

## **LIPEJ KOLENIG (AUSTRIA)**

### **CLIP 01**

The revolt was beaten down within a few days, but they kept working until 1938, when we were linked to Germany.

The father, Wasilij, was still young. And he kept saying that, because of the National Socialism: "That will be no good." but we mustn't repeat what he said. Afterwards, the authority was taken over by the Nazis, they locked up a number of people of the Slovenian minority and priests and such, straight away. There we saw that it would not be the way it had been promised before. It was just a time without work and without bread. And that helped the national socialists a lot to come into power. Bread and work - that was everything. And many let themselves be led by the propaganda and even believed that everything would be okay again. And that the people would live and live well – under Adolf Hitler. But when the first Slovenians were locked up, we already knew my father was right. And this is how it kept going on. The people lost their belief in Adolf Hitler and the resistance formed against fascism and Hitlerism. The first deserters from the 'Wehrmacht' had already escaped to Yugoslavia in 1939. And after the occupation of Yugoslavia they were arrested there or they had gone into hiding under a false name; as my colleague Karl Potoschki did. He was working under false name at a hotel in Bosnia. And already on the 20<sup>th</sup> October 1939, he was shot together with 20.000 'chosen ones' and finished off. The ones that came back after the occupation of Yugoslavia were mostly locked up, respectively were the cadres of the liberation front of the Slovenes of Carinthia. Some joined the partisans straight away; others later on, but the beginning had been made. And from day to day the resistance grew stronger. And today, when you realise how courageous the people were – then again it involved the 'head' and the people didn't have a clue. And the poor people, respectively the plain people, were the ones that helped the rebellion. And as well, without the help of the rural population, resistance would have been impossible. Only because of the help of the rural population it was possible that the number of partisans became bigger each day. And the hope that one day things would change.

### **CLIP 02**

Well, we had already heard before, in 1942, that the partisans were staying in our area. But the first contact was at Easter 1943 when the first partisans came and knocked at the door or the windows: "Mother, open! The partisans are here; the army of the Slovenian people. We will totally destroy fascism and you will be free once more." Afterwards we had regular contact. We sang a song I will never forget as long as I live and there was a woman who had a harmonica. And we were friends straight away. And afterwards we had to help them – every day. Into the forest, delivering food and in the evenings they came again and so on. And that was the way the resistance was organised and kept getting stronger.

### **CLIP 03**

Well, there were only few that weren't with the partisans, very few. In the town there were more. Bleiburg is a known town and Carinthia was Nazi stronghold, but the population outside was of different opinion. And if they weren't, well, there were only few, they did not report us to the police – kept quiet and did not keep in touch with us. But only about 10 % weren't with us.

### **CLIP 04**

In March 43 I had to go to the army physician because I had to enlist. But I already had connection to the partisans. They came every day. In August I received the call-up to the army. Then I said: "What shall we do?" They wanted me to enlist but the mother was against it. Mother was frightened: "they will destroy everything and burn our house down and so on" and she cried. But I thought that the families would not have to pay so much. So I did enlist in Klagenfurt. And from above we may get a contact. When I was in Klagenfurt, you know anyway how it is with the military – today like this, tomorrow like that. From Klagenfurt to Salzburg; from Salzburg to Lienz, East Tyrol; and from there to Italy via Venice, Rom up to – where was that – near Monte Cassino. Then we were sent to the front. There I was wounded, had a first and second-degree frostbite and because of that I got into the

military hospital in Italy, in South Italy (in Sora) from there to Venice, from Venice to Merano, and something like that. Then back to Germany, Black Forest, Solingen – there was a hospital. Afterwards I always thought: Well, I have to get out. I made an application to be moved to the military hospital in Klagenfurt. They did allow it and on the first day, when I was in Klagenfurt, my mother came to see me. She told me that the partisans said: “Come and join us soon, we are waiting for you!” After 14 days the medical consultant of the hospital said: “I will grant you a holiday although I know 100% that you will never come back.” My answer was: “I will come back, of course, where else should I go?” I was with walking sticks, like today; I couldn’t go anywhere in any case. It is just a shame that I didn’t go back to that doctor after the war. Then I could have reported: “Mr. Consultant, I am back.”

#### **CLIP 05**

So, I went home for 14 days. On the first evening the partisans, acquaintances were already there. After 14 days the holiday was over. “Well, what are we going to do, mother?” My mother was crying again: she sprinkled me with holy water and things like that. “Mother, that doesn’t help! I will not go back to the ones that sentenced us to death.” So I went and the commander of the partisans said: “We will come and pick you up. We will bring enough people so your family won’t be resettled or get locked into jail.” The evening came. No partisan called up, but the commander had told me I would be gone in the evening. I went back to Bleiburg and picked up my military equipment and put it on. – Nobody came. And on the next day I met the commander of the partisans and said to him: “Why didn’t you come?” Then he said to me: “You know by yourself where you belong.” That was easily said in those days. But it was not an easy thing to do. But, thank God, the English bombarded Klagenfurt in those days and when the police came afterwards to ask if I had reported somewhere, my mother said: “May be he has been killed in the air raid or so.” And my Mother was clever. There was an illegal co-worker of the partisans, activists (in Bleiburg). And after 2 to 3 weeks, mother gave one of them, a parcel to take it to this woman. Later this woman took the parcel to the post with my military address on it, the one I should have reported to after my holiday. The parcel came back again... So, the parcels kept going backwards and forwards.

#### **CLIP 06**

With the partisans - life was slightly different than before. That is why you say nowadays: “Not everybody had the opportunity to join them.” But many would have had an opportunity but didn’t risk it. I was not fit to work for the front any more. For me there would have probably been a job and I could have worked and so on. But I didn’t want to. I could not share the responsibility to work with the ones that wanted to eliminate us. The partisans had a slight problem with the provisions, and the sleeping in the forest overnight. Here and there in houses as well, still, but most of the time in the forest. And even in the cold and snow, that was not easy. And the clothes froze on you. You felt as stiff as a straw mattress. So, only the ones that were of really a tough nature were able to handle that. But there were also people that could not handle this, and they deserted. But that didn’t help.

#### **CLIP 07**

First I was allocated to the couriers, the news unit – for a while, there. Afterwards I was with the sabotage units. There we blew up bridges, telephone masts and things like that. Afterwards I was in a battalion, there were 300 men together. That was slightly different. When a few men came, because of the food there were problems. But once 200/300 people are together that was slightly different for the food. But some was given to us by the people, some was bought, and some was taken (so to say) - well, the way every military, unfortunately, does it; it didn’t work without. But we only took from the ones that were against us, against the partisans. Otherwise it was voluntarily and paid. After the war they handed in and exchanged their vouchers for livestock. But still, we were glad, that the war was over and that we had survived.

#### **CLIP 08**

When you compare the time of those days - and today, and see the way it was organised - that was wonderful. From home the news went to the neighbour; from the neighbour to somebody else and so on. A few hours before the police came – let’s say – from Bleiburg to go on the hunt for partisans – or

bandits – as they said, we already knew. And it was agreed that a red flag on a house would indicate danger; a white flag would mean everything was fine. Because of that we were already warned. Except of when the police came at night. At night the news supply was not as good as during the day. But it worked.

#### **CLIP 09**

Most of the young people took a lot of the responsibility. The police did not control the children quite as strictly as the older people. The little children used to carry the mail for us and so on. And they informed us as well when somebody was wounded.

#### **CLIP 10**

The women were really poor, I would say. Because they had to really pay for this, more than the others. But – I must say that as well – they were really brave women. Some were braver than the men. Three of those women I really took into my heart so I will never forget them. They had no fears. If there was any returned shooting they shot just the same as the others. But some were – I don't know what to say - placid. They had nothing to laugh about, as well, because of their "monthly problems". And manage all that there and get through that was not easy. But, thank God, they did get through it and did show courage. Most of them did the paper work in the battalions, for the bigger organisations. Secretary work and things like that. But not everyone got a job like that. But it was not easy for the women. And if I'm allowed to say something else: Some women were picked to help the wounded. They were also very courageous there. And they helped as well as they could. At the time, when I was wounded, that was on 19<sup>th</sup> March 1945, women were there, as well. They helped me first and then carried me to a farmer's and from there behind a hut (we used to say bunker), that had been a wood shed before. They had a shack for the forestry workers and that was where I lived until the end of the war. And again it were the women who helped me. They brought milk, bread and sugar and things like that. They cared for me like the mother. I will never forget these people and you cannot repay for that either. Only a real thank you, nothing else.

#### **CLIP 11**

Well, I had been looking forward to the day when the war would be over, before. But unfortunately I was wounded. My brother was with the partisans, as well. He came with a horse and took me home. And he came into the shack. The horse came first and then the man. "Who is coming into the forest now?" And then he came and said: "Lipej, come on. The war is over!" We did not believe him that it was really true; that the war was over. That was unbelievable – persecution, respectively the hunt for the resistance fighters would be over one day. And in those days – we sang, ate, were happy, and kissed – nobody can imagine the way it was in those days. We were all so happy. And that's why for us the end of the war is still the most important day to be celebrated. Back then it was the end of the Nazi fascism and we cannot forget all the ones who were in the forest, all the ones that were in a concentration camp or locked up by Nazi fascists. For all those it is unforgettable and we cannot understand that the people care so little about this day, 8<sup>th</sup> May – the end of the war. We were happy, were glad, but it just looks as if it was the other way round. They lost the war and that's why they never celebrate. Later on they made the 26<sup>th</sup> October a national hiking day or so. What is that? What do they hike for? But nobody thinks about that. What happened and what was achieved by that – peace. We are always for it; every day, never again: war and fascism.

#### **CLIP 12**

The main Nazis, they hid away; took shelter somewhere. Back then, when the partisans were there. Some of them came back out of their holes the end of May and for a while they were like Stasi (secret police of East Germany), you could say. Again, as time went on they showed themselves as what they were; that they were Nazis. And that told us that they believed us to be the betrayers; and even today the word 'betrayed' or 'betrayed of freedom' is sticking to us. How can an Austrian or authority say 'betrayed'? In those days when the roll call came: "Let's go against fascism, for Austria" – where were the people? In Stalingrad, did they fight for Austria, there? That's why the ways are so different and why we will never agree about what had happened. We celebrate the big party and the others are the

losers. Yes, that is something. But for the ones, who were members of the German 'Wehrmacht' the governor and authorities always lay down wreaths on All Saint's Day. But never in front of a partisan's grave. And there are 53 monuments and graves of the partisans in Carinthia. But there nobody ever put a wreath down – nobody, officially. And there were 50.000 deserters who were shot in Germany. Nobody remembers them either. – You know – as if there hadn't been any. Only the one who was with Hitler up to the end, was the right one; according to their rules. Well that was quite sad, it drags on; according to them we were all betrayers. But we did not betray Austria – but those betrayed Austria in the year 1938, when they voted for Hitler.

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