CIRIL ZLOBEC (Slovenia)

CLIP 1
I am Ciril Zlobec, Slovene poet, writer, translator and essayist, and of course many-a-thing regarding my age. Most of all though, it was the Partisan movement during my youth that more or less affected the rest of my life; I joined as a fighter and a coordinator, actively at hand in the Resistance movement for whatever purpose in my field of activity at the time. This period of time played a fundamental role in the formation of my personality.
This early dissenting and rebellious view or relationship I had to fascism helped me in my later life; I had no dilemmas when I was faced with the choice of joining the armed resistance against fascism. Contrary to many in central Slovenia, there was no doubt in my mind whether to join or not.
Although personally, I of course had many doubts. I had gone to study prior to WWII; it was my great ambition to get an education because I sensed within myself, already in my early school days, the inclination to write. I knew I wanted to write already very early on. I even wrote a few awkward verses, but I was aware that I could truly become a poet, in the correct sense of the word, with the appropriate education.

CLIP 2
The first time I ever entered a school building presented me with my first personal contact with fascism; I was six years old and the teacher demanded that all newcomers greet with the characteristic fascist raised arm salutation. Subconsciously, and fit with a family oriented upbringing, I immediately sensed the pressure of something foreign and hateful and I didn't want to salute. I did not want to raise my arm in the fascist salute. Upon the teacher's persistence that I must salute, some sort of childish impetuosity, a stubborn anger arose in me; nothing could make me raise my arm in the fascist salute. Eventually, because he insisted, I raised my arm, albeit in childish wounded vanity. The teacher was standing over me and he gave me a hard slap. That was my first encounter with fascism. And I was a six year old fighter. My second encounter was about two years later when my father took me to Trieste in reward for having been so good in school. Of course we walked from the town of my birth, 30 kilometers. I so wanted to see the city for the first time in my life, and I was fascinated with the palaces in Trieste, especially on the Via Carducci, the main road in Trieste. I asked my father to explain to me, to tell me what was what. At that moment someone wearing a fascist uniform spat in my face and threatened to bash me in the face if he heard one more such obscene word. Even though I was just a child, this was the moment when fascism instinctively emerged within me in the form of identification: everyone and anyone who spoke the Italian language was in my eyes and of course in my heart a fascist. So, the beginning was quite traumatic. On the one hand it was unjust to me, personally, because I was incorporated into the persecution of Slovenes, and also to my family, which was also exposed to various elements of harassment where they lived and worked. On the other hand, this early…

CLIP 3
By 1941 I was ready. And not only I, but rather the entire Primorje region, was absolutely ready to fight against fascism. Of course, anti-fascism was not the only rage throughout the Slovenian territory; there was also the National Liberation Movement. At the time, the Slovenes in the Slovenian Primorje region sensed a chance through the liberation movement, through WWII; and we were always confident that the Allied forces would conquer the neo-fascists. We sensed that by taking part in the resistance we were faced with an historical opportunity to join the rest of Slovenian territory in some new form of community.
And then there were whispers of the Partisan movement in the Primorje region as well. Ever-indignant against fascist politics reaching even into the depths of the schooling system, I reported to the activists immediately: I wanted to join the Partisans. My first contact was with the unit operating in the Karst and in the Vipava valley. I presented myself at the end of 1942; I wanted to make contact with them and they advised me that winter was nearing and that it's pointless because the leaves will be falling and camouflage will be more difficult and that it'll be hard to move. They told me to come back in the

spring and that they'll be delighted to have me then. So I returned home. Who knows if it was just a call of fate, but in February 1943 the Italian army – and I don't know if they were betrayed or if it was just coincidence - found this group and slaughtered them all. Each and every young Partisan. Then they brought the corpses to the cemetery in Štanjel and forced the locals from Štanjel and the vicinity to come and look at the dead Partisans. They wanted us to get the impression that the resistance movement was over. They crammed us into that cemetery; and just to make a stronger impression they partially stripped the dead bodies and turned them over in various ways, displaying even their genitals. This dishonor to the deceased was an outrage to me, considering my classical upbringing straight from the theological seminary - that one must respect the dead akin to how they are respected in literary sources such as Homer etc. This only reinforced my attitude: I would go to all ends, upon first opportunity, to find the next group that forms, which it surely would, and I would join the Partisans. Be that as it may, only a month later I was confined. They threw me out of bed in the middle of the night, they packed me into a truck and carted me away, along with all the other youths born in 1924, 1925 and 1926; they drove us to various regions throughout Italy. I was sent to the Abruzzi and I had to spend all my time there until the capitulation of Italy. I was surrounded by farmer boys, all relatively awkward in the Italian language, even for simple communicative purposes, and it was I who accompanied and brought the entire unit, fit out with a series of bizarre incidents, all to the Primorje region and directly to the Partisans. Three hundred young men.

CLIP 4

As I already stated, the anti-fascist disposition was in our blood. It was automatic upon hearing the first news that some opposition had arisen somewhere - especially once these news came to the Slovenians in the Primorje region, which belonged to Italy – we all were automatically for the Partisan movement. Not only were we inclined to it, indeed we experienced it somewhat naively, or rather, extremely naively: it was almost as some romantic view of unconquerable Partisans, the same Partisans who show up first here and then suddenly there, un-capturable! Basically, the first Partisans were in our eyes according to our hopes and aspirations; they did not conform to reality. Furthermore, already in 1942 there were posters hung all over the Primorje region, warrants for the arrest of a renowned Partisan of the time, Janko Premrl – Vojko. Later he fell in action and was designated a national hero. A financial reward was offered to anyone who would turn him over, dead or alive, to the Italian military authorities. Interestingly, despite the large sum posed, especially for the conditions at the time, no-one was tempted to do anything even similar to betrayal or the mediation of information, which might bring about the arrest or the mere identification of his whereabouts or doings. Vojko, that is, Janko Premrl thus became a legendary hero in our eyes; we attributed to him various activities, which he never even did. Nor could he have done. We said he'd been to Venice, Rome and atop Nanos all at the same time – like a miracle man. Although we knew it was impossible, it was what we thirsted for. In the beginning the Partisans were just a small band, but we made their strength out to be that of an entire troop. These were the dreamy visions of the resistance, which seemed so magnificent to us. But of course, anti-fascism was present in the Primorje region already prior to the war.

CLIP 5

And at some particular moment, I experienced some sort of metamorphosis, a change, like the time in Trieste when the fascist spat in my face and I then identified everyone who spoke Italian as a fascist. Now also this gesture of the civilian population brought me to recognize that it is unjust to condemn or declare an entire population merely for what is expressed through their political, military or whichever other representatives. I began to understand that Italians, no less than us, are quite disparate: there are those to whom I'm close and there are those whom I find adverse, they are my enemy as I am theirs.

It was collective for me. Upon our return from Italian confinement, we all went together in bands.

I remember that the very same day I returned from half a year of confinement, I washed, changed my clothes as best I could, and headed off to join the Partisans. My family wanted me to stay at least a full day. No. I couldn't wait. For me, joining the Partisans felt like discovering America. I wanted to become an active fighter and not just a sympathizer of the movement and such. The mood after the fall of fascism - if I'm not mistaken formally July 25th and later September 8th - when Italy acceded to the

so-termed unconditional truce, and which was when we arrived after a few days of complicated travel from the Abruzzi to the Karst, the atmosphere was already in full swing. People were gathering and cheering about liberation, convinced that the war was over and that we would decide ourselves about I don't know what all. So my comrades and I, we were anxious and eager to seize the day that we too would become fighters, before the war ended, before freedom. It was a total illusion: that with the capitulation of Italy, Germany would fall as well.

CLIP 6

I was so eager to exchange blows with the enemy. I was in a unit, a battalion, equipped with only three machine-guns and rifles, really very poorly armed. The Germans surrounded us with tanks during the night, that is, it was their mighty army against ours; and they waited until morning to attack. We were surrounded. I immediately offered to go, and three more men were equally enthusiastic to go with me up against the German tanks with hand grenades. We imagined it was just a matter of throwing the grenades at the tanks and then we would simply kill the Germans and blast everything to ruins. Fortunately there were leaders, older and more experienced Partisans who told us to calm down. They let us know there would be many more opportunities to fight. They clarified that it's not that simple to destroy a tank; they're not made of paper, rather of steel, and also the Germans, despite it being night-time, were not sleeping.

Indeed it happened in the morning. We were atop this hill, and there was also a bit of forest around. The Germans approached in a dense line of 'shooters' followed of course by a display of tanks and such like, slowly advancing in the rear. That's when we recognized the horror. We were all novices, it was our first fight, except for a few leading cadres. On the basis of my four grades of high schooling, I was named right off as the Political Commissary of a unit; just like that, without any previous fighting experience whatsoever. And I had to take care of my men. We had these dugouts or shelters made from stones; in the event of a fight, we were to defend ourselves from behind the shelters. The command was to remain quiet and calm and to wait until the commander yelled *charge ('juriš')*.

We were to wait for the enemy to approach within 20 meters and then each man was to pick his own target enemy and then we would all charge together. Then something unexpected happened.

They were surely counting on one third of us falling in this battle, that is, of the 300 men on our side the enemy was expecting at least 100 to die. But don't think that's what happened. When the Germans approached, not 20 meters away but rather 40 meters, the guy behind the machine-gun – perhaps his hand trembled with his finger already on the trigger or something – but he started firing the machine-gun too soon. We all charged at that moment, all frantic, all in a rush. We were suddenly inside the German lines, which were well organized according to the logic of a military attack.

The 300 young men charged among them and provoked such havoc that the Germans were so taken by surprise, so bewildered, that they didn't even shoot at us. Had they shot at us they would have also been shooting at their own people, because we were among them. That's how we broke through their lines, basically without a fight. Instead of 100 of our men dying, only two fell and two were wounded and one was taken captive.

CLIP 7

At the time and place, the frame of mind was perfectly idyllic: the responsibility, not only as one regards one's own behavior, but also as one's disposition to one's comrades. If a comrade was wounded, for instance, you would rescue him, even if he fell, you would rescue his body so that the enemy wouldn't get him and desecrate his body. It went without saying that it was a matter of honor; you would not hesitate to risk your own life. Once I dragged a fatally wounded comrade almost three kilometers. Luckily, the Germans knew that a Partisan brigade was somewhere in the vicinity, so they chose not to hunt me down directly; rather, they tracked me through the shooting lines. That time I was almost sure I would die too; but honor prevailed over thoughts of self survival in such moments.

Let me add also an anecdote regarding these relations. It was one year later when the army 'lent' me to civilian society, so to speak, to help organize Slovenian Partisan schooling throughout the entire Primorje territory. I had of course always collaborated in the Karst. Then I returned once again to the unit. I was very active in cultural matters: I wrote songs, recited at meetings… brigades were named after poets, I was in the Kosovel brigade, and then there was also the Gregorčič battalion and the

Levstik brigade… Culture and combat were amalgamated at the time. After having been involved in the educational system for a year already, I had founded schools, taught, been the district headmaster and I don't know what all, anything that was needed, I'd recited my poems – all dedicated to the time at hand - at many a meeting… it was 1944 and we were sure the war would end almost the very next day, and I was called back to the armed forces yet again. They put me among the miners. Once I went with a colleague to mine a track-line between Gorica and Trieste; we fell straight into German occupation near Doberdob. Somehow, and to me it's still unbelievable, we stayed alive. I don't know how. I can only imagine how that group of Germans shot right past us, perhaps they didn't want to kill us; considering that we were within ten meters of them, it seems impossible that they didn't kill us, even after we started running. They just didn't hit us. Whatever. The commander later called a unit meeting and said: *You see? Ciril almost fell today. It's some kind of miracle that he's still alive*. We were all astounded, myself most of all. He said: *When it gets dangerous, Ciril does not go into action anymore. He writes poems*. And so it was to be a molder of Slovene words in the Primorje region, in a time when it was officially prohibited to use the Slovene language and when only two years earlier I had been expelled from school for using Slovene words; these men paid reverence to the Slovene literary word, song, Gregorčič, Prešern… It was constantly recited, and we all carried miniature books of Prešern and Gregorčič near and dear. Me, too. They were all too ready to protect me and keep me safe, in the bunker, while they went into action. Half of them had already fallen within a year. This means that they were consciously prepared to risk their lives to protect me; that they would fall, while I, the poet, and according to today's standards I wasn't much of a poet back then, would only write poems. Such comradeship, such ethics as I experienced then… and mind you, I've mentioned one mere example, there were many more where that came from… I never before, nor ever thereafter came across such again. So, during the actual fighting, Partisan ethics were at their heroic apex; they were pure. Things happened after the war. Once it's all over, when you finally feel that all the bad is over and done with, that's when uncontrollable human passions surface; and of course already the first political reckonings, settlements and everything bad. That's why I, even today, while history is revised, always say that there was that something, which was a clean and pure fight for liberation; especially with the Slovenes, in contrast to the French, the Czechs or whoever, who fought for the uniting of Slovenes into one community. It was pure and ethical. Later is when the passion began. It's when some get weapons into their hands and also deem themselves as having the power to decide by themselves how to use it and who is the enemy and who to take their revenge upon. Of course things then happen which cause a shadow to fall over even those few ideal and idealistic aspects of anti-fascism, across everything that occurred between 1941 and 1945.

CLIP 8

In the two years that I was with the Partisans, I came quite close to death several times and if I may say so, I somehow had to get used to death becoming a part of Partisan life. For each fight there was the success or failure of the encounter. It was determined almost exclusively on the basis of the number dead. If we fought with the Germans and then figured that five Partisans had fallen, so as to find pleasure in the result of the encounter we had to convince ourselves, regardless of how true it was, that we had lost five Partisans while the enemy had lost twenty. You had the feeling that the death that swallowed up your colleagues was not in vain; rather it was a mini-contribution towards liberation and the persecution of the occupying enemy, freedom and everything we imagined was to be after the war ended, after liberation. I myself was lucky. I can and I must say that; although perhaps it sounds conceited. When I was an informer, the Germans caught me three times and three times they let me go; all because I wore this… it's odd, because I'm an agnostic, I'm not a believing man. But my mother was extremely religious and when I joined the Partisans she said to me: *Son, I know you don't pray, but… here, take this little rosary*. And she put it in my pocket as if to say *perhaps it will protect you*. That's how she was. She was a peasant girl. Out of respect to my mother I carried that rosary in my pocket at all times. When the Germans first captured me and of course searched all of me and emptied my pockets, they obviously pulled out my rosary. They were in the habit of believing, as it was also in their propaganda, that all Partisans kill priests, burn churches and I don't know what all. At any rate, they were certainly surprised to find a Partisan with a rosary in his pocket. Furthermore, it coincided with my forged papers, which stated that I was still studying at the

theological seminary to become a priest. Once I fell into the middle of German ranks in the road. I was searched and the soldier also checked my documents. I didn't have any money on me and he said to me: *What are you doing here?* I was near Opatje selo. I had gone down there because I was en route to Doberdob. I told him I was on my way to the theological seminary in Gorica. They said: *It's the middle of the school year now, so what are you doing here?* I explained that I had problems with my lungs; I was very thin, thin as a poker, and I said that I had a little bit of a cavity (fn.: a sickness of the lungs) and that I was sent home to recover and now I'm on my way back. I was riding a bicycle, and I remember how I had thought to myself that there aren't any Germans around and so I could ride on the road. The soldier was looking at me. *Yeah, yeah, yeah… and what will you do without any money?* I explained that we each have our own booklet at school where we record our dues, for which we pay the balance at the end of the school year. That's what I fabricated. And he was suspicious of me the entire time; he couldn't figure out how to get me caught. After flipping through my papers he finally whips out a photograph of my first love, Elvira from Štanjel. 'Forever yours Elvira' was written on the back. He knew a little Slovene and he said to me: *Translate this for me.* I of course did what I had to. And because of his little knowledge of Slovene, he then feeling victorious, snorted: *Now I've got you. So this is a theological seminary? And you're a priest?!* I hung my head and said: *What can I say, youth is youth.* I was repentant, as if to say I'd disobeyed the rules of the seminary. He watched me and then said: *That's quite a tall story you've told, huh?* I looked him straight in the eyes, and he me. And then I said to him: *Is it that difficult to discern when someone is telling a lie or the truth?* I was looking straight at him, like a hawk, but I was dripping sweat from fear and horror. He told me to go. I probably never could have pulled off a trick like that without the foundations of four years of high school. That way I was at least a little above the level they were used to meeting in a regular fighter, a peasant boy, who would only look on in horror once he was caught or captured. I always tried to use politics to save myself; and once I discovered the effectiveness of the rosary, I was more than happy to continue carrying it. I related this story two times after that and it always worked.

…Those were the little guys; they were still learning how to read. For that kind of a situation, if it was sudden, I had a hidden bunker in school, a plank that would lift up and I could hide under it. Some woman would run over from the village, under the pretense of being a teacher; after all, all the men my age were either in the Partisans or in camps. Even if there was someone home… but there was almost no one, except if the parents were so sick and frail that someone had to take care of them. But then this German suddenly appears at the window; we were on the ground floor. They had come from the other side, not through the village. Actually the unit went through the village, all but this one German who I presume was supposed to have a look around, or at least that's what I infer, that he had the task of checking this isolated house, which was the school, to establish what it was. He leaned on the window ledge like this - it was spring so it was open - on his submachine gun, looking into the classroom. My blood froze. I must admit it first occurred to me that this would end in tragedy: these poor children were going to be victims. That I myself would be seemed perfectly logical. This German, he watched the children, who had already witnessed the burning of their village, and they all began to scream and cry like mad. It had always been taught that in the dangerous event of Germans coming, the plank to hide under should be lifted. So one child charged forth to lift the plank where I should hide under. I quickly pressed it down again and I picked up some Partisan handbook we had compiled. Although these children were very young, I just opened the book and told them to open their books on the same page. The text happened to be Ivan Cankar's 'Cup of Coffee', which was by all means for higher levels. I told the best reader to read, but he said a few words and began to cry again. The German just kept on watching and watching. I too watched the children and I tried to soothe them but I couldn't calm them down. I was sure there was no solution and that we'd meet our end. There I was, and I looked straight at the German, straight in his eyes, and I showed him these children, indicated their sadness, and he left the window. I thought to myself that surely he would come around and enter on the other side, or that he had gone off to report to his unit to have them come and finish us off. But he never did show up, nor did any other Germans. The silence was deathlike. A quarter of an hour later the Germans withdrew from the village and all the women came running, all the mothers. The horror that ruled is beyond words. All the mothers were sure that we had all died in the school, that we were massacred. And they came in to find us alive and well. Apparently that German took pity

on those children; earlier that morning the Germans had killed off the wounded, and now to have to massacre the children as well would have been, presumably, too much even for him. So even among the enemy, wearing the SS insignia, they were the cruelest of them all, there were some who were not brutal beasts. There were those who were just swept up into the current of the times and they killed merely because that's how it was.

CLIP 9

While we waited for the breakthrough, many of the boys under my leadership, if I may call it so, cried from fear. It was a horrific sight. The same boys, aged 17, 18 or 20 at the most, were volunteering for dangerous actions, attacks, within half a year already. When a man has weapons, when he experiences the baptism of fire and often even more, when he witnesses the deaths of his colleagues, his friends, perhaps even his neighbors from the very same village, a murderous passion overwhelms him. When in combat, sooner or later the logic prevails that death to the enemy is your life.
Perhaps now as I look back upon myself as a man who wanted to be a poet and who considered himself already a poet, I was a tremendous individualist. Of course, in a war the units are under strict discipline – squad, company, battalion, brigade, division, corpus – all organized according to a military structure quite necessary for leading into any type of combat. It wasn't for me though; it didn't suit my character, if I may say so. There was another aspect of human character. Even out in the open, wherever we managed to get some sleep, I always liked to sleep in a bit, I'm a bit lazy in the morning. When I was in the brigade, we'd usually march at night. That meant that we walked all night long just to get a little bit further, for instance from the Karst to the Trnovski gozd via the Vipava valley, which is where the ambushes and outposts and such like were. I often thought these actions were dangerous or perhaps just too straining, so I often volunteered for various new tasks that would arise amidst a battle. These were more dangerous, but at least I could channel my individualism this way. So I became an informer and I would travel alone to Trieste with forged documents. It was highly risky, but I felt that my life was at my own disposal this way. Later I was also with the miners. That was just a small unit, maybe there were 13 or 15 of us, and it was easy to command. One year I worked in the educational system organizing the school system and appointing teachers who didn't even exist.
I was alone in appointing these teachers in the villages; I was alone and without Slovenian schools. I decided to call a meeting for all the women who stayed home alone - the men had joined the Partisans - so I could present them with a dictation of a text. Considering that I had some knowledge of the Slovene language, being a poet I had studied the grammar and I read a lot, I reviewed the results and decided that the one who made the fewest mistakes would be the teacher. The children needed someone to present them with at least the basics of the language and a little math and reading. They couldn't just go through the entire war without any schooling whatsoever… the official schooling system had disintegrated and so it was necessary to establish a Slovenian school. Actually, things were easiest for me while I worked in the schooling system. Although for a long time I felt like an informer. Of course, being young, I was 18, I strained to be the great informer, like all those characters I'd read about, Sherlock Holmes for instance, and I dreamed of all the miracles I would do. I did do a few bold things, even stupid, but at least they worked. For instance, if I could, I slept in a bed. I'd arrive in a village, as an individual, and they would offer me a bed and I would risk it. The Germans would come at night and that was always a problem: how and where to hide. I always had some sort of mini-bunker somewhere, just for me to hide in. I acted completely against all rules, always rather according to my instincts. Once I was in my home village, in my own home and Germans came suddenly in the night. Luckily it was very dark and they were roaming about with torches. I was on the verge of coming home to my house and what was I to do? They were going to inspect the houses and I got an idea. I thought it wisest to follow the patrol to see exactly where they were going. So I followed them, only meters behind the Germans, through the entire village. I was careful of how I walked so as not to be too loud. It was utterly dark but I didn't need a torch, nor did I have one. That's something that I could do moving around independently or in small units, where we arranged ahead what we would do. I was also a courier, and we would always travel in pairs. I wasn't entirely aware of how dangerous it was and that was a great advantage to me. At the same time it increased the danger factor, but things worked out. Many men, who were just as foolish as I, fell.
So I am left with an almost romantic regard of combat, as if it were a romantic period. Which of course

it wasn't; far from it. At the same time we were also falling in love; I was prepared to walk all night just to see my beloved from afar. In short, we lived intensively, of course, under the conditions of war. We had to be careful. There would be a meeting and we would dance and go wild, then we would fight the very next day; but this became the norm of our lives, we learned to count on it. It was all the easier in the Primorje region, in the Karst especially, in that anywhere you came, either to a larger unit or a village, someone always immediately gave their cow to slaughter so the entire brigade could feast on goulash. When I traveled as a courier, as an informer, I was always fed and if I was wet I was dried no matter what house I stepped into. In short, despite that you were alone or with only one colleague, everywhere and anywhere you went, you always had the feeling that you belonged together. There was never any danger that you might take the wrong turn into the wrong house, an enemy house; everyone was inclined to the Partisans. This of course relieved us of the fears that took rise elsewhere throughout Slovenia, whereby one had to reckon with the potential betrayal of the locals. That is, elsewhere, the Home Guard and their informants were lurking. There was none of that in the Primorje area. I never came across a single Slovenian enemy, meaning the Home Guard, dead or alive.
So I realize I have a somewhat idealized conception. Nonetheless, it was genuine, the idealization that a war could unfold in the form of such beautiful humanity, if I may use such an expression, because war is far from beautiful. It is true though that as a poet it was hard for me to choose death, even the enemy's. This is also why I selected tasks which were far more hazardous than being in the brigade, where the collective force is gathered together. However, it was less imperative in the tasks I chose to have to kill someone standing before me, even the enemy. I have always tried to live my life with as little death as possible, even with regard to the Germans, the enemies. Killing, even in the name of great ideals, will ultimately come back to you later in form of a trauma.

CLIP 10
When we speak of the times and circumstances of WWII, we often forget that the Slovenian area was indeed the only area in occupied Europe where the occupation was thought only a first act. Slovenia was divided. Ljubljana was the hundredth Italian province; and the Italian right hand, with the bishop Rozman at its lead, who sent a letter of thanks to Mussolini for accepting this 'large family' into fascist Italy. All the other countries, in this region as well… the Croatians had some sort of country, fascist, satellite, but their right to some form of their own country was acknowledged nonetheless. The Serbs had their own heir to the crown and thus the Kingdom of Serbia. They all did. Slovakia was a Protectorate. And Slovenia was divided among the occupiers, which means the Italians… Hitler came to Maribor and said *Make this land German again for me*, the Hungarians took Prekmurje. There were some villages in Bela krajina that even the Croatians usurped. We were obliged to constitute ourselves as a nation and as a country; nobody acknowledged us. It was only by way of strongly determined fighting that we forced our allies to understand that, indeed, a people lives here, a nation with its own language and its own culture and tradition and all. That's why the significance of this fight was so very essential and vital. Had there been no Partisan movement, the border never would have changed and the Primorje would not be a part of Slovenia.

CLIP 11
They wanted to keep me in the army when the war ended. I had some sort of Partisan rank, something like second lieutenant, but I did not want to remain in the army because I had no intention of building a military career.
I deserted the army in September 1945. I wanted to study and I believed that I fought for that too, for my own personal freedom, for the right to decide for myself what I would do. I didn't want anybody else deciding for me that I would have a military career. I, myself, wanted to finish studying. I wanted to study Slovene; as I had never attended Slovene schools, my knowledge of the language was deficient, and I was a poet. That was all just retold rather harshly, but they understood. There were no charges brought against me for being a deserter. I had deserted in September and then it was December already before I received my certificate of discharge. I was demobilized. For three months I had been de facto, and I might very well have been charged with desertion before a military court. Many wonders could have befallen me. It was another of my crazy maneuvers that had simply worked out well. They had understood this powerful desire of mine to study and they turned a blind eye

towards the fact that I had broken the law, that I had deserted the unit without anyone's permission. I just left. Our unit was the Gubčev brigade with its seat in Postojna. Every day I tested: *I have to go studying, I have to go studying, leave it alone, leave it alone, we have other worries, and you know how invaluable you are to us*. I was immediately nominated for some medals and I don't know what all, but I just didn't stop. Once the commander finally lost his temper and said: *I'm sick of you! I've had enough of you! Just get out of my sight!* He only meant get out of his room at headquarters, but I played dumb and said: *Ok, Ok, I'll go to hell!* And I went straight to the station in Postojna and I hopped onto the very first train. Actually, it was riding away already and I ran after it and grabbed onto the buffers; I hung onto those buffers all the way to Rakek before I moved forward into the coach. Relationships back then were much more humane. He understood that I hadn't really deserted, but rather that I'd gone to study. And I could afford it too, because I truly felt that it was my right. I always had advocated - instinctively when I was young and then well grounded in later life - almost philosophically, that no society is well-suited if its individuals are not content with how they fit in.

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