

1. Editor's note

There comes the time when yesterday's bakers, painters, poets, chimney-sweepers and engineers turn into cold-blooded murderers over night. This is a story about one of them.

A phone rang in the editorial office of *Feral*. Forty-year-old **Miro Bajramović**, mechanical engineer, father of four. Later it will be seen that besides these benign facts, **Miro Bajramović** is, by his own confession, responsible for the death of 86 people, out of which he killed 72 with his own hands. He was a member of Merčep's unit "Autumn Rain" in Gospić, Pakračke Poljane serving a 4 month prison term. Unlike some of his fellow soldiers, who have in the meantime built restaurants and have been awarded medals from the President, Bajramović is rejected and today has nothing except - as he says - a wonderful family.

He wanted to tell his story to the public, a story which certainly in this country is not the only one, but is nevertheless no less horrifying. We spoke with him at several different locations (from Tuesday to Friday). What follows is his complete story.

2. Introduction

My name is **Miro Bajramović** and I am directly responsible for the death of 86 people. I go to bed with his thought, and - if I sleep at all - I wake up with the same thought. I killed 72 people with my own hands, among them nine were women. We made no distinction, asked no questions; they were "Chetniks" and our enemies. The most difficult thing is to ignite a house or kill a man for the first time; but afterwards, everything becomes routine. I know the names and surnames of those I killed.

*President, Croatian-Helsinki Committee for Human Rights.

I was born on 30 January 1957 in Zenica; I have no memory of my father, and my mother died in 1990. I finished mechanics school in Zenica and moved to Zagreb, where I got a job in Janko Gredelj, in the steam locomotives department at the main railway station.

Later on I got a job in the "Rade Končar" factory, where I was given a chance to further my studies. I graduated from the University for Mechanics. In 1990 I lost my job and soon received an invitation from the Ministry of the Interior.

I met **Tomislav Merčep** in 1991 in the village of Dalj. We fought together from that time on, and went through many things together. Our unit was named "The Autumn Rains" i.e. officially the 1st special unit of MUP. Croatian soldiers knew very well who was in "Autumn Rain" units.

3. Executions in Slano and Gospić

Before going to Pakračke Poljane, somewhere in the autumn of 1991, we were in Gospić. We conquered the military base, headed towards Lovinac, but were ordered to return. It was enough to be a Serb in Gospić to mean that you did not exist anymore. Our unit liquidated some 90 to 100 people in less than a month there. Therefore, it is not true what Vekić said - in an interview published in your newspapers - that 170 people were killed in Gospić; nobody was there at that time performing the liquidation except us.

That story about a doctor from Gospić is also false: he was not killed, he committed suicide. It is also untrue that we burned 50 Serbs in one house. We did kill but never by means of burning.

The role of **Tihomir Oresković** - I think he was a good man and it was good working with him. Due to our friendship I would rather not talk about him. The order for Gospić was to perform "ethnic cleansing", so we killed directors of post offices and hospitals, a restaurant owner and many other Serbs. Executions were performed by shooting at point range since we did not have much time. I repeat, orders from the headquarters were to reduce the percentage of Serbs in Gospić.

We went to Slano four times and liquidated 13 persons there, all Serbs. Their centre was in the village of Vukovići, between Slano and Dubrovnik. I killed 8 out of 13. I was together with **Siniša Rimac**, **Miroslav Briševac**, **Miljenko Zadro**, **Igor Mikula** and little **Gordana** (I cannot recall her family name).

4. Pakračka Poljana: "Prisoner Interrogation"

We arrived in Pakračka Poljana on October 6, 1997 after returning from Gospić. In the beginning, the fire station served as our headquarters and prison. At that time a photographer arrived from Zagreb and filmed our location; within a few days, the site was bombed, and so we moved our headquarters to the end of the village and the prison in the school in Medurići, towards Kutina. I must say that it was not our decision that our base be situated in that place; we were ordered to keep the territory around Pakrac safe; later on when **Boljkovac** (then the minister of the Interior) and Merčep arrived on the site, they agreed that the base be placed there (in Pakračke Poljane). Our first action was an assault on a Serb base in Kukunjevac, a village 18 km long, which we fired on for four hours.

We kept prisoners in the school cellar, and when we had more prisoners, we would put them in classrooms. Nights were the worst for them, since it was then that we "interrogated them" ...; this consisted in finding the best way to inflict the greatest pain in order to make them confess and give the most amount of information.

Do you know which is the best way? Burning prisoners with a flame, pour vinegar over their wounds, mostly on genitalia and on the eyes. Then there is that little inductor, field phone, you plug a Serb onto that; it is a direct current which cannot kill, but it is very irritating. You ask him where he comes from, he says from Dvor, and you then dial a number in that place. Or, a five-wire cable would be stuck into a prisoner's rectum and left there for hours so that they could not sit.

Wounds were opened and salt or vinegar scattered over them; we did not let the bleeding stop. The prison commander **Mijo Jolić** forced them to learn on the same day the Croatian anthem; today he possesses just like **Suljić** - restaurants all over Croatia. Why don't I have anything?

When I recall all that torturing, I wonder that they managed to think of all those methods. For example, the most painful is to stick little pins under the nails and to connect it to the three-phase current; nothing remains of a man but ashes. I would never think of that, although I do know of the "Lenz" law. I was doing the interrogation of prisoners, but I never harassed them nor did I enjoy that; but some did, as **Munib Suljić** for example. We only cared about the results he would get, we did not bother with the means he used. After all, we knew that they would all be killed, so it did not matter if we hurt him more today or tomorrow. During torture, people would

confess all they knew, or what they were asked for. We did play at some kind of democratic police in the beginning and would give papers to Serbs to write all they knew, for instance names or locations.

5. Pakračka Poljana: The Execution of Croats

Merčep was the commander of Poljane, I was the subcommander. Merčep knew everything. He did not participate directly in the liquidation, but he read about what we did in our reports, though most of the reports were conducted orally. He knew about each execution, because he was a commander and was a very charismatic person. He told us several times: "Tonight you have to clean all these shits". This meant that all prisoners should be executed. If you did not carry out what was ordered, then you were considered a traitor. We killed both Serbs and Croats in Pakračka Poljana. The village was echoing with screams. People heard cries and whines coming from prisons but were afraid to tell us anything. Everybody knew that if they asked anything at all, they would end up in prison.

Who were these Croats? Well, the most beautiful one was **Marina Nuić**. Then **Aleksandar Antić**, although many incorrectly claimed that he was a Serb. Ten police ID cards were found in his car. He was accused of being a traitor and was executed, **Zvonimir Trusić** gave orders for his execution. Antić told Mikula: "Please, I would like you to kill me". And he did. A bullet from a magnum to his head. He had to dig his own grave before the execution. Suljić, Rimac and Mikula beat him terribly at the Velesajam (the collective centre), it was only when he was brought down that he was really interrogated.

Then there was **Ilija Horvat**, whose only sin was to invite both Croats and Serbs into his home. Then there was an Italian, because there is an Italian village in the vicinity of Poljana. And this Italian, like all Italians, was corrupt. We arrested him and killed him without any discussion. I personally killed him.

Once I stated that every person I had killed died happily. I issued them release forms written on tiny bits of paper and let them go home. Then I waited for them with a sniper. They died with a smile. This Italian stole an automatic rifle, which was kept in the school building and which he sold to the Serbs.

6. Pakračka Poljana: The Execution of Serbs

We did not separate Serb civilians and soldiers from each other. If we found a rifle hidden in his/her house, we considered him/her a

Chetnik. Serbs at the time could not survive, because there is a saying: wherever we trod, the grass does not grow again. As far as I know, more than 50 Serbs were taken to Poljana from Zagreb. The closest of Merčep's associates - Rimac, Suljić, Mikula, Hodak and I were in charge of bringing them to Poljana. We worked in two groups, one was in charge of taking them to Velesajam, and the other of taking them further. I mostly attended arrests, because I am a rhetoric and I tried to be civil in such occasions. I always told prisoners that I was only doing my job. I even have a witness for this - his name is **Stevan Barjanovic** - he can boast that he was the only Serb who survived Pakračka Poljana.

First, we arrested **Miloš Ivošević**, state director of customs. When we came to his office and talked to his secretary, a Croat, she was afraid to tell us his whereabouts. We found him on Rudeska cesta while he was building a house, and he told me: "In the end you Croats will be cleaning our shoes". He was directly responsible for the attack on the Krnjak police station, where 11 of our fellow-soldiers died, so we did not have any mercy towards him. We interrogated him for 4 or 5 days, after which he mentioned the name of Stevan Barjanovic.

I came to Stevan's house on the day of his mother's death. I deeply apologised for the things I was doing. He started off towards Velesajam with his Toyota, and he had a smoked ham in his car. I, acting like an idiot, took this ham from him and took it to the bar "Stela" and gave it to Zvonko Trusić and told him to slice it up for our boys. Later on, in the course of his investigation, Stevan said that I treated him well, but then he asked about his ham. This is how I nearly ended up as a war profiteer, although I never even tasted it.

I cannot call a Serb a gentleman, but I admire him for the fact that in the course of the investigative procedure he held to truth and facts, and in fact he could have said all kinds of things against us. I do not know whether he did it because he was afraid, because at the time we executed a majority of witnesses. Barjanovic maybe is not aware that he is the only Serb who survived Pakračka Poljana. He survived because he was accidentally wounded in prison, and **Dzemat Peleš**, the idiot, took him to the hospital in Kutina, instead of killing him. He became crown witness later and he could have told everything. A fine order coming from the highest authorities was given, and investigative judges did not insist on details.

7. Pakračka Poljana: The Distribution of Money

It is difficult to say how long we held prisoners. This depended on

how long it took us to wear them out. In most cases we held them for 4 to 5 days before we killed them. If they had survived, they would not have been normal. Serbs, who were good and loyal served us by digging graves, we told them that they were digging covers for machine guns. Once, one of the prisoners from Kutina said that this was the 15th or 16th cover that he was digging. He was executed on the spot. It was not up to him to count but to dig.

Self-interest was very popular at the time. Thirty of us went some 50 meters in front of the first tank. We cleaned and executed everyone. After us there were others who called themselves "merčepovci", who stole from the houses and then burnt them. These were **Maderalo** and **Rukavina**. Merčep told us to take everything away from the Serbs, and the money we found should be handed over to Headquarters for purchasing arms. However, Trusić, Merčep and Rukavina, who was called Pop and **Nedeljko Posavec**, divided the money amongst themselves. How do I know that? A day before the murder of **Pavo Mlinarić**, Posavec and Rukavina shot at each other because they did not split the money equally. Posavec was removed from the unit, however the money was not taken away from him, and it was not merely a question of 1000 or 100000 DM, but much more.

I could not say that mass executions were carried out in Pakračka Poljana. Those were mostly groups of 7 to 10 people. It actually depended on how many people were in the prison at the time. Sometimes we executed people in their homes, and then blew up the house. There were no bodies left. There were many houses like this, mostly in the village of Bujavica.

We were thinking along these lines at the time; kill the children of a Serb because they survive at -20 degrees below zero. I did not have any feelings at the time towards Serbs as being human beings like us, that they are somebody's father, brothers, children. No, we did not kill children, except for Suljić who killed little **Aleksandra Zec**. I saved 10 children with my own hands in Vocin. I would not be able to look into my little daughter's eyes if I had killed children.

According to my estimate, there were 280 people all together killed in Poljana, including 10 women. Besides Marina Nuić, there was a **Nada** from the village of Kusionja who was infiltrated among us. There was also a very old lady in whose house they found a sniper. Besides this old lady, all women were raped and then killed. That is the truth.

It is my firm belief that if it had not been for the Zec family, nothing would have been known about Pakračka Poljana. It was the

main key and the main reason why the unit has been looked at from this angle, and there were many Pakračka Poljanas in Croatia.

8. The Murder of the Zec Family

There is only one thing that I cannot understand - why do they make the Zec family seem charismatic? It is a well known thing that **Mihajlo Zec** worked for the other side, for the Serbs, although he belonged to the CDU party and tried to help the Croatian army. The fact is that while we were holding our positions in Dobrovac near Lipik we found out that **Milorad Zec**, Mihajlo's brother, was returning home every night from Subotska to sleep there. We even waited for him one night in his house in Dobrovac.

We can talk about the way we conducted the interrogation of our prisoners - but there are no secrets here - we beat and physically abused prisoners in any way possible in order to extort their confession. That is when he confessed for whom and what his brother did.

When I came to Zagreb, I issued an order for Mihajlo Zec's arrest. Merčep gave me this order. Mihajlo Zec was worth more to us alive than dead. However, Munib Suljić, intoxicated and drugged out, joined on his own initiative, the group which was supposed to arrest Mihajlo Zec. I told Siniša Rimac that only in case of resisting the arrest should Mihajlo Zec be executed. He tried to escape, Rimac let him go, although it is very hard for me to understand how a 19 year old man like him could not stop Zec. Well, maybe it was just a question of the moment, and then he shot him.

Then suddenly Munib Suljić appeared driving a blue van, without licence plates, because our arrests around Zagreb were carried out by vehicles without licence plates and in uniforms without insignias, to pick up little Aleksandra and Mrs Zec. He first took them to the Panorama hotel, then to Sljeme and then he killed them there.

A few days ago Suljić's statement issuing a denial that he had never confessed the crime was published in "Nacional". It is true that upon his arrest, Suljić told everything, confessed everything, and then took the police officers to Sljeme and showed the location of their graves. Then he confessed that he himself did the killings. The most tragic thing was that he threatened Nebojša Hodak-Čena, Igor Mikula, Siniša Rimac and little **Snježana Zivković** from Gospić, and he even forced Mikula to fire 20 bullets at little Aleksandra and Mrs Zec. This was in order for him to be sure, and then he forced them to bury the bodies.

This is the mere reason why they were involved in this affair. Rimac publicly admitted in the course of the investigation: I killed Mihajlo Zec, but do not accuse me of other things. That is the truth. Today they make Mihajlo Zec look like a hero and tales are told that he died in vain. If it were up to me, if I were the one to publish some newspaper, I would write more about Marina Nuić, because she is the one that really died in vain.

9. Murder of Marina Nuić

Who killed Marina Nuić? By name and surname? Igor Mikula. He was following orders which were issued by Džemal Peleša, the former doorman in the Zagreb Transportation Services. There were certain improvisations concerning the attempts to assassinate Tomislav Merčep, who was at the time at the Rebro hospital. She was raped 19 times by Munib Suljić and executed. She did not say a word. She only said: "let them kill me at once". I can show you her grave. Her parents still do not know where she was buried. The place is called Janja Lipa and is situated near Pakračka Poljana.

However, let us see the reasons why she was killed. Branko Šarić Kosa, Mikula and I think Rimac and Čeno guarded Merčep at the hospital, you know, stood in front of his door, because Merčep was visited by more than 200 people daily. Then information leaked out that Merčep was supposed to get a pen from Marina Nuić and that that pen would kill him.

Marina came with the Rijeka brigade and she was, my God, only 5 days with us. One night she called me, and invited me for a drink, my witness is **Franjo Nemet**, in the one liquor store called "Domovina", and it was one of the places where we drank. We met there that night. She had beautiful hair that night, straight falling on her back, mahogany colour. Merčep was wounded in Lovska a few days earlier. The troops from Rijeka failed to protect us, and we found ourselves surrounded by enemy troops. People from Čazma were slaughtered there. She looked at me for a very long time and said: "When will this war end, and what is still ahead of us?"

I told her like this: "Marina, there is only tomorrow for us and nothing else, and the day will come". She was later arrested. I did not know that this would happen. They put her in our detention centre in Medurić. She was a woman and she was beaten there severely.

I would like to contact Marina's parents, because I am a father

too, and I would like to know everything about my child. Marina came to our unit together with 200 people from Rijeka, because at the time we had many problems with a shortage of men. There were many soldiers at the time in Zagreb, but they mostly waged war drinking at the bar.

When it came to the point to go into the field to fight, few of them actually came. We were rather well-known at the time, that we were mostly engaged in clearing the territory and that we fought direct battles with Chetniks, that we confronted tanks at a distance of 50 meters and that we simply did not fool around. We started off towards Lovska. Thirty-two of us fell into a trap. However we counted on 500 people from Rijeka, who were 500 meters behind us, and if one of them had fired only one shot, we would have been able to get out of it. However, when they heard that we had lost our first tank, they turned around and ran away. We somehow managed to get out of there and found people from Rijeka some 8 kilometres behind us. They threw away their arms and we made them leave for Rijeka the following morning. We did not need soldiers like that. However, I chose among all of them some 10 people who deserved to stay. That is how Marina stayed and today I feel sorry for not letting her go. She was so innocent, she did not know how to cry, she only wept.

Her execution was not ordered by her name or surname, but it was merely said that the prison should be cleansed, and that meant that prisoners should be executed, among them Marina.

10. Giving Orders

I would like to issue a denial of the statement made by Ivan Vekić in the last *Feral*. He lied, he knew everything. I can tell him how many orders our unit received from him. He would say "I demand that you do this, this and this". We never returned without completing the order, and these were mostly executions. It was his order that Miloš Ivošević should be killed, and because of him we had to kill the last living Serb from Poljane, Stevan Brajanovic.

It is not the case, as Vekić stated, that there was a separate Merčep and Mika unit. *Mika Cvitanović* took over the unit after Merčep dissolved it on January 30, 1992 and after the unit became a part of the First National Guard Brigade. This is when Mika made some sort of insignia which indicated that this was both Merčep's and Mika's brigade. This made Merčep very angry. Our unit was called "Autumn Rain". I repeat, Ivan Vekić knew everything.

11. The Investigative Procedure

I was in prison from 2 January to 30 April of 1992. It was the saddest moment for me when Croatia was recognised on January 15 and I was in the Remetinec prison. We were released when Šeks became public prosecutor, but we were released in two groups. Mikula, Hodak, Snježana Živkovic, Suljić and Rimac remained for forty days longer in prison because of the Zec case.

The first month in prison they behaved rudely towards us. Nobody could touch us, because if there would have been some physical misconduct, I think there would no longer be a police station in Dordičeva Street. Merčep had a lot of influence in this, as he was the one that organised our defence, as well as Ivan Vekić, who is now going public with all sorts of nonsense. At that time he was on our side. Maybe I have already said this, but Justice *Jovanović* and Justice *Horvatinović* were very co-operative and they did not ask for any details.

12. The Motives for being a Witness

I was silent about this for a long time, expecting that someone in this country would remember that I exist. My children eat just like Merčep's do, yet he has two houses in Zagreb, two apartments and a house on Brać, and he came from Vukovar without a Kuna (a dime) in his pocket. Then, *Stipe Spajić*, Manderalo ... how did they earn all that they now possess? Let them tell me how I should earn something as well. I am ready to dig and I will dig, I do not find this disgraceful. I expect that Tudman will invite me personally after all this and that he will ask me why all this was necessary. I will tell him: "Only for my children". I am only looking for a job and that my family have a roof over their head.

I am a big believer. I have on my finger a rosary-ring from Medjugorje. God forgives everything to a certain limit. I think I have been punished enough up to now for what I did. My lifelong dream would be satisfied if my children have their subsistence ensured, because I know very well what will happen to me after this story, but I would like somebody to take care of my children. I really do have a beautiful marriage and a beautiful family, two small children. My wife knows about everything I did since this was the only way that we could live together.

I did not feel any sense of relief after telling you my story. I am afraid of my unit. These are experienced professionals who do not miss. And I know that the Hague is unavoidable as well.