

Significant duties held during my military career during the war:

- battalion commander
- head of brigade headquarters
- logistics advisor in the HVO main headquarters
- deputy commander of the Joint headquarters of the Federation army (after the Washington agreement)
- commander of the Joint headquarters of the Federation army (after the Washington agreement)
- head of the Croatian defence council (HVO) main headquarters (after the Dayton agreement)
- deputy commander of the Joint commanding headquarters of the Federation army and head of the Federation army headquarters

I met general Praljak in August 1993 when I was sent to the HVO main headquarters as a logistics advisor. The HVO main headquarters was situated then in Čitluk. General Slobodan Praljak was the commanding officer of the HVO main headquarters, and General Milivoj Petković was his deputy. General Žarko Tole acted as chief of the HVO main headquarters, and due to the frequent absence of General Slobodan Praljak, he usually organised the work of the HVO main headquarters. General Praljak, even though he was the headquarters commander, spent most of his time on the field in the Tomislavgrad military responsibility area because there were a lot of attacks by the BiH Army.

A few days after I started to work in the HVO headquarters, general Slobodan Praljak returned to the HVO headquarters in Čitluk and the first thing that I can remember about him was his intervention when he enabled a convoy carrying humanitarian help to pass through Čitluk and head for eastern Mostar. In fact, people went out to the streets in Čitluk, blocking the convoy that was carrying humanitarian help to the eastern part of Mostar and that needed to pass through the centre of the town Čitluk. When general Praljak was informed about this situation, he went to the site, talked to the gathered people and enabled the passing of the convoy, condemning the blockade of a humanitarian help convoy.

Not long after this event, under the direct oral order from general Praljak, and after the breach of defence lines at the battlefield surrounding Uskoplje, in the area of the toponym Stublić (south from Uskoplje), I was situated in the remote control centre of the military zone Tomislavgrad in Prozor. General Praljak personally left for Prozor that same day; the commander of the remote control centre of the military zone Tomislavgrad in Prozor was the commander of the military zone Tomislavgrad, general Željko Šiljeg (colonel at the time).

General Slobodan Praljak was very appreciated by all commanders of HVO units and not one HVO member ever contradicted his authority. His authority was closely related to the fact that he frequently stayed with his units in the battlefields and solved crisis situations, as the one I just mentioned, which is also the reason why I arrived to Prozor. I stayed in Prozor (with minor interruptions) until December 1993. Under the oral order by general Praljak, when colonel Šiljeg was absent from his command post during that period, I was to take his place, acting as commander of the remote control centre Prozor. Since general Praljak spent a lot of time in Prozor, I think I was able to get to know general Praljak well during that time.

I believe it is important to emphasize that the HVO, in the sense of the armed forces of the Croatian people in the BiH formed during the war events in the BiH, wasn't a structured and organised military formation, in the true meaning of the word. Officers and deputy officers weren't trained professional soldiers, but those positions were held by men who were accepted by the unit members and who stood out with their previous actions in combat situations. The chain of command wasn't clearly established. Unit commanders had a lot of «freedom» in their actions, meaning they themselves usually decided which orders will be executed and in what way.

Under such circumstances, General Slobodan Praljak, as the commanding officer, by his authority, actions and position, acted positively on his subordinates and tried to improve the chain of command. He took extra effort to make units and HVO members respect the convention provisions on war rights and on the protection of civilians from the consequences of war actions. I personally believe that in this sense the involvement of general Praljak was priceless. One of the situations that undoubtedly can verify this is the attack of the BiH Army units on the village of Uzdol on 14/09/1993 when 29 civilians were killed. General Praljak was in the remote control centre Prozor when all this happened and he prevented a bigger tragedy from happening, just as he was able to calm down the HVO members, with his authority, and he forbade any kind of reprisal for the committed crime.

The fact that it wasn't easy and safe to act the way he did under those circumstances can best be supported by the fact that general Praljak was often found in situations where he stood in front of an armed HVO member who was disapproving of something (whether it was politics in the BiH or some trivial questions).

As an associate of General Slobodan Praljak, I believe he made a significant impact on people with his attitudes and authority and by making them respect the war rights and the protection of civilians during the war in the BiH and that without him war rules would be less respected.

Retired general Živko Budimir