



JOSIP - JOKA NIKOLIĆ

(Suhopolje, Kingdom of Croatia-Slavonia, Austro-Hungarian Empire Republic, 1916 – unknown)

Josip Joka Nikolić was born on May 15, 1915, into a family of eight, in the Čazma district. His father was a horse trader. Up until his deportation to the camp in 1942, he lived all his life in his native village.

Nikolić was illiterate. As he mentioned in one interview in 1976, “Misery and poverty were a normal thing for me. I did not know a better life and pleasures.” (Trivunčić, 1976, 4)

Nikolić married Lola (born 1924), and they had a little girl by the name of Višnja (“Cherry”) in 1941. He was **deported by the Ustašas and gendarmes in April or May 1942 to the Jasenovac camp**, along with other Roma from the Čazma area. Roma from the local villages of Lipovec, Šćapovec, Šarampov were gathered in the Ivanić – Kloštar settlement (today otherwise referred to as Kloštar Ivanić), and about 30 Roma families were “stuffed” into three or four livestock carriages and taken to the Jasenovac camp. There, their property was confiscated, and they were confined in a fairly wide area surrounded by barbed wire. Nikolić soon realised that the Ustaša authorities had deceived them.

Nikolić was later transferred to the Sava river’s southern bank together with other Roma, after which the men were separated from the women and children. By then, his brother Milan was already considering escaping. Ustaša camp guards then began mass executions of Roma in small groups. **Nikolić decided then, together with other Roma, to flee.** During his escape, Nikolić saw the corpses of many detainees and witnessed several mass executions. After a few days, Nikolić managed to **reach his village of Predavec, where he joined the partisans.** Most of Nikolić’s family failed to survive the war, including his wife and one of his children. On March 3, 1952, he testified at the District Court in Zagreb in the criminal case against Artuković Dr Andrija, Minister of Internal Affairs and Minister of Justice in the Ustashas government of the Independent State of Croatia, for war crimes.

Describing his life, he said, **“I don’t have a house or home. I don’t have an address. My place is where I find a job. My violin and music is my job.”** (Trivunčić 1976, 4)

Sources:

1. Testimony of Josip -Joka Nikolić, Croatian State Archives, sign. HR-HDA-421, Javno tužilaštvo SR Hrvatske [Public Prosecutor's Office of the Socialist Republic of Croatia], Box 128.
2. Trivunčić, Radovan. 1976. "I was caught as a gypsy". Poruke, 1 March, 1976, no. 1 (10), p. 4.

This biography has been written by Daniel Vojak