

Defendant 'a kilometre away' at the time of the crime

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Witness places defendant Dragan Papic 1km away from the Ahmici massacre in the "Kupreskic & Others" trial.

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After they generally disputed any persecution of Muslims in the Lasva Valley on political, racial or religious ground over the past weeks, the Defence counsels of the six local Bosnian Croats accused of participation in the massacre in Ahmici began last week to individually dispute the participation of their clients in that persecution.

First up was the defence of Dragan Papic, who is accused exclusively on Count 1 (persecution). Papic's counsel called a witness who claimed that on those critical days - 16 and 17 April 1993 - he was with the accused the entire time on guard duty at a spot one kilometre away from the village. He could not then have participated in the attack on the Muslims and their houses and mosques.

According to this witness, on 16 April, between 6.30 and 7 a.m., Dragan Papic came to Radakov most (Radak bridge) between Vitez and Busovaca and stayed there for the next 10 days until his wife gave birth. As guards, they had strict orders "not to move away from the Radak bridge." The statement of this witness was illustrated with a series of photographs of the bridge taken from different angles, as well as a with a long video recording of the trip from Vitez to Busovaca, which goes through Ahmici and other Lasva villages and over the afore-mentioned bridge. This witness was due to be cross-examined this week.

With the help of the last week's witnesses, one of whom was the brother of the accused, the Defence was trying to dispute Prosecution claims that Dragan Papic was a "nationalist extremist" and a "fanatic", who walked around Ahmici armed and wearing camouflauge fatigues or a black uniform, and in whose house a massacre of Muslims was being planned. According to this Defence witness however, Papic was "not interested in politics", that "he never demonstrated a hostile attitude towards the Muslims" and that he only wore a uniform because it was "trendy".

Moreover, as a "forest ranger", Papic needed a gun, "to prevent forest thefts and defend himself from wild animals, especially during the winter".

As concerns the meetings in his house, and the number of cars that were seen outside in the days leading up to April 16 -something which many prosecution witnesses referred to - the Defence witness' explanation that Papic was "a hell of a car mechanic", and that he liked to repair the cars of his friends, including Muslims.

The "Kupreskic & Others" trial will continue on Wednesday, 24 February.

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