

ANTE IVANKOVIĆ

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We are plugged in. I would ask that at the beginning of this recording, you introduce yourself. Therefore, your name and surname, date and place of your birth, occupation and place of residence?

My name is Ante Ivanković. I was born in Bijelo Polje by Mostar 04.08.41. In this damned war I was the chief engineer and I had that role basically through the entire war.

Alright. Tell me what you were the chief of engineering of? The squadron? In...?

The HVO.

The chief of engineering of the HVO?

HVO in the Main headquarters.

And you were there during the entire war, is that right?

Yes.

Alright. I am an agent in this defense team of Slobodan Praljak, and the reason for our conversation is that indictment which has arisen in The Hague. I am most interested, very specifically, did you and where did you, in what circumstances meet with General Praljak during that war?

During the war very...often I met with General Praljak, but always in some sort of a group. It was never by himself, let's say; that I spoke with him, etc. But I knew Praljak when he would give specific instructions, tasks for a larger group of people...we had to fulfill these specific tasks. And there were maybe ten or so instances like that. I remember him as a very, very authoritative man. The feeling was always that he was very...intellectual very strong man, morally very strong. I listened to him. I have to mention this:..on one occasion there was maybe seven – eight people there. And he was saying something about the situation and he was announcing that this, what was happening to us, one small dot in the world on which the gaze of the whole world is focused. Because there exist a number of war conventions etc., and laws of war, and all the rest, that we must take into account not making any errors. Because everything is being seen. Everything is being observed.

What was he thinking about then? Can you tell me, then, what he was thinking about when he said that errors cannot be made?

He was thinking that we, as people, as executers of specific tasks, would not be doing some stupid thing. We just made, for instance, a workable...I remember him saying: and if any one of you imprisoned a soldier, you do not have the right to even question him. Why would you be questioning him? You have your duty. You know the way...A soldier knows how to deal with a prisoner and he gives himself over to the department which will then carry out the interview with him and so. And that no one should take it upon himself...He was always mentioning that, that no one should take the law in his hands, and I don't know, all kinds of things have happened. For instance, this or that could have occurred, and he ...Because I know that. And we all knew that. He would say that, that no one of us should do anything stupid or take the law into one's...

Therefore, if I understand you correctly, that means that he told you about how you should act towards prisoners...

Towards prisoners, towards people, towards anyone...anyone. Because war is war. A person can find himself in any type of situation where he is the superior, on our...If one finds oneself superior, don't do that. In other words, not to assert yourself in any way.

Alright. It is clear to me that you, and you have told me even before we plugged in the dictaphone, that you have already forgotten the dates. A lot of time has passed. Please tell me, was that what Praljak said at some official meeting or...?

Well that occurred...two – three times in official rooms, but often, very often – we would meet like this as a group in the field, or somewhere, on the street, he always, that is the honest truth, he always mentioned, warned about the conventions and that we were under the magnifying glass of the world.

That was not one time?

No. That happened almost regularly...

So that happened many times and...

Many times.

... at times in official areas...

At times occasionally...occasionally...

...at times unofficially...like this?

Yes.

And how did his words echo among the people? How did the people receive his words these words of his?

He was an authoritative man and people respected him, and exactly because of that, because he was an extremely honest and moral man. And he was very...I mean he was a triple, how did we call him, triple intellectual. He was full of some sort of moral sparks. He was always so scintillating. And we were lucky to have such a commander and that he could always give you advice, give you some of his thoughts – where you were uncertain. He was always there to give instruction which was always accepted and it was human. It was always human.

Does that mean, that if people turned to general Praljak, does that mean that they believed him?

All of the people believed him, because he is honest. He is honest and he did not play favourites, from what we saw. He understood the war and all of this...all this adversity. He says: - This is an adversity for all of us and we have to behave like humans. You always have to be a man. Those are his attitudes, his declarations in conversation like that. You always have to be a man! Because he always emphasized: this isn't somewhere in some corner, here- the focus of the world is on us.

Alright, those were Praljak's attitudes. But how did Praljak behave in a situation where someone violated those codes of behaviour*?**

Well now, I didn't have the opportunity for him...that someone was on report with him, but I know that people would...they wouldn't gladly...they wouldn't feel good nor would they wish

to go to him on report. Because I know...we knew that...what kind of person he was, what his attitudes were, what kind...

What was he like, let's say, alright, you weren't there in that situation, but did you hear from other people when he would...How do it look when those, how you say, reports were happening and things were not how they should have been? How did Praljak solve that?

Praljak was, I knew this from conversation, Praljak was decent...decent, and he was strict. He was strict and people...But he was professional, even though he would say that he was never a soldier, but he is so smart that he...logic, that he knows how a soldier should conduct himself. In other words, and since I served as a soldier and I knew the rules of that army and the moral codes and all of that. He is exactly that which I heard over there, he was saying exactly that. Because I suppose from that archive of his, that broad understanding of his, he was able to give advice from all areas. And people respected him, especially intellectuals – those who knew what was going on.

At that time you gave the lawyer Mrs. Niki Pinter your statement about the occurrences surrounding the Old bridge.

Yes.

Is that right?

Yes.

Can you relate to me what you remember, just to broaden the scope...?

Let's say, those timelines I...

*****arrangements of course***?**

I cannot remember exact dates, I only know that it was...it was summer perhaps. The weather was warm. Ljubo Perić, that was the man who dealt with the logistics, he was possibly the chief of logistics, and he stated to me: Praljak instructed that the Old bridge was at great risk of being harmed, of being damaged and that in a specific way it can...I was baffled about where he got that from, really...since I was an engineer, I knew in what manner certain things could be protected and how those rounds can be activated, the ones which explode when the button is reached. And he said that we could protect that with boards, that we should take care to protect it in some way. Considering I was the chief of engineering in the HVO and Božo ***** was the chief of engineering of the headquarters of the municipality of Mostar. I knew that Božo was also a well-versed engineer and he...we served in the JNA. We finished that as senior reserves. I related that to Božo. Me and Božo organized that, and Božo managed the situation. Now, I cannot remember: were there two trucks, or one truck filled with five centimeter boards. That is five centimeters thick. And from an engineering perspective, which we had...there were about forty or so people, at nighttime – under the greatest of dangers...let's say, we dragged ourselves to the bridge with the truck. We left the truck in a sheltered area – behind a building. We lined up the people one next to the other and the board went from one shoulder to another, let's say. And the people there...And that went very quickly. Let's say, because the bridge had a metal railing, then those boards could reach from end to end. In essence, a roof was created over them...and you had to bend to get through. That was considerably good protection. Because the grenades were falling. And while we were setting up we were showered with rounds two- three times. But luckily, no one perished that time. I heard during some other occasion, when they

were putting something on the rubber tubes that a man perished. And now I remember that Praljak – also gave that command – that they put the rubber tubes on the sides.

So that was on the second occasion? That did not happen then?

That did not happen then. Not then – but on some other occasion...I heard, he said: a man died. Afterwards. And then I learned that the rubber tubes were placed there. Now I just, I cannot remember: was it on both sides, in any case – those rubber tubes, automobile tires were placed one next to another. That was exceptionally good protection.

That was all undertaken to protect the Old bridge?

To protect it. That is a cultural rarity, and architectural, and that feature...

******and Praljak's command****?**

And Praljak's command to me was...first...and I heard that Praljak said: -one of my men perished today. I know he was not in our assignment. That means, he was that commander that that be shielded more...

**You don't know how much time passed between the time you set up the boards and the
***?**

That was not a lot of time, but I cannot remember that right now, really, was that ten, twenty days, or a month. Now I cannot...Or was that even shorter. I cannot...

That is the time when the četniks targeted the bridge, is that right?

Yes, yes.

In other words that was* to protect the bridge during the time of the četnik attacks?**

Yes, yes.

Tell me, in the time after that, therefore, first the Muslims and Croatsians were together, after that, problems arise, tensions, and so on...

Yes, yes.

According to the declarations of many witnesses that was the time in which efforts were made to avoid conflict.

Yes.

Did you at that time have any contact with Praljak and how did Praljak behave in these situations when tensions between Muslims and Croatsians started arising?

You see, it is in those days, when those tensions between us grew – those of us who were together, I...I don't have anything in my memory that there...that I was very...in contact...that I saw Praljak. But I know how it was later. Let's say, we could hardly wait for it to be over.

When the conflict was over, I know...I watched Praljak how happy he was that that was finished between these two peoples – who were unfortunately pulled into a mutual conflict. And until then, I know that we had, mainly Bosnian people in the engineering squadron.

That means that you had that there?

Yes, yes. Wad had the engineering squad. And they were mainly Bosnian, because they came in a little later, because the Croatsians...They were all...it doesn't matter what kind of VES he has.

They were on the front lines, in battle. And then later, because they kept entering, we didn't have

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the ability, let's say- so we had to look for engineers. And, indeed, we had ten- fifteen Bosnian people. They were mainly engineers or technicians by trade, who finished school in the reserves, or were engineers in the JNA.

Until when were they with you?

Until the moment of that conflict, the attack which surprised us. We didn't follow that...

On the camp?

Yes, there was an attack. We didn't know who was attacking. It was such a surprise, unexpected, at least for us – who were soldiers. We didn't know those political – all the agreements, the relations, and I don't know what else. That surprised everyone. And then shortly after we found out what it was all about.

When were they there until...?

They were, and they really were...I can commend them, they completed tasks correctly, and everything else.

There were no warnings? Could you...?

Look, it was...Because we were in the 10th elementary school, located there, it was...we started to notice that they started putting up signs of the Armija, that the signs replaced...not replaced. On one arm HVO, on the other arm...But that did not bother us. Honestly, that did not...

There were no problems there then?

No, no. Because they belonged...Alright, we say: the Armija of B-H and the HVO are both fighting for the same thing – to free and protect the land. And then it was like this...the signs

were of some sort and then, they left before this came. They slowly, like withdrew, like that. But that was politics, which we really did not enter into. I wasn't even interested in that. But I saw that people were deserting in one way or another. And only two or three stayed with us to the end.

And afterwards, what...?

And afterwards. They were...

...conflicts arose?

Yes at the very end of the war.

And where are those two or three men today?

That I do not know. I really do not know.

You have no contact with them?

I do not. As far as I am concerned, really...I only knew those people because I didn't...I grew up there but I did not live there. I have been living outside for twenty six years, I mean outside of Mostar. I was, I lived and worked in Stolac. And that is the generation let's say younger than mine and I knew those people only as soldiers. And I really have nothing negative to say about them. But probably **** some of those relations, some of those political relations, they slowly started deserting in some way. He is either sick or one thing or another. But I know that there was a few of them – three, I think, who stayed there, with us to the end.

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Mr. Ante, we have come to the end of the discussion. Have we left out anything important? Should we say any other important thing that has to do with general Praljak and your experiences with him?

Concerning, well, I could say...concerning general Praljak, he has, for me at least, but also to all people, especially intellectual people, remained in memory as someone who...If only all generals were like general Praljak. The Hague would not have to exist.

Thank you very much.

You are welcome.

Zagreb, March 2008

ANTE IVANKOVIĆ

Ante Ivanković
Kralja Tomislava 13
88000 Mostar

I, Ante Ivankovic, son of Mate, born 4.8.1941 in Bijelo Polje, in the municipality of Mostar, with a residence in Mostar, Kralja Tomislava 13, in the collection of defense of Slobodan Praljak, against whom is a charge brought before the international court of justice for war crimes that occurred in the region of the former Yugoslavia, have been warned to tell the truth that are facts as I know them, give the following

AFFADAVIT

In June of 1992, I served as Chief of engineering in the HVO of the Municipal headquarters of Mostar.

In the afternoon hours of June 8, 1992, I received a command from Mr. Ljubo Peric that during the evening and until the morning, and because of the historical significance of the structure, that we must protect the Old Bridge from enemy artillery, which was then the JNA. Mr. Perić indicated to me that he received that command from Slobodan Praljak.

The command I received from Mr. Perić I relayed to Božo Pehar who was a member of the engineering squadron. I knew that he would, in the chaos that ruled the city because of the unrelenting shelling of Mostar by the JNA and the impossible communications with the neighbouring squadrons of the HVO, nevertheless find a way to complete the command, secure and protect the bridge, and all because of his skillfulness, resourcefulness and good understanding of Mostar.

Božo Pehar secured a truck full of 5 cm thick boards, which are the thickest boards. There were just enough boards to complete the task.

The engineering squadron of the Municipal headquarters of Mostar, 40 people, approached in the night at around 22:00 hours on 8.6.1992 in order to fulfill the command. The assignment is completed in 3 to 4 hours, and every member of the group carried a board for 10 meters. The boards were heavy, and we could not drive the truck closer to the bridge to protect us from being uncovered by the enemy. Although we worked in the night, our lives were in danger as there was repeated shelling surrounding us; however we completed our task by 1 am on 9.6.1992.

Despite the artillery fire, we covered the bridge with the boards, shielding it along the railing, one board at a time. With that we succeeded in minimizing the effect of the shelling by the soldiers of the JNA, by receiving the grenades on the boards rather than directly on the body of the bridge. Only the side of the bridge was exposed, so the eventual risk of destruction was minimized. Until then, the bridge was under artillery fire and because of that, Slobodan Praljak issued the command.

I have been warned of the consequences of giving a false statement and do with my signature certify that my affidavit is truthful, voluntary, and according to my best knowledge and memory.

In Mostar, 13.5.2005.

Ante Ivankovic