



## George

We called him Jozo. He joined the Croatian National Guard in the fall of 1991. Jozo came from far-away Louisiana, USA, where his grandfathers had settled in the beginning of the twentieth century. They had set off with a rowing boat from the small port of Komiža on the island of Vis, rowed to Italy where they cheated their way into a sailboat bound for Africa, and from there took an ocean liner to the Promised Land. They had heard that the land overseas was rich and fertile, that you could get by from working on it, maybe even save something. On Vis, as everywhere else in Dalmatia, you toiled to exhaustion with bloody, wounded hands, and barely have enough food to survive.

Once they arrived, Jozo's forefathers earned their living by fishing, collecting oysters, drying out the Mississippi delta, working on the plantations of exotic fruit, and, once the soil dried and hardened, by helping in land clearing for plantations and house building, turning New Orleans into a city. His grandfathers had started out as laborers, but managed to become foremen by the end of their lives. Their sons became owners of numerous fishing-boats and prestigious fish-restaurants. The grandfathers were so homesick that they refused to learn English and demanded their sons marry Croatian women, so marriages were arranged through mail and photographs, the brides crossing the ocean to bear sons to husbands they would meet for the first time upon arrival. While the fathers could speak English well enough, occasionally inserting an archaic Croatian word, the grandsons could not speak Croatian at all, except "Croatia", "good day" and "thank you".

There were many Croatian grandsons in the army in 1991 who came from South America, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, wherever their ancestors had traveled in pursuit of bread and a better life.

In August of 1993, our Jozo from Louisiana was manning a forward observation post high up on a stony mountain range that does not exist anywhere else in the world but Dalmatian karst. It is a grey, barren, and lifeless area. Sharp rocks rise steeply to the top, plummeting vertically on the other side, forming a cliff that, in times of peace, alpinists consider a demanding and dangerous climb. That summer was unbearably hot. Occasional gun fire and grenade explosions in the distance punctuated steady racket of the

cicada by day and crickets by night. As I stood at the bottom of the mountain, listening to that background noise, I wondered if the faint mist enveloping the mountain was an optical illusion, or the rocks evaporated in the burning heat. I was startled out from my daydreaming by the urgent voice of one of the scouts who had gone to replace Jozo on the watch post. He found Jozo lying unconscious under a leafless olive tree, his rifle beside him. There were no signs of combat or struggle, and no visible injuries. He was carrying full equipment and his water bottle was empty. The scouts told me he was feverish, his face deeply red, and body very hot. Concerning the altitude and temperatures, he most probably got sunstroke. All predisposing factors were there: he had been directly exposed to the sun for hours, physically and psychologically exhausted, tired and maybe hungry, irritable, and perhaps anxious. As we rushed towards him with a stretcher, I instructed his comrades to undress him, put a cold pack on his head, and start carrying him down the mountain using the shaded side of the boulder.

It would have been a miracle if something like this had not happened. In this war we had not only to worry about the dangers of combat, but often to battle the forces of nature: thunderstorms, lightning, fire, stormy sea, fire, frost, poisonous snakes, and scorpions. It seemed that this unbearable heat was part of the horrors of war we had to endure.

We met the scouts carrying Jozo halfway down the mountain. He was naked and his comrades poured water over him. His face was red and swollen, temporal blood vessels engorged, and skin dry and very hot. His body temperature must have been very high, over 40 °C. The pulse was fast and shallow, indicating hypotension. I worried that this unconsciousness might progress into real coma if we did not act quickly. However, there were no bulbar symptoms and ocular reflexes were present. I suppose that my instructions about cooling him down during descent worked. We put him into shade and I started an infusion of hypertonic glucose. As the sun's short infrared waves may have direct effect on the central nervous system and cause disturbance of the thermoregulatory centers, followed by hyperemia of the neural envelopes and brain edema, I also administered a ganglioplegic substance, largactil.

Jozo's condition improved – he slowly regained consciousness, but had all the symptoms of insola-

tion. He said he could not see well, like everything was shimmering in front of his eyes; he felt weak and had intensive headache, and his ears were ringing. We kept giving him small mouthfuls of water and I also administered some analgesic for his headache. We took him to our field medical office and continued with the therapy. Jozo slowly got better: his pulse normalized, tachycardia regressed, and blood pressure stabilized, although he still felt weak and had a strong headache. After a few days he recovered and was able to return to his unit.

Whenever I come to this barren and rocky land of my childhood and my war, I feel the stones and history of my people. I remember George and the call that turned him into Jozo. Many like him came here to answer the call of their forefathers. Many died and were buried in graves with the same forefathers who came on their last trip home in coffins on transatlantic liners. Jozo survived, got married, and found the land of his grandfathers. Only by his accent one can tell that he was George once.

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