-five years have passed, in my memory these events remain as vivid as ever.¹

I also have a deeply felt obligation to leave for posterity and history an account of my experiences. The obligation entails a binding loyalty to those who never had an opportunity to express, to state, and/or to defend their associations, actions, and their decisions. My gratitude is owed to those who, often at risks of negative consequences, acted to help other human beings in crucial situations. Throughout my long and difficult journey I was most fortunate to be associated often with such unselfish companions. No matter how difficult the situation or how great the uncertainty or danger, being together with others helped to soften the unexpected blows and circumstances.

Official histories of World War II, or any other calamity of that nature, regardless how many details they include, cannot describe the totality of human suffering, especially by those not directly involved in the conduct of the war. The sufferings of the people thrown into and becoming part of the conflict, the agonizing and terrifying experiences can never be sufficiently and adequately described. Only memory flashes, such as a few entries in these memoirs, might, I hope, raise in the reader's mind and heart the awareness of that side of the war's ugly face.

The deceptions during the war years were most depressing for me. Not the planned military deceptions, which are as much part of the strategy as anything else, but deceptions in interpersonal relationships. Total confidentiality and trust is expected of everybody in any group with common goals and objectives, especially during the war and in underground activities. What is the motivation of a traitor who, by his or her sinister actions causes terrifying consequences for many others?

It is quite possible that other people, who shared some of these experiences with me, looked at these happenings differently. I, however, have my memories deeply imbedded in my mind and in my heart. Therefore, I am convinced that my recollections truly represent the impressions and thoughts I experienced during those difficult and often tragic years.

A drawback in my memoirs is the sad fact that most of my closest friends during the key-events are no longer around. I attempted as much as possible to render accurately what these friends would have said about this or that event or development. I feel comfortable that I have done my inner searching sufficiently and truthfully.

In the post-war period, while hearing, reading, and researching these events in retrospect, more factual and assumed information about the war came to light. Where my reminiscence and knowledge are different or where the recent documentation seems erroneous – according to my eyewitness' recollections – I have made every possible attempt to lead the reader to the sources in question.

In describing events of great impact and far-reaching consequences, I have come in contact with many persons. Where known, the full names of persons who were helpful to me and of those who held any kind of official position, are included. Where I no longer remember the first name, I use letter »X«, for family names, the letter »Y«. For all others, where my associations may not have been either sufficiently positive or even negative, I use abbreviations only. It would have been impossible to locate these individuals to seek permission for inclusion of their names.

I am attempting to bring to the reader a slightly different look at the war, from the point of view of a young person who found himself in the turmoil of events, most often not by choice. To this author and to his generation – at the time they were still growing up, when they were inexperienced in practically all phases of life and human relations, and when they possessed only minimal understanding of the world's ideologies – the war brought the harshest realities of life much too fast and much too soon.

Of special interest in these memoirs may be the episodes of exposure to the authority and personalities of many ideologies involved in World War II and in different localities and under changing circumstances. Those in power came from various nationalities, and so did the internees. People from all parts of Europe were present at the locations where I found myself during the war. Associations with such a variety of people was an experience of valuable and long-lasting benefit, though gained at the most inappropriate times and places. The reader should also be aware that at different times during the war, the status of internees often went through significant changes. Thus, toward the end of the war the chances for survival improved. It may also not be obvious that in general, internees had no rights or if any such rights existed, nobody observed or followed them. We were at the mercy of our captors.

The most tragic and catastrophic development, the forcible repatriations after the hostilities had already ceased in Europe on 8 May 1945, will never be sufficiently and satisfactorily explained. The question »Is the efficiency of military operations more important than thousands of human lives?« will be forever on our minds.

To those of us who survived the cataclysmic years of World War II and decided not to return to our native countries because of post-war developments, the generous international community came to rescue. Not only the governments, but indirectly the people themselves, made it possible for us to start our lives all over again. Our gratitude is everlasting.

Contents

| | |
|---|-----|
| Acknowledgments | ix |
| Introduction | 1 |
| Chapter 1: The Prewar Years | 4 |
| Chapter 2: Attack on Yugoslavia. <i>6 April 1941</i> | 21 |
| Chapter 3: First Year of Occupation. <i>April 1941 - June 1942</i> | 32 |
| Chapter 4: With the Slovene Partisans. <i>June 1942 - August 1942</i> | 42 |
| Chapter 5: In Captivity by the Italian Armed Forces. <i>August 1942</i> | 66 |
| Chapter 6: Concentration Camp Rab in the Adriatic. <i>September 1942 - January 1943</i> | 73 |
| Chapter 7: Days at Home. <i>January 1943 - June 1944</i> | 87 |
| Chapter 8: Gestapo Prison. <i>June 1944 - September 1944</i> | 99 |
| Chapter 9: Forced Labor Camp Auschwitz. <i>September 1944 - January 1945</i> | 112 |
| Chapter 10: Auschwitz: Evacuation and Escape. <i>January 1945</i> | 139 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Chapter 11: Hospital Worker – Graz, Austria. <i>February 1945 - April 1945</i> | 154 |
| Chapter 12: Building a Defense Line. <i>April 1945</i> | 167 |
| Chapter 13: Almost Home. <i>May 1945</i> | 175 |
| Chapter 14: Viktring/Vetrinj: Cruel and Brutal Deception. <i>May 1945</i> | 187 |
| Chapter 15: From Uncertainty to New Beginning. <i>June 1945 - June 1950</i> | 210 |
| Epilogue | 223 |
| Notes | 227 |
| Works Consulted | 247 |
| Index | 253 |

