

## **Bosnians "Tense" Dealings with Mujahedin**

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Defence hope witness testimony will counter prosecution claim that foreign fighters were under Bosnian army command.

A witness in the trial of former Bosnian army general Enver Hadzihasanovic has described the army's tense dealings with the foreign mujahedin fighters who prosecutors claim were their allies.

Sulejman Ribo, a former deputy commander of a Bosnian army artillery unit, this week told the court that he had been forced to negotiate with the mujahedin for the release of mostly Croat prisoners captured during an incursion into the village of Miletici.

Four surrendered Bosnian Croat soldiers were allegedly murdered by the mujahedin - mostly foreign fighters from other Muslim countries who came to the area during the war - following this incursion.

The killings are among the most serious charges in the indictment against Hadzihasanovic, who is accused of command responsibility. Prosecutors allege that the mujahedin responsible were under his command, and that he failed to take measures to either prevent them from committing the crimes or to punish them afterwards.

But Ribo said that during the incident in question, local Bosnian army officers had difficulty in even making contact with the foreign fighters.

The witness told the court that his involvement began as he travelled into Mehurici, a large village near Miletici, on the afternoon of April 24, 1993.

He noticed a lot of people milling around, apparently confused, and saw a group of women who were crying. He was then told that the husband of one of the women had been taken away by mujahedin who were based outside the village. Just after Ribo arrived, he noticed a distinctive white Toyota - a vehicle associated with the mujahedin fighters - returning over the bridge from their camp and saw them take another man.

He went immediately to the headquarters of the local army battalion - located in the village primary school where he used to teach geography - and found the deputy commander, who did not know what was going on. Ribo advised him to contact his superior officer for assistance.

At that point, passers-by brought the news that a large number of mujahedin had set off in their vehicles in the direction of Miletici.

By dusk quite a few people had already gathered in the school when a report arrived that the mujahedin were returning from Miletici with a column of prisoners. One villager had told Ribo that when he had approached the group to ask why they were taking the people away, one of the fighters had struck him with his rifle.

Ribo told the judges that he decided efforts should be made to secure the release of the prisoners as soon as possible. "We assumed these people were not armed and were probably not a threat, which was what

the mujahedin claimed,” he said.

Eventually the local army commander arrived and ordered some men to approach the mujahedin camp to establish contact with a man they had been told was the key figure there – a Libyan who was apparently known to the other fighters as “Doctor” because he had completed medical school.

At first the mujahedin leader refused to negotiate, but he eventually agreed to speak to the army representatives at half past nine that evening.

Three Muslims who had been in the captured group were freed almost immediately. But it took longer to secure the release of the remaining Croat prisoners. After some time it was agreed they would be allowed to go free on the proviso that they would be accommodated in Ribo’s own house and those of his neighbours, so that their whereabouts could be accounted for.

Defence counsel will be hoping that Ribo’s testimony will bring into question the key prosecution claim that the mujahedin were under the command of Bosnian army forces.

When asked if he or the battalion commander involved in the negotiations could have given orders to the foreign fighters, Ribo answered that any cooperation with them was impossible.

“The mere fact that we invested so much time and effort to reach the person in charge shows that there could have been no cooperation with them, let alone us issuing orders to them,” Ribo told the judges.

Regular soldiers were not allowed into the mujahedin camp, Ribo said. And although he admitted that they were occasionally involved in combat, the witness added that they would withdraw “without being accountable to anybody”.

The witness said that he had the impression that the mujahedin had avoided becoming part of the regular Bosnian army because “they didn’t want anybody to [be in] command over them”.

The trial continues.

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