

MARKO LUJIĆ

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May we start? We're on. Well, I will kindly ask you to introduce yourself at the beginning of the interview. Please tell me your name, surname, date and place of birth, and what is your profession?

My name is Marko Lujić, called Markiša. I was born on September 12, 1949, in Jardol, Vitez municipality. I am an explosive expert.

Explosive expert?

Mr. Marko, tell usreal staff, is that right? Mr. Marko, tell me how

Yes... the real staff.did the war begin? Where were you at the beginning of the war? Tell us shortly about that and give us some kind of a description of the entire affair?

My war path started at 4th Split brigade. Immediately at the very beginning I joined the Croatian National Guard (ZNG). Later on I was in the Guard Brigade. When my commanders at the 4th Brigade as well as Navy units in Sveta Letica realised that I knew my job they sent me to the Ministry of Defence in Zagreb where I spent a year making rockets in Kočari.

When was that, which year? When did you leave Zagreb?

I left Zagreb, let's say, temporarily. I was always around on terrains, going everywhere. Officially I left at the middle of 1992. I left Zagreb because the conflicts started in Bosnia and Herzegovina and I received an order from Mr. Šušak to contact Mate Boban in Grude who would transport me later on to Vitez.

That is how you arrived to Vitez?

I arrived to Vitez.

That was the middle of 1992. Tell me, as a man who had former experience in war matters, you had been serving in 4th brigade previously, what was the situation like in Vitez at the moment you came there? What was your opinion of Vitez at the time?

Well, I found that Vitez was the most organised defence town, more than any other town in Croatia.

What was the reason for that?

Well you see, there were 10 people in Vitez who were well aware of the war situation and who worked in military industry in the factory "Vitezit". We knew that we could do a lot. We produced explosives and in such a way we helped the Croatian army and territorial defence, as well as the Muslims who had already waged war against Serbs in some parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), and the Croatian Defence Council (HVO). Our production helped the HVO, I will not say the most, but we helped the Croatian army as well as HVO to some 65%, while 30-35% of our work production went to territorial defence (TO) and the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (AiBH).

Please tell me when you came to Vitez, „Vitezit" was operational. What was your duty there? What was your position at „Vitezit“?

When I came from Croatia, Mr. Ivica Šantić, Mayor of Vitez, invited me to his office and I told me that the Minister of Defence, Jerko Doka, appointed me to a position of a coordinator for military industry among the following military factories: „Vitezit“ in Vitez, „BNT“, „Bratsvo“ in Novi Travnik, and „Slavko Rodić“ in Bugojno.

In „Vitezit" ...

In „ Vitezit", that means the factories „Vitezit" in Vitez, „BNT" – that is „Bratstvo" in Novi Travnik and „Slavko Rodić" in Bugojno,

O.K. What does that mean? You were the coordinator for military industry. What was your job there?

My work was to distribute finished products, in agreement with the Bosniak side, as we had previously decided. Some of those products were delivered to the Croatian army, part was delivered to the HVO, and part to TO. In any case, my main task was making new products as well as to keep enough reserves here, in other words to take care about reserves. My task was to control that nothing was taken without my prior consent from these factories, although I believe that all kinds of things happened there, but that was my main duty.

Tell me, how long did you stay in the region as a coordinator for military industry?

Let's say, until the outbreak of the conflict between the Croats and the Muslims in the region. That was approximately a period of one year...maybe less, maybe eight months. In Busovača the war started on January 21 or 22. Perhaps it was, let's say, five or six months.

Until when, which month...?

Well, until the outbreak of the war between the Croats and the Muslims, then we entirely separated. There was no more...

What did you do then?

I became a head of the war production of the Vitez municipality when the conflict broke out in Vitez. In the meantime I was a head of the Cannon Division within the Vitez brigade. I was a part of the organisation within the Brigade.

Please tell me, explain to me what is exactly „Vitezit“ ... is that a factory, a production plant, what is it exactly?

„Vitezit“ is a in a broader sense of the word ... „Vitezit“ was formed by merging three companies. The old „Slobodan Princip Seljo“, then „Vitezit“ and „Sintevit“. „Slobodan Princip Seljo“ was a military factory, „Vitezit“ was a factory producing the so-called economic explosives and „Sintevit“ was a factory producing plastic masses. I spent my entire life working for SPS, that is „Slobodan Princip Seljo“, which we renamed „Vitezit“ after democratic elections and introduction of multi-party system. To conclude, we merged three different companies into a single one and called it „Vitezit“.

At the time of the conflict with the Serbs and later on with the Muslims, was „Vitezit" operational?

Yes!

It worked during the entire period?

Yes!

And now I am interested in the following: there was a period in which you said that Vitezit produced and distributed all that was necessary among TO, HVO and Croatian Army (HV). Who worked at Vitezit at the time? Who was in charge of its production plants?

At that time, all those who used to work there before the war still worked in production plants. That means Muslims, Croats and even Serbs. Even Serbs worked there.

I suppose that a large number of people worked there at the time? Did they work shifts?

No, they all worked only one shift, one shift only. However workers who specialised in production of materials and products for HVO, HV and TO worked shifts. That means, they worked full 24 hours.

What was, approximately, proportion of Croats and Muslims working there?

Ah, the same as it was before, do you understand. That means, approximately, half and half.

What happened later, when the conflict with the Muslims started?

Ah, after the outbreak of the conflict with the Muslims... Muslims stopped coming to work. In other words that meant that only Croats remained and worked.

They continued with their work in production plants?

Yes ... and then I, since that time... conflicts started on April 16 in the region, and I think that around May 3 we already organised war production with Croats only.

And distribution of products ceased?

And distribution of products ceased. We only defended ourselves from that moment on.

Good. Let us, a bit, go back to the period in the middle of 1992. You arrived to Vitez and said that Vitez was well organised, if I understood that all right?

Yes, yes.

What was the situation like regarding the army and formation of defence lines? What did the cooperation between the Croats and the Muslims who at the time still worked together look like, what was the atmosphere like?

Well, when I returned to Vitez, besides being a coordinator for three companies, I became a deputy commander of the Cannon Division within the Brigade. I know that I cooperated and worked together with division commanders in Travnik Brigade and Novi Travnik Brigade. I know that we shared howitzers 122mm, 152

mm ZIS (artillery), all those things they had in Novi Travnik etc. I know that I went

together with them to visit the terrain and look for appropriate positions for location of our artillery. The defence line was in direction towards Mokrnje facing Serbs and Teslić, as well as in direction of Donji Vakuf facing Vlašić. At that time we worked entirely together. Surely the Muslims were not organised as well as we were. They weren't well organised. They even attempted to do some things, but they understood the war differently from our people. Alija said himself when the village of Ravno was attacked. „This is not our war etc...“ The Muslims are people who listen to their leaders more than we Croats do. It has always been like that.

How did you concretely, in practical situation, see that they were poorly organised? Were there any problems because of that?

They were less organised ... you see, just to give an example, we knew at once where we would locate our artillery. We immediately knew where we would position our artillery. As soon as we dragged Noras (howitzers) from Travnik we knew where to put them. When Muslims were concerned we had to search for appropriate spots to put their artillery. They did not know where to put them while we on the other side had already determined the exact locations for our artillery. They had never planned anything in advance. I was in charge of finding the right positions and we had to search positions for them ...I remember some names of their commanders, some of those guys died. This is how I gathered that their organisation was not good. Regarding other issues, I do not know. I know some things regarding the production. They tried to organise production on their own, apart from “Vitezit” for their own purposes.

Really? When was that?

When we were still together.

Where did they organise that?

For example, I know of one case where we found, I do not know exactly how many, tones of explosives. Better to say nitro-glycerine was found down in Ahmić. It was found in cellars, the police went down there... They returned the staff back to the factory... Some people were charged because of that, in any case...

Where did they produce that, or how did they manage to get the stuff?

Well you see, regarding the production they were well organised. They worked in Zenica, Jablanica, Bihać, Tuzla etc. The experts from Vitez went to Tuzla and worked on those products, behind our backs.

Was all that done in secret, did they work on that secretly?

Well, I don't think that they worked in secret. But, as far as I know, there was not a single Croat employed there, and here at Vitezit factory worked half Croats and half Muslims that was the structure among workers.

And that means that such things happened during the time when Croats and Muslims still worked together?

Yes, while we were still together. That was in 1992.

Good, and how did you find out about that, did you find out about it when it actually happened, or later?

I knew about it, I cooperated with some people who worked for Armija, specifically for TO since I regularly met with the guys from Goražde. I carried capsules and military material in samarice* (simple wooden frames used for

loading and carrying cargo on one's back) in 1992 and distributed the goods in Vitez among TO, HVO and HV. Well that was for sure. Goražde had an entirely different approach to the war in comparison with Sarajevo... they definitely prepared themselves better because they understood that danger was coming... but as you know, what happened, happened.

Please tell me, describe your first encounter with General Praljak? Do you remember the occasion? Where did you meet him? What did the meeting look like? Did you know Mr. Praljak from before?

Praljak? I only read about him. I did not know him. However, I often went to Herzegovina... People, elderly people and young people often talked about him, his family and everything else. But I saw him for the first time in Travnik, when he came with the orders to prepare defence of Travnik against the Serbs.

Please tell me, when was that, approximately?

Well, I think that it happened immediately before the fall or during the fall of Jajce... I do not know exactly... He was sent with an order to organise the defence of Travnik, specifically the defence of central Bosnia.

And what did Praljak do in order to organise the defence? What were his activities and tasks related to establishing defence?

Well, Praljak gathered all competent people around him. He gathered all worthy Muslims and Croats in the army and at production plants and other places. I saw that he talked to the civilian authorities and to mayors. In any case, concerning the cooperation between Praljak and me, I know that he had ordered us to make a larger quantity of directional type Anti-personnel mines. Those mines were called "televizorke". He brought a picture of those mines, and at midnight, as soon as he

arrived to Vitez, Praljak immediately summoned the companies' directors: Mr. Mirko Pranjković, a director of TMH from Novi Travnik and Mr. Nikola Križanović, a director in Vitez. He gave them drawings and ordered them to produce that particular mine. I think that Mirko and Nikola both had problems with him at the time. They were showing off a bit, but he came with a clear command in his head and a will to execute it, and I can tell you that he was right. The fall of central Bosnia was threatening us. He made them consider things more seriously. I believe that if he had known that I was a coordinator at that time he would have called me as well. He probably did not know that. He didn't beat around the bush and directly contacted the top executives. When I found out about the whole affair the following day he had already called me because he found out about me. Nikola and Mirko did not understand the drawing, and were confused about it. When I saw the drawing I went to his office and told him that some things, I believed, were not in accordance with the profession. I pointed out the things that I would change and make even better etc...He received me at his office and started talking to me as he did to them. He simply said: "That has to be done like that". Then I argued with him and presented various arguments and explanations related to some things which wouldn't be able to function and work out according to the drawing. He accepted my opinion. Praljak accepted my professional opinion. Everything was arranged from that moment on and we produced the mine very soon. Everything was set for the work. He visited our defence line every day, improved it, organised mutual defence between TO and HVO in all areas. I think he succeeded in the end because the Serb army was stopped here in Travnik.

What other problems had to be solved? What were other problems regarding the mutual defence of TO and HVO faced by Praljak?

It is very difficult to say that. It is hard to remember, but I know for sure that many of our mutual actions on the defence line did not work out. I know of

several cases. When we organised mutual actions on the defence line we always agreed in advance what side would be covered by the HVO take and what side by the TO and they always got lost.

Who they?

TO lost its way. They did not come according to the plan. Most problems were encountered in Travnik. They were big, big problems in Travnik. The HVO was well organised and you probably remember that Travnik was full of refugees from Kozarac, Prijedor, Sanski Most, and west Bosnian Krajina. These people came to look for shelter and a place to stay. Furthermore they came ragged and barefoot. And that is when problems with TO started because of the arrival of the Muslim refugees which had been expelled from all around to our region.

Problems started with the arrival of the refugees?

Yes, their arrival made problems. Meaning both domiciled Croats and Muslims did not have any problems until that moment. Furthermore the entire situation was complicated by the arrival of Mujahedins.

I am interested in details here. Can you remember, when you say that problems started with the arrival of Muslim refugees into the region – in concrete and practical way, what does that mean? What problems appeared? What happened then?

We had more people, more arms and more different opinions. That is what happened. The new arrivals that came formed organised groups on their own, some even came in an organised manner and created some kind of Krajina brigade which became the new organisation in town. They did not have anything else to do.

What was the atmosphere like around the streets?

Chaotic. You had chaos all around the streets. The domiciled Muslims also faced problems as well local Croats. The refugees looked for shelter and the easiest thing was to throw a Croat out of his house in order to accommodate a Muslim.

Such things happened?

Of course! Many Croats had taken the war much more seriously than Muslims did. Approximately half of the domiciled population were Croats and other half Muslims. There were 38% of Croats living in the area, and 41 or 42% of Muslims living in the area. Approximately the number of both ethnicities was more or less similar. However with the arrival of Krajina people the proportion largely changed. Many Croats joined the army and left their houses while at the same time somebody else moved into his house. Those were practical problems. I repeat again, Muslims had to look for additional space, they had to live somewhere and that was normal. As a result of the entire situation problems surfaced and the main cause for those problems were the expelled Muslims from other regions of BiH. Mujahedins brought additional problems.

Now I kindly ask you tell me more about that. You said that Mujahedins created additional problems when they came to the region. When did they appear and how did you feel about all that here?

Mujahedins came entirely legally throughout humanitarian organisations and were to a large extent transported over the territory of the Republic of Croatia. That meant, they arrived through the Republic of Croatia, Herzegovina. The entire affair was considered quite normal. I know that our people allowed them to cross over various check points. When they arrived they knew exactly whom to contact.

That means that the entire affair had been arranged in advance. They were sent to Mehorići, a village where real military training was organised for them. Furthermore military training grounds were made for them and the houses were provided for them. Simply put, everything was arranged in advance for them. The first Mujahedins arrived to the area of Travnik municipality. That was known publicly. They created enormous problems not only for us Croats but also for their own people, the Muslims. Additionally they had their own internal organisation far away from our sight, from the sight of Croats. That is why they went all the way to the mount Vlašić... It has to be admitted they did not do such things here, but...

You told me before we turned the dictaphone on that Praljak intended to organise a defence line with Croats and Muslims together, specifically with HVO and TO. You said that there were situations where TO lost their ways. Mutual actions were on and they got lost?

Yes.

To what particular action did you refer here?

You see I am not prepared to tell you exactly where. I know that once a coordinated action was planned near the mount Vlašić or Komar. I do not know exactly but I know that 13 of our soldiers were killed there, and the Muslims failed to appear as arranged and strike from the side. The action was planned in advance, and they got lost, they marched as planned and did not appear, they said that the action had not been planned right. The plan was not right according to them. I know that for sure. I only have to remember the entire thing exactly. We bid farewell to some units of the Vitez brigade in front of the hotel. Soldiers from the Travnik brigade were on the defence line and some of them got killed. I think that the men from Paklarevo selo were the ones that got killed. I don't know exactly, but in any case something was

wrong. There was something wrong regarding the organisations of the actions. We had already some problems with them in Vitez and in Travnik etc. You know, the conflicts between Croats and Muslims in Prozor started before the fall of Jajce. I know all that very well because I arrived with the convoy when Refik Lendo stopped us on the open road and did not allow us to pass through. We drove material to Jajce. We should have directed them; however I think that it was too late. Better to say it was almost too late.

Lendo ?

Yes, Lendo Refik. Refik stopped us in Ravno Rostovo. He held us for almost 24 hours. Not entirely 24 hours, but almost. We were ready to fight with them, but...

You were allies then, you held the defence line together?

You see something about Lendo. I won't say that he actually caused incidents and problems, but he was already a part of their well organised army as an organised soldier. One must admit that. Today he is a commander of the 2nd Corps in Tuzla. It is obvious that he advanced well in his career. I believe that on that particular occasion he brought that decision by himself. It was his decision not to let us pass through Ravno Rostovo. We couldn't get across, and we drove the material exclusively for HVO, one has to admit.

Well, when general Prljak was in the area and Lendo was in the area as well, they were in the region at the same time, how did they cooperate?

They should have cooperated, they were supposed to cooperate.

How did that entire thing function? Were there any problems between two of them?

That happened, as far as I remember, when there were problems regarding Jajce. Serbs started the attack from their positions above. I think that everybody had already become aware of the fact that the war was inevitable and the Muslims agreed to cooperate with Mr. Praljak. I think that they agreed. However I think that only HVO worked on establishing the defence line. Praljak and Filipović worked on that together. General Filipović worked with Praljak, because he was transferred from Vitez brigade to Travnik brigade. That happened later. The greatest problems in Travnik appeared when the HVO commander Ivica Stojak was killed.

When was he killed?

I think that he was killed in the middle of 1992. I cannot remember, I merely recall, I remember that Pokrajčić was appointed the commander then, and after him Filip. Pokrajčić stayed for a month or two. Was it October when Praljak was here, I don't know. But I know for sure that it happened in second half of 1992.

Tell me what were the consequences of Praljak's arrival and Praljak's attempts to establish the defence line there? Did he succeed?

According to the situation on the line, he succeeded in that. His success was evident in the fact that the Serbs couldn't pass through. Later on, the Serbs managed to push and move the line of defence, but Praljak succeeded at the beginning. Praljak managed to unite the defence line, he managed to do what he came here to do and then he returned.

Was it difficult for him taking into consideration all the difficulties that had existed at the time?

Well I do not know how well you know Praljak, you probably know him well. Praljak, besides being the character he is, he is also a good actor. He knew why he came and what kind of situation he was about to encounter. He came well

prepared and I think he succeeded. My personal opinion is that he managed to accomplish that. One more thing; he succeeded because the Serbs were stopped. I think he also attempted to prevent the conflict between Bosniaks and Serbs and that was one of the final attempts made to prevent the conflict. That was one of the last attempts.

You think it was Praljak's attempt?

Well, Praljak established the defence line together with the Muslims.

Ok, I know that, but you said... ?

Immediately after he left, incidents and quarrels between Croats and Muslims started again.

You said that Praljak's attempt to prevent conflicts between Bosniaks and Croats was the last one? What did Praljak do in order to avoid conflicts? What did he do in that sense? How did he do it?

As soon as he arrived to Travnik he talked with both Muslims and Croats at the same time, and wanted to establish joint defence. That was most certainly one of the last attempts.

Wasn't that difficult to accomplish in those times, specifically because both Croats and Muslims at that time started distancing and pulling away from each other?

Very difficult. Very difficult, very difficult. Very difficult, very, very, very difficult! But he managed to do that.

Why do you think that he succeeded, thanks to what? What did that man have... ?

First of all, I think that it was because of his character. Praljak was a real character, a real man. His attitude towards the men and the way he approached the men was what counted. He knew exactly how to approach the men, how, why and when to issue orders. But also, he approached people by talking to them, making friends with them, visiting them at their homes etc. He entirely dedicated himself to the cause. And secondly, the Serbs were quite close to the defence line there, meaning that the Muslims became aware of the fact that the Serbs were close and started to believe as Croats that they should defend themselves. They also believed in the joint defence, and had not as yet received the order to separate entirely from the Croats. Their policy and orders at the time were to be together with Croats.

The Muslims who lived here – what impression did Praljak leave on them?

Well you see, I was a head of a cannon division and I worked together with the Muslims on establishing the defence line. They were all very satisfied with Praljak, he was the first man that they were satisfied with, and he was the first man they respected. Zulu came at the time to visit us, I spent some time with Salko Beba, and Mr. Mirsad Terzić, he was also a head of cannon division, and also with Dautović Senad. I think they approved of him, accepted him well, but now, that was from my point of view.

Would it be possible, now in 2005 to reach some of the Muslims who used to live here and who would be willing to talk about such things?

Yes. I think that it would be possible. Why not? There is no reason why they wouldn't like to talk about it.

Do you have any contacts with them?

Yes.

Do you have any telephone numbers?

Well, let me tell you something, I'll give an example here, I cooperated a lot with Mr. Hasan Čengić. I cooperated with him. I cooperated with Lameša as well, and with Salko Beba who was their extended hand.

Salko Beba !?

Salko Beba was for some time in charge of distribution of the material on behalf of TO Travnik. He was together with me then, and he considered Praljak to be one of his own.

Would it be possible to find Salko Beba somewhere around here?

Salko Beba is in Travnik. He is currently working as a coordinator on demining projects and I don't exactly know what else.

Would it be possible to invite him to come here and talk to him about it?

I will try. I have some people in Travnik also, who used to live in Vitez and work at „Vitezit“.

Do you know of some people who used to work at „Vitezit“?

Of course I do. How wouldn't I know about them?

I meant people who came in contact with Praljak and who know how things were run when Praljak was around?

I have a man here in Vitez, who used to be a technical director at Vitezit and who was in charge on the Muslim side to work with me in Vitezit.

Was he in contact with Praljak?

Well now, I cannot remember whether he went to the defence line with me, but he knows all the details very well. He knew the details because he stayed in the region until the outbreak of the conflict between Muslims and Croats. The conflict started on 16, and on 15 he had gone on a business trip. He was in Zagreb and we transported him later on to Zenica. He is here. I think he currently works at customs in Novi Travnik. He lives in Vitez. His name is Merdić Rahman, he is originally from Kakanj by birth, he spent...

We shall turn the dictaphone off. We came to an end of the interview. Could you help me find those people and obtain their statements?

I will try, I will ask. Rahman will certainly give you the statement. I think that even Salko Beba would do it, but I only have to find him. I will look around a bit. I'll try to find them.

October 2005, Ljubuški