

ŽARKO PAVLOVIĆ

MOSTAR -ZAGREB

September 2005, March 2006

The interview was recorded, recordings are under the following code names

pavl. 6.13MB, duration: 1:40 min
pav2, 324MB, duration: 1:27:08 min
pav3. 10.1MB, duration: 2:45 min
pav4, 50.8MB, duration: 13:53 min

The interview took place in Zagreb

8th March 2006, Nika Pinter talks to Mr. Žarko Pavlović.

Mr. Pavlović, today we will speak about your role in the war in BIH 1992 and 1993...

And 1991.

That's right, 1991 also. I will ask you to tell me truthfully and completely everything that you have personally witnessed or know about. For the start, I will ask you to give your personal data, place of residence and address.

Žarko Pavlović, born on 11th January 1959 in Zvirovići, the municipality of Čapljina, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Croatian, Catholic. Married, with three children.

Where do you live?

I live at the same address, Zvirovići b.b. Čapljina 88300 Bosnia and Herzegovina. I was born there and my ancestors are from those areas.

Were you involved in the events in the area of Herzegovina, Čapljina in 1991, 1992, 1993, in Čapljina in 1991, are there any events which you would like to point out?

I was involved in the defence of these areas from the beginning. It means, in 1991 when the reservists came, and even before they came to the Dubrava Plateau, as far as I remember it was on 18th September 1991. The reservists of the JNA, which then, as far as we could see, where anything but reservists, but already they set out with the five-pointed star, they set out with Chetnik symbols, so that it really had nothing to do with...the real army. On Dubrava Plateau, we call that Plato Dubrava, this is an area near

Stolac, the Bregava River all the way to Bivolje Brdo, Čapljina and Tasovčići...we, the folk, call it the Plato Dubrava. As far as we knew, around two thousands reservists came. Serbia, Montenegro, they were mostly from those areas. After these events that happened...

Excuse me, which events?

The arrival of reservists to these areas. It began with the forming of defence units. So that the municipality of Čapljina had one Manoeuvring Unit, as it was then called, I don't know the exact number, but around 140 men, 145, not more. This Manoeuvring Unit was linked to the Territorial Defence of the town of Čapljina. The name remained from the previous system, the Territorial Defence, that was the defence system at that time. It only got the name – Manoeuvring Unit. It means that it covers a bit larger area in the municipality of Čapljina. I was one of the commanders within the Manoeuvring Unit, I commanded one platoon, which consisted of three infantry and one artillery platoons. All the structures of the government in the Čapljina Municipality were involved in it.

Were you armed?

We had one part of the arms...one small part which we got from the Ministry of the Interior, because the Ministry of the Interior had one...reserve police unit. They had their weapons which they got there regularly, all clean. From this side, one part came from there, and the majority came through purchase. The purchase of weapons...from your own pocket, I personally know a number of people who had one cow, he sold the cow and bought a weapon. Because the messages that were sent from the Left Bank, i.e. from the Dubrava Plateau were not good at all.

Messages from the JNA?

Messages from the JNA and the reservists were not good at all...starting with songs how they will butcher someone, us and the Bosnians, then the Muslims, how they will slaughter, kill the Muslims...simply we had to work on an organized defence and arm ourselves.

Were only the Croats included in these Manoeuvring Units, i.e. in the Territorial Defence?

In this Manoeuvring Unit there were more than 80% Croats, one small part were the Muslims, because at that time, as far as I could see, they were not clear about what was going on.

Did you call them, or didn't you, or maybe you didn't want to have them in your ranks?

I must note that this was the Territorial Defence of Čapljina. This Territorial Defence included everyone... all nationalities, religions, minorities, everyone. It means all were under the Čapljina Territorial Defence. We called them, later on there was one unit on the level of the town, a bit smaller, around 30 men, where there were Muslims and Croats...in that unit there were a number of shady characters which later went over into HOS, not the HVO, there were good guys there, but one part had a thick criminal dossier, and... But in this unit, the Manoeuvring, there were both Muslims and Croats, but as I say, over 80% were the Croats. I forgot to say, why we were forced to buy our weapons, because after the arrival of the reservists, all arms belonging to the reserve units of the Territorial Defence, the entire area which was under the competence of this barracks, these entire arms were taken away in the direction of Stolac, it means, in the direction...under the control of the JNA, i.e. reservists from Serbia and Montenegro. We were left with the crumbs. Although these were the arms of the Territorial Defence for which our fathers, and we also paid through the years by way of various taxes, as it was in those

times. It means, we now had nothing of that, everything was taken away, and we were forced to buy arms with our own money.

Do you know what and how it was and whether anything was organized in Stolac, some territorial defence...?

The reservists, as far as I know, passed without any problems. Even some Muslims were throwing flowers at the tanks. This is known, this is no secret... a part of the Croats and a small part of the Muslims that were in the reserve units of the Ministry of the Interior tried something, but they were soon disarmed, because there was no massive movement, something organized. That's why reservists simply passed through Stolac. They just passed without anybody stopping them, and it was problematic because some of the Muslims offered them hospitality, without being aware that after the expulsion of Croats from those areas, they will come next.

You mentioned these Manoeuvring Units, they did not have HOS incorporated...HOS was not in that organization?

No, no, no. This Manoeuvring Unit was simply an organization, let me put it this way, within the framework of the municipality. Within the framework of the municipality, without HOS, without paramilitary units, using this word with quotation marks, this was a unit that had a legal form even earlier.

It only continued...?

It only continued, nothing more.

All right, and now with the fall of Dubrava, when reservists are coming to Dubrava, what is the situation, what do you know about Čapljina, Neum,

Stolac.

Ravno!

Ravno!

It was a big problem, the date was 28th September 1991, when Ravno fell.

It was then that they entered Ravno?

It was then that they entered Ravno, and some people were killed, and it was a big problem for us... because we all declared ourselves on the referendum which was in 1990, 1991 for Bosnia and Herzegovina and for the President Alija Izetbegović. I personally voted for that option, and to this very day I support a unified Bosnia and Herzegovina... so we supported a unified Bosnia and Herzegovina with the late Alija Izetbegović as President. On the day when Ravno fell, which has a majority Croatian population, his statement on the television was that this was not his war, as far as I can remember, "this is not our war", something like that, which caused a confusion among us, at that moment we didn't know what to hold on to, what was happening. We had to put the question first what does it mean "this is not our war", and Ravno is, as far as I know, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, so it took me a couple of days to... I must admit that as a platoon commander I didn't know what to tell the soldiers, I didn't know the answer. That was a period of a chaotic state in these areas, for the simple reason that the majority population, 99% of the Croats left this area, some elderly population which were on Šćepan Križ, this is above Stolac, where a couple of elderly Croats were left, they were killed, killed by, I can freely call them Chetniks. They were killed and 99% of the Croats left those areas.

How about the Muslims?

One part of the Muslims remained, one part fled...one part has fled. However, we were forced, apart from forming this Manoeuvring Unit, we were forced to involve ourselves in a serious way in the liberation of these areas for the simple reason that the Muslims which came to this side, on the right side of Neretva, together with us who were already there for some time, they came too, and they were mostly situated in Međugorje, in the areas of Zvirovići, Trebižat, the municipality of Čapljina generally speaking, but we had an agreement between us, as a Manoeuvring Unit, that we had to distance the civilians as far as possible from the first line, situate them more towards Međugorje, towards Čitluk, because if they remain in the town, because at that time not a single barracks was freed, and the barracks in Čapljina, one of them... Grabovina, a pretty large barracks, one among the stronger...then there were the barracks at Dretelj, Gabela and the barracks Kasopić. So that these majority Muslims, which were then, we can freely say, a majority, with our help and the help of the Red Cross and the Civilian Defence of the town of Čapljina which at that time, we must admit, did one good job, they organized well...these Muslims together with Croats, a part of the Croats were transferred, but as I say, the majority of Muslims were transferred to the areas of Trebižat, which is a couple of kilometres from Čapljina, Zvirovići, Međugorje, because Međugorje could receive more people and a large number of people could be situated there. A large part of Muslims we sent to the Republic of Croatia, which the Republic of Croatia then... did in an organized way...but this was not in our competence, this was in the competence of another state.

When you say on the other bank, what was on the other bank?

On the Left Bank...the bank that was at that time under the control of the Serbian-Chetnik...I can freely say, because this period that I mention, in Tasovčići there were already infiltrated the Chetnik Radicals, Šešelj's men which had formed a kind of Government, I didn't know what kind of Government, but they created the Militia of SAO Tasovčići, when they did that...

In 1991?

Yes, yes. This is the period when they were there. This was, as I say, a period when SAO Tasovčići existed so that the people, the remainder that was on these areas...had to pass through Tasovčići in order to come to the Right Bank, or swim over the Neretva, or by boats, God knows how, but this was done by several thousand of them when Dubrava fell, a couple of thousand, but as I say, this was organized, and one small remainder which was there, and which was not transferred to the area of Ševač Polje, it had to pass through Tasovčići, at the time when it was extremely, extremely risky.

Tell me where is Ševač Polje?

Ševač Polje is the area of the left side of Neretva, it is within the larger Počitelj area. It links up when you go from Mostar by the Left Bank between Žitomisljić and Počitelj. It means, along the Main Road (Magistrala), which is now called Magistrala M17, i.e. Neretva.

It means Počitelj?

Počitelj is a bit larger centre, actually Ševač Polje is linked to Počitelj.

So the civilians, residents are crossing that point?

Yes.

That is, the locals?

Yes.

They cross Međugorje, Trebižat to find protection?

Yes.

And this is organized, who organized it?

You see, in that period of the war Dubrava falls. We did, this Manoeuvring Unit tried, with me as commander, it was on the 4th April, i.e. 4th to 5th April 1992...

**All right, so we completed this...this crossing was in 1991 or in 1992?
What you were saying about the Red Cross organization and the rest...
and accommodation in Međugorje, Trebižat, when was it that the
civilians were going?**

This is the period since 1991 when they were coming, but the remainder that was there happened at the beginning of 1992...it means...we have a period when their propaganda was saying all the time "we will not hurt you", the Serbs. But it was essential for them to get rid of one people, whether Muslims or Croats, but as we knew what they were up to we were the first who tried to do something so that the Croats pulled out first, with a part of the Muslims. It means, this period when the Muslims crossed over, this part which happened in 1991, and the rest in 1992, who remained.

Can you describe this to me, if you have direct knowledge about it?

As I said, we crossed on the 4th to 5th April, around four in the morning...we crossed from the Right to the Left Bank in boats in...Ševač Polje. Here Neretva was somehow, most amenable. In this crossing we had collaboration from the other side, an organized one, of both Croats and Muslims. This Unit of mine which numbered some 120 men whom I commanded, I was the first to cross there and we tried to do something on the Dubrava Plateau. Because one tank unit that was stationed on the area of Domanovići, Pijesci,

Mostar...by the Chetniks, it was on the area of Pijesci, we covered the area and made one defensive line on Bivolje Brdo. This Unit of mine was stationed on Bivolje Brdo and one part was positioned on the left flank toward Mihića Mahala, that is the name of the place, Mihića Mahala, on the Dubrava Plateau. It means, we did not cross over to the area of another municipality, which is the municipality of Mostar, above Bivolje Brdo. We dug in on Bivolje Brdo where...the municipality of Čapljina ends. Being such a Unit, we did not have the competence and we were only where the municipality of Čapljina was. We were here a couple of days, and I left a part of the Unit as reserve on Domanovići, the other part went to an area, as I said, Mihića Mahala, and the right flank, looking from the direction of Čapljina toward Mostar, the right flank Aladinići toward Stolac, it was empty. Someone else had to cover that, it was supposed to be covered by a unit which was predominantly Muslim, but it wasn't done. Following the attack on us and Muslims on Bivolje Brdo, where alongside our Unit there were around 30 of them, who were guarding our right flank...where we were on Bivolje Brdo...when tanks started moving, I remained alone with my Unit. They left everything. I understand them, because normally, it is not easy to listen to the tanks, it wasn't easy for us as well, but...and then these tanks penetrated through almost as far as Domanovići, they almost linked up with Tasovčići. These tank units of the JNA, but I prefer to call them Chetnik units. And then they linked up with these Radicals in Čapljina who were there, who were together, only it was their response... And this is the official fall, the fall of the Dubrava area, it means a definitive fall in all respects.

It means that was in April 1992?

Yes. This was that period when...it definitely fell...Dubrava...and those who thought that they would do something realized that nothing can be done, that one has to flee.

Let me just ask you something, when you started speaking about the

crossing, in April over the Neretva, did you personally take that decision that you will cross over and come to Bivolje Brdo or...how did that happen?

No! As a commander I was receiving orders from my superiors, it means from the Headquarters of the town of Čapljina. I did nothing of my own accord, nor was I allowed to, I was then already, a pro, in quotation marks... at least I tried to be professional. The only thing where I was free to decide was the plan of training of soldiers which were stationed in Zvirovići, and to organize firing practice on Zvirovići, here I had partial freedom, but when it came to what we were going to do my word did not count much.

So you obeyed?

Yes, I obeyed. I obeyed the orders, nothing more.

I have another question because you are mentioning Dubrava and the Plato Dubrava...can you say does that plateau have any strategic significance?

Those who were in the army knew that who controls the Dubrava Plateau has control all the way to Ploče. And I think that the Chetniks did not care much about the Right Bank of Neretva as much as the Left Bank, due to descent of the direction Mostar, Čapljina, Metković, Ploče. And here one problem appeared of which we were, I must admit, not aware at the beginning. We were not aware of it, we were only aware that on that area a large number of women and children of Muslim nationality have been left. We couldn't put up with the fact that they remained there, that's why we went into this crossing, to try to pull as many people out, and, as I say, over 90% were of Muslim nationality.

When exactly was that, April...?

It was the period of 4th April 1992, when our main goal was to enter among them, it was a plan which I would not dare to do now, to enter among them and pull as many people out...because mind you, the mass moved then, and when the tanks moved to definitely link up with Tasovčići...all who were going from Dubrava over Tasovčići were blocked. This has been documented.

Good!

There are documents...All were returned to the area, to the area, this is somewhere...

Can we find all of this in the document...?

You can find in the document that the Radicals-Chetniks returned everyone into Tasovčići. So that in Tasovčići...they had a chaotic state where there were some 10.000 women, children, mostly Muslim that we had to...we had to fight on Bivolje Brdo so that they could cross over to the Right Bank over Ševač Polje.

Actually, you were fighting so that they could cross...?

Exactly...cross over. Because we thought it will go faster if they move over Tasovčići, over the bridge and to the Right Bank. However, in Tasovčići they were turned back, as far as I remember, then the Crisis Headquarters which was on the area of Ševač Polje, Počitelj, with majority Muslim population, and two of our men, went to negotiate with the Chetniks to let the civilians go, but they wouldn't allow it.

If I later show you a document about this crossing, will you be able to explain it to me...?

I will, I will.

Its meaning, but this we will do at the end of the interview...in any case, you know that there exists a document about the importance and role of Ševač Polje in 1991 and 1992, which was issued by the Muslims?

Yes, it is...

...from the members of the Crisis Headquarters...?

Yes.

...members of the Civilian Defence and of the Crisis Headquarters...?

I am aware of this document because, when we were crossing over to the Left Bank, a group of these people took part and helped us cross the Neretva...it was around three-four in the morning.

We will deal with it later...

All right.

...if necessary, it is now essential for me that you know that such a document exists, and that you know that it basically speaks about people who were doing guard duty in villages, who participated in this...who knew about the arrival of the reservists in...Dubrava, who were members of the Crisis Headquarters.

Yes, yes. Who helped the civilians that were turned back by the Chetniks and so on...

Do you know that there were members of this unit from Ševač Polje in Međugorje?

I was personally with them up there in Međugorje, people of Muslim nationality stationed in Međugorje. We also trained them up there...we also gave them uniforms, we armed them, they were being prepared together with us. They were then being prepared in Međugorje together with us for the liberation of the Left Bank.

All right...let me ask you now, to be completely clear, when are you transferring the civilians from this area into Međugorje...in April 1992?

Yes, it took time, it took a bit longer, it was done over several days, you couldn't do it all at once. In that document it says exactly when it was, because I cannot remember all these dates exactly. There were too many things...

Of course, I want you to verify it, that you know these dates...

Yes, I know that it exists...

Let's put it this way then...we now completed one part, i.e. the civilians crossed over, but those from Dubrava didn't. Dubrava fell. What is happening at that time in Čapljina?

When it all happened, it means when Dubrava fell, we had to retreat from Bivolje Brdo. I then had three killed. Which was not so bad at that time, because actually we had only Neretva which at that time was abnormally large, and apart from the civilians, everything that was happening, we remained the last. When we crossed over into Čapljina, there was a completely chaotic situation, in the military and civilian sense. It was a situation which I don't like to remember because

everything had to be built from scratch. But after a short period of time, I cannot remember exactly when it was...this general Obradović is coming, and...general Praljak.

1992, April – May?

He arrives some time in that period, I cannot remember the date exactly, I know that he came where we had stationed the headquarters in G.B., a hotel in the town. So that we could be as close as possible to the front line. It was a good thing that the general came down there. For the army it was a big morale-booster, as well as for the civilians, and then we started again to establish defence on the area of the Right Bank, i.e. the town of Čapljina, all the way to Gabela. From Gabela we crossed over to the Left Bank on the areas of Gnjilište, Karaotok, Knjilišta-Klepci...to Neretva, and that part to Bregava towards Neum. Here the Chetniks were stopped, and this area was the line between us and Chetniks on the areas of Tasovčići and Prebilovci.

Is Praljak coming when this line was already established, or...?

This line never fell.

It was there from the beginning?

From the beginning. Because the most important thing for the Chetniks was to clear Dubrava. And thus to create a precondition for the passage either from Stolac toward Kruševo, toward Neum, or along the Neretva Valley toward Ploče, wherever they find it softer. So, they were not in a hurry to get to that area. This was as it was, and we stopped them there. Probably, if the Left Bank had not been liberated, this would be the location of bloody battles for the penetration to Stolac. That's why we had to hurry. To make a larger plan of crossing over to the Left Bank and liberation of the Dubrava Plateau. At that

time general Praljak started forming, strengthening this line which was essential, because as I said, the state was chaotic, the army was entirely without morale, this Unit of mine remained where it was, we were strengthened a bit, but insufficiently for defence. And then the general, as far as I remember, made a move, connected this Unit with soldiers who were from Stolac, who were...and they had mostly found refuge in Pelješac and another part down there, a part in Čapljina...with the army from Ravno and Neum. So that one defence line could be drawn, a bit stronger. So that we could already think about replacements, which is essential, about replacements so that people can be unburdened...then it was much easier, and most important of all, the most important thing was the morale, the morale returned, and everything started to look better.

Did the morale return by the very appearance of general Praljak, with regard to the fact that it was strengthened...?

Well, with his arrival, it was...morale, here comes a man who knows his job and when all the circumstances are taken into account, the people said: "All right, let's rally around the general, let's do something..." then there followed a plan which the general made with his co-workers, and that was, that was a winning combination of how we can continue to survive and the enemy cannot penetrate further in the direction in which it wanted.

Do you still at that time have the Manoeuvring Unit or there is a different form of military organization?

At that time we already moved, I mentioned a little while ago, to take Stolac, Neum, Ravno, Čapljina, to broaden it, to broaden it and then firstly one battalion was formed, but at that time this was more than a battalion, and we soon went to form a brigade. So that this is the beginning and the creation of a brigade which had, from the military point of view, an order, a structure. A

structure which, in my opinion, at that time, beside us who had a certain status as professionals, although we were not paid, but we were professionals in how we acted on the terrain, so that this brigade was really, really a formation, I can freely say a professional formation.

Where was the Headquarters of the Brigade, in Čapljina?

It was a big problem for us. The barracks was full of army, at that time the regular army, there were also the reservists, the artillery and every now and then they were shelling the town...and so general Praljak on one of the meetings that we had, made the decision that the town must be freed from that army, which is logical and normal. This was an army which we called the Chetnik army, because if they had been a regular army, as they called themselves, they wouldn't support the Radicals that were in Tasovčići, wear cockades and the like...so it is not clear to me if they called themselves regulars why were they shelling the town, helping them. So that several times we tried to attack the barracks...without success! But later in a finely executed, as we say military, military action commanded by general Praljak, the barracks has been freed, as well as Dretelj which was not such a strong barracks, it was more like a warehouse for fuel, and it didn't present any problem to us, but the problems were created by this barracks Grabovine and partly the barracks in Gabela. After the freeing...

Just a moment, this freeing of the Grabovine barracks...did you personally take part in that?

Yes, I personally participated in the freeing led by the commander, general Praljak was the commander of the complete action and we were together, there is a video. Where the general tried, I remember very well, several times he openly called for surrender, to avoid loss of life...

Were you present when general was at the barracks in Grabovina?

I was beside the general, there is a video recording, and I am really proud to have been then with general Praljak because general Praljak is...we lost two or three days, we didn't want to attack, we even asked the families of some soldiers, commanders who were there to come to try to convince those people against the loss of life, that we try to make a reasonable deal. This met with great difficulty because of some hotheads that loved to shell us...and certainly this is why general Praljak remained in very good memory to me also as a diplomat and politician – in quotation marks – and as commander. Because someone had to possess all those qualities at that moment to come...I can tell you, 20 metres from the trenches. From there he spoke with them, maybe it was less than 20 metres.

But, on an open road...?

Yes, yes...this was on an open road...

Not in a trench...?

No, no, we didn't have trenches from this side.

That's right!

The trenches were inside the barracks, and then the general, I told him a hundred times, although I wasn't really allowed to speak to him a lot, that what he is doing is crazy. To take the megaphone, come to within 20 metres in the middle of an open space where someone could have hit him with a stone, not to mention a bullet.

Were there any bullets, was there any shooting?

There was shooting, and the biggest problem for us at that moment was a sniper from the barracks. He really caused us the greatest problem...

He was shooting?

He was shooting. And I know that the general swore at him several times and told him: "Don't shoot, you idiot! You will kill the civilians!" because on our side there were civilians in the houses, and then, I remember well, families of those in the barracks were coming, starting with parents whose names I can tell you later, if necessary...they pleaded with the army to surrender...we were offering guarantees, and later kept our word, those who came from the barracks to us, to doctor Moro or Lah...Lah who was, I don't know exactly, ensign or sergeant. Dr. Moro was then a physician who was all the time in the HVO, and he is here now. One fantastic guy. They also helped to bring some people inside to their senses, to avoid the bloodshed, because if it had come to a real shootout, our assessments were that between 50 and 100 men would die. But, thank God, it didn't happen.

When you were in front of the barracks and when Praljak spoke on the megaphone and when the shooting occurred, this was one day, but it wasn't the day when the barracks was freed. Sometimes they had civilians with them?

No! When we were making the plan, general Praljak several times...for instance I wore a bullet-proof vest on me, the general didn't. And in these conversations...then we postponed it for a day or two, and in the meantime we sat down and searched for the best modality of how to avoid senseless bloodshed. We were searching how...then we sought out the parents, wives of those inside, I stress that we were only seeking out the parents and wives and no one else...they can testify that, we can bring the names if necessary, to plead with those inside to let it all pass without bloodshed. This was our basic aim, that

the barracks is freed without bloodshed. And I think general Praljak played one fantastic role here, a truly fantastic role...apart from everything else, speaking as a man, not as a professional, as a soldier...because he has that gift in himself of a politician and psychologist, if you want, and of a commander and a physician, whatever you want...I am proud of being that day with him.

The actual freeing of the barracks, how did it go?

The freeing itself...there was an attack which later...they were pulled out by helicopters...

The attack of the JNA, not your attack?

We were inside the barracks when it came...a helicopter landing operation, where they were pulled out. Then the helicopters came, we didn't open fire on them...I claim we could have shot them all down, but general Praljak was clear. To us the barracks is important, it is important that we have no problems behind our backs. The people who are there, some will leave in this way or another. They chose this way to go, by helicopters, and maybe it was the best way if they chose so. And while this operation was going on, no one fired even one bullet at the helicopters, because we could have...it was around 200-300 metres air distance...a better kind of rifle can cause real problems for such a helicopter.

When this landing operation was over, what happened to the barracks?

Now the Brigade enters the barracks...

All right! Did you find anybody there?

In the barracks...those who wanted to stay with us...they found..., we found them and they who wanted to stay with us, they changed uniforms and stayed straight on in the HVO.

Do you remember, I have this information, that some young guys remained, that they were recruits, or...?

Yes, recruits...while it was still a barracks, while they were shooting at the town, we organized with the local community Grabovine...general Praljak insisted on that, and we asked...that every young soldier who defects, and they were defecting, quite a lot of them were defecting, had to be received, given opportunity to change into civilian clothes, to get rid of that uniform. Who didn't have money was given money, wherever they wanted to go, there were Macedonians, there were Croats, there were boys from northern Bosnia, from Herzegovina, there were Slovenians...every one of them who didn't have money got money, was fed, given civilian clothes, and was helped to get to Croatia by bus to go home.

Is that the date when you entered the barracks or is that earlier?

That was earlier. As we entered the barracks we found young soldiers in the basement, who were, as all young soldiers are, in a miserable state. I have a child and I do not wish every to see that expression on my child's face...when we found them they panicked, God knows what they were telling them that we will do...we first fed them. Because they didn't have good food there... After they ate we asked who wants to go home! Where is everybody from! All who were from far away wanted to go home. They all got clothes, and no one kicked anyone, not to mention anything else.

So how did they leave?

We enabled them, we gave them... a large part of them had no money. We gave them money. Who could go by train, went by train, but mostly they went home via Croatia, with buses.

Was this organized?

We organized it. The Civilian Defence was responsible for that, with assistance from the army, and really not one civilian, i.e. not one young soldier that was here... we enabled him by bus in an organized way, if someone needed an escort, from Metković, from Ploče...some of them we drove to Ploče to board a bus to go home.

Do you know what happened with Serbian population in Grabovine, if you know, if not, we have other possibilities...?

I was then partly informed, a part of the Serbian population in Grabovine ...Zurovci that were there, left and a large part remained. And they live there to this day. And I can tell you now...I cannot remember everybody, whom our people, the Croats, held in their homes. We had to keep them in our homes, it was war and we feared...someone might be out of control, like in every war, we called them "vultures". General Praljak expressly demanded that if anybody is harassed in any way, that he will personally get rid of that...if he does anything to a civilian of Serbian nationality. So that a large part of Zurovci, whom I personally know, as well as people from Čapljina or the suburbs of Čapljina, they live there to this day, they work and live normally...whoever wanted to stay could have stayed. But there were a couple of them who, what the general allowed...

Yes...

I know that...this...

Finish the sentence.

Those that were involved in the fight against the Croats and Muslims, and the rest, and other citizens of Čapljina...they were not expelled by our side, but they left of their own accord in agreement with the army. Although we wouldn't have...this is logical, it is a normal thing. Although if they had stayed, we wouldn't do anything to them because this barracks, let's say that if it came to a real shoot-out between us and those that were inside, if there had been a lot of dead, then I fear things would go out of control, but it happened as it happened and it was the best that could happen.

Do you know that some members of the HVO, let's now call it HVO, although at that time I think the HVO didn't exist yet...?

Yes, it was already in the formation phase...

Yes, in the formation phase... guarded that settlement of Zurovci, i.e. the area where the Serbs were?

Our structure was at that time, apart from this professional Brigade in quotation marks, which wasn't, but we gave ourselves this title, because we didn't have money then, but we...

Did you have a name then or you just called yourself Brigade?

We were already called the First Herzegovinian Brigade.

The First Herzegovinian Brigade?!

Yes. Then came the order that the Civilian Defence, which was also, I can say all the best about the Civilian Defence, which took care of the reception of

refugees, took care of the situation in villages...that the Civilian Defence, a platoon, it was called Vrgorac Grabovine, one platoon of the Civilian Defence got an order to...

From whom?

From general Praljak, general Praljak was still commander of it all...got an order that in Grabovina, a small settlement which was within Grabovina where Serbs were the majority population, these are Zurovci...they got an order that they must guard that place.

This is what you said, to prevent those from coming...

Yes, precisely due to that, to prevent uncontrolled entry, because the war is as it is, every war is no good. And this was prevented in such a way, and that's why these Zurovci who are down there today have no problems, it means, with the help of the locals and on the orders of general Praljak, and the Civilian Defence was then partly under the full command that was on the level of the First Brigade.

Let's talk a bit about HOS, as you had mentioned it, we were already talking a bit about it. Did HOS have any role in the freeing of the barracks?

No!

None!

None! Maybe individually yes, but this was the exclusive...exclusive competence of general Praljak.

But HOS as an organization, you said it was paramilitary, so it was not within the regular...?

No! HOS was then outside of the commanding of the First Brigade, i.e. general Praljak.

Did you have any problems with HOS?

Well, at one time they created big problems for us when...when the Dretelj barracks was freed too. There they made their prisons where they kept a number of civilians, and this was a big problem for us, we had to resolve that. Although, we had to take account that we do not enter into conflict between us. Because, if you touch the troops...we had to find a way how to get these civilians out of Dretelj, without causing armed conflict. This is when I, I personally got the order from general Praljak which was short and clear..."In whatever way you can, but free the civilians! In whatever way you can...but you must bring them out of there." And this is precisely what I did.

How?

Well, I positioned myself right on the entrance, on the entrance door...all or nothing... I came to take them, and this I am going to do even if I have to risk my head for that. So that on the other side there were some men who agreed to talk and a deal was made that these civilians, who were around two buses, where general Praljak...

These were the Serbs?

They were Serbs. Where general Praljak immediately said that buses be sent there after we made a deal for their release. And I personally commanded this crossing from Dretelj, the Dretelj barracks, into the barracks Grabovine where the

Headquarters of the Brigade was, i.e. where we were.

It means, the Headquarters of the Brigade moved out of the hotel in Čapljina and came to Grabovine?

Yes. We had no more need to be in the town and we wanted some kind of life on these areas...to try to separate the military from the civilian, and I think in the context of those times, we succeeded. And then these civilians were transferred from Dretelj to Grabovine where we helped the people, fed them, who wants to stay we let him stay, who wants to go into exchange can go in the exchange. One part opted for exchange, the other part remained. A larger part went and maybe, at that moment it is better that they went because some things were happening which... we couldn't guard everyone. We couldn't guard because the army was over-exhausted, and now to dispatch one or two for every house, it was really too much. And we would have to raise, mobilize people of almost 60 years of age, which...is not in order. So this small part which stayed, we guarded them together with Civilian Defence, I mentioned a bit earlier, these Zurovci, and the part that left was taken in an organized way to Stolac, where was that...area of the Chetniks at that time.

It was their personal choice?

It was strictly their own choice. I know well that general Praljak said whoever wishes to stay is free to do so. He can stay. Who wants to go for exchange, i.e. to leave...whichever choice they make...everything will be organized and will be strictly under our control, not some paramilitary or God knows whom...

Is there anything at all that you can tell me about HOS, how did HOS behave, how did it act, or do you have no knowledge about HOS?

I did not have any special knowledge, I only know that at one time they were not really under the command of the HVO. They weren't, they had their independent command. Our superiors tried all this time to place it under one command, because from the military point of view it is not normal to have two commands. I personally was involved with the First Brigade and the zone of responsibility of the First Brigade and this was what interested me. And HOS as such, it was the matter of our superiors at that time. Not general Praljak, but...this was a matter for even higher instances above the general. So that the general and those that were under his command, we were only interested in this zone of our responsibility, i.e. these projects of liberating...liberating the Left Bank and...because we had to go into a kind of war undertaking for several reasons. One I mentioned a little while ago, this penetration toward Višići, where all the Croatian and Muslim population in Višići, Čeljevo and that period...everything would go under their control, and the other reason, every day we got a portion of 50 – 100 shells on the town. This is one of the reasons we had to go into it. Chetniks were even at one time, they became so arrogant that they even shelled Međugorje, and Međugorje was full of civilians. So that we had to undertake the liberation of the Left Bank, push them as far as possible, out of reach of artillery.

When did you set out?

The liberation of the Left Bank of Neretva was on 7th June 1992. The action started early in the morning. At that time in that action there were troops, there was a part of HOS, and I must admit they placed themselves under the command of HVO. It means, it was unitary action where HOS participated, albeit a small group. Even I got a group of them, some five-six, because this is how we decided, we who were commanders of combat groups on the terrain, we thought if we have them in groups of five-six we will have them under control. These were more or less people...from HOS, but there were also a

number of volunteers who wanted to go to war in such a way, which we gladly accepted. There were also Muslims. Only on that crossing to the Left Bank, the ration of Muslims and us was...I think there were around 15% and 20% of Muslims. All the rest were Croats, but there was a part of Muslims who helped us with information from the other side, which we were receiving regularly, about the situation among the Chetniks on these areas, where they are situated, how...So that they were an important asset for us. And thanks to this information it was easier to carry out the job which we did, so that the action was over by 4 - 5 p.m.

And when did it start?

It started, as far as I remember, somewhere around 4 a.m.

You crossed to the Left...?

One...this was a broader action...a broader action and I can tell you that it was truly professionally performed, to the greatest possible degree. We even had groups infiltrated fifteen kilometres in depth. We were grouped in depth. One part attacked the direction Tasovčići, that part which I mentioned earlier – Karaotok, Klepci, Tasovčići, one part...

The southern direction..?

South, that part going down to the sea. The other part... one group went in the direction which crossed to the Left Bank with boats, Ševač Polje up along the cliffs, and one team was infiltrated a day earlier, as far as Domanovići ...on the area of Domanovići where their Headquarters was. So that in the morning when a strong artillery fire started from our side, because by then we were already well armed...

Where did you get the arms from at that time?

Well, we were buying a lot, one part we confiscated, the greater part we confiscated. Because the freeing and...of these barracks which were...a lot of weapons were left there, they could not take the artillery pieces with them.

Of course!

They took as many weapons as they could, and that was it. So that we managed in all sorts of ways...for those circumstances it was pretty good and therefore this action was successfully completed...it was done mostly thanks to the heart of the people and an organization which was really on a high level. I think these are...

And the Dubrave Plateau was then liberated?

I think this is the first area that was liberated in war. Definitively liberated! We stopped them up on the areas...Rotimlja 690 elevation Buna-Hotimlja-Hodovo, these are the directions some thirty kilometres from Čapljina.

But this is a bit north from Čapljina?

This is a bit north, yes...we already came into a phase when the 120 mm mortars and smaller, and 155 mm howitzers had problems to come there. They could only target Čapljina, what they did afterwards for about a month, every couple of days, they were shelling us from the area of Nevesinje by 130 mm cannon which had the range. At that time also we had a couple of killed in the town, they were shelling during the day...but they soon stopped because we were beginning to return fire.

All right, and now...now they are liberated, so this is one of the first

liberated territories on the area of Herzegovina?! What happens after that? After that successful operation what happens? You organize life in Čapljina and in other places or...what happens?

After the crossing on the Left Bank the first order was the clear the mine fields that we knew of. Because we didn't have precise information where the mine fields were, but only on the basis of stories of those that remained up there. And when our engineer units did that one part of the Croats returned immediately to their homes, along with the army. The other part of Croats and the majority of Muslim population from the Dubrava area which were in Međugorje and partly all over Croatia returned by order. Not really by order, but we insisted that they return. There were two reasons for that. The first reason was that this what we had done actually makes sense, and the other part, very important for me as a soldier, is the morale of the soldiers, because if he knows that there are civilians with whom he can have a cup of coffee, talk a bit, it is easier for him as well. Although we did not demand it, where the first line was established, in an area of up to five kilometres all women, children, the elderly should not be there. Those that were, it was more in depth. Let's say the area of Domanovići to Aladinići, Prenj, this is the part of some 15 – 20 kilometres in depth.

It means they returned?

One part, a large part returned. Because we asked for it. We asked through civilian structures as a matter of urgency after the clearing of mines, and potential infiltrated groups and saboteurs, when it was safe for the civilians, when everything was clean, the first line established, the trenches, then we demanded from civilian authorities that they do what they are in charge of. It means, that they try to normalize life on these areas.

It means, we can say that the civilians returned, in other words that the Muslims returned too?

Yes!

From Međugorje or from Croatia, depending on where they had been?!

I say, a large part, not everyone. Because I do not have exact data how many were there. I know that a large part returned, but we did not allow them to go there, into that belt of the first line, which is normal, it is a normal measure.

And now, what are the relations between Muslims and Croats after the liberation of Dubrava, i.e. after the Dubrava Plateau was cleared and after you...now Čapljina was not attacked any more, now normal life is going on?!

This line that was established, I don't remember exactly, but its length was over 60 kilometres. It means, for such a line it was necessary to mobilize everyone who is capable, and it is normal to mobilize. So that our Brigade in certain moments numbered a bit less than 5000 people. Quite a lot of Muslims were in that Brigade. It means in that period we worked together, we were together. I wish to note that the Brigade was already the First Herzegovinian Brigade, in full name the First Herzegovinian Brigade of the HVO. In this First Herzegovinian Brigade there were these Muslims, in one way or another a bit under 2000 passed through it.

As members?

As members in one way or another. Some were leaving, others were coming, but this is the approximate figure. All of them are in the HVO, so I can freely say...95% of them were armed by the HVO, trained by the HVO...and we ate together. When we freed the Orahovina barracks, there was a large professional

kitchen there, of a capacity of five to six thousand meals a day that could have been cooked without any problems. And we tried to get one warm meal a day to the first line. One meal had to be a warm meal. It was desirable also to have a soup in that meal. In other two meals, three were mandatory, other things could come. Dry food...or something like that. At that time already one part of the Muslims, normally, their religious beliefs and...it is normal that they had their religious needs...at that time the Brigade tried to accommodate the wishes of the Muslims, as much as we could, and as much as the kitchen could, to cook the food for them. Which suits them...as believers of Muslim religion. And I think we succeeded pretty well in all of that, although it was pretty tough, but we succeeded. There was this period without any problems. We were really...as a person in charge of security within the Brigade, I did not see even a single incident of religious, national nature...any incident at all. The problems started since the breakout of hostilities in Central Bosnia.

It means, this is already, we are entering the year 1992?

The end of 1992, beginning of 1993. This is a period which I don't like to remember, because we were really, really...only such a Brigade, professional Brigade!...which was prepared for further liberation, but we were where we were and we only followed orders. And then, after the breakout of hostilities in Central Bosnia between the Muslims and us, Muslims and Croats, there appeared some problems within the Brigade, some things started to happen which were not good. And they were related to the disappearance of ammunition.

You as a person in charge of security in the Brigade had to determine whether such things are happening, isn't that so?

Yes. On the part of a certain structure of people ammunition started to disappear as we were doing the analysis in which units...as at that time the Brigade was still

in the villages...the people wanted to be together. I protested several times against that, but because it was structured like that, I respected that decision. I was against...let's say there are a greater number of them from one locality, and, God forbid, they get killed, then we have many funerals in one place. So that in the troops, for instance in one battalion, two-three battalions which were...here for instance a certain Kapetanović was commander, a certain Zuhrić, they were commanders, where the Muslims were the majority. And we respected that! And then we say that ammunition is disappearing! Then we came into a situation where the 60 mm mortars were disappearing, then the 82 mm mortars...And then it started, it started worrying us in the Headquarters, what was happening. In parallel with this process, this conflict from Central Bosnia was descending down toward Mostar, toward Čapljina, toward the area under the control of the First Herzegovinian Brigade.

Was it always called the First Herzegovinian Brigade or it got some other name as well?

We were called the First Herzegovinian Brigade almost until the end. Then it became a regiment.

Herzegovinian?

It was only called Regiment. I had at that time already quit the Regiment. I went to Mostar.

And what is Knez Domagoj?

This is that Brigade.

So it did have a name Knez Domagoj?

Yes, yes...

That's what I asked you...the First Herzegovinian Knez Domagoj...!

..Knez Domagoj...yes, yes.

In the papers it appears as Knez Domagoj, and you speak about the First Herzegovinian, just to clarify that point...

Yes, yes...the First Herzegovinian...the full name was the First Herzegovinian Brigade Knez Domagoj. That was its name.

The commander was Neđo Obradović?

Then!...After general Praljak left, who did what he did in Čapljina, very positive...

When did general Praljak leave?

I can't remember...

Did he take part in this action on 7th June 1992?

Yes.

He takes part in the liberation...?

He took part in that action, the preparation of the plan and everything that happened, general Praljak took part. After that came general Obradović, at that time colonel Obradović, who graduated at the Academy in Belgrade... the former Academy...he then fled from Serbian...he fled and came here. And after this

action he became commander of this Brigade which had already a good skeleton. And with the help of general Obradović this Brigade was pretty much organized and continued what general Praljak had left, a strong foundation...of a Brigade.

And tell me, this Bregava Brigade...it was firstly within the Herzegovinian Brigade, i.e. Knez Domagoj...

No.

The First Herzegovinian Brigade Knez Domagoj covered the area of the Dubrave Plateau and the length of a bit more than 60 kilometres. They were in one period, it is in the documents when it was formed...when the Bregava Brigade was formed. They were formed apart...apart from the First Brigade.

But on the same area?

Yes!

This I think is essential, that we have two military units on the same area...?

That is so. It had its seat in Mostar.

Bregava?

Yes. And they took the zone of responsibility where we were.

And the commander was...?

Bajro Pizović. They were called Brigada Bregava Stolac. First for some time they tried to be in Stolac, but it couldn't be done because we didn't allow HOS to be in

the zone of responsibility of the First Brigade. Because this had to be resolved on higher instances, and it couldn't be solved...the way in which someone wanted to enter the zone of responsibility when he wants and how he wants. This is normal, this is militarily so!

So! You do now allow...HOS, you didn't allow them, that's normal?!

No...if there had been an order from someone above that we ought to give, we would give. But the zone of responsibility is known – the depth, the width...if you want...and the height. The zone of responsibility of a brigade is a known thing. And please, these are...these are the rules of the game...

Sounds pretty chaotic?

That is so! An anarchy which the colonel, then the colonel and later general Obradović did not allow, which, to my mind, is correct.

It means the Bregava Brigade has its Headquarters in Mostar?

They mostly acted out of Mostar...from Mostar.

Was the entire Bregava Brigade in Mostar or only the Headquarters?

There was the Headquarters and the lists that they held, these lists were foreign to us. Why am I saying that...on 17th March 1993 we asked for a meeting with Mr. Šuto, I forgot his name...I know he was a lawyer in the Bregava Brigade. It means, the Legal Department...We requested a meeting with him. From our side, the HVO, i.e. the First Brigade, on that meeting there was supposed to be colonel Obradović, Milenko Menalo, the battalion commander and I as a deputy commander for security. What was the main topic, on which I also insisted...I felt

certain things that could happen were not good. That the Chetniks could utilize it again, the disorder among us. If they came, at that time they didn't yet come, but if they simply came, I put the question who would stop them?! We insisted on that meeting, and the goal was only one. To place the lists of military draftees, theirs and ours, put them together on the table and "mix them up" as we say and to have a single command. This list never materialized. The forming of the Bregava Brigade which happened...I stress that even then there were Muslims in the First Brigade.

And in spite of the forming of the Bregava, Muslims are still in the First Brigade?

That is so. And all whom I am quoting now are still in the Brigade, the First Brigade. At that time I didn't know and it wasn't clear to me...

And Bajro..was Bajro Pizović in the First Brigade?

He was there and left.

He left..?! And when is the Bregava formed, before or after the 7th June 1992?

After.

It means when everything was liberated...?!

When everything was solved then, then something happens about which I have said a hundred times that it is not right from the moral, human even from the political point of view. If someone contemplates forming this Brigade, he should have formed it before the liberation...! Let him liberate and I would be the first one to accept that he is my superior. It was not clear to me what was the aim, and I fear, I fear the statement by Mr. Izetbegović after the fall of Ravno that "this is not our

war"...I fear that this was it. Which became clear to me only later. But there is an exact date when the Bregava Brigade was formed. This can be traced through documents...there is a written trace.

There is...all right, we shall see that through other documents...?

So this meeting never materialized, it never happened that we put the lists...that we put the lists and that we know.

Did HVO equip this Bregava Brigade also and the members of the Bregava Brigade, or it went through...?

The forming of the Bregava Brigade, as far as I could see, went mostly from those men who escaped from the HVO, First Brigade...who escaped literally with equipment, complete equipment which they had received from the HVO. There are also documents, name and surname who, how many soldiers there were in the HVO, First Brigade. As I said before, we are speaking about around 2000, or 1960 and something, this is roughly the figure. There is, it means, a complete list...of Muslim religion that were in the First Brigade, name and surname, year of birth, with all that...who escaped from the First Brigade. For us, they were formally deserters.

Are you sure that they were not pushed out, that the Croats did not push them out from that Brigade?

No.

You are not sure, or they were not pushed out?

No, they were not pushed out. They were not pushed out. In that period when the

Brigade was being formed, because...one Brigade in depth...the zone of responsibility of a Brigade is its zone of responsibility in all matters. If we allocated the points of the Military Police, what is a normal matter, we allocated them in quite a number of cases for the simple reason to prevent theft and other things. In parallel, there were a couple of attempts, there were a couple of attempts that the Bregava Brigade leaves its point, positions its point in the zone of responsibility of the First Brigade which we didn't know about. I as deputy for security of colonel Obradović, had not the slightest idea about it. Namely, on 18th March 1993 I accidentally went into control of our 3rd Battalion, which was stationed on Rotimlja, on Rotimlja, up towards the Chetniks. On Gubavica I met a point of the Military Police, I stood there, with my two assistants, I stood and asked: "Whose Military Police are you?", because I knew all the points of our Military Police...he told me they were the Military Police of the Bregava Brigade. I asked him: "On whose orders are you here?" They said on the orders of Bajro Pizović. And I should add that this point was around ten kilometres behind the first line, where we were. It means, we are on the first line, and here in the rear, ten kilometres back, something is happening which you know nothing about.

What is the importance of Gubavica?

It was strategically essential because in later conflicts it was shown that it was strategically very interesting.

Is that the point zero?

Yes, that is so.

Can you clarify a bit what does the "point zero" mean?

At one point there was a small barracks here...a small barracks of the former JNA,

which had its observation points. And this was...a starting point...from this side you had...you keep Mostar under control behind your back...then, behind your back you keep Mostar...you have a free way toward Čapljina, you control the passage that was Buna-Rotimnja-Hodovo-Stolac-Neum...it means it is a point, an elevation where you had almost everything under your control.

And where are the Serbs in relation to this elevation?

They were some ten to fifteen kilometres away from this elevation.

It means, with respect to defence from the Serbs this control point has absolutely no significance?

It has no significance. Not even for the defence, because this was a phase of entry into something that we in Security assessed as not good. And then I asked the men to leave that point, to leave that point. There was a discussion, an acrimonious dispute, we didn't go rough, and the gentlemen which were here, after our return, I told them to leave the point until our return. If they had not left it we would have issued an order for their arrest. This is a normal matter. As I say, it happened on 10th March.

18th ...18th ...or...?

18th March...18th March, the point of the Military Police which was up on Gubavica.

How about this finding of yours that the arms were being stolen from the Brigade...that it disappeared. Namely, you first saw that it was disappearing, did you know at that time that it was being stolen...did you find out who, what and how...or these issues were left aside?

Allow me just a little bit, allow me to return to the Bregava Brigade. Although it was later within this Brigade, an independent company Gubavica...

Within the Brigava Brigade?

Within it, within it. They were later with the Bregava Brigade and that company, the independent company Gubavica was then within the First Brigade, and it consisted of 100% Muslim population. Namely, colonel Obradović tolerated that. He even, there are documents, many times asked for the list...asked for the list of this company, the independent company Gubavica as they had called it, they asked for the food to be delivered to them. It means, we had to have the list in order to deliver the food. We were delivering food to them. Although, later it proved deadly, but at that moment the general, colonel Obradović did everything possible to avoid the tensions, to simply...to simply preserve peace in these regions. Following an analysis that we made within the Brigade, related to the disappearance of weapons, ammunition...we as a Service had to, it was routine, to make...to make an analysis and give a plan how to proceed further. And then we initiated an action where we saw that these battalions which had majority Muslim fighters...in these the ammunition didn't disappear. With them everything was regular. And here where they were mixed, among our fighters, it isn't there ...We placed these two variants on the table to discuss them and what we later proved...There was the first variant that our fighters are stealing and selling it, which is normal. The first thing we will think about is something like that. The other thing which I personally would rather avoid thinking about was that someone was stealing in order to arm himself. Through a work that we did in a short period of time – a month or two, we came into possession of evidence. We even got hold of payment slips...that were given by those in the South Camp in Mostar, given by the Armija, i.e. the Bregava Brigade or Armija.

When did you find this evidence?

There are the exact dates, I cannot remember the exact dates now...

At that time, I mean 1993 or when?

Yes, yes...this was the period...this was the period when this started to happen to us...from the beginning of February until May...in that period of 1993. And then we came to know what it was all about, we came into possession of payment slips for some people and we knew the arms were bought in an organized way in the South Camp in Mostar, which was then under the control of Armija BiH. That is, the Fourth Corps of Atif Pašalić. We came into possession of payment slips, the originals with name and surname where it says exactly how much for a bullet, how much for a mortar, and how much was paid. In my view this was an organized act where we had to react. We had to react, which is a normal thing to do. It wouldn't be good if we hadn't reacted. So that we caught some men, some ended up in jail...there were unfortunately one or two...Croats that did it together with them...Because they told us then in the story, those that did it, that they didn't know what it was all about. That they thought it was clean. Only the Deutsche Mark was there, only the Deutsche Mark and nothing more. So that we had that...disappearance...disappearance of the 82 mm mortar...82 mm mortar which disappeared, we found out was stolen by a certain Dizdar Selim, Eso Boškajilo and Meho Kavara.

So you even have the names of persons who...?

Yes. We then gave it to the Criminal service, and where it ended up I must say I don't know. I don't know, but we were concrete...so for instance on 23rd April 1993 we have the disappearance of 60 mm grenades. We found out that they were allegedly bought by Mr. Pizović. It means, they were going to steal from the Brigade as much as possible in order to disarm somebody. And the date when we were due to hold interviews...17th March...I do not see the reason why someone had to steal if he was

with us in the Brigade and it was known if he was going to the field which combat set he will be given. So that this soldier who is up there on the first line...And this combat set was the same for everyone. Irrespective of religion, irrespective of the colour of the skin, irrespective of height, irrespective of anything. It means, everyone got what he was due to get according to some rules of war. It means, he was dressed, we were all dressed the same. We all had everything. Only the food was not the same, because if the Muslims wanted something without pork meat, we made sure we provided it. And we really took care of that. And then it is not clear to me why the need to steal what was stolen. In parallel with these thefts we had, a couple of times, on the same positions, the cutting of the wires. These were telephone wires which connected the first lines with the Headquarters.

This was already sabotage?

This is sabotage. It means, when we link up this, 7th March theft, 25th June 1993 the cutting of wires, several times, on the area Hodovo and Jasoč.

That means between...?

Between the first line and down where we had a Headquarters outpost for the battalion which was...their responsibility, that part...we also had a problem on 13th January 1993, the cutting of wires Domanovići – Jasoč near Aladinići. This also...this also a couple of times the situation was a bit tough where you simply...simply have no contact with the first line because...because the line was cut, why had all of this been happening...

Did you find out who cut the wires in January?

On 25th June 1993 we had information, our operatives did that, that these were Čolić Samir, Tucaković Ibro, Usako Čadem and Soči Satko.

And...this in January 1993?

In January we didn't because we had put men on duty in that area, and then it stopped. It stopped, but at one time we couldn't keep everything under control, because there were kilometres of these wires, kilometres...which linked up the entire line, so that we had quite a lot of problems with that, but it happened, as I say, there on locations which are not clear to me to this day...it is not clear to me why that happened if we were all together in one and the same Brigade.

Tell me, these reports about thefts of arms, cutting of the wires, did you send them to anybody?

At the level of the Brigade we demanded that these people be sanctioned. And when we speak about the disappearance, the disappearance of ammunition and weapons and buying...that happened...what they have, regular records...we preferred to be quiet about it for the simple reason that we didn't want the people who were doing it to notice that we are working on that case. Because if we had raised the question openly, I fear we would never have gotten to the documents to which we have gotten...where the value of each bullet and everything else is accurately noted and paid out in the Southern Camp which was then under the control of the Armija and the Bregava Brigade, i.e. the Fourth Corps...

Do you have more information on the theft of arms?

This is just in brief, there are more documents...approximating the quantities we are talking about, and as I say, we didn't want to go openly in order to prevent them from finding out...this is one of the reasons why we came into possession of this documentation, the original payment slips which were in the Southern Camp.

Do you know anything about the findings of arms in the mosques, and if, where

and how?

We had information, though I personally was not there to see, that it was the mosque in Stolac.

All right...

Where a certain quantity of ammunition was found, weapons, all found in the mosque, as I say, I was not there personally, but the men that were there...counted, they know what they are talking about. At one time we also had information that there was a problem in Stolac and that people complained terribly, all the time, that allegedly a sniper is shooting from that mosque. Even that, as I say, I was not at that time in Stolac, but I know what the people were saying and we tried to find out a couple of times what it was all about...in the meantime there was that action in the mosque where arms were found so I can believe that even that is true, if there were arms there that there was also this sniper...that he created all sorts of problems for the passing and all that.

And where were you in the course of June 1993...in the zone of responsibility of your Brigade?

Yes, I was on the areas of the zone of responsibility of the First Brigade where in the meantime a headquarters, we called it Advanced Headquarters location Domanovići, specifically Andruna...the Andruna settlement where the Headquarters of the First Herzegovinian Brigade on that area was stationed, it means, it was the area of Domanovići on the Left Bank, on the Left Bank which was at a distance of sixteen, seventeen kilometres from the barracks where we were until now. With this Advanced Headquarters location Domanovići, i.e. Andruna we wanted to be as close as possible to the first lines, to be as close as possible to the army, and that was the decision of colonel Obradović, to make a command post up there, which I saw as something

logical and normal.

Do you have any information on what is happening in the Headquarters of the Fourth Corps and what are the relations between the Bregava Brigade and the Fourth Corps and what are the relations between the Fourth Corps and your First Brigade and HVO in general, irrespective of the First Brigade.

Due to the fact that we, as a Brigade, were tied to the left. I am now speaking facing the enemy...left, we were tied to elevation 690, it means Buna 690 elevation which covered Blagaj, Malo Polje...in that area all the way to 690, from this elevation and a bit closer down, we were tied with the Chetniks...and then some 60 kilometres further, so...it is a normal thing that in this zone of responsibility, it was essential to our Brigade, enemy on the front side, along the line of defence, as well as in depth. From our sources that we had up there among the ones and the others...we were interested whether this was an organized removal of weapons or this was purely for profit, someone's profit, I myself don't know what to call it...where we held the view that this is a way to sabotage, an attempt...

At the removal of weapons.

And this was one of the reasons why we tried to get to information inside...inside of the Fourth Corps which was superior to the Bregava Brigade...and we had to get to information what is being done, what they are up to...so that in this desire to find out as much as we can about the theft of weapons and the crossing over, crossing over of some of our leaders, I can call them leaders, battalion commanders...to link it all up, to have a clear picture of what was going on. So that apart from what I mentioned, we came to the realization that as soon as 13th January...! 3rd January 1993 some people, acting on orders of Arif Pašalić established contact with their men, their men under quotation marks, within the First Brigade of the HVO, so that now we had a position, in my view very critical and very serious, where on 13th January 1993 contact is made

with battalion commander Mr. Zuhrić, HVO battalion...Zuhrić...and Mr. Kapetanović.

They are the commanders of a battalion which is part of the First Brigade?

Yes, the First Brigade, and I just said that these two battalions which were, which were 98% exclusively of Muslim...Muslims, I said at the beginning, purely out of... due to preserving peace in the house! Whether it was good or not, it turned out that it wasn't good, that we should have...but this is how it was. To us it was already a sign that we, within these security and intelligence services, and, if you wish, the Headquarters... practically activate the alarm bell! Because this was a position which was not good at all. On the other side, we had information that the Chetniks are planning a penetration on the line Hodova-Jasoč, toward Stolac and this way here in depth, so that we had to give everything that we had...to throw ourselves on the information who is planning what. In the meantime we got information from our people who were installed where they should have been, that a major attack is in preparation...a major attack into the depth of the First Brigade.

Can you locate in time, when would that be?

They...the notification was that it had to be on 5th July 1993, then it was postponed, prolonged, in order to happen in that period until the middle of July. They themselves couldn't find out the exact date...and something happened what...what could have...been even worse, but something happened that we had an infiltrated group, several groups, infiltrated on various points, where even our Headquarters on Domanovići was attacked, Gubavica was attacked, where I had been, on Gubavica in encirclement.

And who attacked you?

We were attacked by the Bregava Brigade, i.e. the Fourth Corps.

So, it was not the Serbs, but Muslims?

Not the Serbs, but them. We were attacked in Stanojevići, below the Domanovići ...one main road, where the road is mined, the main road Domanovići-Čapljina, we were attacked on five-six points...and that day...that day on 13th July at half past four in the morning an action went ahead on us with these infiltrated groups and on that day we lost 23 men and tomorrow, we lost a total of 26 men, they were killed. They were killed, and I don't know the number of the wounded, but it was quite a number.

Were you yourself preparing an attack on the Muslims sooner or later?

One attack was ready which had to happen two days earlier. So that we...knew that something was going to happen, but we couldn't pinpoint it exactly. They attacked us sooner, and these orders that they...in written form...we came into possession of them later...it was known that they were even preparing an artillery attack on the Right Bank in the direction of Međugorje, where a couple of thousand Muslims once lived, to attack even up there, to attack all communications...speaking of the Right Bank, this relates to the bridge, to Žito, in Čapljina the one which was not destroyed, but an improvised Old Bridge...the Headquarters in Domanovići...and other.

Did the relationship between you and the Muslims, i.e. the Croats and the Muslims get worse and...are there any changes related to 30th June and the attack on the Northern Camp...and Mostar?

After the attack on the Northern Camp we already, already...had problems with pure Muslim battalions...this was for instance the Višići battalion, which was not pure, it was mixed, where, for instance all the Muslims that were in that battalion when they had to go to the line, refused the order to go. The information that we got that they

were supposed to attack us, before this happened...as we didn't know exactly when, we had to take two very important decisions. As Services that were within the Headquarters of the Brigade, we were placed in a dead-end situation, confronted with a difficult decision which I personally don't like to remember, but the decision was, our assessment, if they attack us in the depth, i.e. from within the Brigade, on orders of Arif Pašalić... "to urgently contact our men...", whose men are those I don't know to this very day, nor what it means with "our men", but we realized that these are the people from the Third Battalion, where Muslims were the majority and where there were scouts of which 80% were Muslims...it later turned out that these scouts killed, butchered two of ours...their brothers in arms...the late Bunoza and the late Marković.

These are the Croats?

Croats! Who were their brothers in arms, whom they butchered and ran to the other side...Our assessment was, unless we make a radical move, and that was to disarm...to disarm everyone with weapons in the Brigade, because our assessments were that on the day when the command had been given to attack the First Brigade with their men within it, we came to the assessment that only in one day between 750 and 800 men would have died in one day...on both sides, Muslim and ours. Now that we take this calculation into consideration that so many men would die...either disarm...because we...because we were thinking like Americans did in World War II, prevention...we had to disarm all who were in the First Brigade to prevent this bloodshed. If they killed 23 men in one day with these infiltrated groups, this happened after the disarmament...it means after disarmament...it happened...we must all put the question what would have happened if there had been a thousand of them inside the Brigade and if every one of them took up arms, what would happen...