

## **Manjaca Camp "Safest Place" for Prisoners – Bosnian Serb Officer**

**Author:** [Daniella Peled](#)

Defence witness tells judges that maximum was done to follow Geneva Conventions.

A former security officer who served at a Bosnian Serb prison camp during the war in the early 1990s told the Hague trial of Serb army chief Ratko Mladic this week that a "superhuman" effort was made to care for inmates.

Radomir Radinkovic's testimony contradicts evidence previously heard at the Hague tribunals that detainees at the Manjaca camp suffered starvation, forced labour and physical abuse.

Radinkovic was a security officer in the Bosnian Serb army's 1st Krajina Corps, and was stationed in the prison camp from soon after it opened in 1991 until its closure in 1995. From May to November 1992, he was in charge of security and was part of the team that worked to identify and admit prisoners into Manjaca.

In his summary of the witness's written statement, defence lawyer Miodrag Stojanovic said inmates at Manjaca were "treated in accordance with the status of prisoners of war, according to the Geneva Conventions concerning registration and verification, and regular food supplies, sufficient quantities of drinking water and medical care [were provided], regular visits from the ICRC [International Committee of the Red Cross], and accommodation, which meant beds for the officers who were POWs and the rest slept on straw and had a sufficient number of blankets".

During her cross-examination, prosecutor Carolyn Edgerton pointed to incidents of abuse, such as one where two prisoners were beaten to death by military police and another in which 24 detainees suffocated to death in transit from Sanski Most to the camp.

The witness agreed that these events did occur.

The prosecution then went on to discuss the issue of sick, elderly, underage and non-combatant inmates who should not have been in a facility meant for prisoners-of-war.

Edgerton referred to a list of 92 individuals which Radinkovic was asked to draw up in August 1992, after the Bosnian Serb leadership expressed concerns that there were detainees at Manjaca "for whom there is no evidence of... participating in military activities". She said these people were "quite ill and their appearance [was] attracting attention from the media and international organisations".

Among the examples she cited were those of a 29-year-old man with active tuberculosis, a 17-year-old and an elderly man with kidney disease.

Radinkovic agreed he had drawn up such a list.

Edgerton then produced a 1992 telegram from the Bosnian Serb presidency which was forwarded to the witness from his core command. The document granted amnesty to 69 prisoners from Manjaca and another prison camp at Trnopolje. Just three of them were on the list of names he made in August.

"Well, of course we made a list – shall I call it a wish-list – of people who should go, and the command was just supposed to decide which of them, or if all of them, would be decided to leave in various ways through release or exchange," the witness said.

"This is just a token gesture by your leadership to avoid international condemnation, isn't it?" Edgerton asked.

"It's their right and their policy that I didn't go into," he replied. "We did our job professionally, and as for why the authorities decided what they decided – whether to score points with someone else – it's up to them; it had nothing to do with us."

Radinkovic then explained that "we couldn't release them to go home. Physically it was impossible".

Presiding Judge Alphons Orie asked what he meant by that.

"Well, it was impossible, it would have been a sin to release them from the Manjaca camp to go to their own homes," Radinkovic. "If they had been on the receiving end of beatings even there, you can imagine what would have happened outside. So the most logical choice was to let them go somewhere where they

would be given accommodation... logically that was the safest place for them.”

After some discussion of whether the individuals released could have been sent to a third country, Judge Orié said, “You referred to the Geneva Conventions several times. Are you aware that under international humanitarian law, which we find in the Geneva Conventions, that there is individual responsibility which cannot be evaded by saying that you acted under orders. Are you aware of that?”

The witness replied, “Everyone who worked on the team for dealing with prisoners of war had to study the Geneva Conventions and I was aware of them, my colleagues were aware of them.... I claim with full responsibility that we as human beings made a superhuman effort to make these people feel as safe as possible and we did our best so they would be treated according to the Geneva Conventions, if not 100 per cent then up to a maximum.”

Judge Orié asked him whether it had been impossible to fully comply with the Geneva Conventions because of the ongoing conflict.

“Of course,” Radinkovic replied, “because you should all bear in mind that this was 1992, and the population of Republika Srpska was hungry for the most part, that is to say the supplies were very poor and so on and so forth. But the camp commander managed to provide as much as was possible at that point in time. That’s why I’m saying a maximum was given.”

Prosecutors allege that Mladic is responsible for crimes of genocide, persecution, extermination, murder and forcible population transfer. He is also accused of the massacre of more than 7,000 men and boys at Srebrenica in July 1995, and of planning and overseeing the siege of Sarajevo that left nearly 12,000 people dead.

**Daniella Peled is an IWPR editor in London.**

**Location:** Bosnia and Herzegovina

**Topic:** Crimes Against Humanity  
War crimes

**Focus:** ICTY - Ratko Mladić Trial  
International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia

---

**Source URL:** <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/manjaca-camp-safest-place-prisoners-bosnian>