

BRANKO VUKŠIĆ

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The tone record and the transcript of the interview are recorded on a CD
marked

SUNJA 2.

The tone record of the interview is filed under

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The interview was conducted in Zagreb, in the Leut restaurant, Jarun

You ask a question and then I'll answer it.

The interview is being recorded. Could you please state your name for the record.

Branko Vukšić, a journalist, 49 years old, born on May 14, 1956, ID number 140595630330045.

You know it by heart? And I cannot remember my cell phone number!

My place of residence is Vlaška 70 a.

I'll talk a bit louder, so the microphone catches it. Tell me, please, when did you meet Praljak?

I know Praljak from my theatre days. I've met him before the war, and I know him as a man who was present in all theatrical and intellectual circles. Therefore, I've met him earlier, and our – I can now safely say we are friends – friendship started in the war days when we, a group of cultured men, regularly visited Sunja, where we used to bring him all kinds of supplies. Anything that was needed, anything we were able to procure, we used to bring to Sunja.

We spent, let's say, some six months hanging out together. And we stayed in touch after that, even during his stay in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We are still in touch.

Before we continue talking about Sunja – we are going to talk about it in more detail – you mentioned Bosnia and Herzegovina? Did you visit him there?

No, I didn't. We used to socialize when he would come here from Bosnia, and we hung out and talked about it.

So, you didn't go to Bosnia?

No, I didn't go to Bosnia.

All right, let's get back to Sunja. You say you, a group of cultured men, used to go there?

I was one of the key members of the Croatian Art Forces. I used to organize theatrical performances on battlefields. I think we performed a few hundred shows around battlefields, but all of the first ones we performed in Sunja. In Sunja, there were different theatres, artists, starting with...I don't know, 'Kerempuh' performed most of them, then the theatre from Varaždin; late Ena Begović was there, and Ivo Gregurević. There were around ten theatres. We also organized different performances for other battlefields, but primarily for those in Sunja.

You say you first procured supplies. Did you offer them yourself or Praljak asked you to do that?

No, we did that on our own... Since it was through someone... since Sven Lasta, also a man of theatre, was there, and Miro Međimorac... Mustafa Nadarević, who had a great relation with Praljak, and I think he still does. When the Croatian Art Forces was formed, we contacted Mustafa Nadarević who connected us with Praljak. That's when we started to communicate with Sunja on a regular basis, and often I was in charge of our visits. We drove a lot of trucks full of food there. I don't know; there is this one detail. I'm from Međimurje, and in Nedelišće, let's say, there was a van full of cakes baked for Sunja. A van full of cakes, and cakes were in every box – there were a hundred different cakes. That means that the whole town was involved in baking. We sent those cakes on Christmas 1991. In the 'Mirko Bukovec' elementary school, that was the name of the elementary school in Nedelišće, the students wrote letters and put one letter in each box. It was really touching, they even cried; we established close relations. I was there, and I slept over in Sunja, so I met... I talked to Sven Lasta, I talked a lot with men fighting in Sunja – we talked about Praljak. During my first visit to Sunja I eagerly said to Praljak 'Let's do an interview', and then he said something like 'There's nothing to say about the war. The war needs to be felt, and the best way to do it is to walk around here, among men, talk to them, see things. After that, if you still have the desire to do an interview with me – I'll agree to that interview.' After a few days, and a few visits to that place, I said 'I have no need to do the interview', because it's true, there's really nothing to say, nothing... It's interesting to talk freely to one of the commanders. Because some things that happened over there just cannot be understood by someone who has never been to a battlefield...

*****was a problem*?**

Yes, well, a problem, it's simply hard to talk about it. You are not allowed to write about something that is a military secret. That means you are not allowed to talk about positions, you are not to talk about the way they defend themselves, you are not to talk about a lot of things. Therefore; and Praljak is not a man that would allow some kind of glorification of his persona, and that wasn't the case... no war propaganda should be made.

According to Praljak's words, he remembered Sunja from earlier as a place he used to wake up in when he returned from some place by train, and he used to have a coffee there, light a cigarette – and Sunja was always foggy. And then life brought him exactly to Sunja. Praljak had no previous war experience. How did he seem to you when you went there and saw him on a battlefield, in all that war scenery, surrounded by devastated houses, men that were with him? Grenades were falling, they were under attack, dying. How was Praljak like in that kind of surrounding?

Praljak was a peculiar person. He is a man who finished three colleges, and those were different colleges. Already in that sense he falls into a category of people who don't belong to a mass, he stands out in many ways, he is a man who attracts attention. But he attracted attention even earlier.

When I first saw Praljak, a man who usually talks a lot, he was silent. When I came to Sunja, you had to pull words out of him. Praljak was silent. Usually, he let us do the talking, and he was scarce with words when answering our questions. A lot of actors went there, from Zlatko Vitez, Ivo Gregurević, all those actors that were curious, and it was understandable that... It was actually something exotic. A war people hadn't felt until the first... when the first grenades fell, then everyone got serious and huddled. Praljak was simply very relaxed. He never carried a weapon. Those times when we went sightseeing in Sunja, when he took us on a sightseeing tour or anywhere else, he always went first. We followed him. When a grenade was heard in the distance, he wouldn't blink an eye, he would just continue his way. We all waited, looking for some kind of a tree to hide, a house, a shelter, anything. Praljak would just say 'That's far away, guys. It's not near.' So, he was very unassuming during those war days, which was unlike him. He was a great authority to all. They called him Hemingway, because of his looks, his distinct appearance. He was really distinguishing. He stood out among a hundred of men. So, that's what he was like on the battlefield. His philosophy was also different, his attitude towards war, and life. More importantly, he protected the dignity of every fighter. He was...

You say 'he protected human dignity'. That's something I often hear when conducting similar interviews, but I want to know what made you think that?

Well, the basis for good behavior is to create a system. At that time, he... There was no logistics within the army, and he actually imposed order and discipline. He was the first one to have a prison. That's another story. He established something that couldn't have functioned under the civilian rules; he took matters in his hands and imposed order in Sunja. It was clear what was allowed, and what wasn't. He set rules everyone was to follow. When there are general rules that apply to everyone, and that everyone abides by, then it is a lot easier to live in a war zone. Everyone was the same in his eyes. He treated all equally. He 'punished' men for wrongdoings they wouldn't usually get punished for. For example, he said to me 'Go visit the prison', and I went to that prison. It was a house with no doors or windows. I entered that prison. There were two men huddled, sitting on a bench, smoking. I started talking to them. I said 'What are you doing here?' They said 'You shouldn't be in here' I said 'Why?' He said 'We are in prison.' I said 'What do you mean 'in prison'? You have no door.' He said 'We don't need a door. We are not allowed to go out. We are disciplined prisoners.' I said 'Who locked you up?' He said 'Commander Praljak'. And then I talked to them regarding the reason of their imprisonment.

And why were they in prison?

Now, for example, one of them was... I talked to him 'Well all right, why are you in prison?' He said 'I was over there.' I said 'What do you mean 'over there'? Where?' He said 'I went there, on the other side.' I said 'What do you mean 'the other side'? Why did you go there?'; 'I went over there to drink with them.' I said 'What do you mean?' He said 'Those are my old friends. They fight us, we fight them' I said 'So, why are you locked up then?' He said 'Because I have no discipline. I wasn't supposed to be there. They could have killed me. I could have gotten hurt, and the commander is responsible for me. I

didn't think clearly, and that's why I got five days in prison.' I said '***' He said 'We are here during the day.' And then he goes to his home to sleep, because he has no place to sleep there, and in the morning he gets back to prison. It was a touching gesture that the international forces we called couldn't understand. How could you tell them he crossed to the other side to have a drink with his friends, the Chetniks or the enemy army, got drunk over there, and returned in the morning; and he was shooting at them, and they were shooting at him.

I was at the headquarters when a wealthy Serb called from the other side, and first he asked one of Praljak's men, who refused, and then he asked to talk to Praljak on the phone, because he wanted him to cut the water line to his central heating, because it was very cold and he was afraid his pipes would crack.

Were you present during that conversation?

Yes. The conversation lasted...

Can you remember what Praljak looked like while talking to that man?

Praljak was talking...

They were under attack, right? People were dying?

Praljak behaved like he was asked to close the door or light a cigarette for someone. He said 'No problem, we'll do it.' He called one of his soldiers who was at the headquarters. He said 'Go to that and that house. Please close the...'. He agreed to it. We heard that conversation, but we couldn't hear much. But he said 'OK, we'll close it.'

And he asked nothing in return?

No, he asked nothing in return. He just said 'I'll stop the water line for you.' And he was about to fire grenades at his house.

He said that?

Yes. 'And he will fire at his house.' This one time, during a patrol, we saw a boy, maybe 17, 18 or 19 years old, I don't remember. I think even 'Večernji list' wrote about it. He was sitting outside on a bench, a fence, I can't remember, and I noticed he was despondent. I said 'What's wrong with him?' He said 'Nothing. Go and talk to him.' So, I went to talk to him, and I said 'How are you? Where are you from? Who are you?' and so on. 'What, are you depressed?' Then he said 'I'm a Serb.' I said 'All right. What has that got to do with anything?' I said 'How come you're a member of the Croatian Army?' He said 'I was born and live here. It is completely logical that I fight on this side, because this is my home and I'm defending it.' I said 'Well, are you alone?' He said 'I'm not alone.' I said 'Do you have anyone?' He said 'I have parents.' I said 'Where are your parents?' He said 'My parents are on the other side.' So, I said 'Where is your father?' He said 'He is in

that army.' I said 'So, why are you sad?' He said 'Because he is shooting at me, and I am shooting at him.' So, Praljak's army was very colorful.

Praljak knew about that story? About what happened to that boy?

Yes, he knew about him. And Praljak was a man who approached soldiers in all those tough times, talked to them, adjusted to them when talking. Sometimes he had to rise to their level in order to understand their problems. There's another anecdote. Two days after that we went to Sunja, and the fighters talked about Praljak's bravery. There was a house called 'a missile' that has been hit the most times. That's why they called it a missile, because every missile used to hit that house. The house was inhabited by the father of one of the fighters. During an attack some thirty missiles flew towards that house, and it was assumed there was no way to defend it. At one point the grenades stopped coming. However, no fighter... The son started yelling that his father was inside of the house, and needs to be saved. Praljak said 'Your father is probably dead', because 30 missiles hit the house. The house was devastated and so on. But the boy was crying so loud and he was suffering so much that someone had to go into the house. Another attack started. Praljak crawled to the house. He pulled the body out. From the house. That means he jeopardized his own life just to prove to the boy his father was dead, because the boy needed to know. Because it was a long time... So, he didn't want to send one of his men, he went by himself. It was understandable his men knew he didn't need to act as a strict commander, because he was the one yelling 'After me!', and not 'Charge!' He didn't follow his men or hide in headquarters. Always, in every action organized, he was the one who moved first - and mostly without a weapon.

Tell me Branko, please, did you get a chance to see... You told me what happened to that Serbian boy, and the specific situation he was in. A lot of Serbs stayed there, some of them as old civilians and some of them in the army. Did you get a chance to see how that relation functioned? What was Praljak's attitude towards them?

I was close. Praljak never mentioned the nationality of his soldiers. He said that his unit was mixed, and that, as far as he is concerned, a soldier's nationality doesn't matter. All fighters were equally good, no matter if they were Serbs, Muslims or Croats. Therefore, he treated them... I know he was always repeating; I was even with some commanders then; that no house was to be devastated, not a single roofing tile was to be thrown off of a house; that it was all Croatian property, no matter if the owner of a house was a Serb, a Croat or a member of any other nationality.

You heard him say that?

That's what I've heard. There is one thing I would rather not talk about, because I had a friend ***** a commander; they talked and discussed about how to keep the property safe, because he kept repeating 'Every inch of the Croatian land, every house - they are all Croatian houses, the Republic of Croatia will have to pay for them sooner or later. Nothing was to be torn down. Nothing was to be damaged. It's enough that a lot of properties will be destroyed during the war, so there is no need for the army to destroy

even more.' And that army, as he was saying, never stole a single roofing tile. There was no plundering. It really functioned, and when the bombs weren't falling, it was perfect. There was no nervousness. There was no tension. The attitude one soldier had towards another... There was no drunkenness. There was no fighting. There weren't any of those things you could hear and read about in the newspapers that happened on other battlefields after the operation Storm. It was clear his authority was really like that, and he managed to create a way of life where people trusted him, realizing that only with that kind of organization and approach Croatia had a future. Their Sunja, i.e. a small group – I think he was a role model and people followed his example in organizing a battlefield.

You said actors and cultured men came to Sunja, from the background, wanting to experience battlefields exotic to them, is that right?

Oh, no. They went earlier... I mentioned the exotic part... We watched... I remember when we watched an attack on Beirut on the television. We always watched wars on the television. We didn't think it could happen to us. Always some kind of misfortunes, we thought that was far away from us. However, only after you face it, you realize what it's really like. I was always surprised to see them clear the area after an attack, bring out the tables and drink coffee. I considered it crazy. That's exactly what Praljak tried to accomplish... The war lasts as long as it lasts. An attack lasts as long as it lasts. After that attack you need to work, live, try to contribute as much as you can. There were no factories there, nothing, but you needed to create some kind of life... people needed to keep their dignity in those war times.

I think we can put everything together now and conclude that at that time – it was 1991, the war was raging – there was a small area very close to the state of law, as much as it was possible in those conditions, and it functioned on the territory of Sunja; and it was probably more successful than in, let's say, Zagreb.

More successful than in Zagreb! In Zagreb... all kinds of things happened. I don't know if... I don't even think I remember we ever talked about a car accident. He always used to warn us when we crossed the scaffold; that was the most dangerous crossing. And that story about passing through the woods, when we lay down in a truck or a car; the driver was one of them; because they were able to shoot at us from the woods. So, that was risky. He used to say 'Don't go there, we don't want an accident happening, we don't want blood.' Actually, every time we came to him, in those first 15 minutes... you could see he was very tense. And he was tense because of us, because he was always afraid that we who wanted, who brought performances, who brought some kind of food, who brought clothes... I brought him his first boots from Munich. It was hard to find such big boots. It was Torjanac's friend; we went to Munich where we got around three hundred uniforms, so we sent them to him. And those boots for him. So, that was the first time he had such boots. Before that, he wore his shoes and snickers.

Yes, that's a famous anecdote about his short pants and those boots.

So, in that area functioned... It's amazing. There was no need for a repressive regime; that was clear. There was no need for a strict and big, any kind of repressive regime if people have trust... The system. So, if commanders in those war areas are just, I think things just have a way of handling themselves. Of course, the system needs to be set, and trust needs to be earned. He earned that trust without a problem, according to all my talks, and all my talks to Sven Lasta. Who was a symbol of a new resistance? Who was a recognizable figure in Sunja - Praljak, Međimorac and him - three cultured men who went to defend their homeland. They all said... They considered Praljak a legend. He was a lot more than just a commander. Praljak was their hope. They mystified him. Someone they...

Are you talking about Sven or...?

No, about Praljak.

You are referring to the guys who were in Sunja?

Primarily, I refer to the guys. Their attitude even towards Međimorac, who was less known than Praljak – Međimorac is a very modest, withdrawn man, a great intellectual, and Sven Lasta – but those fighters, people living there, civilians who were there, regarded Praljak as some kind of a god. He incorporated everything good. Over there in Sunja, they realized he came there and knew Sunja wouldn't fall while he was there. That's what people talked about. There was some kind of tavern, a pub, there. Of course, they frequented that pub. There was a lot of laughter there. There were no sad faces. I've been to some rather gloomy battlefields. For example, I was in Slavonski Brod when the last 'krmača' bomb fell, killing a lot of kids, I don't know the number. I was there visiting general Crnjac. Praljak created that positive atmosphere, because people felt secure among themselves, regardless of all the uncertainty.

Praljak gave them support.

Yes. Also Praljak gave them support... Every time we brought food to Praljak... Let's say, Vindija gave a lot of supplies, all companies from Čakovec, trucks full of food; he would divide it fairly among the fighters and locals. We brought a truck full of oranges. Then we brought cabbage, flour, fruit, all kinds of vegetables... vinegar from the vinegar factory... I said 'Why do we need so much vinegar? We're not gonna drink it.' You know, then they gave you... Perishables, and he had it unloaded immediately and distributed. He made sure everyone got equally, so there was order in Sunja. It was secure. And it lacked nothing.

During the period when Praljak was in Sunja, i.e. from September 1991 until February 1992, the attacks were in progress. Those were hard times for Sunja; people got hurt, there were loses. According to what a lot of people said, Praljak took those loses hard. Did you get a chance, during a number of visits, to see his reaction to it?

I didn't... First of all, I saw Praljak in a few situations. I wasn't there when men died in his arms. Because he never allowed us to... I was there a few times during attacks on Sunja, when they went to their positions. There even was a performance when Sunja was... when the enemy attacked Sunja using tanks. The performance was in progress, I think it was a theatre from Varaždin... there were three plays. He usually didn't allow the fighters to come to a play carrying guns, they had to put it aside. They were supposed to come to a play without weapons. However, when we came that day they were in the hall carrying weapons. Those of us who used to go there more often were a bit nervous, because we realized something was wrong. Praljak never talked to us about it. The play was in progress. In the middle of the play fighters started getting up and leaving. Then I asked Praljak; I was near him; I asked him 'What's going on?' He said 'Nothing that should worry you. Everything is under control. If things start to get out of control, we'll stop the play.' And that was a few kilometers away from Sunja...

Where was that? In which room?

It was in their centre.

What centre?

The one that had no windows...

Was it some kind of a basement, a hall?

No. The hall was for the plays. Every time we were there, we put on performances in that hall.

Was there an attack in progress, let's say exactly at the time of the performance?

Yes. There was an ongoing attack a few kilometers away from Sunja.

And you heard it?

That's what we heard. Yes. It could be heard in the hall. The actors were very stoical. None of them showed any fear, there wasn't even voice shaking, nothing. There's this great... The best play I've ever seen was performed on the first battle line, near the train station they guarded; Ivo Gregurević played 'Đuka Begović' for the audience of six men. I wrote it down. There's one of my articles about it in 'Večernji list'. It was a glorious performance. Gregurević had tears running down his face, because he was so into that play, simply... There, I can feel the butterflies even today when I remember it. It's something... It's fantastic. It was the best play I've ever seen in my life. It was the best scenic experience. It's the way you experience an actor, but not only that, but also the atmosphere, those fighters who watched 'Đuka Begović', for some 30-40 minutes 'Đuka Begović' lasted. There was a complete silence. It was simply... The atmosphere could be cut with a knife, it was so... something beautiful. Ivo Gregurević talked about it as something... We spent an hour after that talking to the fighters who were thrilled. They

said 'Now we can do anything we want in life.' So, that was on the first battle line. It was performed in some kind of a warehouse with no windows...

Could you, please, remember how that place looked like? So, that hotel had already been torn down, damaged by the grenades, is that correct?

It was... We even climbed up in the attic and watched the enemy positions from there. It was very close. It was a room that... there were no windows. All the windows were covered. There was no light, electricity or anything. There were only boards. That room... it wasn't suitable for a theatre. It wasn't suitable for a theatre in any way. When Ivo Gregurević and I went inside that day; I think it was January 15, the day when Croatia was recognized; when we entered, I looked around. It was dark. First we had to adjust to the darkness. There were only traces of light here and there. I remember January 15 wasn't a bright day. The light was piercing through some of the boards, and we wondered where to put the stage? They said Ivo should pick a place for the stage. He picked a place he considered suitable. We sat on the other side. They lighted candles.

Was Praljak also there?

No, Praljak wasn't there during the play, only the fighters were there. I think Praljak was... At that time, the play was also performed in the hall. I think Praljak was there.

How many guys were there?

I think six, eight, something like that. They were the ones that had to guard the area, and weren't allowed in the hall.

Yes, on that position were only the toughest fighters.

They were the toughest. They were actually on duty. They watched the play carrying all the equipment.

Tell me, what were they saying? Did you hear their comments during the play?

No, no. There were no comments.

There were no comments?

No. They watched the play in amazement... For them, all of them, those six or eight guys... For the first time they saw an actor performing. That was their first time at the theatre. That's what they told us later; later they talked to Ivo Gregurević, touching him. It was amazing. Ivo was also thrilled. Simply, it was an indescribable experience. It was, so to say, an experience that... like, for example when I was in Israel, memories of those kids in the centre, the Yad Vashem museum, where... you enter it and hear the names of all the kids who died during the holocaust; their names and photos of them are showed, and they use candles and mirrors to present it. That was an experience similar to this one

involving Gregurević. Those are two different... This was a thrill, and that was immense sadness. There wasn't a man that wasn't crying when leaving. Because it was something horrible and yet dignified. The same was here. Those were the two most overwhelming moments in my life. Besides some of my personal tragedies. It was something completely different. But this is indescribable. It was simply surreal. Like it never happened. I keep it deep inside of me. And I consider myself a lucky man to have witnessed it. Everyone asked what happened. When I described it, they all said 'Why weren't we there!' I said 'If you were there, it wouldn't have been like that.' Ivo left immediately after it; I don't remember where, but I have it written down; some other location. He performed in three more plays in the area of Sunja. He performed, because troops kept coming. People were in that area, and the plays were performed.

During your visits, were there any situations when you were in a real danger?

No.

There weren't?

No, no.

Luckily.

We had a code. I would always call a certain phone number, and then he would say if it was safe to come. They knew – that much experience they had – when there was a possibility for an attack. When we drove the cakes from Nedelišće for Christmas, Mustafa Nadarević and I were supposed to go. However; and I found that out later; Praljak called and said we were not to come. I travelled with Mustafa, and Mustafa Nadarević... His car broke down in Velika Gorica. Something, I think the axis cracked or something like that. That's when Mustafa Nadarević said to me 'I beg you not to go. It will take long to fix this.' For an hour he tried to persuade me not to go to Sunja. That was, I think, on the 24th. Then he said 'You got a wife and a kid waiting for you. Be home for Christmas. Don't...' and so on. And he left alone. Eventually, I cancelled that trip. They were all saying 'No, no, no! I don't know when they will fix it.' However, it took him an hour to fix it, and then they went to Sunja. On that day a few thousands grenades hit Sunja. Praljak wasn't glad he came, but nevertheless, he was glad they managed to get through, that the cakes arrived and so on. But he was aware the enemy was about to hit Sunja hard on Christmas and he didn't want to... Torjanac was also supposed to go... However, his answer was always 'No!' when an attack was expected.

Tell me, Branko, please, after the plays or before them, there was usually some kind of a lunch, is that so? Was that in the house where the headquarters were?

No. The headquarters were located in a small house... except when four or five of us came, and we had lunch there.

In Ćuk's house?

Yes. Ivo, the driver. That was in Ivo the driver's house; I don't know where he is now.

Ćuk, yes.

Yes, yes. There. But we usually ate right next to the Community Centre where there was that; I don't know the name; a big room, and there... We ate what we brought, because we always brought food with us. And we ate fish. A freshwater fish. They cooked it very well. There was always good food. Women from Sunja always made us great lunch. And we never ate alone. The army always ate with us. There was never any disunion when it came to food. Praljak used to say 'Mingle. Don't separate into groups, but socialize. Talk to them. Your visit is like a holiday to them. You have nothing to talk about among yourselves. You'll do that when you return to Zagreb!' So, the actors used to sit at the table with five or six fighters and talked... So, it was a big room, there was a big table everyone was sitting at, those that were allowed to enter and those who weren't on duty.

You mentioned Ivo Gregurević and Mustafa Nadarević. Do you think they would be able to remember those events?

Gregurević could surely remember it. And Mustafa Nadarević also... Then... Ljubomir Kerekeš was there, and Zvonimir Torjanac, Marija Kohn, a lot of actors, all the actors from 'Kerempuh', Ljuština was with us a few times. He was there also on January 15. And Zlatko Vitez was there. Late Ćurdo was there, then there were... We often brought guests, and the guys from Požega were there... a visit to another battlefield. General Crnjac was there. Praljak was here. Then those guys from Orłjava, they went there; Ćelik, the ex prison warden, then... A lot of people visited Sunja.

You will give me Mustafa's and Ivo Gregurević's phone numbers. OK?

OK. Sure.

And, in case I need it, you will help me contact them.

Sure.

There is something else we should mention, regarding Sunja and Praljko in Sunja?

During my last visit to Sunja, I remember when people heard he might leave Sunja – they were all very sad. They simply didn't know how life was supposed to go on. Actually, according to their words, they were losing a father and a friend... I mean, they lost a man who meant freedom to them. Someone who was more than a commander. Who was...

Yes, people often notice Praljak's father figure quality

I never heard Praljak raise his voice. He never talked much, which was characteristic of him. Never talked much, always calm. He never wanted to talk about the war. He said the war needed to be experienced, it couldn't be retold. It couldn't be retold in books, by

means of stories and so on. What was going on inside of him at that moment couldn't come out. He was always; we stopped at that; he was always shaken. I remember when he came from Bosnia, when I asked him, one time there was... He came to a play in 'Vidra'; 'Kerempuh' performed in 'Vidra', and after a few minutes he went out of the hall. I saw him getting out, and I went after him a few minutes later. He was at a bar drinking a juice. I said 'All right, what...?' He said 'I just can't watch that... that comedy. I thought I would be able to relax a bit. I'll go back. Too many men died in my arms. I don't judge people in that hall, but at this time I simply don't belong to this world.' Then we talked a bit. He said 'I've seen a lot of death. I'm a stable man. There's so much death in me. That death balanced me, and there's nothing else in life that could throw me off. All those... I feel them like my kids. All those guys who were dying in my arms, all those guys whose mothers entrusted me with their healthy children - and I sent them back in a coffin. I feel... Not as a guilty man, but as a loser. Every time a piece came off, and I got stronger.' He said 'They fought for what they believed in. I was the one gathering them and leading them. And I stayed. They died.' That was very hard for him. Even, I remember this one time near Mostar when a lot of men died; I think every car was hit. It seemed he was disappointed to have stayed. It was so hard for him that he said 'But you see, I'm alive, and they all died. A lot of men that were younger than me.' That's how it was with those deaths... He still doesn't talk much. It's clear that only a man who believes in what he is fighting for can stay whole and healthy as he is. However, that emptiness and that fight he feels inside no one else can feel. We can only guess what happened. Because many people lose their mind after seeing things like that.

But, what happened with him – as far as I've followed and observed him, listened to all the stories... In fact, in those situations, after all of that people usually stop to value life, stop to believe in some values...

No, moreover, he is one of the people who believe in life, because if... If he was to stop believing in life, he would betray all those who gave their lives for them. Because they gave their lives exactly so others could live.

Yes. And that moral vertical was impeccable, maintained, and regardless of all the detonations he heard, all the tragedies...

Yes, yes... Now, there's a story: Željka Ogresta had...I think she still had a show on Radio '101'. It was 1992 or 1993, I can't remember exactly. And one night, he was a guest at the radio and he invited his fighters from Bosnia. After that, we ended up in 'Gavella'. So, 'Gavella' had already opened, it was 1993. I listened. We stayed with those fighters until morning... Stories about Praljak. Praljak was sitting at another table. There was about ten of those guys who said 'We entered the war in order to liberate that part of Croatian territory, do defend ourselves from the enemies. However, now we are... we stopped asking, we trust Praljak that much that we would die for him'. That's what they said on the air, and at that time they talked about Praljak as a man who imposed order. A man who... Any thought about retribution was unknown to them. They talked about Praljak who saved the Serbs, the Muslims, the Croats - everyone; Praljak who never separated people based on their religion, education or anything else... But he treated all

the fighters equally, and his unit comprised of the Serbs, the Muslims and the Croats, and he never allowed any conflicts; at least none of the commanders heard about that. Because they followed Praljak's example and they all... He was the commander... He educated everyone. He broadened their horizons, so those who had no education could realize it was the only possible... He told them 'We have to continue our lives after this. And we have to live together. The less evil you inflict, and the more people you save, the easier your life will be, regardless of your nationality.' He was aware of everything that would happen later. He was aware of the Judgment. He was aware of all the consequences for all the wrongdoings. And that lower civilization level he was living in... The organization in Sunja was far greater... And really, when I talk to people who fought with him and who I meet – he really left a mark there like no other commander.

In other words, if we look at the war as the state of chaos under some kind of definition, then in Sunja that level of chaos was actually lowered to...

Oh, there was no chaos in Sunja, while in Bosnia there was - and he managed to impose some kind of order, and tried in every way... I remember when the fighters talked about how many Muslims he saved. I remember that story about a pregnant lady that the Croatian television didn't air...

Oh, yes!

...because he cursed.

That's a another story...

Another story!

...about the war events behind the curtain.

He saved several lives with the help of cursing. It should have been aired; I don't know if the tape still exists; in order to show his actual role... Not his role as Praljak, but his role as the commander of the Croatian forces...the way they reacted, the way they defended, no matter who they were saving.

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