

# The Most Dangerous Road in Europe

(August 15–21, 1995)

For all of us there is a twilight zone between history and memory; between the past as a generalized record which is open to relatively dispassionate inspection and the past as a remembered part of, or background to, one's own life.

—ERIC HOBSBAWM, *The Age of Empire: 1875–1914*

THE MOUNT IGMAN ROUTE TO SARAJEVO was often described as the most dangerous road in Europe. Parts of the road, a narrow, winding red-dirt track originally used only by farmers and shepherds, were controlled by Serb machine gunners, who regularly shot at U.N. vehicles trying to reach the Bosnian capital. The roadbed itself had little foundation and no reinforcement along its sides, and in several of its narrower sections it was difficult for two cars to pass each other. The wreckage of vehicles that had slid off the road or been hit by Serb gunners littered the steep slopes and ravines. In the summer of 1995, however, with the airport closed by Serb artillery, the two-hour drive over Mount Igman was the only way to reach Sarajevo without going through Bosnian Serb lines.

The chief European negotiator, Carl Bildt of Sweden, had been shot at crossing Serb territory only weeks earlier. He urged us not to use the Igman road. But without visiting Bosnia's beleaguered capital we could not carry out our mission. On August 15, we made our first attempt, taking a United Nations helicopter from the Croatian coastal town of Split to a landing zone high on Mount Igman, after which we would drive in armored vehicles to Sarajevo. Our helicopter was unable to find a break in the heavy clouds over the landing site. After circling for several unpleasant hours, we returned, frustrated and tired, to Split.

Hearing that we could not reach Sarajevo, Bosnian Foreign Minister Muhamed Sacirbey, accompanied by the senior American diplomat in

Bosnia, John Menzies, drove over Mount Igman to meet us at the Split airport. Known to most Americans via television as the eloquent face of his embattled new nation, Sacirbey was perhaps proudest of the fact that he had been a first-string defensive back at Tulane University. He was tough, strong, and fit. Still, the long and bumpy road trip had tired him, and he was as exhausted as we were. To avoid being overheard, we squeezed into the cabin of our small Air Force jet as it sat on the tarmac, and briefed him on our plans. I stressed that while our mission had the full backing of President Clinton, and represented a last, best hope for peace in the Balkans, there was no guarantee of its success. Our discussion finished as darkness fell over the Balkans, and we flew on to Zagreb, the capital of Croatia, to meet Croatian President Franjo Tudjman. After a day in Zagreb, we arrived in Belgrade on August 17 to meet the key actor in this stage of the drama, President Slobodan Milosevic of Serbia.

Although I knew the other major leaders in the region, this would be my first meeting with the man who, in our view, bore the heaviest responsibility for the war. I approached the meeting with great uncertainty and was guided by my deputy, Robert Frasure, who had spent many hours negotiating with Milosevic earlier that spring.

Frasure's main bargaining chip with Milosevic had been the economic sanctions that the United Nations had imposed in 1992 against the "Federal Republic of Yugoslavia," the name by which Serbia and Montenegro called themselves even though the four other republics of the original Yugoslavia—Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina—had declared themselves independent nations. The sanctions had seriously damaged Serbia's economy, and Milosevic wanted them ended. But for more than sixteen months he had refused to offer anything concrete in return for our suspending or lifting them.

Our first meeting with Milosevic, on August 17, lasted almost six hours. He was smart, evasive, and tricky. Warren Zimmermann, our last Ambassador to Yugoslavia, would later write: "Milosevic makes a stunning first impression on those who do not have the information to refute his often erroneous assertions. Many is the U.S. senator or congressman who has reeled out of his office exclaiming, 'Why, he's not nearly as bad as I expected!'"<sup>1</sup> His English was excellent, and he was playing word games devoid of substance—focusing on inconsequential changes in draft documents over which he and Frasure had been arguing since the beginning of the year. His goal remained to get the sanctions lifted at no cost.

Our most important point concerned whom we would negotiate with. The United States, we said, would never again deal directly with the Bosnian Serbs

who rained artillery and racist rhetoric down upon the Muslims and the Croats from their mountain capital of Pale. "You must speak for Pale," I said. "We won't deal with them ever again."\*

Frasure thought the meeting had gone well, but it left me dissatisfied. I decided to see Milosevic again the next morning to let him know that we would not continue the cat-and-mouse game he had played with previous negotiators. To emphasize this, it was necessary to change the ground rules a bit. Our entire team of six people had attended the first meeting, but Milosevic had had only two people with him—his new Foreign Minister, Milan Milutinovic, and his chief of staff, Goran Milinovic. Nine people were simply too many to establish the sort of direct relationship necessary for a frank dialogue.

Early on the morning of August 18, before our second meeting with Milosevic, I met with Frasure and Rudy Perina, the senior American diplomat in Belgrade,<sup>†</sup> in the garden of the ambassadorial residence. As we walked between the imposing old stone house and the tennis court, under magnificent chestnut trees and presumably out of the range of prying microphones, I said that I planned to throw a controlled fit to make clear to Milosevic that what he was doing was unacceptable. Because of this plan, I added, the next meeting needed to be smaller.

Apologizing to Rudy, I asked him to drop out of the meeting. Returning to the house, I asked the other two members of our team—Joseph Kruzal, the Senior Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense; and Lieutenant General Wesley Clark, the Chief of Plans for the Joint Chiefs of Staff—to drop out as well. I would take only Frasure and Nelson Drew, an Air Force colonel who, as the National Security Council staff member on our team, represented the White House. Frasure concurred with this suggestion.

Nothing generates more heat in the government than the question of who is chosen to participate in important meetings. My request ran against a diplomatic custom I greatly respected—that the senior resident American diplomatic representative should attend every official meeting with a head of government. But although unhappy, all three men agreed without objection. It could have been a difficult moment; I was deeply gratified by this early sign of our cohesiveness as a team.

\* Many earlier negotiating efforts of both the United States and the Europeans, including an American probe as late as January 1995, had dealt with the Bosnian Serbs as a separate entity.

† Our diplomatic presence in Belgrade was unique in the world: it was a fully functioning diplomatic mission, yet it was accredited to no one. Neither the United States nor the European Union recognized the claim of Serbia and Montenegro that they still constituted the "Federal Republic of Yugoslavia." However, because of the value of continuing contacts with the Serbians, we maintained an Embassy in Belgrade even though we did not recognize the country it was in.

Less than an hour later Frasure, Drew, and I were seated in a high-ceilinged meeting room in the Presidential Palace—one of Tito's old offices—in Belgrade. It was a room we would come to know well in the next seven months. Like other such meeting rooms in communist and former communist countries from Beijing to Bratislava, the room tried to make up for its lack of charm by a drab gigantism. The three of us sat on a long sofa. Milosevic took an armchair a few feet from where I sat at the end of the sofa. Foreign Minister Milutinovic chose another soft chair facing us directly, and Goran Milinovic, always the loyal staff officer, sat at the edge of the group, taking notes.

As we talked, I thought of the difficulties and dangers we would face each time we tried to reach Sarajevo. It was annoying that we had to depend on U.N. helicopters, the uncertain weather—and that awful road.

"It is disgraceful," I said, "that President Clinton's peace mission has to travel to Sarajevo by such a slow and dangerous route. In order to negotiate we must be able to move rapidly between here and Sarajevo. We have already been in the area for almost a week and we haven't been able to get there. It is ridiculous. You claim to want peace. I ask you now to arrange for us to fly to Sarajevo or to guarantee that we can use a safer land route without any interference from the Bosnian Serbs."

Milosevic stared at us for a moment with a penetrating gaze, as if no one had ever made this request before. Then he replied, "You're right. I'll try." He spoke sharply in Serbian to Goran, who almost ran out of the room. Milosevic said, "I'm sending a message to General Mladic. Let's see what he can do."

Bob, Nelson, and I watched with fascination, looking for clues as to how the enigmatic relationship between Milosevic and Mladic worked. This was the first time we had evidence of what was to become a recurring pattern during the diplomatic shuttle: direct communication between Milosevic and Ratko Mladic, the commander of the Bosnian Serb forces, who had recently been indicted by the International War Crimes Tribunal for direct or indirect responsibility for the murder of thousands of Bosnian Muslims and Croats.

Less than twenty minutes later, Goran returned and handed a piece of paper to Milosevic. "Mladic says the airport is too dangerous," Milosevic said. "He cannot guarantee that you would not be shot down by Muslim or Croat soldiers." This was an absurd statement: everyone knew, I said heatedly, that the only danger to people at the Sarajevo airport was from the Serb gunners ringing the hills around it. But Milosevic was not finished. "Mladic says you can fly to Kiseljak and go in by road from there. You will be completely safe." I knew that road. Its flat terrain and paved surface made it a much easier

drive than the route over Mount Igman. But the road ran through Bosnian Serb territory—"Indian country," as Bob Frasure called it. I had traveled down it as a private citizen almost three years earlier, on December 31, 1992, huddled in the forward seat of a Danish armored personnel carrier, trying to appear inconspicuous under a U.N. helmet and a heavy blue flak jacket. We had been stopped a half-dozen times by heavily armed Serbs who poked machine guns around the inside of the APC while checking our ID cards (to make things worse, mine was a crude forgery). Less than two weeks later, the Serbs had killed a Bosnian Deputy Prime Minister during a search of a French APC not far from where we'd been.

"We can only consider using that road," I said, "if you give us your personal guarantee that we will not be stopped by the Bosnian Serbs."

"I can't give you that guarantee," Milosevic said, "but I'll ask Mladic for one—"

"That's out of the question, Mr. President. We can't possibly accept guarantees from Mladic, only from you."

Sitting next to me on the long couch, Bob Frasure leaned over and whispered, "We have no choice except Igman."

That night we flew to Split. Four days earlier, we had stayed in the lovely old Kastile Hotel, directly on the water; where we had dared Joe Kruzal and Wes Clark to dive in from their third-story windows. The two men had leaped into the water, proud of their courage. But the Kastile was forty minutes away from the airport, too far for our exhausted team, and we opted for a dreary hotel near the airport with chalk-white walls and blue lights.

On the short bus trip from our plane to the hotel, Kruzal and Frasure hung on the hand straps and improvised a reggae lyric in anticipation of the trip we were going to make the next day; its refrain was something about "Goin' up Mount Igman, mon, tryin' to make da peace, mon." It wasn't much to listen to, they cheerfully admitted, as they danced in the bus to their own song. We ate dinner in the bleak hotel dining room, almost alone and unnoticed. I sat with Frasure, Kruzal, and Clark; my executive assistant, Rosemarie Pauli, sat at the next table with Nelson Drew.

We talked at length about a mutual friend, Frank Wisner, who had recently become Ambassador to India. When it came to personnel in the State Department, Frank was always the first person I consulted. When I became Assistant Secretary of State for European and Canadian Affairs in the summer of 1994, he recommended Bob Frasure for the deputy's job. Frasure had worked for him in the Bureau of African Affairs ten years earlier. After one meeting with Bob, then finishing a tour as America's first Ambassador to Estonia, I offered him the job and asked him to reorganize the European Bureau's Central Euro-

pean division so as to reflect the new emphasis we wished to place on that region.\*

Frasure, fifty-three years old, was a craggy, cynical professional diplomat who loved his work, while grumbling continually about it. He walked—almost shuffled—with a slight stoop, as if about to fall over, but he had enormous energy, great patience, and a strategic sense unusual in career Foreign Service officers. His cables were widely read in the Department of State not just for their content but for their wit and descriptive powers. His reports of negotiating with Milosevic over lengthy dinners of lamb and plum brandy were classics for both their conciseness and their humor—two qualities not much in evidence in most State Department telegrams.

Bob's greatest joy was to retreat to his farm in the Shenandoah and, with his wife, Katharina, and his two daughters, Sarah and Virginia, paint his barn. At the end of 1994, with the situation in Bosnia continuing to deteriorate, Secretary Christopher—who greatly admired Frasure's cool detachment, fierce loyalty, and patriotism—suggested we add to his portfolio the job of chief Bosnia negotiator. Although Bob had earlier said he did not want direct responsibility for Bosnia, he accepted this enormous additional burden without complaint. But by the summer of 1995, he was visibly worn out by the constant and frustrating travel to the Balkans, and we had agreed that after this trip he would remain at home to backstop our efforts. Frasure wondered constantly if, in its post-Vietnam, post-Somalia mood, our nation would have the nerve and strength to stand up to what he called the "junkyard dogs and skunks of the Balkans." He believed in the need to use airpower, but doubted that the United States had the political will to do so.

Joe Kruzel was shorter and stockier than Frasure. At fifty, his sharp mind combined in equal measure theoretical and practical ability. He often wore his eyeglasses on the lower part of his nose and peered over them, in a manner that emphasized his academic background. He was equally proud of his undergraduate days at the United States Air Force Academy and his Ph.D. from Harvard. Kruzel had a certain playfulness into which he could switch effortlessly from his somber, serious demeanor. After our dinner in Split, Joe volunteered to rewrite our presentation for the Bosnians. Reading his memo the next morning, I saw he had slipped in a one-liner, perhaps to see if we were paying attention: "We will need a mini-Marshall Plan (you know Minnie Marshall, George's sister)."

\* We abolished the outdated Office of Eastern European Affairs on our first day in office in September 1994, and created in its place three new offices that reflected the post-Cold War realities of Europe. One combined the Nordic countries and the three newly independent Baltic states. We also banished the phrase "Eastern Europe" from our official vocabulary, replacing it with the historically and geographically more accurate "Central Europe." Unfortunately, most people, including the media, still use the outmoded phrase.

As we talked, General Wesley Clark joined us. He was in a complicated position on our team. A West Pointer, a Rhodes scholar from Arkansas, and a Vietnam veteran, he had been one of the fastest rising officers in the United States Army—the youngest brigadier general at the time he got his first star. He had a personal relationship, although not close, with another Rhodes scholar from Arkansas who was now our Commander in Chief. With three stars, Clark was at the crossroads of his career; this assignment would lead him either to a fourth star—every general officer's dream—or to retirement. Assignment to a diplomatic negotiating team offered some exciting possibilities, but it could be hazardous duty for a military officer, since it might put him into career-endangering conflicts with more senior officers. Clark's boyish demeanor and charm masked, but only slightly, his extraordinary intensity. No one worked longer hours or pushed himself harder than Wes Clark. Great things were expected of him—and he expected them of himself.

Of the people at the hotel that evening, the one I knew least was Samuel Nelson Drew, a forty-seven-year-old Air Force colonel who had recently joined the National Security Council staff. In civilian clothes he seemed less like a military officer than an academic. (He had a doctorate from the University of Virginia.) A devoted family man with a strong Christian faith, he had worked for almost four years at NATO headquarters, where, among other responsibilities, he had headed a special crisis task force on Yugoslavia.

In our first meeting with Milosevic, Nelson hung back, saying almost nothing. But near the end of dinner, Milosevic began to pay close attention to him. Sensing that he could become a vital part of our team, I took him aside that night, and urged him to speak up more. As we prepared for the next day's trip, he seemed subdued, and spent part of the evening writing a long letter to his wife.

On Saturday, August 19, we ate breakfast early and returned to the French air base. The French helicopter had room for only six passengers, but we were seven, counting Rosemarie Pauli and General Clark's executive assistant, Lieutenant Colonel Dan Gerstein. So Rosemarie, who had visited Sarajevo on two earlier trips with me, offered her seat to Gerstein.

The helicopter ride was relatively uneventful, although swooping between hills and looking for breaks in the clouds can never be entirely routine. Nelson Drew, seeing the savage land for the first time, stared silently out the small window. After about ninety minutes, we landed in a soccer field at Veliko Polje, near the Mount Igman pass. Our greeting party was headed by Lieutenant Colonel Randy Banky, the senior American military liaison officer with the U.N. forces in Sarajevo. Two vehicles waited for us on the soccer field—a large, heavy French armored personnel carrier, painted U.N. white, and a U.S. Army Humvee.

General Clark talked to Colonel Banky for a moment. Then he turned to me and yelled over the roar of the helicopter, "Have you ever been in one of our new Humvees? You ought to see how much better it is than the jeeps you were used to in Vietnam."

The French armored personnel carrier, or APC, would take the rest of the party to Sarajevo. As we walked to the APC, I asked Kruzel what the attitude of the Pentagon would be if the United States sent troops to Bosnia as part of a peace settlement. "They wouldn't like it," he said in his half-sardonic, half-joking style, "because it would disrupt their training schedule."

Another American introduced himself at the doors of the APC: Pete Hargreaves, a security officer in the American Embassy in Sarajevo. The doors on the back of the massive vehicle swung open and everyone took seats on the side benches, Bob Frasure at the front left, the others facing each other, Gerstein and Hargreaves in the seats nearest the back doors. "Think hard about how we handle the meeting with Izetbegovic," I said to Bob Frasure. He gave an ironic laugh and, as I turned back toward the Humvee, the doors of the APC slammed shut.

Clark sat to my right in the backseat of the Humvee. Colonel Banky and the driver, an American sergeant, took the two seats in front. The vehicle was heavily armored and the windows, which could be opened, were almost two inches thick. Nonetheless, Clark insisted that we buckle our seat belts and put on flak jackets and helmets. In the August heat, our colleagues in the APC did not take these precautions.

For almost an hour we traveled toward Sarajevo through seemingly peaceful woods, although the road was bumpy and in poor condition. The French military, in whose sector Sarajevo and Mount Igman fell, had recently begun upgrading the road and patrolling it with tanks, part of the new and powerful Rapid Reaction Force (RRF) established by French President Jacques Chirac to show the Serbs that France intended to pursue a more aggressive policy.

The road emerged from the woods and reached a steep incline above the Sarajevo valley, where, hugging the mountain wall, it suddenly narrowed. On our left was a nearly vertical wall, to our right a sharp drop-off. We were approaching the most dangerous part of the road, where we would be directly exposed to Serb machine gunners. But in these well-armored cars we felt safe. It was about 9:30 in the morning.

The Humvee rounded a corner. On the left, a French convoy going the other way had pulled over against the inside wall to let us pass on the outside. As we approached the last French tank, we saw a soldier yelling and gesturing, but we couldn't hear what he was saying through the thick windows. Our driver

got out of the car, looking puzzled. "I don't understand this guy," he said. "He's speaking French." I jumped out of the Humvee to help, but I couldn't quite grasp what the French soldier was saying, something about a vehicle behind us going over the edge of the road. I thought that I had misunderstood him. Behind us was—nothing. I signaled Clark to join me. The APC must be far behind us, I thought. Then it hit me.

Clark and I ran back about thirty yards. About six inches of red clay seemed to have broken off the edge of the roadbed. We could hear voices in the woods below, but we saw nothing except a few flattened trees. Somewhere below us lay the APC with our colleagues.

Wearing heavy flak jackets and helmets, we jumped off the edge of the road and started down the steep incline. We were less than ten feet below the roadbed when two enormous explosions went off. Small-arms fire broke out around us. From below and above people cried out in French, "Mines! Get back on the road!" Grasping roots to pull ourselves up, we scrambled back onto the road.

The shooting continued. Far below in the distance lay villages with a clear line of fire. We had no idea whether they were Serb or Muslim. I ran back to our Humvee and asked the sergeant to turn it around in case we had to get back to the relative safety of the woods and the soccer field-helipad. We tried to set up our portable satellite dish to establish communications with the outside world, but the vertical rise of the mountain made contact impossible. Colonel Banky had disappeared.

Finally—it seemed like an eternity but was in fact less than ten minutes—a French corporal ran up to us. The missing APC, he said, was not immediately below us, as we had thought, but beyond the next hairpin turn.

At that moment we realized how bad the situation was. Until then we had expected to find our colleagues injured but, we hoped, not seriously. I had not allowed myself to think of any worse possibility.

Wes and I started running down the road, twenty pounds of extra weight cutting into our necks and chests. We rounded the hairpin turn and followed the road for almost a kilometer. Finally, we ran into a cluster of French vehicles on the road, including a medical vehicle that had, by chance, been coming up the road. They were grouped at the spot, we now realized, where the APC had *bounced over the road* and continued to somersault down the mountain. Below us trees had been flattened as if by a giant plow.

The shooting died down and rain began to fall. In addition to five Americans, four French soldiers—the driver and three other men who had been in the APC—were missing. We established a weak radio contact with the Embassy in Sarajevo through the Embassy radio net, but because we did not know exactly what had happened, we asked Sarajevo to hold off reporting

anything to Washington. It was not quite 4:00 A.M. in Washington, and what ever had happened, there was nothing for them to do until we knew more.

Since I was the only person on the mountain who spoke both French and English, I stayed on the road to work with the French while Wes descended. We anchored a rope around a tree stump so that he could rappel toward the vehicle, which French and Bosnian soldiers had already reached. Huge plumes of smoke rose from somewhere below us. We could hear Clark yelling through his walkie-talkie that he needed a fire extinguisher urgently. I looked around frantically; there was none.

A French jeep drove up and stopped. A solitary figure was seated upright in the backseat, covered in blood and bandages. His face was unrecognizable. I asked him who he was. He mumbled something unintelligible. "Who?" I asked again. "Hargreaves . . . your . . . security . . . officer . . . sir," he said, very slowly, talking in a daze. I climbed into the jeep and asked him if he wanted to lie down. He said he didn't know if he could make it. He thought his back was broken. Two French soldiers helped me ease Hargreaves out of the jeep and lay him on a cot on the road. I got down on my knees next to him. He was having great difficulty speaking. I understood him to be saying that he should have saved people, that it was his fault, that his back was broken. I tried to calm him down. Desperate for information, I started asking him, one by one, about our team.

"Frasure. Where is Ambassador Frasure?" I almost shouted.

"Died." He could barely say the word.

I stood up. Three years as a civilian in Vietnam had exposed me to occasional combat and its awful consequences, but this was different. This was my team, and my deputy was apparently dead. But there was no time to grieve. Wes Clark was still far below us on the mountainside, and the only thing I knew was that Hargreaves believed that Bob Frasure was dead.

I got back on my knees. "Joe Kruzel," I said. "What about Kruzel?"

"Don't know. Think he made it."

"Nelson Drew?"

"Gone. Didn't make it." Hargreaves started to cry. "I tried . . ."

"It's not your fault," I said hopelessly. "There was nothing you could have done." It was a refrain we would repeat regularly to Hargreaves over the next three days. His first reaction—typical of a highly committed security officer—was guilt for his failure to protect those for whom he was responsible.

Clark struggled up the hillside, using the ropes. He looked ten years older. "It's the worst thing you've ever seen down there," he said. By the time he reached the APC, he said, it was already on fire, apparently from live ammunition it was carrying that had "cooked off" and exploded. Bosnian soldiers in the area had reached the APC first, and had taken two Americans,

tentatively identified as Joe Kruzel and Dan Gerstein, to the nearest field hospital. Wes had seen charred remains of two other bodies, probably Bob and Nelson.

As we stood on the road absorbing this unbearable news, a jeep drove up and stopped. A tall, thin French officer stepped out, introduced himself as General René Bachelet, the commander of Sarajevo Sector, and began issuing instructions to his troops. Behind him came another French medical unit and the first Americans, three security officers from the embassy.

By now, journalists in Sarajevo had picked up some conversations about the accident on the internal radio network of the French military and had begun to report a confused and inaccurate version of the accident around the world. It was time to talk to Washington. Asking the American Embassy security unit to take their orders from General Clark, I left for Sarajevo with General Bachelet. On the road we passed the wreckage of several other vehicles that had been hit or had slid off the mountain; one had gone down only a week earlier, killing two British aid workers.

The American Embassy in Sarajevo had recently moved out of crowded and vulnerable rooms in the Holiday Inn. It now occupied a small villa next to the U.N. military headquarters. The communications equipment—secure telephone lines, radio links, and telegraph facilities—were crammed into one tiny, windowless room. It was from there that we now attempted to coordinate our activities. John Menzies, a brave young career diplomat from the United States Information Agency who was awaiting final Senate confirmation to become Ambassador to Bosnia, had already alerted Washington to the tragedy. Shortly after 2:00 P.M. in Sarajevo (8:00 A.M. in Washington) the State Department Operations Center—the indispensable nerve center that keeps all senior State Department and other officials around the world linked to one another twenty-four hours a day—set up, in its usual efficient manner, a conference call with the National Security Advisor, Tony Lake, and his deputy, Sandy Berger; Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott; and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General John Shalikashvili. (Both Secretary of State Christopher and Secretary of Defense William Perry were on vacation.) I described the scene, stressing that our information was incomplete and that General Clark was still on the mountain.

The Associated Press, Reuters, and UPI had all reported that the French APC had hit a Serb land mine. It was important to correct this as quickly as possible, in order to prevent runaway journalistic speculation and pressure for a military response. I asked Washington to include in its initial announcement a flat statement that the tragedy had been caused by a road accident. We agreed that the officials designated to tell Mrs. Frasure and Mrs. Drew the

news prepare them for the worst, but not confirm their husbands' deaths yet. Finally, I asked that someone call my wife, Kati—we had been married for less than three months—and tell her the news personally, so that she would not hear an incomplete version when she woke up.

Clark soon arrived with a vivid description of his efforts to retrieve the remains of the two men, who he was now certain were Bob and Nelson. We called General Shalikashvili again to discuss arrangements for bringing the bodies and the injured home through the American Army hospital in Germany. As I was talking to Shalikashvili, Menzies came into the tiny communications room. "Kruzel is dead," he said quietly, his long arms hanging motionless at his side. "Didn't make it to the hospital. Massive head injuries."

This was, in some ways, the worst moment of the day for us. We had barely absorbed the terrible news about Bob and Nelson, but we thought Joe and Dan Gerstein had made it. Now all three of our senior colleagues were dead. And the thought of Joe—funny, sardonic, wise Joe—dying helplessly as he was driven to the field hospital was simply too much. I asked General Shalikashvili to tell the others in Washington and turned the telephone over to Clark.

A short time later President Clinton called from Jackson Hole, Wyoming, where he was taking a short vacation. I did not realize then that it was his forty-ninth birthday. "Mr. President," I began, rather formally, "we have the sad duty to report that three members of your negotiating team died this morning in a vehicle accident on Mount Igman . . ."

With Strobe Talbott listening in silently, the President made some comments about the terrible nature of the loss, both personally and for the nation. I told him that he could be especially proud of the actions of his fellow Arkansan, and put General Clark on. We gave the President a sense of what he had found at the site of the APC, and said it was "like the Boston Road" in Arkansas, a steep and dangerous route both men knew well.

The President asked what effect the tragedy would have on the negotiations, and when we would be ready to continue the mission. "You sent us here as a team, Mr. President," I replied, "and we want to come home as a team. Then we will be ready to resume our mission."

"That's fine," the President said. "Come home as soon as you can, but make it clear publicly that our commitment to the peace effort will continue and that you will lead it. And see Izetbegovic before you leave." Knowing we were focused on our loss, the President was thinking ahead for us. He wanted to show publicly that the tragedy would not stop the peace effort.

"All of us, including Bob and Joe and Nelson, would want to continue," I replied. The President, in reporting to the nation from Jackson Hole a few minutes later, said publicly, "What they would want us to do is to press ahead, and that is what we intend to do."

The next few hours were a blur of action that felt meaningless; we kept thinking of how the smallest changes might have prevented the accident, yet it was already permanently imprinted on our lives. We found Gerstein alive in the makeshift French hospital in the basement of the Sarajevo Post Office Building; he was banged up but in surprisingly good shape. He told us a little about the terrible scene inside the APC: how it had slowly started to slide over the edge, how no one had time to speak or get out, how he had grabbed a metal pole above his head and pressed his face hard against the outer walls of the APC as it tumbled—he estimated twenty to thirty times—four hundred meters down the mountain; how it had come to a stop and he had climbed out the top hatch, then, hearing Pete Hargreaves moaning, had gone back to help him escape.

Then, Gerstein said, he and Hargreaves went back to the APC one more time and pulled Joe Kruzal out through the hatch just before the ammunition exploded. He last saw Joe as the Bosnians took him to the field hospital. It was his impression that the others had been knocked unconscious in the violent initial bouncing and tumbling of the APC, and that they never had a chance. Hargreaves himself had survived by wedging himself under his seat, after almost being thrown out the back doors as the APC fell.

We wanted to leave Sarajevo with our fallen and injured comrades that evening. But the injured could travel only by air, and this produced an ironic result: the very permission to use the Sarajevo airfield that had previously been denied us by the Bosnian Serbs—and that could have prevented the accident—suddenly materialized, arranged swiftly by the French directly with Mladic. As we went through that dreadful day, the French and British arranged to send helicopters to the Sarajevo airport to take us out.

Menzies sent word to President Alija Izetbegovic that we still wanted to see him, but, given the circumstances, we asked him to call on us at the Embassy rather than receive us in the normal manner at his office. At precisely 6:00 P.M., Izetbegovic and Sacirbey strode up the steps of the American Embassy. Menzies, Clark, and I greeted them outside the front door in front of a large throng of journalists, and escorted them into a conference room, where General Bachelet joined us.

Several people in Washington had suggested that we conduct substantive conversations with Izetbegovic, but it was clear that the circumstances were not appropriate for a serious discussion. With the press listening, I thanked the French and the Bosnians for their help during the long day. The Bosnians, having lost so many people in the war, seemed relatively unmoved by three American dead. Finally, slightly annoyed with Izetbegovic, Menzies pointedly said that, while we fully recognized how many Bosnians had died, these

were the first Americans to lose their lives in Bosnia. This seemed to impress Izetbegovic, and he offered some words of condolence.

The helicopters would be at the airfield shortly. Light was beginning to fade in Sarajevo and the weather was deteriorating. We started for the airport, where there was one more terrible task to perform: the formal identification of Joe Kruzal. Then, as we stood at attention in a light drizzle, a French honor guard escorted three simple wooden coffins, each draped in an American flag, onto a French helicopter. The rain intensified. It was almost dark, and the clouds seemed to be descending toward us, obscuring the mountains that ringed the airfield. The flight out would be hell.

I turned to General Clark. "We've had enough for one day," I said. "Let's try again tomorrow. We'll spend the night in Sarajevo."

We slept, but only briefly, on Army cots in the Ambassador's office. Endless phone calls to Washington, to family and colleagues, filled the evening and the night. Sacirbey, who was distantly related to Joe Kruzal through a cousin of his American wife, came over and stayed for hours. Too exhausted to think, we were unable to sleep until, well after midnight, we had drained ourselves of the event.

On Sunday, August 20, we set out once again for the Sarajevo airport. This time without an honor guard, we loaded the three coffins onto a French helicopter and the two injured men onto a British helicopter. Although I had spent hundreds of hours on helicopters in and since Vietnam without fear, that French helicopter suddenly, irrationally, scared me. I started toward the British chopper. Clark said, "We should go with the coffins all the way." Wes and I had not been separated for what seemed like days, and we boarded the French chopper together.

The helicopters rose noisily into the air. With my knees pressed into one of the coffins, we flew on to Split. To distract myself, I tried to read a John le Carré novel I had been carrying with me, *The Secret Pilgrim*, but could not focus on the page.

Rosemarie Pauli had taken over the arrangements in Split from a confused and chaotic combination of military and civilian personnel. She had worked for me in Germany as well as Washington, and I had complete confidence in her ability. We needed to transfer the two men and the three coffins from the helicopters to a special American military plane, carrying medical equipment and military doctors, that would fly us to Germany. I gave Rosemarie only one instruction: make sure that the movement of Gerstein and Hargreaves, who were

both on stretchers and looked awful, was done far from the television cameras and with dignity. All this Rosemarie accomplished with her usual skill. Shattered by the loss of our three colleagues, and aware that she would have been in the APC if there had been room for one more person in the helicopter, she carried out her responsibilities calmly and efficiently until we reached Andrews Air Force Base the next day.

As we changed aircraft at Split, we spoke briefly to the press, telling them we would resume our shuttle diplomacy in about a week. I expressed particular outrage at a statement by the Bosnian Serb leader, Radovan Karadzic, that we had taken "an unnecessary risk" by using the Mount Igman road rather than crossing Bosnian Serb territory—a deliberately nasty reference to the Serb offer to use the Kiseljak road. I called the tragedy "an accident, but an accident of war."

Air Force doctors quickly examined Gerstein and Hargreaves as we flew to Ramstein Air Base in Germany. The Supreme Commander of NATO, General George Joulwan, an old friend from Vietnam, had flown to Ramstein from his headquarters in Belgium. He stepped forward, saluted as we disembarked, and embraced me. Then we stood at attention as the three coffins received the first of many official American salutes on their way to their final resting places.

I knew the American military hospital at Ramstein well from my time as Ambassador to Germany, most unforgettably from an afternoon spent visiting the Americans wounded in the ambush in Mogadishu, Somalia, in October 1993. The raw courage and patriotism of those young men, several of whom had lost their sight or limbs during the fighting, were still vivid in my mind. Now the same doctors treated Gerstein and Hargreaves as we took our first showers in two days and prepared to return home.

At 12:15 P.M. the next day, August 21, we landed at Andrews Air Force Base. As our large C-141 pulled slowly up to the spot where so many of America's triumphal and tragic returns have taken place, the injured men were taken off the plane separately, out of sight of the television cameras. Clark, Rosemarie, and I walked into a silent crowd of friends and family. I could see some of our closest colleagues—Warren Christopher, Bill Perry, Strobe Talbott, Madeleine Albright, Tony Lake, Sandy Berger, Peter Tarnoff, and others—sitting immobile in chairs behind a velvet rope. A place had been saved for me next to my wife, who silently squeezed my hand as I sat down.

We had brought our comrades home, and it was time for others to carry on with the heartbreaking but necessary rituals of remembrance and farewell. Suddenly, exhaustion hit us. As we squinted into the bright midday August sun at Andrews and an Air Force band played "Nearer, My God, to Thee," the coffins were unloaded and placed by an honor guard into three hearses.

Christopher, Lake, and Perry talked movingly about the men who had died. We embraced one another and sought out the wives and children of Bob, Joe, and Nelson. Then, for a few moments, we stood around in a daze, not sure what to do next. Peter Tarnoff, the Undersecretary of State, found me and said gently he would take Kati and me home. We drove into Washington together with Peter, a close friend for over thirty years, and Brooke Shearer, Strobe Talbott's wife. Dropping us off, Peter suggested we take the rest of the day off, and asked if I could come to the State Department the next morning to meet with Warren Christopher.