

Krstic 'Feared' Speaking Out Over Srebrenica

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Prosecutor Peter McClosky opened his cross-examination by asking the then commander of the Army of Republika Srpska, VRS, Drina Corps whether he "knew or had reason to know" his subordinates had committed crimes or whether he had punished anyone under his command for their part in the massacres.

McClosky presented several VRS documents which clearly defined a commander's obligations to ensure respect of international humanitarian law and the Geneva Convention, and to initiate proceedings against subordinates suspected of violating these laws. The prosecutor asked Krstic whether he had followed "those obligations".

Krstic said he had "intended to report war crimes", but was prevented from doing so. When asked what had stopped him, he said, "I feared for my security and that of my family."

Krstic was reluctant to name who he specifically feared. McClosky insisted he clarify whether he was referring to the commander of VRS general headquarters, General Ratko Mladic. Krstic turned to the judges for protection, requesting that these questions be put during a closed session.

The judges responded, however, that in the interests of public justice Krstic should answer in open court.

The prosecutor reminded Krstic that in an interview with investigator Jean Rene Ruez in February he had said Mladic "was the one who executed thousands of Muslim men." When asked once again if he was afraid of Mladic, Krstic replied through clenched teeth, "one could say that I was afraid of him and his security service."

Throughout last week's cross-examination Krstic would not be distracted from his version of events at Srebrenica. He said Operation Krivaja 95, during which he served as chief-of-staff and then Drina Corps commander, aimed at separating the two enclaves of Zepa and Srebrenica, in order to put an end to "sabotage-terrorist" activities by the 28th Division of the Bosnian army.

But on July 10, 1995, Krstic said Mladic personally assumed command of the operation and ordered the attack be expanded to ensure the total elimination of the Srebrenica enclave. From that moment, Krstic claimed, he was a mere observer.

Krstic stuck to his guns despite the prosecutor's presentation of newspaper articles and video footage from the time which glorified Krstic's role in the "Serb victories in Srebrenica and Zepa."

One article from a Belgrade weekly, which described Krstic as a "brilliant strategist who surprised NATO", was dismissed as "journalistic garble" by the general.

Likewise when reminded that the former Bosnian Serb president Radovan Karadzic had called Krstic "a chief architect of Serb victories in Srebrenica and Zepa" and a "great army commander", the general protested "he had no grounds for saying something like that!"

Krstic's cross-examination is expected to continue until the middle of this week. Prosecutors are likely to focus on the role of Drina Corps units in the mass executions carried out at Orahovac, Petkovci, Kozluk, Branjevo, Pilica and other sites around Srebrenica.

Focus: International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia

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