

## **Croats testify against HVO Special Unit**

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against each other

After a break of several weeks the presentation of evidence in the trial of

Dario Kordic and Mario Cerkez continued last Monday (January 10). Two Dutch

members of international organisations and one Bosnian Croat testified.

It has been a rarity in the trials at the Tribunal for a member of an ethnic

group to testify against defendants of the same nationality. However, in the

Kordic trial, several Croats did appear as prosecution witnesses. For

example, the leader of the HDZ in B-H, Stjepan Kljuic, the former HVO

commander in Fojnica, Stjepan Tuka, and the HDZ "dissident", Dragutin

Zvonimir Cicak have all appeared for the prosecution.

Last week's witness, Ante Breljas, was a so-called "political officer" in

the special HVO unit Vitezovi (the "Knights") and latterly took over

logistics and liaison duties, which included taking charge of detainees held

by the members of that unit.

Breljas testified that on April 15, 1993, the day before the HVO offensive

in the Lasva valley and, especially, the attack on Ahmici, Kordic told the

leaders of the Knights at their base in the village of Dubravica that "that [the coming offensive] must be to the end." Such an accusation implies that Koric had a very important role in the attacks that followed.

Later during his testimony, Breljas admitted the possibility that Kordic made the statement a day later on April 16. The Knights, as a unit, did not take part in the attack on Ahmici but some individuals may have done, Breljas claimed.

The witness assessed that Kordic "wished to make hatred between Croats and Moslems as great as possible" and that he [Kordic] claimed that the Bosnian Croats "must fight for survival."

In an effort to prove Kordic's military role - a role disputed by the defence - Breljas claimed that "Kordic led the defence of Krizancevo Selo and Buhine Kuce" in the Lasva River Valley in December 1993, when the HVO commander in central Bosnia, Tihomir Blaskic, was absent.

Breljas testified that he saw Kordic study maps together with a local HVO commander. "I assumed even before that Kordic had influence over the army, even though he did not have military-strategic experience", Breljas said.

Breljas confirmed that after the April conflict, the Knights had detained some 350 Bosniak inmates in a school in Dubravica. The inmates included

civilians and some soldiers. He confirmed that about 15 were killed, that there was abuse and some were taken to dig trenches. "There were soldiers who cut the ears of the killed, one even made a whole necklace of ears," Breljas said.

Two Dutch witnesses - the former ECMM monitor Johannes de Boer and a former member of UNProFor Carneilus Van der Pluijma - testified that at their meetings with Kordic, he demonstrated he could quickly and independently give orders to the army in the field.

For example, following a protest from the ECMM, Kordic secured passage for a general who had come to visit the Dutch troops in Busovaca by making a short telephone call to soldiers at an HVO checkpoint. After another protest concerning the detention of three Bosniak girls, Kordic secured their release.

**Location:** Bosnia and Herzegovina

**Focus:** International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia

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