

## **Mladic Witness Recalls Branjevo Preparations**

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

Prosecution contends that ex-army chief was in command of soldiers who carried out the killings.

A former Bosnian Serb soldier has told the trial of Ratko Mladic that he unwittingly supplied the ammunition and equipment used in the massacre of some 1,000 Bosnian Muslim detainees at the Branjevo farm in July 1995.

Dragan Todorovic was giving evidence as a defence witness in the trial of the former Bosnian Serb army chief.

Defence lawyer Branko Lukic began by asking Todorovic about his experiences in his home town of Kladanj in eastern Bosnia in the run-up to the war.

The witness recalled that Bosnian Muslims were organising themselves into armed groups and that he himself had been invited to join the Patriotic League, a paramilitary body that later became the army of Bosnia and Herzegovina, although he did not respond.

"Trust started dying, people started avoiding their former friends and acquaintances, guards started patrolling the town," he recalled, adding that he finally left Kladanj at the end of April or beginning of May 1992.

"A man in uniform came - he was my neighbour. He said, 'Go! I can help you today [but] I can't help you tomorrow'.... I realised it was not a joke. I went to my village, to where my parents lived. I stayed there for a while."

Lukic asked Todorovic whether he knew what happened to the Bosnian Serbs who remained in Kladanj during the war.

"Some of them joined the military and those that refused to join were taken to a camp," he replied, recalling four young men who were relatives of his. They disappeared and their bodies were only found after the war. "Those who were in the camp survived, thanks to the Red Cross organisation that registered them," he added.

Todorovic went on to join the Bosnian Serb army and served in a number of positions. By summer 1995, he was in charge of logistical support with the Vlasenica platoon of the 10th Sabotage Detachment.

Soldiers from this unit took part in the mass execution of more than 1,000 captured Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks) at the Branjevo farm on July 16, 1995. This was part of a series of killings carried out by Serb forces after they overran the Srebrenica enclave on July 11 that year. As commander of the Bosnian Serb army, Mladic is accused of genocide and other crimes in relation to the killing of more than 7,000 Bosniak men and boys over that period.

Todorovic's commander was Milorad Pelemis, who testified as a defence witness in the Mladic case last month. (See **[Witness: Mladic Not in Command of Branjevo Killings](#)**.)

The prosecutor's office in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) regards Pelemis as a war crime suspect and has issued an arrest warrant for him.

Lukic asked the witness about the events of July 11, 1995, when Todorovic was among the Bosnian Serb troops which entered Srebrenica.

The witness said Pelemis ordered them to proceed to the police station and warned them to be on the alert and take no risks as they "could expect anything - an ambush, mines, explosives."

Dragomir Pecanac, intelligence officer from the army's Main Staff and an aide to Mladic, came to their base in Vlasenica a few days later to recruit soldiers for a special operation. This turned out to be the mass killings at the Branjevo farm.

Todorovic said that as logistics officer, he had supplied the equipment for this group, but that neither he nor any of the men knew what the assignment was.

He stressed that at that time, "things were done without any papers, orders".

In cross-examination, prosecuting lawyer Peter McCloskey highlighted the ties between Pecanac and Mladic. He turned to evidence which Todorovic gave at the trial of former Bosnian Serb president Radovan Karadzic to show their close links.

"You've described him as General Mladic's aide de camp or adjutant, haven't you?" he asked.

"Yes, that's how he introduced himself to me, so I stick by that. Sometimes he would say he was chief of security. I don't know what he was; I don't even know what adjutant is," the witness responded.

McCloskey went on to remind the witness of his previous claim "that General Mladic was always with him" (Pecanac).

Todorovic replied that it was Pecanac's responsibility to stay near the army chief, adding that "all the officers of our army liked to be close to General Mladic".

"And you tell the court that Pecanac was always with General Mladic, correct?" McCloskey continued.

"Nearby, by him, around him, whatever all of that mean," the witness responded. "He said he was there. Maybe he was just carrying papers around. I wasn't there...."

The prosecutor continued to press the witness on this point, saying, "As far as you knew, Pecanac would carry out General Mladic's orders, correct?"

"Of course, he wouldn't be carrying out my orders. I carried out the orders of my commander too, whatever it was that he ordered," Todorovic said.

The witness described how on July 15, 1995, Pecanac arrived at their barracks and ordered the officers to get "a group of people" together for an unspecified special task.

Todorovic confirmed, as he has previously done in a number of testimonies, that Drina Corps security chief Vujadin Popovic also came to the barracks on that day.

The witness said that he clearly remembered seeing Popovic's "cherry-red" military vehicle at the gates, but that he never crossed into the barracks.

"I claim with full responsibility to this day that Popovic did not enter the compound. His vehicle was outside the compound about 30 metres away. I know that vehicle."

McCloskey reminded him of previous testimony in which the witness recalled Pecanac talking about another senior officer.

"Did Pecanac say anything about Beara?" he asked.

"That he should see him, meet up with him [in Zvornik]," the witness said.

Ljubisa Beara was security chief in the army's Main Staff. He and Popovic were both found guilty of genocide at the Hague tribunal and sentenced to life imprisonment.

Later, the prosecution returned to events in the summer of 1992. McCloskey asked the witness to verify testimony previously given by Pelemis that a group of Bosniak women were held captive in the village of Pelemisi during that period.

"Yes," the witness replied, adding "They were not held captive - they were brought [there] in order to be exchanged for some people in Kladanj."

Asked whether this meant the women were prisoners, Todorovic said he "didn't ask too many questions... there was no prison, there were no bars on any windows. The houses were just normal village houses".

McCloskey asked whether the young women were "fraternising" with Bosnian Serb soldiers. Pressed on this, Todorovic said there might have been some "socialising".

He said that were not enough soldiers available to guard the women properly, but that an old man they called Uncle Momir was instructed to watch them. "If he can be considered as a person who guarded them, I don't know," he added.

McCloskey raised the issue of one of the captives, a 16-year-old girl who was raped, and asked whether this was reported to Pelemis.

"Yes, and he punished that soldier," the witness replied. "I know that he was beaten, that a report was drafted and presented to the brigade; that's all I know about that case."

McCloskey then asked several times whether Todorovic knew the name of the rapist. The witness said that

he did not.

The prosecution went on to state that the body of the 16-year-old was later found in a mass grave five kilometres from Pelemisi, along with the remains of 59 other people.

“How did she get there?” McCloskey asked.

“Please believe me when I say that I don’t know whether she was returned to Vlasenica again or taken from Vlasenica. I wasn’t there, I cannot comment,” the witness said.

McCloskey asked him whether he knew what happened to the other women found in the mass grave.

“No,” Todorovic replied.

“Too many mass graves, too many rapes?” the prosecutor asked. “Is that why you can’t remember?”

“I don’t know,” the witness responded. “All I know is that I did not hurt anyone and that I can stand before anyone, all those who were there, who met me, who got to know me from the Muslim ethnic group. I am available to all of them. I cannot comment about who did what. I don’t have information about that.”

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

**Location:** Bosnia and Herzegovina

**Topic:** Crimes Against Humanity  
War crimes

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

---

**Source URL:** <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/mladic-witness-recalls-branjevo-preparations>