

## **Krstic Trial: Srebrenica Execution Survivors Testify**

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Srebrenica Muslims describe how they escaped the Bosnian Serb firing squads

The prosecution in the trial of General Radislav Krstic last week began to examine the fate of around 15,000 Muslim men who fell into Bosnian Serb hands after the fall of Srebrenica nearly five years ago.

Over 7,500 of them are listed as missing, presumed dead. The remains of about 2,000 have been found in mass graves. And the Tribunal's investigator is said to be examining at least the same number at other sites still to be exhumed.

Five Srebrenica Muslims who survived Bosnian Serb firing squads appeared before the Tribunal last week.

According to their testimonies, Muslim men were either captured or gave themselves up after they fled the enclave, while those who stayed behind in and around the UN compound were separated from women and children.

The escapees marched through mountains and forests for days, dodging shellfire and ambushes, before surrendering. Some were hoodwinked into turning themselves in by Bosnian Serbs soldiers masquerading as UN troops.

The arrested men were loaded on trucks and taken to overcrowded detention centres where they spent the night. While they were there, detainees were led out, dull blows and calls for help were heard, followed by single shots or automatic bursts of gunfire.

The next day they were taken out in groups, their eyes covered and/or their hands tied behind their backs. They were then loaded on to trucks and driven off to execution sites, where they were lined up and shot.

Some of last week's witnesses threw themselves on the ground the moment the Serbs opened fire; others were knocked down by falling bodies or were injured.

The survivors, covered by piles of corpses, lay motionless for several hours. They testified that they could hear bull-dozers digging graves or loading corpses on to trucks. They heard soldiers laugh and joke. When the executioners left, they men crawled or ran to safety.

One survivor, Witness "N", an elderly peasant from the Srebrenica area, claims that he saw General Ratko Mladic, the commander of the Bosnian Serb Army, as many as six times after he'd been arrested, the last time just after he faced the firing squad and, luckily, survived.

The prosecutor asked none of the survivors whether they had seen the defendant General Krstic, the commander of the Drina Corps of the Bosnian Serb Army, which carried out the Srebrenica operation.

For the prosecutor, it was enough that the witnesses confirmed the soldiers involved in the arrest, detention and execution of the Muslim men were wearing Bosnian Serb military fatigues and not blue

police or other kinds of paramilitary uniforms.

The trial of General Krstic will continue on May 22.

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

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