**Roger Stanton MBE , Director/Founder ELMS**

**Roger Stanton, ustanovitelj in direktor mednarodnega društva WW2 Escape Lines Memorial Society**

**Govor ob 80. obletnici osvoboditve zavezniških vojnih ujetnikov v Ožbaltu - 31. avgust 2024**

Mr Marko Rakovnik, Mr Eduard Vedernjak, Ladies and Gentlemen

G. Marko Rakovnik, g. Eduard Vedernjak, gospe in gospodje

Members of the WW2 Escape Lines Memorial Society join you here today to remember with respect and gratitude the people of Slovenia who assisted Allied Escapers and Evaders many years ago as they escaped from the camps or from downed Allied aircraft, and passed through your homeland evading the enemy.

Člani društva WW2 Escape Lines Memorial Society se vam danes pridružujemo, da bi se s spoštovanjem in hvaležnostjo spomnili prebivalcev Slovenije, ki so pred mnogimi leti pomagali zavezniškim ubežnikom, ki so pobegnili iz taborišč in tistim, ki so se rešili iz sestreljenih zavezniških letal in šli skozi vašo domovino, da bi se izognili sovražniku.

Local people provided food, shelter, medical aid and guides to lead the fugitives onward towards freedom. The helpers had no training, few resources and limited supplies. What little food they had, they willingly shared.

Lokalno prebivalstvo je zagotovilo hrano, zatočišče, medicinsko pomoč in vodnike, ki so ubežnike vodili naprej proti svobodi. Tisti, ki so pomagali niso bili izurjeni, imeli so le malo sredstev in omejene zaloge. Tisto malo hrane, ki so jo imeli, so voljno delili.

The enemy forces were very powerful with a massive infrastructure to control Slovenia with a very efficient Intelligence organisation. For those people who assisted the escapers, the consequences were very harsh, capture, hostile interrogations, torture, followed by a concentration camp or execution.

Sovražne sile so bile zelo močne z obsežno infrastrukturo za nadzor nad Slovenijo z in zelo učinkovito obveščevalno organizacijo. Za tiste ljudi, ki so pomagali ubežnikom, so bile posledice zelo hude. Zaradi tega so sledile aretacije, surova zaslišanja, mučenje in transport v koncentracijsko taborišče ali usmrtitev.

So why did ordinary people bother to assist total strangers who could not speak their language? Why did they share their homes and meagre food supplies with strangers? Why did they cross snow covered mountains in mid-winter to deliver their charges to freedom? Why did they risk themselves, their families and their homes to severe punishment and death? Their homes were burnt to the ground and their livestock were killed as a warning to others.

Zakaj so se torej navadni ljudje trudili pomagati popolnim tujcem, ki niso znali govoriti njihovega jezika? Zakaj so svoje domove in skromne zaloge hrane delili s tujci? Zakaj so sredi zime prečkali zasnežene gore, da bi svoje varovance pripeljali na svobodo? Zakaj so tvegali sebe, svoje družine in svoje domove zavedajoč se hude kazni in grožnje smrti? Njihove domove so požgali do tal, živino pa pobili v opozorilo drugim.

They did it for freedom, for humanity towards others regardless of race, colour or creed. We must remember and learn from their example.

To so storili za svobodo, zaradi človečnosti do drugih ne glede na raso, barvo ali vero. Spominjati se jih moramo in jih imeti za vzgled.

Although the escapers and evaders had ‘daring’ deeds to tell of their wartime exploits, foremost in their minds was the credit they gave to the people of Slovenia who assisted them to return home to freedom. The sacrifices made by the helpers so many years ago, for people they did not know, were exceptional and are remembered with fondness and gratitude by the escapers, their families and many other people.

Čeprav so ubežniki in tisti, ki niso zašli v roke sovražnika govorili o svojih 'drznih' dejanjih, o vojnih podvigih, so bile v njihovih mislih predvsem zasluge, ki so jih pripisali prebivalcem Slovenije, tistim, ki so jim pomagali pri vrnitvi domov na svobodo. Žrtvovanje tistih ljudi pred davnimi leti in to za ljudi, ki jih niso poznali, je bilo izjemno. Ubežniki in njihove družine ter številni drugi ljudje, se jih spominjajo z naklonjenostjo in hvaležnostjo.

Whenever I spoke to the escapers and their families in our Society, they all asked me to pass on a simple message to you and the people of Slovenia - **Thank You.**

Kadarkoli sem govoril z ubežniki in njihovimi družinami v našem društvu, so me vsi prosili, naj vam in prebivalcem Slovenije prenesem preprosto sporočilo – **hvala vam.**