

PETAR ZELENKA

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Ljubuski

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Interview was held in Mostar

**Recording has begun.**

Petar Zelenika, born November 23, 1949...

**Happy birthday!**

Thank you! ... Citizen of Mostar, Siroki Brijeg, I have been living in Mostar for 35 years ... there, what else?

**Now: 1991 in Mostar?**

So, an important date for Mostar at that time was September 19<sup>th</sup>, 1991. It was one of the important dates at the end of the war, quote, in Slovenija, as the JNA withdrew into BiH and Croatia. The night of September 18<sup>th</sup> going on to the 19<sup>th</sup>, around fourteen thousand members of the JNA and the Serbian-Montenegrin reserves with “četniks”, with Šešelj’s white eagles on their foreheads, came into Mostar from two directions: from Nevesinje and from Stolac. It was actually an occupation of Mostar. And from that day, I mean, that day I will never forget. Simply put, there was a sense of panic in the city, where people started fleeing when at around 11:30 they started shooting, meaning, it was one long line, about 22 kilometers long, meaning, from the direction of Nevesinje, towards the airport. They came to occupy ... then there were reports ... At the front of the line was general Torbica. That day, probably because of some human instinct, because I was at one point ... previously up until 1990 I worked ... I was an inspector, before that a police officer, I was in some special police ... I left that Ministry of Internal Affairs (MUP), at that time known as SUP, for reasons that I saw that it wasn’t why I originally left: that it became one nationalistic MUP, Serbian politics, greater Serbian politics, as a matter of fact they started harassing people, attacking police officers of Croatian and muslim nationality, there was a variety of provocation present. Because Mostar, under their plans for a greater Serbia, was of interest to them, they thought that there wasn’t going to be resistance, as a matter of fact, they were more interested in western Hercegovina. They thought that Mostar would fall, they went to surround Mostar, they came with that goal. That operation was called “Ram” according to the strategic maps from the general headquarters of the former JNA, meaning, that, if you remember when the tanks were stopped in Polog, they already had that plan. Meaning, one part of that line of tanks went to Kupres, they had to, and the other one, that left May 7<sup>th</sup>, 1991, they were already in Kupres, in their strategic positions in Kupres. The other line, that was coming September 19<sup>th</sup>, it had to surround Mostar, to come out on these mountains behind Mostar, and to cover plateau Bila. That is Plato, the mountain between Cabulje and Široki Brijeg. So, we are there, a group of people, instinctively there more so than being organized to be there, naturally, HDZ is there, which was the Croatian party, and SDA was also there ... however, there were those young men, how should I say, that were a little brave – they stayed, while the others ran. There are still those who have not yet returned. Because, the plan was to put barricades, hedgehogs were built, people were self organizing and that is how it began. The plan for Mostar to submit, to cover all that ... means, that was every day ... those were the events. That first day they started shooting over Gnojnice, there was broken windows, houses, meaning they were

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consciously instilling fear. With their behaviour they were instilling fear. Every day in Mostar from that day, there was some form of conflict: whether it was bombs being thrown, or starting some form of preparation, or some form of provocation, or fights in café's with reservists. They walked the city drunk, which can be found in this police report. There is a separate report written for each day and each day's events. As time went on they would continue to provoke more and more and in the same token they were climbing higher on the surrounding mountains. And just like that in one moment they took control of all the surrounding mountains except for the road towards Goranci. That was the road to safety, which was the entrance and exit to Mostar. They did not occupy this part, thanks to the young men that stayed there in our defense. Open conflict ... now that is a long story: every day events, some motion for Jugoslavija, then organization of meetings, then mothers-not letting their children go ... those are every day events, that is an every day story. And, at sometime in January, January 15<sup>th</sup>, a crisis center was being organized and the defense of Mostar was beginning. For the commander of defense, a lieutenant-colonel or colonel was coming ... a colonel who allegedly escaped from the JNA, Vladimir Perak. He placed himself in charge of defense, he organized the defense, therefore his behaviour ... in the beginning we were enthusiastic with him. The man was trained for leadership, for army leadership, as a matter fact, he instructed us, showed us maps and all, however, aside from all that we couldn't quite understand his behavior or decision making, which can be seen on April 7<sup>th</sup>, 1992. That morning he ordered the withdrawal of people and army from Mostar, meaning, the civilian population. But the Serbs had already controlled everything and the only thing left was this road, and at that time he, at 4 something in the morning, ordered by way of radio, without us knowing, we were with him, a few of us were with him in Stozer ... he without our knowing went to the control center ... I think that Vlado Čuljak was there that day in the control center ... he told him to call the entire army and population, all our army groups and to slowly make their way to the road towards Goranci. And when we ... when the people, actually, we were sleeping ... me and another were there sleeping ... when people barged in they thought that we had made that order, they wanted to kill us. Then we jumped and returned that order, he escaped and that means that it was a betrayal in order for Mostar to fall. After that, we returned, there was the crisis center with Milivoj Gagro in charge, --- -----, these people, who after ... when we got in touch with them, they told us that we will not leave Mostar, ok, except for women, children, we organized that, and there were ... and Muslims and Serbs and Croatians, and everyone who wanted to ... we organized busses under the threat of falling bomb shells, and we pulled out convoys by this road to Croatia. This way thousands and thousands of children, women were saved from Mostar. Newspapers wrote articles and television stations recorded these events, it was the Road to safety. At that time there was confusion, there was a lot of groups that weren't organized and they called me, I think on April 10, in Grude and at that time president Mate Boban told me to take command until another man arrives. I told him that I wasn't fully qualified or skilled for that responsibility, but if it is like that, I would try. People thought, at least I thought, that they respected me, maybe because of who I knew, what can I say, there, I wasn't afraid. I returned ... when everyone was leaving Mostar, I returned to Mostar and we tried that we accomplished ... we made ... simply, we gathered these army groups, that were scattered into one command unit. We made an organization.

**When was HVO started?**

April 8<sup>th</sup> ... two days before. When this guy escaped, that is when HVO was started. When Perak escaped. And I tried as much as I possibly could, everyday people were dying, there was no water, electricity, not even a coffin for the dead. It was outrageous; you can't even talk about it. We had nothing. Simply put, at that point I understood ... these people were happy when they said ... he has arrived ... You are in charge, gave me command and left. I stayed, without water, electricity, fuel, a car, there was nothing ... simply put.

**What about weapons? Were there weapons?**

Well, weapons we ... we received one part of our weapons from Croatia, and the other part by capture. We would capture them ...

**You found your way?**

... You find a way ... there wasn't any ... If there was ... we barely had food, that is how it came to us ... one or two cars at a time would enter Mostar ... we didn't have ... and everyday there was shelling going on, people dying, especially on the front line, everyday they wanted to come in, the Serbs had occupied the left shore and even the center of the city, their people were there, provoking, shooting from windows, people were dying, snipers were at work, so that it was crazy. Somewhere around April 27, one morning in, I don't know at what time, we were in Cim, the command post being moved to a basement in a house owned by Ile Vrljić, when ... this soldier told me, who was standing in front of the entrance, said: "Here, Colonel Praljak is looking for you." And that is when the bearded man came in, a tall man, who I did not know, but I heard of him from Sunje and from accounts ... that it was Praljak. He was then a colonel and that is when we first met. He being himself, in his own way said "Let's go visit the front line!" Then for the first we went on foot, even though shells were falling and past Rudnik we came, I started further to ... he stopped and spoke to a few people he knew and at that moment a machine gun started cutting up the road, and where I ran across and that is how we remained divided for about an hour and a half, we could not join each other. The machine gun separated us. Afterward he gave some assignments as to how to better organize the defenses and again he went to Čitluk, that's how we worked, we would come a few times ... every time he took the road to/of Safety, meaning he would come often and would give his orders or commands ... contact ... because the white observers were there in hotel "Eri" ...

**At that point the observers were already there?**

Yes, yes they were, they had already come ... Who were, in fact, then I didn't immediately understand, now I see that they were working more for the Serbs than for us. They tried to ... us to give up, no to ... but that's not important.

**But this now, so that we don't have to return to it, this with the Road to Safety that he came in on, respectively, from Goranci, did you also follow this road? Tell us how this worked?**

Well, there was ... it was like Russian roulette. So, the Serbs were on Orlovac, there and on Hum, while their canons (minobacaći) and rocket launchers (VBR) were in Opinama and on this road to Fortice. And like that, any car they saw they would take out. For them whatever came to mind. They were there counting, sees a car, they would be informed from Orlovac, and this guy would shoot. And that was like a lottery getting by there, therefore many people lost their lives there and cars and blown up cars and on fire. People would by pure luck, you would never ... and at night it was common practice to go out without the lights on. That was just one ... but the next time wouldn't exist.

**So, Praljak used this route?**

This way ... many times, many times coming ... descending, entering the city and returning. And sometimes he would sleep there ...

**I ask that so that we don't have to return to it, but this time ... he exited as well ...**

This road, there wasn't any other way to Mostar. Everthing that came to and left Mostar went using that road.

**Did they shoot at night as well?**

At all times of the day. If they see brake lights, so people would disconnect their brake lights they wouldn't ... they see brake lights, the guy was up there, and that was it. Right away canons or rocket launchers or ...

**So that means driving was done without the use of lights?**

Without lights, without lights, at that time it had to be done like that.

**And, if possible, as fast as you can?**

Only the bravest went this way, and there wasn't ... or they, would be used, say for example if a convoy with women and children were traveling, then contact by the observers would be made with the Serbs to negotiate and then the Serbs would say "from 11 to 12 there would no shooting, the buses would be allowed to leave." But as soon as any other truck would come through, they shoot. In that sense their word didn't mean much, they did not allow for any entry into Mostar.

**Ok now, I brought you back a little. Therefore, Praljak is coming the 27<sup>th</sup> ...**

That was the first contact, his entry into the city and after that he's helping, organizing and ...

**How is he organizing? Can you ... what is he doing? Does he have any ideas, was he giving any advice ...?**

Well you see, he was giving us experience from the war in Croatia: he gave us ideas about making trenches, protect windows with sandbags, entrances, to turn out all the lights, to bring in a curfew and things like that, which were the commands to be followed for people to survive at that time. And then he would try, organizing, he would leave, organize help with food, in fuel, we weren't, in Mostar there was nothing.

**Good, but where was the local defense situated?**

That was all ... the local defense was there until April 7<sup>th</sup>. After that it fell apart. After that there was a certain chaos in the city, you wouldn't know who's drinking and who's crying: this guy is running away this way, that guy that way, this guy is stealing, that guy breaking stuff, shells are falling, people are dying and there is nobody to bury them. And then, when we came there we were organizing ourselves until April 29, when the crisis center, which was really useless in a basement awaiting some kind of saving grace from the 6<sup>th</sup> American Fleet. They were always saying the 6<sup>th</sup> American are coming. And then they left the defense of the city to HVO, which was also a signed document. That document, interestingly enough, they have been looking for on April 14 1992 from Alija Izetbegović for the city to be trusted to the HVO, but Sarajevo didn't agree until more people started dying, until they saw there was nothing. Sarajevo is already burning, but began burning on the 6<sup>th</sup> of April. And then Alija gave word to Ismet Hadžiosmanović to sign the document so that the city can be trusted to HVO, where it was said that that they could unite a part of the civilian, there was also Muslims, who were also fighting, in the formations ... we had 9 battalions and 4 individual companies. We were already organizing, like a real formation, army, meaning we held one ... line from Bijelo Polje, to Buna, to Žita – Žitomislca, with regards to our command and our members of HVO. The Mostar battalion was with the HVO. The cooperation was good, it was a united defence. Included were us and the Croatians, it was more the people from the city, and that's how that went. That means, the city headquarters, young men, that were ... we armed them ... they were in formation for the first time on May 17<sup>th</sup> 1992. They were placed in formation when commander Jasmin Jaganjac came.

**Jasmin was there?**

Jasmin was in the Croatian Army (HV) and with orders from Janko Bobetko, he came here to command the defense, in my place, May 15<sup>th</sup> 1992. At that point he formed the Mostar battalion. I think there was 173 men and then we gave them some uniforms and whatever arms there was, and they went to training camp in Gorance, in Raska Gora, in Dubrane, those were the names of the places where they were trained. Then after that they came back to Mostar, meanwhile, Mostar was totally surrounded. Food ran out and we were looking for a way to ... our biggest problem was Orlovac and Hum, they held these two dominant positions over Mostar and from there they were aiming, so that we wouldn't use this road to Čitluk, since they were already in Miljkovićima and Kruševu

and towards Široki, therefore it was a very difficult situation. The whole time we were trying to free those two positions and then on the 7<sup>th</sup> a plan of action was brought, when general Bobetko came and the southern battlefield when we were making this ...

**07. 05.?**

06., 06.

**Meaning a plan?**

Yes, and then the 9<sup>th</sup> down in Čapljina, in Bivoljem Polju, Neretva and there we chased them away.

**And that was down there?**

Yes, down there and then we went this way on the 11<sup>th</sup> we chased them from ... and then we went towards Žita and from Slipčići, from Kruseva, and freed Hum, Orlovac. Hum 11<sup>th</sup> this right bank, and then ... 11<sup>th</sup>, meaning 06.

**Orlovac?**

Orlovac and Hum and the right bank of Mostar. And that's when they were destroying the bridges ...

**That's when they were destroying the bridges?**

The 11<sup>th</sup> they were destroying the bridges, yes.

**Who are they?**

The Serbs. They had already placed the explosives, just activated them so that we would not be able to cross to the other side to chase them out.

**All the bridges were destroyed?**

All except the Old bridge, that was damaged.

**Yes, but all the others were ...**

All, all gone, there's nothing left.

**Was there anything solved around crossing? Was there a crossing?**

No, not right away, there was no crossing. Before Metković there was no crossing and Salakovac. Those were the only crossings on the bridge and in Metković...

**Everything was cut off, correct?**

Everything was cut off. And then on the 13<sup>th</sup> going on the 14<sup>th</sup> of June (06) 1992, at night, I don't know somewhere around one o'clock at night, general Praljak came, and woke me up, and because Jaganjac, the commander of defence at that time, left for Zagreb ... He left for Zagreb on the 12<sup>th</sup>, after the liberation, meaning the right bank, he went to Zagreb, so at night 13<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> general Praljak came and told us to gather all the commanders and for all of us to go the left bank, to free the left, to liberate Mostar, the valley along the river Neretva. And he led that action and it was successfully completed until the morning of the 15<sup>th</sup>.

**So, he led the action ...**

He planned and led, organized and led the liberation of the left bank.

**Good.**

That night ... interestingly, that meeting, it was the first, how should I say, problem between Arif Pašalić and HVO, meaning the commander of the Mostar battalion. Arif that night ... first he didn't want to come immediately, so he sent Tetak and Tetak asked ... general Praljak asked this Tetak, that was Arif Pašalić's replacement, how many soldiers he had, documents, he gave him some list, I think altogether they had 63 soldiers that were ... even though they all haven't come over, they only had that much. I think only about 30 crossed over. Arif didn't come, he came later, he came only after the second intervention, when the military police went to get him, then he was his, that remained in my memory, when he said "I'm going, but I am the commander of the airport!" Meaning, if we liberate the city, that he would become the commander of the airport.

**Who said that?**

Arif Pašalić. He was looking to become the commander of the airport. It happened like that and he got it, I think, and from Antun Tusa and that command. He got it by fax, something like this. I know only that he played something out there. And we ... so, the battle was going on, the Neretva valley was cleaned out, the 15<sup>th</sup> in the morning sometime around 5 o'clock, we had one direct line, that we, because the phone lines were disconnected, so we had a lowered line from Široki to Mostar, by the road ... the phone rang and, I think, that it was an emergency, the minister Gojko Šušak was looking for Praljak to return to Zagreb immediately. He told me "Don't say anything, and you lead from here, don't tell the troops that I left, until this has been completed." That's how it went.

**Therefore, the army didn't know ...?**

Yes, that he left.

**Why do you think he said this? Did he explain why?**

No, he didn't, he didn't explain why, only I didn't discuss it, all I know is that a phone guy came and said he had the minister on the line and then ...

**No, why did Praljak say: "Don't tell them that I'm not here!"?**

I believe because of his authority, so that the men wouldn't lose morale or so they wouldn't get mad because of his departure, there would have been doubt, no? Typically, that how ... why isn't the commander there, but he was always in contact, he commanded, he ...

**That was ...**

1992

**... everything after the fall of the Neretva?**

Yes, every place was cleaned out. A line was setup ... from Aleksina Hana, to Rošaca, up to Velež to Vranjević and further towards Domanović, Stolac.

**That means, that these 9 battalions (bojne) took part ...**

9 battalions and 4 individual companies, this whole team took part in it ... and after ... and a part of the Mostar battalion took part in it, one part, 60 something, one company (četa), they called it a četa.

**But before this last action, this "Lipanjske zore", however it was called, was that the last or was there more after that?**

After that there was ... after that there was a clash in Podvelež, because the Serbs wanted Podvelež back.

**Ok. Let's go back to another thing. Before these events occurred from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> of June, and the liberation of the east bank, what happened to the Muslims from the east side or otherwise the left bank?**

Well, there ... thousands upon thousands, not only from the left bank, but also from Nevesinja, Gacka, Bileće, Višegrada, Foče, everyone entered Mostar. Some left for Croatia, while others were moving into Serbian apartments. That is where the refugee problem started.

**Where were they coming in? How were they coming in?**

They were moving into vacated Serbian apartments.

**But how were they entering Mostar? Which passage were they coming in through?**

The Serbs chased them out; they were fleeing through the woods, in any case before the bridges were destroyed. Meaning, through the woods, from the direction of Nevesinja, some were killed, some the Serbs let through.

**So what was happening in the city when a flood of people enter it? What happens then?**

As organized as we could be, we offered them aid and were saving them. Let's say, a family, who were imperiled, where the father was captured or killed, or where they don't know of his whereabouts, those families we would put in the vacated apartments or in halls or in a shelter. These other ones we would forward to the republic of Croatia. The majority of them would end up ... some of them went to Grude, some to Široki, some to Makarska, ... Makarska, from Zaoštrog all the way to Split and further.

**Were you chasing them away or?**

No, no, no we just kept records, it was a service in the local community, there existed these services, Civilian protection and record keeping, we extended them our help, some went to be treated in hospital, everything was happening there.

**Ok, did they leave on their own request or were they asked to ...?**

No, no ... however they wanted to. Whoever wanted to stay stayed. Whoever wanted to fight, they were given weapons, whoever wanted to leave left. There was no asking them to do anything.

**Ok, that was ... therefore, it was, in fact, their choice,**

Yes, yes, their choice.

**Now, let's go back to the action. We finished off on the 13<sup>th</sup> going on to the 14<sup>th</sup>, that action crossing on the left side, correct?**

Yes, we're liberating the left side ...

**Let's go now to the airport ...**

Yes, and that was being liberated

**Or was the airport later?**

No, it was all then, everything happened from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup>. One the 15<sup>th</sup> we had cleaned out everything, by the 16<sup>th</sup> we were in Podvelež and were making lines towards...

**At this time is Praljak still there or ...?**

No, no Praljak had already left.

**Further ... what else happened? Was Jaganjac returning?**

Jaganjac was coming on the 18<sup>th</sup>. ... 17<sup>th</sup>, I think, the 17<sup>th</sup> Jaganjac was coming ... on the 19<sup>th</sup> we have (tiskovnu pod pecinom???) . It is the well known (tiskovna???) that included Jaganjac, Daidža, Tuta, Ante Roso, Mića, I can't remember who else was there, I knew...

**Mainly, (tiskovna ???) was because Mostar was freed?**

Because Mostar was freed.

**Good. What else happened, the Serbs were pressed in Podveležje, is that correct?**

In Podveležje. The Serbs tried to come back, but they failed to come back to come closer.

**At that passage across the Neretva, respectively, the liberation of the left bank, did all the battalions (bojne) take part?**

Yes all of them.

**Did the Mostar battalion?**

The battalion in one part ... they, however much they were ready. I think around 69 of them were in the Mostar battalion ... there was Muslims, we have to distinguish this. There were Muslims in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> battalions as well as in the 1<sup>st</sup>, in Bijelo Polje, and in the 4<sup>th</sup> ... and in th military police. It was ... there were Muslims, but in the Mostar battalion, under commander Arif Pašalić, 63 men, something like that.

**Was HVO ...**

Again at the head of this was Karlo Džeba, a Croat. He was the first to cross the Neretva.

**Karlo Dzeba was the first to cross. Did the Mostar battalion receive weapons from the HVO?**

Yes, from us, from HVO. Who else will give it to them, us.

**Good.**

And Daidža was there with his ...

**Daidža was there?**

Daidža, of course, his regiment was there and with regards to the Mostar battalion and these guys, he call them all, he didn't call the Mostarski battalion, what kind of Mostar battalion, that was ... rather for him it was the people from Mostar (raja), for them through this Naila Nožic Pince (????) and Sejo Čelebića and Sude Čupina ... The first commander was Suad Cupina, it was not Arif. Arif came in the fifth ...

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Yes, yes.

**Meaning, Suad Čupina ...**

Then Arif, yes, yes.

**Arif would come later?**

Yes, he would come in the 5<sup>th</sup>, sometime ... I really don't know the exact date.

**Did you know of a list that existed that named the members of the Mostar battalion that crossed the Neretva?**

No, there was only one, when this Tetak was at the first meeting ...

**Tetak was there?**

He was Arif's replacement

**His name was? Sulejman ... Budaković.**

Sulejman Budakovic, also know as Tetak, that's right. When he came, Praljak asked him "How many men do you have?" He said "There's ..." "How much? Gve me a lsit of all the men." Then he wrote them down on a piece of paper ... I think he gave around 30 or so men, but where that paper ended up ... On regular paper he wrote it. Later Arif came, and showed it differently. In that action I think there was 63 of them altogether.

**Was Tetak in the Mostar battalion at that time?**

He was pre Mostar battalion, but he was in the anti armoured vehicle unit. He was the commander of this unit, his replacement was Bruno Vidovic, the late Bruno.

**Ok, now we came to ...crossed the Neretva, ----- and now the line is being drawn ...**

On the Neretva, the line was drawn. And now the line is being drawn in Podvelež and further in that direction. The Serbs are trying to come back, on the 26<sup>th</sup>, (I'm assuming he is talking about the date and not the number of men), we are capturing the transmission tower (relej), this "Kažnjenička bojna (battalion)", and that led to conflict, that is why we were above Nevesinje, so the Serbs are attacking by air, we're losing the transmission tower (relej), we're returning to Podvelež again, like that. But this was all led by Jaganjac.

**Jaganjac led this. And that is how the line was being drawn and it ...**

Remained.

**Remained?**

Remained, remained.

**How long was that line active?**

Until June 30<sup>th</sup> 1993.

**(At this point in the interview two questions are crossed out and therefore are not translated)**

**Good, and now that line is being drawn. What are the relations like between Croats and Muslims in Mostar?**

Well, concerning the military, there are no problems yet ... men are going to the front lines together, they're bound together ... they held from Zalika, meaning they held about a liometer and a half, and we held almost 60 kilometers of the line towards the Serbs, our formations, they had from Zalika to Opina. It was this part of Fortice, that is what they help, he Mostar battalion.

**How much?**

A kilometer and a half line. Meanwhile, that political situation, after that agreement between Izetbegović and Tuđman July 21<sup>st</sup>, 1992 in Zagreb, one group of Muslims in Čapljina, were creating a Muslim nationalistic council headed by Faruk Čupina and efendija Smajkić and another group of people, and they were looking for, from Alija to break the alliance with Croats and to withdraw from a united command and united ... That is where, according to me, the first signs that would cause a rift. And then all of a sudden the BiH army is being created, then they were creating their own military police in the city and so on. At that time, general Praljak would come, many times and would calm the situation and talk to Ismet Hadžiosmanović, with Šosijem, Zijadom ...

**Just slowly, you have to say the names fully.**

Yes, fully. Therefore, he spoke with Ismet Hadžiosmanovic, the president of SDA Mostar ...

**Hadžiosmanović?**

Hadžiosmanović, yes. Zijad Demirovic was the president of the regional committee and later he was, under the Vance Owens plan appointed the governor of that province.

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----- He even gave me orders. And at one meeting he, that was in SDA rooms, and I went with general Praljak, I remember well, they were agreeing to lower the tensions until a political solution ... to see what will happen with the Vance Owen plan ... meanwhile I went into a command position, the general went through the city and at the Rondo (round about) there was a clash between HVO members and one group of these Reds, that is how they called the "Red Berets" who were led by Zijo Oručević, from the muslim side. And then Praljak calmed that situation down, came between them and said: "Why are we going to fight each other, when we fought together in the war, we have t push these ones out!" ... like that. But I was not witness to these happenings, but there are people who were there that witnessed it.

**But, you know that it happened like that?**

I know it happened like that, because people came and told me: "there's going to be a fight, there is the general down there ..." I came later and it had already ended.

**So, he went in between all of them?**

Yes, yes, Dujmović was there, then there was Buhač, there was ...

**When you arrived, where was the general at this time?**

The general left and went to the ministry, to Bruno Stojić's.

**This, when he went to the SDA, was it a meeting for peace or a meeting for argument?**

Peace, peace ... no, no a peaceful meeting, very simple talk to release the tensions, because I think there was a problem that the military police stopped a convoy of weapons, but was disguised as humanitarian help. And that is when the tensions began and the general stepped in to calm the situation and that is how that ended.

**Did you have personal contact with the general during this time?**

Well, whenever he came, we talked.

**Were you able to ... can you tell us now your experience regarding general Praljak with respect to the eventual clashes with the Muslims? What was his position towards some kind of provoking of clashes, clashes or was he ...?**

Simply, the same as mine.

**What was your position?**

Mine was: we had a united enemy and to fight against that. I didn't ... I was the last thing on my mind that we would ... it was impossible for me, for me it was impossible. And I think general Praljak thought the same way. We would always say "If it is about us then we both lose and the third party only wins." That is how we always thought.

**That is how it was. Ok, and that's what happened, now, the political tensions are starting to increase ...**

Those tensions, those political tensions are starting to increase, problems in Bosnia, that are occurring here, the pressures of refugees ... All that was showing on Mostar. But, Mostar was the only, how should I say, all humanitarian help, all refugees would go through Mostar, meaning these people from Bosna, who were fleeing over Igman through the tunnel, they all had to enter Mostar and Croatia. General Praljak even moved, I think, their complete command and logistics to Baško Polje, where the all the logistics were.

**Whose command was it?**

Muslim. It was their logistics is Baško Polje. The embassy ...

**Baško Polje was?**

Ours. In Croatia.

**Really?**

In Croatia. That was their set there ...

**In the Republic of Croatia? It wasn't on Bosnia and Hercegovina territory?**

No, it wasn't on Bosnia and Hercegovina territory, but in the Republic of Croatia, in Basko Polje, where at one time there was an army complex, where there was ...

**And that was given to them?**

That was given to them and they were there for almost two years until the open conflicts began.

**This pressure from refugees, how did it affect life in the city?**

Well you see, it couldn't be controlled anymore. There were problems where people were just entering apartments and not respecting the police curfew, random theft, robberies everything.

**Was the police curfew just for Muslims?**

No, no for everyone, the police curfew was for everyone, and that's it.

**Were the Muslims, as far as you know, treated like second class citizens, that they were left without work, that they couldn't work ...?**

Nobody had work.

**Excuse me?**

No, as far as I'm concerned, they were treated like first class citizens. They went to the sea, and on the beach, while we were in Podvelež, defending Podvelež.

**Was there work? What kind of work was being done?**

What work would there be, nothing. Gather shells, only these ruins here ... what work was there?

**Ok, I mean, you lived then, we need to know how it was then, because there are stories that say that they were left without work, that they were being forbidden to work ...**

I understand. Here ... what would they do? They weren't able to ... because, the bosses (direktori) were the bosses from before. Was the boss of the water supply (hydro) a muslim. Did they work in all the services, in the hospitals, the Muslims worked everywhere. Meaning privileges. It was only privileges, not discrimination, just privileges. That they were able to leave, when ever they felt like leaving they were given passed to the sea.

**Yes, and the principal of the school, as far as I know.**

And school, high school, but at that time they didn't work, In 1992 they didn't work.

**What was organized in Neum?**

Oh, yes, a university, led by Konjhodžic.

**Konjhodžic was Muslim, correct?**

Yes, now he's Bošnjak (Bosnian nationality)

**Do you remember how that ended ... maybe we should go back a little to the conflict at the beginning of May, those young kids, how should we call them ... was that HVO or was it young boys, so to speak?**

They were ... that is a little difficult now. They were ... they were one part of the "Kaznjenicka bojna", who were up there, who were from the city ...

**Were they familiar with these guys from before ...?**

They all knew each other. It was ...

**So, that means there might have been guys that weren't cleared...?**

Yes more so private, fewer ... there was more guys that had prestige, who had the bigger ego, than...

-----  
Yes, yes on some kind of ... it wasn't ... it was just that then everything was rising, tensions were rising, simply, it was bad propaganda, especially the Muslim National Committee, that was poisoning people and under their control they took their radio, Radio Mostar, that they called War Radio Mostar. Arif was there and a part of their command, this guy at the head with Arif Pašalić, while others were, who were from the beginning with us, they continued to be for ...

**Let me ask you, weren't all the Muslims on their side??**

No, no Ismet Hadžiosmanović didn't agree and left.

**Who was that?**

Ismet Hadžiosmanović. He openly said that, and I have a letter, I think I gave you that letter of his, where he is writing to Alija, begging him to stop.

**Maybe I'll come to him.**

I think there is, I gave it.

**I know you gave it, but, this ...**

Yes, it says, try Ismet Hadžiosmanović's letters and it has his printing, I gave two of his documents, good ones, he even begged me, he asked me, I said I didn't know where. In

Berlin, where he holds the prints ... in Berlin he said in front of thousands of Muslims at a gathering, he said “ Croatsians saved us ...” that time when the clashes began. At that time that was ... Pohora was also there, I think.

**Armin?**

Armin Pohora

**What was he saying?**

Nothing, also positive.

**Good, but regardless, that means, for those people, who are trying to positively influence, they exit one side and they exist on the other side, things still seem to be tumbling. In what direction are they continuing to tumble? What exactly is happening, from the perspective ...**

Well, the confrontations were a problem. Maybe there wouldn't have been these confrontations if there wasn't the problem of Central Bosnia. From up there they are calling for refugees from one and the other: from Eastern Bosnia Muslim refugees and from Central Bosnia Croatsians and Muslims are coming. And here ... they come to settle their differences. Everything comes to Mostar and that's when problems begin.

**What kind of settlements? What kind of problems are these that are arriving with the refugees?**

Well problems: “I have an apartment, you don't”. For example refugees coming from Konjic and, I don't know, from up in Central Bosnia, where the Croatsians were displaced ... From Konjic they would come here, over there there would be Muslim refugees, but they were displaced by Muslims. And there they would settle their differences. These are the problems, that would start, that could no longer be controlled.

**Were there attempts to control the problems?**

Of course, we tried, the police would work ... there was civilian police, that tried restraint, offered solutions, meanwhile, Croatia was unable to accept anymore refugees, so then that problem started, they were not allowed entry there anymore, they were looking for residence and here, making it a very difficult time. But, the main problems began guaranteed when they started displacing in Central Bosnia and the incidents in Konjic between Croatsians and Muslims, in Busovači, in Zenica the killing of the member of HVO. Let's say, at that time from Zenica came a huge mass of Croatsians came here and for them the Serbs were no longer the problem, for them the problem was now the Muslims. So we had to, you weren't able to reach every situation, so we would further enforce, do this, then don't do that ... peace...

**Sad**

Of course it was, when we accepted both sides here. What can you do, I think to myself, we were not looking for a conflict, but we had ... It was useless that the Serbs were so far away, everyday they were shelling Mostar.

**The line was still intact, there existed relief and replacements ...**

Relief came, everyday they would be fighting the Serbs. Our people were dying from Rošac all the way to Podveležje, to ...

**Now this, when you mention Konjic and the conflicts in Konjic. Do you have any understanding as to what was happening in that part of Konjic?**

In Konjic, they already ... careful, already near the end of 1992, Mujahideen fighters were beginning to enter this area uncontrollably, the English start showing up, some of them to HVO and others to the BiH army ... really a spy game. That is where problems begin ... until now nobody mentioned this ... ok, this was before the Mujahideens. That means, sometime after the Muslim National Committee and their visions, looking for Ismet's departure and the government to no longer be united, normally they are rising ... the tensions are slowly rising, even if they don't affect the military part. And then at that time, about half way into the 8<sup>th</sup> month Arif Pašalić writes ...

**Just tell me what year?**

1992. Arif Pašalić was seeking from the chief, at that time the HVO headquarters, general Petković, to leave the command, from the Mostar headquarters and for him to just obey orders from the headquarters. Every day he recruits his own soldiers, trains them and creates a larger army, but always holds the same line. That means, that he continues to hold that kilometer and a half, but every day more and more soldiers...

**Logistically he's giving -----**

Logistically, yes ... on one hand, on the other hand they were already making their logistics in Baško Polje, meaning the BiH Army, where they were going, arming themselves, bringing supplies through Vienna, I don't know the routes they went from the Arab lands, every day more and more arms would arrive. And sometime after that general Petković confirms, he sends a memo to us in the command that general Pašalić from today date was under his command. I think that it was a key moment, where he immediately starts creating military police, following the creation of the military police, he is making a brigade, and following the brigade a corps and then he listens to neither Petković nor us.

**And now what? That means one city has two armies?**

Two armies, two ... I think ... At that time I wasn't a commander, Jaganjac was there, Mića Lasić came ... that's when different combinations develop, Bruno Stojić continues

discussions. The head politician is no longer Ismet Hadžiosmanović, rather, after the arrival of Alija Izetbegovic in October of 1992, the head negotiators with HVO are Zijad Demirović and Safet Oručević ... a new set were coming, so that the first people who were a part of the union, were slowly removed and no longer part of any important decisions and it continued this way.

**It's coming, to what?**

It's coming to greater tensions. 1992 is coming, in central Bosnia the first are coming, as a matter of fact, first comes Rama, the attack on a spot in Rama, on the HVO military police. Two police men die there. Following that, a new conflict in Rama results. Then a chain reaction results, conflicts spread throughout Bosnia and it affects the state of Mostar, reason being that everyday more and more refugees come to Mostar: both Croatian and Bosnian, who then settle their differences here. It was leading to an anarchy ...

**And there was a lot of people...**

... unfamiliar people, whom nobody has control over. And then the Mujahideens arrive.

**And, we also spoke of something in the 3<sup>rd</sup> month in Konjic, Jablanica.**

Well ok, it's the same, same ... everything is tied to here, everything is happening here.

**Everything is taking place over there. Now, do you remember if there were any conversations with the UNPROFOR, between HVO and UNPROFOR and between the BiH Army and UNPROFOR?**

That is ... that was the 18<sup>th</sup> going on the 19<sup>th</sup> in April of 1993 when Arif, but with the signature from Mithata Hujdura Hujke, commanded the attack on HVO. And that night we were stopping that attack and they were, because our units were pulled outside the city, the city was almost empty, except for the military police. They took advantage of that section began moving in. The conflict started at the Glass Bank, as it was known. That is where they attacked our spot, our police spot. They threw, one of our young men died, threw a bomb and it led to a battle and at night, at one in the morning arriving ... that was the day before, two days earlier there were peace talks in Geneva and on the 18<sup>th</sup> of April in Zagreb an agreement is being signed, after Ahmić. The agreement between Izetbegović and Tuđman and Boban with 4 periods. And that night at one in the morning general Pilnez (?????) arrives with 11 transports and along with him general Praljak.

**He's coming with Pilnez? (?????)**

At that time, with Pilnez (?????). And they were looking for us to meet, because Hujka was over there, this commander of theirs, brigade ...

**When did Hujka become a brigade commander?**

Brigade, sometime in November of 1992.

**You said something previously, before we begin with this conversation with Pilnez (?????) and this ... You had said that they planned an attack?**

Yes, yes it was ordered.

**Where did you get this from?**

Well they got it ... our authorities got from their command. There is a document ...

**From which you can see that an attack was being planned, is that correct?**

From which you can see a quoted attack, yes ... on two pages ... the order to attack members of HVO, the removal from the city and so on.

**And that attack was planned for?**

18<sup>th</sup> onto the 19<sup>th</sup> at night.

**18<sup>th</sup> onto the 19<sup>th</sup> at night ...**

And it started, but we got that document early enough, so that we were prepared.

**Good. And now where is general Praljak coming from?**

From the direction of Međugorje.

**From Međugorje?**

From Međugorje, from the Spanish base. And he is coming here with 11 transports looking for an emergency end to the hostility and a meeting. The meeting took place in "Design building". At that meeting ... I was there, Stank Marić was there, Ilija Filipović from our side, on the other side there was Hujka, Mithad Hujdur Hujka and I don't know the others, I think that document still exists, I believe it's somewhere. And general Pilnez (?????) asked, here's what ... he turned to me and ... "What do you suggest, for them to stop?" I simply told him what I thought at that moment ... in that moment I said the army in its barracks, the police on the dividing line and wait for a political solution ... and that is what we agreed to. And that night all hostilities ended, the next day Arif Pašalić and Mića Lasić were to come to ...

**... to sign? What interests me is, what was Praljaks' position on the discussions?**

General Praljak was not present at that discussion. He was in command with Slobodan Božić, [this name was hand written in the original Croatian transcripts and therefore may have been misread] elsewhere.

**Aha, so he was not at the discussion?**

He wasn't at the discussion, ... he only came with them and then left and told me that I must go to the meeting with general Pilnez (?????).

**Did he give any direction as to how to lead the meeting?**

To me they ... I found myself there, now I can't remember ... I know that this guy or one of them gave me these 4 points and said that we must proceed according them. Four points of this agreement.

**That is what you received; however, those weren't the points that you thought of?**

No, no those were the 4 points, in order to proceed and then we added 4 points, but nothing was signed. Meaning, to move out, because they had already settled in the Student residence, they made, the Mujahideens were there, their muslim center, they made a prison here, in Hotel Mostar. And then we moved them out, all without a fight, simply through conversation.

**Yes?**

But we accommodated the army, since our 4<sup>th</sup> battalion was on the Rondo, on the Heliodrom, the 5<sup>th</sup> battalion was here the former hotel "Hercegovina" – in the Northern camp, so the city was left without an army. Their command center had to go from Vranice to Konak.

**Did it go?**

No, unfortunately.

**Yes, because it was not signed...**

Yes. And when we started to realize that in the morning, we named them: hotel "Mostar", named the army, our squadrons, everything went as discussed. In other words, one of theirs, one of ours, one of theirs...

**One camp is ours, one camp is theirs...was that the agreement?**

Yes, yes. And that is how the army went, and the command center from Vranice was supposed to go to Konak over there, where the JNA once was. And around the 20<sup>th</sup>...it was the 20<sup>th</sup>, sometime around 11,30 I was called to Grude to see president Boban and

to...The rest to...I was there, for some information that I signed something, split up the city, that I...and that I had to leave the city, that I hadn't left...And that is the end.

**Alright. Therefore, Mate Boban said that you should not have signed that kind of an agreement?**

Yes, that kind of an agreement. I said that nothing was signed, that that agreement did not exist, I mean, just that I proceeded according to the command, which general Praljak gave me.

**That is right. And that the goal in fact was...**

...that the hostilities stop.

**That is right, those kinds of conflicts. And that was your mutual, this...**

Our wish and goal, that people not perish. I even had an interview...in the Slobodna Dalmacija, everything can be seen there.

**Do you have any knowledge that Pilnez (?????) was looking to speak with general Praljak, so that the continued hostilities would be appeased?**

Who, that he?

**General Pilnez (?????????), or what is his name...**

Yes. Pilnez (?????), that's right.

**...was looking to speak with Praljak, that he speak with Praljak, in other words, general Pilnez...**

He came together...those two were in Medugorje together and they arrived in Mostar together and he...again he went over there with him to talk. I just brought, this...rather, I didn't bring it but this Stanko Marić, our chief executive, took it.

**And they continued to be together...?**

They were in continued contact and...next day...I don't know, I don't know for sure...later Filip M----- arrived, I don't know.

**So M----- arrived too?**

The second day, second or third day. Filip M----- came and then this man left, Marijan came, and then Se----- came.

**Was Praljak there when M----- came?**

No, no. Praljak had left.

**Can you remember, did Praljak maybe give you or someone else an order to sit down with the Muslims and to create an agreement?**

He told me that I go call Hujka over the phone and to search for an emergency call, for, what's his name, Pilnez (????????) sent for a connection through an officer of theirs on that side, and then Hujka came and we sat down together: Pilnez (????????)...

**Where did you have that conversation?**

In "Projektanta" the building Projektanta. Yes, yes, but an agreement was signed to achieve...that is an agreement, in fact, it is an agreement. In other words, that was: cessation of hostilities, the army in the barracks, the police to go to the lines, until the political solutions are resolved.

**Alright, until that moment you had already had some sort of a relationship history with general Praljak...**

Yes, yes.

**What is your impression about how important that discussion was to general Praljak?**

Very, very important, I think he went there genuinely. He came that night and returned immediately, only to cease the conflicts.

**Did he...how did he...what are you basing your impression that it was important to him, that that conversation was important to him?**

Well, because he said: "Come on, enough of these stupidities, to be fighting amongst ourselves in these parts, when we have so many problems that we have to...Our boys are in Podveležje up there, and we are fighting amongst ourselves here. Who is going to bring them their food, where will they go!" Like that, in that vein.

**Did you conclude that that conversation was equally important to the other speakers?**

Well, as far as Mithat Hujdur is concerned, yes. He even cried, because he was my soldier, who said: "I do not support that, they coerced me!" He admitted to me that Arif forced the document on him. Not only to me, there were many other people who were there. When I said to him: "Why did you need this Hujka? Then he said, started crying and said that, that it was ordered to him, forced, that he had to listen to the command.

**Who was deceptive in the agreement and why?**

I know who didn't, but who did...

**And, who did?**

Well, I didn't.

**Alright. Did the army start to retreat?**

Yes, entirely.

**Where did the B-H Armija go?**

Armija B-H went to the Northern camp, and their commanders...

**And the HVO?**

The HVO went, one part went to the Heliodrom, and the other in the barracks "Tihomir Mišić", where he was...

**And the HVO commanders?**

And our commanders stayed in... wherever, and theirs had to go to Konak over there.

**And did they go?**

No.

**And they stayed in?**

In Vranice.

**In Vranice. Therefore, the commanders of the brigade and the commanders of the corps were in Vranice?**

No, the commanders of the corps. The commanders of the brigade were here in Šantić's, there at the "Partizan" cinemas, where their MUP was.

**And in the 5<sup>th</sup> month, then the commanders are still in Vranice?**

Yes, but that...

**No, no, I don't mean it was...**

Yes, it was.

**It wasn't already then in Konak?**

That day when I went to Grude, everything stopped. Everything stopped where it was agreed upon.

**Alright, and after that, I know you are now a civilian, you are no longer...do you still reside in Mostar?**

Yes, I do, I haven't gone anywhere.

**I am interested what the situation is like in Mostar at the end of the fourth, fifth month? Was life peaceful? Did the Serbians fight? Were there any incidents?**

No! The Serbs fought all the way until "Oluja", Serbians fought all the time, and then it stopped there...life there was tense, there was a situation...breathing was more and more labored. In other words, that agreement was not fulfilled, out of what reason, I do not know.

**Alright. And you fulfilled it? That is what you know.**

I was called in from the settlement into Grude. With the realization of the agreement, I was exactly on the bridge when he came to get me and go. And they were supposed to come out, their MUP was in the Partizan cinema and as I left is, that is where it had stopped.

**Alright.**

**I have nothing more.**

**Anything else about Praljak?**

**We said how, that meeting was important to Praljak, why it was so important, we said that too.**

**And did you personally see Praljak later in Mostar...?**

I think we did not meet after the year 1995 any more.

**Alright.**

**We can unplug?**

We can.