

## **Courtside: Milosevic Trial**

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By Chris Stephen in The Hague (TU 306, 24-28 March 2003)

In between, the Bosnian Muslim endured savage beatings that ended in him being given up for dead four times.

But he survived, and this week gave evidence prosecutors hope will show Milosevic was the man ultimately to blame.

Gusalic told the Milosevic trial he was shot in the leg by guards outside the Srbija café just as he was about to throw a grenade towards at Serbian paramilitaries in March 1992.

He said he was avenging a Serb grenade attack the day before on the town's Istanbul Café which wounded seven, some of them Serbs.

The attack came just as paramilitary units were arriving in the town at the start of the Bosnian war.

At first he was taken to hospital, but a few days later he told the court the paramilitary units, backed by the Yugoslav army, firing artillery from the far side of the Drina River, blasted into the town.

He was among thousands of Muslim men and boys sent to the Batkovic prison camp outside the town - where he was singled out for special abuse.

Gusalic joined a group of ten Muslims separated from the rest of the camp and beaten day and night.

"I seemed to be a speciality for being beaten up, as if I could be blamed for the war," he said.

He was young and fit, which helped him survive the first few days. Others were not so lucky. One man, Fayed, was killed. "There was beating and beating and Fayed just couldn't take it. He succumbed to the beating," the witness continued.

Three days later, with combat units arriving to do their own beating, he said another man died, "I think on the third day, Slatan the jeweller also succumbed. He couldn't take it any more."

Prosecutors are keen to establish a link between Milosevic, at the time in command of forces in Serbia, and the Bosnian Serbs.

Gusalic obliged: as well as evidence about the Yugoslav army role in the ethnic cleansing of the town, he identified a warrant officer in a detention camp who was from Serbia, and said the accents of the paramilitary men he tried to kill indicated they were from Serbia rather than Bosnia.

In two months at Baktkovic, he said at least 100 detainees, mostly Muslims But also Croats, perished.

Some Muslim children were kept there - but were hidden from sight when Red Cross teams made occasional visits.

Gusalic said he too was hidden - so that the Red Cross could not see his terrible wounds.

"The beatings went on," he said. "Breakfast, lunch, dinner, when we lined up. And after midnight. They liked to beat us unconscious then."

Ten years later, he still suffers from chest pains and other ailments as a result of injuries, including cracked ribs.

When the guards were bored, they devised other tortures, forcing prisoners to perform sexual acts with each other.

Two months later, he was transferred to a military prison at Doboje, where Serb doctors were shocked to find maggots living inside the untreated wounds.

"I found a mirror. I looked in it. I hardly recognised myself," he said. I was 110 kilos before. I went down to 59. I was just skin and bone."

Back in Batkovic, the beatings resumed - but they were less severe than before.

"They beat us with police batons but it was like being hit with toys compared to what had gone on before," he said.

A spell of forced labour followed, but conditions improved and he was even granted three visits from his wife, a Serb, before being released, as part of a prisoner exchange, in November 1993.

Gusalic's gave evidence after a two- week break in the trial caused by Milosevic's illness.

But if the defendant was stressed by his high blood pressure, or by news his wife is now being hunted by Belgrade police, he did not show it.

Instead, he launched a quick-fire series of questions at the witness that ended with Judge Richard May cutting his microphone.

"You're not here to harry the witness or bully them," said May, his finger hovering over the button that cuts Milosevic's microphone. "You will confine yourself to proper questions."

Milosevic did, producing a report from Reuters news agency that he said showed there had been no mistreatment at Batkovic.

Milosevic said the report was dated February 26, although there was no year, and that the Reuters correspondent had visited the camp and reported conditions were fine.

"There is no obvious rancour between prisoners and Serbs and the international Red Cross visits every week," Milosevic said, quoting in English from the report.

Next he attacked Gusalic for refusing to go back to Bijeljina, a town now in the Bosnian Serb republic, after the war.

"Perhaps the reason for your fear is that a large number of people say you were the man who started the war in Bijeljina?" said the defendant.

Gusalic made a rare smile. "Yes, I started the war, Milosevic," he said.

In an increasingly bad-tempered cross-examination, the accused was again rebuked by May who told him to stick to the subject of the testimony, "If you are suggesting that what he says, about the camps, is not true then you should say so in some way. Now move on."

Milosevic snapped back, "Mr May, do you consider it to be a side issue how the war started?"

Gusalic told Milosevic he had been ordered to appear in front of a Bosnian Serb TV crew to tell them Muslims were responsible for the war.

He had refused - and was beaten again. "I always spoke the truth and perhaps that's why I suffered so much," he told the court. "The truth must win."

Milosevic this week had an appeal for release from jail on the grounds of ill-health turned down by Judge May.

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Bosnia and  
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