

# **ZORAN TRNINIĆ**

**Ljubuški**

**December 2005.**

The interview was recorded; the tape is marked as code

**zotrnic**

**12,7 MB**

**Duration 40:00**

**The interview was taken in Mostaru**

**Here, our Dictaphone is turned on. I would just like to ask you and the beginning of our recording, to introduce yourself, if you could give us your name and surname, date and place of birth, residence and occupation?**

I'm Zoran Trninić, doctor, born 01.03.1961, in Sarajevo. I live in Mostar, I'm a surgeon, I work in the Clinic for surgery and urology KB Mostar.

**Now, 2005 is the year we have to go back to, in the early 90's, during the war. Hence, my first question to you is where were you, where were you when the war began, what did you do during the war?**

Like this, at the beginning of the war I was living in Mostar, out of work, just married and at the very beginning days of war, which means it was somewhere in the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> month of 1992. I contacted the Medical Centre, because during that time a lot of people, even medical staff left the city to go to various places for various reasons so I began to work at the Medical Centre.

**The Medical Centre was where?**

The Medical Centre was on Bulevaru, it's where the Medical centre is now.

**Was that the only Medical Centre that worked at the time or was there more Medical Centres that were working in Mostar?**

It was like this, that was the only Medical Centre, in this respect, there was a Medical Centre branch in Brankovac, I don't know whether there were doctors there on call (emergencies), who had, doctors who worked there I believe were there, but I don't know whether they were on call, meaning 24 hours.

**You, it means had 24 hours?**

We had 24 hours and we were organized in such a way.

**O, now tell me, how in fact was the Medical Centre organized? At the same time there was a hospital Bijeli Brijeg which was in function, is that so?**

Yes.

**Then, how did you divide the work, who did what?**

Well it was like this, during that time there was, I think that he was called commander of the Medical Centre, whose function was director, who organized the work and I remember there were always services; I was called to be in the service for medical work.

**Medical work?**

Yes. And what was the worst we were called to watch in the rooms of medical work which were practically, I can't say they were barracks, but they were ground level buildings without, only with mounting cover, meaning without a secure roof and we worked shifts for 24 hours.

**Who came to you, that is, who did you go to?**

It was like this, as far as I can remember there wasn't much work, we were coming, we were working principally for civilians, which means when we were working in the Medical Centre we worked our normal doctors jobs.

**Were they classical emergency jobs?**

Classical emergency jobs, I remember that we, I spent a lot of time sorting medicine that was arriving through humanitarian aide, you can practically say foreign medicine appeared straight away and they had to be translated, sorted into groups and so forth.

**Was the medicine that was arriving only intended for the Medical Centre or after they had arrived to you were they sent elsewhere?**

No, no it all stayed at the Medical centre and they were, I think they were less organized, I think there was private or sort of private packages or they were coming from somewhere, meaning unsorted medicine in packages, a little of medical supplies.

**Were refugees coming to you who were living in the city?**

Well, at the very beginning there wasn't many refugees, it means I'm talking about the very beginning of the war 1992, there wasn't many refugees, not much, I said there wasn't much work, there wasn't much people walking through the city, nor were there many people sick in the sense with normal pathology which a peaceful Medical Centre has, types of viruses, colds and these other normal things which more then 50% there simply wasn't any, it means the people, the people weren't exposing themselves....

**What were then, what were the cases of people who were coming to you?**

I don't know, they were chronic illnesses, some serious illnesses, I was mainly supplying the medicine, I can't say damaged, but most people from their buildings, from neighbouring buildings, because I lived in that part of town where there were big buildings, skyscrapers, then everyone knew I was a doctor, they knew, then I would take them...

**Bags.**

Well, something like that, roughly, basket. There wasn't much medicine, but it was like that, because people were looking to walk as little as possible, because at the time there was a lot of un-proportioned ammunition power, which means, that JNA (Yugoslav Peoples Army) was predominant with the artillery weapons so they were bombing the city a lot, so that...

**Do you have any cases that were injured, that is, did you intervene in such cases?**

No. As far as I can remember while working in the Medical Centre, which means in the city in the building of the Medical Centre we didn't have such interventions, and the other thing is, there was a little of that sort, I wouldn't say due to it being organized but rather unorganized, but there was a hospital nearby. It means, in 1992 there were two hospitals for surgery that were working, means one of them was for surgery and still is as of today, meaning the hospital that was called Nova Bolnica (New Hospital) where the surgeons worked who were there before war and there was a War Hospital already in the building of the new hospital unfinished on Bijeli Brijeg, where they worked, one part of surgeons who came as help from Croatia, I don't know exactly when, what date it began, but in any case there was hospital for surgery up there. At the beginning of 1992,

because at the beginning of 1992 and right up to the conflict with Muslims, we were mutually working together in the surgery building; meaning in Surgery.

**Good.**

And how much... Even now, because I'm talking about all of that I believe that, I don't believe but rather I'm sure that at the beginning of the war, the war here is connected with an explosion, the explosion in the Northern Camp, that everyone was injured even though they were taken care of here, some of them stayed there, some of them stayed for awhile on therapy...

**Where?**

In surgery up there.

**Good. Now I'm interested in, meaning, if I clearly understood, you had somewhere around 4<sup>th</sup> that is 5<sup>th</sup> month of 1992 and then up to 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> month of 1993 been in the Medical Centre?**

Yes.

**That wasn't exactly a period of peace that was a period where there was tension. Within that year, what was your hardest period? What was on you / and, what was the most difficult experience, biggest problems that you faced during that period? How do you remember that period?**

Actually, I don't really remember that period well, because, well, in any case,

especially that first month or...

**This Dictaphone can't exactly take note of that symbolic hand gesture, but I understand that as you saying that you've repressed your memories related to that event.**

Well fine, yes, I suppose so, most likely, most likely yes, how should I say, I had... I can't say it's a feeling of fear but simply a feeling... now, most likely there's also fear involved, but no, I had never been, how would you say, felt some kind of fear from being in those situations, but more so of an uncomfortable feeling with the whole situation in general, because a person has unexpectedly found himself in a war situation, found himself in a city that was practically closed, is that so, in general it was difficult to leave, there were special permits for leaving the city, so that, how should I say this, I think in the first month that feeling overwhelmed me, you see.

**How about after those first couple of months?**

Later, how would I say, job is a job. It was never in question, it means, a man is trained to do a job with the basic part of education, education for that kind of a situation was not like that, I don't know, with me there was no dilemma about it whether I could do it, I want to do it and so forth, I say there was a decision to stay there, a decision not to go anywhere.

**Was it a difficult situation in that period, I'm talking about the Medical Centre?**

Well it was like this...

**Especially, what you can remember, can we touch into?**

Well it was like this, in the actual Medical Centre not something special, well we were in front of the Medical Centre, meaning the Medical Centre that is the doctor's at the Medical Centre were holding spots where they were covering the combat command. As much as what I can remember, I was on three or four places, and they were: Blagaj, Vranje, not Vranjevići or Dračevići and Drežnica. In Blagaj, Drežnica there were ambulances from before the war and there was staff working with them, we doctors were exchanging, it means we would go for 5 or to 7 days, if I remember well, on the field.

**You covered, what does that mean? You went there on request, or you were there on a regular basis?**

We went on a regular basis. It means there was a Medical Centre on the field, it means that the Medical Centre covers some of them; I can't remember now the exact amount....

**You would receive a schedule and would know...?**

Yes, I was, from Monday to Monday in Blagaj.

**What was the situation like there?**

Well fine, it was closer, practically on the frontline, I think it was a couple of kilometres from the frontline, Drežnica was a little further, that is not further than air distance, but the configuration of the terrain was as such that the valleys with high mountains, how should I say, you couldn't visually contact them. It means, there was somewhere, there was a line that I, let's say in Drežnica I didn't know where it was, I knew that people were returning from their shift, I knew there were injured in Drežnica, I didn't have any injured, I was up there twice, you went there for 15 days at a time, because it was further, it was a little bit more difficult to get

to, there was no communication, in fact there was, there was communication, but I say it was further terrain, it was about 20 kilometres, and you went there for 15 days at a time.

**What was the situation like at the spots? I assume there were more soldiers, how was it with the civilians? I'll put my question across like this: was there during those periods when you were at the spots, on call, cases that you solved, where civilians turned to you or soldiers?**

There civilians and soldiers. It means, we were working there in normal, in normal circumstances, it means if there was no battle then we would do our normal doctors duties, it means the people were approaching us normally, it means like doctors, but if there was battle involvement or injured related to the war so to speak, I also mean with self-inflicted injuries, accidental injuries, some incidents with force, then we would work.

**Did you have an ambulance?**

Yes.

**Did you go out with the ambulance?**

Yes. Not that often, I think in Blagaj and in Drežnica I didn't, I didn't go connected with, it means I didn't go to the frontline – in that sense, there was covering the terrain and leaving, under the apparent signs, house visits, but I didn't. On Vranjčevići I had, but that also wasn't the frontline, it means they were civilians who were, who were wounded during the bombing. We were the ambulance stop, we were the first ambulance stop with doctors and so forth, as much as I can remember and how much I knew then how did I have to function, you had to function on a second level or second echelon medical protection, I

should say ambulance protection. It means first aid would be given...

**On the spot?**

On the spot and then with some resources that the command had would be sent to us. Otherwise it was the time when HVO (Croatian Council for BiH Defence) and Army BiH held together positions, meaning they were holding their own line or they were exchanging in other parts.

**These parts that you mention, meaning Blagaj, Dračevica, Drežnica, were they positions where you were exchanging?**

It was like this, as much as what I can remember, HVO was holding one part above Blagaj, but the part towards Podveležja, Dračevica, meaning going up the hill and towards the east the Army BiH was holding.

**I assume the soldiers that were in positions, if they needed a doctor for any reason, they would come to you?**

Yes. How should I say, I would like to, because I know what I'm talking about, it was the time when in the Medical Centre and in the commands, meaning the Medical Centre was, under talking marks, mixed, meaning one team that happened to be there, from cosily people where they worked, meaning there were people with different nationalities, also...

**I'm talking about a team of doctors?**

Yes. Doctors, sisters, meaning a complete team of people who were working there before the war, mainly Croats and Muslims, there were also Serbs, how much less, and it was a small number.

**The teams functioned well?**

Yes, well, how should I say, it was in that part, meaning in the strict medical part, in the strict medical part where, we had problems, meaning there were spots a little further away and meaning whenever something was going on in Mostar with the first car they were taken to surgery one or the other, so being, when a person analyses this, I'm a surgeon, and I analysed a few things that have passed, it was even better because...

**It means there was a mixture of doctors in teams, is that so?**

Yes.

**Who functioned, if I understood correctly, on a professional level they functioned well?**

Yes.

**Was there any other level?**

Well, more in the organizational, meaning the sort of problems for instance how often is somebody going, how much who where someone is going and so forth, problems around the logistics, meaning the logistics itself, types of material, with medicine there were no real problems. I remember that I, meaning regarding this, there was another time, meaning the beginning of the war, when I was in a Aluminium combinatorial, meaning I was covering shifts for workers, and during that time the Aluminium was apparently on enemy territory, meaning, the workers, including us who were in the ambulance went as agreed upon known as the Crisis headquarters city and Military departments of JNA. I was, I remember the ambulance was

equipped completely by the City Chemist and Medical Centre with all sanitary materials, bandages, medicine, and in general it was prepared for some autonomous actions, for a couple of days, for taking care of for some time, meaning somewhere around the middle number of wounded, if any should happen to show up.

**During this time that we are talking about regarding these spots where you were, was there a difference between taking care of patients, meaning a difference between nationalities, religion, whatever?**

No, no. Absolutely not, nor can I remember such an example even when I wasn't there. I don't recall any such problems.

**So, it was the period 1992 and 1993, during that time the tension rose bit by bit between Croats and Muslims. Did it have an effect on your work, on the conditions that you worked in, and if so, in what way?**

In general, no. I remember being on the field in Drežnica, which a dominantly Muslim, where there was part of Croats, where there was even a HVO command, later it seemed to have come at the beginning of the conflict, some people were killed, I was roughly there 10 days before the conflict and spend 15 days up there and how should I say, some tension did exist, there were stories about some smaller conflicts somewhere further, but I never was...

**You had never come across an uncomfortable situation?**

No, no.

**Or any discomfort connected with staying in that area?**

No, no. Even, I say, I had some, how should I say, I spoke with some commanders of the Army then and apart from some light tension, which I would call, lets say political, more for political reasons, actually tied with, it was really tied in with the national thing, there was a question over the leadership, around all that, because Drežnica was on the border of Jablanica, but also fell under Mostar, where with the agreement from the beginning of 1992 command of joint defence forces was entrusted to HVO, you probably known, it was something that was published then, which existed, now to when and how, that is another story.

**Good, around 05/1993 you left the Medical Centre, is that so?**

It was like this, I was in the Medical Centre, it means I left my shift, my colleague Pehar was in the next shift who stayed and was captured, in the evening, which means straight after my shift, it means he replaced me and was left with the team who was also...

**He came normally to do his shift?**

Yes, yes. He came normally to work and it was that evening that it began, when the conflict began, that is when the Army took over that part of city. Because the Medical Centre was on the border then and stayed on the border till the end of the war, it didn't change.

**Just a minute, doctor Pehar came to do his shift, there is some tension there, they were growing, we know through some other stories that happenings...**

Yes, yes. There was even some shooting in the city, but nothing special.

**So it was like that. But doctor Pehar is going to do his shift. He wasn't warned, it means, a possibility of being captured?**

No, no.

**What happened with him further on, after he was captured?**

It was like this, as far as I can remember, I believe there were further mixed teams, my team the day before was mixed, his team was mixed, I don't remember now, it's not difficult to reconstruct who was there. I even believe that he had that day or a couple of days or something similar hid at a technical staffs or something like this, so in general, I don't know, I know that through stories, not his, but some other, and that he was, whether he was exchanged or managed to flee, but he was taken in...

**How much time did he spend there?**

Well, I don't know exactly. Not more than a month, but how much exactly I don't know.

**Where is doctor Pehar now?**

In Mostar.

**In Mostar?**

He is on department of Physical Medicine, yes.

**What happened with you further on?**

It was like this, when the conflict began, I was in a specific situation. My parents lived in a building in Vranić by, where the command was, where the command was of the Mostar battalion. I lived in the building next to them, so that morning when the conflict began received in my apartment, meaning through my living room a few bullets from which they called sifter of death or PKT, so that I was, I remember that day that I transferred my wife and child who was born in 1992, meaning he could be 4 or 5 months old, from my apartment in an apartment further down, a couple, lets say 500 metres, but in a part of town where there was no conflicts. I remember I tried to get in contact with my family, but I couldn't, there were some, I think that is what they said on Radio Mostar, that they sent messages on a personal basis, so I roughly through them told them that we are alive and well. I didn't know anything about them until the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, my sister was, how should I say, 300 metres from the Medical Centre and her fiancée place, then it was her boyfriend, and that building was 2, 3 times went from hand to hand, I knew that because I had the information, so I was occupied with those problems, and then I got in contact, I got in contact, whether it was the first day or straight away the second day up there in the hospital on Bijeli Brijeg. Then I was first allocated at the reception for emergency surgery, I was there for a couple of days and then afterwards I was allocated, allocated, I went with the command III. Battalion 2 Brigade HVO.

**That what you are saying that you were on Bijeli Brijeg, was the hospital**

**hit?**

I don't remember.

**Were the snipers at work?**

Snipers were working then. As much as I can understand then, the hospital was quite far, second thing, part of the hospital that was in function was turned towards the west, so the reception and that part of the building where we were could not be hit.

**In those couple of days were there a lot of wounded?**

I should I say, I wasn't, how should I say, I didn't see many of them. I think, I can say I saw a few, how many were there, was it two or five or something similar, but approximately it was like that, approximately like that. What I can remember that I saw, that I was doing, that I was doing, I was examining the bodies, if it was that, how many days, it was very short.

**Was that the time while you were in hospital?**

It was during the time while I was in the hospital, with some police inspectors, there was kind of refrigerator, a truck refrigerator, then we made it, I think it was in the first second or maybe fifth day of conflict.

**Where were the bodies collected from?**

The bodies were collected from around the city.

**Around the city?**

Around the city, some were in military gear, there were some civilians, but a majority of them were in military gear, there were just a few civilians. I remember there was an authoritatively record, whether it was all of them, I don't think so, because I remember there were a few members killed from the HVO lets say from

Široki and Čitluk, I don't know where they are from exactly, they took them home, however there were members of HVO amongst them.

**As far as I understood, they were in military outfits, with whose badges, HVO...?**

There were no badges. How should I say, I can't remember the badge, the badges I can't remember, but I tell you, but I think they managed to reconstruct a majority of them, if not then everyone from the place from where they were bought, by this how would you call it, documents that were found with us, mainly it was done, how should I say, it was just the beginning of the war, so it wasn't treated like a war, special police reports, I as a doctor, with a police inspector as a inspector and we would, we signed the police report after examining the body.

**Good, after a period, short period of being in Bijeli Brijeg you would leave with the command as a doctor?**

Yes. Yes, I went to Vrde. **Which command was that?**

That command was, like this, they were, just moment, 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> brigade or it was 3<sup>rd</sup>, pardon 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion, Cim battalion 2<sup>nd</sup> brigade.

**3rd battalion of the 2nd brigade. Where did you go?**

On terrain in Vrde.

**What was the terrain like?**

Well it was like this, I remember I was up there a few times, what I can remember from then there wasn't any, at least no big battle going on. I was there for the configuration of the terrain it was quite far, I was the town of Vrde, but the line was by Neretva and towards Drežnica and I can't remember whether there were a lot wounded, I think there were barely any.

**What was the problem then, what did you do there as a doctor?**

Well, I don't know how to say it, I think it was, the concept was as such, meaning bringing closer together the doctor and...

**I understand, but what did the people need most from you as a doctor, I'm talking about the men from the command, meaning, what was their main problems during that period?**

Well, what could I say, I don't remember that there were any major problems. I say once again...

**Were there self-inflicted injuries?**

No. I don't remember that, I don't remember that there was.

**Were there drinks, then after affects later?**

No.

**Fighting, breaking?**

No, no. I say, I remember that as a peaceful period, I was on my own, once again you couldn't psychically see the line; where I went, once I went to the line, but I don't recall that I returned with a wounded person, whether there was a smaller

injury, so I bandaged the person, or I simply put him in the ambulance and bought him back with me, then returned him, but there wasn't any serious wounding.

**Till when did you stay in the command?**

Well it was like this, practically till the end of the war, which is by the time they formed a mobile surgery team, it was somewhere in 1994 or 1995, I can't remember exactly. At one stage I was on all three places, meaning I went on terrain with the surgery team, I went on terrain with the command, so in general that was that. And up to, that is, Vrde was the beginning, later I was at Studenac, which is actually called...

**What was the situation like there?**

It was a little bit more difficult. Meaning, it was a part of the eastern bank of Neretva in Bijelo Polje which wasn't directly connected with the city, meaning there was 3 or 4 kilometres of airline, and the way that went around was exposed to fire, and it was quite long, relatively long, it took a hour and a half to the hospital, so there was a problem of transporting the injured, we couldn't transport them until the night fell, unless if there was something extra...

**Were you as a doctor doing your job ever in a situation where you were**

**shot at?**

Yes a few times, exactly there. There was shooting, meaning not on me but the vehicle.

**Was the vehicle marked?**

Yes.

**Regulated the way it should be, with...?**

Principally yes, principally yes, that was during a time...

**Where was that?**

It was down in Bijelo Polje.

**In Bijelo Polje?**

Yes, only in the bottom.

**During what period was it?**

It was somewhere in 1993, summer of 1993.

**And your colleagues? Were there similar situations with them and, at all, were any doctors injured that went?**

Well it was like this, what I can remember, it means there were, there were in Rama, in Rama there was one, how much I can, the story goes that someone fell into a connection, he called to say there was injured, the doctors that ran in and medical team were killed.

**Mister Trninić, I believe we came to the end of our conversation. Did we forget to mention something?**

I don't know, if there is anything of special interest to you, you can ask me, I'm saying once again connected with the beginning of the conversation and what is important, I say, I wasn't present, nor do I know that there were on all these places where I was, meaning I was in Bijeli Brijeg in Surgery Department, I was in the surgery in the city, I was a doctor in a command, I never noticed there was any discrimination, I don't know. Religion, nationality or race I'm not going to talk.

**Shall I ask you something else before I turn off the Dictaphone? Do you believe there are let us say Muslim doctors, who were a part of the mixed, joint teams when you were working, or nurses, who would want to talk about this period? Do you keep, as doctors, any contact amongst yourselves?**

Well, only with the ones that I am connected with through work, meaning not anything special. What else, what else is important to the story, what I can testify about, where I was present, but it was, I know a complete ambulance was captured was 1<sup>st</sup> battalion HVO who was in Bijelo Polje. It was a thing... meaning simply they... whether the colleagues were involved or not, the story is they were, but I wouldn't talk about it now...

**When was it?**

It was at the beginning of the conflict, at the very beginning of the conflict, whether it was the 1<sup>st</sup> day or just before the actual conflict in Mostar, I don't know the dates.

**What happened with those people later where were there...?**

They were in captive and I believe they were exchanged, that they were exchanged later.

**Meaning, it's suspected that your colleague doctors were there...?**

Yes, yes. I say, I know because I was for a long time, I was for a long time in Bijelo Polje, meaning in parts of 1<sup>st</sup> battalion of 2<sup>nd</sup> brigade HVO were holding that, because practically on the bridge was dividing them, meaning that Neretva stayed as the border, even HVO held one part of the bridgehead on the eastern bank, so they were telling me, telling me that people from that command, that is people that lived there as civilians.

**Good, lets go back a bit, do you believe there are parts of these doctors teams, ambulance teams, Muslim, who could talk or who would want to talk, who would want to confirm that during this time there were joint activities?**

To tell you, I don't have contacts with anyone concretely that I could tell you, that is direct you. In any case there are people. I don't keep contact with anyone that I could now say, that is direct you to them so you can contact them.

**Mister Trninić, we will turn of the Dictaphone, if you remember**

**something else...**

No problems.

**...we will continue. Thank you.**

December 2005, Ljubuški