

Slavko Veljačić – Old School Driver

I began working in 1943 as a student in the railway workshop in Zavidovići. That was a workshop for a general overhaul of locomotives and the repair of wagons. In the workshop for the overhaul of locomotives the chief was a German guy named Eisenbeiss.

When the *Kulturbund* retreated to Germany in 1943, Eisenbeiss left Zavidovići. He was replaced by a Slovenian guy named Kraševac. He came from Drvar. He was also an expert for locomotives. After the war, Kraševac married my sister Dragica, he was my brother-in-law. They both died and were buried in Zavidovići.

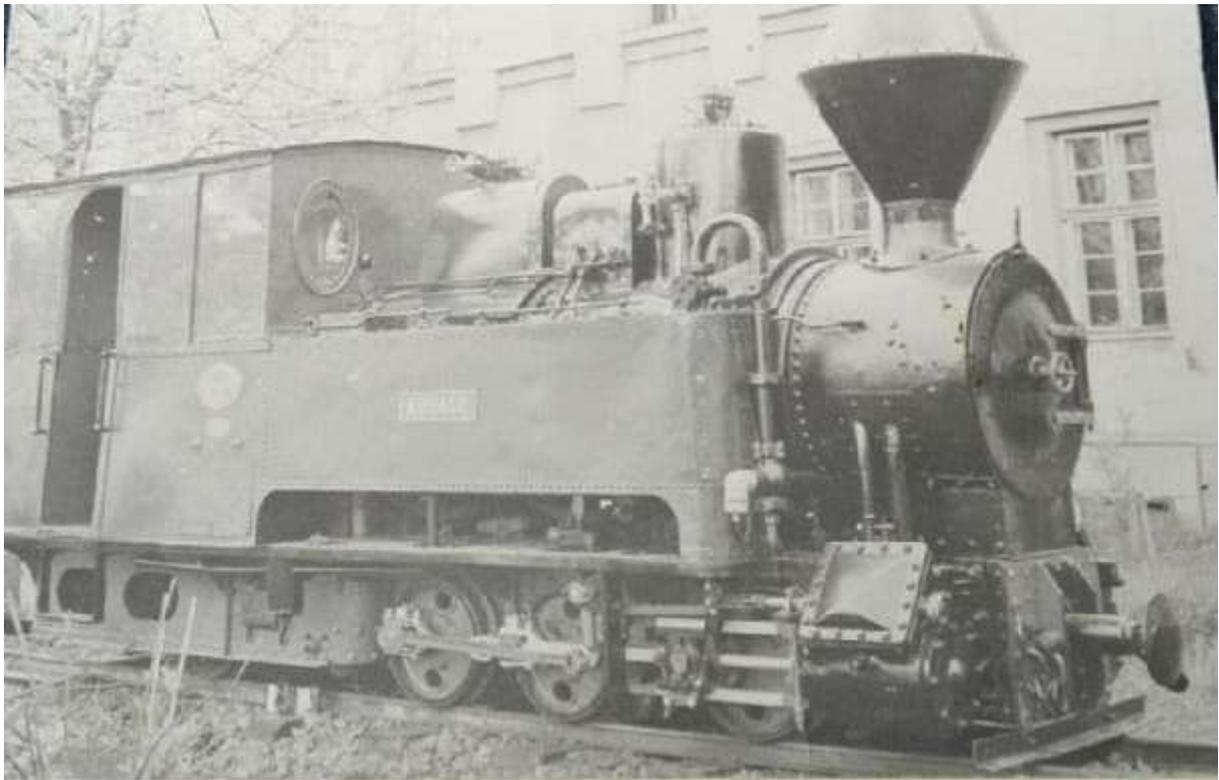
On the 1st March 1943, my father enrolled me in the railway workshop in Zavidovići. Overhauls of locomotives for the whole Krivaja (from Olovo to Drina) were done there. Here I studied this profession until 1946. I became a journeyman locksmith. In 1944 Rudo Bartolović came to the workshop. He finished studying this craft in 1947: Bartolović later became the general director of Krivaja. We serviced those locomotives. We had a lot of them.

The first locomotive was called *hajnzerica*. When I came to the craft, there was only her stand. After it, Krivaja had 17 locomotives. First there was the three axed ones (one was called Žep, and the other was called Zvijezda (Star)). Krivaja had 5 *krauzer* locomotives that were made in Linz, Austria. They had 4 cylinders, high and low pressure ones. They used double saturated steam, first in the high, then in the low pressure cylinders, and then the steam. Those locomotives were: Jablanica (later First May), Biošica, Han Pijesak, Žeravica (sold in Foča), and Olovo. Those were four connected, four-cylinder locomotives, all using saturated steam. There were five *bimbs*. They were the strongest, of five related axels. They had 220 horse power. There were five of them: Jugoslavija (renamed to Promet at the time of Independent State of Croatia), Pilana (Sawmill), Trgovina (Trade), Šuma (Forest) and Industrija (Industry). Those locomotives made the fleet in Krivaja. They drove on the train tracks from Zavidovići all the way to Drina. I kept them until 1947., and then I was a stoker in Sarajevo, in school, as the youngest engine driver. I drove from the age of 17 and I removed the last rail at Gostović, in 1964.

My father was the chief of station in Olovo, and later the chief of a huge ropeway in Paklenik (the ropeway spanned from Paklenik to Brateljević). The ropeway was so strong, it transferred 800 cubic meters of log in eight hours, all of them were 16-er boulders. The machinist in Paklenik was a man whose surname was Plestenjak. The ropeway was driven by a huge traction engine, which was operated by Plestenjak. The ropeway itself was 9 kilometers long. The cables that carried the logs were 50 mm thick, and the ones that pulled them were 25 mm thick. Before that, Plestenjak, the machinist, was the engine driver on the relation: Zavidovići – Olovo – Han Pijesak.

During the war, the chiefs were German officers. They held the whole Krivaja. Then there wasn't any final processing of wood. There were 24 gaters, and only wooden planks were processed, because the fabric was a shack. Everybody worked day and night, because every day 2 shacks went to the East front in Russia. The fabric (Krivaja) was constantly attacked by American and English planes, and they attacked

the railway, too. Every day we had to mend at least one locomotive, since it was punctured. Once the Germans brought it, we couldn't move for 4 days until it was fixed.



Locomotive KUSAČE in the past



Locomotive KUSAČE now