

This book is dedicated to the memory of the Jews of Yugoslavia who perished in the Holocaust from 1941 to 1945.

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Cover: Valley of the Destroyed Communities — details from the monument to the vanished Jewish communities at the Yad Vashem Memorial Museum in Jerusalem

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Publication of this collection of memoirs of Jewish survivors of persecution in the Second World War was made possible by a donation from Haim Mile Pinkas and family.

FOREWORD

After more than nine years of work and several hundred meetings, the Editorial Board of the series *We Survived* has completed five volumes of testimonies by Jews from the territory of the former Yugoslavia about how they survived the Holocaust. The published volumes contain 208 testimonies.

When the collection of testimonies began, the Editorial Board could not have anticipated that the work would be so extensive, that it would last so many years, or that so many volumes would be published — of which the first two have been translated into English and published for Holocaust researchers and readers in other parts of the world. Work on translating the remaining volumes is ongoing.

We were acutely aware that time was passing and that fewer and fewer of those who could write about what happened to them during the Second World War remained among the living — that it was becoming ever harder for participants of that era to recall what had once been, that they would have to relive the horrors they had endured and return to the anguish of the destruction and disappearance of their loved ones, that they would have to touch once more that painful past.

At the same time, it was clear to the contributors and members of the Editorial Board that this act of recording was the last opportunity to preserve the memories of past suffering from oblivion, and that it was the only way to leave a message for future generations that they must fight to ensure the horrors of the Holocaust are never repeated, for anyone, anywhere.

According to data gathered to date, before the outbreak of the Second World War there were approximately 65,000 Jews permanently settled in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, to which must be added approximately 15,000 refugees from the subjugated countries of Europe. During the war, 67,248 perished — indicating that nearly 82 percent of the total Jewish population was destroyed.

Unlike the heroic uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto and Jewish resistance in other parts of occupied Europe, the Jews of the former Yugoslavia had the unique opportunity to fight against Nazi-fascism in the ranks of the National Liberation Army, as equals alongside others. Approximately 4,600 Jews participated in armed combat. More than 1,300 were killed, ten were proclaimed National Heroes, and fourteen attained the rank of general. Despite being a small ethnic group before the war — just 0.55 percent of the total population, one that was nearly annihilated at the very outset of the war — 5.60 percent of the total number of Jews in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia participated in combat on the side of the National Liberation Movement.

Of the 127 Jewish communities that existed before the war, life could be renewed in only 38.

Throughout all nine years, the Editorial Board gathered once a week around a table with manuscripts and notes, often in the company of those who brought their written testimonies. The witnesses of the Holocaust were resistance fighters, children, concentration camp prisoners, refugees, internees, captured officers, forced laborers... Jews whose closest family members had been killed during the Second World War, who were left without their families, homes, and houses of worship. Testimonies were written by witnesses from all parts of the former Yugoslavia and by those who now live in entirely different corners of the world. Five members of the Editorial Board carry their own experience of the Holocaust; the others were born after the war. A shared conviction united them all: what once happened must not be forgotten, every victim has a name, and generations must remember it.

These five volumes of testimonies were published during years in which neo-Nazism resurged and the Holocaust was denied in many parts of the world. Right-wing movements are growing stronger in numerous countries; ideologies that not so long ago brought immeasurable evil are being dragged from the darkness and put into practice. Five volumes of testimony are the best weapon against the rewriting of history.

The Editorial Board