

Krstic Trial

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In 1998, during a search of the Republika Srpska Army, RSA, headquarters, Tribunal investigators confiscated over 30,000 documents.

Among them were orders for the use of trucks, buses and heavy construction machines, as well as detailed records on the amounts of oil and petrol issued and used. This information now forms part of the case against former commander of the Drina Corps, General Radislav Krstic, currently on trial for crimes committed in Srebrenica in July 1995.

The transport orders, along with intercepted radio-communications between headquarters and units of the RSA, survivors' testimonies and other confiscated military documents, are being used by the prosecution to build a comprehensive and reliable reconstruction of the events that followed the fall of the enclave on 11th July 1995.

The task of the reconstruction was assigned to Richard Butler, a US Army military-intelligence analyst. His testimony for the prosecution lasted for nine working days. (27-30 June and 17-21 July; see Tribunal Update No. 182) Last week, the prosecution presented several records of the use of vehicles which seemed to confirm evidence of the planned and organised nature of the mass executions which followed the fall of Srebrenica.

For example, on 15th July 1995 one truck is logged as having driven to a dam near Petkovci-Petkovci six times, another made the same journey four times. Survivors' testimonies and forensic investigations of the area suggest that between 800 and 1,000 Muslim prisoners were executed at the dam on the night of 14th July. Their bodies were then loaded onto trucks the next morning and taken away to be buried.

On 17th July, another truck made 10 journeys along the Zvornik - Pilice - Kula - Zvornik route. According to the testimony of former execution squad Member, Drazen Erdemovic, some 500 detainees were killed the previous day at the House of Culture in Pilice. An indeterminate number of Muslim men were also killed at a school in Kula, according to statements from survivors.

The use of construction machinery - trench-diggers and earth movers - was logged in equal detail. The Daily Records Book of Orders for the 4th Engineering Company of the Zvornik Brigade that "dredging work (was done) on the Branjevo farm" on 17th July.

Drazen Erdemovic testified that over 1,000 detained men were shot at the farm the day before. The working order records that a trench-digger and earth mover which "dug trenches" for eight and a half hours, were carried to the farm from the base in Zvornik on a big Mercedes truck. Heavy machines, heaps of freshly dug earth and a piles of unburied corpses can be seen in US aerial photographs from 17th July 1995.

Butler acknowledged that the prosecution did not hold similar records of the use of vehicles, machines and fuel in September and October 1995, when a big operation to reopen the mass graves and move corpses to remote and inaccessible locations took place.

However, he pointed out that some documents could be linked with that operation, for example an order

from General Mladic on 14th September 1995 approving the use of 5 tonnes of diesel fuel for "engineering works" by the Drina Corps.

Asked by the prosecutor if General Krstic could have been unaware of the opening of graves and moving of corpses, Butler replied that it was inconceivable that the Commander of the Drina Corps "could not know what was happening in his zone of responsibility for two whole months." By cross referencing the various sources of information, Butler concluded that General Krstic participated in all stages of the planning, execution and co-ordination of the RSA operations in Srebrenica and Zepa.

Indeed, in video archive of a military inspection in December 1995, the chief of general staff of the RSA, General Ratko Mladic, can be seen congratulating members of the Drina Corps on their victory over "Muslim gladiators" in Srebrenica and Zepa. On 13th July 1995, two days after the fall of Srebrenica, General Krstic was promoted from chief of staff to commander of the Drina Corps.

As the video footage was shown, the prosecution abandoned the usual practice of not revealing in public who else might be subject to investigation. Butler was asked directly if he saw any other people in the footage - apart from Generals Mladic and Krstic - who were relevant to the Srebrenica investigation.

Butler then identified Captain, Milan Jolovic, commander of the special "Wolves of the Drina" unit, along with Colonel Ljuba Beara, security chief at the RSA headquarters. In an intercepted communication, Colonel Beara was heard asking General Krstic to send him 15-20 people urgently, as he still had 3,500 "packages" left to "distribute." The prosecution decoded the "packages" as detained Muslims and "distribution" as execution.

Focus: International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia

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