

IVAN VIDOVIĆ

**Rama
September 2005**

The interview was recorded, the recording is registered as follows

vidovic

7.21 MB

duration 22:34

The interview was conducted in Prozor Rama

Good day to you, Mr. Vidović.

Good day.

We are a part of General Praljak's defense team and we would like to speak with you about your knowledge, direct facts and contacts you had with General Praljak during 1992 and 1993. We would like you to tell us about direct facts you are aware of, that is, about what you saw or heard, in your best knowledge and recollection. At the beginning, I would like you to state your name and last name, date of birth.

Vidović Ivan.

When were you born?

May 9th, 1944.

Where?

Jurići, municipality of Prozor.

You are retired now, or still active?

I am in retirement.

So, you lived in this area the entire period of 1992 and 1993? Here, in area of Prozor Rama?

Yes. I was working in Austria and came back when the war started. When conflicts started happening. I was in the army, at home.

Were you taking an active part?

Yes.

Did you report yourself or were you mobilized by your municipal authorities?

Well, I reported myself, because my wife and children were chased away, so I came back to check on that and I remained. My older son also came back, but it was my opinion that I am more capable than him, so he went back to work and I remained. And so I stayed for two years.

Stayed where?

In the army.

Was that a Home-guard unit or some...?

A Home-guard unit.

That means that you were here, in the Prozor area.

In Jurići village.

Jurići village!?

Yes. For the most part.

And how was defense organized in Jurići village? How did you organize that?

Well, it was five or six of us who were organizing defense, sometimes there were ten of us. But it was difficult. It was not easy.

Tell me, were there any conflicts in Jurići in 1992 already, were there any physical conflicts between...?

Well I cannot tell you the exact date, but I returned to Juriće when they attacked for the first time.

When the JNA (cro: Jugoslavenska narodna armija; Yugoslav People's Army) attacked, or...? Can you recall which war was that?

That was the war between us and Muslims. I mean, between Muslims and Croats.

When Muslims and Croats started the war?

Yes, that is when I arrived.

What did you find here? You arrived from Germany and find what?

From Austria.

From Austria.

Well, I found my wife and children in Prozor. And we spent a few days there. And then we got back for the second time, the second day actually, to Jurići. That is how we started to organize sentry duties. We stayed there for two years, 1992 and 1993.

Can you give us a short description of the situation? You said that it was difficult? Can you describe in what way it was difficult, were there any conflicts, were there wounded people?

When they did it the second time, when I got wounded on the day of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, I don't know the exact date, whether it was the 18th, the Sacred Heart of Jesus is in June. We were about to attend a mass in Prozor when Muslims attacked, the Muslim army. Two soldiers got killed and one civilian, a child, a girl, and I got wounded.

And where were you when they started shooting?

I was in the house.

In what house?

Well, here.

And the child?

And that child was from this house.

So they were shooting at houses?

Yes. And they entered the house.

They entered the house?

They killed Marin and Joza right here on the couch. It was a lot of dust, impossible to stay inside. I got out, and in about 10 minutes I got wounded. My son stayed in. "Be quiet, do not tell him I'm wounded, because he might hurt himself." So he defended the house, shooting was really heavy, it was impossible. Because I was not involved in a real war. I am a peaceful man, not the type to go to a war, but I did it, to save people. But I got wounded and could not go on. They took me out downstairs, through the window, down the ladder, it was not possible to use the door because of the shooting. They could not get me out. That is how it was. Then they transferred me by car, another soldier, to Rama, where I remained for 15 days. After that I returned and stayed here until the Fall, until I recovered a little. People were telling me: "Everybody is going to work, so why wouldn't you, you'll lose your papers and everything..!" Whether I lose them or not, I am not going back, until... I went back the next year. And that is how it was here with us.

Have you met General Praljak during that period?

Well, yes, at the time he was, between that...

Between what?

Between the first attack and the second.

The Muslim attack or... ?

The Muslim attack. They said: "Praljak called for at least two serious men from each village. There will be a conference, a meeting in the motel in Prozor." So they sent me. It was 9 of us.

You went from Jurići?

Yes.

From what other village people arrived?

Well, it was at least a hundred people there.

Only Croats, or were there Muslims as well?

Well now, I don't think that there were a lot of Muslims, there was a conflict with Muslims before that and that was mostly the reason he called for people.

So, he called for you because of conflicts with Muslims? Village aldermen?

Yes. That were some young men from our side and theirs, I guess, in a coffee bar, but he was scolding our men. He was yelling: "Don't do that! You should be calming things down, so we'll tell these people, those that are a bit more serious, we will tell them that there is no need for that. Don't do such stupid things! And if you agree, if someone thinks he is that mighty, after this meeting I will be on the command spot for about one hour. Those who want to fight, come up there! Don't do such stupid things! We can do it peacefully! And the rest of you, it makes no difference whether you have a rank or not, you can tell your men that

it can be done peacefully!" And so we stayed here and went home.

So, did you try to pacify the situation after that?

Well yes, we did. We would work on agreements as much as we could. They would come from up there, from Here, there is a water spring about one hundred, hundred and fifty meters from our house, so they would come from up there, and we would come from down here. And we would negotiate, and they would also come here to negotiate, they would come from Prijedor to negotiate. And when UNPROFOR was present, they would say that things can be done peacefully. And Praljak was really, truly for peace. I have heard of him before and then I had a contact with him.

You had a direct contact with him?

Yes, that is correct.

You met him in person?

He was sitting here, about three or four meters away, at a different table. He was suggesting people to pacify the situation.

Did people listen to Praljak, did they trust him?

Well, yes, they did. Older people, there were all kinds of people, people of all ages. But older people are more serious, you see, and he called for them. Everyone came, it was like at a mass. Those who believe and those who don't, my God. But he said: "Look, people, I cannot do it myself! We can avoid bigger conflicts!" He was telling people to calm down, to pacify the situation.

Were there younger people as well?

Yes, yes.

And when you mentioned him saying: "...I will be up there for one hour...", who was he referring to, young people or... no one in particular?

He was... who was that mighty, young or old, at that time you could not even argue with him, he was tall, bearded, with his big nose and that little sabre...

Was he asking that, did he say it because there was someone in the room expressing disagreement with what...?

No, it was because people clashed earlier, and for no reason, like he said: "You did it for no reason!" It is like when married people quarrel, but when they think it through the next morning, they realize it was for no reason. You see, people did silly things and he wanted to calm them down.

He wanted to prevent...?

To prevent things from happening for no reason. It happened the first time, but it must be done slowly, an agreement must be met. That was the way he was doing it.

What were people thinking when they heard him saying that, did they understand?

Well, some did, but I heard some youngsters say: "Why not go up there". No one went up there. That was his way of calming people down, to prevent Muslims and Croats to engage in conflicts for no reason, you see.

Was he angry?

Who?

Praljak, at that time.

Well, he was talking rigorously, the way I am talking now, well maybe a bit sharper as he was yelling: "I will be up on the command spot for an hour, so if

someone wants to fight, there will be a fight!" I don't know whether he meant himself or someone else, someone standing behind him maybe.

Did he asked someone to come up?

Not by the name, he was referring to those bullies.

So it was.

Bullies that were picking a fight in a bar earlier, and then someone had to calm the situation, the police, or... That was how he was doing it.

There were bullies?

People drink to much at times. There were bullies, it cannot be said that there was none. He called for more serious people, it was like hearing a monk speaking, he is a man of learning, don't do that, that leads to no good. You see, he was...

Were all of these older people active in the military, could they be considered HVO soldiers (cro: Hrvatsko vijeće obrane; Croatian Defense Council), or were you all Home-guardsmen?

Well, they were both HVO members and Home-guardsmen. I rarely left Jurići.

You did not go to defense lines, the lines around Rama?

No, older people did not go. They did not make us. And we did not ask to go.

And were there any conflicts between Croats and Muslims in Jurići at that time? Were Muslims living in Jurići?

No, there were 9 households here, all Croats.

And the neighboring village?

And the neighboring village, named Here, up there, those are Muslims, there are no Catholics, no Croats. An all-Muslim village.

How did you deal with Here?

They did it all of a sudden, it was so sudden, I don't know. We were on good terms with them before the war.

And tell me, could you tell me when exactly did you come back from Austria? Did that thing with Praljak happen before you got wounded or after that?

Before, it was before. And I got wounded after that. That was almost at the beginning of the war.

So, that was...?

The first conflict happened in Prozor and Jelići, the second one happened afterwards.

Was that after the first conflict?

After the first conflict.

That means, October of 1992.

He was calling for people, that happened in Prozor, and calming things down, he was calling for people from all sides, to instruct their armies what should be done. That there is no need for the war to continue, no need to make things worse. That is what he said and all serious people considered him, I think, to be an intelligent and refined man.

Did you come across him afterwards?

Yes, around Prozor.

Around Prozor?

Yes. He would come from time to time, I don't recall exactly at this moment, but it was not many times that I saw him. I cannot say we had a drink together, because we did not.

Yes, yes. I am asking whether you have seen him, was he coming there?

Yes.

And can you tell me were there any refugees in Jurići, or were you only people in the village?

Well at that time it was only us. Help would come sometimes, the army, to perform the sentry duty, and so on.

And what kind of weapons were you using when on sentry duty?

Well, guns.

Where did you get them, were those your own guns, or someone gave them to you?

Not our own, we were given guns.

You were given guns.

I didn't even have a hunting gun. We got them. When I got back, everyone was given a gun and ammunition, and a few grenades.

And, when you started performing the sentry duty, were conflicts with Muslims happening already, or was... ?

Yes, I'm telling you, when they for the first time...

Which one, as you arrived? When you came, the conflict with Muslims

already started?

It was already done. Everyone fled from the village, mostly. When they attacked, I think there were only 3 or 4 soldiers there, and they all ran away, women and children, and then they wanted to set something on fire, they burned down a cowshed, some haystacks, a house, they crashed some things, after that another house was burned down. That happened then. When I heard about it, that is when I came back. How could I not come back?!

Of course.

And I think, because of my wife and children, I love my wife, I was younger back then, ha ha.

Well, of course.

And the children. It is even harder when you hear such news abroad, you know. That made it even worse. And it was hard. Grandma was killed when I got wounded.

That time in the house?

In her own house, grandma, my mother, children used to call her grandma.

Your mother was killed?

Yes, it happened then.

By Muslims?

Yes, and then I was taken to Rama.

To a hospital?

Yes. Another soldier wanted to take me there, the shelling was heavy, it was impossible to stop. My wife was yelling: "Do not carry him, you will all get

killed because of one man!" I took it as an insult.

You were taken from here to Rama, to a hospital. For how long did you stay there?

Not from here, I was in Jurići.

For how long did you stay in hospital in Rama?

15 days, 20.

Were you treated by Croats, or were there Muslims who were also treating people?

There were Muslims also.

So, when you were brought there after what happened to you, after that tragedy, you were in the hospital together with Muslims?

Yes. I remember one woman, I come across her occasionally, her brother got killed. A Muslim was brought in and she said: "Don't make me treat him!" That is how I know that Muslims were also there. "I cannot treat him!" I guess her brother was killed by Muslims.

But, was that Muslim treated?

Yes, yes. They helped him. I think it was something more serious, he was given the first aid there, and then they took him to Split.

He was taken to Split?

Yes.

So, during those 15 days there you would come across Muslims?

Yes. It was not, no one wants you if you are wounded. I guess that was the

command.

So, everyone was given help equally?

Everyone equally. I don't know whether some of them refused to help certain people, like that woman did, but there were other people there to help them.

That is why I asked you, that man was given a treatment after all?

Yes, of course, they helped him, he was transferred to Split by helicopter.

He was transferred to Split by helicopter?

Yes.

How do you know that?

Well, I was told so. They said: "We are in war with Muslims and here they are...!", OK, some of them opposed it, some didn't, you know how it is. On the second day in the hospital I was already able to speak, it was not like I was going to die. But, it was dangerous.

Yes, it was dangerous.

And yet my wife said don't carry him! As we were fleeing away with the car, they were shooting at the car!

Where is the Jurići village?

Well, about 10 kilometers from here, toward Uzdol.

So, that is toward Uzdol?

Yes. From here it's Vide, Jurići, Here and Uzdol. By that road up there. It is fine, regarding that, there is no, that was a like a quarrel between married people, the thing between Muslims and Croats. I can tell. Because we were working

together, there was no animosity, it was all so sudden. We were surprised hearing about it in Austria.

And after you returned from Austria, have you seen people in Prozor and surrounding places who were not there before, who were not living there before the war? Have you seen any refugees, did the population increase?

Well, yes.

The structure changed, new people came?

Yes. From down there, Konjic, Uskoplje, Travnik, there were people from everywhere.

They came here, is that right?

Yes. Well, I could mention one more thing, as we were coming back from Jurići, we brought cows with us, and they were yelling: "What kind of refugees are these, the same as Gadafi, he's only taking milk from his own camel, when did they have time to take the cows with them!?" But, we were returning later. That would happen, once you escaped, the army was there, it was like that. They did not say that out of hostility, that thing about milk. So it was, it was war, things happened.

So that was the only time you met Praljak? When he was trying to settle the dispute, to prevent conflicts?

That was the only real meeting. When he is concerned, I did not attend any more meetings.

And who told you to go to the motel?

Well, our people, those who were bringing food, junior officers. Because he was not sending for commanding officers, he was sending for those who are serious.

Good.

We did not know what he was about to tell us. But he was saying nice, smart things, like a monk.

Very well, Mr. Vidović, thank you for this conversation.

Cheers and thank you too.

I am switching off.

September 2005, Ljubuški