

COURTSIDE: Bosanski Samac Trial

Member of forced labour detachment gives "sad" description of ethnically cleansed villages.

After Bosanski Samac fell to the Serbs in April 1992, Nusret Hadzijusufovic agreed to participate in "work duty" - a practice the indictment describes as forced labour - rather than be shipped to a camp.

Chores ranged from trench digging and bunker protection on the front lines to confiscating furniture, electric equipment and farming equipment from the homes of Bosniaks and Croats who had fled. "Those deserted villages offered a sad picture," the witness said last week at the trial of four political leaders of Bosanski Samac municipality at the time of the take-over.

Blagoje Simic, Milan Simic, Miroslav Tadic and Simo Zaric are charged with crimes against humanity, grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions and violations of the laws or customs of war for organising and implementing the ethnic cleansing of the municipality.

Before the Serb take-over, 22,500 Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Muslims lived there. By May 1995 fewer than 300 remained.

"The population had been taken to camps or exchanged, while dogs were standing in front of the houses waiting for the people to come back," the witness added.

One of the "work duties" in the summer of 1992 was to clean up debris from the mosque, which had been destroyed by mines, and other damaged buildings. The witness said the Catholic church in Bosanski Samac was destroyed bit by bit over several days with the help of excavators and a steel ball, to avoid damaging the nearby Orthodox church.

Tadic, as chairman of the Bosanski Samac "Exchange Commission" and member of the crisis staff, compiled lists of workers taken to perform these duties. Hadzijusufovic was exchanged in January 1993 and has not returned to Bosanski Samac. The trial continues.

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