

Serb Officers Relive Killings

Author: [IWPR](#)

A Yugoslav Army intelligence report gives a unique insight into the enormity of war crimes in the Kosovo enclave last spring

War-weary Serb officers have spoken for the first time of sickening atrocities committed by the Yugoslav Army in Kosovo during the NATO bombing campaign.

One field commander admitted he watched in horror as a soldier decapitated a three-year-old boy in front of his family. Another described how tanks in his unit indiscriminately shelled Albanian villages before paramilitary police moved in and massacred the survivors.

The shocking confessions were made by officers who took part in a survey commissioned by the Army Intelligence Unit in January and February this year.

They say the internal report gives an insight into the scale of the Kosovo massacres for the first time - and they claim to be shocked by the enormity of the crimes. Particularly disturbing are the combined testimonies of field officers, which suggest that VJ units were responsible for the deaths of at least 800 Albanian children below the age of five.

Several officers interviewed in the survey told IWPR the research was aimed at gauging their morale against the backdrop of growing tension between Serbia and Montenegro.

The veterans said they were appalled by the prospect of mounting a military campaign against their ethnic cousins. They claimed to have been traumatised by what they had seen in Kosovo and some had even taken to drink in a bid to blot out the memories.

One officer, Drazen, who took part in the Kosovo campaign, said, "I watched with my own eyes as a reservist lined up around 30 Albanian women and children against a wall. I thought he just wanted to frighten them, but then he crouched down behind an anti-aircraft machine-gun and pulled the trigger. The half-inch bullets just tore their bodies apart. It looked like a scene from a cheap movie, but it really happened."

Drazen concludes, "I don't know how I will live with these memories, how I'll be able to raise my own children. I'm not willing to accept the collective guilt. I want to see those who committed these atrocities stand trial for their crimes."

He added, "My grandmother is Montenegrin. I'd rather kill myself than go through all that again in Montenegro."

For many of the officers, Belgrade's propaganda is wearing thin. The commander of one tank unit was quick to dismiss Serbian claims that the Kosovo campaign was aimed at crushing Albanian separatists. "For the entire time I was in Kosovo, I never saw a single enemy soldier and my unit was never once involved in firing at military targets."

He said state-of-the-art tanks were sent out against defenceless Albanian villages. "The tanks, which cost

\$2.5 million each, were used to slaughter Albanian children," said the officer. "I am ashamed."

A reconnaissance officer for an engineering brigade said Yugoslav Army reservists in Kosovo ran amok while their commanders did little to intervene, "During one ethnic cleansing operation in a village in south-eastern Kosovo, we gave the villagers half an hour to leave their homes.

"They were standing in a long line along the road leading out of the settlement. A reservist nicknamed Crni (Black) went up to an old man who was holding a child aged around three or four. He grabbed the toddler from the man's arms and demanded a ransom of 20,000 German marks. The Albanian only had 5,000. Crni took the child by the hair, pulled out a knife and hacked off its head.

"5,000 is only enough for the body,' he said and walked off past the other villagers, carrying the child's head by its hair."

Vladimir went on, "All of this took place in front of dozens of people. We were all in a state of shock: some soldiers vomited, while our young second lieutenant fainted at the terrible sight of the headless body writhing in the dust.

"Crni was later declared insane, discharged and sent home. But he is still free to walk the streets, even though he committed this terrible crime."

One retired veteran of the wars in Bosnia and Croatia says the Yugoslav Army has been responsible for the deaths of countless children over the past decade.

"I was trained at the country's top military academies and commanded a crack infantry unit," he said. "Kosovo was the third occasion the army was responsible for the deaths of children. I didn't see so much of it in Kosovo because I was more senior by that time -- but I fought on the front line in Croatia and saw some terrible things then."

At an international conference in Ulcinj, Montenegro, entitled "The Truth, Responsibility and Reconciliation", Baskim Hisari, who represents the Foundation for Humanitarian Law in Pristina, focused on alleged war crimes committed by the Yugoslav Army.

"Members of the MUP, the Army and the paramilitary units were responsible for the deaths of hundreds of young men," said Hisari. "Many families have been left with no male relatives at all.

"In the village of Bela Crkva alone, 64 people were shot down as they ran away from Yugoslav Army tanks. One man, Sabri Popaj, buried them all, including his two children.

"Eighty-three villagers were killed in Celina whilst, in Velika Krusa, 206 people were executed and another 117 are still missing. There's nothing but a few blackened bones in the village now - some of them children's.

"There are parents who lost as many as seven children. Jovca Berisa, from Suva Reka, lost her two children as well as 21 members of her family."

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