

MIHOVIL HRDALO

Sunja

17.07.2005

Recording and transcript conversation recorded on CD

Sunja 2

Recording of the conversation registered under

mhrdalo

4,80 MB

Duration 15:01

Conversation took place in the home of the collocutor

We are on and would you please introduce yourself in the beginning.

Mihovil Hrdalo

When and where were you born?

12.07.1959. in Greda Slunjska.

U Gredi? And where do you live now?

In Greda Slunjska

What I would like to ask you is concerning “Oluja” – relatively, you said a while ago, in “Oluja” you were near Praljak.

Yes.

What do you remember? How did that look alike, and how did you get in contact with Praljak?

Praljak organized the retreat of Croatian army, on distance, by the orders. In town of Dvor.

In Dvor? What was the date?

Well it was ... I don't know now, 07 or 08.

All right. It was 07. or 08. of August?

Yes.

In the year of 1995?

Yes, that's right. That was somewhere around seven, eight hours before liberation of Dvor.

Seven, eight hours in the morning or afternoon?

Seven, eight hours before that.

All right. That was what time of the day?

That was somewhere around 10, half past 10 in the night till 10 o'clock in the morning. He kept under control that section, on the distance, Croatian Army...

Precisely, Praljak personally?

Praljak personally, and the headquarters with Stefanek in command.

Al right. You are telling me he personally “kept on distance” How did he keep that?

He kept on distance because he was informed with that order. He commanded to Croatian Army to place the line at Dvor, at the very entrance to Dvor because the column was passing...I think that was the 21. Corpus, but I can't say exactly. We, in really didn't come into contact with them. We only observed from a distance their passing into Bosnia. That was done really expertly, there was no breaking into their columns – however, at the retreat, they had it in negotiations... We didn't know but we found out later that they had to leave all equipment in Croatia. However, they didn't abide by. They didn't, comply with negotiations and wanted to pull out the equipment, the tanks by force. They crushed down six and a half kilometers of their own column.

You saw that?

Yes, I saw that. They crushed six and a half kilometers of their own column.

Wait, what does that mean? They set out with their tanks...?

Yes. They departed with their tanks for Bosnia, to pull out the equipment, not thinking about their...

And there they were crushing the columns of their own civilians?

Yes, they were crushing columns of their own civilians. That's right. They were crushing columns of their own civilians.

And you have seen that?

Yes. I have seen that.

Who else did see that?

That was seen... All men, soldiers have seen it...

Let's say can you give me three, four names?

Yes, yes. Damir Gorsa, he has seen it .. Everybody saw it.

Try and remember some other name.

The commander Bjonda, has seen it, Mr. Krapljan, commander of the 17. and Stefanek knew all about it, and Pesa.

Did Praljak see that?

Yes.

Praljak was there?

Yes.

How did Praljak react?

Praljak was, and when he heard about it ... Than he said it is impossible that they would crush their own, in order to pull out the equipment from Croatia, and in reality that wasn't their equipment.

Praljak reacted that way?

Yes, yes, He got mad. He simply ...

Did you see him then?

Yes, yes.

Can you tell me what did he then ...Which words did he use?

Praljak is ...

He was swearing?

Yes, he was swearing, he was swearing and he was saying he couldn't expect that they are ready, because of the equipment, to crush their own men.

He was furious?

Yes he was furious, he was furious and that... Simply he got mad. He kept the hands on his head, screw it; I've seen the tears in his eyes.

He cried?

Yes. It grieved him. I believe, he is a soldier, a real soldier but he couldn't expect that. Because they...The column were wide, they were retreating – and there was agreement. The agreement was honored by our side. We were really on ***** and nobody fired or went into that column, they

were going...And they passed through. And when they passed through, an hour thereafter heavy rain fell. And then Praljak said we should still remain, in case there are some stragglers who wanted to retreat. And only then, deffinitively, after our scouts went ahead and verified no body is coming any more – then we started forward and came all the way to Suva Meda (???). There we connected with Muslims, some Muslim formation came and that was the end.

I know we are now discussing an ugly matter, which is difficult...

Which is ugly, yes?

...difficult to remember – but would you please try to remember like this: before the tanks set going over their own people, that column was allowed to pass by us? Is that right?

Yes, that column was allowed to pass by us.

Was Praljak there then?

Praljak was... This way...A motorcyclist came; I can't now remember precisely, that boy was a courier. The cyclist came and said that they are crushing the column; they are crushing their own column. He said that, and he (Praljak) didn't believe it. And then he went...And when we came on the hill, then we... He went, and when he saw how they their own farm wagons for the hay and all... that in what the people were retreating. The people were retreating, you know? All of that was crushed, they crushed their own...

All right, what did Praljak demand from our army?

He said he must immediately organize the Medical Corps to help out the people who are still alive, who are...

There were survivors?

Yes, yes, there were, and then our Medical Corps went to help those injured people.

Praljak was present at that time?

Yes. Praljak commanded, and then clearing of that terrain started – not clearing of the terrain but... how would I say that? Medical help to those people, it was a horrible sight.

Was then many dead and wounded? That you know that you saw?

In that region, in the center of Dvor, there were injured ones. Those people were helped. Then the Medical Corps continued further on. Two days, three days, they were helping that column, to help them out to see who is alive... And they were packing into those medical, the ones... how would I say that... with numbers...

In the bags?

Yes. Bags. They were really helping – and we continued forward. We continued and when we took the line as agreed, that was the end.

A while ago you mentioned some situation in which Praljak shouted something using a megaphone. Some column had to be allowed to pass. Were you present when that happened?

Yes.

Can you tell me how did that look alike? What did he say with the megaphone? What did he shout?

I can't now precisely say the words; I can't precisely say what time it was...

But that was the same day?

The same, the same...

At the same place?

Yes, at the same place. There was no movement, nothing; he was still repeating that... I think, I'm not sure, but I have a feeling that he at that time got in contact with UNPROFOR. Because UNPROFOR remained there also, they had there a post. They were like a post – and I think they could also be the witnesses. They know that Croatian Army in Dvor didn't commit any crime, and only helped out. Helped out. And I can openly say that never under Praljak's command, never were forced attacks. There was always a military distance, that... Respecting the rules and everything. He always said: allow carrying out the action with fewer casualties. Always. Really.

And the men in the “Oluja” were obeying Praljak, when he shouted not to fire, to allow the passage?

Yes they did. It wasn't only he, who... All the officers present, supported that.

Yes, I know. But now my interest is just concretely Praljak.

Yes, yes. Everybody obeyed. There is no default of. We didn't move, we stayed – even retreated. We even retreated. He organized, he organized for security retreat to the entrance to Dvor – to allow them complete passage, so there wouldn't be ...

Some story exists about a lieutenant of JNA, who was then wounded, shot through the hips, he was laying down and Praljak was somewhere in the vicinity. Do you know about that event?

What did you say?

I think his name was Stijak.

And what was his rank?

I think he was lieutenant. Do you know about that event?

No

You were not near? You don't know about that event? Didn't remain in your memory?

No, I don't know. And what function did he have?

In general, he was there, he was wounded, and Praljak was – according to that story which I have – in the vicinity, he requested to save the man; he called Medical Corps or something like that.

Generally I know this: Praljak did say that all who were found in that region, which we overtook, all those men – and that is the way it was – all those men were gathered in one place. The civilian police took them over, we gave them cigars ... Praljak did say give them the cigars! Give them water!

Praljak said that?

Yes, yes Praljak did say to give them cigars, to give them water, they were people who were startled, who remained in the houses and apartments. They were predominantly older and so ...

And were you present in some situation in which there were some old women, and it was necessary to provide rubber foams, to enable them to lie down, to rest. Do you know something about it?

No, they had adequate accommodation. There was no problem; they were neither in the rain, nor under clear sky.

And who organized that accommodation?

I think it was Praljak... Like this... We were, that was all during the movement, and it is not possible to know correctly everything... I was in those officers that headquarter, which this time operated in this region... The headquarter said, and Praljak was

that time (there) the medical help must be given, the accommodation must be provided, so they would not be in the rain, and that they can't remain on the square – because they were gathering on the square. And our army didn't handle them. Simply some people were exiting from those houses and passed by, some had uniform overcoats. Most likely the people were cold. They were passing by we told them: go down there, nobody will touch you, where your people are in the center – join them and there is no problem. They were given food, water, they got everything, and they got cigars. The males got the cigars. One of them just there said to me; thanks to the commander who organized all of this.

They said that to you?

Yes, yes, they said that. I think those people, those Serbians could attest to it.

Tell me still only, my last question: You are in “Oluja”, in that moment, in the event we are discussing now – what was then your characteristic?

I was commander's assistant for security.

Commander's Assistant for security?

Yes. Of my formation.

And that is?

17. Brigade.

Did we forget to mention anything with relevant to this event? Do you thing we should mention anything else?

I think we should not. We said everything.

Thank you.

Sunja, July 2005