

## **Former Suspect Insists Testimony Truthful**

**Author:** [IWPR](#)

He tells judges he would say same thing if he was defending himself.

A former war crimes suspect concluded his evidence in the trial of three ex-generals by asserting that he had been telling the truth at all times.

Former Croatian military police commander Mate Lausic maintained that he would have given the same evidence, whatever his status.

“My testimony, regardless of the form that it has or the capacity in which I give it, as a suspect or witness, or perhaps even in the capacity of an accused, would always be the same,” he told the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia, ICTY.

Lausic was appearing at the trial of ex-generals Ante Gotovina, Ivan Cermak and Mladen Markac, who are charged with orchestrating the permanent removal of Serbs from Croatia between July and September 1995.

The indictment states that the three men presided over the “deportation and forcible transfer, destruction and burning of Serb homes and businesses, plunder and looting of public or private Serb property; murder [and] other inhumane acts”.

The witness was in charge of the military police during the Croatian army’s Operation Storm, during which it seized control of the country’s Krajina region from Serb rebels.

Lausic was previously questioned as a suspect by the Hague tribunal’s Office of the Office of the Prosecutor, OTP, in May 2004, and has been named in a court document as a member of a “joint criminal enterprise” along with the three generals.

However, the tribunal never indicted him. As the court is due to close in two years, prosecutors can bring no more cases.

The defence have sought to undermine the evidence of the witness – who testified that his men were unable to enforce discipline among Croatian troops at the time of Operation Storm as they lacked support from the main command of the Croatian army.

During cross-examination of Lausic this week, Markac’s defence counsel Goran Mikulicic challenged a key allegation against his client that he – along with his co-accused – conspired with the late Croatian president Franjo Tudman to force the Serb population out of Krajina through the commission of crimes against them.

Mikulicic asked Lausic whether he had ever personally received an order from the country’s highest officials, “formally or informally, that the citizens of Serb ethnicity in the Republic of Croatia should be mistreated, harassed, that a crime at their expense should be tolerated or even encouraged with a view to driving them out of Croatia?”

Lausic replied that neither Tudjman nor the late defence minister Gojko Susak – who is also named in the indictment as a participant in the so-called joint criminal enterprise – had ever asked him to do anything that would be contrary to his work ethic, his world view or his professionalism.

He explained that on every occasion when he spoke to Susak about crimes being committed by members of the Croatian army, Susak's reaction was "vehement".

He asked for energetic action from the military police to deal with the perpetrators, said the witness.

"He asked that every incident of opportunist behaviour be reported to him, be that on the part of the Croatian army officers or on the part of the colleagues of the ministry of interior – and there were such cases," said Lausic.

Mikulicic also wanted to know whether Lausic had known of any agreements to leave illegal acts committed by lower-level troops of the Croatian army unpunished.

He replied that in his view, there was a tolerant attitude towards a lack of discipline among the troops at this level, resulting from the empathy that commanders felt for their men.

"[This tolerance] did not arise from any orders, but rather [from the fact that] as individuals, the commanders hailed from the same body of people over whom they were in command, and against the principles of professionalism, they instilled notions into their decision-making process," he said.

"They did that to empathise with perpetrators as people who could not escape the traps of their own frustrations, who had suffered in the war and had been persecuted in the war."

Cermak's defence counsel Steven Kay then questioned Lausic.

He put to the witness that an order to subordinate military police unit the Knin company to his client had never been put into practise.

Kay showed the witness the relevant order.

"This does not say that they should report to the garrison commander in Knin," he said.

According to the indictment, Cermak was appointed as Knin garrison commander on August 5 1995 – the second day of Operation Storm. Prosecutors are trying to prove that Cermak had effective control over the Croatian army units attached to the Knin garrison and was responsible for disciplining and supervising them.

Lausic said the order specified that the military police should send their daily reports of any crimes committed to “the most senior commander in the Croatian army in the area of responsibility”.

The trial continues.

**Location:** Balkans  
Croatia

**Topic:** Courtside

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

---

**Source URL:** <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/former-suspect-insists-testimony-truthful>