

PREDRAG STOJAKOVIĆ

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Sisak

The sound recording and the transcript of the conversation were recorded on a
CD marked

SUNJA 3.

The sound recording is registered under the code

stojakovićpredrag

7,37 MB

duration: 23:03

The conversation was held in Sisak, in the collocutors house

I turned it on and at the beginning I would like to ask you to introduce yourself to me.

Predrag Stojaković

Where were you born?

In Sisak.

Tell me what were you doing during the war? What were your obligations?

I was in Signals, in the Signal Corps, mostly. So, from 1991 until somewhere 1994 I was in the Signal Corps. Later, as it went in the formation sense and as it developed, we were signalmen and then later I was the commander of the signal squad and so... Until they moved us here.

About the way that signals function, about how you worked, what happened – I talked about that a moment ago with Nedad, and with Željko. I would like to hear you too. Tell me what it all looked like? How did it go?

Well it went in the way that we didn't have anything. We provisionally put together what we had, but from those... We used some postal connections, something ours, something what you found. There were these wires, telephones and some of those Motorolas there was. Then this, later it all started as we received equipment. So that we also developed in the way that in fact the formation was developing. So, in the way that for example the regiment when only later, then we were only the signal platoon. We didn't even have a formation, like military – that didn't exist, but people volunteered according to what they knew. There, we were in those waters, we knew how to use the technology, and then in that way we stayed connected.

When you are talking about how you started, was it the time before Praljak or the time when Praljak already arrived?

Oh that somewhere about that time, he is... I don't know the dates now...

He came at the beginning of September 1991.

Yes, then it's somewhere about that time. Yes, that was then. Was it? We, when there wasn't anything. And then when we arrived, I for example joined on 13.09. Then we, like, started working on that connection because until then that didn't exist. There was no connection. We were the first to ... Krapljan got the assignment, Predrag Krapljan, and he took us in Signals. We started with what a how we knew.

Could you tell me, like this, in two sentences, what was the condition, what was the situation in July, August 1991? So the war has started, the attacks have started – what was happening? How did that function? From many sources I heard all of that was quite scattered.

Well it was scattered, I did... Look, my house is there in ****. That's the ex *****. So my house was on the first front line. I was next to the police station, exactly my house. That's that, first of all those there were those patrols that only the police had. Then was that***, 27.07. when there was an attack, all of that... I worked the night shift. When we went from

Sisak to Sunja then the train stopped and came back – like, then Sunja was attacked. You have the feeling that all of that was demolished. In the end, there were few shells everywhere around, and the least on the police station like we thought. I worried the most for the children. Nor was it known according to me, who, what, how? Those were those first steps, in fact, what were. I haven't joined immediately. I was working. Then for a while, while I was working and travelling it didn't work anymore. Then I, in September, stopped working and then we applied down there in Sunja.

So, you actually joined about the time when Praljak came. Is that right?

Well I don't know, now exactly is...

The beginning of September....

I can't remember now, but... but it's here somewhere... He came somewhere about the same time when we did...

Did you have the chance to work with Praljak, i.e. were you in some kind of contact?

Oh look, I was a lot lower, by rank I was nothing. I didn't personally with him. He used to come to see us, and how to tell you? I didn't personally work with him.

You were actually a small group? How many were there, four?

Well, four, five I think. We actually started like that, so to stretch that, they were interrupted those postal... Then we started those ours, with those postal-telecommunications cables to stretch. And like that, so that we were also in the Command, and everywhere. We connected all units.

Did Praljak give you difficult assignments? I suppose that your job was difficult?

Well it wasn't. It was difficult. He had nothing to do – he wanted the connection to function. While we were there it functioned. We gave as much as we could. Here used to be a lot of shelling, let's say, and then those cables were cut. Mostly we relied on wire connections because of the shells, eavesdropping and that, and that could not be eavesdropped. Then it's the most secure connection. But that functioned well.

So it means that at the time it functioned?

That was our obligation, to do that and I think that it was very well-made.

I heard that it was one of the best connections at the time.

Well we did what we did. Praljak demanded that it must function, that it must be done. We did it and the connections functioned.

But no matter of the attack, when ever a connection was broken you went out again...?

We did it all the time, how many times we ... Once we almost bumped into him.

How? What happened?

He from this side, I don't know now, on self-propelled gun or a tank – and we from the entrance, from here. Dark, like, you don't turn on the lights, "What are you doing here?", "Working, fixing", "So wait for the attack to stop and then.." – and you can't when the shelling was constant. You didn't have working hours, when they will start shelling. I don't know. As much as we could, we gave everything, and I think that this...

I will ask you something without hesitation: other people I talked to told me that there were problems because exactly you were in Signals, i.e. that some people complained about that. Is that right?

Well listen... Down there, unfortunately, in Sunja, we had problems. Lets' say, I'm from a mixed marriage, my father is a Croat and my mother is Serb. Then some people kept rubbing it in that... Not some people but the leaders. I can say that after Praljak left they replaced us.

When Praljak left?

When Praljak left, because they were pressuring Praljak, as far as I know form the information I got, to replace us – and he wouldn't let them because we were doing our job as we should.

So, the pressure existed even before?

Yes, from the local leaders. They requested that we should be replaced because of that unfitness...

Political unfitness?

It's not political, but at that time it was also political. Who wasn't, how to put it, that was a very charged nationalism. Who wasn't like pure Croat – that person was unfit.

That what was happening to you, those bad things that were happening to you – were happening not only to you. It was obvious them more people were going through that, right?

Well it was. Let's say, Nenad Novalić, he was of Serbian nationality, but exactly, we had... We experienced open attacks. On all sides, good, we were from a mixed marriage and that functioned for a while, and so... In the end we turned out to be Serbs and that...

That was in 1994? Then when you were disbanded?

Yes, when we were disbanded, but already then Praljak has left and there was no one to stand behind us. In fact, he wouldn't let them touch us – because we did our job extremely well and that was important to him. So, according to me, then nationality wasn't important for Praljak although we were... Let's say, I don't know, my wife is Croatian, my father is Croatian and what does it matter if my mom is Serbian... What is, I don't see a reason here... No reason, but for the local people there was. I believe that Mirko also knows how much we... even the death threats, and everything...

Look, let's understand each other: it's even unpleasant for me to ask you that because such classification for me is simply something that gives me creeps..... But I have to ask you, exactly because of....

You don't have to be embarrassed, I am... Unfortunately, I risked my life and all that – and in the end I turned out to be unfit. And I was replaced from the Signal Corps.

At the same time when the rest of them?

At the same time. We were three brothers. So one from the army, two were removed and I was thrown somewhere over there, because I had the rank of the sergeant and they threw me to work on the telephones, fuck that.

Praljak stood behind you?

Yes, yes.

When he was here, when he could?

Yes, Praljak. And Peša even, that is...

In what way did Praljak stand behind you?

He wouldn't let them touch us.

How exactly did he do that?

Look how exactly was that. Those were constant pressures, those local ones, that we should be removed from Signal Corps, like that we were unreliable, and that. Praljak didn't allow that, there was no way. When Praljak left, the commanding officer was Krapljan, Željko Krapljan. Krapljan called me and said listen: "I have nothing against you *** in other words but really I can't stand behind those attacks anymore." ***** they replaced us then, and Krapljan, because we were also friends, I mean friends, as much as they ***** At the time we were playing and we were always on parties. I know how many times we for the boys on B52, then in the Hotel over there, where we always played tamburitza where there were no attacks. Parties were organized and that – and people appreciated that. But there were always individuals, unfortunately also on power, who were, who were probably bothered by our blood – so that were, Krapljan, Željko Krapljan strictly removed me and sent me there to Bistrać, on the hilltop somewhere. They didn't even let me take my clothes off, but simply they... And I as a sergeant, let's say, came there, to AMD, artillery-missile division that has a signals department, here as a simple soldier – and my commanding officer was someone who they mobilized a month ago. And it was like that at the time. Look, there were people who stood behind their job, who wouldn't allow others to blackmail them. Not to blackmail, in general. So starting from Pavlak, they all urged that we should be replaced, so the total, I can say, top of the CDU (Croatian Democratic Union) – we all bothered them. Orkan was their puppet. Orkan threatened me with death, he says: "What would happen if for example a truck hit you tomorrow, this – that, what? Who would investigate? Who would prove?" and I don't know what? Those things were very difficult for me and they irritated me a lot, but nothing... that was the time. I stayed alive and well. But thanks to let's say, that's why I also say about

Praljak – he is the man who stood behind us, who knew what he was doing and who brought order to Sunja. I have to say that.

Can we say that Praljak, during the time he was in Sunja, hasn't allowed discriminations or divisions....?

Yes, that's what I wanted to say.

That he made an effort about that?

To say in short, so, he hasn't allowed that people are inconvenienced. Not only us, but as far as I know from people that those things didn't happen.

What did that mean for you personally, in that situation, how did you feel when you heard or when you found out that he...

Look, I was glad. Sunja had, I knew many people and I was friends with many people. And let's say, whatever was happening, that's always, someone tells you. And then what are the plans here, what are..., someone always tells you: guys this and this. You know the situation is like this. That was, you know, you couldn't hide it. There were always people who were normal, who were... they don't judge people according to what they are, but how they are – and Praljak was like that. Praljak did his job. He came to Sunja, did what he had to do: so, brought order to that anarchy that existed. That was all like: I'm the stronger boss, you are that, skirmishing, he is like that, that one in his village – and then he made order. And we established that connection. The connection functioned perfectly and I have nothing to say about that because he stood behind that. We really did that job well and did at the time having in mind how and with what we worked. How many times did we on the front line... shells break it even 10 times a day and how many times we were caught in the middle of shelling. And he even said "Do not dash headlong so much, slowly. When it stops, then fix it!" so from that side I can't say anything bad about Praljak. He went up the current, as you say.

I will ask you just a few questions about things that were symptomatic, people remember then and connect them to Praljak's period so maybe you know something about it. So, Praljak when he came, the defence was in peaces, broken, it needed to be connected. First thing that Praljak decided to do was to establish the line and build pillboxes. Where you present when that was happening and do you know how that functioned?

Well look, honestly, I wasn't present on those briefings because I didn't have that function. But that was like, you defended from house to house, around, on the roads, and where Praljak came the line of defence was clearly defined... And then the pillboxes were made. Not only pillboxes but it was known exactly, you know, and you didn't go over those lines. It was defended exactly; we defended ourselves in Sunja actually all the time. We haven't attacked from anywhere but like, it was exactly known: there was B52 on this side, the border-guard on this side and there that line over Bistrač was made over to Bobovac *** I know because we drew the lines so I know more or less where the lines were. It was defined everywhere, we connected those pillboxes with the command.

Tell me, after the attacks on Sunja started, after a certain number of people left – here they say "over the railroad" - and a part of civilians stayed, what was happening to

those civilians? In what way were they taken care of, was there some kind of organized care for the? Namely, it is difficult to distinguish in that period the civilian and the military power, all that had to function in some way.

Well I don't know exactly how many civilians stayed in Sunja. The ones that stayed, I don't know. I wasn't really, my family, we were all in Sisak. I took my wife and children to Sisak. There were some older people on this road, I don't know. With civilians, as far as I know, there were no problems here. I don't know I say, I was too low down there to participate directly. We were mostly on those parties. When there was some kind of party them we played...

Did you play for Praljak sometimes?

How many times was he there: he, Lasta and that. We even went to Mirogoj to play for Lasta...

Did you go to the concert of Zlatni Dukati?

Zlatni Dukati? When was that? I don't remember, I don't remember that.

Tell me, that wasn't specific only for this front line, that was in a certain period present in many places, so, it was very popular to wear Ustasha signs. How was in this area, during Praljak, that problem solved?

Well...

Did you notice someone wearing it at all?

Well, I didn't really... Oh look, there were individuals. I know when we were all playing on a party that there was a lot of that. We had to also play many Ustasha songs, and everything...

When was that?

During the war. Already when UNPROFOR came, we stopped playing. But it was the matter of individuals. So, if someone comes and asks, I in order to avoid excess, exactly because the used to provoke – then we played that. Song is a song. To me it wasn't...

I asked you for that concert of Zlatni Dukati exactly because they were playing some Ustasha songs that time, and Praljak interrupted the concert.

I don't know that. I wasn't, I wasn't... I know later, later – when Praljak left we had more problems then during his time. So, while Praljak was....

But that's, objectively, the time when there were no more attacks, when you could expect a more peaceful....

Until UNPROFOR, that was that, war as you say. When UNPROFOR came then it was already....

And then, you say, you had more problems then during Praljak?

Well then there were problems. When Praljak left then those locals came. Then they had it their way and we used to have many unpleasant situations. That's why I came to Sisak in the first place, to move from there, simply. Here I don't have a problem with anyone. Since it's a bigger town then... but down there... I loved Sunja more than anything – now really, it doesn't attract me. Because people make a place not houses.

Thank you. Have I bothered you a lot?

Oh no.

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