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## A WARTIME DINNERTABLE

### SUMMARY

This article uses the example of a concrete and incomplete research project on the survival techniques of Vukovar citizens in the 1991 war to suggest an interpretation of personal accounts as the basis for analysis of eating habits in time of crisis. The accounts of Vukovar refugees which I recorded in Zagreb from February 1992 to the present show that food problems alternated with other problems imposed by the war. The remarkably bountiful 1991 harvest and the total lack of experience in handling crisis situations such as the agonies of war and hunger led the Vukovar inhabitants to store for winter no more than they usually would in peacetime. No doubt the fact that Vukovar suffered little or no damage during World War Two meant that the elderly inhabitants could contribute little experience toward surviving such crises.

The greatest problem for the inhabitants of Vukovar who were trapped inside the city after it was completely surrounded and all communication cut off was not the problem of buying food stuffs such as fresh meat, but rather how to prepare the food in their cellars during the constant bombing. The dietary traditions in this grain-growing region define hunger as a lack of bread. Yeast quickly vanished as an essential component of bread-making. This coupled with the difficulties in pumping and delivering drinking water proved to be the fundamental questions for survival.

In my description of wartime diet among Vukovar residents I respected the emphases the refugees themselves placed in their personal accounts of the tragic experience of surviving.

*(Translated by E. Elias-Bursač)*