

Mladic Trial Examines Single Bomb Attack

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Prosecutor probes how much witness saw before being made to leave scene.

A former United Nations military observer told the Hague tribunal this week about the effects of a bomb that hit Sarajevo in April 1995.

Thorbjorn Overgard, an officer in the Norwegian Air Force who served with the UN peacekeeping force in Sarajevo during the war, appeared as a prosecution witness in proceedings against wartime Bosnian Serb army commander Ratko Mladic.

His testimony focused on an incident involving a specific type of weapon used in the siege of Sarajevo, an aircraft bomb modified to become a rocket-powered, self-propelled projectile launched from the ground.

In the instance under discussion, a bomb of this description landed in the Hrasnica district of the Bosnian capital on the morning of April 7, 1995. The prosecution says an investigation determined that the bomb was launched from Bosnian Serb army positions in the suburb of Ilidza.

Prosecutors allege that Mladic, the highest authority in the Bosnian Serb army from 1992 to 1996, planned and oversaw the 44-month siege of Sarajevo that ravaged the city and left nearly 12,000 people dead. His army is accused of deliberately sniping at and shelling the city's civilian population in order to "spread terror" among them.

When the bomb was fired at Hrasnica, Overgard said he was staying very nearby and heard it coming in.

"It was just like big aircraft coming. It was unusual sound, so we were on our way to floor when it exploded. We didn't see anything, just heard it," he said.

The bomb blast killed a woman and injured other people.

Because Overgard's testimony in previous trials has been entered into evidence, the prosecution asked very few additional questions.

During the cross-examination, defence lawyer Miodrag Stojanovic asked Overgard what happened when he and his colleagues went to the bomb impact site to investigate shortly afterwards.

At the time, Hrasnica was held by the army of the Bosnian government in Sarajevo.

"We were told by the commander of [Bosnian government army] 4th Motorised Brigade to go back to our accommodation. We did so, and when we arrived there, there were three soldiers at the gate. We went in, and when we tried to go out again, we were not allowed to leave during the investigation or visit by the civilian police," Overgard said.

He said they were not allowed to go out again until that evening, but by then it was getting dark, "so there was not so much we could do".

"Can you remember how long you stayed at the scene [right after the bomb landed] before you were told to leave by members of 4th Motorised Brigade?" Stojanovic asked.

"A maximum of 15 minutes," Overgard said, adding that he and his colleagues were the first ones on the scene.

He said they were not given any reason why they had to leave and return to their accommodation.

"Throughout that whole day, you were not permitted to leave your accommodation at all - is that correct?" Stojanovic asked.

"Yes," Overgard said.

He said he informed his superiors about the situation and some French peacekeepers came to find out what had happened, but once they arrived, they too were not allowed to leave the accommodation.

"When you went back to the scene that evening, did you note any changes compared to the situation in the morning when you first arrived at the scene?" Stojanovic asked.

"People had been around the site there, and one body I saw inside a damaged house had been removed,"

Overgard said. "As darkness was coming, we were not able to see too much. We had to wait until morning when daylight came back."

Stojanovic asked the witness to describe the body he saw on the morning of the incident.

"There were two legs with a uniform on and boots coming out of pile of bricks. The legs were not moving but when I discovered that, that was same moment that commander came [to] order us back to our accommodation," Overgard said.

He said he did not see the body of the woman who he later learned was killed.

"I cannot remember seeing her at the site, no. The information about her came later on," Overgard said.

"You were told to leave the scene at the point where you found that body [with the boots on], is that correct?" Stojanovic asked.

" Yes," Overgard said, proceeding to give more details about what he saw.

"The body - I could just see the legs. The house was demolished; it was fallen down. The area around the site was very much damaged.... But that house especially, that had been closest to the impact and explosion, it was totally demolished," he said.

The indictment against Mladic - which lists 11 counts in total - alleges that he was responsible for crimes of genocide, persecution, extermination, murder and forcible transfer which "contributed to achieving the objective of the permanent removal of Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats from Bosnian Serb-claimed territory".

Mladic was arrested in Serbia in May 2011 after 16 years on the run.

The trial has now been adjourned until April 8.

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