

Court Told Markac Highly Moral Person

Author: [Julia Hawes](#)

Defence witness says special police commander took care of civilians he came across during Operation Storm.

A witness who worked closely with the former commander of the Croatian special police, Mladen Markac, praised the defendant's wartime conduct this week, saying he spoke of the importance of honouring international conventions and treaties.

Defence witness Davorin Pavlovic, a communications expert with the Croatian special police, was with Mladen Markac, former commander of the Croatian special police, before, during and after Operation Storm, a Croatian military offensive in August 1995.

Pavlovic told the Hague tribunal about the special police's relations with non-Croat civilians in the occupied territories during Operation Storm, calling Markac a "highly moral person" whose men provided civilians with food and water during their operations.

Markac is accused, along with generals Ante Gotovina and Ivan Cermak, of participating in a joint criminal enterprise that resulted in crimes committed against Serb civilians during and after Operation Storm, aimed at retaking the Serb-held Krajina region in August 1995.

As commander of the special police, Markac oversaw the operation and functions of special police units that participated in Operation Storm. According to the indictment, Markac also controlled the operations of members of the Croatian army, HV, artillery units attached to his force during the months leading up to and following the military offensive.

The indictment charges Markac with permitting, denying and minimising ongoing criminal activity - including plundering, destruction, inhumane treatment and murder - by his subordinates during Operation Storm against the Krajina Serbs.

Pavlovic worked in communications and technology for the Croatian ministry of interior for over 20 years before retiring in 2000. In 1990, Pavlovic was assigned as assistant commander of special police for communications. He earned the nickname of "Antenna" due to the two to three radios that were constantly in his possession.

Tomislav Kuzmanovic, one of Markac's defence lawyers, asked Pavlovic what type of communications he organised for the special police before Operation Storm.

Pavlovic told the judges that he was responsible for coordinating communication between the commander of an operation and his subordinate soldiers. Soldiers depended on their ability to report back on their positions, medical conditions, and need for reinforcements, Pavlovic said.

Kuzmanovic asked Pavlovic about the objectives and role of the special police during Operation Storm, particularly concerning the treatment of enemy soldiers and Serbian civilians encountered during the operation.

"If we encountered civilians, those civilians had to be sent to the basic police force... to ensure their documents, food and water," Pavlovic told the judges. "If we encountered enemy soldiers, we were told to disarm them, leave sufficient numbers to keep an eye on them, and call sufficient police."

The task of the special police was to "fight against terrorism", by expeditiously advancing forward and establishing combat contact with the enemy, Pavlovic said.

"After us, you would have regular police force come in," Pavlovic told the judges. "[To] prevent crimes, uncover perpetrators - those were not the tasks of special [police]."

The special police were not assigned to a specific territory, unlike civilian police, he added.

"What was the purpose of the mop-up and search operations after August 21?" Kuzmanovic asked.

Pavlovic told judges that the special police were assigned with searching the terrain in certain areas following Operation Storm, as well as deploying special forces to uncover enemy soldiers, mine fields, and hidden weapons. The special units engaged in mop-up operations until September 12, he said.

Kuzmanovic asked Pavlovic about Markac's behaviour towards other members of the special police, as well as civilians in the occupied territories.

Pavlovic, who said he had known Markac since the beginning of war, said that the commander was a "highly moral person".

"[Markac] is a very socially sensitive person who took equal care of the special units and other members of the ministry of the interior as well as the civilians we came across in occupied territory," Pavlovic told the judges.

He said that he had seen Markac supply civilians with food, cigarettes and water on multiple occasions.

The witness also recollected instances where he had come into conflict with Markac over disagreements on how to best use equipment and weaponry belonging to the special police.

In one situation, Pavlovic said that Markac sent units of "greater force than necessary" to pull out wounded or dead members of the special police. Markac sent a helicopter into enemy territory to pull out a wounded soldier, despite Pavlovic's protests. Enemy combatants shot at the helicopter, Pavlovic said, but the soldier was rescued. However, the unit was then forced to travel by horseback or foot due to the loss of the helicopter.

"He did everything he could to provide assistance to such members as soon as possible," Pavlovic said, adding that Markac adhered to all Croatian laws and moral codes.

Kuzmanovic asked whether Markac had ever issued instructions on how to treat enemy combatants.

Pavlovic said that Markac briefed his soldiers on the areas where they operated, describing combat operations and tasks in detail.

"There were never political speeches given," Pavlovic said, adding that Markac spoke of the importance of honouring international conventions and treaties.

When taking enemy prisoners, Pavlovic said, Markac instructed his units to disarm and search such persons before calling on the regular police. It was also a soldier's duty to care for civilians by giving them water and calling on regular police, who would in turn call for civilian protection, Pavlovic said.

The trial continues next week.

Julia Hawes is an IWPR reporter in The Hague.

Topic: Courtside

Focus: International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/court-told-markac-highly-moral-person>