

Srebrenica Defendant Allegedly Seen at Massacre Site

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Several prosecution witnesses tell court Drago Nikolic was present at the site where 1,000 Muslims from Srebrenica were executed.

The trial of seven high-ranking Bosnian Serb military and police officers this week heard from three prosecution witnesses who said defendant Drago Nikolic was present at the scene of killings of Bosnian Muslims after the fall of Srebrenica.

Tanacko Tanic, former treasurer of the Bosnian Serb army's Zvornik Brigade, told the court he saw Nikolic at the Orahovac school, where the indictment alleges that 1,000 Bosnian Muslim men were executed.

Nikolic, the former chief of security of the Zvornik Brigade, is accused of genocide and war crimes along with Ljubisa Beara, Ljubomir Borovcanin, Vujadin Popovic and Vinko Pandurevic. Radivoje Miletic and Milan Gvero are charged with war crimes and crimes against humanity for allegedly blocking aid and supplies to Srebrenica.

They all face charges for two separate but connected plans: one to "force the Muslim population from the Srebrenica and Zepa enclaves" and the second "to murder all the able-bodied men captured from the Srebrenica enclave".

In court this week, Tanic said he worked in the financial section of the Zvornik barracks and didn't take part in any combat during his time in the military because he was not prepared to carry a weapon.

He said that on July 14, 1995, he was in the barracks when another officer told him to grab his gun, because prisoners were escaping from the Orahovac school. He followed the soldier, and when he arrived, saw two dead bodies and "a pile of clothing and a pair of crutches" by the playground fence.

"It was obvious this was organised. There were children. People were detained. It became apparent there was going to be an execution," said Tanic.

Tanic said he saw Nikolic in the schoolyard. "There was no doubt it was him," he said.

He was also told that Popovic was there but was unable to identify him.

The week's other two witnesses supported Tanic's testimony that Nikolic was present in Zvornik at the time of the executions.

Nebojsa Jeremic, a military policeman whose office was in the Zvornik barracks near the Orahovac school, told the court that on July 14 Nikolic came into his office with two Serb soldiers who were accused of "helping the enemy"- giving food and water to four Muslim men who had survived the Branjevo Farm massacre.

The indictment alleges the four were later executed.

Jeremic said Nikolic wanted criminal charges filed against the Serbs who had helped them, and said the two Serb soldiers looked “frightened, thin, with their clothes in shreds”.

He said Nikolic was in the office when the first man was brought in and slapped him when he refused to talk. Jeremic said the soldier then confessed to helping the four men, and Nikolic left soon after.

A third witness this week testified that on the evening of July 13, he was ordered to replace Nikolic as the duty officer at the Zvornik Brigade’s forward command post, because Nikolic was called away unexpectedly.

Mihajlo Galic, former assistant for personnel and recruitment in the Zvornik Brigade staff, said he didn’t see Nikolic at the post when he arrived but was told he had been there.

He said the order to replace Nikolic was unusual given the lateness of the hour, around 11pm. He also said it was out of the ordinary that Nikolic had already left when Galic arrived to take his place.

Galic’s immediate supervisor at the time was Dragan Obrenovic, who pleaded guilty to charges against him in 2003.

As a part of his plea agreement, Obrenovic wrote a statement in which he said on the evening of July 13, Nikolic told him he had to leave the forward command post so he could prepare for the arrival of a “huge number of Muslims” who were being transferred from Bratunac to Zvornik.

During cross examination, Stephane Bourgon, Nikolic’s lawyer, argued that Galic was never the duty officer at the command post, pointing out a discrepancy between Galic’s statements in 2001 and 2002 about his duties.

The seven accused, all high-ranking officials from the Bosnian Serb army and the military police, are alleged to be among the most responsible for the July 1995 Srebrenica massacre, in which more than 8,000 Muslim men and boys were summarily executed.

They have all pleaded not guilty to the charges against them.

The trial, which began on July 14, 2006, is the largest case before the tribunal. It will continue next week.

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