

SALKO BEGIĆ

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The interview has been recorded, the recording is kept under the code name

salkobeeic

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At the beginning of the interview I will ask you to introduce yourself, this is the usual way we start the interviews.

Salko Begić, born on 3rd April 1948 in Tomislavgrad, currently living in Sarajevo, Derviša Nuića St. 7. Married with two adult children. Currently employed as an inspector of civil aviation in the Civil Aviation Authority. During the war I was a coordinator, an expert coordinator for the establishment of an air bridge between Croatia and Western Bosnia.

Which period was that?

I would say it was the entire period from 1992 until 1995 when "Oluja" was over.

This air bridge existed all that time?

Well, not really all that time, it started when the people from Bihać organized themselves in 1992 and we had one plane, an AN2, then we bought another plane – KAZA 212 and the flights went on sometime until the end of 1992. We made approximately 36 flights until the UN Resolution was passed, according to which the area of BIH was declared an "offline zone", flights were banned, we broke this ban a couple of times, a bit consciously, a bit unconsciously, but then the Croatian authorities banned our further activities, because they were criticized for failing to apply this Resolution. Consequently, in the period from 1993 until the mid-1994 this air bridge didn't function.

It didn't function at all?

Not at all. We only activated it by the mid-1994 and then it was on, I would say, pretty intensively until the end of the war, until "Oluja" was over when we could cross over into Bihać, i.e. parts of Western Bosnia by the land route.

How did this air bridge function? Where did you take off, where did you land?

Well, the air bridge was established first of all from the territory of Croatia towards Western Bosnia, i.e. Bihać, or more precisely the airport Čoralići near Cazin which was built at that time. Basically we were taking off from the airports Pleso and Lučko, and with subsequent approvals of the Croatian military authorities, due to certain tactical reasons we used also the broader territory of Croatia, it means south toward Karlovac, a bit here towards Slavonija, depending on the situation on the ground so that we could adequately undertake some tactical measures and procedures i.e. to reduce our losses, so that we moved around a bit. But usually it was Lučko and Pleso.

What were you transporting?

Well, first of all we were transporting arms for the Fifth Corps. Then we transported some materials for the arms industry in Western Bosnia, and this Office of the Bihać District, that was its name, it undertook some other activities, aid, in the work of this administration and the like, with which I am not too familiar. But the basic stuff was arms and equipment for the needs of the Fifth Corps, i.e. for the arms industry which was then functioning in Bihać.

After the departure of KAZA to Cologne, when KAZA remained there, after that the activities of the Mixed Transport Squadron cease. This was, I think, the summer of 1993?

Yes, formally the name was the Mixed Transport Squadron. Actually there was one plane - AN 2, it was the property of a company that went broke, and we bought it, it means Bosnia bought that plane. And basically this plane did the flights. These names that you mentioned were engaged, because I arrived while

they were doing that, because it was necessary for a coordinator from our side to be there...

What was your formal position then?

I was the Commander of the Air Force and Anti-Aircraft Defence of BIH.

BIH, and you were...?

Armija. And I was there in the primary function to sort it all out, to coordinate it. There were dangers in the privatization of this air bridge, some people from Krajina whom I met wanted to market some goods there. There was an information here in Sarajevo that this air bridge does not function as it should, that it could very easily be turned to profane use, that the situation should be resolved through the sorting out of correct relations with the Republic of Croatia, through the solution of the status of the pilots who already came out of Bihać, through the provision of their training, and the creation of material and technical conditions so that they could work normally. I resolved all these matters with Imra Agotić, Milan was also there...

Who else did you cooperate with, who were you close associates?

Well, I think I cooperated in the most direct manner with Imra Agotić, he really gave us a lot of support, an understanding, I think that...I must say that he was a great officer, a great general, very reasonable, and I must always be thankful for the help that he gave us. I think he enjoyed an undisputed authority among his subordinates, so that what the two of us agreed, he would pass on the them – and I, because I was in charge of this professional part, never allowed anything to be disrupted beside what was agreed. So that we obeyed the time schedules, entries, exits and that whole regimen which had to be executed, which was pretty tough for us, but which...All it all, I was more than satisfied, we never had, as far as people are concerned any

troubles. They were really forthcoming, they helped us as much as they could, they understood us, I think we were doing it, so to say – as one body. I must also note that we were doing it with our means, i.e. the helicopters were all BIH, the arms were all BIH, and everything that was transported, everything was BIH.

Everything was bought?

Everything was bought and paid for. As far as I know, the accounts are totally transparent, we also respected a certain ratio, the quota of HVO, the quota of Armija, but I must say, I must say this because of truth, really as far as I know, and I should know, all the material and technical means, and the people that were engaged, everything was paid by BIH.

All right. So this cooperation existed throughout the war, is that so?

It did.

It existed all the time. They were telling me, I know of those warehouses in Zagreb where the humanitarian aid was packed, the arms, everything went together by this air bridge. You know what I'm talking about?

I know, I know.

By which route was this transported? Did it also go by the air bridge?

Very little, very little, believe me, as there was no reason, nor priority for it to go by the air bridge.

How come...?

I think these guys were doing it, where I was less involved.

By which route did that...?

Well, this is what I think: they were very resourceful, these men whom I praise, I think they even, as far as I heard, had some factories, making tin cans, fuel cisterns and the like. I really wasn't involved in that, but I admire them, because I had heard their story. I was not present there and I believe them, they were very resourceful. And now, there was this war, probably there were some bribes and all sorts of things, so that they used these international forces and the like...

It means it went exclusively by convoys, UNHCR convoys and trucks...?

Yes.

Did it also go by the air bridge?

Very little. Very little, because in maintaining this air bridge we were somehow, how shall I put it, hostages of our daily activities. If we send a helicopter today, then we know what the situation is like, new information is coming by the evening, if you don't come in the evening, we are not there. And you know, we are giving it over and can do no more. Here, I think you have dispatches like that in the documentation. So that it was very difficult to relate to that when food was concerned, food didn't go. Maybe something, but let me tell you, these were more some private parcels, which I strongly opposed, I didn't allow that, I was especially rigorous here, because I had a note from Mr. Agotić who also had something to send, and then you know, you don't send to this one, but you send to that one. Then I banned it completely. Now, we were putting these things under lock and key, when the loading takes place. All right, the loading of the helicopter, something extra can be thrown in, now I can't...

Did everything what was going by the air bridge for the Fifth Corps remain exclusively on that area, or was it later distributed elsewhere?

We were unloading everything according to our preparations, i.e. according to orders which I gave to the crew on the Čoralići airport. Later probably they distributed it around a bit, there was a logic in that.

Was it possible to reach Srebrenica and Sarajevo?

No way, only for this region.

And how did they, by which air bridge did they deliver the stuff to Sarajevo?

There was no air bridge, there was only the international air bridge that was kept, but according to the same schedule, or the same model they tried here in Bosnia to do Tuzla – Srebrenica, you know, just that one part, but we applied, I would say, the same method that we did in Bihać. I was very successful, I have a certain documentation and maps which were just like, how shall I put it, like special operations, something that you can't, I was educated, completed the military schools, I didn't read it anywhere. So I studied Afghanistan a bit, their experiences in order to apply it to Bosnia, all that you learn in military theory, I myself don't know it that is good for special combat operations and the like, from the aspect of meteorology, temperature, cloudiness, fogginess, visibility and the like. Here everything was just upside down. It was – the worse, the better, because simply, that's the way it could function. Then there were these assessments, by calendar when they had some festivities, when they had holidays, these were our high-impact times. And it was then that we were most satisfied, irrespective of the effort, that we delivered the greatest part of the stuff, and this other thing, we applied it to Goražde. We did around 70 tonnes by

the same system from here, I think it was Kakanj – Goražde. There were arms here in Bosnia, but the helicopters were engaged from here using the same method.

And how did it go, what was delivered to Sarajevo...?

To Sarajevo it came in a normal way, it was independent.

From Croatia to Sarajevo. And then? From Sarajevo...?

Within the overall contingent. It means the contingent that was coming for the needs of Armija here. A part of it was taken, than it was loaded from the logistical centre Visoko and then the helicopters flew over to Goražde using the same methods, ideas and the like. And I think that...somewhere around 70 tonnes, we managed to inject in there. I have to say here, we put in over 500 tonnes in about 200 helicopter flights to Bihać.

This is the air bridge which...?

Yes.

It means 200 tonnes?

There was just over 500 tonnes, we always loaded 4 tonnes by helicopter. Believe me it was so, without packaging, without anything.

This is a lot.

Of course it is. Believe me, it was really exhausting, it was every day.

And what was going on in that period when the Mixed Transport Squadron stopped flying? Then these Russian crews were coming, is that so? Ukrainian?

Well, roughly the same people who worked for Croatia also worked for Bosnia. We simply inherited that.

Are you telling me that it continued further?

Clearly. It means, this contact served us so that we can continue with these people who were checked out, who were superbly trained. Neither Croatia nor BIH had such trained crews, the first league we can call them. You know, they can operate under such conditions. No one else could have done it, only they could.

And these boys who were in training, who were undergoing training in Croatia for these Antonovs and all the rest...Pečenković, Iftić and all those who were with them – they later returned here, is that so?

No, they remained in Slovenia. You know that after this unfortunate conflict...they went over to Slovenia and trained there, I would say more to become company pilots, like "Air Bosna"...

They didn't come here after the training, in order to be of use here, to help here?

Well, it wasn't much of a training, you know. We tried to do some training in Croatia, but we didn't have good conditions for that. Then, if I rightly remember, this training was stopped half-way, I would say after the completed theoretical part and then they had to leave Croatia and they went to Slovenia and there they found themselves in a facility near the Brnik Airport

and there they began training within "Adria Airways", so that some practically worked on this KAZA and the like, but it was all too little, at that time our "Air Bosna" had already been formed, and they were earmarked for this commercial flying and the like. This military segment they had already forgotten. They had some activities in that part, I think there were several flights with KAZA directly, who transported it from this part, here to the Visoko Airport, it was all something parallel.

Is it true that in Croatia, the airports of Pula and Rijeka were opened, i.e. used specially for these needs?

In 1992 there were several flights with KAZA from Pula and Rijeka. Otherwise, not.

No?

No, no, no. Everything was done, as I said...

Paščenko? Šetić? They were on these airports then.

No, no, only a couple of flights were made, I think it was before the New Year 1992, but don't press me for exact dates. I think at that time we had a record number of flights. It means, you had to come from different directions so as to confuse those. They went from Lučko, mostly this KAZA, something went from Pula, Krk, so that from there on two nights, 29th and 30th November these were the last flights. I know that at that time 6 flights were done in one night. And then it stopped. Then the air bridge stopped functioning, I think until 15th June 1994 when we resume our activities.

**It means, you are telling me that these airports in Pula and Rijeka didn't...?
And tell me, were the arms coming by ships, the aid, humanitarian aid which**

was then transported?

Now, this is a segment that I know very little

about.

Into the Ploče harbour?

This is a segment that I know little about. I think this was done by a special group together with the Logistics Sector of the Ministry of Defence of Croatia. I think one part went by the air route via Pula, whether by ships, I don't know, and it was transported up toward Varaždin, into some warehouses I think, and there it was sorted out, according to a ratio which they had agreed upon. I really wasn't involved in that, but I know that one part of that went directly to Bosnia, one part of these arms went to this warehouse, was it Velika Gorica, and from there we transported these arms to Western Bosnia.

During 1993 humanitarian flights went by helicopters from Split, this was the pulling out of the wounded...do you know something about that?

I know something, this was for the needs of HVO of Central

Bosnia.

Only for them?

Only for them. Exclusively. Really, because if it had been for these other ones, I would know it, normally. I know 100% that they were doing it for the needs of HVO in Central Bosnia and I really don't know anything about those parts, I really have no...

How did these flights function, do you know?

I don't know, really. I couldn't say anything particular about that. I know that they took place, but I really have no special...

Can you help me with this document, this is a scanned document...?

Just a moment, 1992, the end of the year, I organized all this, I organized these purchases of helicopters for Bosnia, we were also working through this, we flew over with technical landings, more or less on Lučko, and continuing further to Bosnia. I had returned to Bosnia a little, a little in Croatia, because I had to coordinate it. All until those controversial conflicts when a strange thing happened, we had 3 helicopters that we had purchased, they were in Lučko, certain men from HVO came knowing that this is it, some conflicts, you know, Armija and so, anyhow, they took these helicopters although they had been only on technical landings there. I think they took them to Sinj and HVO used them later on.

When was that?

In 1993.

And who took them?

As far as I know Roso organized something together with the representatives of the Ministry of Croatia, they probably didn't know the status of these helicopters, we were paying for these helicopters to our suppliers only when they touched down on Bosnian soil, but they probably didn't know that this is a kind of intermediate landing, they just came and took them. I heard of it from some people who asked me if I knew where the helicopters were, and I should have known, because I was waiting for the clearance by Croatian authorities for the continuation of the flight to Bosnia and I saw

that this is being prolonged, that something is not all right, and they took these helicopters, I learned later and there were some unpleasant situations for me, like that arrest warrant against me that was issued?

Why?

Because I was probably the source of information about these helicopters, I was in charge of getting them to Bosnia. Probably all the traces had to be removed then, because someone had to pay for them to the supplier. So apparently it was Croatia who had to pay for that.

And how was it resolved in the end?

I think the Republic of Croatia paid

for that.

So nobody bothered you about

the payment?

No. So that we renewed the order, but until the Washington Agreement was signed, we couldn't go on any further. Because there were no conditions for that. And this here, what is this?

This is, can you read it? I will enlarge it if necessary.

This is from 1992?

This is June 1992.

I think I saw this.

Decision on the entrusting the flight control activities over BIH. The activities of flight control are entrusted to...

I saw it. This, you know, is 1992. You have a lot of documents from 1992 which are very affirmative, which are personally very dear to me, that we are moving on together, we are going jointly...

This document is signed, it enters into force. How was this document implemented?

Well, it wasn't implemented, this document was...

Was the linking up of the air space realized?

Well, it was useless, it couldn't have been implemented, no way.

Why?

Because BIH was the "offline zone", you couldn't fly over it. Therefore, anyone could have done it in the name of BIH.

This is some kind of battle in international organizations which must recognize newly created states, and then...

This is what we did.

Did you have any support by Croatia in that?

No, in 1993 we normally applied for membership in ICAO, the organization. Our delegation, our official delegation went to Montreal and we were accepted completely legally without...

Didn't you go there with Kapetanović and the others?

No.

No?

No. I didn't go at that time, I know that Irfan Bibibović and a man from here Cico Mahmut went. All right, I think that Kapetanović... To tell you frankly, I heard a lot about Jure Kapetanović. I met him recently in the Civil Aviation Authority of BIH. It was rather him who insisted on seeing me, that we meet, because he had heard that I am here. I really... that man... but I heard a lot from my colleagues that they contact him a lot, that they are resolving certain issues, I really didn't go into the essence of these issues. I was a soldier, I kept to my military orders, really, for me he was enough.

All right, on the level of military orders – was there a cooperation?

Jure was then Mudrinić's deputy.

Yes, as I say, I had heard of him and I met that man now, maybe 3, 4 months ago, when he was here in BIH.

And what was Cico doing?

Who?

Cico.

Cico, I don't know, this was like a core for the creation of this civil aviation, administration and the like. It means, on the same location up in Slovenia, the people were already gathering to nominate this Civil Aviation Authority of ours, so that a director was nominated, Cico was there, I think he was in charge of the segment of flight control.

Was he often in Zagreb?

Cico?

Yes.

Well, all right, they knew Jure Kapetanović first and they probably needed him due to some, I myself don't know: experience, instructions, how to best solve certain problems, and the like, because Croatia had been through all of that, so I believe he was helping them.

Were at that time both Croatia and BIH recognized with ICAO?

Yes, they were. You know, I think that BIH had a bit of a problem due to the status of air space. Because, mind you, our air space was all the time a no-fly zone. So that we were accepted as a member of ICAO in 1993, but we couldn't undertake anything on this issue, until...even today we suffer from these consequences. Because we didn't have...how shall I put it, we didn't have the manpower nor the technology to take it over. Therefore the services of Croatia were used to a maximum, and normally, after that came Serbia and Montenegro, i.e. Yugoslavia, so that the division of the air space was on the level, as it was before the war, on the 18th meridian, to the left and to the right. This is it.

Were you ever coming to Divulje?

I came twice during the war, I think these were some talks on how certain things should be done. There was this man, Katavić. Wherever I went, from Imra Agotić, his...the co-workers, this was my impression, respected him a lot, whatever he told them I had such a treatment, so that we always agreed quickly on what we had to, I felt good and I am always grateful to them for all that.

Apart from Imra, who else did you cooperate with, when it was needed? Whose doors were open to you?

Well, you know, in the Air Force they were always...Jozo Čuletić was there, Bagarić on Lučko, I cannot remember all the names now, but all were very good. Then I think in one period there was Stipetić when things got critical a bit. We had an ad hoc meeting, what to do, how, the situation was really critical, I had an approval from general Bobetko that I can manoeuvre with the helicopter all over Croatia, so that I was pretty much legal in those circumstances. And I really respected this legality to the full, I don't know if they have any complaints, but I don't. I really stuck to my brief to the maximum, not only I but those who worked with me. I really did nothing outside of it. The protocol had to be respected to the full. We really had to behave as if we were on foreign territory, these relations should not have been disrupted, to leave a stain, at least in this professional part. And you know, there were some accidents, accidents that happened, the fall of a helicopter...

Were you there when it...?

Yes, yes, yes. Here in immediate vicinity, one horrible situation, I am sorry that some damage was made then, but I think we overcame it in a cultured and civilized manner. I think the damage was paid for in full. We had certain, I would call them, incidents, through the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and what happened,

and I still maintain that too much calling and the use of mobile technology, and their knowledge, although Mr. Agotić and Čuletić know that, it means we always prepared those people how to behave before departure, how to behave during the flight there and back, and especially when they find themselves in that region. However, probably this was all human, this wretched mobile technology, it did a lot then, and the people, in their wish to show that they are there, called everybody, so that these conversations were very well recorded, we had information about it afterwards and it ended up as it did. It may not have been the only thing, you know. There could have been something else, but this really contributed a lot, I will not say that it was crucial, because we never investigated it until the end, but we had to go on working.

Tell me, how did you cooperate with Hajrudin Osmanagić?

Hajrudin Osmanagić worked in a military office. Although this is not much, I will say here, really due to the function which I had there, due to the relations in the beginning I relied a little on those people who were working in that military office. But, after information that reached me, their excessive involvement in cases of discovery, I would even say the revealing of certain plans which were pretty much secret, it couldn't continue in the same way, everything that I would tell them I have the feeling that they were placing, positioning themselves in it, then it went really, really well. I really realized that this is so and I later avoided, simple I didn't need them.

But were you supposed to cooperate with them, coordinate?

No, no way. I could have talked with them about it, they knew about me, but I was not accountable to them.

To whom were you accountable?

Directly to BIH, here. It means, to the Headquarters of ABIH.

Did anything change later when Zijo Poprženović came?

Well let me tell you, sometimes if I needed certain documentation, documents for abroad, I think I had a greater support from Bisera Turković who directly cooperated, though these relations became more difficult when Kasim Trnka came, but not specially because, sincerely speaking, there was always the problem of that information. I feared giving away information, if for nothing else, then for the names in Croatia which I respect, in order not to compromise them in any way, because these persons didn't give me a conviction that they could be secretive, that they could behave in accordance with the situation. Because I heard certain rumours, you know, the very answering of these mobile satellite phones in the Embassy and similar was very questionable, I think I will mention Lošo...

Domazet?

... we were friends even from earlier times, he warned me a lot of times of it, we had some tapes, I handed them over to the Ambassador and I said: "Please, can you reduce this a little!" There was a funny situation where he claimed that this is not even close to the truth, that his people are not saying this, and I asked him to give me a cassette player, and I played the tape for him. So, the two of us are sitting down, and I ask him: "Are these yours?" "They are." "Good bye." These are some of the moments where I cannot tell, you know I wasn't running away from these people. But I didn't involve myself, I didn't have trust because of the nature of conversations between Agotić and myself, you know, these are conspiratorial, special operations and I never let anyone know when we will fly, where we will fly, which will be the elements and the like. Lošo gave me intelligence information, this I can tell openly. I had all these data, I carried out the preparation of the crews, only they and I knew where they were going and

how they were coming back. To no one else was I allowed to say this. I think Imra fully respected that, he knew it. I explained it to him. Always when an operation was over I would tell him how it all went.

How about Milan Lelas?

Well, Milan Lelas, we know each other as military pilots, I think he was involved in the flight control, he is not some...

Did you cooperate with him?

He did not cooperate with me, no. We were talking more about things that we knew as friends, as acquaintances, otherwise I like him very much.

I have one protocol here which says that in 1994 there was a meeting of the delegation of AIR RH and AIR BIH. In the delegation of AIR RH there were Kapetanović, Enver Mušinović...

Civil aviation.

And the AIR BIH delegation: Omer Kulić, Mahmud Cico, Bakir Karahasanović, Ifran...

Well, this was the civil aviation, I did not have contact with them, I was the military segment.

But they refer to precisely this Government decision on AIR BIH from 1992.

Well, you know, I am not raising the issue of

legality...

The key of the agreement in the direct carrying out of the flight control on the part of the Zagreb flight control in the air space of AIR BIH as a member of ICAO.

I am not raising the issue of legality of this group of people.

Cico signed this, did he?

Now I would have to go backward to see who empowered Cico. Don't mix me up in this. I think this is more...

It means you weren't in...?

No, I think this is more of a private matter between them, probably some private meeting, and they made it official. Why not, it's not a problem This again is a document which...

I want to ask you one more thing, I know that you are in a hurry and I won't keep you, I have here some scanned documents from the Split Hospital Centre, i.e. the notes of thanks which the Split Hospital Centre received for help provided. For instance, I now opened one document "Letter of thanks to the Clinical Hospital Firule for the donation of 14.800 ampoules of vaccine to the city of Sarajevo. This was signed by Tarik Jašarević, year 1993"

Believe me, I don't know.

So in which way did it get there?

Probably this is...

I have here around a hundred of such documents. In which way was this coming – not only to Sarajevo, it went everywhere, we have here...

The land route...

Was it possible?

Sure. Please, don't let me say too much.

Well, don't say too much.

Well, let me tell you, there was an embargo, a world-wide embargo. The embargo was for ground movements in Herzegovina, in HVO, there was no embargo for international forces. You could have moved in the country however you wished, it was only the matter will they allow you or not.

But this came to Sarajevo – it means it was let through?

Yes, it was let through.

It means, there was a circulation?

Well, you know, it could have come just before Sarajevo, then carried out through a tunnel, these are the ampoules and they are taken inside.

Here we have Tuzla, Public Health Centre Kladanj: "Letter of thanks to the Clinical Hospital Split for the donation of humanitarian aid in medicines"

Probably. This is the part which I cannot...

You don't know about that?

No.

Živinica, letter of thanks... !

When they pulled the wounded from Srebrenica, there were some 50 of them, then the air bridge Tuzla was organized, it means with helicopters, Lučko...

Srebrenica? Is that so?

This was from Tuzla to Lučko.

When was that?

1994, 1995.

Was this the pulling-out of the wounded?

Yes, the pulling-out of the wounded. It means, we pulled some 50 of them out, but you know, there was a number of wounded whom we pulled out of Bihać, because it was a great burden for the hospitals. They were taken to Zagreb, and then they were in Lučko, there was a house in which we placed them, then the humanitarian workers would take them over.

Where were these people hospitalized? Where did they receive medical aid?

In BIH. They were not hospitalized, as far as I know, in Croatia, but they were in that house which was a kind of transit centre, than they were taken further.

They didn't go into hospitals?

No, not as far as I know. Maybe there were individual cases. But, sincerely, I don't know.

The Hospital in Split has a large list of people that were received and treated there.

Well, probably, you know, this is the southern part, Split was at that time far from Zagreb, what they were doing... You know, there are a lot of such logistical centres, I would say, in BIH, who cooperated in various ways. How much all of that was linked up, how much it was legal, I really cannot say anything about it.

But it means, the wounded were coming?

They were certainly coming from

Bihać, and...

To the territory of Croatia?

...from Tuzla, I think these were not big numbers, I didn't like it, it was spread all over the Croatian newspapers, how we did that, a big humanitarian effort, the pulling-out of the wounded from Srebrenica and the like. Which was not good, was it? We were thinking of concealing it a little bit, but all right, you know that the journalists always get their story and then it goes its own way. So that there were many pictures, I think this was not good, but, what can we do. I think it was all organized by the Embassy of BIH and a Ministry, I cannot tell you which one. I think Bisera Turković was involved in that, and I was in charge of the technical part.

It means, you stayed in Zagreb until the end?

Until the end.

It's a pity you don't have the time to go over these documents with me, it would be interesting for you to see them.

Well, let me tell you, I can look at these documents, but I am really not, I am not competent with respect to the documents that relate to such...Military documents are, let me tell you, very rare. That part went on the basis of agreements. You know, Government delegations.

It means on the level of a Government delegation an agreement was made, to...?

An agreement to nominate Salko Begić as coordinator for these activities. This is known to them, for them I am legal.

Then why did they sign this binding agreement?

In order to coordinate together these activities of the air bridge, this was the core of the matter.

All right, but was it defined here also what the Croatian side is obliged to do?

It wasn't. It was more like this – this guy calls me and says: "Go there, report to so and so," he knows that I am that man and then he asks me what do I need, I need a certificate that I am in that function, with a stamp on it, and that's it.

What I frequently notice talking to people about the cooperation with BIH is that everything in that cooperation seems very fragmented. Everything boils down to some personal contacts and...

More or less, more or less.

But because this was all moving in the same direction, because the aims were reached – someone had to hold these strings and coordinate...

Apparently so. But I really couldn't determine who these people were. But a problem in all these activities was that you felt like being a hostage to daily politics. Will the war propaganda go this way or the other way, and will you become a victim of it. It was hovering above us all the time. In addition, I know, and these people who worked there knew that we were under close surveillance. Being an experienced soldier I told them: "This is good. As long as they keep surveillance over you, it is good. When they stop monitoring you, you should be concerned." Then you should be concerned, right? I knew of it and maybe I would say something to that effect to Imra. My last very unpleasant situation happened when we were all happy because of the "Oluja" when we could go there by the land route, to empty all those warehouses, some donations, ambulances, and we were all moving in one convoy, everyone who had a driver's licence was driving down there to take it all to the people, there were still shootings, you know Plitvice and that...

This was after "Oluja?"

Yes, immediately after. They passed and we went after them immediately with this help now that we could use the land route, and we could fly a bit more freely, without some fears. First, there was this Croatian arrest warrant because of those helicopters. Believe me, I had nothing whatsoever to do with this, but this is how it was, it is war, we will tolerate it. When everything was over, and when we were all happy, exhausted, I thought I am packing and on

my way to my destination. I remember Imra and I were sitting and talking and he admitted some things to me, for instance that he was very surprised how much we endured, because he thought it would be two or three flights and that would be the end. He said a lot in praise of us, anyhow, when I came home to pack up, two policemen appear at the door. "Are you so and so?" "I am." "Come with us." "All right." They took me to Trešnjevka, I really didn't know my status, what am I, arrested or what. This was on the fourth floor, some young men came, supposedly inspectors, they put on the sunglasses and started questioning me from the beginning – who are you, what are you, show the papers, draw us, who gave me, what orders, from whom did I receive orders, how much, what, and I cannot put the picture together, I see that it is an official institution, a Police station. One very unpleasant situation, I really didn't, they were insisting, names, names, and I was eschewing precisely that: "Please don't, there are institutions, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of the Interior, all of them legally knew about this!" The names, even if I knew at that time it wouldn't be correct. But it was an inappropriate behaviour on their part, I asked them to tell me their names, who are they, and they kept me like that for 4, 5 hours. For me it was something exhausting, abnormal. But I knew I had to endure it all. So that they let me at the end with a kind of suggestion that I continue cooperating with them. I told them: "Lads, I don't even know your names. I respect, this is your country, but I am a grey-haired man, I am not cut for these kinds of things. I am asking you in a friendly manner!" Whatever, I left, put my belongings into my car and left for Bosnia.

Did you get any explanation?

Never, believe me, because I couldn't, they masked themselves, played Sherlock Holms. I told that to Imra, he was very angry, asked me to tell him who were they. I tell him: "Imra, believe me, I don't know. They didn't even introduce themselves to me!" I don't know, I know I was sitting in a room, a rather ugly room. They were young, some very provocative, difficult questions. I answered

easily, because I never moved from my position. Well, you know in all these things there are things which you would rather be without, but that's how it happens.

It was a special...

But no, in general I think we had a very good cooperation, I really wish to say my sincere thanks to all the people who cooperated, their behaviour, their professionalism and this comprehension of the situation, relationship, engagement, they were really beyond reproach. All honour is due, I haven't the slightest objection, I am only sorry that we don't sometimes get together to comment on all these things from today's perspective. Some events were organized on this basis, here I also had an invitation, I must mention my Imra, he asked me when this was taking place...

What?

Some anniversary relating to this air bridge, etc. Something, I don't know, some people organized in the "Intercontinental", they asked me if I knew of this. And I said: "Imra, neither someone called me, nor do I know!" Possibly, to tell you, this secretiveness of ours, you know. I learned in war that everything what two people know, it is dangerous. If a third man knows, cancel the operation. Cancel the operation, it is the same everywhere. So that it was a kind of logic, I wasn't afraid of them, but simply I didn't want to compromise anybody, right? And this other group which I want to mention, you are in contact with them, what I think, this professional part, their work, their engagement, I would say their activity, the fight for this region of theirs, for a better future of those people, of their families and the like, this was an extraordinary effort, I am sorry for these people because I hear of their fate which was very incorrect on the part of the officials. I am really not an official, I am in a different position, but I am always prepared to say all the best for these people, from what I know. If there are any

other things, I cannot comment that.

They did a great job.

But they are fantastic, fantastic, you know. Everything that I do, and the reason why I speak with you, believe me, I am doing for them. Salko Begić doesn't need anything, thank you very much, it was what it was. I gave as much as I could, but I think that they were the key ones. They played the key role. I am sorry, I am sorry it turned out that way, that the men, some who, I would say depended on them a lot, people for whom they did a lot, that they behaved so incorrectly. I would say, from the military and even political structures, these are incorrect people. Apparently some egotism of their prevailed, they didn't want to share the pie with anyone else, or I don't know what, but they aren't right. They aren't right, I cannot mend these things, I wish I could. But I am always glad when I meet those people and all their close co-workers whom I knew, and even Mrs. Silva who was there many times when things were hard, then you come over for a coffee, and, you know you are always in a kind of haze. Just like that.

Let me ask you, now that you mention Silva, those groups of hers which went over Slunj, do you know anything about it?

I don't, really.

You don't know?

I don't know.

She received them there, they were trained, and went over Slunj to...?

I really don't know of these activities, but here I can say for this lady that she was very correct, very engaged, she understood our situation. You know, you can be sure, these were very, very difficult situations, these were non-stop activities day and night, an exhaustion.

How did you personally experience when you were in Zagreb, i.e. on the territory of Croatia, and you were here a long time, that period when those unfortunate conflicts between Croats and Muslims in Bosnia started, all that was happening, how did this reflect on your work, your status...?

Well you know, to me personally it was like a blow. Simply, I knew that this propaganda is such as it is. I knew a lot, I had a lot of information from the field, which is logical, but I think that the propaganda was terrible at that time. To listen at that time to a certain Smiljko Šagolj or someone, it was a catastrophe, you know, you could bear with all the grenades and everything, but here, you live in a world and you cannot believe that it is so.

And how did you go on with your work, were you able...?

Very difficult, very difficult. Believe me, it was just then that everything was done in great secrecy, there were dangers, you know, it is normal that this propaganda influenced the people, people knew that it could come to an incident, I must tell you how I managed to accept it all. First of all, I had spent a long period of time in Croatia. I have many friends there, I even married there, my wife is Croatian, my children were born in Zadar, I come from an area where my first neighbours were Croats. Secondly, I cannot understand to this very day some moves, to be sincere, it all seems very artificial to me. But it is logical that it was very difficult. You know, it was difficult to conduct yourself, especially when the media are concerned, it was terrible.

You and Imra cooperated at that time?

Of course, I never broke off with Imra, never.

These changes of relations?

Look, I never raised this topic a lot with Imra, I knew and felt that he also at certain moments is having a lot of problems due to this support (that he was giving me). I felt it, and he is a strong man, he never used it to tell me. But you feel on a man, I felt very sorry at those moments and I don't know, he always found more understanding for me than I did for him, although it sometimes should have been the other way around. Believe me, when that helicopter fell down and those hellish tangerines, and the markings, you know that it was a terrible situation, you know that I had a hard time, I came from the woods, and, logically, there was police waiting for me. There was Jarnjak, everybody was waiting for me, I had no intention of going anywhere, but, if it is prison, so let it be prison, what can I do now?

Were you personally at the site...?

On the very site.

You were together with Senad...?

That's right, 40 metres from there and we were

lying down...

In that car on which it fell?

That's right. I did everything. I firstly found Senad, because they had disappeared, there were 6 men, I firstly found Senad, but they took me away...all right they found him and brought him, so that I, normally, I was guarded by the police, everything correct, isn't that so? Imra visited me then, it was in a room on Lučko, when we softened up things a little, they asked me if I would like to see one of these men. Because I had reported 6 men missing. And they brought me Senad ruffled as he was, half of his hair burnt, I was glad, I kissed him, but he was still in shock, then those bills of lading...

He does not remember one part.

He is looking for those half-burnt bills of lading, and I say: "Leave it now, Senad, c'mon," we called him the Ruffled one, and then we found another one, then a third one, then we found some in the hospitals and I am glad that it all...so even a certain Mirsad Hajrić, he stayed a bit longer in the "Sveti Duh" Hospital.

He got burns?

Yes, it was terrible, they were with some switches, I better not speak to you about it.

It is incredible that everyone survived.

Everybody survived, incredibly. You know the situation that was created, it was Hiroshima. This was something. You know, you couldn't help anyone and that moment happened somehow very quickly, surprisingly, we found ourselves there, we were lying, it was December, in some pool of water, on some ice, it was cold, terrible, terrible. And it is cracking all around you, there were 150.000 bullets

there.

And the other helicopter caught fire?

Yes, the other one also. This was also property of BIH, this one was destroyed, it was later compensated by Croatia, but you know there was 800 kg of TNT. When that exploded, it was as if the sky opened, Strela 2M, when it is launched, goes into the sky, you don't know, it is a catastrophe. It lasted around 40 minutes, and in the morning when we came to see it, God forbid. It was a crater 10 by 10 metres. And we tried to approach these guys, to help them, but we couldn't. The helicopter, I remember it as if it was today, when it hit the ground, it simply split into two parts, and that flame began. So there was nothing to it but lie in the pool of water and wait. So that it was a terrible situation. That kind of shooting, I don't want to hear ever again in my life. The sky opened above us. There you are.

Did I wear you out?

You didn't wear me out, I am glad if I can contribute anything at all from the aspect of evidence, there is nothing I have to add or take away, maybe there are some finer details, but they are unessential. All in all...

If you remember any interesting details...

If we find the time, or if I come to Zagreb, we may get in touch, no problems.

September 2005, Ljubuški