

EXCERPTS FROM BOB DJURDJEVIC'S BOSNIA WARTIME DIARIES

July 1994

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Names of the soldiers and/or army officers with whom this writer has met during his wartime trips to Bosnia have been changed to protect their privacy. The only real names in these notes are those of generals and politicians, i.e., the public figures of the Bosnian war.

Battle of Gorazde

BOSNIA, July 25, 1994 - Gen. Zdravko Tolimir said that he was commanding the prong of the Serb forces which fought on the high ground during the April 1994 Battle of Gorazde, while Gen. Ratko Mladic led the other which advanced through the valley below. "The fighting was so fierce that we could not get the soldiers to charge the enemy lines without setting a personal example," he said. So, at times, he took the point, and commanded, "follow me!"

I could not help but recall that that's how the WW I Serbian Army officers were taught to command their troops. I also remembered that, by contrast, when the Croatian war broke out in 1991, many former JNA officers cowered behind the front lines, while ordering their troops to "charge," rather than "follow" them.

"This type of battlefield bonding paid off when the order came for the troops to retreat following the NATO ultimatum," he said. The Bosnian Serb government agreed to leave some of the territory the Serbs had taken within the 3 km exclusion zone. "There is nothing more difficult than to make a soldier to give up the land for which some of his pals have given their lives," the general said. "They would have never obeyed the order were I not there with them on the battlefield all the way."

Later on, Major Matic voiced his own personal opinion about that retreat. He felt that that was a mistake. He said the Serbs should have taken Gorazde despite the threats from NATO. "By retreating, we've just put off the inevitable."

French "Mirages" Downed?

Major Matic also said that, in addition to downing the British "*Harrier*" over Gorazde, which NATO had admitted, the Serbs had shot at the three French "*Mirage*" jets. "One of them went down into the Adriatic Sea. The other two were damaged, but managed to land," he said. "But the French were too embarrassed to admit it."

Ripe (Muslim) Pears

Gen. Tolimir also talked about the other Muslims enclaves in Eastern Bosnia- Zepa, Srebrenica etc. Pointing them out on a map in Gen. Djordje Djukic's office, he said, "these enclaves like the ripe pears. They will fall into our laps sooner or later." Yet, according to the Contact Group plan, they were supposed to not just remain Muslim, but be connected by additional territorial concessions which the Serbs were expected to make, and which would cut up the Serb-held territory into smaller pieces.

At about 21:00, Gen. Tolimir and I said our goodbyes. Major Matic, Nesa and I were on our way to Pale.

Pale, Bosnia

Relations with YU

As Major Matic and I sat in the conference room used for press briefings on the main floor of the Pale Presidency building, waiting for Momo Krajsnik to show up, I overheard a familiar voice. "That must be Zoran," I said, and walked out to see. Indeed, Zoran was talking to someone on the phone, sitting in front of the secretary's desk. That evening, Milica was on duty. "Mina has the day off," she said.

After he finished his telephone call, Zoran joined us in the conference room. He said he was not very hopeful that there would be a satisfactory solution to the Contact Group proposal. He again tried to minimize the rift with the Slobodan Milosevic government, but he only ended up restricting himself. I did not feel like challenging him, though. So I just listened to him without commenting.

He said he wanted to meet with me again tomorrow, but I explained that we had a long day ahead of us tomorrow, and that this would not be possible this time. "You always stay such a short time," he lamented. "Actually, that's all relative," I replied. "To me, spending two days in one place is a long visit."

Momo Krajsnik (MK)

(a meeting at his office - 22:15 to 23:30)

New Furniture

I was first met and welcomed by Mira, MK's secretary. I was surprised she was still there at such a late hour. But she replied that that's pretty well normal for them. When I entered MK's office, I noticed that he had brand new furniture. The conference table and his desk looked very elegant, like the 18th century French style designs. I complimented him on them. "Oh, that's nothing," he said, sounding embarrassed. He quickly changed the subject.

Cabinet Meeting

MK said that the Cabinet meeting is still going on. In fact, it was just getting started in earnest. "There are 24 items on today's agenda, and we've just tackled the first three," MK said. "Ordinarily, I would have had to stay, too. But since I am not the presiding cabinet member today, I was very happy to get out, and to welcome you here again on behalf of the RS government."

I replied that I was also happy to meet with him again.

MK gave me the photo which they took of the two of us during my May visit.

The *ECONOMIST* Article (Jun/94)

Then MK said that he could not reply to the article I had sent him because of electronic eavesdropping that they are all subjected to. But he felt that the article singled him out for attack because he was the only member of the RS government whose roots are from Sarajevo. His village (which he showed me on the map in the northeast part of the

Miljacka river valley), was just one of the many disputed areas. MK said he would have had no problems if it were to go to the Muslims, provided that they agreed to other territorial proposals which the Serbs had put forth. But the Muslims would not even consider them. Which is why he thought that the *ECONOMIST* article was off base in criticizing him personally.

Relations with Milosevic/YU

I asked him about the RS government relations with Milosevic/YU? MK said that publicly, they are maintaining the posture that there is no rift between Belgrade and Pale; that the relations are "business as usual." "But I can tell *you* that I am very worried," he confessed. "In fact, I am more worried about the Yugoslav government than I am about the Contact Group proposal. We can win the war even if there is a foreign intervention. But I am not sure if we can do it alone."

As a result, MK also went on to say that they (the RS government) may have to implement some more Draconian laws. "Until now, everything had pretty well run on a voluntary basis," he said. "But now, we'll have to start demanding our people to do certain things, like when, where and for how long to serve (in the army); when, where and how hard to work, etc. No more shirking of duty!"

To me, these plans sounded like a "War Measures Act." Yet, I thought, hasn't this government been at war for the *last two⁺ years!?* So, why do it now?

In other words, RS appears to be preparing for the eventual self-sufficiency test in case of a break with Yugoslavia. That jived with RK's comments in late May that they were trying to produce more ammo on their own. But is it too little, too late?¹

My Advice to MK/RS

MK then asked for my advice under the present circumstances. I replied that I could not be very specific, as I was not very familiar with, either the detailed proposal of the Contact Groups, or with the maps. But I could offer him the same type of universal advice which I have given Gen. Mladic this afternoon, when he posed a similar question. "And what's that?" MK asked, anxiously shifting in his chair.

"I don't see a way for you to *negotiate* peace," I said. "I only see mean-spirited enemies doing evil things to you so as to force you to capitulate. I am afraid, you will have to *win the peace!*" (militarily).

MK nodded pensively. Just like Gen. Mladic did earlier today.

July 26, 1994

Mount Jahorina, Bosnia

Hotel "Rajska Dolina" ("Paradise Valley"), Mount Jahorina

(a dinner with Major Matic, Nesa at about 00:30)

¹I warned Dr. Radovan Karadzic in September 1993, that his split with Milosevic was inevitable, in my opinion. We met on the day of the Banja Luka rebellion, which was incited by the Serb Communists (i.e., Milosevic's wife) Yet, as recently as May 1994, he thought that Milosevic was "a good Serb." And evidently did very little to prepare for such a showdown.

Late Dinner, Early Breakfast

Gen. Tolimir had phoned ahead to reserve the rooms for us at this military hotel, which was once used for R&R by the former JNA military "big wigs." I heard him also tell the hotel manager to have a dinner ready, as we will be probably arriving late and hungry.

He was right. We arrived at hotel at about 00:30. And we were hungry.

Except for the two uniformed staff who met us at the reception, the place looked deserted. One of gave us our room keys, another them took our dinner order. We went upstairs to leave our bags in our rooms before going to the dining room. I was surprised to see that my room was, in fact, a two-bedroom apartment. The rooms were small, but clean. But there was no hot water. I remembered the warning about this from my last visit here in 1993.

We ate dinner at 1:15, and went to bed at about 2:00. We agreed to get up at 8:00 and hit the road by 9:00.

I tossed and turned most of the night, annoyed that I did not know what time it was (my watch was still on the blink). I got up once at the crack of dawn, and again by the time the sun was already up. Finally, I gave up trying to sleep, got up, showered (using the cold water, of course) and got dressed. By the time of my wake up call at 8:00, I was wide awake - not the least of it because of the ice-cold shower. I went outside.

The scent of the freshly cut grass filled the air in front of the hotel. I muttered something about how nice it smelled. "I cut that yesterday," said a uniformed staff member who prepared our late-night dinner for us. "Would you like a coffee?"

"Yes, please," I replied.

He disappeared inside the hotel. I went for a walk.

By the time he returned with the coffee, Nesa was also up. We continued a three-way conversation. Some other people also joined us.

I noted how deserted the hotel looked compared to the last time, when the Bosnian Serb parliament session was held there (in Sept. 1993).

"Those two French soldiers are also here," the staff member explained.

"The ones who deserted?" I asked.

"Yup."

"What are they doing here?"

"I don't know. I think that they are being debriefed by our intelligence people."

Nesa on General Mladic

I asked them what the deep rut tracks were from across a steep ski hill? "I can't imagine what vehicle could have climbed a hill this steep," I said. The soldier who made us the coffee said that they were from the tanks which participated in last summer's Serb offensive on Mount Bjelasnica and Mount Igman.

Nesa then recalled some of the hairy rides he had had driving General Mladic. "With him, you can never be sure how fast you'd have to go," he said. "One day, he'll force you slow down practically to a crawl. The next day, he'd make you drive like a maniac even on sheer ice."

By about 9:00, Major Matic also joined us. Soon, we were on our way to the very top of Mount Jahorina (elevation about 6,000 ft.) along a twisty dirt road.

Mount Jahorina Observation Post

(a visit to the military installation - 9:30 to 10:30)

Close to the peak of Mount Jahorina, to the south of the road, was a large spheric object. I remembered seeing similar ones at the weather and astronomic telescope observation station on a mountain peak near Tucson, Arizona. "What's that?" I asked.

"These are telecommunications antennas," Major Matic replied. They are enclosed like that so to protect them from the elements. "From here, our crews deep below the ground can literally see every NATO plane as it take off from the Aviano base in Italy" (several hundred kilometers away), he said. But I noted that the antennas were quite exposed and could be easily knocked off by an aerial attack. Major Matic agreed. "That's why we have mobile back-up systems," he explained. The back-up antennas are apparently mounted on trucks which can be easily moved around as needed.

A Motley Crew

A view from the top of Mount Jahorina was breath-taking. I took a few photos of the Mount Bjelasnica and Mount Igman - the sights of last summers big battles around Sarajevo. One could also discern in the distance the valley in which the city of Sarajevo is situated. Even though it was a hot sunny day below (over 95°F in Belgrade that day), it was downright freezing at this elevation. The temperature could not have been much above 50°F, if that. There was also a constant breeze.

Maybe that's why, when Major Matic returned from the underground bunker with the site commander, this guy took one look at me, and invited me to come inside. I refused politely, preferring to stay outside in the fresh air. So, the commander ordered that someone bring me a coat. He looked surprisingly young for a post like this, I thought. He was probably still in his twenties.

"How many of you work here?" I asked just to make some conversation.

But when the commander, whose name I thought was Mirkovic, answered my question with "a sufficient number," I was again reminded of both, the classified military nature of the site, and the fact that he had probably not yet been briefed about who I was. Later on, Major Matic answered my question without hesitation.

Four or five other officers came out of the bunker and joined us. They looked like a motley crew. One of them even wore a pair of beach thongs.

All of us sat down on wooden benches bordering a space of about a 12x12 feet in front of the bunker. A beautiful brown-haired "boxer," who was tied to a post right next to the benches, made his presence known by loud barking. Even though I love dogs and was tempted, I was not crazy enough to pat a strange dog. The dog's tail went into overdrive, though, when he saw his master emerge from the bunker.

A soldier brought out a military jacket which I threw over my shoulders. The commander ordered some coffee and plum brandy ("slivovitz") for us.

"Plum brandy, at this hour?" I protested.

"Oh, but you must," Major Matic interjected, trying to save me from embarrassment.

"It's the tradition."

"Okay, then," I gave in, shrugging my shoulders.

I'd never heard of this tradition before. Except perhaps in Scandinavia, where they served me once a different (brown) type of "gasohol" for breakfast. But then, I was raised as a "city slicker." Later on, Nesa, our driver, who was grew up a farmer, explained that that's

how one always greeted a guest in his village (Kladanj). And that even the local peasants themselves would drink (a special, weaker type of) brandy in the morning, before going off to work in the fields.

"Where are you from?" I asked the commander.

"From Banja Luka," he said.

"And how long have you been stationed here?"

"From the beginning of the war."

What followed was a story of deprivations and hardships which these men have had to endure at this 6,000-foot mountain top - mostly at the hand of Mother Nature. Their isolation and dependence on each other reminded me of the stories I had read about submarine crews. Except that these guys had much better views - at least when the weather was clear.

A soldier came out carrying black coffee and a single glass of plum brandy. "This is home made," the officer seated to my right said about the large glass of "slivovitz." He raised the glass to me, said "*iveli!*" ("cheers!") and took a sip from it. Then he passed it on to me. Suddenly, I clewed in about the "tradition." We were each supposed to share the *same* glass of brandy. So, I took my sip and passed in on to Major Matic, who sat to my left. The glass went around.

Being a "city clicker," I could not help but think about how some of these "traditions" are somewhat unhygienic. Of course, I said nothing. But I was reminded of this scene the following day, when I got a sore throat. Over the next three to four days, it would escalate to a full-blown cough, cold and (probably) a fever, despite the antibiotics I got from my sister in Montenegro, a medical doctor. Even Anne, my daughter, caught some of the virus before we returned to Phoenix. I did feel guilty about that. For, unlike myself, Anne had no choice about my trip to Bosnia. I apologized to her later on. But she only shrugged it off with, "don't worry about it."

Probably hearing strange voices, another dog started barking ferociously behind the bunker. I turned around and saw a German sheppard. The dog was tied up.

"She's one of our war casualties," the commander explained.

"Oh,?" I asked, not getting his point.

"If you look carefully, you'll see that she's missing a hind leg."

I looked hard, but from the distance of more than 20 yards, it was hard to tell.

"Last year, she stepped on a land mine," the commander explained.

This brought on stories of UNPROFOR's lack of humanitarian concern for the Serb victims of the war. A 13-year old boy, for example, from a nearby village, apparently injured his back in a fall the other day. The Serb military applied for the U.N. permission (because of the "no fly zone" restrictions) to fly him by helicopter to a hospital in Belgrade, where he could receive the kind of surgical care they could not provide in Bosnia. "The boy's been in agony for over three days," Major Matic said, "and we are still waiting for such a permission."

The commander then spoke about the Serb offensive last summer which resulted in the taking of Mount Bjelasnica and Mount Igman, the two peaks we could see so clearly in the distance, just south of Sarajevo. They peaks being defended by a much stronger Muslim enemy, at least numerically. Thousands Serb infantry troops, many tanks and artillery units, took place in the action. "It was like the movies," the commander said grinning ear-to-ear.

The site commander and his soldiers wanted to know what the people thought of them in America. I told them what the U.S. media have been describing them as alternatively as the aggressors, the rapists and the butchers of innocent Muslim civilians. "Which is why the latest Contact Group proposal is intended to punish you for winning the war so far," I added.

They just shook their heads silently. After a long pause, the commander finally spoke up. "You see this (12x12-foot) space we are sitting around?" he asked.

I nodded.

"Maybe the Great Powers of this world can back us into a space no bigger than this," he said, speaking in a very soft voice, almost a whisper. "But you should tell tell your Arizonans that we'll never give up. They'll have to kill us first."

I looked around at the faces of the people sitting around the 12x12-foot space.

Everybody looked very pensive. And dead serious. Some soldiers were looking down at their shoe laces, as if trying to imagine what their end would be like. Nobody said a word. They did not have to. Their determination was evident. The sense of sacrifice and destiny was almost palpable.

"We have a long day ahead of us," I said, directing a comment at Major Matic.

"Let's take some photos," he suggested.

We took one. Then my film ran out. I changed the roll on the way to our next destination - Mount Trebevic, above Sarajevo.

Along the way, Major Matic and Nesa debated which route to take. Some approaches to Mount Trebevic are apparently often subjected to the sniper fire, and/or are in Muslim hands. "I am not going anywhere near the 'Cliff,'" the driver said at one point with a finality in his voice which indicated he would not budge. "I've been there once. It's too dangerous."

Sarajevo, Bosnia

Mount Trebevic Front

(a visit to the Serb front lines - 11:00 to 12:00)

We met the brigade commander, Major Kesic, in front of a wooden log house which was converted into his headquarters. The place was deep in the forest atop Mount Trebevic, overlooking Sarajevo. This is the front where "Vuk," the hero of my July 3, 1994 *ARIZONA REPUBLIC* story about the fighting on Mount Trebevic, had served 21 months and was wounded in May 1993.

Major Kesic wore a yellow T-shirt. He was drying himself with a towel. "I am sorry I am so sweaty," he said, shaking my hand. "But I just got back here from the Gorazde front." He pointed to his green jeep parked in front of us, as if to a witness.

"The Gorazde front?" I was surprised to hear. "Isn't that quite a distance away from here?"

"Yes, it is. But my brigade is responsible for a piece of it, too."

Major Kesic called for a man to escort us to the Trebevic front lines. "Why don't you go ahead," he told us. "Peter will take you to the periscope. I'll be right along. I just have to take care of a couple things here first."

"Poor, Unarmed, Badly Outgunned Muslims"

A fat guy in his early thirties shook our hands, and took the back seat in our car next to Major Matic. Peter was carrying a stubby machine-gun which looked like an Uzi. But it seemed to be of a bigger caliber than 9mm. Major Matic also showed some interest in Peter's weapon. He explained to me along the way that this was a modified, lighter and a smaller version of the AK-47.

I noticed during our ride to the front that some trees were cut in half, like match sticks. Even a civilian home, well back of the front line, was totally destroyed. "Muslim artillery fire?" I asked.

Major Matic nodded affirmatively.

"Wait till you see the trees up the road a bit," Peter piped in.

After a couple of minutes, we reached the side of Mount Trebevic directly above downtown Sarajevo. The forest there had an eerie look about it. About a third of the trees were charred or cut in pieces. Just up the hill, one could see the remains of the bobsled run, a sad reminder of the happier days during the 1984 Winter Olympics. The bobsled site was also badly damaged by artillery fire. "And so, this is what the 'poor, unarmed, badly outgunned' Muslims did?" I asked rhetorically, quoting the typical attributes from the American media. For almost two years, CNN and other TV crews only broadcast to the world the pictures of the alleged Serb shelling of the city - *in response* to the Muslim artillery fire - never offering their viewers the other side of the coin - the sight of utter devastation we were now witnessing.

Nobody in our party said anything. They didn't have to. The extent of destruction spoke by itself. "And now, our government wants to lift the arms embargo so that you would have more of this," I muttered dejectedly, as we walked toward a fortified shelter some 20 yards ahead. From there, one had a clear view of Sarajevo which was sprawled around the Miljacka river valley right before our eyes.

"Here's the periscope," Peter said, pointing to a six-foot tripod which sat on top of some wooden planks. "Feel free to take a look."

Scenes of Sarajevo

The telescopic lenses mounted on each of the tripod's two arms protruded above the fortifications which protected the viewer. The contraption made it seem as if a giant "E.T." were watching over Sarajevo.

Nesa was the first to take a peek. I followed him. As I slowly swung the periscope arms from left to right, familiar sights from the TV broadcasts started to emerge. The yellow structure in the heart of downtown Sarajevo right next to the twin black towers was the "*Holiday Inn*," the home of the world's media which contributed so much to the fanning of the Bosnia war flames. A few miles to the right, one could see the Kosevo (Olympic) stadium. Somewhere in between, I noticed a farmers market. Fresh fruit and vegetables were laid out on open stalls. The picture was so clear that one could practically read the hand-written prices. An older man in a white, short-sleeve shirt entered the scene riding a bicycle. A plastic bag was dangling from the front the handle of his bike. A young woman was crossing the street on foot, carrying two sacks of food, after shopping at the market. The life in the city seemed as normal as can be.

"Where is our front line from here?" I overheard Nesa ask a soldier who was sitting in the trench right next to us.

"This is it. You're standing on it."

"This is it?" Nesa repeated. "How far are then the Muslim lines from here?"

"Oh, maybe 40, 50 yards down the hill from here. They are just down there," the soldier said pointing at the shrubs in the direction of downtown Sarajevo.

At that moment, Major Kesic drove up in his green jeep.

"Sorry, I got delayed a little bit," he said, speaking slightly out of breath.

He took us to a double fence filled with rocks between the heavy wooden planks. "I had this built because of the sniper fire from the city. You can take some pictures from here, if you'd like," he told me. "Just don't stick your neck out too far."

I did (take two photos of Sarajevo - see the album).

Major Kesic then started to explain the lay of the land in detail. As if looking at a map, I learned who held this or that hill, this or that bridge, or this or that road.

NATO Overflight

At that moment, a NATO jet appeared throwing out four or five flares as it thundered above our heads. As if anticipating my question, Major Matic explained that the flares were intended as decoys for the heat-seeking surface-to-air ("Stinger") missiles. "They do it routinely when they fly over Sarajevo," Major Kesic added.

Russian Pin

I noticed that Major Kesic was wearing a small Serbian flag-type pin attached to his T-shirt just above his heart. "I got the pin from a Russian officer," he said. "Then I just turned it upside down." Everybody laughed (the Russian flag consists of white-blue-red horizontal stripes; the Serbian flag of red-blue-white stripes).

As if guessing my thoughts, Major Kesic went on to talk about the many unsung heroes who have served under him on the Trebevic front. Some of them were Muslims and Croats, he said. They had escaped from the city below and joined the Serb forces. "One of them stepped on a land mine, had a leg amputated below the ankle, and he still returned to the front to fight," he said.

Gorazde Front Scene

As the conversation veered back to the Gorazde front, Major Kesic said that his troops there witnessed some of the worst Muslim atrocities. "In one Serb village, we came across an especially gruesome sight. A young boy, aged maybe 11, was slaughtered by having a knife stuck into his throat from right to left," Major Kesic was demonstrated on his own neck what the Muslims did to the boy. "His body was then slung across a tub head down, so that the blood would drain from his wound and drench the top of his head in it."

"My guys went berserk after they saw that," he said.

He paused and took a deep breath before continuing. "We had this wounded Muslim prisoner who was being transported in one of those wheel barrows on rubber wheels. At one point I turned to look at something on my left. That's when our guys jumped him. It was all over in a few seconds. Before I could do anything to stop them, they had literally cut him up into pieces."

He paused and sighed. "After what the Muslims had done to that boy, what could I do to them?" (his soldiers) he lamented.

Russian Observation Post, Muslim Lines

We explained that we still had a long trip ahead of us and said our good-byes. Major Kesic gave Nesa directions for how to get back. He started to drive on the road along the Mount Trebevic slope which was effectively the Serb front line. Soon after passing under the torn-up Olympic bobsled run, we came upon a fork in the road which Major Kesic had not mentioned. The right branch of the road seemed to lead down the mountain, toward Sarajevo. The left branch headed toward the higher ground.

Remembering what the other soldier had said about the Muslim front lines being maybe less than 50 yards away, there was not much room for error.

Nesa stopped the car and swore perplexed about which way to go. We decided to take the road to the left. After just a few hundred yards, we came upon a plateau. It turned out it was the Russian compound of the UNPROFOR forces. We just waved to the Russians, turned the car around and went back. On the way down, we passed Major Kesic's jeep, who seemed about to pay his Russian friends a visit.

We turned left at the fork in the road, hoping this time that we would not end up an easy pray for the Muslims. Fortunately, the road quickly veered again to the left, away from Sarajevo, and back toward Pale, our next destination.

Pale, Bosnia

Pale Market

(a brief stopover on the way to Gorazde - 12:30 to 13:00)

Major Kesic suggested that we should stop at the Pale open-air market and see if we could get there a battery for my watch. I was astonished that such luxuries as watch batteries would be imported at all in this war-ravaged country. That's why I tried to save us all the trouble by saying that that really would not be necessary. But the major insisted, saying we could also buy some fresh fruit there for the road, and so I relented. The Pale market was quite small, but bustling (I took a photo of it). And lo and behold - we even found the battery! And it cost only DM 1 (about 65¢). And a watchmaker even installed it for me. I was surprised and impressed.

We also bought some grapes and a large bottle of Coke (also a modest surprise considering the U.N. sanctions and the war).

Rogatica, Bosnia

Rogatica Front

(a visit to the Serb Army headquarters - 14:00 to 15:00)

Rogatica was a town with a sizable Muslim population before the war. Now, most of those people are gone. In their wake, lay rows upon rows of destroyed houses. In fact, the destruction in this town was probably the worst I had seen anywhere so far during my trips through Bosnia.

The Rogatica brigade commander, Major Kostic, was just about to get into his car and drive off when we arrived at his headquarters. The building was a factory which he insisted was still being used as such as well as serving as an army post. He quickly turned back, and led us to his third floor office.

When I turned around, I realized that we had "lost" Major Matic somewhere along the way. So, Major Kostic and I sat down - he behind his desk; I at a conference table in front of it.

A secretary came in bringing a Heineken can of beer for me. Once again I was stunned - a can of Heineken in war-torn Rogatica, Bosnia!? "Surely, you don't expect me to drink alone, do you?" I asked Major Kostic, seeing that she did not bring him anything. He ordered some red wine for himself.

Major Kostic was a stocky man in his early thirties. A giant mustache more than made up for the lack of hair on his balding forehead. He said he was born and raised in Rogatica. Before the war, he said he was an athlete. What sport did he practice? "All sorts," he replied. "Karate, volleyball, soccer..."

At that moment, Captain Petrovic, a good-looking, ash-haired officer in his late twenties or early thirties, came in. He greeted me warmly as if we were long lost friends. He said he'd heard of me, and thought that maybe we had even met on one of my past visit to Pale. I could not recall. He also knew Biljana quite well. And he said that he had been reading "all my articles and FAXes" which SRNA (the Bosnian Serb news agency) had been receiving.

"Your articles show that you have a brilliant military mind," he said.

I smiled. I told him that I had never even served in any army of any country, American or Yugoslav, let alone had had higher military training.

"That doesn't matter," he argued. "You still think strategically, like a general."

"Well then, maybe that's because I have been taking part in, or analyzing the computer company wars for a couple of decades," I joked.

The secretary returned with a lunch plate. The meat looked like grilled veal -again a mild surprise under the war conditions. She also served a Serbian salad. Major Kostic and Captain Petrovic excused themselves, saying that they had just had lunch. But Captain Petrovic joined us in a toast with a shot of plum brandy.

"We must get you a uniform," Captain Petrovic said enthusiastically. "You've done so much for us so that you might as well look like one of us."

It was evident that he meant well. So I did not want to hurt his feelings. "I am flattered," I replied, "but I can't accept it."

"You can't?" he looked perplexed.

"I can't."

"Why not?"

"For the sake of decency."

"For the sake of decency?" Captain Petrovic raised his eyebrows. It was evident that he was quite baffled with my answer.

I explained that, since I am an American citizen, it would not be proper for me to wear a uniform of another country.

"But your heart is obviously here, with us?"

"Of course," I said.

Captain Petrovic seemed relieved with my answer.

Major Matic walked in. He never even glanced at Captain Petrovic.

"You two know each other?" I asked.

"Of course," Major Matic said. "We just had 'pasulj' (a thick bean soup) together downstairs at the officers mess."

"That's not fair!" I protested, looking at Major Kostic. "I would have like to have had lunch with them, too. Especially 'pasulj.' I love 'pasulj' and I can't get that kind of a dish in America."

Kostic was just grinning. He seemed amused by my anger. "Oh, but you're different. You're a guest. We always prepare something special for our guests."

"I still don't think that's fair," I grumbled.

Major Matic asked about the current war situation on Major Kostic's section of the front, which stretched from Gorazde to the Zepa Muslim enclaves. As Major Kostic started to talk freely and openly, once again it became evident that they were not concerning about withholding any secrets from me.

Major Kostic complained about a shortage of gasoline, as well as about the problems which they've been experiencing with foreign intelligence services. "All the world's spies seem to have converged on my sector of the front," he said. "But Captain Petrovic is dealing with that very well." It was evident that the major had a lot of confidence in and admiration for his captain.

Captain Petrovic smiled, then got up. "I've got to be on my way," he said. "I understand you're on your way to Gorazde, as I am. We'll see each other there shortly." He swung a formidable brown leather case with a long strap over his shoulder, waved to us and left the room. His case itself could have housed a laptop computer, and looked like standard intelligence officers' gear.

"Just one more thing," he said before he left. "You keep referring to this country as Bosnia (in my articles). This is Republika Srpska."

"I know that," I said. "But that's not translatable into English."

Captain Petrovic's raised eyebrows showed his surprise. "It is not?"

I explained why not. And why the term in translation could be easily confused with the Republika Srpska Krajina.

"Well then, in that case, let's call ourselves Western Serbia," he laughed as he left

After a few minutes, Major Matic and I got up and thanked Major Kostic for his hospitality. We drove on toward Gorazde.

Gorazde, Bosnia

Gora`de Front

(a visit to the Serb Army lines - 15:45 to 17:30)

Drive to Gorazde

The river gorge which we followed from Rogatica to Gorazde was truly spectacular. The nearly vertical cliffs rose in some places hundreds of feet straight up into the sky. Were this not a war zone, one could easily imagine the tour buses lining the road, and the tourists snapping pictures of the beautiful country side.

It was also getting quite hot again. The chilly Mount Jahorina breezes from this morning, were but a distant memory by now. "The climate in Gorazde is always warmer than in the rest of the surrounding areas," Nesa explained. "It almost feels like the Mediterranean climate. I don't know why. I just know it is (warmer)."

We turned right at a crossroads in a part of the river valley which was starting to open up. Immediately, we came across one of the many checkpoints. As on previous occasions, seeing our license plates, the guards waved us through without inspection or discussion. "This is where the front lines used to be before the April fighting broke out," Major Matic explained, pointing to a hill behind us. "Where we are now used to be Muslim territory. It stretched all the way from here to Gorazde."

As it turned out, Gorazde lay less than five miles from that point.

We crossed to the right (East) bank of the river Drina over an old steel bridge which was adapted for military car and truck traffic by piling up heavy wooden planks across the railroad tracks. From there on, the roads were no more than dirt ruts carved out of the mountain.

Captain Ristic Visit to the Front

After about a mile or so, we stopped in front of a house. A single soldier sat on some newly-made wooden benches in front of it. He looked pretty disshevelled. We got out. Major Matic introduced himself and asked to see the duty officer. The man disappeared into the house. A short while later, he came out with a heavy-set man in his forties. "I am Captain Ristic," he said, shaking my and Major Matic's hands. His graying hair was rumpled. He was unshaven and looked unkempt. Major Matic explained the purpose of our visit, and asked to see the colonel, who commanded this part of the front. The colonel was a good friend of General Tolimir's, he explained, who has arranged this trip. "The colonel is not here. Let's go inside the house and sit down," Captain Ristic suggested.

I looked at my watch impatiently. The damned thing had stopped again. It was obviously not a battery but its mechanism that needed repairs. "What time is it?" I asked Major Matic, taking my watch off, and putting it in my pocket.

"It's almost four o'clock," he said.

"Maybe we should just get on," I said looking at him. "You know that we have to get to the coast tonight."

"Let's go inside," Captain Ristic repeated. "Too many ears here." He was referring to the two other soldiers who have stepped out onto the porch in front of the house.

Security seemed like a legitimate reason for it. Major Matic and I looked at each other and nodded silently. We followed Captain Ristic up the stairs to his office/ bedroom on the second floor.

The place looked just like the man - unkempt and messy. A younger man (perhaps in his thirties) was also there. "What about the ears around here?" I remember wondering, before Captain Ristic explained that that was his son-in-law. I still felt uneasy about the whole set-up. Even though we could not talk, I sensed that Major Matic felt the same way.

"How about some brandy?" the captain asked us as we sat down around a table.

"No, thanks," I said. "I've just had lunch. And I don't feel like it in this heat."

"Oh, c'mon," the captain insisted. "One drink won't hurt you."

I started to feel animosity toward the captain building up inside me. I noticed that the captain's eyes were red. I began to wonder if that as well as the rest of his appearance was a sign that he was hugging the bottle more than a rifle?

"No, thanks," I said firmly, determined not to give him a chance to delay us any more than absolutely necessary. "I don't wish any."

Probably sensing that I was getting my back up, Major Matic diplomatically said he would have a glass of brandy with the captain. The major had hardly touched a drink before now.

A gangly teenager entered the room. He quite tall, but no more 17 or 18 years of age.

"Oh, this is my son," Captain Ristic said. "Bring us that bottle of brandy, son, will you?"

"No more bottles for you, Dad," the boy replied, confirming my worst suspicions. Here we were, so far probably on the most dangerous part of the front, and we had to deal with a drunken officer, who surrounded himself probably in someone else's house with members of his family. To say that this post looked highly unprofessional by military standards was to be kind.

"Can we just get on with our business?" I said impatiently looking at Major Matic.

"Don't worry," the captain said. "I'll call the colonel right now. But you must at least have a coffee with us."

What could I do? "Okay, one coffee," I said, shrugging my shoulders dejectedly.

The captain turned around and reached for a telephone. "Is the colonel there?" he asked whoever answered the phone at the other end. "I have some guests here who came to see him." Then he open the cupboard behind him. Out came half-filled plastic bottle of brandy which he had evidently hidden from his son. He poured himself and Major Matic a glass.

While he was doing all that, I whispered looking at Major Matic. "No names, please.

What sort of a phone is he using?"

"What kind of a telephone is that?" Major Matic asked.

"It's our field phone," Captain said, evidently not comprehending our concern for security.

"I know, but what kind of a field phone?" Major Matic asked.

"Oh, it's the one connected by wires to our front line."

Both Major Matic and I breathed a sigh of relief.

"They'll try to find him," Captain Ristic told us, putting down the receiver.

Major Matic and I looked at each other. You could have cut the silence with a knife.

Captain Ristic's son-in-law brought in the coffee.

"So, General Tolimir sent you here?" the captain asked.

Major Matic nodded, and explained who I was and what this trip was all about. When he mentioned that I had had quite a few articles published in the American press, and that I would like to take a few pictures of Gorazde, Captain Ristic raised his eyebrows, took a breath which whistled through his teeth, and rolled his eyes looking at me. "Our colonel does not like the press around here."

His acting was immaculate, despite his inebriation. I smiled as I thought how much his reaction reminded me of what the Japanese typically do when confronted with unpleasantness. Yet, "he and a Japanese!" - the very idea seemed preposterous.

"I'm afraid, you don't understand," Major Matic intervened. "Mr. Djurdjevic is not 'the press'... He is a guest of General Mladic's from America."

The captain started to write down our particulars into a book which looked like a daily log. "And your name is...?" he asked Major Matic. The major replied. I was admiring his patience with a lower ranking officer, and a drunk at that.

I just shook my head. I could see we'd be stuck here for a while.

After he had completed the form, Captain Ristic took interest in the fact that we were going to the coast of Montenegro. He said that a friend of his from Hercegnovi could use a ride. He asked Major Matic if we could take him. Major Matic was tactfully non-committal. But when our eyes met, I shook my head silently. Later on, I had a chance to tell him, "no passengers, please! If for no other reason than so that we could speak freely along the way."

"I quite agree," the major replied.

"Why don't I take Mr. Djurdjevic there?" Captain Ristic suggested suddenly as if woken up from a deep sleep.

"Where's 'there'?" I asked.

"Past the UNPROFOR, to the front lines," he explained.

"Past the UNPROFOR?" I repeated, not understanding the "lie of the land" as they say.

"Yeah," the captain said. "The major can't go into the demilitarized zone dressed like that," he pointed at Major Matic's military uniform. "Either you come with me, or he'll have to change."

I shook my head and whispered to Major Matic that I did not want the UNPROFOR forces to see or check my passport. He nodded understandingly.

"Look," I said, speaking to the drunk captain. "It would seem this is all turning out to be a lot more trouble than it's worth. I don't want Major Matic to have to change.

Considering that we still have a long trip ahead of us, why don't we just forget the whole thing and go on to Montenegro?"

"No, no" Captain Ristic mumbled, fumbling hurriedly to reach for the phone. "It'll be just a minute. Let me try again to see if they had found the colonel."

This time, I rolled my eyes in despair.

Of course, there was no trace of the colonel. "Let's go find him. If you can let me have some of your fuel, I'll take you in my *LADA*," the captain suggested. The *LADA* turned out to be a beat-up Russian-made "FIAT" parked in front of the house. "And we'll give you my son's track suit to change into," he added, looking at Major Matic.

I said I had to use the bathroom, and signaled Major Matic to meet me outside. We agreed that we'd have Nesa siphon off two liters of gasoline from our car and pour it into the captain's *LADA*. "But there's no way I'll have this guy drive us, too," I said pointing to the captain upstairs. Major Matic agreed.

Nesa protested a little that he would have to give up his precious fuel, but eventually did what he was told anyway. Major Matic changed. The four of us were about to get into the *LADA*, when Captain Ristic's son asked, "Dad, can I come along, too?"

"No way!" the father replied speaking firmly for the first time today.

The kid backed away from the car. Figuring that the captain would probably do more for us than I seated in the passenger seat when we come upon the UNPROFOR checkpoint, I suggested that he take it. He seemed glad I did. Major Matic and I sat in the back of the dusty, old *LADA*. None of the other passengers had any IDs on them - on purpose. They are supposed to be "civilians," remember? But I took my wallet and my camera with me. I weighed the risk of being checked by the UNPROFOR guards versus having my wallet

and passport stolen at this weird Serb outpost, and decided that the latter outweighed the former.

When we approached the road barrier, Captain Ristic told us, "Don't worry. These are the Ukrainians. They like us."

Indeed, having recognized the captain in the front seat, the UNPROFOR soldiers immediately removed the road block, and waved us through with a smile. "Good to see you again, Mr. Kapitan," the commanding officer shouted.

I could not help but wonder if they were pals because of the affinity to the bottle?

The dirt road continued in a straight line along the right bank of the river Drina for about a mile, then veered off sharply to the left. As our *LADA* struggled up a steep incline, we passed a few houses. Somebody started frantically shouting from the balcony of one of them. We had no idea if they were the Serbs or the Muslims.

"Oh, don't worry about it," the captain said. "Just go on."

But the shouting persisted.

Nesa stopped the car. All of us looked back to see what was going on. I could not understand what the person was saying, but it was evident that he was quite incensed about something.

"Fuck you!" Nesa replied angrily, as he pressed the gas pedal.

We continued our climb over the rocks and through the ruts for about another half a mile, or so. Suddenly, we came upon a mountain ledge. We could see the city of Gorazde below as if on a palm of one's hand. "Go on, go on," the captain urged Nesa, who had stopped to survey the road ahead. "I think I'll just park the car here," our driver replied. I could see why he acted so sensibly. The road over the ledge ahead was wide open. Our car's hood was currently at least hidden behind some bushes. A few more yards, and it would have been totally exposed. All of us got out.

"Do you mind if I take some pictures from here?" I asked the captain.

"I don't know, let's go and find the colonel."

We took a few steps up the dirt road. After no more than 10 yards, Captain Ristic pointed to his right. "Can you see those Muslims down there enjoying themselves on the beach? Why don't you take a few pictures of them?"

I looked at him in astonishment. "Only a minute ago..." I thought, but waved off the thought. I realized we were dealing with an idiot. I took my pictures.

"And here, and here, too" he kept cheering me on. "Take a picture of that Serb suburb, too. See those burnt out homes? That's where the Serbs used to live. Take a picture. Take a picture."

"Where are the Muslim lines from here?" Nesa asked what quickly seemed to become his "usual" question in dangerous places.

"Muslim lines?" the captain laughed. "See that guy over there looking at us?" he said pointing to a person no more than 100 yards away. "That's a fucking Muslim." "And see that rooftop?" he asked signaling toward a house just below us, not more than 30 yards away. "That's a Muslim house." "And see that clearing up on the hill" he said pointing toward a swath of land which was devoid of trees. "That's the fucking UNPROFOR.

They cut those trees so that they could keep an eye on us."

A man wearing a T-shirt and blue jeans started walking toward us from the nearest house.

"He's okay. He's one of us," the captain said. We shook hands with the man. "The UNPROFOR raided us," he reported. "The mother-fuckers took all our rifles away." We

walked up the hill with him toward the house. The Muslim across the hill slope seemed to keep a watchful eye on us.

Across the valley one could hear a volley of machine-gun fire. "That's probably Rade," the captain said calmly as the rest of us took shelter behind the eastern wall of the house. He turned around and grinned.

"What are you guys afraid of?" the captain said looking at us disdainfully.

We followed him continuing our uneasy walk up the open slope of the hill. I felt very stupid putting my life in the hands of a drunk. I would not have minded one bit if half the Muslim Sarajevo artillery opened fire at us while on Mount Trebevic. At least we were in the company of a competent commander and a bunch of brave and experienced fighters. But this? "God must be testing me," I thought.

"Who the hell is Rade?" Nesa asked, continuing the interrupted conversation from a minute ago.

The captain explained that Rade was a Serb out to avenge the death of his family. "The Muslims massacred his entire family. Now he keeps sniping away at them. He's been averaging about four Muslims killed every day."

We reached the house at the top of the hill. "Is the colonel here?" the captain asked a man standing on the front porch.

"No, he is not. He's gone to see what's happening at unit number 'such and such,'" the man replied.

I looked at Major Matic. "What time is it?"

"Almost 5 p.m."

"Why don't we just forget about the colonel and go back?" I suggested. "I got the pictures I wanted. I saw Gorazde. I saw the demarcation lines. I even saw 'the fucking Muslim' I said mocking Captain Ristic's expression."

Major Matic smiled and nodded in agreement. We started walking down the same open slope we had come up a few minutes ago. Once again, we were totally exposed - to the UNPROFOR cameras up above, and to the Muslim snipers all around us. I had never felt more naked in all my life.

"What nationality are the UNPROFOR troops up on that hill?" I asked one of the men who were walking with us.

"I am not sure," he replied. "I think they are British."

Once in the shade of the bushes close to where we had left our *LADA*, we turned around. Our captain was nowhere to be seen.

"Where's the captain?" I asked.

Everybody just shrugged.

We waited. And waited. And waited...

"This is getting ridiculous!" I said to Nesa who stood right beside me. "Where the hell did he go?"

Major Matic sent one of the men to look for Captain Ristic and to tell him to come down, as we were ready to leave. A young guy in his early twenties proceeded to explain to us which side held what positions on the surrounding hills.

After a few minutes, the man who went up to look for Captain Ristic returned. "He'll be along in a minute," he said.

"You see that bridge down there," the young guy pointed toward downtown Gorazde.

We nodded.

"The Muslims call it the 'Bridge of Love.'" The man paused. "Want to know why?" "Why?" Nesa volunteered.

"Because that's where the Muslims fuck each other every night. And nobody cares whom they are fucking, either. It's all a part of 'free love'. Which is rather funny, wouldn't you say, when you look at those Muslim broads on the beach below. Alija (Izetbegovic - the Muslim President) has decreed that they must cover themselves head-to-toe while on the beach."

From where we stood, I could hear the beachgoers, but could not verify with my own eyes whether or not the Muslim women wore normal swim suits or something else. Which is why I could not help but wonder how many of all such stories were the Serbs' own propaganda?

"What the hell is keeping the captain?" I fumed, looking at my watchless wrist.

"He's probably found a bottle up there," the young man observed dryly, suggesting that the captain's weakness was widely known.

I turned to Nesa who stood next to me. "I can't understand how the Bosnian Serb army can tolerate such officers at all, let alone post them at the important front lines such as this?"

"The man is a walking dead. He won't live long. People like that don't last," Nesa said matter-of-factly speaking like an experienced veteran.

"I figured as much," I said. "But what about these guys?" I signaled with my head in the direction of the people inside those houses up the hill. "How many of these soldiers will the captain take down with him?"

Nesa looked around to make sure nobody was within ear shot. "It doesn't matter much, anyway. These guys will also be dead soon."

I looked at him astonished. "How can you be so sure?"

"Just look at how open their position is. There are no trenches, no back up, no Serb artillery within range. They'll have no chance once the Muslims start to advance. I'd never accept an assignment like this. These guys are a suicide squad."

Even though I had never served in any army, I was beginning to understand why I felt so uncomfortable the entire time we had spent in this unit. A sense of danger was evidently in the air all the time, even though it took me a while to explain it to myself.

I looked up the hill for the umpteenth time. Still no trace of the captain. I turned to Major Matic. "Maybe you'd better go and get him?" I figured that the time has come for the major to pull rank.

Major Matic trotted up the hill. After a couple of minutes he came back. "He's coming," he said. "I think."

Finally the captain strolled down toward us. "Sorry Major," he said to Major Matic.

"But you know what the army business is like. There's never an end to unexpected problems."

Nobody said a word as the four of us piled into the *LADA*. We left the "suicide squad" behind us. On one hand, I was happy to go. On the other, I felt badly about the people we were leaving behind.

The same lunatic screaming from the same balcony which had startled us on the way up did the same on the way down the hill. Except that this time we did not stop. Nesa did not bother to waste a curse, either.

Just before we reached the Ukrainian UNPROFOR checkpoint, Captain Ristic asked Nesa to stop the car. He said good-bye to us and headed toward a house off to our left, close to the right bank of the Drina. "Good riddens to you," I thought.

The same Ukrainian soldier lifted the same road barrier and smiled the same way. "What a boring job!" I thought. "Lift the barrier. Smile. Close the barrier. Smile. Lift the barrier..."

Nesa switched the cars at Captain Ristic's house/post. Major Matic changed his clothes. I went to the bathroom. On the way out, Captain Ristic's teenage son walked by with a hand gun strapped to his belt. "What a weird place!" I thought.

Soon we were on our way again. It was 5:30 p.m.

As we were crossing the old railroad bridge, one of the wooden planks was sticking up. Nesa had to get out and flatten it. When we proceeded, he said that the last time he crossed this bridge, a few days ago, he saw a man being interrogated by the Serb soldiers. He stopped to see what was going on. It turned out the man was a local Serb. He was dripping wet. And he seemed beside himself. Speaking in a choked-up voice, as if gasping for air, the man said that he was upstairs at his home when the door bell rang. His wife opened the door. Several Muslim soldiers grabbed her, and slit her throat on the front porch, as her husband watched. The desperate man jumped right out of the second floor window, ran and dove into the river Drina, a short distance away. He did not stop swimming until he reached the Serb territory. Now, he was planning to spend the night at the bridge, waiting for his wife's body to wash up. "They always dump the bodies into the river," he said speaking of his Gorazde Muslim neighbors.

All of us sat silently for a while.

"Let's see if we can find Captain Petrovic here," Major Matic suggested, pointing at a factory to our right. Petrovic had already left.

We headed eastward toward Rudo, on our way to Montenegro.

Bosnia-Montenegro Ride

Conversations with Major Matic

(during the ride from Gorazde to Tivat, Montenegro - 17:30 to 02:00)

Major Matic seemed rather subdued as we left Gorazde. He sat quietly in the back seat for quite a few minutes. I figured that he was embarrassed because our visit to Gorazde was a total bust from a "PR" standpoint. So I broke the silence. "Don't feel too bad about what had happened," I said. "It was useful for me to see the bad and not just the good sides of the Bosnian Serb army. That's the way life is."

Major Matic tried to explain Captain Ristic's presence at such a critical point on the front by saying that "the (mysterious) colonel was an excellent commander."

This implied that he protected the people under Captain Ristic from his incompetence. Even though I am not a military person, this explanation did not wash with me. "If the colonel is such a good commander, why would he tolerate officers under him who endanger his troops?" I wondered.

"It's because we are short of people," Major Matic answered.

"In other words, even a drunk body is preferable to no body?" I thought, but did not say anything. If true, this would be a pretty sad state of affairs at VRS.

Trading with the Enemy

Major Matic said that actually corruption and the trading between the Muslim and the Serbs soldiers was one of the biggest dangers for them. "The Muslims get from their friends a lot of things the Serbs don't have, not the least of it being cash," he said. "On the other hand, our people have the things the Muslims want" (e.g., the weapons). So they start trading. Pretty soon, there are regular meetings and exchanges taking place. "Then suddenly, after they had gotten what they wanted out of us, the Muslims jump our people and kill them all," Major Matic said.

Nesa nodded silently. "That's why I did not like to see that guy (a Serb on *that* hill above Gorazde) talking to the Muslim woman," he finally said.

"She was a Muslim?" I asked, astonished.

Nesa nodded again.

"How did you know?"

"The guy in the blue jeans said so."

"I never heard that..." I lamented.

"She'll cost them their heads," Nesa predicted confidently.

Captains Batic, Petrovic and DM10 Million

As if seconding our driver's opinion, Major Matic said that earlier this year, thanks to Captain Petrovic, the Serbs were able to seize a large amount of corruption money from the Muslims in the Gorazde area.

The Serbs and the Muslims were negotiating an exchange of prisoners. This falls into the jurisdiction of Captain Batic, to whose unit I donated a laptop computer last February, so that they could do better job in the field, when there is no AC power available. The deal which Batic had negotiated was that the five Muslims prisoners in Serb hands were supposed to be turned over to the Muslims in Gorazde in exchange for some Serb captives.

"We ran the five names through our computer database," Major Matic said, "and they all came up as Muslim government officials!" Naturally, the Serb military became suspicious of Captain Batic. They followed through with the deal, but Batic never showed up at the prearranged meeting place. "It seems that someone had tipped him off," Major Matic speculated.

In any event, even though they could not prove Captain Batic's culpability, the incident was enough to cause them both to watch his moves more carefully, and to scrutinize any UNPROFOR shipments in and out of Gorazde very diligently.

Eventually, the diligence paid off...

One day, the UNPROFOR trucks tried to pass through a Serb checkpoint by saying that they were delivering the mail to the Gorazde residents from their friends and relatives in Sarajevo. The Serbs (Captain Petrovic) insisted on inspecting the contents of the alleged mail bags. The UNPROFOR at first mildly balked, but then let the Serbs check the bags, as it was no skin off their backs.

Nearly every envelope which Captain Petrovic had opened contained a stack of DM100 or DM50 bills! The money was intended as the bribe and corruption bait for the Muslims to use on gullible Serb soldiers, before liquidating them.

"In total, we expropriated DM 10 million," Major Matic said.

"DM 10 million?" I said, sounding incredulous. "Are you sure?"

"DM 10 million," he confirmed.

"Wow..."

"Actually, considering how much money they get from their rich Muslim friends, that was almost spare change for the 'Turks'," Major Matic said. (The "Turks" is a typical derogatory term which the Serbs use for the Bosnian Muslims who converted from Christianity to Islam during the centuries of the oppressive Turkish rule).

Source of Muslim Weapons

Major Matic also said that, in some cases, the Russian planes had been hired by Iran, for example, to deliver arms to the Bosnian Muslims via Croatian airports. "Basically, the Bosnian Muslims give their shopping lists to their wealthy Middle-eastern friends, who in turn fill the orders using third parties," he said. "The arms embargo is a joke."

But he said that the American-made armaments aren't necessarily compatible with the European ammunition. Which precludes the U.S. or NATO from easily arming the Muslims. "Most of the weapons used around here (in the Balkans) are of Russian design - which is what the domestic Yugoslav production was based on," he said.

Captains Petrovic and Gen. Tolimir

Major Matic said that, when he was serving in the JNA in Croatia in 1991, he had met Gen. Tolimir, but did not serve directly under him. "But Captain Petrovic did," he said. Which is why the two are such close friends.

"When did Gen. Tolimir become a general?" I asked.

"On Vidovdan" (June 28, 1994).

"Oh, so recently?!" I exclaimed, pausing to reflect on the new fact. "How many generals are there in the VRS?"

"That's a military secret," Major Matic joked, implying that there were perhaps too many newly-minted generals. But he never answered my question, either.