

## Vera Erak's Father Ilija Erak As A Soldier



The picture was taken in 1915 in Belgrade. My father is pictured as a soldier in the Serbian army. My father Ilija Erak was born in Zemun in 1890. He attended primary school and commercial school in Zemun. When the war began, he was a member of a youth organization for resistance against the Austro-Hungarian government and for the liberation of Zemun. In 1915 when that organization was discovered, the Austro-Hungarian government published a list of names of its members who should be captured. Among the names was my father's. To avoid capture, he headed for Serbia, together with his parents, who did not want to separate from their only son. My father enlisted in the Serbian Army in the Moravian division. At the same time a refugee convoy for civilians was formed, which my father's parents joined. When the Serbian Army met their demise, the people

from the refugee convoy and the army pulled back through Albania together. When they passed through the Albanian mountains and came to Skadar, my father's mother, my grandmother Zorka, died from exhaustion and hunger. In 1915 she was buried in the Skadar military cemetery. The day after the death of his wife, my grandfather Stojan woke up entirely gray-haired. The military and the people from the refugee convoy continued towards the Adriatic Sea, and embarked on boats which sailed towards France. When they arrived in Marseilles, my grandfather Stojan, unable to get over the death of his wife, took ill from grief and died. He was buried in 1915 in the military cemetery in Marseilles. While they were passing through Albania, the detonation of a bomb ruptured my father's eardrum, so that he became deaf. Because of this he was unable to continue with the military, so he stayed in Grenoble and continued his education. He attended the Commercial Academy, and to fix his material situation, he worked at the same time in a sawmill. While he was working there, a saw cut off part of his right thumb. He received cash compensation, and when he finished the Commercial Academy in 1919, he used that money to return to Zemun. He settled into his father Stojan's house, and he bought a mixed-goods store right across the street from the building where my mother, Edith, lived. Very quickly they met each other. They date their love back to those early days. When he found a place to live, he sought after Edith in Vrpolje to ask for her hand in marriage.