

ANTUN PAVIČIĆ

March 16, 2005

Hrvatska Kostajnica

Recording and transcript of the interview was recorded on CD and registered as

SUNJA 3.

The interview was recorded under the following label

pavicicantun

5, 73 MB

duration 17:55

The interview was conducted in Kostajnica at the municipal office premises

Here we go, I turned on the dictaphone. First I kindly ask you to introduce yourself.

My name is Pavičić Antun.

Where were you born?

I was born on April 4, 1961 in Hrvatska Kostajnica, and my current residence is in Hrvatska Kostajnica, Unska 28.

Where were you at the beginning of the war?

The beginning of the war caught me in the town of Hrvatska Kostajnica where I lived as a citizen. First attacks begun in June 1991 and we, as citizens of the town, were lost at the beginning. All of a sudden our normal every day life and everything around it turned into war situation. We all know that war situation is not a normal one. We had to change our way of living as we went by and adapt to war situation. It all happened in June and July. In August we left Kostajnica and came back again at the end of August only to organise a mass evacuation. In September our attempt to recapture the town and carry out a successful counter attack failed and we all ended as refugees throughout the entire territory

of Croatia. In my case, I stayed in Zagreb with most of my fellow citizens and I spent the autumn in Zagreb until October when mobilisation was carried out. We were mobilised then and sent to a training camp which had been organised in Žažina, the former rocket base. A military formation of a size of a company was formed there and after completion of military training we were sent to the town of Sunja. The company was headed by a commander and consisted of platoons. A proper chain of command was also established. I remember the afternoon when we departed from our temporary training centre very well. We were armed with M48 rifles and water tanks which would later on provide us with water. We reached Sunja from the opposite direction. We reached the river Sava. I had never before reached Sunja from that direction. We arrived to the river Sava where General Praljak was waiting for us. The night was on and we all gathered on the ferry. He immediately divided our entire company and deployed the men in, let's say, Bobovac, where he sent 10 people. Furthermore he sent 20 people to Sunja and some people to Nova cesta and some to Stara cesta, as circumstances demanded. We arrived in some kind of fear... however that was the first time I saw him. We heard about him. He was a charismatic man and resembled Hemingway, with a beard and a deep voice. That was our first encounter with the defence commander of the town of Sunja. Later, as the time passed, we were reunited with the rest of our company although its platoons were deployed in different streets but under unified command. I met him on several occasions when I served as a soldier there. Later on I became a chief of Biochemical Defence Unit. I did not go to him, but he often visited our positions. Since we lived in private houses it was demanded that we keep them clean and that we regularly collect the garbage in order to avoid diseases. On one occasion we received an order to clean it all up and he came to inspect us. He said, I don't know whether he said that to everybody or only to us, the following: "My heart is filled with happiness!" something like that and he shook hands with each of us. We saw him as a true leader; we saw confidence and

strength in him. And secondly, whenever we were attacked with mortar fire – he came to see us and constantly warned us: „Do not go outside; do not expose yourselves without any need. Those who are currently deployed in bunkers have to keep watch and look over to the other side, all the others should stay under cover in shelters.“ He greatly cared about soldiers and we saw how strong and firm he was. That was one thing. The other thing was that he paid a lot of attention to physical training of soldiers. He conducted physical training as often as possible. At least, during his stay there, approximately three months, we were often sent walking in order to improve our physical condition and to be able to carry out the attacks, as we learnt later on. That was all accepted well by the soldiers. He was always there, either leading our columns or making rounds and checking on us.

Where was your physical training conducted?

The training was carried out in the area behind the town of Sunja, in safe areas. The training was done on the bank of the river Sava. I forgot names of those places; I think one was called Sunjska Greda. There was a large field where we practiced platoon training consisting of attack drills, extending in more open formation, advancing by means of rushes, passing through or over wire obstacles, changing formations. Later on training was developed through practical training, suppositions, physical training and he was always present and always lowered himself to a rank of a simple soldier.

When was that?

That happened in December 1991, and January and February 1992. I do not remember the exact date, but after him Žarko Peša came and replaced him as a commander.

Did you, I mean soldiers in general, consider physical and military training strange and a bit silly at the time? You were both tired and in mud, shot at and had to sweat additionally instead of resting and sleeping in warm houses. How did people react?

Well how can I explain that? That was the end of 1991. Croatia was already deeply in war, the town of Vukovar had already fallen, famous shelling of the town of Dubrovnik occurred on December 6, Saint Nicholas Day- all of us were deeply affected by the war which was constantly drumming in our heads. We were already conscious of the fact that it was a real war which would not be over in a month or two. Famous cease fires, truce agreements, then again violation of truce agreements were announced all the time etc. The situation was developing in such a way that we understood that the army was slowly being built. In that way some kind of training was conducted – not a drill – but a kind of training that they had time for because people were also simultaneously carrying out their every day duties: keeping watch in bunkers, outpost duties on exposed positions where guards rotated every 24 hours. Soldiers who were not on guard at the moment and the reserve were sent to training which consisted of handling arms and strength training by walking in formation. It was not so much based on marching left and right, but it was based on things that we would benefit from mostly in war circumstances, meaning: how to keep undercover, how to camouflage and not to expose ourselves. Praljak was always present, always giving instructions...

Were there any situations in which he was angry?

I did not feel that he was angry. He was always talking in his deep voice and his appearance seemed... I remember on one occasion, I was not present there but I heard the story. In January, somewhere near Bobovac in direction of Lonja,

there was a lot of ice by the river Sava, and the ice was slowly breaking because warmer weather was coming. Weather was like in March and the ice started breaking during the night. The soldiers on the defence line reacted and started firing because they thought that enemy had opened fire at them. When Praljak heard about the incident, he went to the defence line, scolded them and taught them a lesson about wasting ammunition. He said that each bullet was expensive and that if they wished to fire that they should buy their own ammunition and that they shouldn't waste army bullets. He wanted us to learn the lesson and be aware that it was not the enemy but only breaking of ice and that the army got scared...

How did the army react in such situations? Well as you see, you have war, what is war but shooting and firing? And all of a sudden you have someone telling you not to fire. Could people understand that at the moment? Was Praljak able to make them understand? Was he able to teach them?

Yes, it was a well known fact that the war was on. Defence line ran through the streets of Sunja and we knew who was on the other side. Depending from position to position, the enemy was situated somewhere closer and somewhere far from us. Somewhere we were able to see them, and somewhere they were across the street in bunkers. I was situated near the gas station and they were relatively close. You could see them through binoculars. We were given strict orders not to open the fire on our own initiative. We had to obey our commander and his orders except when your life was on the line and when you saw that live force turned against you and started the attack, then it was normal to fire back.

Since you were situated near gas station, you were under constant attack and shelling? Is that right? You were pressured all the time?

Yes, we were situated at the most exposed point... that point was... When people asked me how Sunja was and what it meant to be stationed there I would reply: “There is a road called Nova cesta (New road) and the other road called Stara cesta (Old road)”... and then I would stick my finger into my interlocutor's belly and explained to him: “It was like that, you know, we were pushed into the other side, as if somebody stuck a finger into our belly”. Our defence position was some 500 to 600 meters wide and it further spread in a shape of a fan in the direction of Sunja. That was the finger I was talking about, it was exposed on the left side, on the right side and from the front. The way of life was, how I would say that, a bit more dangerous there.

It was only a bit more dangerous?!

Yes, it was a bit more dangerous. We grew accustomed to the situation and it was very unusual when firing and shooting was not heard. It was strange, and we were nervous, as long as we heard shots we felt very good.

Meaning that you slept the best when you were being shot at?

Yes! Yes. It was like that really, that does not have anything to do with common sense.

And tell me, did Praljak join you in those difficult situations? How did he react in such situations?

I am telling you, when the attack and shooting was on, he visited our positions, left and right wing and the front top. He wanted to join us and be in contact with squad commanders. Praljak wanted to see how the situation would furthermore develop and what would happen to our defence line, whether it would be broken

or whether someone was wounded or whether ammunition was needed, first aid etc.. He raised our morale, he was a big moral support.

Do you know how Praljak reacted in situations when the guys dressed in Croatian military uniforms broke into empty houses and looted white technics, televisions etc? How was that taken care off?

There was no looting and stealing other people' property while I was there. Those things did not happen. It did not happen. We were located in other people' houses, we used them for sleeping because they were near our frontlines, but looting was prevented. I do not know of any such case. A unit from Zagreb, we called them Postmen because of their grey uniform had been situated there before us, they were in fact a police unit. They stayed 15 days, we came as their replacement and stayed 4 years. You stay down there, as if you were on some kind of vacation, take a shower, wash you clothes and return.

Tell me has anything changed for you after Praljak's departure? You stayed there.

For me, personally, things changed. He was gone physically and other guy arrived, who had a different approach, he was much younger. I think that...I am not that young any more. However, while Praljak was down there I saw a father in him. Concerning his age, he could have been a father to me. I knew that he was a highly educated man, film maker and had two university degrees.

Three.

Three, yes. His every word meant something. I think, well I did not contact him often during the war but after the war I watched a number of TV shows, such as

„Latinica“ and others where he appeared. I always listened to his comments and opinions of war with delight and everything else that he was saying. I was surprised when I heard that he was summoned by the Hague Court because none of his actions or his behaviour during the time I spent with the guys on the frontline could have caused or resulted in what is happening to him now.

Thank you very much.

Well...

Have we forgotten to say something perhaps?

I think that was all.

O.K.

May 2005