

BORO HRVOJIĆ

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Sunja

Recording and transcript of conversation recorded on CD as marked

SUNJA 2

Recording of the conversation registered under

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Conversation conducted in the home of the collocutor

It's connected, to start with would you please introduce yourself.

Boro Hrvojic.

Boro Hrvojic. Tell me when were you born?

1968.26.01.

Where were you born?

In Sisak.

Where were you when the war started?

From the 5th month I was a volunteer in Odra. Then I signed an agreement with the Zbor Narodne Garde (National Guard Corps) and went first to Pola Komarevo, with that unit, 3. Company. After that we passed to the defense of Sunja the year 1991, in the middle of the eight month.

Well, it means you came earlier?

Yes, and before...

That means you came in the eight month. Where did you come?

We came to the front positions of Sunja: the station to saw mill, to famous Fortress B52, and so. There we were in small numbers. At that time, when I met the general for the first time, he was a colonel of the Croatian Army...

He already had the rank?

Yes, I think he was promoted at the time to a colonel. I know he went to all the military positions and as a man... I saw he took trouble as an older man to show us, because we were young whipper-snappers, squirts. We didn't know either what or how. He had lots of knowledge. He showed us how to connect railway ties how to fortify. In essence he did his job as an army leader, like every other army leader.

Due to the fact that you arrived there before him, he arrived in the beginning of September, could you tell me what was the situation when you came?

Yes, it was Pesa, and we came to replace 2. Company, because the late Skender was killed at the time. That formation was in a shock in the beginning. They needed replacement and they were sent to some rest. So they sent us 3. company to replace them, to let them have some rest. However, they didn't return to Sunja, but were sent to Glinske Poljane.

Let's touch on the situation you found: what was the situation with bunkers and fortification?

It wasn't very good.

Wasn't very good or was it bad?

It was bad. Mostly we guarded and observed from the houses, through the windows, through broken riddled walls. The cetniks were not very far. They used to come UP to 20 30 meters.

Is it true that the defense was in reality from the courtyards?

It's possible... of course.

Is it true that the bunkers were thrown together, more or less from some ...?

Well, they were slabs, some boards. They were penetrable by the grenades and everything. Because when Praljak came, the picture changed. In Sunja he organized reserve, Sunja domobrani to fill up the sacks with sand and deliver with tractors to us on the front line. So the cetniks would not kill us off, and to save more heads.

That's right. When Praljak came, the very first thing he demanded was fortification. But let's return to the period before Praljak – That is important because of the comparison. Well, the bunkers in reality didn't exist; the lines were very badly fortified. What was the situation with drinking?

What do you mean? In the formation...?

Yes. In general. Did the men drink a lot?

Well, no, there was drinking, but let's say, it was under our supervision and also by the commanders. And if there were individuals, you know how it was: the war and all of that, there were some who over did it... We knew how to treat them. Yes.

I know, before Praljak, prison didn't exist.

No, military prison, no.

That means there were reasons for it: there was disobedience, and there were things needing sanctions. With Praljak's coming the prison was established.

Yes.

First thing that Praljak demands is precisely fortification. Were you the witness, I know certain incidents, when just the fortification was big problem. In one of those incidents, Praljak threatened to kill off the cows.

Well, that's not true.

It's true. It's true and that was brilliant. That was Praljak's chess move. That was a brilliant move – because otherwise he couldn't force the men to go dig the bunkers.

Well, yes, yes. All right, I don't believe he would do that. Maybe, even if he did it, he was bluffing

No, he didn't do it, but when he threatened, the men made the bunkers.

Well, yes, yes. He did on the entire Sunja territory, those people whose homes were destroyed with the grenades, those who remained without the roof – he moved them, he helped. Whoever came there, who had nothing to eat, at that time, it was the war, and he would take from military rations and gave to the people of Sunja. I was the witness when the people went to him. Simply, in one word, if he couldn't, he appealed to me there as a human – if he couldn't help the people, he listened to them. He had time to listen to them.

You say you were the witness. To what? The people who came to him, what problems did they have?

Well, let's say, the house burnt from a grenade. They have no place to sleep. They haven't got this or that...And immediately there was a search for another house. He as the commander of the territory, immediately solved the problem, so the people wouldn't, remain under the sky.

Do you remember some other problems people had? I know, let's say for the case where the man came and said: "Mr. Commander, my neighbor is letting his cow eat the grass on my meadow."

Yes, let's say the ferry for transport of arms and ammunitions was working for our needs, in different situations when the people were sick or something, he would immediately order the ferry men to transport the people, so they could go to Sisak to the hospital or something similar. There is more but I don't remember. That man in every respect, and that can confirm thousands of people who were there in Sunja, he was to us a sacred thing and God. Yes. In my life I never met a more kind-hearted or more intelligent man or in that way ... Concerning those gentlemen in The Hague, that really doesn't make any sense to proclaim such a man a war criminal. Because, even if we had negotiations, we were encountering the cetniks on many an occasion, and we would negotiate in Vedro Polje, and all of that. One or twice I got in touch with cetniks because they wanted to negotiate.

With Motorola, or how did you...?

No, no, with my voice.

Was that somewhere where they were near?

By the bridge in Vedro Polje. There was cetnik Milan Radosavljevic from Gornji Hrastovac. For the occasion Praljak, as the commander and a fine man, sent a liter of drinks and a carton of cigarettes – well, to the enemy. Yes I took that drink and carton of cigarettes to that cetnik.

And what kind of negotiations were they? What did you negotiate about?

The word was about that there are... That Milan Radosavljevic, but I didn't take the bait, where about ten of them over there, would pass to our side. They would surrender. However, at the said time, after three days, as we agreed, they would at that time pass over. Yes. Did something brake between them or...? Well in essence that wasn't true. It was only something they invented.

Was Praljak present on the negotiations?

No, he wasn't present, because maybe that was too risky for the commander of such a territory. It was a risky situation. Notwithstanding he is a courageous man. I was convinced because between ourselves, when there was pulling out of the wounded: I got convinced about his courage. My hat off, I have no words.

You were present when there was pull out?

Yes.

Can you say something about that?

Three men went scouting, because enemy armor was heard in Gornji Hrastovac. The men who went scouting encountered a cetnik patrol. One was wounded in the leg. We had to organize everything to pull out that man.

Where was that happening?

There in Vedro Polje.

Before the bridge?

Before the bridge, yes. And as we were securing, doctor Fid was bandaging and stopping the bleeding, that boy was from Zagreb, I don't remember his name, we were securing. In that moment, from the left side, from about 5 meters, behind some well, Mr. Praljak took his position. And there I saw, he is really ... He is the man.

Was there any firing at the time?

The cetniks already retreated. They were there; we came on time, so they couldn't kill them and take prisoners.

The youngster was pulled out?

Yes, yes.

You had no losses?

No, only he was wounded. Nothing else.

Well, you were with him in those fiery situations, in those more difficult situations?

Yes.

Praljak is known for going into just such places...

Not that, see, after every shelling, after every infantry attack, he as the commander, was liked, not only by me, but he was liked by all, who were on the first line! He did

unfailingly, make the rounds from one bunker to the last bunker, from position to position to see if anybody was hurt, did anybody get wounded, and did anybody get hit and all of that.

What kind of effect did his presence have on the men?

Well, positive. It's unbelievable how... All of us there were capable, all to the last one to die for him.

And he for you?

Yes. And now this moment, if he came comes here to me in the yard and tells me: "Let's go". Yes, Yes (crying)

I could gather an Army; do you know how many said just that?

And such men were defending Croatia. And if today, tomorrow the shooting starts, again those people would be the first... who were first, they would again start out first now.

Let's make a short pause.

Well, if you wish.

_____ (Recording interrupted) _____

Yes, he hit the tank in...

Where was that?

On the fortress B52. The late Josip Kuzmec-Kosta was still alive. I fired... Then we had only one mine thrower 10 cm, on the fortress. We didn't have any aiming tools, so we fired by the feel, by likelihood towards Hrastovac. It was a quite heavy attack. They started with the tanks from Gornji Hrastovac, Drljaca, from all sides. This boy was so courageous, he climbed on the upper floor of the house, and from there he was yelling: left, right – he was giving the coordinates.

He was guiding?

Yes, he was guiding and I was firing the mine thrower. And what happened, happened. The tank hit the house and the man was buried by the wall. In that moment late Kosta with Praljak tried to pull the man out. However, the concrete and that wall were very heavy. Even if they had a compressor they couldn't pull him out. Yes.

Was Praljak there at the moment of impact?

No, Praljak came later. After he heard what happened, he was there in a flash. The man was compassionate to everything: tears in the eyes. Whenever something happened to someone it was visible on him it wasn't ... Simple, I was there on an occasion, when he used to walk in the yard, wouldn't contact anybody, then I knew something is braking up inside him, he

BORO HRVOJIĆ

is feeling sorry for somebody and when something happens. Well, let's say, This Pero Stimac and I, after late Kosta fell, we looked with about then men for Kosta. However, I wasn't from Sunja, and I wasn't familiar with the terrain, and we didn't find him. Later another Gulij's group found him. Another member and I got somewhat lost in the forest there. Maybe Mr. Orkan remembers? In reality, they pronounced us disappeared, captured by cetniks. When I came back to Sunja...

You came back alone?

Yes, yes. Two of us came to Vedro Polje and started towards our bunkers. Our boys started firing at us until we communicated with them. And when Praljak heard on Motorola that I came back, said: "without delay you are to appear by my side" Well, as I had my official car "Jugo" I went to him, and he is already waiting in the yard. I got out and he hugged me... and well, he said: "I love you as my own son!" (crying) well, well. So to... Well

("Story about the cat", remarks Orkan, present at conversation)

I, as the commander of the fortress B52, in reality, first commander was late Kosta, Josip Kuzmec, and after his death I was ordered to be there the commander. There were about 40 to 50 members, on the fortress B52, that corner; Just the same many members were at railroad station Hotel which they held. Those were two corners which were bulwark for the Sunja territory. Had the Hotel or Fortress fallen, the cetniks would have come all the way to Sava river. I was commander there after Kosta's death, and there was some disobedience by some members. They were young boys who joined the Zbor Narodne Garde, and there were the girls in question. There were a few of those who wanted to escape, like for an hour or two. On an occasion I let three of them go for two hours. They were from the Sunja territory. They asked me to let them go to Radio 101 – in Sunja, they would order some songs. At that time such a thing was possible. I let them go, however they made a disturbance. This Goran Vinkovic, at the moment I don't know who is the boy from Sunja, there was a cat in the Radio 101 studio, and this guy threw the cat on this guy from Lika, and the cat scratched him. He in the heat of the moment took the knife and stabbed the cat. And so on the account the cat there was the complaints which came to Praljak. The Radio 101 crew complained because they did it, and they were a bit provocative. On account of that Praljak called me, how could they be there at that time and what for. It was all kind of sorts. What kind of commandant was I to allow my men to do something like that? And I was guilty. I let them go on my own responsibility, and they did what they did. And so he placed me as the commander in front of the column, and as punishment we had, to force march from Sunja to Bobovac. And over the Zremen field. At the time I remember it was ice. The field was under water and it was very difficult to come to...under full war gear to Bobovac. But the punishment had to be done. There wasn't ...

How long did the walk last?

It lasted well, about good two three hours.

It was the winter?

Winter. Well yes, the field was ... ice; there was some snow in places. If it wasn't for ice we would have fallen in, because that was the wet part. We would have fallen in and the walk would have lasted much longer if it wasn't frozen. There.

You had to go from bunker to bunker?

Yes, we had to go from bunker to bunker to collect the signatures. He already ordered them in order to see how far we came, and all that. But we changed the story for them, we said we were scouts, and we are the control. Because we were ashamed to say why we were walking.

All right, and what did the men say, when they had to walk?

Nothing, They new they were in the wrong, and as the soldiers, they had to take it.

But there were those who have done nothing wrong and they had to walk? Did they complain?

Well, no. They didn't.

And now tell me one more thing; it's an important piece of information. I have information, the people told me, Praljak insisted of not firing at civilians on the other side, at peasants.

Yes. Like this. Praljak would pass his orders internally to the positions to us commandants, not a single bullet must be fired: only in case of life in danger. It must not be fired on the civilians, and it was like that already, because if anybody fired a round, I had to have good reason why the round was fired and where it ended. So we the commandants of the positions were very careful with what we were doing.

I know that those peasants from the other side came to steal the grains from the railway cars, which were in between. What did Praljak do in such a situation? Do you know that?

Well, no, I wasn't at the train station but I know there was something... but at that time ... I know they came armed in the uniforms to the railroad cars, and the boys who were at the station fired.

That is another thing.

Yes, yes. But this that the civilians came and stole the grain – I don't know.

Well, tell me this: you mentioned aiming tools, relatively firing on the other side. How did the targets on the other side get selected?

Well, mostly the boys who were up there scouting would give the co-ordinates, mostly they gave the co-ordinates for spots where the fire came from. Because I have no use to fire thin mine thrower somewhere else into some empty region – it the enemy entered into a row of houses there, as it was the case. Normally we would aim for it.

And what was the situation with firing, unnecessary demolition well was it possible that some of our men arbitrarily fire on some houses?

No.

Why that could not happen?

Well, it couldn't happen because at the time we didn't have at disposal as many grenades as cetniks did, to start with. Every grenade had to have the... Praljak did the same. I even used to get mad at him, when he allowed the self propelled artillery unit to fire onto Gornji Hrastovac – but only three grenades into the transmitter station, because by the transmitter station there was a tank which would fire two grenades and retreat behind transmitter station. Then there was another house there it had two stories, and Praljak allowed only three grenades. And I was thinking to tell the crew to level that station with the ground. There I just didn't... I even yelled to him: "Old man, let the boys do their job..." but he wouldn't let them.

Was that only because of the ammunition, due to lack of grenades or ...

No, no, no. Well believe, he, he was thinking deeper than us who did... Because there was the civilian population, Serbian population, and Croatian, there were old men and all of that. He knew what he was doing.

It means he didn't allow to...

No, he didn't allow bombardment of unnecessary targets or without just cause – which he didn't allow.

Tell me one more thing. When the Montenegrin reserve entered, or Banjaluka Corpus, I don't know who, entered the station, our boys retreated and in about an hour's time came back again. Praljak was there. Were you there?

I was not at the station. I was at an altogether different end, B52.

Do we have anything else to say? Did I forget to ask something?

I simply don't know what to say. The man like a man = he appealed to me, and as long as I'm alive will carry him in my heart as the commander. My commander. And he is, because I had the honor to go to war with him in this our homeland war, he is the only general for me. There.

May of the year 2005.