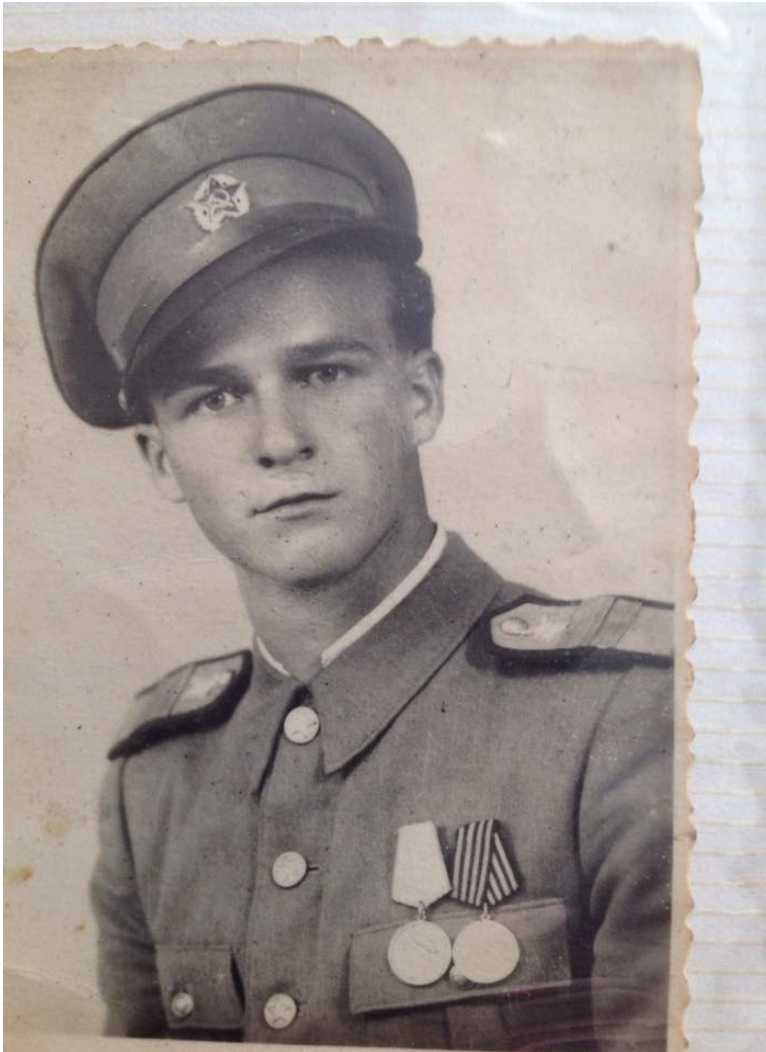


# A Long Way Home: Jože Vodlan

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By Ajda Vodlan



**My grandfather Jože Vodlan** (photo: private family archive)

I would like to tell you the story of my grandfather Jože Vodlan. He told me this story when I was in elementary school. Jože was only 15 years old, when the Nazis came and sent him to a German concentration camp (he did not know which one). But before he came there, he escaped with two other boys. One of them was shot by the guards right away, but my grandfather and the other one managed to flee. They did not know where they were, they just knew that it was far away from home, far away from Slovenia. They were two young boys, in a foreign country, hiding from soldiers. Grandfather never said it, but I believe he was scared.

## Coming home without a chance to stay

Later he found out that they had walked all the way from Munich in Germany back to their home in Slovenia. When they arrived at the hometown of my grandfather, Velika Lašna near Kamnik, they hid in the woods. But a relative of my grandfather saw them and the family was very happy, that Jože was alive. However, he could not stay at home or even close, because the Germans would have burned the house and killed all of them, if they had discovered my grandfather. The other boy went to his town, and my grandfather had no other choice than to join the partisans. It was not his free will to join the partisan army, but what other choice did he have? He was not a little boy, but nevertheless, he was deprived of his childhood, lost his opportunity to finish school and could no longer live with his family.

## Lost childhood

Instead of nice memories of when he was a teenager, my grandfather had horrifying memories of war, of killing, of losses. But still, I never noticed that he was really traumatized by war; maybe he didn't like to talk to his granddaughter about those things or maybe he forgot them.

After the war he stayed in military, he married and he lived happily. He had one son, my father Janko, and he built a house in which I still live. Two years ago, he passed away and I miss him very much. I wanted to tell his story, because maybe he is not a declared national hero, but for me, he is a hero.

I never understood, if he was so happy to be alive, or if he had simply forgotten about those bad days, but he always smiled. For me, he always had chocolate, coffee and a big smile. I was wondering – pretty much every old person in Slovenia had made some bad experiences during Second World War and most of the boys were part of the Partisan movement. Maybe they were not obviously traumatized, because bad experiences were just a common thing. Or was it just “those other times”, when post-traumatic stress was not recognized yet and you just had to deal with it? Or was it the communist propaganda? People were told: “You had to suffer during the war, but we, the common people, won the war and earned our freedom and better future?”