

# IVICA JUKIĆ-KINFA

**Sisak**

**May 25th, 2005**

The voice recording and the transcript of the interview are recorded on the CD  
marked as follows

## SUNJA 2.

The voice recording of the interview is registered as follows

*jukicivica*

15.2 MB

duration – 47:46

The interview was conducted in Sisak, in a coffee bar

**At the beginning, please introduce yourself: your name, surname, date and place of birth.**

Ivica Jukić, February 21st, 1967, Sisak.

**Can you hear me well? Is the noise disturbing you?**

I can hear you.

**Please state your occupation?**

I am a waiter by occupation, and now I am a retired officer of the Croatian army (cro: Hrvatska vojska).

**Can we make a short introduction? Where were you at the beginning of the war?**

Before the Homeland war (cro: Domovinski rat) I was employed at the Sisak Ironworks (cro: Željezara Sisak). At the very beginning, that is in November of 1990, I joined the Croatian Police forces. After completing a police officers'

course, in July of 1991 I transferred to the Croatian National Guard (cro: Zbor narodne garde) and joined the 2. Guard brigade.

**You participated in defensive actions in Sunja?**

I was defending Sunja for 10 months, which means some...

**When did you join?**

In August of 1991. At the end of August.

**And where were you stationed?**

I was stationed in Sunja... we called it the Dozen (cro: Dvanaestica). It was on the Railway station.

**It must have been a very comfortable position, was it not?**

That is correct.

**Very good, comfortable...**

Following that I was the commander of the Intervention station (cro: Interventna postaja), meaning the entire \*\*\* Sunja.

**Can we make a short description of that initial period? What was Sunja like as you arrived, how was the defense organized?**

Well, the organization in Sunja only started during August, an organization of higher standard... Dubravko Klarić was the commanding officer at the time. He was a police inspector, but was appointed the commanding officer.

**Not Peša?**

No, it was Dubravko Klarić at that particular time, we called him Duc. Žarko Peša took the post after him, and following him, Slobodan Praljak was appointed the commanding officer in Sunja.

**How was defense of Sunja organized before Praljak? Was it unstable, or stable, chaotic – how was it?**

Well, it was not chaotic. By my judgement, defense was not stable, because various units were stationed in Sunja. On the first line of defense, by the Railway station, down to... we called it \*\*\*, down to the Saw mill, the 2. Brigade held it's positions, members of the Infantry troop – that was my unit. I was the \*\*\* \*\* of the reserve police unit of the Croatian army at the lateral position.

**Praljak arrived in early September of 1991, is that right?**

That is correct.

**When did you see Praljak for the first time? How did your first meeting look like?**

Well, the first time I met General Praljak... I was commanding the Dozen, that was the outermost defense line on the right side of Sunja, at the Railway station. That was the first time that I saw a man coming to inspect our position.

**Was he wearing his famous trousers?**

He was wearing his trousers, and some hiking shoes...

**How did you react the first time you saw him?**

Well, I was... It is hard to say at this moment... We were all in our uniforms, we were members of the Croatian Army – and there came this man, wearing civilian clothes and claiming he is our new commanding officer.

**How did that appear to you?**

Well, as a person, he appeared serious enough at the moment, but to me he seemed a bit unreal, with that beard of his. A tall man, strong, huge – to me he looked like an alpinist. At that moment we thought that a hiker joined us.

**Some say that the joke spread about him being a film director, an actor...**

Well, yes, some people were saying that. People were looking at it with \*\*\* here comes a man \*\*\* the officer commanding over defense of Sunja, having no battle experience at that moment, unlike us, who had the previous battle experience. Not only me, the rest of the men also. People that in some way... there was not many of us, our troop consisted of 35 – 38 men at the time, I think.

**When Praljak first came and took the commanding post, what was the first thing he tried to do?**

The first thing he noticed... Speaking from the experience I had with General Praljak, he read quite a few books on \*\*\* armies, on war. The first thing he did, the thing he insisted on, and the thing I took a big share in helping him with, along with Crni, and \*\*\*, was to monitor and inspect the reservist units that were in that moment conducting \*\*\* of their positions. And we, being at the first line of defense, we were doing it along with them. Bunkers were built of \*\*\*, \*\*\* was brought in, the material was taken away... This was not provided at that point.

**So, Praljak insisted on building bunkers and similar things – what was the situation on that before his arrival?**

As he arrived, he noticed...

**Were there cases of people fighting from their backyards?**

Not only that there were such cases – that was the reality. People were not only defending the houses, they were stationed inside houses, there were no bunkers, no trenches... So the first thing he insisted on was to fortify all our positions, to protect us from artillery attacks, mortars, and similar – and also, you know, as protection from infantry attacks.

**Were people opposing it? Did actions on building fortifications go smoothly, or were you facing problems?**

Well, no, it was war. It did not go smooth. Some people protested, they did not think it was necessary, they believed it was safer just being in a house, and so on. But, all in all, he was very persistent about it – if I may go off the subject a little - not only in defending Sunja, he demanded the same to be done in Žemen, Bistrač, Bobovac, all the surrounding villages actively involved in defending Sunja.

**Were you present on the occasion he made a threat to kill some cows?**

Cows?

**Cows, yes, because he did not know how to force people to start digging bunkers.**

Yes, I believe that was the situation in Sunjska Greda, because some people were... they were saying that "there is no need for constant sentry duties, no need to spend time in bunkers, because they have other things to do, to \*\*\* \*\* the cows, mares, horses", and similar. After all, \*\*\* hear him saying that to anyone, but there were a lot of incidents and situations where he specifically asked for... I know that there were situations where he would hold people in custody, he would send them to detention for refusing to perform duties they were assigned to do.

**He started sending people to prison?**

Yes, that is correct, he enforced that by bringing in the military police that was answering to him, and also \*\*\* the police forces stationed there. Well, people were... there was opposition, like I said, from the active personnel, from the

police, and also from reservist formations that were stationed in Sunja at that time.

**Tell me, what were the top offences people were sent to prison for? What irritated Praljak the most, what made him upset?**

Well, as far as I recall, the thing he resented the most was alcohol. I know some people - the now deceased Kosta, for instance - he sent to prison over alcohol. There were other situations as well: disobeying his orders, not doing what you were ordered to do, or not conforming yourself to the goal of fortifying our defense lines. Right now I cannot recall all situations, but I remember one that happened in Benković. He was the commanding officer, and when faced with opposition, he dealt with it very smoothly and elegantly, and simply sent them to detention. People threatened him later on and resented the arbitrariness on his part, but they failed to realize he did so for our own good, to the advantage of everyone there.

**How did Praljak react in those isolated incidents – however rarely, they did happen - when people would try to take belongings from abandoned houses?**

He was very strict on that too. I know of certain occasions when people would take things, like televisions, washing machines, furniture, everything. It was immediately taken back.

**Did you witness such events?**

Well, I was present at one occasion, I think, where they took some furniture, living-room furniture, wall-units, closets – it was quite \*\*\*. That man was sent

to detention, and I don't know what happened to him later on, but I do know that he (Praljak) did not allow such things to happen, I actually don't think that General Praljak knew about that particular incident – in any case, the man fared well. It was General Praljak's luck that the only way out of Sunja was the ferry. He cleverly appointed people to run the ferry, thus controlling who was coming in and out of Sunja.

**Praljak had his intervention groups. Were you a member of such a group?**

There was one intervention group in the entire defense structure in Sunja. The first commanding officer, when I was on the position, was Crnković Miroslav – Crni, and I was appointed as \*\*\* commanding officer after him. One more group was formed, \*\*\* and his team were in that group, they had mortars. They would perform a considerable portion of tasks General Praljak would order, either to us or them.

**Praljak would often join the intervention groups himself?**

Yes, he would.

**Did you come along on some such mission?**

With Praljak?

**Yes.**

Well, I joined general Praljak in Žreme, I went to \*\*\*...

**In Žreme? As people abandoned their positions?**

They abandoned the positions, that is correct. \*\*\* was not with me during the attack on Bobovac, I took the men then.

**Was that the time they came in with the cows?**

That is correct, that was when they entered that little lane, but like I said, one of the situations was in Žreme, when people abandoned their positions. Under my judgement, there was no real attack there \*\*\* General Praljak, if I recall well, I was with him in the vehicle, we were driving in a 128 (Zastava 128, a motor-car model).

**His famous 128.**

Yes, these people had a bit too much to drink, so they \*\*\* I believe they fired their weapons and scared each other – it seemed like an attack, but I think nothing really happened.

**But as you arrived, people already abandoned their positions?**

Yes, they retreated, they fled, so we chased them and returned them to their positions. I know that he got terribly angry at that moment, he yelled, he demanded to speak with the commanding officer, he sent people to detention, and similar.

**What did he said on that occasion? What were his words?**

He had a very explosive personality, and in provoking and stressful situations like this one his reaction was always express and dangerous, he would threaten to send people to detention or chase them out of Sunja, or similar. By my

judgement, and by judgement of quite a lot of people I have spoken to, he was volatile when he saw that something was wrong, that people are avoiding their duties. That they don't do what they are supposed to. In such situations his reaction was dangerous, he would yell, threaten, shout, and so on.

**Did people fear him then?**

I think yes, because he is a tall, strong man, a bulky man, and he had a powerful voice, he was loud, and so on. I would attend his meetings.

**His briefings?**

We would come from Firemen's hall in Sunja. He simply forced people to always be alert and to never relax, it made no difference whether it was a quiet day, without any attacks, or we had 500 grenades falling on Sunja. He constantly demanded from people to be aware of the situation we were in, and of the importance Sunja had in that moment.

**Tell me what happened after Praljak left – he left Sunja in early March of 1992? You continued to keep touch with him. In what way?**

Well, General Praljak left in the beginning of 1992, in early March. I was not in touch with him at that moment, but I heard he had a mission in BiH (Bosnia and Herzegovina), to organize the defense of Mostar, that city was in a severe situation at that time, judging by the news and the media. In early April a group of volunteers was formed, and Miroslav Crnković, the commander of our group at the time, took the commanding post in the new group. Ivica Pandža was also there, and another nine or ten people, I don't know exactly, people who in that moment were members of the Kostajnica Battalion. We took a minibus and went

to Herzegovina, to help enforcing their positions. We were doing what ever needed to be done. What ever General would order us to do, we would do it.

### **What were his orders then?**

Well we found him. He was at the office of the commander in Čitluk. We came to him, and the first few days we were staying at the hotel in Čitluk. During that time we were in touch with him the whole time, where he wanted us... Basically, our mission there and our goal was to go where he would send us, to pass our battle experience from Sunja to the people who were there at the beginning of the conflict with the Serbs. Our first task was to go to Mostar: I went to (now deceased) Tihomir \*\*\*, Crnković went to Rudnik – that is the part of Mostar – while Ivica Pandža went to Mahala, which was the Muslim part of the city, right by the North camp barracks. As far as I remember, there were two barracks in Mostar, the South camp, and the North camp, because there were no fortified positions at that moment. Mostar is positioned in an oval valley, surrounded by hills and \*\*\*. Situation was very severe in the city, there was no food, there was no anything. The rest of the members can confirm that, those who were with me \*\*\*\* sharing meat paste, food was prepared in a hotel, food for the army, for the people on the front lines – one kilo of beans had to be shared among 300 people, and so on. So judging by all that, situation was very difficult. People were poorly armed, they only had \*\*\* short or long barrel rifles, there was no \*\*\* weapons, \*\*\* weapons was only starting to arrive, the first shipment went to the deceased Tihomir Mišić, that was two or three weeks after I arrived in that battalion, to that position \*\*\*. I remember that people did not even know how to handle these weapons. There was a lack of everything: optical devices, everything. There was a basement, right beneath Hum, that I presume was serving as some kind of a nuclear bomb shelter. It was probably built by the

former JNA (Yugoslav People's Army; cro. Jugoslavenska narodna armija), I don't know who built it, and they put the weapons down there.

**What was your position?**

Well, I was with the late Mišić. Various people were there: volunteers from Vukovar, some locals, there were a lot of Muslims I made friends with, we became war companions and were visiting the positions together, we went...

**There was no difference, is that right?**

No. For instance, during the night I would stay at the place owned by two Muslim brothers, we shared our food for almost four weeks.

**Were there any clues of what will happen later on?**

No, there was absolutely no signs that a conflict could arise between Croats and Muslims. At that time we were together, united in defending Mostar. That was the case for \*\*\*, as well as for the mine and for \*\*\*, and the entire city, there were no differences – we would go and have a drink together, we would eat together, we shared food, ammunitions...

**How did the defense in Mostar at that time seemed to you, a person with battle experience?**

There was the same lack of interest: they did not see the need for fortifying the positions or bunkers. Mostar and the surrounding area are full of rocks. They thought it is easier to hide behind a rock than to dig a trench or build a bunker to hide in. They were throwing hand grenades from the the top of the hill. I

remember joining Crnković and General Praljak on a meeting in Grude, with Mr. Mate Boban, the appointed President of the Republic of Herzeg Bosnia (cro: Republika Herceg Bosna), the late General Janko Bobetko, Mr. Miroslav Tuđman, and so on. I cannot recall whether or not Mr. Šušak was also present. Mainly, General Praljak invited me to come in and present a brief assessment of the defense situation in Mostar, with regards to safety, which meant the fortifying activities and the situation in general... at that moment I sincerely said that the situation was catastrophic, that it was very severe, and that we were brought in to work on that and to help those people with our experience. That the city should not be defended out of houses or buildings – instead, we should approach the enemy as close as possible to ensure a secure and stable defense of Mostar.

**After saying that, you left the room?**

I left, I don't know what was the result of that. I was talking to General Praljak in the car.

**Was Praljak angry?**

After that meeting?

**During that time in general – as well as after that meeting – considering the situation and all his attempts to bring order into the situation?**

As I recall, he was extremely dissatisfied with the existing situation, not only in Mostar, but also in other places that were facing conflicts with Serbs. I know, I recall that he was saying there is a lot of opposition. I know that he was faced

with many problems in the next stage, when I was there, he had many problems with the Tutić group, with the Convicts Battalion (cro: Kažnjenička bojna).

**But that was later?**

Yes, that was the second time we met. At that time, Croats and Muslims were united in defending the areas we were present in.

**Can it be said that Praljak was in fact trying to do in Mostar the same thing he did in Sunja?**

Absolutely yes.

**That is, was he successful in doing the same thing he did in Sunja...**

It is hard to compare, because Mostar is a larger city, while Sunja was a small town. Mostar had the equal amount of territory for defense purposes, and it was surrounded by hills like Sunja was. By my judgement, General Praljak was trying to copy the situation and the goals he achieved in Sunja to Mostar.

**But it was much more difficult here?**

It was more difficult. I don't know, I guess people were skeptical because he was a Croatian Army general trying to achieve something in Bosnia and Herzegovina. People probably did not even know \*\*\*. At that moment, at least according to my judgement, and that of my colleagues Crnković and Pandža, commanding officers stationed in Mostar behaved like they were gods, each of them holding their own part of the city, their own precinct...

**And their were holding to that?**

Yes, and they did not care about other positions – I know that he had put a lot of work into trying to create connections between them, persuading them to keep contacts at all time and make them realize that it is important for each of them to know what is happening in other parts of the city.

**A short while ago, as I was talking to Crni, he told me that dividing the city to Croatian and Muslim parts happened at a later time, it was not present while you were down there – that is, that Praljak was, during the time we are talking about, simply working on defending the city as a whole.**

Well, I know that he never made such distinctions between people... I am not saying this because it can be beneficial for him, for his defense. I know that many Muslims \*\*\* and Serbs were living in Sunja, and that he never spoke of any of them in terms of their nationalities. He simply tried to organize those people into one whole, to make them function like one orchestra where everyone is playing their instrument. Basically, that means that everyone had their tasks. And if they failed to do their share \*\*\*\*\*, they had to pay, it made no difference whether they were Croats or Muslims. They would end up in military detention, or \*\*\*\*\* from Sunja or I don't know what, but I know that he never allowed any \*\*\* things, he did not allow people to contradict him or to undermine the achievement of the goal he had set out for himself.

**Tell me, for how long did you stay in Mostar on that occasion?**

About one whole month.

**And after that you returned?**

After that we returned to Croatia, and then in 1993. they sought volunteers to go to front lines in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

**Just one moment, was Posavina not before that?**

Posavina was in 1992, July.

**That is correct. You went there... Crni was telling me how chaotic and difficult was that period.**

It was the same there... It is my belief that General Praljak was copying his experience from Sunja to every other place he went to. He always had to struggle with local power-wielders, with all those various units who had their commanders and were simply refusing to obey the chief commanding officer. During that period General Praljak was the officer commanding the defense of Bosanski Brod – from Žeravac up to the Greek cemetery (cro: Grčko groblje). I remember one situation where we were present, when the entire unit deserted their positions.

**Where? In Posavina?**

In Posavina. They abandoned their positions, and General Praljak went to the troop commander, Kruno Cavrić. I was also present as he said "we must hurry to the Greek cemetery, the entire unit abandoned their positions". The sun was setting, we took Lada Niva (a motor-car model) and made our way to... For about 7 or 8 kilometers not a living soul could be seen along the road, absolutely no one, and then we encountered members of some brigade, simply carrying their weapons over their shoulders or in their hands and leaving. Going toward

Bosanski Brod. We stopped the vehicle and ask them who the commanding officer was, and they said "what commanding officer?" So we asked them where they have been. They were up by the Greek cemetery, and then we forced them... I remember that occasion... General Praljak was extremely angry \*\*\*  
\*\*\* he was yelling at them, trying to force them back to the positions they abandoned, insisting that they had put us too at risk, the members of the Second brigade, as well as all other units that were involved in defending Bosanski Brod and the villages included in the defense ...

**What unit was that?**

I really cannot recall what particular unit that was, but we encountered about 100 people, moving in groups of 15, 20 people.

**Was it dangerous to do what Praljak did at that moment? Was there a risk that some of these people might shoot at him?**

By all means!?! They threatened to kill both him and us. We pulled our weapons, we had long barrels and we chased them back. We did not threaten to kill them, but we did say that they should have not done what they did, and that they must return to their positions, that these positions were not lost because according to our info the army – JNA and the chetniks – did not take control over them yet... And then they started returning, but...

**You managed to get them back?**

Yes, but like I said, it was a very dangerous situation. There was a possibility of General Praljak getting killed, or myself, or Kruno Cavrić... The situation was...

**Was Praljak brave in such situations?**

He was! Absolutely! He really behaved like a commanding officer... Let me get back to our arrival to Bosanski Brod. The first night after we arrived, we went to the front line – General Praljak leading us himself. He took the head, guiding us on foot to the first lines on Žeravac, to show us where the enemy was stationed. At that point I did not even know whether he had an assistant, being a general... I remember that occasion. There was a sort of a joke we shared among us, myself, Crni, Kruno and the General: "You, a general, are leading us to the front line, where people are getting killed, fleeing... Why do you need to return them? Isn't there someone else to do that for you?" I simply have a feeling that he was not willing to stay in the shadow while someone else is doing his job instead of him.

**Not only that, but he was always stepping forward, wanting to know everything, to have full control... That is what makes him different from other commanding officers, and that is his constantly occurring feature. Fine. Tell me, when you went to Mostar for the first time, did you carry some kind of weapons?**

Well, we carried our weapons, our personal weapons, meaning the short and the long barrels, and some were also carrying hand grenades.

**But there was nothing else?**

We carried one "osa" and couple of "zoljas". We took what ever we had, because we had the information that the situation with weapons and everything else down there...

**After Posavine you returned...**

I returned to the Lađarska barracks. I got a two-day leave and after a two-day leave I was sent to the front line in Dubrovnik. There I spent about three and a half, or four months, down on the Dubrovnik front line. That means, from July to October of 1992.

**And after that?**

After that I met General Praljak, when I joined a group of some hundred men as a volunteer, to leave for Mostar.

**Conflicts with Muslims already started by that time?**

Conflicts between Croats and Muslims were already happening. That means, not only the city of Mostar, but all the settlements on that line. Because, judging from the situation with mainly Muslim population and so on...

**What was the situation then?**

The situation was very difficult. People were abandoning their positions. As soon as someone got killed, another one got wounded – people were fleeing in groups. I know that he... It was the same situation as in Posavina: he was making people to return, he was not letting them abandon their positions. All the time he was encountering verbal conflicts, conflicts with commanders, and soldiers, as well as with the people from \*\*\*\*.

**Regardless of the conflicts that were happening, I know that Praljak was often saving people, women, children, passing convoys through... Did you witness any such situation?**

I cannot say I did. I know I was looking for him on two or three occasions, because we had our mission as members of the 2nd Guard Brigade (cro: 2. gardijska brigada), along with the group of Tigers (cro: Tigrovi, a brigade). I know I was looking for him, but he was constantly on the move. He was in Vakuf, or Central Bosnia, he was always in the fields. He was following all those talks about leaking here or there. Basically, he was always in the fields, spending all his time in restoring the positions and consolidating the army. I remember that during that time General Petković was stationed in Čitluk, along with another general, I cannot recall his name. I know that the situation was rather chaotic, there were many problems. They asked us to join the military police, to help them enforce discipline among the members of the HVO (cro: Hrvatsko vijeće obrane; Croatian Defense Council). I know that the members of the Convicts Battalion were causing a lot of problems.

**Praljak told you that?**

Yes.

**What kind of problems?**

The members of the Convicts Battalion were behaving like mercenaries, as if they are in a different country and this was not their own country, their own cities and villages. For performing the actions they performed, they simply... I remember that very well! There were a few people there with us. General Skender was with us in \*\*\*, where the Convicts Battalion got the order to attack

the village Brijeg (???) and some other positions – they were asking for money... I don't know how much they were asking per person, to perform combat actions – and that were the same positions they were holding previously, and then abandoned them.

**And then they expected to get paid?**

Right! They expected to get paid! I am sure it was very difficult for him then. He was not, I cannot say that he was willing to talk about that much. It even seemed that he was avoiding the subject when we would have a conversation. I had a feeling that he would simply skip to another subject, because... It was obvious that the members of the Convicts Battalion behaved like cowboys in that part of Herzegovina.

**Tell me, were there any convoys bringing aid to the Muslims during the time you were down there?**

You mean the second time, or?

**Yes, the second time you were there.**

Well, I couldn't say....

**You don't have that information?**

I don't have the information because I was not there, so I cannot tell...

**UNPROFOR convoys or something of that sort?**

No, I was not. Basically, we would go to places where people abandoned their position, to the positions that were lost, to regain control over those positions. I was not in a situation where I could say...

**Was there a situation you remember as being especially difficult... ?**

Well, there were situations when Muslims started attacking... Basically, there were two or three difficult situations. The first one happened when Muslims attacked the Hum hill over Mostar and took control over it. After that we organized an attack, regained control over those positions, but we had a lot of wounded men. The second situation happened in Vrđi, where we were facing the enemy, but also the elements: there were thunders! Some of the men got injured by thunders, it was a terrible storm, heavy shower, lightning, it was horror. The third situation happened in a village named Dobrošin (??), near Vakuf. It happened on Christmas day 1993. Three troops, I think they were Muslim troops, attacked Dobrošin, which is a village situated in a round valley, dominantly populated by Croats. Some 80 people were involved in defending that village, and it was a big area.

**Civilians were also present?**

Civilians were there, they saw us coming – that is, members of the 2nd Guard Brigade who came to help the local population... Because there were some information of a large-scale attack on the very Christmas day, I cannot really tell, but there were clues that the Muslims will put the maximum effort to take control over that village – which would allow them to approach Vakuf from the other side. Because we had control over one part of Vakuf, they controlled the other part. Basically, the fights lasted for five or six hours. It was a close combat, with anti-armor weapons, and other armaments... I think that the well-

known Muslim commander was commanding the attack, I believe that later he was murdered in the Netherlands, his name was Juka Prazina.

**Was Praljak present in these situations, the three situations you mentioned, was he near you?**

Well, I cannot tell where the General was at that moment, because I was not present. There simply was no time or place to meet. I know that on one occasion he was looking for me in Mostar. I don't know where I was, probably in the fields somewhere, and I was also looking for him on two or three occasions. He simply had duties he had to perform, and so on.

**Fine. How long did you stay there?**

We stayed there until 1994, I returned in February of 1994. I actually returned about 15 days before the entire group of volunteers involved in actions in Mostar got back.

May 2005