

IVAN PRIMORAC

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The interview was recorded, the recording is marked as

ivanprimorac

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The interview was held in Mostar

Here it is, we are on.

My name is Ivan Primorac, I was born on the 16th of November, 1951 in Uzarići, municipality of Široki Brijeg. I live in Uzarići bb, Široki Brijeg.

Mr. Primorac, have you had the chance of meeting General Slobodan Praljak during the war in 1992 and 1993?

I have heard of General, Mr. Praljak, while he was still in Croatia – he was being mentioned to take part in Sunja front during the war in Croatia, but I have not met him until February or March of 1992, when I met him entirely by chance. Namely, our Headquarters in Široki Brijeg was situated in basements beneath a department store, and a man came to me there. I was not 100% sure what his name was, but later I found out it was Suad Ćupina, one of the commanders of the Muslim territorial defense forces that were being organized back then in Luka or Zalik, I am not entirely sure. He came to me, asking me to help them in conducting anti-armour actions in Mostar – because the Yugoslav People's Army (cro; sr-cro: JNA, Jugoslavenska Narodna Armija) was stationed in the Southern camp and there were many armoured tanks etc. I tried to present the issue to my people at the Headquarters, and they were not happy about it, because it was war and people were not keen on sharing the weapons once they got their hands on it. At that moment, as they were almost about to decline my proposal, a tall man appeared from somewhere and said: "My name is Praljak. What does the man want?" I said: "He wants weapons", and he replied: "Then give it to him! Thank God there is someone willing to fight!" So we gave them the weapons, I don't know exactly how much of it or how it happened. Later on I met General Praljak on several occasions, I knew he descends from here, that he was born in this part of Herzegovina and that he went to school in Široki Brijeg, highschool, etc. I knew quite a lot of him. After that I have not seen him for a longer period of time. Only in August 1993, when I was the chief of the Main Headquarters Operational and Teaching Department in Čitluk, I briefly met General Praljak,

but then in one moment he disappeared from the area, and before that we heard of a convoy for Muslims that was to pass through Čitluk. Since at that time, as well as before, there were quite a lot of cases where Muslim forces were attacking the Croatian Defence Council (cro: HVO; Hrvatsko vijeće obrane) in the Buna area, where some people from Čitluk even got killed, the news caused indignation among citizens of Čitluk, who gathered and stopped the convoy. I knew personally some of those people, and I knew that they were not easy to communicate with and that there is little chance of the convoy advancing. However, at that moment I was told that Praljak also got there and – I thought it was rather mad, not brave – he climbed on one of the vehicles and said: "Shoot at me! This convoy will advance, and you would never do this were your children hungry! Someone's children are hungry, and this convoy must advance!" And then I... later on when I came back, I saw that he was nervous, and angry, etc. I never met him after that. I know of these two occasions, and I really admired him then. I would not do that, knowing those people, and not even today I cannot perceive how they reacted differently to him.

You were talking about that man, Suad. Do you know his last name?

Ćupina. Suad Ćupina.

I think today he is the selector of Bosnia and Herzegovina's national karate team. I am not sure, even though a relative of my wife, who was living in Sarajevo, told me that the man sent his greetings several times.

Can this Suad be reached?

Absolutely yes. Why, he is a public figure in Sarajevo.

I mean, do you have his phone number?

I do not have his phone number, I never contacted him, but I am sure it would not be difficult to get it, he is the Bosnia and Herzegovina's national team selector, karate

national team.

Let us clear this: you have mentioned to be in the Main Headquarters in Široki Brijeg. What was your function in the HVO?

At first I was... I was working in the intelligence department. We did everything: both intelligence and operational activities in Široki Brijeg, and later...

Are we talking about 1992?

1992. ... from 1991 to... In 1991 I had other duties, which is not that important right now, but in 1992 I was in Široki Brijeg, and after parts of Čule and Kruševo were recaptured I was transferred to the Main Headquarters in Mostar, where I was the head of the Operational center. That Headquarters was situated under the Partizan cemetery (cro: Partizansko groblje) in Mostar. The Main Headquarters was commanded by General Petković. I think that back then he was brigadier Petković. If I recall well. And the chief of the Operational department was, I cannot recall his name right now, but a Muslim was the chief of the Operational and Teaching Department back then, while I was the head of the Operational center.

And after that?

After that I was commanded to form the 3rd HVO Brigade in Mostar. The forming commenced on the 1st of October, meaning that this date is considered...

What year?

... the forming in 1992, which included 45% of Muslims.

For how long was such structure maintained?

That structure was maintained up until... until around... between the 25th of April, 1993 and the 7th, the 8th of May, 1993, and later, when the BiH Army intercepted my men from Široki Brijeg who were delivering food to Guberača -

Podveležje, where men from Široki Brijeg guarded the Muslim and Croat houses, and took them captive, took away their vehicle, and they also took captive the policemen at the road spot and took them to prison in East Mostar. At that time there already were some cases of intolerance, so some of the people, Muslims, went away, while some of them remained in the brigade.

Did you chase them off or was it their decision to leave?

No, no! They left at the exact place where, because fighters from Široki Brijeg withdrew to the airport. It was no longer safe for them to go there, since some people were taken captive. Some of the people from Buna, who were guarding the front line together with the Muslims, up on Plahovine, were also taken captive. So it was no longer safe to pass through and we could no longer work on it.

You said that the men from Široki Brijeg were intercepted: where exactly did that happen?

That was from, it was in Kočine, near Kočine, which means toward... the road to Guberac.

Was this a joint road spot or just...?

It was no road spot, those were the Army members who cut off the road and intercepted the men from Široki Brijeg who were delivering food, took their vehicle, took them captive and transferred them to prison.

What was their destiny?

They were exchanged later on. When I was in the Hague earlier, I even made available a discharge letter, a letter of discharge from the 4th Corps, from there, I made available a letter of discharge for one Covtić Marinko, who was released from that prison, and from it one can see where he was. They tore their ranks in the car,

threw away their crucifixes and so on.

So, the structure of your brigade has not changed because you decided that...?

No, no. We have not had a single excess.

No?

On the contrary. When in March a direct aggression from the Muslim forces happened in Konjic, in the village Uzdol and in Konjic, we knew about it already, and as I was passing through – because we often went to the Ministry and so on – Mr. Bruno Stojić asked me: "Ivan, how are things with you?" I told him that things are fine, and there are no problems. That was in early April. I do not exactly remember, but I think that General Petković was also present. So, he said to me: "Keep things as they are, avoid any conflicts. It is hard for us to maintain the line as it is, we do not need conflicts. I suggest you to address the people in Mostar, considering all the men you have in your unit. Also, you should make a plea for peace on the Radio Mostar and ask people to avoid conflicts." I did what he said, I was talking for over an hour. I keep a tape recording of my interview with Mr. Mario Vrankić.

Would you be willing to make that tape available?

Well I did give a copy to the Hague investigators, back when I was...

OK, you gave it to the Hague investigators, that is good to know...

... and I will absolutely make it available if needed. I did make a plea and ask the people, even on that tape I said: "If you by any chance get attacked by my people from Široki Brijeg without justification, I will stand in your first line, and if you attack any Croats, I will defend them by all means", and so on. So, I was particularly addressing people of Blagajci, etc.

Maybe we should go back to General Praljak. Have you had any personal contact with him, meaning being in the same place as he was, where you could observe the way he is reacting, explaining, making demands, as well as his general attitude?

I did meet General Praljak on several occasions, not exactly during formal meetings where there was possible to gain knowledge of specific operations, but I have heard him talking... In my opinion, his attitude was humane and just, both regarding the army and civilians. He was especially particular in demanding from people to behave like military professionals, for he himself behave like that. He was always alert, and when I would said to him: "Let's have lunch", he would reply: "Just give me a sandwich and I'm gone". So he was always out in the fields, he wanted to be with his soldiers. I had a feeling that he was ready to sanction every, so to say, misbehaving coming from his men, but in a different way, maybe.

Have you been witness to any such sanctions? Or heard of any? ...No?

For certain things, it is possible... I did hear of certain things one man did... I do not know to what extend he was behaving unprofessionally, but he (Praljak) slapped the man. For behaving unprofessionally. That is what I heard.

What did the man do?

I cannot say exactly what he did, I only heard that it was... for him it was always... he absolutely deserved it. Later on Praljak regretted doing what he did, but at that moment it was just who he was. He was living a life of a soldier to the fullest, he was behaving like a soldier and was honorable, I never saw him expressing any kind of hatred.

Could you say some more about that convoy? Regarding the logs, we will get that organized, so we don't have to worry about it, right? This incidental

comment will not be included, I mean, that's the tradition, plus we need to have it organized. But I would like to hear more on that convoy. People were dissatisfied, or better indignant, about the existing situation, like you said before... so, did Praljak arrived by the transportation vehicle, or how did that vehicle appeared there? Do you remember...

I cannot recall, I was told when he was already on the vehicle. I did not look as he was climbing. But it was one of the vehicles... one of the international vehicles, that was going in front of the convoy, that was the vehicle he climbed on. So I was told, that he climbed on it. It was not one of the HVO vehicles. This vehicle was escorting that convoy, which was aimed for Muslims, and when they stopped it... they stopped it because a lot of their soldiers died. Because we were suffering attacks, constant attacks. For instance, it happened in August, and even before that we lost Kičin, which was held by men from Čitluk, many of whom died. Some of them died on the 10th of May also, on Hum, and so on. People from Čitluk were bitter.

Are we talking about 1993?

Yes, that was in 1993.

How did people react when Praljak climbed onto the vehicle and started speaking? How did people...?

He said: "Move on!" I am sure at that moment he was expecting to be shot. I was convinced of that, but, no one did shoot...

No one did?

Absolutely not. I know these people, it was surprising they did not shoot. I was surprised.

You think it was a dangerous situation?

I think it was, because... I know that Praljak's father also... after the World War II, he was active in those, I don't know what they were called, those services, security services, and I knew then that people were a bit frustrated about that too. I even expected that someone might kill him. Knowing these people, even to this day I cannot understand how it happened that no one fired their weapons, that they let that convoy pass through. I would not have done what he did.

Let us now go back in time... In 1992, when Mostar was made free, where were you?

On the 11th of June, 1992 I was directly involved in relieving actions around Mostar, on the line leading from Čule to the Electrical plant (cro: Elektropostrojenje), along with forces from Kruševo and Široki Brijeg.

Relating to Mostar, what is the geographical position of that location?

South of Mostar.

South of Mostar. Did you take part in preparing the actions on raising the siege of Mostar?

Yes, I was involved in that.

Did you see General Praljak? Was he there?

I did not see him then.

Good. Do you know where he was?

Someone told me he was there, but to be honest, I did not see him. Because the main line of attack was leading from Žovnica, I suppose he was somewhere along that line, because that was where the "Convicts Battalion" (cro: Kažnjenička bojna) was active, along that line, and I do know that Mladen was there – Naletilić. I suppose he (Praljak) was there. If he was in the area, he must have been there. I

did not see him on the Čule line.

On the line. Have you had any help, beside your... was it already a brigade?

It was not a brigade?

Those were the forces of the Široki Brijeg Headquarters (cro: Stožer Široki Brijeg), they were called 'battalions', but nothing was formed officially... and yes, we called it a brigade, but I cannot recall the exact structure.

There was also that "Horned viper Battalion" (cro: Bojna Poskok), was it not?

There were already three battalions formed at that time, the "Horned Viper Battalion" was among them... "Horned Viper" was moving along the Žovnica line. Mića was going with them.

And you, have you had anyone by your side, beside your own battalion or units you had stationed south of Mostar? Were you alone on that side, or was there someone else?

No one was on the line I was moving along. Like I said, we had part of the men from, I cannot recall right now, but I think it was one troop from the 2nd Battalion from Široki Brijeg, and one troop from Kruševo – of the 6th Kruševo Battalion.

Were there any units from Croatia?

Not where I was. There was talk about some groups from the 4th... but I never saw them moving in any way along that line.

Very well. And after the liberation operations in Mostar were over, where were you after that?

According to my insight, operations on liberating Mostar were not over until around the 26th of June. When the "Convicts Battalion" made a breach to Podveležje, they

took control of the repeater and handed it over to forces from Mostar, I don't know exactly which forces, but these forces lost control over that area due to negligence, and were pushed back to the line, which was held after that, that was the line Velika Kosa – Plahovine – Bubreg, toward Dobrič, and so on, Fortica...

And that was where you, following the 26th of June, were holding the line toward the Serbs, that is, the Republic of Srpska army?

We were not holding that line yet, because I... battalions were in Mostar at that time. Forming of brigades was only beginning, and the commanding officer in Mostar was, I think it was Jaganjac... at that time... Jaganjac. He later made an action that was ill-considered at that moment, an action that caused a failure of the operation on the line toward Podveležje, upon which he was removed from office and replaced by Miljenko Lasić, who took the post of the Mostar Main Headquarters commanding officer sometimes in July – I think it was July. As for myself, as said before, I left Široki Brijeg to act as the chief of the Operational Department.

And who was holding the lines toward the Serbs in and around Podveležje?

The lines toward the Serbs on Podveležje were held by these parts... parts of the 7th and the 8th Battalions, from Bjelopolje, Cim, and so on. Dropping out was already present, people considered the area liberated and were leaving to Croatia. People were fleeing, armaments went missing, they were probably selling it. I felt it as I started the formation of the 3rd Brigade, as well as during meetings with people from these battalions. Lack of weapons really became apparent, they had nothing, not soldiers, nor the weapons, so forming the brigade was really difficult. After my brigade was formed, the 3rd Brigade, sometimes during January the 2nd Brigade was also formed.

What was the actual process of forming the brigade and mobilizing

people? Was it easy to gather people and then form military brigades? Was there a mobilization in progress? Were these people volunteers?

It was like this: after the Kruševo region was liberated and threats of attacks in territories of Grude, Ljubuški, Široki Brijeg etc. were no longer present, during August president Boban made the decision and commanded the forces to be demobilized, which meant keeping the units from Široki Brijeg, Ljubuški, and according to my knowledge Grude, as reserve units. I was left to form a brigade consisting of the 5th Blagaj Battalion, the 7th Dračevica-Gnojnice Battalion, the 9th Radoč-Jasenka Battalion, the 6th Kruševo Battalion, and the 4th Battalion "Tihomir Mišić", which was, so to speak, a city battalion. All the people were coming from these places, and the formation process was also conducted locally. I was also ordered to form a single brigade consisting of men from Široki Brijeg and Kruševo who were practically volunteers, and that brigade was made a reserve unit. I did form one such brigade, while forming the rest of the brigades required hard work, meetings, persuasion, etc. Because no one was willing to go 50 or 60 kilometers in the hills to guard other people's houses. Men from Široki Brijeg went up to that difficult post, where later they were captivated and attacked from the very people who's homes they were guarding. It was a big disappointment.

Is it fair to say that forming a brigade consisting mainly of volunteers was equal to building a real military organization, or were there problems with people? Were people stationed in barracks or would they go to their homes after finishing their shift on the line? Who was taking care of the men? Who was in control of the men, so to say?

Overall command and appointments regarding the front line were coming from the Zone of Operations (cro: Operativna zona). The duty of the brigade was to cover the appointed line, which was organized accordingly to available forces and troops...

we also had troops, independent ones, like the Buna troop; they were given control of territories in accordance with the number of men they consisted of, and their duty was to protect those territories.

How did they function? People worked in shifts, and were paid accordingly. For those days spent on the front line they would receive a certain monthly compensation, a sort of a benefit, while for those days spent in the reserve unit they would only receive a reservist compensation, which was less than the one awarded for serving at the front line. As for the rest of the brigade members, who already finished their duty at the front line, they lived at their own homes, while keeping their weapons. They were free to work and move around, excluding traveling to Croatia, for which a permission was needed. So, they were not staying at the barracks, only part of the people would sometimes spend their time at the barracks, to take care of the arms, like antiaircraft arms, artillery, and so on. We had crews working in shifts for that purpose, for instance at the Heliport, where I was stationed.

Let us picture the following situation: after spending his time on the front line, and not being liable to stay in the reserve unit, a man named Mate comes to Mostar and plunders a house.

As his superior, do you have to send for him and call him for account? Is he your responsibility? Are you obliged to punish him for such behaviour?

I was responsible for the behavior on the front line. I could not be held responsible for what was happening in the background, because that was where life was happening... Here is an illustration: in the western part of Mostar, in 1992 and 1993, even after the conflicts, there lived approximately 8000 – 9000 Muslims, fifteen hundred Serbs, and the rest of the citizens were Croats. So, people lived together, and if you saw a man walking down the street, not wearing a uniform, how could you tell whether he was a soldier or not and, if he was, what he might

have done!? What could I have known about his actions? After all, did the police know anything about it!? We knew about people who may engage in murders, robberies, etc. Those ready to kill, as well as those who would institute processes. So, it was not at all.... let us put it like this: usually, a criminal is a man ready to commit a murder. It was hard to address such things in a situation where there was no system, where there was practically nothing. They could be prevented individually, if we would meet someone, see them or bring them in, but that could only be done with petty thieves, those prepared to bend their heads when meeting a police officer. But these were insignificant offenders, they were not robbers or criminals. So... if I would have knowledge of certain things some of my men had done, I certainly would never include them in the unit again. That is a given fact, but it was upon the court-martial or some other court to take the appropriate action. Some actions were taken, but I cannot say anything of the extent of such actions.

You said "if he was not wearing a uniform...". But my sources say that almost everyone was wearing a uniform, whether they were in the army or not.

Everyone was wearing a uniform, those who were in the army and those who were not, women, men, children. It would be harder to single out those who were not wearing a uniform. Since such things did happen, there was looting, plundering and so on, and since people fled to Croatia, those who were expelled from Široki Brijeg, from here. They all fled to Croatia, because the population was in danger from artillery attacks. When my local community organized leaving for Makarska and my own family left to Croatia, I found about it three days later. So, these people were moving around, looting homes. As that became clear, a decision was made to limit any movements during night to those in possession of a special permit, signed on behalf of the Ministry. As the Commander of a brigade I had such permit, which allowed me to move around the city at certain times of day. My permit was signed by

superintendent Bruno Stojić. I have it with me.

Were Muslims given such permits as well?

I don't know what they were given. Here, there was no reason for that. A permit was given only to those who really needed to move around at night. Commanders of a certain rank, and similar. And yet, these people were... Looters were still moving around. Not everything could be controlled, it was impossible, impossible indeed.

That is exactly what I am interested in, that... I will not call it a disorder... that situation. To what extent could, as you call it, the background, be controlled?

I don't know what was the authority of the people who's duty was to control the situation, but judging from the situation I am sure, as a man and a commander, that it was very difficult to control it. Very difficult, for sure. Especially at certain times. It was easier during the day, but at nights it was difficult to control it.

You were stationed at the Heliport with your brigade?

Yes, I was.

Were there any other units stationed at the Heliport?

Well, there was the "Baja Kraljević" unit. They had their military training there. At the beginning there was also a reconnaissance troop, but they left later on. It was a Southeast Herzegovina Zone of Operations reconnaissance troop, consisting partially of Croats, but mainly Muslims. Also, for a period of time Juka Pražina and his unit were stationed there after arriving from the Igman Mountain. They moved on later, some of them to Grabovica, some joining the Army, committing crimes and taking over the HVO road checkpoint. A few of the men from the unit remained in the city and they did not come back. I asked General Petković to transfer them from the Heliport, after one of them said: "We'll get you, just wait and see!", or something in

that sense, over dinner. He was a Muslim from that unit and I asked Petković, I remember it well, I said "Make them go away!" Because it was really troublesome, there was also a military prison at the Heliport. It is well known that later on civilians too were stationed at the Heliport. I did not allow people to get in, or out. We were using the southern entrance, and the northern one, coming from the military bridge, and avoided getting in from the West, to avoid any provocations, because some HVO members were imprisoned there.

Was this a military prison also?

It was a classical military prison. At one moment it turned into something else, due to circumstances.

I wanted to ask you one more thing, regarding your work in and around Mostar. You said that your brigade had artillery weapons, is that right?

Part of the artillery weapons belonging to us, yes.

Were you well equipped? Did you have all the combat sets needed?

Not at all, we were forced to economize and be careful about every bullet, let along the combat sets. I was faced with big problems regarding the expenditure of ammunition. Only later on I realized that ammunition was stolen on the front lines, because Muslims from my brigade were reporting an enormous expenditure of ammunition. However, that ammunition went to the Army. Part of them was infiltrated into HVO just to take the ammunition, so when they separated, they took the ammunition with them.

The prosecutor claims that the HVO excessively shelled Mostar. Could you say something about that, from your personal experience? How was that organized? What was the way of issuing commands to use the artillery?

Firstly, to mark something as excessive, or even as shelling, one must be familiar with characteristics of a certain weapon. That's first. And if the prosecutor is making such claims, then he is not familiar with characteristics of weapons. There was not enough ammunitions for throwing it about. When ever I ordered using the artillery, it was always for a defined purpose, and the aim was to neutralize a possible military force moving toward my line or their artillery outposts, rocket launchers, and so on. Because they had everything. They had a lot of armaments, and those who claim that they were not well equipped, they are lying. Let him read this list of armaments they reported having in 1992, also given by Faruk Kulenović in his sociology work, which I am making available here. In that work he stated the quantity for every type of weapons. So, the shelling was aimed to prevent attacks, and the artillery, along with mortars and the rest of it, was used to prevent intrusions, and in no way to target buildings. Fugase grenades could cause no damage on strongholds or buildings anyway.

Let us talk now of the city of Mostar. If a weapon, or an artillery unit, is situated near a house, you are shooting at that unit until it is neutralized, it that right?

You see, the ammunition we used came from different sources, including mines, grenades and others, and we used charts made by the former JNA. Despite our best intentions, these charts could not be precise, because of different types of artillery ammunition, weather conditions, powder charges and so on, as well as the hand made mines and others, so they were not precise. I cannot exclude the possibility that sometimes our mines were falling on our own positions. The calibration was poor, so they were falling short, and we were not able to use the aiming charts. Often we performed corrections, we would perform guided firing, then make a correction from the third grenade, and continue as long as we could. And as for those artillery weapons that were endangering our positions, but were hidden behind different objects, I could not move those objects out of the way. I had to

shoot at that weapons and could not avoid hitting a building at times. I suspect that Jeo evacuated the population when installing his weapons on buildings. If he did not, he is guilty of exposing the population to running fire.

That is correct. Where were you on the 9th of May?

In the morning of the 9th of May... I was often... I almost never went home, to Široki Brijeg. I was spending my nights in Mostar, for a while on Panjevina, and sometimes I would stay over at my colleague Vinko Marić, since we were good friends, even before the war. On that day, the 9th of May, and I remember that well, I was sleeping in his living room, by the window facing North, while he was sleeping on the South side of the house, in his bedroom. Sometimes around 4, 4.30, or 5, 5.30, I heard four or five explosions, coming from the North, and these were not normal explosions... At that time not even Serbs engaged in intensive shelling. It was a rather peaceful period, so I wondered where these explosions were coming from. I woke him up and told him about the explosions. He immediately phoned the Zone of Operations and told me that Božo Raguž, an operative that was there, heard nothing. After that we went to the Zone of Operations and as we arrived, we found out that the North Camp was shelled, the "Tihomir Mišić" barracks. Along the way, as soon as we took leave, we heard terrible shooting all over the city. We heard shooting everywhere and saw tracer bullets, and met many people, in vehicles and on foot, fleeing toward Bijeli Brijeg, toward Goranci, up to the stadium, on the way out of the city. We arrived to the Zone of Operations, asked to speak to the commanding officer, Mićo Lasica, but were said that he was not present, that he was at his house, and that the contact with him is to be established. I said to Vinko that I will be leaving for the Kobilovača line to see what is happening in the South, where I was in command. I contacted my men and was told that there was no actions in the South. At the same time, he (Vinko) went to an observation post, I did not ask him what observation post exactly. He was waiting for Lasić to arrive, which happened a while later. At the same time I was on my way to Kobilovača, it took me very long to get there, because traffic was jammed.

Vehicles were fleeing toward Široki Brijeg, Čitluk, and so on. It was chaos, a confusion. On my way back from Kobilovača to the corps gathering place I found out that one of my soldiers died at the cathedral, his name was Dragan Čule. According to my information, their groups were thrown in. Starting the attack, they threw their groups in the background, groups that broke their way to Rondo and Panjevina. They took control of one part of Panjevina, but the inhabitants of Panjevina, along with the soldiers from the 4th Battalion who were home on a leave, took their weapons and fought back, and managed to stop them. But since there is no settlements at Rondo, no one was there to confront them. They took captive of several people, according to my information they captured doctor Pehar at the Health center. The evening before they raided the post office and captured the priest, Ivan Vukušić. Before that, on the 7th already, they captured my finance officer Željko Krtalić and seized his car in Mahala. They also captured Čović and others, on Kovačine, toward Guberača. Also, Pero Lasić, his son Tomo Lasić... they all were in the 4th Elementary school. We did not have a line in the city, we had no prisoners at that moment, no Muslim prisoners. It was not clear to me why they captured these people, but all pointed to the conclusion that their operation was started as was anticipated by the command presented to us by a Croat, who was working at their Military police. He stole that command and brought it to us in April. One of the commands, number 19, if I recall well, was issued by Arif Pašalić, and it said: "A good job was done in the North, make preparations for the following actions...", and so on. The second command was worked out in detail by Mithad Hujdur Hujka, the commandant of the Mostar brigade, and the third one, which I also saw, was issued by Bajro Pizović, who was appointed a zone as a result of, so to say, indulgence on the part of Miljenko Lasić, after continuous insisting, I was with them at the time... He (Pizović) was appointed a zone above Rotimlje, named Gratina, elevation 690, which he lost to Serbs after a very short period. I used to stop by their place of command, where Žujo and the rest were stationed. I have known Žujo from before, from the TO (Territorial Defense Forces), and Bajro Pizović and the rest of them were there. And that

command... later on it was clear that their aim was to break through to Stolac and attack the HVO forces, and so on. It was clear from that command, that said that only imams were to be informed. So, that was his... I believe that it was December of 1992 when Lasić appointed him that zone. Which means that they were making preparations... As we returned to Čapljina, after the zone was appointed to him, I saw that people in Čapljina were terribly irritated with Lasić for appointing that zone to them. They knew what Bajro Pizović and others were up to. So, this attack on Mostar was following... before that we did put the forces on alert, on combat alert. But to be honest, people were immune to that... combat alert was being ordered again and again, but nothing ever happened, so people relaxed a bit, from the 21st, when we were supposed to be attacked, and the period after that... people were immune. On the 21st of April 1993, after a meeting at the Zone of Operations - I happened to be at the Zone of Operations - Petar Zelenika and myself walked down the Boulevard with Mithar Hajdur Hujka, and talked about forming joint police road checkpoints: on the road to the Tito Bridge, toward the Ruža hotel, by the Ero hotel, and so on, which would allow people not carrying long barrels to move on that line unchecked, and to keep that line free of snipers, and so on... On monitoring the realization of that decision we appointed, I think, Mate Knezović and Mario Mikulić on behalf of the HVO, I don't know who was appointed on their side. After that, at three o'clock in the morning, as I was passing on my way from my command post at the Heliport, on that very line, right by the Hit, I saw a sniper, a man I knew, I met him before... I'm not sure, I think he was English or Irish. I turned around and rushed my car to their police station near the Ruža hotel, where I...

Are you talking about the Muslims?

Yes. ...I rushed in and said: "Why did you put long barrels and snipers out there again, after we arranged...?", and so on... and I also said: "Whit kind of Muslims are you, you are wearing emblems with lilies on them, like our St. Ante..." One of them said: "I am a Croat!" That was Jelavić, the Deputy Commander at the police

station. He was there at the time I came in. So...

Who was this Jelavić?

Jelavić ... Goran Jelavić I think, they called him Malac. So, they did not respect the agreement. After that we were always ...

Just one thing, since we are already mentioning this agreement: these road checkpoints were joint in structure, is that right?

That is correct.

And that was agreed upon?

Yes.

One more thing: what was the way of determining where the Main Headquarters will be situated, and where in Mostar to station both armies – was that agreed upon, or it was not agreed upon at that time?

I don't know, I was not present as this agreement was met.

You said they were stationed in the Ruža hotel?

By the Ruža hotel. Their police station was situated next to the Ruža hotel.

And where was the BiH Army (cro: Armija BiH; Vojska Federacije Bosne i Hercegovine) Headquarters?

As far as I know, the BiH Army Headquarters was stationed in Vranići, along with a brigade. And the police was stationed in the Mostar hotel somewhere. I don't know what happened with the police later on, I was not included in later agreements.

Fine, then well talk only of the things you know. So, the agreement on the joint road checkpoints was made on the 21st of April. Do you have any

knowledge on how it happened that the command issued by Pašalić on the 19th of April was not executed?

You see, that agreement was met following...

The things that led to it? Is that right?

Like I said before, small incidents already started happening. There was that one by the Hit, involving the HVO police and members of the Army. One of the HVO policemen got killed on that occasion, his name was Talić, and the son of Petar Zelenika got wounded. That was on the 17th, I think it was on April 17th, although I am not completely sure about the exact date. Others followed after that... I also believe that the operation they were planning was postponed because they planned to attack Doljane at the same time, or before that. They did realize that attack, they surrounded Doljane, the "Mijat Tomić" Battalion, and probably it was planned to finish that attack earlier and then join the forces and attack this area. But, all did not go as planned up there, so the operation in this area had to be postponed until the 9th of August. That is my military insight, I don't think it could have been any different.

Good. We were talking about what happened on the 9th of May, and then went back in time a little. So, you were commanding a brigade at the time, have been staying the night at your friend's house, and had no knowledge of any attacks planned by the HVO?

I had no knowledge of that kind. The general practice was that people would spend their time with their men while planning an attack. As I was planning to attack Kočine with my brigade, I was staying with my men during the nights, analyzing details, making plans, and so on... every detail. What kind of a commander would I be, leaving my men and spend my nights elsewhere... The Commander of the Zone of Operations was not present at the time, according to my knowledge. Chief of Staff, Milivoj Petković, he was not even in Mostar. I think the Army knew that as well, and

I believe they had used that information to their advantage.

Before we continue, I would like to confirm what I saw in their commands, as well in the command issued by Mithad Hujdur Hujka, to attack in April: lines of attack by their forces were worked in detail. They included in their forces the Ministry of Internal Affairs (cro: MUP, Ministarstvo unutarnjih poslova) Special police, the MUP forces were transferred to Mostar, and what was even more interesting, they planned to attack their targets with certain launchers, rockets, which means they disposed of a sufficient amount of weapons. Also, they planned targeting the hospital and the parking lot in Bijeli Brijeg, which is highly symptomatic. Furthermore, he was told that the hospital, the surgery and the MUP should be taken at any cost, and that the breakthrough must be made toward Žovnica and Cim. That means that they had the artillery prepared, and were planning to use it on civilian objects, parking lots and hospitals, where the most of the wounded people and civilians would gather. Plus, they planned, and realized, throwing in their groups, which is apparent from the killing of my soldier, named Dragan Čule, at the cathedral, on the same day his father got killed by the Serbs one year earlier. He took his colleague, Marić, to attend the mass for his father, since it was the anniversary of his death, he had a candle and flowers in his car. Marić got wounded, and he got killed. Then I went up there to tell the priest that Dragan got killed and there will be no mass. He left his wife behind, his mother and one child.

After that, the HVO started to organize and respond to this attack. Was that on the 9th of August?

We sought help from all sides. That means, from the units, which were active to the fullest. When the Zone of Operations Commander arrived, he took steps to, so to say, sanify the damage, stop the advancement and to repel the attacking forces. He was asking for help at that moment also, I know that the other units were asked to help, and they arrived from Čitluk, Ljubuški, and so on. The units arriving from Čitluk were stationd on the Hum hill, to secure Hum, and I know that three or for men were

killed right away. I cannot be certain, but I know that some tank corpsmen were also killed, they were hit by a red arrow, and so on.

Why was Hum important?

From Hum you could have control, and you could also perform guided firing on certain targets. But they were shelling Hum with artillery and mortars. They hit a tank with a red arrow.

Since your line was in a way facing theirs, do you have any knowledge on the weapons they used, beside the artillery?

Now, that is... arrows... they had the red arrows. I don't know how many of them they had, but they used them, since they hit a tank with one. That is one of the best armour-piercing weapons. Furthermore, they had tanks, I don't know what types of tanks exactly, they had mortars, and so on. There was no need for them to use the artillery of the larger caliber, that is, the long-range weapons. Because this was war on a small area. Plus, they practically did not attack the Serbs, they were paying the Serbs to attack us – that was published in some of their newspapers. Hodžić, I think his name is Hodžić... a reporter published it six months ago, he published what exactly they were taking, from whom they were taking it, and what types of weapons and ammunition they used.

Where did he publish that?

I am not sure which newspaper it was, I think it was the Oslobodenje. I came across that story somewhere. I did not keep it, but I am sure it can be found.

Good. So, you cannot say what weapons they used, but you do know they used the artillery?

I know that they used artillery, and I know they used the antiaircraft weapons, the red arrows, and so on.

What exactly is a red arrow?

It is an armour-piercing weapon, a heat-guided weapon. It is practically a self-guided weapon.

Does our side dispose of red arrows?

Not exactly the red arrows, but we used other kinds – Fagot system and others.

Let us continue with the following: on the 9th of May the front line was formed, so to say...

On the 9th of May battles were fought, no front lines were formed!

So, not yet... But following the 9th of May, it was...

There were fights up until, practically, until the 12th, when there was a meeting held in Međugorje. What kind of a meeting it was, and who were the participants, i really don't know.

Good.

But they were political representatives, possibly of the highest rank, maybe even from Croatia, I am not sure.

Good.

At that moment actions were suspended, and the lines in the city established.

And around the city? Southern side of the city, for instance? Where was the 3rd Brigade?

The 3rd Brigade was holding its line in a standard manner, because on the 9th, the 10th and the 11th of May there were no actions taken by the 3rd Brigade.

You were... the 3rd Brigade was still in Podveležje, holding the line

toward...

It was not holding Podveležje! The 3rd Brigade retreated toward the airport, due to capturings and attacks we mentoned.

It was not active at front lines at all?

They were holding the line here, they were stationed at the airport.

They were not not there because they were being attacked, intercepted...?

They could not stay up there, they could not, the part of the men that remained there were captured. Men from Bunje remained there and were captured.

And after the lines were established, what was the arrangement for the 3rd Brigade?

After the lines were established the 3rd Brigade was deployed on the line Kovačine, the airport, Buna, toward Kičine, that area... part of the men were stationed at the Catholic church, and they were placed under command of the Group of Operations, along with parts of the 4th Battalion and the 9th Battalion... The defense was formed by groups of operations, so called sectors. There were three sectors organized in the city, being formed right at the beginning, but they did not last for very long. They were reorganized after a short time, because of the difficulties in issuing commands. I know that my operative, an Albanian Muslim Fadil Haljiti Šok, was in command of one of the sectors, the one covering the area from the Catholic church in Podhum to the Catholic church at the Gymnasium.

That was in May of 1993, is that correct?

Yes, that was after the attacks by the Army, after the 9th of May.

And Šok was commanding a sector.

Fadil Haljiti Šok.

He was Albanian or...?

Albanian Muslim.

Albanian Muslim. Good. And after organizing the sectors, the zone was organized, is that correct? Was the defense of the city also formed?

Nothing, the established line remained as it was, there were no actions... apart from sporadic activities, sporadic shooting, and so on. There were no major combat activities, not before the 30th of June, when the BiH Army attacked the "Tihomir Mišić" barracks. Quite a lot of Muslims were active in that brigade, the 2nd Brigade, and the battalion stationed up there, and they remained there afterwards.

Was that called the North camp (cro: Sjeverni logor)?

The North camp, yes. This is where Muslims, stationed in the North camp at that moment, as the HVO members, cut off the only wired crossing and disabled withdrawing and escape, and slaughtered some of their colleagues. The Mostar Brigade commanding officer, Mithad Hujdur Hujka, got killed during the attack on that object. That was when Bijelo Polje was taken, and it must be said that they were organizing evening parties before that, to gather commanders on certain places. They killed a lot of civilians and took control of the ammunition warehouse that belonged to the 1st Battalion which was stationed up there, the "Maka Radić" Battalion. They took very large quantities of ammunition, very large quantities.

They got provided with a lot of arms that way, is that right?

Of course.

This is when the conflict started, is that right? Fights began outside of Mostar as well. There was no conflicts between the BiH Army and the HVO around Mostar before that?

Up until then... after the... after the 9th of May and this... there was no conflicts from the 9th of May to the 30th of June, and after the 30th of June the sectors were formed. That is, the North Sector, the South Sector and the City Sector. The first attacks started on the 13th of July, in the South, and were aimed at my brigade.

That is correct.

Five of my men died there...

In what area?

In Petak, on Buna. The place is called Petak. A man heard a noise and got out of his bed, wearing only his underwear, saying "What is going on?", and they shot him. The man was Slavko Kulaš. We gathered certain information during the observation and sometimes before morning, around 3.30, I issued a command to activate the alert and inspect the lines, and as my men were inspecting the lines on Buna and Lakševine, toward the graveyard... my men, Milo Mandarić and Krunoslav Zlomislić, got killed as they were driving in a van, by members of the Army thrown in behind our backs. As we were cleaning the area, we lost Zdravko Sopta and Božo Anić. Five of my men got killed. We got down a number of the Army fighters, a large number of them got killed, and we continued with cleaning the area / restoring the lines.

When you say "cleaning the area", what does that mean?

It means that every house is checked, every bus they arrived on, because during the cleaning we found some of them on the graveyard, hiding in vaults. We handed all of them to the Military police, and I don't know what happened to them afterwards, they were probably exchanged.

Is cleaning a normal operation after a ...?

Leaving a terrain and the background clean, without leaving anyone there.

Everyone were supposed to leave, because there was practically no civilian objects in that area of action. We organized a new action on the 17th of May, whereby I must say that the Zone of Operations was not ordered to go to that action. It was organized with the help of the Tactical group 5 from Croatia. I don't know what was the force or the man-power of the Tactical group 5, but I do know that Luka Džanko was in command. It was organized following a command of General Bobetko, by his instructions. My duty during that action was...

So, that was the Tactical group sent by General Bobetko...

Yes, he sent the Tactical group, and my duty was to work on the Kičin line and to make available one platoon for the Tactical group... a reconnaissance platoon, consisting of about 20 people, of which five or six died. Unfortunately, the Tactical group suffered 27 dead, 140 wounded, and so on. We were attacking on the Kičin line. Until 12 o'clock we cleaned the area, cleared it, speaking in military terms, it was an uninhabited area, there were no residential objects. We did not lose any men. We were supposed to be followed by the 1st Brigade, the "Neven Obradović" Brigade, but they never set out, so we were exposed to the utmost risk.

What was the significance of Kičin? Why was it important?

According to our knowledge, and that was also my insight back then, the Tactical group 5 was sent to prevent the Muslim forces in cutting the communication lines between Mostar, Čapljina, Neum, and further to the South, while part of their forces was headed toward Grabovica, aiming to cut off Stolac and Čapljina and arrive at Neum, which would mean cutting off the southern part of Croatia completely. I was aware that they had such intentions before, because I was... I said that already, at one of the meetings in Mostar, with General Lara from Spain attending. At the meeting I asked Dreković, a BiH Army General: "Why did you sign the truce while your men went to negotiate with the Serbs?", because I had that information. The following people attended these negotiations: Fatima Leho,

Safet Oručević, Zijo Demirović, and Esad Humo. They asked the Serbs to let them attack Stolac through Berković, and they would let the Serbs to take control of the entire southern area. They reported that the Serbs refused. I told them that, and Dreković said he did not order that, that he did not know about it, but he did not deny that such negotiations were held. I know for a fact that they were held. That was probably why the action of the Croatian forces was necessary in that area, to... Because we were attacked on the 13th already, and the intentions were very clear. Croatian army arrived in a haste, I did not even see them. They arrived in a haste and maybe that erratic condition and the haste were the reason for so many people getting killed. They wanted to prevent cutting off the communication lines in the shortest time, because it would be impossible to restore these lines later on. They would have control over the left bank of the Neretva river, the road to Čapljina, Mostar, and that would be the end of it. No army in the world would be able to restore that.

And what about Gubavica, was is strategically important?

Gubavica is positioned parallel to Domanovci and covers the entire communication toward Čapljina and Počitelj. It is a dominant position, and no one would be able to take any control there, Southern Croatia would be entirely cut off. As I said, we regained control over that area with great difficulties, the 1st Brigade suffered even more losses, and the losses of the 3rd Brigade were extremely high, because a lot of Muslims were active in that brigade. They remained in the brigade and then reacted in a treacherous way, as quislings within the HVO. That is why this action ended in such a difficult, ugly way. After that, on the 17th and the 18th, I was completely broken physically, I was exhausted and asked General Petrović and Bruno Stojić to remove me from the brigade because I could cope no longer. They said: "Let's wait until tomorrow!" and I replied: "If you don't transfer me now, tomorrow I may not be alive, I cannot take it any more!" They

transferred me to the Main Headquarters, where I took the position of the chief to the Operational and Teaching Department in Čitluk. When I arrived to Čitluk, the first one I met was (now deceased) General Stanko Matić. He was aware of my condition, but it was not customary to send anyone on a leave during the war. He issued a written decision to send me on a 7-day leave, because he knew in what condition I was. I continued to work in the Main Headquarters for a short period, and then I was ordered to take the commanding post at the North Sector from Miro Andrić.

What was the northern region? The one toward...

The North Sector was the area that was attacked later, as well as the entire city. It was the area spreading from Klaka, which means from the Salakovac dam, or a bit lower, to Rakitno, Karamanovi Klanci and the top of Drežnica – almost 72 kilometers.

When were you appointed the Commander of the North Sector?

I don't remember the exact date of the transfer, but it was during September. From September of 1993 to...

That was during the situation in Raštani, was is not?

Well, yes, I was up there. Raštani was part of the City Sector. I was there until February of 1994, and Ilija Vrljić came after me, when there were no more combat actions. During the time I was commanding the North Sector, the Army attacked the North Sector five or six times, 10-15 HVO soldiers died, mostly members of the Grude Brigade, and some from the Široki Brijeg Brigade. During one of the attacks, on the 19th of September 1993, in one moment 15 men from the village I was born in went missing. It was a shock; all but three of them were my relatives. We found two of them killed, one of them was my wife's cousin. Two or three were killed after being captured in Bijelo Polje – facts of that are available to the court. A legal

proceeding was organized earlier, but it was stopped. They killed Dragan Lasić, Pero Kosir and Mario Lasić, all of them captured before.

During the operation up there Zvonimir Zovko and Vencel Lasić got killed. Jura Kosir survived and was exchanged, but a part of his ear was cut off. One of my relatives, Primorac, jumped out of the vehicle as they were driving them, he jumped out and crossed the Neretva river by swimming. The rest of them were beaten heavily, and I know, I was told that they would have probably been killed in the 4th Elementary school if it weren't for Braco Dilbertović and Piko Demirović – one of the men who got beaten, Stanislav Ljubić, was related to Braco Dilbertović's wife. When he (Dilbertović) saw in what condition Ljubić was, he attacked the Commander of the prison. Later on they faced a lot of problems for saving these men, it must be said.

Where were they captured?

In the 4th Elementary school.

No, no, before they were taken to the 4th Elementary?

They took captive of them in Jedrinja.

Which is?

That is... Jedrinja is positioned above the Jedrinja dam, on the south side.

Good. Is that the area toward Grabovica?

Before Grabovica, that is, left of Salakovac. Coming from Mostar, left of Salakovac. Muslim forces crossed the lake during the night by boats and attacked that area in the morning.

Were any of our units present beyond that area toward Grbavica?

Toward Grabovica.

Grabovica.

No, none of our units were on that side. There was no one on the other side or up there.

Our forces were present as far as Salakovac, is that correct?

We were covering the entire area, but on the south side of the Neretva river, yes.

Yes, on the south side.

Yes, and we were also partially stationed in Bijelo Polje, by the nunnery.

Yes, as they attacked that nunnery.

Yes.

While we were talking about this, I wanted to discuss one more thing... just a moment, I don't want to use this... I would like to know whether General Petković, or General Praljak, after he took the commanding post, issued any commands to undertake any conquering actions in the area controlled by the HVO, where you were stationed and during the time you were in command of the brigade, and later of the Sector, and also while you were active in the Main Headquarters?

At this moment I cannot recall any such action. We did have some opportunities... later on, as I left the Main Headquarters and took the commanding post at the North Sector, I did have opportunities to attack, to undertake combat actions. In front of me I had Drežnica, which could not be taken by anyone and at any time, that is first. Secondly, I had the lake and the river in front of me, and there was no need for us to undertake any attacks, we were only holding the line of defense. I had no knowledge, and nothing was known in Mostar, of any conquering operations, excluding the operation I performed on the 15th of July 1993, as I said before. I know of no other such operations, nothing was planned. In Raštani people organized spontaneously, to

take back Raštani after it was seized by the Muslims, and at that point everyone in Mostar carrying a rifle, including the members of the special forces who were on a leave, went for Raštani to make it free. It caused great losses on our side, because it was not at all coordinated. So, thus...

Were Raštani an important post?

Absolutely an important post! Absolutely! I have no knowledge of that operation, but I do know about one action... the one that happened on the 15th of August. That action was ordered, and as I said, on the 15th of July I took control of Kičine with my brigade, we threw off the enemy away from the Stolac-Mostar communication line and, because my brigade was exhausted, we left the control over to the Čitluk Brigade. They were controlling the area for a month, and then lost control of it on the 14th of August, with some casualties. As I recall, the "Baja Kraljević" Battalion was called to act after that, along with one part of the "Convicts Battalion", they were called to act on the 15th of August. That day is the greatest Catholic holiday, and majority of the men came from Široki Brijeg, where there was a celebration of the Western Christian Assumption. They did the job until 10 or 12 o'clock, so that they could leave for Široki Brijeg and join the celebrations.

I am asking this for the following reason: you were talking about the 13th of July, and the return on the 15th of July.

That is correct.

If it was a conquering action, what was its purpose?

The purpose was to regain control over the areas that were lost on the 13th of July.

Not to take over new areas?

We had nothing to take over. It was impossible for us to take over any area. Our

mission was to repel the enemy, even off Blagaj, not to take over anything. My brigade was controlling the areas in Podveležje. These areas were then lost, and returning to Podveležje did not really mean taking over anything. We were just returning to positions we lost by treason.

So that is how it was.

So, we were not taking over anything. I did make plans, in case we manage to move further, and I organized forces that were supposed to take the line toward the Chetniks, but I was not ordered to take my forces further toward Mostar.

That is what I am interested in. Have you ever been ordered to take over any area, that is, to take over terrains that were not...?

No, no!

So, these were manly defensive...

We had no men, we were thoroughly exhausted fighting the Serbs, we had no forces, no men, and it was well known that a brigade was formed by mobilizing all Croats, all Herzegovinians that were residing in Croatia at the time, and that brigade was sent here. They were considered to be deserters, because their homes, their fathers had to be protected, and instead of taking part in that, they fled to Croatia. So, the least popular measures had to be taken, we had no... We had many wounded, many got killed, the line could not be hold like that.

You mentioned mobilization. Can you say anything of the proportion of forces between the HVO and the BiH Army? In what condition was the HVO when the war was most intense, during June, July and August?

You see, I read so many books, especially those on wars around the world, and I could not find any records of a small nation, a small army, going into war against two

armies in one year. Two armies, absolutely superior in numbers, five times or more, and two armies that were better equipped. So, with... Any normal person can see that an army as small as the HVO was, would not want to fight two wars. Secondly, Croatian nation in Bosnia and Herzegovina absolutely did not need any more territory, because, in terms of the demographics, we had too much of it anyway. I can tell you from my own example that until the age of 30 or 40 I have never been to Blagaj, not until the war. What would I want to go there? Why would I want to take over Blagaj, for what purpose? I went there to help them. My superiors told me to help them. First blood I gave during the war went to a wounded soldier Osman Marić – a Muslim. My family never told me: "We have to fight those people." They say I am a volunteer – I don't know what a volunteer is. If I would have gone to Palestine to fight, then I would be a volunteer. I went to war out of necessity, because my family was attacked, no one mobilized me, so I could never have been demobilized. Also, no one could mobilize those who did not want to go to war. They found ways to avoid it, and there were no means to punish them. What would it mean to them if we put them to prison? That would be the best solution for them, it would mean that they will not get killed. They would be fed and they would not get killed. It would mean rewarding them, so, it was not all that simple. Those who went to war, they did it out of patriotism – I would say that the first driving force was the need to defend your family, the second was patriotism, and the third was the shame of staying at home, not going, while your neighbours were brought home dead. Those were the elements driving one to go to war. I can affirm that no one, not a single Croat, wanted to take over Nevesinje to live there. There was no need for that, it is insane. When Muslims attacked the HVO, they controlled a very small area and sensed that the international institutions are developing some kind of agreement to just leave to each of the sides those areas they controlled, so they set out and attacked those who they considered unable to defend themselves, and they also had what is the most important for every army – they had support in the background, a large number of their people was active in the HVO, they knew the plans the HVO made and the strength it had, because their

soldiers were active in the HVO. For example, over twelve hundred armed Muslims left my brigade and joined them, and they knew everything. The same happened to the 1st Brigade, the 3rd Brigade, the 2nd Brigade, they had all the information, plus the support from the civilians, they regularly received intelligence data. It was impossible for us even to blink in our area without them knowing about it. When conflicts started, only 47 Croatian nationals remained in eastern Mostar, and later on that number declined to 27. And there were 5,600 Croats...

Before the conflicts?

That is correct. So, it is very clear, no other conclusions can be made on that. It was an act of aggression on their part, to gain control over as many land as possible, thus gaining the most benefits once the international community starts dividing the country.

Because, that was constituting a demographic boom in Mostar, was it not?

Absolutely!

How many of them came? 18,000, or 19,000 refugees?

Mostar was full with refugees, Muslims from Gacka, Nevesinje, Kalinovik, Ulog, Stolac, Čapljina, Počitelj, God knows where else... Bileća, Trebinje... all of them came to Mostar. They were having a huge...

They were coming from Bosnia as well?

From Bosnia, of course, they had tremendous man-power. And as for us, we had difficulties in holding five bunkers in shifts. We had no men. Many wounded, many killed, plus they had the opportunity to escape to Croatia, and they took it, and so on. We had terrible problems.

I think we have it all now.

IVAN PRIMORAC

November 2005, Ljubuški