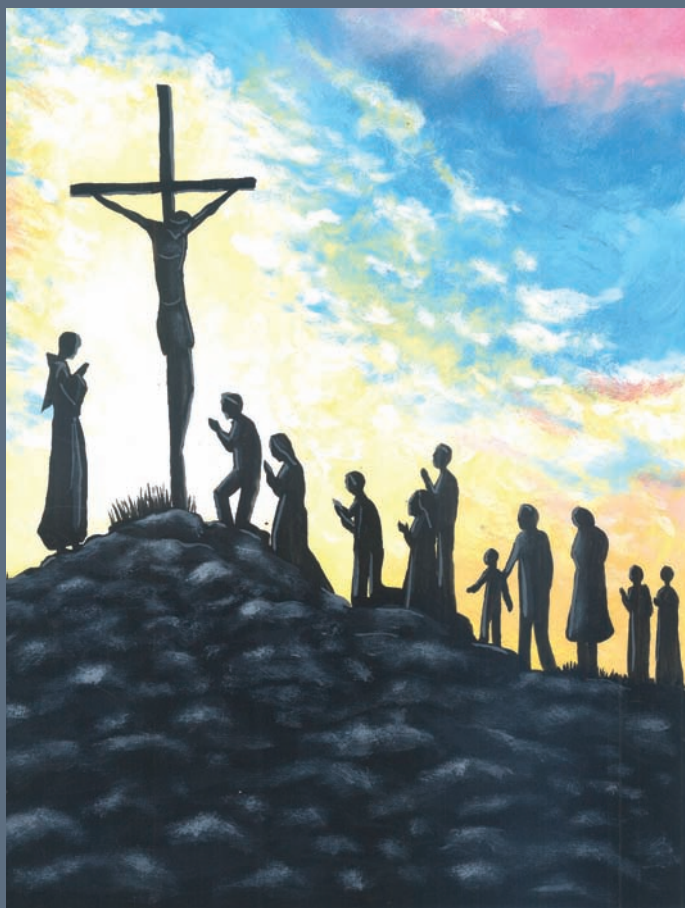


# RECOLLECTIONS OF MARTYRDOM IN A TIME OF TERROR



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**Communist Persecution of Religion  
and People in Western Herzegovina**



**Vicepostulatura postupka mučeništva**

**»Fra Leo Petrović i 65 subraće«**

**Široki Brijeg**

**&**

**Ogranak Matice hrvatske u Vinkovcima**

**&**

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## FOREWORD

The author of the *Recollections* knew how to soberly observe, endure, and judge the events and people, who, in a lesser or greater degree, were the determining force of the tragic times he lived through. Some of these personalities he has skillfully singled out and, by his vivid descriptions, he has left us their authentic and realistic images which reflect the gruesome conditions of the time. From his pen flowed pure streams of immediacy and impartial utterances, as he relates his personal story of the suffering and danger he endured while being a witness to the Faith, and as a living sacrifice for the people whom he served as a spiritual shepherd.

He remained far from exaggeration, or any sort of judgmental condemnation, or off-hand praise, even though he writes about a time in which sixty-six of his brother friars were killed. Of those Herzegovinian Franciscans that survived, and who were not incarcerated, twenty-seven of them suffered under the Partisan terror, while another thirty-four of them were imprisoned! Even in such clearly barbarous times, for him every man remained a human being – in the measure that he proved himself to be humane through his actions.

The book *Recollections of Martyrdom in a Time of Terror* is a valuable expression of facts, and, at the same time, a literary pearl. This book serves as an admirable acknowledgment of the faith in God of the Herzegovinian Catholics, and as an unobtrusive guide to Truth for those who diminish, or even hide, the bloody Partisan crimes and persecutions of people during the Second

World War and its aftermath by their claiming to be Anti-Fascists. These same people fail to take into consideration that in Herzegovina – and not only in Herzegovina – the crimes and terror of the Partisans were more numerous, brutal, and longer-lasting than those committed by the Fascists.

This book captivates one by its manner of expression, and by the facts it brings, as well as by its easy style and language. By its distinctiveness, the book manages to express the soul of the people, as well as the feelings of its author for the existential quality and meaning of the written word. Hence, as such, it would have been a pity to impose the strict rules governing correct writing, and the standards of grammar on the flow of his language. For that reason, proofreading interventions were almost entirely dispensed with.

The organizer of the manuscript for publication divided the original writing by sub-titles for the sake of ease, and only in a few places chose to chronologically order the text, or single it out for the sake of creating a thematic whole.

*An Awful Moment*, is an addendum to this book written by Fr. Jerko's younger brother, Fr. Blago Karačić O.F.M., who describes the events that took place in the middle of February 1945 – events which easily could have left Fr. Blago without a brother, and you, the reader, without Fr. Jerko's *Recollections*.

It must be said that these *Recollections* are unexpectedly fresh and accurate, although the author wrote them after a significant time had elapsed from the events he describes. Furthermore, he jotted down his *Recollections* while living in a foreign country and while his homeland was under Communist oppression. As such,

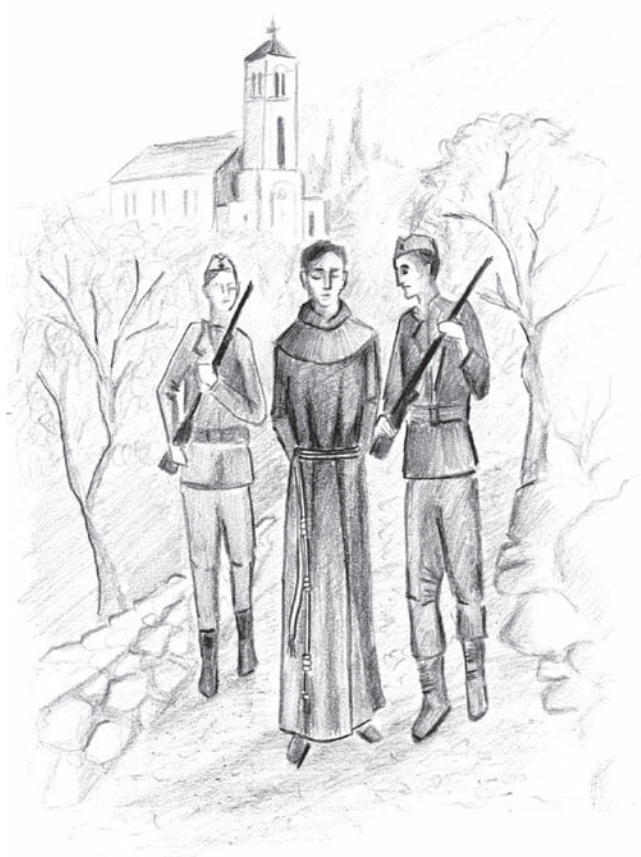
he was not able to make use of either written or living sources, that is, witnesses to these same events. For that very reason, we must be all the more thankful to him for these pearls which will, even in our own time, make his fellow victims and their descendants shed a few tears and awaken in them a sense of patriotism and religious pride.

Feast Day of St. Jerome, in the year of our Lord, 2011.

Fr. Vendelin Karačić, O.F.M.

I

**RUŽÍČI**  
**April 1945 – May 1946**





## “A Partisan in a Franciscan Habit?”

I came to Ružiči<sup>1</sup> at the beginning of April 1945. The house was completely wrecked. The church remained locked ever since the pastor, Fr. Zdenko Zubac, O.F.M. was taken away [by Tito's Partisans] and killed. This happened in February.<sup>2</sup> The paved way around the church was completely beaten-down since the people in the area, (almost all women, since the men have been called-up to serve in various armies, and many died), would, in the morning hours, tread that path on their bare knees in supplication. They would carry out this act of earnest prayer only in the early morning hours, or else, in the late evening, since they were not permitted to do so by the “People's Authorities.” Meanwhile, the Parish Office had been spared. All the documentary books were left untouched. Thanks must be given to the then Secretary of the [People's] Committee, Vlado Žulj, known as Čović. The basement was entirely ransacked, the rooms and the kitchen stood wide open and empty.

The word in the village was: A new pastor has arrived. They found it hard to believe, since: Where were

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<sup>1</sup> A village and the Parish bearing the same name, near Grude. Fr. Jerko Karičić came there as the newly-appointed pastor.

<sup>2</sup> Fr. Zdenko Zubac, Gradnići, August 6, 1911 – Zagvozd, February 10 (?), 1945. His remains were found in a mass-grave containing the remains of Partisan victims. His remains were identified, transferred on October 9, 2007, and buried in the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, in Široki Brijeg. The details of his capture and execution, as of yet, are not clear.

the friars? – either they were killed or Tito’s Partisans chased them out.

Sunday, a clear day. The bells were ringing at 8, 9, and 10 o’clock. They could not believe it. At 10 o’clock, the church was full, and overcrowded. I make my entrance to the Altar. I began the Mass. I announced the *OUR FATHERS*.<sup>3</sup> The weeping was audible, piercing. Sighs. “Hail True Body of Christ!” was sung in such a high tone that the entire church reverberated. Following the Mass, no one asked me my name, or how I am doing. Strange!

A bit before noon, the President of the Local [People’s] Committee, Stipe Vranješ, known as Becić, stopped in. He is a gravel road repairer. He brought along a 14 year old boy: Marko Mikulić, known as Tabaković, and said to me: “Friar, here you are, he will be your *dijak*”<sup>4</sup>

The boy shook hands with me, and proceeded to remove his backpack, and leaned it against the wall. This very same President Becić asked Ivan Mikulić, (brother to late Fr. Rudo), to ask the Provincial Fr. Mate Čutura,<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Since the Mass was in Latin, a language the people did not know, the priest, at the start, would announce the intentions for which the congregation would pray, as well as how many *OUR FATHERS*, *HAIL MARYS*, and *GLORY BES* should be prayed, and for what intention.

<sup>4</sup> The name given to one who served; who helped take care of things for the pastor or in a monastery. [The etymology of the word *dijak* comes from the Greek: Deacon = servant, helper]

<sup>5</sup> At the time, Fr. Mate Čutura was acting as the Provincial since the Partisans grabbed and killed the Provincial, Fr. Leo Petrović, along with six other friars from the monastery in Mostar on the 14th of February, 1945.

to send a friar, if he could spare one. Thus it was, that I came to Ružići.

The boy, upon the departure of the President, took half a loaf of corn bread from his backpack, and a good chunk of bacon. He said: “My mom sent this – here is some lunch!” We found a bottle in the sacristy, which we used for bringing water. The next day, the Committee sent some 10 kilos of corn flour, two kitchen spoons, and one five-liter pot. A neighbor, Jozo Iličić, known as Crni, ventured to come to see me, and he immediately promised to bring me a half liter of milk. I and my *dijak* began to learn how to cook *pura* [*polenta*]. The boy, surprisingly at ease with me, as we cooked the *pura*, began to sing: *Druže Tito, kako ću te volit, tri mjeseca nemam čime solit* (Comrade Tito, how can I love you; for three months I have had no salt.) [The English translation of the ditty doesn’t begin to express the sarcastic wit of the Croatian.] Salt was a “luxury” up until “UNRA”<sup>6</sup> began to provide it.

It was only later that I came to know why my parishioners were suspicious of me. They did not know me personally and they thought that I might well be some sort of Partisan dressed in a friar’s habit. Later, after being convinced that I was truly a friar, they accepted me as their pastor and hero, because I “suffered much” for their sake.

Still, many, if not almost all of them, did not dare to come to me for fear that it might be interpreted that

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<sup>6</sup> UNRA – United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. An organization for the relief of victims of war through the provision of food, fuel, clothing, shelter, and other basic necessities. It was organized in 1943 and dissolved in 1948.

they were against the “people,” and “current government.” Each passing day, I would find basic food items, either in front of my door, or else, left on the altar in church, since they were afraid to publicly give something to the *pratar* [a local pronunciation of “fratar” = friar] so that he would not perish. Nonetheless, I did not perish.

### Youth Social Gatherings

Of all my woes, perhaps the deepest was the vexation every other night of having to listen until late in the night, the singing at the “Youth Social Gatherings.” Every Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday, all the youth from the village had to gather about nine o’clock in the evening in the so-called “Youth Hall,” to hear “reports,” and to dance the Partisan kolo, that is, a circle dance. (This confiscated hall was once the home of Mate Iličić, a man who returned home from America, and who ran a tavern in the village.) The youth leader was a Moslem woman from Ljubuški, born in Vitina, and always armed up to the teeth, named Kana Bušklija [should be Bušatlja]. Her three-pointed Partisan cap became the subject of cursing, although, for the sake of one’s head, no one could publicly “dishonor” it. The poor youth! They must work at home the entire day – poor and shoeless, hungry and bereaved because every day news would arrive about how the sons of the village, Croatian soldiers, imprisoned in various Partisan camps, were withering away from hunger, or facing firing squads, simply because they could no longer march any further in the post-war death marches. One man told me how he was made to walk from the Austrian border all the way to Kovina (near Belgrade). The “column”

of marchers was numerous at the start, but, by the time they came to Kovina, there were but one-hundred of them. The village youth had to dance and sing to the tune of Partisan propaganda under the snout of the aforementioned Kana Bušatlija, and the [Communist] Party. The members of the youth “administrative” group consisted of local seventeen or eighteen-year olds: Ljubo Žulj-Čovič, Mile Kondža, Marko Jurčić, Ruža and Zdravka Marićušić. Kana, for them, and for all the youth in the village, was both a god and a cudgel.

Of the thousands of situations endured by these youths, let this one alone be mentioned. Sometime about the end of June, two daughters of a villager named Mikulić (known as “Hrkandaš, whose house was located on the northern side of Zelenikovac hill), did not want to attend the youth meeting. Because of this, Kana blew up a storm, and issued threats to those who “disrespected” the Party and the youth leadership. The father of those girls happened to have seven lambs. The very next day, all of the seven lambs were confiscated by the Party, in retaliation for the non-attendance. Then, on the same day, the lambs were driven off to Ljubuški. (Ljubuški is located some 25 kilometers from Ružići).

A youth, Marko Jurčić, commented at the very next meeting that he thought the punishment was too harsh, and, also, why did they confiscate the lambs from a poor man. A discussion ensued. Marko became even more angry and shouted: “Why were the lambs driven to Ljubuški for the *balije* (the pejorative appellation for Moslems) to devour – we could have eaten them here?” Words of warning dropped on Marko, and he was openly told that he is a source of division to “brotherhood,” and that he would pay for that. Within a few days,

Marko received orders from the Youth Committee that he must carry a letter to Lištica<sup>7</sup> to the [Communist] Youth Committee. Of course, no car or bus was available. He had to walk there. At the time, walking was the mode of transportation, since the “People’s Authorities” did not have any better transportation means available even to ordinary Communists, much less, for ordinary citizens. Marko set off towards Lištica, and was never again heard from, or seen. Whispers were heard saying that he was seen dead in the area of Mount Mamići. It is hard to say if the decomposed body found there was that of Marko Jurčić, since such human remains were to be found in many places and were often detected by the smell of decomposition. His brothers were forced to sing the Communist ditty: *Comrade Tito, we swear to you, from your path, we will not stray.*

### **Annual “Allotment” and Deceitful Committeemen**

At the end of May, I announced a Mass and blessing of the fields to be held in the cemetery known as Seline. That was Sunday before the Feast of Pentecost. Immediately following the Mass, Nikola Iličić, a scribe for the People’s Committee, climbed onto the wall before the

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<sup>7</sup> A small town and administrative center. From its origin, and until the Spring of 1952, it was known as Široki Brijeg. The Communist authorities changed its name to *Lištica*. Its original name was returned on the 16th of October, 1991. (SL SR BiH, god. XLVII, br. 32; Ukaz pod br. 359). (The expression: *ići na Lištice*, is heard even today, since, from time immemorial people went to Lištica to mill their grain on the River Lištica, or else, the name applies to a part of the town itself.)

## Dancing the Partisan Circle Dance

Along the path of all the villages on the southern side of the Mostarsko Blato, is found a rather high mountain known as Trtle. The Partisans were convinced that škripari were to be found in the mountain. For that reason, greater or smaller numbers of soldiers could be found throughout the entire parish. That army, which the poor people had to feed and supply – except, of course, for their weapons – was called: *The People's Defense*.

I went to the village of Jare to minister to a sick person. As it is the custom, a man ringing a bell walked before me to call attention to the faithful that I was carrying the Blessed Sacrament – the Body of Christ – for the sick person. This time, as I passed the *Primorac* houses in Jare, I encountered about twenty soldiers on the road. I passed by them. They were silent. My companion did not ring the bell. Suddenly, they circled me and began to dance a Circle Dance around me. They danced and sang: *Pobit ćemo sve popove, hođe, fratre, i lopove*. [We will kill all priests, imams, friars, and thieves!] I can't move – I'm in their middle. Christ grants strength. After all their singing, and shameless behavior, they went their way, and I went my way.

After ministering to the sick person, I intended to go home. A woman ran into the house and said: "Reverend, don't leave the house. The Partisans got hold of a friar – it seems to me that he is the pastor in Čerin." The road leads directly beneath the house. My curiosity aroused, I looked through the window. Two soldiers in the front, two in the back, and in between them is the pastor in Čerin, Fr. Živko Martić.<sup>24</sup> His Franciscan habit

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<sup>24</sup> Fr. Živko Martić, Rastovača, July 31, 1897 - Mostar, December 20, 1963. Doctorate in Classical Philology, Clas-

was blowing in the wind, since they removed the cord around his waist – I suppose so that fewer people would recognize him. They marched Fr. Živko across Mount Trtle, then through Jare, and on to Lištica. He was not tied since I could see him wipe away the sweat from his brow. All the residents in the house fell to their knees and prayed for him, and for me. Again, I had an escort back to Ljuti Dolac. On the way home, (below the house of Đolin, in Biograci), I heard a youngster sing, as he gathered wood: *Druže Tito, siti gospodine, ubiše nas tvoje zle godine...Partizani, ne znalo se za nje, uništiše svačije imanje.* [Comrade Tito, full bellied sir, your evil time is killing us...Partisans! – may all memory of you be erased forever, for you have destroyed everyone's property.”]

### **Movement Was Forbidden**

Again, an even greater pandemonium. Ićan Kordić, from *Sretnice*, the village Committeeman, was killed through the night. Soldiers are multiplying, again. Everything has to be given to them. Summer time. Movement banned after seven in the evening and until six in the morning. All the bell ringers were ordered to sound the bells at those times. There were four bells in the parish. It was very hot. The people worked in the tobacco fields and in the vineyards, in the morning hours, and in the late evening hours. The army was cruising on all sides. The talk in the village was that Ićan Kordić was killed by the Partisans because he was not to their liking as a committeeman.

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sical Gymnasium professor. Sentenced to two years imprisonment. He served the full time in jail.



Again, an uproar. The army entered the Andačić melon patch and ate melons at will. One of the soldiers (most likely drunk), thrashed and cracked the melons such that he destroyed all of them. Even though people were working right next to the melon patch, no one dared to protest. This hero sang as he was breaking the melons: Ćorić Osman ruši kulački bostan. [Ćorić Osman destroys the kulak's (wealthy farmer's) melons.] While destroying the melons, his gun slipped, and he ended up dead in the melon patch. The Partisans wanted to torch the Andačić houses, but two soldiers that were with Osman testified to the truth. This guy Ćorić Osman, was the leader of that Partisan patrol. He was from *Podveležje*, by birth. The people lived in fear. Conferences [that people had to attend] were filled with threats.

### **Young Girls' Defiance**

The fields were already being scythed in Mostarsko Blato. By old custom, during the time of scything, the Mass would be held on the *Bilile*. The water-sources beneath the village of Jare are called Bilila. The area has many willow trees and much water, and festive gatherings were held there. On that occasion, a lot of people were at Mass in Bilila. The army was also present to "share" in the festival atmosphere. While the Mass was being said, the soldiers sat beneath the willow trees and smoked. The people gathered around the priest and prayed. In my sermon, I mentioned how the colossal ship, the Titanic, sank on the Atlantic because it struck an iceberg. Following the Mass, I was approached by a ribbon-be-decked soldier who said to me: "Priest, you can't be that dumb to think that the ocean has ice in it; yet, with your

sermons you make the people stupid...” I did not answer him since he immediately left my side.

The youth, (almost all young girls) gathered in a circle – they were not dancing the *kolo* [circle dance], but began singing in a circle formation. The soldiers wished to join in, but the young girls broke formation – they did not wish to dance the *kolo* with the soldiers. On the opposite side of the small river, the girls gathered in a *kolo* and a girl (from Jare) began to sing: *Druže Tito, šta ti na blok nije, osim ovo sunce što nas grije?* [Comrade Tito, what do you not cover by your ration-stamps, except this Sun which warms us?] (*Blok* – the people called the ration-stamps which were issued by the “people’s authority” – to whom they willed – so that they could buy a specific item.) When the army heard this song, they broke up the *kolo* formation, and demanded to know who began to sing this song. While the soldiers were disputing with the girls, the angry girls from Ljuti Dolac, on the other side of the water, gathered together in a *kolo*-formation and began to sing: *Mila mati, komu ćeš me dati, ako mi se ustaša ne vrati?* [Mother dearest, to whom will you offer my hand in marriage, should my *ustaša* not come back home?”]

The soldiers surrounded the entire *kolo* group, and all who were in that circle were taken across the field toward *Ovojni*, on the main Široki Brijeg-Mostar road. All the people scattered within a moment. Along with three older men, I set off towards Ljuti Dolac. The army did not accompany us. The young girls were driven off to jail. The youngest among them were released to their homes. Eleven of them (the older girls) were kept in jail. The name of the girl who related the agony they endured in jail must remain a secret as promised. She

related to me how she was the first to be released after one week in jail. Later, the others also returned home from jail. Some UDBA agent interrogated each girl, one by one. This was repeated day and night.

The agent tried to convince her (the girl who related this to me) to act as a spy on this or that guy in the village. She grew tired of this “eternal” interrogation and urging to spy, and she finally agreed to spy on the church and on the *kapela*<sup>25</sup> (that is what she said). So that the other girls would not wonder why she was to be released home, the agent told her that the next morning, she was to stand nearest to the door. She agreed. When the agent entered the room the next morning, he asked the girl what her name was. She gave her name. The agent went on to say to all the girls present: “Oh my! Last night I had a terrific headache. It was so bad, that I promised St. Anthony that I would set one of you free, and that would be the one who was standing closest to the door when I came into the room. Hence, take your things, and go home. And, my head no longer hurt...” That UDBA agent was Serbian. (He was known as Risto Masleša?). This girl did, indeed, come home; however, she immediately had a travel-permit issued, and set off across the River Sava, to stay with a relative. She never returned to her home; she was lucky to find her fortune across the border [she left the country].

### **The Massacres on Mount Mosor and in Bogodol**

Word spread throughout the village that some *križari* [guerrilla fighters] were tricked and killed on Mount Gostuša<sup>26</sup>(Mostarski Gradac). Seven of them, cleverly

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<sup>25</sup> In this instance, *kapela* means: the Rectory.

<sup>26</sup> The event is remembered under the title: *Pogibija na Mosoru*, The event took place on the 18th of September,

tricked by the Partisans, and killed. Their leader, Mariofil Mandić,<sup>27</sup> was also killed.

*[The injured Benedict (Benko) Penavić died as a križar (škripar) in the village of Bogodol, just beneath Čabulja, on the 20th of December 1947, where he, wounded, hid in the hay. The Partisans, after hearing of this, forced the people to remove the hay from their haystacks. The residents did so twice but continued to hide Benko. However, since the traitor insisted that the wounded soldier was still in the hay, the Partisans ultimately found him, and shot him dead.<sup>28</sup> Agents of OZNA, in the presence of*

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1946. Mount Mosor rises above the *Borak Spring* above Široki Brijeg. Nine, (not seven!) škripari were killed there: Jakiša Alpeza (Ledinac, born April 8, 1925), Zlatko Čavar (Oklaji, October 7, 1924), Bože Hrkać, known as Golub, (Dobrkovići, May 15, 1928), Ivan Katura Jakić, (Dragićina, March 20, 1920), Ivan Jurčić, known as Pijavica, (Ružići, April 29, 1918), Mariofil Ivan Mandić, (Široki Brijeg, November 19, 1924), Vidak Prskalo, (Mokro, March 19, 1927), Veselko Rezić, (Donji Crnač, February 12, 1922), and Jure Zovko, (Oklaji, September 26, 1926). The details of the murders of this group are, as of yet, not fully known – in fact, not even the exact number, or identity of those slain!

<sup>27</sup> Mariofil Ivan Mandić, son of Dragan and Ivica, née Lončar, was born in Oklaji, on the 19<sup>th</sup> of November, 1924. At the time he was murdered, his parents, and two sisters were alive.

<sup>28</sup> The author of *Recollections* accurately described the event, however, he reversed the names of the two neighbors and the victims – Mariofil Mandić, and Benko Penavić. Hence, the editor added a short description of the murder of Benko Penavić, whose dead body (not that of Mariofil) was publicly displayed on Lištica Bridge.

*many of the locals, killed the protectors of Benko, that is, Franjo, Jure, and Manda Vrljić, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of December [1947], near the church in Goranci.]*

The dead body of Benko was brought to Lištica, and a bit farther from the house where he was born,<sup>29</sup> he was placed on the bridge – his dead body already decaying. The Partisans placed a cigarette in his mouth, I suppose to better frighten the people; however, by doing so, they demonstrated who and what they were. *The family of Benko had to view this*, yet the Partisans did not “hear” the protests. The body was “exhibited” on the bridge for two days,<sup>30</sup> after which the Partisans cast the remains God knows where. Young members of the Communist Party spread across the entire Široki Brijeg region urging the citizens to go to River Lištica Bridge to view the dead body of *Benko Penavić* exhibited there, with a cigarette in his mouth. They threatened all those who

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Mandić actually died on Mount Mosor, on the 18<sup>th</sup> of September 1946, and was buried there.

<sup>29</sup> Benko was born in the village of Mokro, on the 7<sup>th</sup> of July 1926. He lived in Široki Brijeg on the River Lištica.

<sup>30</sup> Through conversation [after the collapse of Communism] with eye witnesses, it was established that the body of Benko hung on the bridge across the River Lištica, (Cf. *Imenik boli i ponosa*, Široki Brijeg, 1999, p. 43). In similar manner, the agents of KNOJ [People’s Defense Corps of Yugoslavia] and OZNA used the same approach with the bodies of two “škripari”: Vinko Škrobo from Dužice, and Stipe Karačić from Gornji Crnač, who, providing a retreat for the rest of the members of the group, were killed in Šarića Dubrava (enclousion of Pelisice, under the ownership of Ivan Hrkać Jozić), in the Spring if 1948. (The date is not confirmed; the murders took place “when the forest began to leaf.”)

failed to go to the bridge to view this “heroic” Partisan act saying they would be denied their ration cards, that is their “*točkice* and *kvarte*.”<sup>31</sup>

One of the more serious and open peasants from Ljuti Dolac related to me how all of this looked. According to him, the Partisans exhibited the body of *Benko* to frighten the people, and also to see how they would react. Many curses were heard against the Partisans, and on this occasion, a significant number (of women, since there were few men) ended up in jail.<sup>32</sup>

### **Arrest of Iva Zovko, the Sister of Three Missing Brothers**

At dusk, Iva Zovko, from the village of Jare, came with the wish to have a Mass said in honor of Saint Anthony. On that occasion, Iva (an older unmarried woman who lived alone; her parents were dead, and her three brothers disappeared in the war – Slovenia...) [Most likely during the withdrawal of Croatian Forces towards Austria to surrender to the Allies.], went on to relate: “It was five or six months ago. I went to Mostar, and when I passed in front of our (Catholic) church, as is customary, I genuflected and blessed myself. One *bula* (this is the way Iva refers to Moslem women) began to berate me for having genuflected. The *bula* went on to say to

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<sup>31</sup> *Točkice* were a type of coupons with which one could buy some articles of clothing, while *kvarte* designated a small quantity of food items which could be purchased with these coupons. That was based on the number of persons in the family.

<sup>32</sup> In similar manner, the Partisans dealt with the bodies of the two *škripari* they killed, namely, Vinko Škrobo and Stipe Karačić.

## The Case of Stepinac also Addressed in Hercegovina

In recent time, there was an awful upsurge in propaganda against the Archbishop of Zagreb, Stepinac. In fact, some “big shot” from Mostar held a conference in Ljuti Dolac, where he severely attacked Archbishop Stepinac. (Such conferences were held almost every day in all villages, such that the people – having to attend such conferences – sighed: “Conferences for lunch, conferences for dinner!”) The people of Ljuti Dolac remained silent, but ground their teeth. During the customary *kolo dance*, following the Sunday Mass, some adherent of SKOJ from Međine<sup>46</sup> began to sing: “A pigsty collapsed in Krašić, a place where traitor Stepinac was born.” The *kolo* immediately dispersed and, in turn, the “guest” from Međine strongly threatened the “reactionaries” in Ljuti Dolac.

## The Counting of Sheep

Unbearable times. The counting of sheep by night. The members of SKOJ had to carry out that function. The people did not report the exact number of their sheep, and, as soon the shearing of sheep had to take place, they wanted to know who had how many sheep, since a new directive was issued which stated that everyone must deliver a specific amount of wool to the authorities. People would sing ironically: *Titi strižu galu i galina da napravi gaće za Staljina*. (“Black sheep and black ram are being sheared so that Tito can make Stalin’s under-

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<sup>46</sup> A hamlet on the road between Mostar and Široki Brijeg, in the County of Mostar. It was populated mostly with Moslems and Orthodox Christians.

wear.”). Another one: *Družē Tito, svi te redom kunu što odnese s ovaca nam vunu.* (“Comrade Tito, everybody swears at you for confiscating our sheep’s wool.”) There were many such songs sung at the expense of “wool.” They soon ceased to be sung since many were forced to labor on the *pruga* where revenge of all sorts was taken upon them. When they came back, they would sing: *U Zenici nigdje ništa nema nego jedan od kupusa Zema.* (*Nothing is to be found in Zenica, except for one Zema selling cabbage*). *Zema*<sup>47</sup> was a newly-coined word and concept, referring to *Zemaljski magazin*. [*Nation’s Warehouse*, that is, a *State Store*.]

### **Truman’s Cornmeal Mush, and the Celebration of the First of May**

The people livened up a little when cornmeal, milk, and powdered eggs sent by Truman arrived. The people expressed their sentiment over these gifts in a song form – known as *ganga*. Here is what they sang about the cornmeal flour: *“Naše cure po tri dana ćure, najele se trumanove pure.”* (“Our girls plop down [on the toilet] for three days – they ate Truman’s cornmeal mush.”) The cornmeal was freed from its germ, and, as a result, it was difficult to digest – their stomachs ached when they ate bread made from the corn flour – but there was nothing else to eat. Here is another one about the powdered eggs: *Stomak krči, bit će tu belaja, pojeo sam Trumanova jaja.* (The stomach growls, ‘accidents’ will happen, I ate Truman’s eggs.) [The painful humor, and bitter sarcasm of the two chants above cannot be adequately

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<sup>47</sup> An abbreviation of the name of a department store in Mostar.



expressed in English – we dare to say, in any language other than the original.] The poor had no choice but to make use of these food items since there were shortages and they had little or nothing else. All who had cows had to hand over most of the milk to the state store, so this was a special burden for peasants. All of this, once again, was enshrined in their circle dance. *Anđa* Bošnjak led the *circle dance* by singing: *Tito zove, sve se zemlja trese, došli kvarti ponesite ćese.* (*Tito calls, all the earth shakes, rations have come, bring your little bags.*) This *ganga refrain* in the *Partisan version* reads: *Tito zove, sve se zemlja trese, proleter, ujedinite se!* (*Tito calls, all the earth shakes; Proletarians unite!*) *Anđa* made use of the word “*kvarti*” – the people used the term to designate the portion of flour or grain given per person as relief – usually, one *kvarat* [*a quarter of a kilogram*] per person in the household. *Ponesite ćesu* – again, a *ćesa* is a small bag; mispronounced version of the word *vreća*, that is, “bag.” Once again, they paid for such wits at the government’s expense. The government’s revenge was to force them to work on the *rail*, to increase the already high tax, force them to hand over more wool than one could supply, more milk for the *state store*, etc. Such *gangas* abounded – and, the punishment for them was ever greater.

The *kolo* and the *gangas* sang while they danced, were very interesting: all that the poor people experienced at that time would surface in the Sunday *kolos* – wrapped in *ganga* singing refrains. I had a young lad who would always report what was sung during those circle dances. That proved to be the vent which served the people to give them some sense of relief for their misery. One was not allowed to sing anything against the authorities, or

else, it would cost you dearly. For example: *Oj djevojko, moja gara, gdje si bila Prvog maja?* (O maiden mine, my dark-haired one, where were you on the First of May Day?) *Ja sam bila sva u plaču, kod Begića vršuć draču...* (I was soaked in tears, while thrashing brambles near Begić's house...) Namely, one was obliged to go to Mostar for the celebration of the First of May Day. They would gather up the youth in open trucks and take them to wherever best suited them.

Thus, early on that May Day, they gathered up the youth, ordered them to climb open trucks and drove them to Mostar for the celebration. One such truck rolled over in Kruševo, near the Begić house. No one was killed, but the site where the truck rolled over was filled with bramble bushes. That, then, was the source of „I was soaked in tears, while thrashing brambles near Begić's house.” *Opet će se Slovenija gaziti, kad se budu grobovi obilaziti.* (Slovenia will be trodden again when the graves will be visited.) That *ganga* was sung on the occasion of a conference being led by an agronomist from Slovenia: he delivered the party-line propaganda recommending that sesame and peanuts be planted. In fact, one friar, (Fr. Ljudevit Rupčić,<sup>48</sup>) was given eight years in prison for supposedly saying that his mother would be able to spin in a weeks' time all the cotton that

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<sup>48</sup> Fr. Ljudevit Rupčić: Hardomilje, September 26, 1920 – Mostar, June 25, 2003; doctor of Theology, Professor. His older brother, Fr. Bonifacije, was sentenced to eight years, and two months in prison, where he served a full six years and seven months. Fr. Ljudevit was sentenced to five years, and three months. He slaved away in prison for a full four years and eleven months. (Reference: see footnote No. 16).

Herzegovina could possibly produce. This Slovenian agronomist, “wound up” in the Party and Partisan ideology, poured out his knowledge about the advantage of sowing sesame seeds and peanuts to the peasants, and explained how great a profit they might reap per acre. One peasant responded to him (Stanko Bošković): “Yeah, all that you say is like it is. The only thing is, give us – if you can – sun under the cap, and rain in the sleeve.” The poor agronomist simply went dumb.

### **Mowing Wheat Before Its Time, and Forced Cotton Planting**

Nonetheless, cotton, sesame, and peanuts had to be planted. In the beginning of May, the People’s Police descended upon the village of Biograci. They ordered the Committeemen to mow the wheat crop which was still in its growth period, and ordered every landowner to plant sesame seeds in its place. The peasants remained silent, while their clenched teeth scrapped as they watched their unripe wheat being mowed. In the end, they finally received sesame seed, and – like-it-or-not – cursed the seed, and proceeded to plant it. It appeared that this plant might succeed in Hercegovina, but, the peasant, like a peasant, poured hot water over half the seed<sup>49</sup> and proceeded to plant it; of course, it germinated very poorly. Where the seed did succeed in germinating, the peasants would “tug” at this disdained crop so that it would not grow properly. This “tugging” tended to destroy a portion of the plant’s roots system. They “tugged” at the cotton and the peanut crops. In the Fall of that year, the “buying” of the sesame crop took

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<sup>49</sup> *Obariti*: = to parboil

place. Some had a kilo, some, perhaps two, but, everyone produced less than the seed given him.

Yet, one peasant did bring about the same amount of sesame crop as the seed he received. This peasant's name was Pero Zelenika, from Biogradi. He stuttered a bit, and, as a result, the people would call him "Pevo." When Pevo brought a sack filled with 6 kilograms of sesame, and when, according to the entry in the journal, it was determined that he was originally given that same amount of seed for planting, the Secretary of Lištica County, Dane Zovko, screamed: "Here, people! Here is one man who grew as much sesame as the seed that he was given to grow. He deserves a reward!" Dane then proceeded to say: "Comrade Zelenika, now then, proceed to tell us how you went about growing your sesame crop, such that your harvest was the same as that which was sown?" Stuttering, Zelenika answered: "Mr. Secretary, I received these 6 kilograms of seed this past Spring, and placed them in the chest by the barrel, and here it is returned to you now." The two who were supposed to control the sowing of the sesame crop were imprisoned for not having known that Pevo Zelenika did not sow his seed at all!

### **"Brotherhood and Comradeship" – by Persuasion**

The people, exhausted by the attempts on the part of the Communists and all the other pressures applied to them, become firmer in their Faith as well as more practical. Whenever a member of the Party said something against the Faith, the people would literally spit at him whenever they could, that is, when there were no witnesses. They did not read the Communist press; there

were no religious publications in any form whatsoever – not only in Hercegovina, but across all of Yugoslavia.

About noontime, a newly minted member of the Party, Nikola Vidačak, known as Kozo, from Podgorje,<sup>50</sup> came to see me. This time, he said that he wished to speak with me privately and openly. We sat together in the Rectory. Nikola told me quite openly that he was sent to try to convince me to give up my habit (that I leave the priesthood), and that I take over the management of a printshop wherever I wished. (As a friar, I finished the printing trade.) I responded in the spirit of “brotherhood” and “comradeship,” that I would never do so, and that he should wipe that notion out of his head. The conversation continued. Anger began to well in me. I raised the question to Kozo asking how he felt towards his own people, and the fact that they have been totally worn out in every way, and that the Party continued to suppress them. He attempted to defend the Party. I asked him what he thought of the fact that his Party slaughtered sixty-five<sup>51</sup> friars who were neither judged nor condemned by any court. They were slaughtered and tossed away as if they were the worst criminals. He responded saying that the Revolution did what it had to.

Striking the table hard with my fist, I said to him that more than two-thirds of our people, perhaps more, were slaughtered directly following the war, than died during the war. His reply was that this, once again, takes place in every Revolution. When I responded that the state of

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<sup>50</sup> A village in the neighboring Parish of Kruševo.

<sup>51</sup> In the Second World War, and directly following it, 66 Herzegovinian friars, not 65, were killed by the Communists.

revolution had long since been settled, and asked, why, then, are priests being arrested and sentenced to ten, fifteen, and more years for small infractions – let us use as an example, that the priest might have said in a sermon that it is one's Christian duty to work and to pray for the conversion of sinners. He said that this was the program of the Party. I said to him: "Listen, Kozo, there are only 27 of our Herzegovinian friars who are "free," while 34 of them are in jail, and, in fact, 28 of them in the Zenica Prison, 4 in the Mostar Prison, and two on forced-labor in Jablanica, (Fr. Mladen Barbarić, and Fr. Krsto Ravlić). All of those men are a source of pride for me since they innocently suffer.<sup>52</sup> God strike me dead, sooner than that I would give up my habit and join forces with you – persecutors of the innocent." He stood up, shook hands with me, and departed.

He, nonetheless, proved to be enough of a man since he did not mention any of this within his Cell, or to the Party Committee, since I did not endure any specific hardship as a result of what I said. Otherwise, this could have cost me much. Perhaps this was so, since

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<sup>52</sup> The Partisan authorities have condemned Herzegovinian Franciscans for a total of 348 years, and 28 days of imprisonment. Out of that, the friars have served 225 years, and 4 months, and 16 days. (See Nikić, A.: *Patnje hercegovačkih franjevac 1945 – 1990, Stopama pobijenih*, II, No. 2 (3), Humac, July-August 2009, p. 25.). However, the friars served more prison time than indicated above. For example, Fr. Zdenko Galić was sentenced to death – despite the fact that he was forced to serve as a Partisan – though acquitted, he spent some time in jail – a fact not included in the above statistic. Also to be added to the above is the jailing of a seminarian, Ivan Turudić, who was sentenced to eight and served six years.

there were no witnesses to our conversation. One could surmise that the Party worked on young priests hoping to persuade them to leave the priesthood. I can conclude this to be the case since I was also urged to do so by Mirko Ivkić. This Mirko, a rather well-known person, had a saloon in Polog, in Ovojci. They confiscated all that he had, and, in the end, jailed him. When he was released from prison, he urged me to shed my Franciscan habit and, by doing so, I would save his life. I could take what he said as being partly a joke. He did not insist on my doing so too intensely. On the Feast of Saint Ilija (Elijah), I celebrated the Solemn Mass<sup>53</sup> in the Parish of Kruševo. Mirko sent a young man from Polog to ask that I come to him in Ovojci. When the young man (known as Peruška) did not find me at home in Ljuti Dolac, he returned to Ovojci. When Mirko learned that I would not be coming to see him, since the young man did not find me at home, Mirko took his hunting rifle, and killed himself on the steps leading to his house (?!).

### **Search and Arrest Directly Prior to a Funeral**

An acquaintance from Mostar related to me how he encountered Fr. Mladen and Fr. Krsto doing the most difficult labor in the Jablanica hard labor prison camp. He thinks that Fr. Krsto may have said something on the occasion of the funeral-burial of Fr. Mate Čuturić.<sup>54</sup> Fr. Mate

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<sup>53</sup> After Solemn Mass in honor of the Patron Saint of the Parish, or, in similar situations, when a large gathering of the faithful come together, a festival (*dernek*) would follow.

<sup>54</sup> Regarding the events that the writer of these *Recollections* relates, he goes back in time to a few years in the past. Fr. Mate Čuturić, a former professor in the Classical Gymnasium, was, two terms, Provincial of the Herzegovinian Francis-

protectors of the people,” I said that he was the one who cut the tobacco. As I was the only one searched by the *cajo* – that is what the people called policemen – two or three women protested. The *cajo* remained silent, and continued to carry out his “job.”

When I exited the bus at Ovojci, the policemen said that they, too, would cross the field, but that they would not join me to Ljuti Dolac, and that I must wait for them on the side of the Ljuti Dolac [Mostarsko] Blato field. Thus it was. We went off to the residence of Planinić. Vinko was taken by surprise. At the insistence of the *caja* [*policemen*], he took the wood plane and a bit of tobacco in his hand and showed them how he cuts tobacco. They had no basis in law to confiscate that implement – one that is used to plane wood.

### **Haystacks in Flames – On Sundays You (don't) Work**

Summer heat was in full force. As usual, August brought extreme heat and drought. It was a Sunday afternoon (just before sunset) when a boy, Darinko Perunić, burst into the kitchen of the Rectory and said: “Ah, my friar, a wonder in Torine. The *haystacks* are in flames – the hay on the horses is burning...” I ran out to see what the boy was saying. And, truly, a mule ran across Torine, and the haystack on its back was aflame. The faster the mule ran, the greater the flame on its back. In the end, the *haystack* fell from its back and continued to burn on the ground. Meanwhile, the mule ran towards the Josipović houses to meet up with another mule which had already, near the Perunić vineyard, freed itself from its *haystack* which continued to burn. Both mules were owned by Sekula Pehar from Ograđenik. That Sekula



was a Party member, and was given those two mules by the government. Someone lit the piles of hay that were on the mules on fire while the mule-driver stopped to have a drink or two at Ivko Perunić. The mule-driver was not Sekula himself, rather some young man, a relative of Sekula.

I ran back into the house so as not to look at that misfortunate happening. Mirko Ćorić, the son of Franjo, stopped by and told me what had happened that day in the field (Blato). He related: “Today, a bit after noon, five or six young men from Ljuti Dolac gathered at the Stanić houses. They downed a few drinks (from the basement of Ćamil Nožić). Most likely in agreement, they went to the field and cut the reins of all the Brotnjaks [people from the region of Brotnjo] who came to the fields on Holy Sunday to tie the hay in bales so they could drive it all home in the evening when it was cooler. When the youth were tossing the *bales of hay*, they yelled: ‘We are not Communists! We do not work on Sundays!’ In fact, there was a work-truck in the Fendić fields (the name of one portion of the *Blato* field) that was almost filled with hay. Those young men from Ljuti Dolac scattered all the hay and warned those who were stacking the hay not to move anything. Božo Barbarić, from Ograđenik (hamlet Ćmarevac), hired the truck to haul his hay from Blato. Our young men were now in a bind since Božo was a „*big shot*” in the Party.” Thus ended Mirko’s story, and, as he set off, he said that in the same connection the hay belonging to Sekula which was stacked on the backs of the mules in *Torine* was also set on fire. Božo Barbarić was truly a bright man, a blacksmith by trade. When he realized what the Serbian-led Party intended, he joined the Communist Party

to speak in behalf of the Croatians in western Herzegovina. He sought to dull the sharp Communist blades whenever and wherever he could. He stood up for the Croatian cause wherever he could and helped as much as he could; however, since he joined the Party, he was seen as being a leading person as far as the people were concerned.

The next day, the police came to the village and arrested seven young men who caused a commotion the day before, when they “cursed” against the disrespect of the Holy Sunday obligation. The entire blame was placed on Markan Bošnjak and Franjo Lesku saying that they organized the entire commotion. Nothing was able to be determined as to who set Sekula’s hay on fire. Markan Bošnjak and Franjo Lesku (newly released from serving their term in the army), were accused of being the leaders along with five others. The police took them to the jail in Mostar. After a week, they returned home – peaceful and silent – having lost weight, and shaved down to the skin. They said nothing as to how they were treated in Mostar. They came to Mass, but just barely as the Mass began, and then they “crawled” into the sacristy.

In private, Markan told me of all that happened to them in jail. They beat them, and tried to convince them to say that the friar talked them into urging the others not to labor in the fields on a Sunday, and the like. “No one will suffer or be jailed because of us.” Markan stressed this quite vehemently, but, at his departure, he whispered that they so “disposed” them, that all seven of them promised to join the Communist Youth movement.

that I, in no way, may exert any pressure on the inhabitants of this area as to carrying out their duties to God and the Church. He alluded to the marriage of Markan. When I told him that the Gospels quote Christ's invitation: "He who wishes to follow me..." and I stressed this "who wishes," he stood and left abruptly.

Again, another member of the Party – otherwise one of our men – told me of a fierce discussion that took place at the local Party meeting. Some more important "big shot" came from Mostar and fiercely denounced the membership of the Ljuti Dolac Party for their inactivity. As he left to return to Mostar, he issued a stern warning to the membership, as well as the local *priest* who leads them by the nose, yet is defended by them as being a good "man of the people." That same official reprimanded the local Party membership for having failed to undertake anything against the priest *during the* past spring when measures were taken against the infestation of grasshoppers and caterpillars. The priest, he said, told them that the grasshoppers and caterpillars are a part of God's creation, hence they should not destroy them. At that point, Ivka Čaić, the Committee Secretary, stood up, and said: "We, in fact, raised the question to the friar in that regard." He responded: "It is correct: the grasshoppers and caterpillars are God's creation. If we were not allowed to destroy the grasshoppers and caterpillars, then we also would not be allowed to kill wolves; rather, we would have to allow them to continue to destroy our animals..." This "big shot" answered that the priests are the greatest shysters. He also added that priests continue to obstruct and hinder the Party, and that the battle against them had to continue with full force. He said they would allow the priests to

engage in their activities only for a specific time, but in their church behind closed doors.

**“Oh, Široki Brijeg, they Changed Your Name...”**

The terror did not let up. They continued to resettle villagers. The army continued to roam about. Officially, Široki Brijeg *should not be called by that name anymore*; rather, the place should be called *Lištica*.<sup>70</sup> I was told of that change by Mila Penavić, who worked in the local post office. Clerks in the post office had to cross out the usual: “Z. p. Široki Brijeg,” and they had to designate the final point of delivery as being “Z. p. Lištica.”<sup>71</sup> The part on the hill, and the street where the monastery, the Classical Gymnasium, and the Students’ Residence was located had to be designated as being on “Đačka ulica” [Students’ Street].

The Sunday following that change, and, after the parish Mass, the young men went through Lištica singing the following: *Oj Široki, pridiše ti ime, pa se nemam*

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<sup>70</sup> According to the dates recorded in available documents in the County, the name Široki Brijeg was changed to Lištica about, or possibly before the 28<sup>th</sup> of April 1952. The County of Lištica is already mentioned in the *Zakon o podjeli teritorije NRBiH*, the official publication of the NRBiH, No. XI, Vol. VIII, dated the 5<sup>th</sup> of May, 1952.

<sup>71</sup> The Presidency of the Socialistic Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, by way of its Decree of the 16<sup>th</sup> of October, 1991, declared: *Rule about the change of name of the inhabited place Lištica and the County of Lištica to Široki Brijeg*. (*Službeni list SRBiH*, year XLVII, No. 32, under Decree No. 359.

<sup>71</sup> Z. p. = last post office prior to delivery of mail.

*ponositi čime.* (Oh, Široki, they changed your name, I no longer have anything to be proud of.) Those young men were from the family of Kitić and Semberović. Many people who heard that *ganga* openly wept and sighed when the police grabbed and arrested those young men and sent them off to jail. They were released after two days – shaved, and “thoroughly” beaten. The people, however, continued to call it Široki Brijeg.

## **Addendum**

### **An Awful Moment**

It was winter. A thin layer of snow covered the ground. The trees, decorated with white flowers of snow. The houses, the hills, covered with white linen.

In the morning hours, the local pastor, and a priest from Mostar, who took shelter there because of the battles that raged across Mostar, and even as far as Konjic, sat together in the Rectory. While those two Franciscans chatted, in fear and concern, about war-time conditions, two armed Partisan soldiers abruptly appeared. They politely greeted the friars and sat down. They asked to see their identification papers. After a short conversation, they said: “You, from Mostar, are coming with us to our Command Post which is located on the right side<sup>72</sup> of the River Neretva.” The order given – the order carried out. All three left. The pastor, worried and frightened, was left sitting alone, filled with dark thoughts.

All went well at the Command Post. They returned via Jablanica. When they arrived at the railroad bridge across the River Neretva – the bridge is rather high and somewhat short, with great stones beneath it, and beneath it is the foaming, raging River Neretva. Suddenly, one of the soldiers grabbed the friar by his legs and intended to toss him over the guardrail into the raging River Neretva, as he said: “Now it is your turn to follow your brothers!”

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<sup>72</sup> Viewing it from the source of the River Neretva, the Franciscans were located on the right, but one of them was required to go to the left side of the River Neretva.

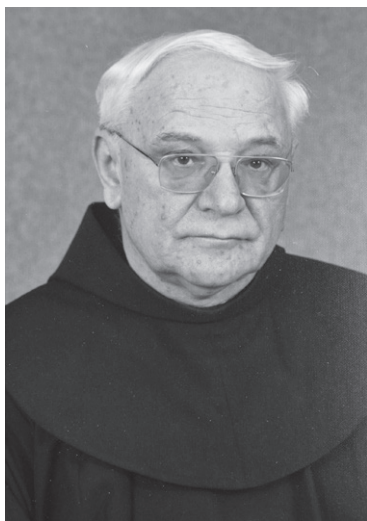
RECOLLECTIONS OF MARTYRDOM IN A TIME OF TERROR



Fr. Jerko, 1945

## Biographical Sketch

The baptismal name of Fr. Jerko Karačić was Marko. He was the son of Jakov and Marija, née Šaravanja, born on the 20<sup>th</sup> of January 1912, in *Gornji Crnač*, near Široki Brijeg. He began his schooling in the public grammar school of Široki Brijeg in Lištica, and continued at the Gymnasium where he received his diploma in 1935. As



a student in the Gymnasium, he entered the novitiate of the Herzegovinian Franciscans in June of 1932. He studied Theology in Mostar (1935-1938), and in Breslau, (1938-1939). Fr. Jerko was ordained a priest on the 12<sup>th</sup> of June 1938. He served his obligatory army time in 1940, in Petrovaradin and in Novi Sad. To further his studies, Fr. Jerko registered at the Theology Faculty in Zagreb on the 10<sup>th</sup> of March, 1940. However, partly because of war-time conditions, and partly because of his obligations with the Franciscan Press in Mostar, he withdrew from his post-graduate theological studies on the 28<sup>th</sup> of March, 1942. He then passed the exam for printing shops experts on the 14<sup>th</sup> of October, 1943, in Dubrovnik. Fr. Jerko was not only skilled in the print-



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*The Recollections of Martyrdom in a Time of Terror* is a precious book. First, because it provides the reader with an eyewitness testimony of those bloody years. Second, because of its beautiful style and language which makes it a literary gem. It is also an impressive expression of faith in God by the Herzegovinian Catholics and an unobtrusive guide to the truth. It is addressed to all those who try to minimize or cover up with anti-fascism the bloody Partisan Communist crimes and other violence against the people in the years after the Second World War. It should be taken into account that in Herzegovina, and not only in that area, the Partisan crimes and terror they spread during and after the war were the most numerous, the most barbaric, and the longer-lasting of all.

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