

COURTSIDE: Bosnian Generals - The Crimes of Central Bosnia

The first indictments against the Bosnian army swell the number of generals in The Hague officers' club.

The prosecutor has unsealed the first indictments for alleged crimes committed by the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina, ABH, against Croats and Serbs in the bitter struggle over Central Bosnia. Arrested by the Federation authorities, the indictees - Generals Enver Hadzihasanovic and Mehmed Alagic and Colonel Amir Kubura - are charged with violations of the laws and customs of war and grave breaches of the Geneva conventions for crimes committed between January 1993 and January 1994.

The three accused, commanders in the army's 3rd corps, are charged on the basis of their command responsibility within the terms of Article 7(3) of the tribunal's statute. They were, according to the indictment, "responsible for ensuring that military units under their command respected and applied the rules of international law" and "oblig[ated] to initiate proceedings for legal sanctions against individuals under their command who had violated international laws of war".

In spring and early summer 1993, the 3rd corps launched a series of heavy attacks against the Croatian Defence Council, HVO, around Bugojno, Travnik, Zenica and the Lasva valley. These operations, according to the indictment, culminated in a massive attack on June 7-13 in the vicinity of Kakanj, Travnik and Zenica. The 7th Muslim Mountain Brigade, joined by Mujahidin from Islamic countries ready to conduct a jihad or holy war against the enemies of the Bosnian Muslims, played an important role in the attacks.

At least 200 Bosnian Croat and Bosnian Serb civilians were killed, and many more wounded.

General Hadzihasanovic, 51, said to be commander of all units of the 3rd corps and responsible for all units acting in the area under his command, is charged for the killings of surrendered HVO soldiers and civilians in the villages of Dusina, Miletici, in the municipality of Zenica and Maline, and Bikosi, in the municipality of Travnik.

The prosecutors also charge him with unlawful confinement, murder and cruel treatment of detainees in the Zenica Music School, the Yugoslav People's Army barracks in Travnik and locations in the area of Kakanj, Bugojno and other places in central Bosnia. A number of detainees were allegedly killed while digging trenches or carrying out other work on the front line, while others were used as hostages or human shields.

In several villages around Zenica and Travnik, the property of Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats was stolen or destroyed, and several religious properties were ruined.

General Alagic, 53, is charged for similar violations through October 1993, when he was commander of a 3rd corps operations group called Bosanska Krajina, and for crimes elsewhere in central Bosnia from November 1, 1993, while a 3rd corps commander.

Colonel Kubura, 37, commander of the 3rd corps' 7th Muslim Mountain Brigade, is charged for the killing of detainees in the villages Dusina, Bikosi and Maline, the maltreatment of detainees in Zenica, Travnik and Kakanj, and the plunder and destruction of property of Croats and Serbs in Zenica, Travnik and Vares.

Two of the accused have already appeared before the Hague tribunal as witnesses. General Hadzihasanovic and Colonel Kubura gave witness statements in the trial against former HVO commander Tihomir Blaskic. Hadzihasanovic also gave a statement in the trial of Bosnian Serb General Radislav Krstic.

With the arrival of Alagic and Hadzihasanovic, the "generals' corps" of the UN Detention Unit has now expanded to seven. They join generals Blaskic, Krstic, Stanislav Galic, Momir Talic and Rahim Ademi. The Bosnian Serb, Bosnian Croat, Croatian and Bosnian armies are all represented. Generals from the Yugoslav Army and the Kosovo Liberation Army are not included, but it is likely to be only a matter of time. At least three generals on public indictments are fugitives - Ratko Mladic (Bosnian Serb), Dragoljub Ojdanic (Yugoslav) and Ante Gotovina (Croat) - and there may be more on sealed indictments, for example relating to Dubrovnik.

With the prosecutor's focus on those with command responsibility, it is likely that The Hague's officer's club will grow in the coming years.

Vjera Bogati is an IWPR special correspondent at the Hague and journalist with SENSE News Agency.

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