

IVAN VULIĆ

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I would like to ask you, at the beginning of the recording, to introduce yourself. Telly us your name and surname, date and place of birth, current place of residence and profession.

My name is Ivan Vulić, born on 9th April 1967 in Metković, Croatia. My current residence is in Gabela, the Čapljina Municipality, and I currently work as director of the Public Institution "Sports Centre Čapljina" in Čapljina.

Tell me, Mr. Vulić, how did war begin for your, i.e. where have you been in those war years?

When the war broke out I was in Sarajevo. I had completed the Air Force High School in Mostar, after Mostar I went to the Military Academy in Belgrade where I spent three years, and the fourth year I specialized in infantry and I stayed on to work here. So, when the war broke out I was in Sarajevo. Naturally, after the beginning of hostilities I went over into the police force, then the only organized force in Sarajevo, and I stayed there until September, actually until 1st September, when I was invited to join the HVO, i.e. to form a brigade, a HVO formation which existed in Sarajevo.

Just a moment, you were in the police until 1st September, which year?

1992.

In the police in 1992, September, in Sarajevo?

In Sarajevo, yes.

And since September 1992 you went over into the HVO?

From the 1st September 1992 I went over to HVO by invitation and I remain, practically until the present day, actually in Sarajevo until 6th November 1993, after which I worked in the HVO Headquarters in Posušje, and after that in the Educational Centre in Čapljina.

Can we take it one at a time, starting with the period when you were in the police in Sarajevo until 1st September 1992? What was happening then, what were the problems in the police, what do you remember from that period?

In the police, I actually worked in the police, if you can call it work, it means, I was in the patrols, we were safeguarding the buildings and facilities, actually, that was the work of the police, and of the problems that we had at the time, as far as I know, the first problem was a lack of weapons and a lack of manpower. As far as I could see, these first moments of aggression, actually I can only speak about Sarajevo, because it is there that I found myself, the people at the beginning did not enter, did not enter into these formations that were organized, there was a lack of manpower, a lack of weapons, actually I know only of these problems, and the entire work was what I had said. It means, only patrolling the city and the safeguarding the buildings and facilities.

What was the composition of the police force then?

Mixed.

How long did such a mixed composition last?

As far as I knew, in that police there were Serbs, Muslims and, thank God, there were the Croats too.

How many Croats were there?

In this group where I was there were the three of us. I really don't know how many were in these other groups, because my work was to do my shift, two shifts, go home, and again to work when my shift comes. And in the town, to socialize or, as they say, walk around the town, I just didn't do it. When my shift was over I took the shortest way home.

When did Sarajevo actually feel the war? It is 1992, the war is on in Croatia, how and when and in which way did Sarajevo become aware of the war?

I repeat, it is only my personal opinion that sometime in August, only in August they became aware...

Which year?

1992. It is only then that they became aware that war is a reality, because until then it was only the sporadic shooting, barricades in the streets, on the roads, this is what I know what the people were saying, that they tried to resolve it in a peaceful manner – this is not war, this is not our war – we are a multi-ethnic community, they mainly tried to push this argument, all the talk was about that, they simple didn't believe, didn't believe, maybe we believed that Sarajevo actually with those barricades, that Sarajevo was under siege. That it was a closed town. Already at that time it was known on which streets you can walk and on which you cannot, which ones are covered by a sniper.

When was this atmosphere created in Sarajevo as a city?

According to me, it was in February, March 1992, with the beginning of the first barricades in Sarajevo.

At that time, I am speaking of 1992, there are some well known statements from the political leadership, Alija comes here with his statements that "this is not our war", whatever he might have thought. How did it reflect on the relationship between the people, on the relationships between the Croats, the Muslims, the Serbs? What was happening here under the influence of the media and media messages?

Well, I think, I repeat, this is my personal thinking...

Of course, this is your experience.

...that the majority of people succumbed to such a speech. Everyone was saying, the majority were saying: "This is happening to someone else, not to us!" And these barricades that were in Sarajevo: "It is not in my street, it is in the next one, this doesn't concern me, as long as it is not in my street!" – like that.

And the fact that this street is actually very close – five minutes, it meant nothing to them?

It meant nothing to them. The essential thing is only that it is not in my street, that it is not happening in my street, and the happenings in the neighbouring street – it is their problem, let them solve it. It seemed to me that an overall picture was created precisely in this manner. It means, let no one touch me, I am not interested what is happening elsewhere, and I think that the media, actually the statements by Alija Izetbegović that this is not our war had a great impact on the public opinion, i.e. the thinking of the citizens of Sarajevo, who were not aware of what's going on. Until it broke out, openly, when they saw they have no way out, it was over. Only then did they become aware, but this was too late, Sarajevo was completely encircled, artillery pieces positioned

around the whole town, mass shelling of the town began. People were not prepared, they were not prepared at all for such happenings in Sarajevo.

Tell me, did you perceive in that period any kind of polarization, separation of the people along national lines, do you see the appearance of any kind of mistrust of ones against the others, and how is this reflected on the public order and how does the city function under those circumstances?

Well, in the first moments of 1992, I couldn't say that there was any separation, no.

It means, they were all jointly unaware that war is coming?

No. Actually, I, they didn't realize that the war

is coming...

All together?

All together.

It was not the opinion of a specific group, but apparently it was the same with everyone?

With everyone. And it slowly crept through 1992. I can only say that as soon as I came into the unit, everything was o.k., it means until 1st September, at least in my view, everything was o.k., while the HVO units that were forming operated on the territorial principle. It means, one municipality had one unit, the other municipality another, and these divisions, I felt them when we tried to create our own brigade. Then I heard things like: "What do these Croats

want, they are pulling to their own side." It means, at the beginning of September, if you want to have something of your own, not to separate from something, but to have your own recognizable feature, you feel the difference, that it is not what you thought it was, but the division had already set in and existed.

Let's just return a bit to this period when you were in the police, it means until September 1992. How is the life of the city functioning then, i.e. in the practical sense, are the shops open, can you buy bread, milk, soap, is there electricity, postal services, telephones, does that function?

Nothing worked, the shops were empty, water was available only on certain locations.

We are speaking until September?

Until September you had water only on certain locations, actually it was known where the biggest quantities of water were to be found, actually, where the people went to fetch water, this is the location of today's brewery.

At what time is the city left without these basic utilities, necessary for its functioning? When are the people faced with it?

They...here somewhere...

I am trying to get a view from the inside from your stories, how the things were functioning in those times?

Well, the shortages, I mean shortages, this is already June, May 1992 when shortages started appearing in the city. Everything was in short supply.

We are speaking about Sarajevo, we said February, March, the tensions are already being felt, people still think in the manner – "it is happening in the neighbouring street, not in mine", is that so?

Yes.

How was the city divided during 1992, i.e. who controlled the city?

In 1992 the city was controlled by non-formal groups. It means, individuals, you can simply say that the government and law did not function in the city.

These non-formal groups are armed, is that so?

Yes. These groups tailored, actually they divided the city, and they were the law and justice in the regions which they controlled.

How was the city divided, can you give me an approximation?

Look, throughout this period they are prominent figures, and later during the war they became unit commanders, the southern part of the city was controlled by Juka Prazina, the central part of the city was controlled by the so-called Kruškonja who was later commander of the Military Police, I don't know his name, and the northern part of the city was controlled by Mušan Topalović – Caco. And it was known and the people were saying that the law and justice was on the side of those people, and that the law which was valid in the southern part of the city was not valid in the northern part, it means, the leaders of these groups which split up the city, they administered the justice. And they set down the rules and controlled life in those parts of the city. It is an open secret that Mušan Topalović Caco wasn't allowed to come from the northern part of the city into the southern, nor take the man for the digging of trenches, and likewise, Juka Prazina's men from the southern part did not dare go into the northern part,

and oftentimes, when this was not observed, there were clashes between them. It means, the police, as far as I know, the police never made any investigations, including when people disappeared from certain parts of the city. Nothing was processed, nothing was investigated, simply the darkness swallowed you, the story is discussed for a couple of days and after that it is as if you never existed...

Were there many such cases when people or families simply disappeared, swallowed by darkness during the night?

Well, the greatest number of stories about Sarajevo turned around Mušan Topalović Caco, who controlled the northern part of the city. At the beginning, the Serbs were disappearing, i.e. simply today you are in your flat, tomorrow you are not there any more. Who took them? Mušan Topalović Caco.

Were any of these people later found?

Well, after the war these famous cauldrons (*kazani*), as they were called, were discovered, and ...

What are the *kazani*?

As far as I am familiar with the issue, what they called *kazani* was a chasm, a cave near Trebević, which was under the control of Mušan Topalović Caco, their opening is in the form of a cauldron, a round opening, and deep, and they were called *kazani* from the times past. Probably this is due to the round shape and the story goes that people were killed there and thrown into these *kazani*.

It means, killed and thrown inside?

Yes.

What you are saying is that under those circumstances the police couldn't act as you would have done in peacetime circumstances...?

It's not that it couldn't, it wasn't allowed to. The police wasn't allowed to, because as the story goes...

What does it mean, that your commander in the police told you: "Don't go" or how did that happen, what does it mean, it was not allowed to go, why wasn't the police allowed to go?

Well, because they were the commanders and rulers of that part of the city.

Did they have an influence on the police, did they have their men in the police?

As far as I know, they did. I think they did. Simply, it was not said, but it was suggested when we go on patrol: "Don't go there, God knows what can happen!" Because they were the rulers. No one knew if it would occur to them to pick up the police or not, nobody knew, but it was suggested not to go, and I didn't want to go there, especially not during the night into those areas when I was on the patrol, thank God, I will fear for my life. Why would I go there, if you know that it was suggested, i.e. it is known that they are tailoring the law and Amen. Nothing more to say to that.

All right, in that period, 1992, and later in 1993, what did it mean in view of the things that we sketched, what did it mean to be a Croat or a Serb in Sarajevo?

To be a Croat or a Serb in Sarajevo in 1992, and especially in 1993 meant to be, not a second class citizen but a zero class citizen. If you were expecting any help

from anyone, if something happened to you, you wouldn't get it. It means, you were on your own and it's up to you to take care of yourself. In the first place were the Muslims, and then, if we look at this ladder, for a long time there is nobody, then you, the Serbs, actually the Croats and the Serbs were practically on the same rung of that ladder. Because to them it was the same if you are a Croat or a Serb, you belonged to the zero class. Simply, you were nothing and a nobody.

And in case you are exposed to aggression by some non-formal armed groups, I presume the Croats and the Serbs had no one to complain to?

There was no one to complain to. There was no one to ask help from, because you were aware that no one would offer you help. That's why I'm saying, if you knock on the door of your Muslim neighbour, he wouldn't open, because he knows what follows, what follows if he helps Serbs or Croats, because he will be put in the same basket as them. And he will disappear, maybe sooner than a Croat or a Serb. A little while ago when I said that the Croats and the Serbs were zero class citizens, below them were actually the Muslim traitors. Because they hated their own traitors – this is what they called them – more than the Croats and the Serbs. Therefore, you manage as you can by yourself, you take care of yourself, because no one is going to help you.

Were there many Croats in Sarajevo at that time? How many Croats were approximately in Sarajevo, is this known, in 1992?

I really wouldn't know the number.

Were they concentrated on a certain location, or they lived dislocated all over the city?

The greatest number of Croats lived in Novo Sarajevo, as far as I know, then in the Novi Grad, if we speak about the city, and one part, the smallest part of the Croats lived in Centar Stari Grad – this is mainly, 90% the Muslim part of the town. And in the suburbs Stup was the biggest settlement of Croats in the suburbs, with approximately 99% of Croats.

Tell me, at that time, how, in which way could the Croats get humanitarian aid? I.e. whatever was necessary under the conditions that you have no electricity, no running water, the shops are empty, how did the people provide the basic supplies?

The Local Communities (Mjesne zajednice), actually you had to register in the Local Community to get a card for the distribution of humanitarian aid. These cards looked like the points after World War II, where there is a date, then bread, flour, milk, and they put a dot depending on what you got that day. These were minimal quantities according to the number of people in a family. If the family is more numerous you get more, if not, the distribution was 250 grams by family member. The other type of aid for the Croats was the Caritas. Caritas was also distributing, actually helping the Croats, and not only Croats, it helped irrespective of nation and religion, whoever asked for help got it.

Are you sure of that?

100 % sure!

It means, you know that?

100% sure, because I was closely linked with the church in Novo Sarajevo, actually with Caritas where I came an X number of times and observed, and I

saw in that queue the Serbs and the Muslims who were standing just like the Croats did.

It means, both the Serbs and the Croats could have asked for and get help in the Caritas?

Yes.

Let's now look at the things another way around, could Croats and Serbs get any help in Merhamet?

As far as I know, not. Not really. Merhamet distributed aid according to just one criterion – religion.

So this was already present?

With Merhamet, yes. With Caritas, no. In Caritas both the Croats and the Serbs and the Muslims and whoever applied and waited in the queue, just as I waited, and asked for aid, could get that aid. So behind me a Serbian was standing, it means there was no separation, of course everything was according to quantities which were at disposal. They didn't give some huge amount of aid to the Croats, and not to the Serbs and Muslims, but simply it was given away the same to everybody.

Do you know of any cases where a Croat or a Serb tried to get help in Merhamet?

I told you, at my place, and I lived on the 4th floor, there were, I never went myself, nor did I need to, but this family which lived on the 4th floor, they were Serbs, they went to ask Merhamet for aid and they didn't get it.

Did they talk to you about why they didn't, how they were refused, what were they told?

Well, what they were actually told, I don't know, simply they are not Muslims and they can't get aid.

All right. So, this is the period until September of 1992, approximately, is that so? You were until then in the police. In which part of the city were you then, which part was covered by your...?

Centar Stari Grad.

What happens after 1st September 1992?

After 1st September 1992, upon the invitation by Mr, actually the first contact which I had was with Mr. Ivan Slaviček, who was in the then Ministry of Defence of BIH. I made the contact, how he came to me I really don't know, but the conversation was on the topic that I should come for a chat in "Geoinžinjering", that was the name of the seat where the then HDZ gathered, to make, actually they had heard of me, that I try to make, HVO already existed on the territorial principle by municipalities, that it would be good to make and form one unit. I responded, thank God, and went to the meeting in that building. They met me there, I think there were all the presidents of the HDZ in municipalities, it means from Stup, Novi Grad, Novo Sarajevo and Centar Stari Grad. Actually, Drago Plečko was also there with Ivan Slaviček.

And, what happened there?

Well, the conversation went step by step, who am I, what am I, where am I, how did I come to Sarajevo, everything was bright and shining until the moment when I said

I was an officer, a former officer. Simply, at that moment the curtain falls: "You are a former, we have nothing more to talk about!" Thank God, I again returned to the police. After a certain time they again invited me for conversation, they had softened up a bit. I went again into the "Geoinženjering" and again the same story. Simply, at that first moment, at least in my case, at that first moment when I met those people, they didn't trust former officers. They didn't trust, later, as far as I had found out, they actually didn't trust the Herzegovinians. I was the worst of the combinations – A Herzegovinian from Herzegovina and a former officer, a total blockade. The second time the conversation lasted maybe 5, 6, 10 minutes maximum, where they lower the curtain again: "Good bye!" and then I sat down with Slaviček and Drago Plečko, and told them let them decide what they want and then call me. If they want me to help them form a unit, no problem, I am at their disposal, but to be humiliated like this twice, it makes no sense at all. So I went for the conversation the third time, where it went in much the same way – who are you, what are you, where are you, where are you from, because every time I was coming to these conversations there was someone new, and then I have to start all over again who am I, what am I, where am I, and more or less they said there are no problems...

Just a moment, these who were asking you who you were, what you were, where you were, who were they, in the HDZ...?

Yes. In the HDZ.

And every time there were new faces?

Not every time, but always someone new was coming. You know when you have an animal in a cage, someone likes it, someone doesn't, this is how I felt, every time someone new comes, and I must start all over from the beginning who am I, what am I...

In which time frame were these meetings – the first, second and third meeting?

It all happened in August 1992.

So, within a one-month period you went three times to these conversations?

Three times for conversation. And this third time, they managed to reach an agreement, but that I shouldn't expect anything right away, to become some kind of an official or the like, but simply, I will be a soldier, I will help them and I said there are no problems, and so, officially on 1st September I went over to HVO.

I was discharged from the police, actually this is how I remember that date, because on 1st September I turned in my weapon and equipment in the police, actually, I came back and officially joined the HVO, and it is there that practically my war path in the unit begins. And little by little, little by little, I got to know all these units which were organized all over the city on the territorial principle, it means there was the HVO battalion Centar Stari Grad, HVO battalion Novo Sarajevo, HVO battalion Novi Grad and a separate unit which was, which was, not a separate unit, but HVO Stup.

So how many of these HVO units were there?

There were four.

Four.

At least, this is what I encountered when I came, four units.

How many men were involved in this, approximately?

Well, let's say, when I formed the brigade, all the members of the HVO who were in the battalions, it was 1609 men on the list.

1609, it means, we can say, approximately 1600 men were in these four battalions?

Four units. The biggest problem at that moment was...

Were only the Croats in the unit?

Stup was 100% Croats. Novi Grad had a sprinkling of the Serbs, I wouldn't know the percentages now, likewise in Novo Sarajevo, and Centar Stari Grad, where the population is mainly Muslim, it was around 60:40 in percentage, i.e. 60% of Croats, 40%...

What did you say where was it 60:40?

Centar Stari Grad. Having come into the HVO, actually, making a tour of all these units, I encountered certain obstacles, I came as someone new, and these were practically formed units, I say formed under quotation marks, who were active on the territorial principle, just giving the guard duty, actually, defence of their territory, municipality in which you live, and you don't go out to help others, they were not coordinated, there was no coordination, every Commander of this unit was a Commander of the HVO. There is a Commander of the HVO Battalion Centar, Novo Sarajevo, Novi Grad and Stup and they were in no coordination at all. It means, they were active as HVO independently on the area of the city of Sarajevo and the problem was to get them under one hat, put them under a single command, under the command of one man, and thus I spent my first month making a tour of these units and speaking to the commanders of these units where I had situations similar to the one in HDZ – when the first meeting

was organized – "now an ex-officer is here", as it was popular to call it at that time, then they said things like "he is now coming to teach us wisdom", "where were you until now?"- I was hearing comments like these. However, in spite of all these obstacles, I was steady and I formed a unit. At first, it existed only on paper, and I placed their commanders in coordination. I can say with certainty that these four commanders met for the first time by the end of September in the premises of "Geoinženjering", it was the first time that they faced each other. Until then, they didn't meet, there wasn't, thank God, the need for them to meet and at that time, for the first time the four of them met and got to know each other.

Just one question which can sound odd to you, but we should answer it. Why were the HVO units actually formed, what was their goal?

As far as I understood...

...everything that follows,

In Sarajevo, as in every other town there was the Territorial Defence (*TO*) and within this *TO* there were Croats and Serbs and Muslims. At least as far as I know. As the Muslims from the *TO* formed some units of their own, such as, the best known in Sarajevo was the Patriotic League (Patriotska liga), then the Dragon of Bosnia (Zmaj od Bosne), so the Croats felt the need to form their own unit and each municipality formed its own battalion, i.e. it was formed under the roof, under the tutelage of the HDZ, every President of the HDZ formed in his part of the territory, i.e. in their municipalities they formed these units of the HVO. The need was felt that the Croats make themselves recognizable in Sarajevo, that the Croats are also present in Sarajevo, that they too are defending, participating in the defence of the city of Sarajevo. It was to prevent anybody from saying – as the Croats were a drop in the ocean in Sarajevo – that they do

not drown in that ocean, that we do not simply disappear, that no one can say that we didn't participate in the defence of the city of Sarajevo, that's why the need for form the HVO.

It means, the Croats wanted to participate in the defence of Sarajevo?

And be recognizable.

And protect themselves...?

Sure.

... of course, as a drop in the ocean, to try to preserve?

But first and foremost to be recognizable, not to drown in the situation. Because, then we are gone.

All right. Let's stick to our topic. We came to September, actually, we completed September, we have four units of the HVO and the commanders of these four units come together for the first time and get to know each other, is that so?

They meet by the end of September in the building of "Geoinženjering". At the first moment it was a bit odd to me, but nothing is odd in war circumstances, the presidents of HDZ in municipalities were meeting each other, but it was odd to me that irrespective of these meetings that they held, each one of them was active on his own territorial principle, and it was odd how the commanders at first did not know each other. And, of course, after this first meeting, who is, what is, where is, and my explanation why and how and why I brought them together, there was resistance. It was difficult.

What was the resistance all about? And what was the main point of contention...?

Well, the main thing was, first of all I told you a little while ago this "former" who now came to teach them wisdom, gives them a lecture, and the second thing was that in these war events, it was not easy for them to lose the position of the No. 1 man. As long as you are the No. 1, you are worth something, you are being asked and you are somebody. And when you are under somebody's hat, you are no longer the No. 1, but No. 2, No. 3, whatever, you lose that position of yours. And people were thinking in such a way because all of them were, let's call them, street boys, the boys who spent their whole life in that part of the city and in that part of the city everybody knows you, in that part of the city you are somebody and something in the eyes of the people, you were someone and something for the Croats in that part of the city, because the Croats turned to you. Actually, they had no one else to turn to, if you are the commander of the unit in Centar Stari Grad they have no one else to turn to but to you. And that's why you were someone and something and at this first moment when I talked with them I felt that they thought they were already losing that position, losing the ground under their feet, because someone is appearing, above them...

So that was the problem really?

That was the biggest problem They swallowed easily the fact that I was a "former", that I lecture them, but the problem was losing this position.

And how did you solve this?

By talking to them. I explained that: "You as commander of the unit Centar Stari Grad know better than me the problems of Croats in the Centre, in that part of the city, and thank God all the problems that will come and which we will be confronted with, you will solve them, people will again turn to you, you will not

lose your position, but simply, now..." at that moment I didn't know that I will be the commander of the unit, this Brigade "Kralj Tvrtko", that this commander will be only a link in the chain who will only coordinate all their requests and their problems. Also, instead of being scattered all over the city, to have one place, one place where we will meet and be equal and even. That there will be no first, nor second, nor third, nor fourth, and in 15, 20 days things slowly started moving. The most important thing were the two courses I held with them, where the topic was the defence of the city of Sarajevo, which was their biggest problem – how to organize defence. It means, by talking to unit commanders, I actually held to the promise from the meeting with HDZ, where they asked me for help, but warned me not to expect... and I really didn't want to impose myself. I decided to help as much as I can, and whether I will be a soldier or not, it didn't matter to me at all. This was also my approach to the unit commanders, where I, as I said, held one or two lectures about the organization of defence, about the systems of firing, where one of them said: "Look here, this guy knows something, these are not fairy tales that he is giving us!" And so, in conversation with them, which means, after that meeting I continued to go to meetings of their headquarters and again talk to them, and through a continuity, through work, they got to like me. Because, as they said: "You are not one of those who speaks a lot, promises a lot, and than when a job needs to be done, good bye, you are nowhere to be found!" My biggest problem was Stup, Stup as such, practically those were 100% Croats, the President of HDZ on Stup and the then commander of the unit was Velimir Marić who at that time, actually Stup as such was the first to feel the war destruction, and the first time when it cracked, Marić fled to Kiseljak. And now I appear after him, where the people do not trust anybody any more, and look at you as yet another fake guy who will flee as soon as it gets hot, and here, I think, it isn't that I had problems, but there was the greatest resistance among them, they don't need anybody, they can organize themselves and put up the fight by themselves. They don't need anyone to pepper them with wisdom, so that they were, I found them in small groups, it means not as a battalion which had its headquarters, they were oriented at groups. Otes had some company of its own here, where such-and-such was company commander, Azići had their

company, Stupsko brdo had its own company, I don't know, these four, five settlements within Stup all acted as they could and as they knew best. And then everything I have been through in the city with unit commanders, I had to pass on now on Stup to these company commanders, where again I made a list of people going around, made the list and asked and called them to come, I don't know how many times, because this first headquarters of theirs was in the Fire Station on Stup, I pleaded with them to come to the Fire Station, that we sit down, talk, and see what we shall do, then I again told them that if they remain as they were then, and the war progresses, they will have to lean on somebody, because sooner or later the food that they have as reserves will run out, they will have to ask for help. By all accounts, as they were saying then, they will have to lean on the unit which was on Stup.

Because one part of Otes and another part toward Rajlovac was held by Armija BiH. Either they will have to lean on them, or they will have to move away and let the others take their positions. And finally, after much persuasion I managed to gather them on one place and form again one unit where they said, jokingly, but maybe not: "If you leave, you won't have a good time!" I tell them I know how they felt, because the first time it cracked their commander fled and now look what you have. So, after these conversations and getting to know the people, and organizing these small courses, the time came to form the unit on paper, it means make an organization, an organizational structure of the unit, an HVO unit. I did it, thank God, by the best of my knowledge, but throughout my efforts all this time there is my President, because HDZ had that political part under control, held meetings where they had to choose the President of the HVO. The President of the HVO, elected at that time, was Mr. Slavko Zelić. It means, in parallel with this work of mine he was politically active and, of course, when I made a tour of all the units and practically formed them, then he also, I took him with me to make a tour of the units and where he as the President of HVO – a bit from the political side, because he is really the man, I take my hat off to him, he is a speaker and a politician, he knew how to speak nicely and simply, the best I heard until then. He speaks as if someone was pouring these sentences into him, and he was saying, as we were touring the units, why we have to form one unit, because if we remain scattered all over the city

we will drown. Sooner or later we would have to lean on to somebody. In October or November, I am not sure, Mr. Zelić went to Grude. Of course, through these two liaison officers which the political part, i.e. the HVO – he as the President of HVO – installed, he asked for two liaison officers to be placed with UNPROFOR, went to Grude and returned with the order to form a brigade on the level of the city of Sarajevo and with the name of the brigade – the HVO Brigade "Kralj Tvrtko".

When was that?

This is November 1992. And in this first period, for about a month, he was placed in the position of the Brigade Commander, and President of HVO and Commander of the Brigade "Kralj Tvrtko". I was nominated as his Chief of Headquarters, as an operational head of the Brigade Headquarters. And at first, the unit commanders protested. I mean, it wasn't a mutiny or something, but simply, they were looking at him, although he was a great speaker and they respected him at the beginning, but didn't see him as a soldier but as a politician. Then on one meeting I proposed to the four unit commanders that we decide, if they think that Mr. Zelić cannot fulfil the duty, because he is a politician, here they have four battalion commanders, let us place one of them in this position, of course, with the agreement of the President of HVO, because he was in a political function where nobody wanted it. Nobody wanted to take the responsibility to become that commander. Further on, in January, I really won't say and I don't know how or why, or who said what, and what happened, but in January 1993 I got from Grude the nomination on the post of Commander, the functions of the President of HVO and Commander of the Brigade "Kralj Tvrtko" were separated, it was said that one person cannot fulfil these two functions, that Slavko Zelić remains as President of HVO, and Ivan Vulić is promoted from the position of Chief of Headquarters to Brigade Commander. And practically, from January 1993, I became the Commander of the Brigade "Kralj Tvrtko", which of course...

When do you become the Brigade Commander?

In January 1993, and I remain on that post, practically, not only until that dissolution, until 6th November 1993, but until the order on the discharge from the duties of the Commander of the Brigade "Kralj Tvrtko" when I started working in the Headquarters in Posušje.

All right. What were the first tasks, what do you encounter with the Brigade "Kralj Tvrtko", by the end of 1992, beginning of 1993?

Well, the first tasks were, as I said a little while ago, I am speaking about it all the time, that the battalions were operating on the territorial principle, and thank God that they were within the framework of municipalities and they operated with ABiH on certain lines of defence, i.e. participated in the defence of the city.

It was coordinated with ABiH ?

Yes, at the first moment they coordinated, but individually. It means, Centar Stari Grad operated on a stretch of this municipality of theirs, Novi Grad operated toward Dobrinja, Novo Sarajevo operated toward Grbavica, but everything was within the framework of ABiH. Our first task was that the Brigade "Kralj Tvrtko", as a regular military unit gets its zone of responsibility, where all the four battalions will take part in that zone of responsibility and our first zone of responsibility was Stup.

All four battalions?

All four battalions were on one line of defence and the first line of defence was on Stup. It stretched from Otes to the school, which was then called "7 sekretara SKOJ-a". It means, Otes, Azićka steet and the school "7 sekretara SKOJ-a". That was our first line of defence. And here, on this line of defence we remained

until the end of March, middle of March, end of March 1993. This line of defence was the most exposed. What does it mean exposed? There were no natural barriers, Stupsko Polje stretched practically from the Mostar loop to Rajlovac. The larger part was controlled by Serbs, and the only part which was under control, a smaller part was under the control of the HVO, i.e. where the Croats were living. In this period we weren't, just as we weren't later on, well equipped, we had no artillery pieces, we didn't have, mainly...

Just a moment, you are Commander in this period, is that so? At the time you held these positions on Stup, until the end of March, do you have any morning briefings, do you attend them, whom are you meeting with, how are the problems of your unit resolved at that moment?

The morning briefings were only on the level of the Brigade. It means, within my unit where we solved the problems. We had a million problems. We tried to solve the basic ones. The biggest problem was to secure food for the members of the Brigade, as well as arms and equipment. The food, 90% of the food we needed, we got from Caritas.

For the military needs?

Yes, for the Brigade "Kralj Tvrtko". Not for military use, but for nutrition, for the Brigade.

It means, the nutrition of the Brigade went through Caritas?

It did. In the greatest part through Caritas. One part from the humanitarian aid, and mainly, that was it. As for the arms, we couldn't get any as we had no money to buy it. The requests we made to the Armija, of course, we asked ABiH to give us arms, but they didn't give us. So we managed as best as we

could.

I am interested in one thing only. How did you coordinate with other units, i.e. ABiH? Were there any attempts that you do something together, to organize, solve the problems?

The majority...

...of the line, is that so?

Thank God. From our left and right side, as regards the operational defence, i.e. the keeping of the line of defence, we coordinated with them. It means, we harmonized the left and right side as regards the organization of firing, as regards the organization of defence, but everything in that domain in which we could. Directly on the ground we had a coordination with them up to a point.

On the ground?

On the ground.

Joint meetings, some kind of meetings in the Headquarters?

No.

There were none?

Nothing. Ever. Nor did anyone ever invite me as the Commander of the Brigade "Kralj Tvrtko". I know that the President of HVO went two, three times to some meetings in the Presidency, but I as the Brigade Commander, although we were operationally subordinate to the First Corps of ABiH in the part of the defence of the city of Sarajevo, I was never invited to these meetings. It means, simply, we were left to our own resources. As one of them

said once: "You wanted the Brigade "Kralj Tvrtko", you wanted to organize yourselves, here you are now, cope as you can!" He did not say suffer, but cope.

And practically this is how it was. Here you are, and...

You have to explain it to me a little bit more, I am not quite clear. How does it function then? You are holding a part of the line, a joint defence of the city, is that so?

It is.

A joint defence of the city, if the line breaks on this point, then it breaks for everyone, not just the Croats!?

If the line breaks, it would break all over the city.

So, in which way do you resolve your problems in terms of guarding this line, the arms, the solving of all possible problems related to keeping of this line, how does this coordination function? You say you were not invited to meetings, is that so?

No, we weren't.

Were these meetings held without you? Do you have this information?

Of course they were held. As far as I know, in the First Corps of ABiH they had morning briefings. I was never on those briefings.

It means you were not invited to participate? Weren't you supposed to participate?

I was supposed to be invited and participate, but no one ever called me to these briefings. And, I say, it is obvious that we got this part of the line of the defence at Stup for this reason – here you are and now suffer, and you will see that you can't cope with it. As far as I know, the President of the HVO – Slavko Zelić at the time – because I wrote to him also, and talked with him that with those arms that we had this line of defence was really something impossible, and if, God forbid, the Serbs move towards us with all their arms, we cannot, we cannot keep it. And then he went to talk to the Commander of the First Corps, I am not sure who was Commander at that time, Hajrlahović, the Italian, he went to talk to him...

Who, Zelić?

Zelić, yes, yes and mainly if something required a discussion, they always... Slavko went there several times, they were inviting Slavko. Now I really didn't ask Zelić: "What?", when he had the need to tell me something he would tell me, mainly he did not transmit any information until that meeting with the Italian, when he said that we will withdraw from Stup and we will get a less dangerous line of defence.

When was that?

That was in March 1993. That we would get a less dangerous line of defence which does not require so much armament, artillery or other things.

Before we move over to this, to this other line, the transferring to other positions, you mentioned that you demanded something from ABiH...

Well, look...

What did you ask from ABiH ?

At that moment, regardless of the fact that we didn't talk, although I was not invited to those meetings, I took it that I am operations-wise subordinate to the First Corps ABiH within the scope of the defence of the city of Sarajevo, and so I thought I had the right, as well as other units, the right to certain needs, to demand arms, food and ammunition and everything that the city should provide for us. Not from the First Corps, but from the city. But, we never got anything.

And you demanded?

I demanded. We were constantly demanding. At least I constantly demanded, but we never got anything.

So, we come to the month of March 1993, Zelić comes after the meeting with the Italian and says you will move to another position. Did that actually happen?

Yes, that was...

Which position was it?

It was in the city itself, the position from the Vrbanje Bridge or as it was popularly called "Steleks" to the "Elektroprivreda", i.e. the last bridge behind the "Elektroprivreda" on the Miljacka River. Where, as they said, we got less dangerous positions, but actually we were separated from the Serbian line of defence some 15 metres, while on Stup we didn't even see them. But here we are, the members of the HVO protested, especially those members from Stup: "Why are we withdrawing from Stup and leaving the first line of defence to the troops of ABiH?"...

How long was this line, from the Vrbanje Bridge to "Elektroprivreda", i.e. to the last bridge behind "Elektroprivreda"?

Around four kilometres.

And you say that it was actually very, very...

Only Miljacka divided us. So, how broad Miljacka is, taking into account the road and the river bed, and the Serbs were already on Grbavica on the other side. Which is indicative, while we held positions on Stup we really, all the time there were some ceasefires, respecting of the ceasefires, respecting, these agreements which the First Corps was signing, actually the politicians. As for us, even if we wanted to shoot at somebody we didn't have the arms and equipment and the little that we had we had to spend on somebody. However, when we withdrew from Stup, the Serbs attacked Stup, defeated the ABiH and took that part.

Just a moment, when you withdrew from Stup the Serbs attacked this position, when was that, how long after your withdrawal did the Serbs attack this position?

Less than 48 hours.

And they took it?

They took it. They took everything including Otes and actually, pushed the positions of ABiH that were on Otes and here on the other side, pushed everything toward the city, almost, not almost but actually to the Mostar loop, the Stup loop.

How did it actually happen? How come that they within 48 hours, only 48 hours, as if they were waiting for you to leave, what was the problem?

I don't know what was the problem, the positions that we had held, they didn't just attack our positions, but the complete line of defence on Stup, on that part and conquered it. So that ABiH withdrew from these positions all the way to the Stup loop. And, I think through later developments, what was indicative in all this, the problem was evidently that the First Corps of ABiH couldn't control us on Stup. Because, practically, this was 100% Croatian part of the settlement, and simply it looks as if their aim was to put us under control and to see what we, what we are doing. Because on Stup they couldn't to that. Now, as the President Zelić held these talks and why, but apparently they referred to...

... is that so?

That I don't know. But apparently they referred to these requests of ours that we are badly armed, at the time of taking over this other line, actually why they gave us the other line, their main reason was that we were badly armed, and they did nothing to help us, to keep that line which actually, nobody mentioned it, because in my conversation with Zelić, but it didn't hold water, I think it didn't hold water, Slavko says that he was saying the same in his talks with the Italian: "Give us arms, and we will hold the line that we got, but don't switch us to another line with the same arms, the same equipment, and again you will not give us anything!" But they had this story...

Was this other line in any way easier or better...?

This first line was more difficult and worse from the one on Stup in every way, but as I say, through all these happenings, simply, their aim was to keep us under control.

And this they accomplished on this other line?

On this other line.

On the first one they couldn't do it?

On the first line they couldn't do it, on Stup they couldn't do it because, let me repeat once more, this was practically 100% our people who lived there. The Croats were still there, they didn't move out of Stup and if they had tried to do something they couldn't have, and here in the city they could do as they please, which manifested itself on 6th November 1993 when they even attacked us. But, as far as we could, we took over these positions from their unit that was there, totally disorderly, unprepared, and we really brought order to those positions, thank God for us.

You are saying that these positions were disorderly?

Well, yes, disorderly.

These positions that the Armija held until then?

Armija.

You are arriving, it is March, by the end of March...

By the end of March.

Tell me, what did these positions look like when you took them over?

Simply, when I say disorderly it means there were no dug out bunkers, no dug out shelters, no dug out trenches, no one knew how to explain it all to you, now I don't know who was the commander when we did the takeover, how they organized the system of firing, where to pay attention, simply they were

there, God only knows how they held them. And we actually did dig the trenches. The biggest problem was, here, on this stretch where we were there were the high schools. High School of Economy, two faculties, the Mathematical and the Philosophical Faculty, High School of Electrical Engineering, somehow on this stretch these schools were one beside the other, and they held them only in a room behind the corner. However, we dug through in order to make at least part of these trenches, we had to dig and demolish the walls of some of the schools, where they complained that we had destroyed everything. The biggest problem appeared because on that stretch of our line there was the Land Museum and the Natural Museum. We never touched the Natural Museum, only on places where there was nothing we dug out the bunkers, where they later brought the UNPROFOR to show them what the Croats are doing, how they are destroying.

What, what, what, will you repeat this once again!? What, you were building the bunkers there...?

We had...

... in order to hold this line that you got?

In order to hold it, yes. But it was, we dug out the bunker on two corners where there was nothing.

All right.

And after that, someone passed it on to them, they brought the UNPROFOR and God knows whom, to see how we had demolished the Land Museum and a big problem arose that we destroyed the Land Museum. They asked me why. Why!? To keep my head on my shoulders, that's why, nothing more! The TV was

there...

So, we are talking about the Natural and Land Museums, how the Croats demolished them.

Actually, as there was no electricity in Sarajevo, some parts of the city, actually parts of the city got electricity for an hour or two every evening, so when you have electricity you can watch the TV, I myself didn't see that broadcast, the biggest noisemaker regarding this Natural Land Museum was Pejaković.

Who?

Pejaković.

Which Pejaković ?

He has one brother in Zagreb, another in Sarajevo. This actor from Sarajevo. Not the singer, but the actor from Sarajevo. What was his name, Josip, Zlatko, I don't know. I know that they are Josip and Zlatko, but what was the name of this one, I think this one in Sarajevo is Josip.

And what, he, he...

He was at that time...

What is he, an actor...?

Actor by profession.

And, what?

He was at that time in Sarajevo as a big patriot, I don't know, the advocate of the preservation of I don't know what, or NOB (National Liberation Struggle in World War II) or these antique exhibits, because he was the first one to appear on the first line of defence to examine the Land Museum and from him the whole noise started. Now, did he call the TV crew or not, we really do not know, but he was the biggest advocate, the biggest noisemaker that we had destroyed the then Natural Land Museum.

By digging the trenches, is that so?

Yes. By digging and destroying these walls, by destroying the botanical garden, I don't know, where there are a number of endemic plants. Slavko Zelić did ask me at a meeting whether it was necessary to dig there, and I said as if I had destroyed the school as well, actually I didn't destroy the school, but we were tearing down the walls where we were making the bunkers and trenches. "If you as the President of HVO of the city of Sarajevo ask of me to make and fortify this line of defence, I see no obstacles why not to dig in a bunker here!" Because, I am aware of that and we found two parts where really there was nothing and I also had the same aim, we had no need to destroy the Natural Land Museum, but if we must make our defence here, then we have to choose the lesser of the two evils. But, what we chose, it was total evil for them, the trenches that we dug out. But, there was another characteristic feature on that line, as I said a little while ago, that through later happenings, it proved that they simply wanted to have control over us and at that time we saw a growing number of members of ABiH, as well as the police in patrols on that part of the road, i.e. path, actually behind our backs, where we held the first line, the first line of defence. No one paid any attention to that, why these patrols. It never occurred to anyone that they were making a second line of defence behind our backs. When we found out, upon our asking why they were doing that, the answer was that it was a second line of defence that we have reserve positions

in case of attack, while actually already by the end of March they were preparing to practically drown us, to melt us down and erase our existence in the defence of the city. Because it was indicative that on that part of the line they were constantly provoking behind our backs, shooting, shooting at the other side.

Just a moment, it means they were behind your backs, and they were shooting from behind your backs...?

They were shooting at Grbavica.

How far behind your backs were they?

Let's say, some 100 metres. It means, between the first buildings, as our line of defence went, it means they have two times two lanes of the road, the first buildings, between the first buildings they were already making this second line of defence.

Was it called the second line of defence? Is that what they...?

They called it reserve line, so that we have some place to retreat in case of attack. But apparently they were preparing to remove us from the first line of defence, to keep us under control, to see what we were doing and to be able to slip in more easily into our line of defence. As they mainly contacted Slavko Zelić, Slavko told me and asked me several times, that he put the question if we are badly armed, if we have no weapons, and everything boils down to "if we do not have", they would place their two, three patrols, I said every time with Slavko: "When they ask like that, you demand, let them give us, we have enough manpower!" We had 1600 men in the Brigade, but badly armed. It means, the problem was not in manpower, the problem was in the arms. "We do not need your men and arms, but

simply give us the arms, we will manage with our men, and if you still think that it is not well enough fortified and secured, we have the men, just give us the arms." We never saw the arms, actually, we never received them. So that they made this second line of defence behind our back and put their members in it. The event from 6th November 1993 resulted as it resulted, when they attacked us from that line of defence... This fateful, before this 6th November 1993 we got the first suspicions that they practically want to take over our lines of defence, and attack us, from the liaison officers who informed us that, as the liaison officers were in direct contact with Slavko Zelić, so they informed him that the Serbian liaison officer told to our liaison officer that they caught somewhere on these radio frequencies that ABiH wants to take over the control over the HVO, that they practically wish to remove us.

When was that?

It was in the month of June, beginning of July.

It means June, July?

These were the first attempts, that's what I call them, of taking over the control over us, because apparently we as an organized unit were a bone in the throat for them.

Just a moment, let's get back to these liaison officers, who, it means, inform you that they got this information via the Serbian liaison officer. Who were these liaison officers who notified you?

The liaison officer was Ril Anton.

Ril?

Ril Anton or Antun.

All right.

One of the two. And Hofman.

...Hofman. Where are these people now?

Ril Anton is in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, something like that.

In Sarajevo?

In Sarajevo. And Hofman is the chief inspector, the chief investigator in DGS, the State Border Service in Sarajevo.

Also in Sarajevo?

Yes, also in Sarajevo.

Do you maybe have their telephone numbers?

From...I have, from Ril not.

I will then ask you later to see whether I could also have a word with them...

All right.

It means, already in June, July there is the first information about the intentions of ABIH to attack...

To attack us. Then we demanded, i.e. whenever I say "we" I think also of the President of the HVO Slavko Zelić, by means of liaison officers, that the UNPROFOR protect us. Because we saw no reason why should they attack us, why would they assume control over us, are we such a strong force in Sarajevo that the First Corps is afraid of us, or what. And UNPROFOR did come, and positioned itself practically between us, on this part of the path between us and this line of defence of theirs what they had made, and the Headquarters of the Brigade. In the Headquarters of the Brigade there was also this political part, actually, we were on the same floor, this was the "Marko Marulić" Elementary School, that was it's name, but I am not sure. There was a political and a military part, it had its offices there and three, four personnel carriers had parked around the school. And, as far as I know, they called Slavko from the First Corps, because I think the UNPROFOR was the first to call the First Corps and demand explanation why and what were their intentions and then, actually, the Commander of the First Corps came to the Headquarters, not to calm the situation down, but what do we mean, where do we get this idea that they will attack us, there is no intention, we are defending together, we are one, we have one aggressor in front of us, this is what we should orient ourselves at...

It means, he then tried to deny this information that you had received?

Yes, yes. As far as I know Slavko didn't tell them, he did tell them he got the information from the liaison officers, but how they had gotten to this information, I doubt that he told them, as far as I know he didn't.

Just a moment, these liaison officers, Ril and...

Hofman.

They were liaison officers?

Of the HVO with UNPROFOR and they were situated on Sarajevo Airport. And I say, he tried...

The Commander of the First Corps who came, it is the Italian, is that so?

It think it was him.

He comes and tells you the story about...

With them the Corps Commanders did not stay long in this position, the changes were frequent, so that I really cannot be sure. About the Italian, I know for sure that Slavko came to him when he talked about the taking over of the other line of defence, but now which was it, I really don't know. He practically tried to deny this, there is one aggressor in front of us, what is coming to our minds. And practically they then reached an agreement on non-attacking, the so-called, in quotation marks.

Between?

Between the HVO and the First Corps and to focus on a single mission, and that's how it ended. Since that event, it means since June until that fateful 6th November there were no actions against the Brigade as such, but there were individual incidents. At the beginning, when we talked about the leaders of non-formal groups, which later became their military units Juka Prazina, Mušan Topalović Caco who later became commanders of these units, they began to take away the HVO members. It means, to do the digging, investigative interviews, simply speaking – provocations.

Was there a lot of this?

A lot, a lot of HVO men were taken away.

Where from were they taken away?

From their homes.

From their homes?

Mainly from their homes. No one touched the Brigade as such, the Headquarters and that part of the Brigade which was on the lines of defence. But they were brought in from their homes, called for information interviews, even the beating up of two, three members of the HVO in their apartment, where these so-called leaders of these groups, i.e. from Mušan Topalović Caco, this was in Centar Stari Grad, where the boys were celebrating a birthday and allegedly sang "Jure and Boban" and that these had heard it and broke in and beat them up, which our boys denied. Yes, they did celebrate a birthday, as much as you could celebrate in Sarajevo in those days, but no one had the slightest intention to sing songs like these. But simply, these guys broke it and started beating everybody up. So there were instances like these, which we tried to resolve with the First Corps all the time, but the answer was always: "You know what the situation is like, neither you have a full control over your HVO, you never know what an individual soldier is doing, nor can we have control over our soldiers, but we will try to solve it!" Actually, they never solved anything. All the time there were these skirmishes, I mean, these were not skirmishes, rather incidents, and it is indicative that none of these things happen until June, people were not taken away, beaten up, it all comes after that.

So, it fits into the information received by the liaison officers?

Yes, the provocations begin, I mean the provocations, these incidents toward the members of the HVO begin, and the worst fate was that of the Muslims that were in the HVO. They, according to some...

They are still in the HVO in that period?

Yes, yes. They were in the Fourth Battalion. They got a worse beating from the

Croats, because they called them...

So who mistreated them?

Also Mušan Topalović Caco, i.e. his followers, because they already called them traitors of the Muslim people.

Why?

Because they are together with the Croats. Where are they going to go, like: "Where will you go when this is all over, you think the Croats will protect you!?"

So, it was a pressure on these Muslims that were in the HVO?

Pressure to leave the HVO. First they exerted pressure on them to leave, now I will not claim that they didn't leave, some of the Muslims left, but with regard to that period when it happened, a larger part, a large part of the Muslims stayed in the HVO unit, in that Battalion Centar Stari Grad. Irrespective of the fact that they attacked us and they took them together with the members of the HVO. What happened to them later, I really don't know, but apparently first was the pressure on them to leave and then the taking away of the Croats and maltreatment and I think, I don't know, these are the stories that I heard, Slavko Zelić has – I would like you to talk to him as well – he has some documented cases of beatings and taking away of these members of the HVO. Mainly, he dealt with that, conducted negotiations and talked to the First Corps and members of the Presidency, mainly he focused on that.

All right. So we are nearing November 1993, the 6th November, is that so?

Yes.

What happens then?

On 6th November 1993, actually before the 6th there was the 5th November, we had an attack on our line of defence on the part of the aggressor, from the Serbian side, we had an attack, and thank God, in order for the Serbs not to break through the first line of my defence, I brought over the reserve from the Headquarters of the Brigade and positioned it on the line of defence, and as we had no artillery we asked twice for artillery support from the First Corps of Armija BIH and we got it and it lasted...it began around ten in the morning and lasted until dusk, darkness, it is November, the darkness sets in early, until approximately six in the afternoon, and the sky above Sarajevo opened, it rained, I didn't see such rainfall in my whole life. And then it calmed down, I had two or three killed on that line at that time, from this attack.

From the Serbian attack?

Yes. Among other, the son of Mr. Ivan Slaviček was killed, his only son, he also has a daughter, but there was his son and he was killed. And you know how it goes, the calming of the situation, a renewal and the consolidation of the line of defence, are there any wounded, are there any killed, all that. And when this was over, it lasted until late in the night, that part of the people who was more exposed to the shooting, thank God, I sent them home to change and come back into the Headquarters, and this other part I left on the line of defence, and I came back, sat down in the Headquarters of the Brigade to change as well, this was around three, four in the morning of November 6th, it means we are already deep into the night, and I took off my clothes, I was only in my underwear, when all of a sudden something happened, you don't know what it's all about, at the first moment you think that some grenades have fallen, a noise, a kicking, a shaking, I didn't even orient myself, already in front of me there are five, six armed soldiers with masks over their heads, they push me to the wall, search me, although I was practically naked, they search me and tie me with chains, and I have not the slightest idea...

It means they break into the Headquarters?

Of the Brigade.

It means, on November 6th, these armed men, masked men break in around four, five in the morning?

Half past four in the morning.

They break into the Headquarters?

Into the Headquarters. At the first moment, at least that's how I feel, I have no idea what it's all about, my first thought had been that the Serbs penetrated the line of defence, this was going through my head, and thinking later, from my Headquarters to the first line of defence there are three, four kilometres, you simply don't know what is happening, who are these men. And here, they put me into a room, I am practically naked tied with chains, I ask for explanation, everybody keeps quiet..."You will hear it in due time!" And then he appears, around seven, eight o'clock, they bring Slavko Zelić.

He was also caught?

Yes, yes.

Also in the Headquarters?

They got him in his apartment. He was in his apartment, he slept in the at his home, and I am in the Headquarters, I thought I shouldn't go home, I am more needed in the Headquarters, here with the men, then to go home. And they brought him from his home over here, and they brought that

other guy, they also caught him at his home, the other vice-President of the HVO, Mr. Željko Jukić, they brought him here as well, and here were the three of us. Plus two or three Presidents of the HDZ. I think it was the President of the HDZ Novi Grad. And we were only looking at each other, practically searching for an explanation of what's happening.

Were you all in chains, all tied up?

No, only I was. Slavko Zelić had handcuffs on his hands, these two were not tied.

And what happens next?

Here, as I say, we practically sought from each other an explanation why and how and around 8 in the morning, it might have been around eight, first they took Slavko away, and after Slavko they took me, practically they made me pass between two lines of men, like a solemn farewell, in quotation marks, shoved me into a personnel carrier and took me to the military prison of the First Corps. The First Corps was then situated in the building of the Omladinski radio 202. This building is across the present-day Presidency of BIH.

They only took you there?

Only me. Only I ended up there, I didn't know where they had taken Slavko, actually they had taken Slavko to the former barracks "Viktor Bubanj", and Željko Jukić and those two Presidents of the HDZ, they took them into the former "Marshal Tito" barracks.

You say, in this building of Omladinski radio 202, it was a prison, the building of the First Corps?

It was the prison of the First Corps, and on the other side the First Corps was situated. And they, they crammed me here, locked me up and I had been in that prison until April, until the end of March, without any explanation. Actually...

You were in that prison from November until March?

Yes. Actually, I wanted, the investigators were coming – who are you, what are you, where are you, which schools did you complete, what were you in the HVO, simply to tell them my war path practically from the beginning, from my birth onwards.

So, we are talking about that, you spent the time between November 1993 and March 1994 in...?

In a military prison.

In a military prison. You say, they were coming, questioning you, what were they asking? Who was coming, do you know these people?

No.

You don't know them?

No, no. I don't know them, they introduced themselves when they would come, but mainly they used Croatian names and surnames.

Croatian names and surnames?

That's how they introduced themselves, but I sincerely doubt that these were their real names, I don't know what effect they meant to achieve. And they

wanted everything – when were you born, where were you born, why were you born, which school you attended, where did you complete elementary school, the high school, the Military Academy, why did you form the HVO, do you know that HVO is a paramilitary formation, do you know that you serve in an enemy army, do you know that you can be tried and sentenced because of that, do you know what the HVO is doing down there in Herzegovina, how much they are pounding.

So these were the investigator's questions?

Yes. And this is where it all ended. Then in three, four days they would come again, and again, and again...

Tell me, do these investigators come throughout your stay in that prison, or was it only at the beginning?

About a month and a half at the beginning, and non-stop they were asking the same questions, the same questions, who, what, where, how, which way. And just as they came, so they disappeared, but after that, I must say nobody beat me, I cannot say that anyone beat me, but psychologically it was killing. After that, there came a period, in the same fashion at a certain time of the night, three-four of them would come with masks on their face.

With hoods?

Yes, with hoods. They take out the knives, and start in that fashion: "How shall I butcher you, you choose, shall we skin you or something else, shall we take your eyes out!?". They take out the knives, you sit in the corner, they stand above you, and talk like that with the knives, actually they ask you to tell them what do you want them to do, some five-six times, until I said at one moment: "Listen friend, if

you are going to do something, better kill me or let me sleep two hours in one piece!", I was really at the end of my tether, they were psychologically killing me. I even had some thoughts, as I was sleeping in a room on the fourth floor, I mean sleeping, I was in that room on the fourth floor, there were only window frames, but no windows, I was really contemplating killing myself, simply to stop this torture, this is how I felt at that moment. I had also lost weight, they gave me food once a day, which I ate at the beginning, but later I became suspicious because after that food I had to go to the toilet all the time, I had diarrhoea. And simply, my organism demanded a lot of water, and I was losing a lot, and I thinned out, so that at one moment I came to around 45 kilos out of my normal 80, and...

Through those months?

Through these four months I terribly...

Were you allowed to ask for medical help?

I did ask for medical help, and they did send me a doctor and the doctor gave me two tablets, to stop this...

Loss of liquid?

Loss of liquid, however, I became suspicious of everything. Firstly I thought they were poisoning me, and I thought, although the doctor checked me out, I doubted that these tablets were for what he said they were, so I never took them.

How did he check you out? In the cell or you had some...?

No, no. In the cell. He listened with the stethoscope, and examined my eyes with

the penlight.

But you didn't have your blood taken, urine sample, any laboratory tests?

No, nothing. As I say, I was here until March...

Was this the only medical help that you had?

The only one, the only one I asked for. Actually I asked from the beginning, because I wasn't feeling well, I could see it on myself that I am withering away and I don't know why, I wasn't ill, nothing, you simply wither away, melt away completely, and simply as they had arrested me and took me away, basically, this guy who was a sentry in front of the cell he gave me some hope, like, he heard information: "You are being sought after, the whole Corps is buzzing that Zagreb is inquiring about you." How come Zagreb all of a sudden, how does Zagreb know about me, it was the furthest thing I could think of.

Was this immediately at the beginning or was it later?

Later, it was later, somewhere in February, February 1994 and it gave me some strength, I thought if someone is inquiring about me, they are not going to kill me.

**All right, what were they telling you, why are they keeping you there?
Did they tell you anything?**

Due to, as they said, service in the enemy army. Service in the enemy army, i.e. in the paramilitary formations of HVO. Actually, they treated the HVO as a paramilitary formation.

It means, you should have been put on trial?

Well, things were going in that direction, they were telling me all the time, the investigators: "Do you know that you will be tried, do you know that you are serving in the enemy army, that there is only one army in this state and that is the Armija BiH? The whole story was going in that direction, and after that, just as they had kept me, the doors of the cell were opened and they said: "Good bye!"

That was in March 1994.

It was the end of March 1994.

Did you ever get any kind of paper, was the indictment ever brought?

Never, nothing.

At the time while you were in prison, did anyone from the International Red cross visit you, or anyone else?

No. While, these that were, Slavko Zelić in "Viktor Bubanj", the Red Cross did come there.

In what kind of state were they?

That I really don't know. And these guys in the former "Marshal Tito" barracks, I don't know how long they were kept there, but the Red Cross was there as well. But in this prison of the First Corps never, actually, no one came during this period, except they allowed the visit a couple of times to my girlfriend, who is now my wife, to come. And at the end, they simply opened the door and said: "Good bye!"

Tell me, Zelić and the others, Zelić and Jukić and others who were arrested that night just as you were, did they stay in their prisons as long as you were?

Zelić stayed, let's say, one week longer than I did.

It means, longer?

Longer, and these others weren't, maybe they were ten, fifteen days in all, then they were released. So that after leaving the prison, actually my present-day wife took me to hospital, actually she carried me. They found out that my liver was swollen two and a half centimetres, and I stayed five-six days in the hospital.

In the hospital in Sarajevo?

In the Sarajevo Military Hospital. Until I recovered a bit. Actually, I was supposed to stay there for a much longer time, but I didn't want to and I was returned, I came back to the house where I am living. And then the police was all the time in front of the door, they were taking shifts.

Because of you?

I think because of me, they had not been there earlier, but all the time after my release from hospital, you simply see two policemen standing in front of the building, changing shifts every two hours, now is this because of me, or not, they apparently...

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...After that only the neighbours were coming, coming to visit to see how you were, what you were. Then on the 9th in the morning, around four in the morning, my wife and I were exfiltrated from Sarajevo and brought over here to Herzegovina, on 9th April 1994, on my birthday.

It must have been a nice birthday present?

Well, yes, at the beginning. Actually I wasn't aware at that time where I am going nor why I am going. Just as those guys surprised me with the attack in the Headquarters, likewise these two colleagues from Kiseljak that pulled me out of Sarajevo and transferred me to Kiseljak. Here in Kiseljak I came to Zvonko Marić. Zvonko Marić exfiltrated me from Sarajevo and a man called *Brzi* (the fast one). His name was Ivica, I don't know the surname, maybe I remember it later. Here we were in Kiseljak, it was in the morning and sometime in the afternoon there was a convoy that was organized from Kiseljak, at the time when up there in Vareš, Kakanj, there were clashes of major proportions between the Croats and the Muslims, mostly women and children were in the convoy, they shoved us in into the convoy and transferred us on the area of Herzegovina. This is how I came here and am here to this very day. Thank God, thank God.

All right. Thank you, the story is very important for me and very interesting, I know it must have been hard on you, to remember those times, but this story is of essence to me. Tell me, Zelić, where is he now?

He is in Split.

In Split?

Yes.

Do you have his number?

No.

You don't have it?

I used to have his telephone number, at one time we used to speak more often, but in the last year and a half, whenever I tried to phone him, I get the disconnected phone signal. But I could find out by means of these guys who live in Knin. Actually, Zelić is from Knin, his mother lives in Knin, so they sold the house, I don't know to whom they sold the house in Knin, and they bought an apartment in Split and they live in Split.

All right. In any case, keep in touch, I think that his story would also be very interesting.

He is a type, I think, he likes to research, I said earlier he is a typical politician who misses nothing, who deals with the information, simply, politics is in his blood. And he likes to be in politics.

All right, so you don't have his telephone number, but you said you had a telephone number of the liaison officer, is that so?

I have Hofman's number.

Hofman's?

Hofman's, and he will probably have the number of Ril Anton.

We said that he was in Sarajevo?

They are both in Sarajevo. But the biggest, I think it is not the biggest problem, you can get to anybody...here it is: 061 132696.

This is the cell phone, or...?

The cell phone. It's the only one I have, I recently spoke with him.

November 2005, Ljubuški