

Omarska Camp Trial

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Defence witness opts to give evidence at a "safe distance"

A defence witness in the trial of "camp visitor" Zoran Zigic last week opted to give evidence via video link because of his fear of being arrested.

The witness, DD9, a former guard at the Keraterm detention camp, was one of five people named in the original indictment for crimes at the camp.

He refused to appear at The Hague despite tribunal assuring him that he would not be detained.

Former chief prosecutor Louise Arbour dropped both the case against the five and charges against nine others accused of crimes at Omarska in May 1998. Arbour said the decision had been made in an "attempt to balance the available resources within the tribunal and in recognition of the need to prosecute cases fairly and expeditiously".

DD9 and the others were deemed "small fry", people without command positions in the camps, but facing charges of individual involvement in beatings and killings of particular inmates. (See Tribunal Update No. 75).

Despite being guaranteed "safe passage", DD9 preferred to appear at a tribunal office 1,700 kilometres away in Banja Luka.

In early June 1992, DD9 was a guard at Keraterm alongside Zigic. Like other defence witnesses he described the accused as a "split personality... a nice man when sober, dangerous when drunk".

According to DD9, Zigic was a danger to all when drunk and not just to inmates at the camps. "Shouting, swearing, insulting and occasionally slapping someone" were typical of a drunk Zigic, DD9 said. "But he did that not only to Muslim and Croat inmates but to his Serb friends as well."

Prosecution witnesses claimed Zigic was fearsome and threatening whether sober or drunk. He appeared at all the Prijedor camps, former inmates said, abusing, torturing and killing detainees.

Arbour left Zigic on the revised indictments for Omarska and Keraterm, although he too held no command position, because, as she put it, he had particularly distinguished himself through his brutal and bestial treatment of prisoners.

Witness DD9, who had been accused of taking part in some beatings and killings alongside Zigic, said via the video link that Zigic never beat anyone, let alone murdered inmates.

During cross-examination, prosecutor Susan Somers revealed that in January 2001 DD9 had talked to Hague investigators. Somers said DD9 had offered "completely opposite statements" during those interviews and accused the witness of lying.

Focus: International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia

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