

Srebrenica Trial

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Expert witness assesses key radio intercept evidence

An alleged intercepted radio conversation in which former Bosnian Serb Drina Corps commander General Radislav Krstic is said to give an order to kill Muslim soldiers came under scrutiny last week .

A British expert witness, Dr Peter French, told the court he could not say conclusively whether the recorded voice was that of Krstic. In the intercept, prosecutors say Krstic can be heard issuing the order, "Kill them all!"

Krstic is accused of genocide for his role in the Srebrenica massacre, which claimed the lives of at least 7,800 Muslim men and boys.

Prosecutors presented the recording in November 2000 during their cross-examination of Krstic. On it one of the speakers identifies himself as "Krstic" and is addressed by the other participant as "general". (For a transcript of that conversation see Tribunal Update No. 197).

Prosecutors claim the recording is of a conversation between Krstic and Major Obrenovic, chief of staff of the Zvornik Brigade of the Bosnian Serb Army, on August 2, 1995.

At the time, the Zvornik Brigade was "combing the area" for the remnants of a large group of Muslim men and boys who had tried to break through from Srebrenica to Tuzla.

One voice says occasional stray Muslims were being "caught". The voice allegedly belonging to Krstic says, "Kill them all!" and "Don't leave anyone alive."

On hearing the recording, Krstic said it was "one hundred per cent fabrication".

French, an expert in analysing speech and language, said the recording was inconclusive. He said its poor quality and short duration meant he could not decide whether it belonged to Krstic or not. On a probability scale of minus five to plus five, French said he would give a score of zero.

A linguistics expert, a protected witness from the United States, had better news for prosecutors. On the basis of his knowledge of different speech patterns in Bosnia, he concluded the recording was of a conversation between "speakers of ethnic Serb background".

The expert said it would be "very difficult for Bosnian Muslims to imitate the speech of Bosnian Serbs".

Finally the prosecution scored a partial victory in proving the authenticity of the recording. A tape of the same conversation, recorded by a different tapping station, has been found.

The Bosnian army intercepted and recorded transmissions from the Bosnian Serb military headquarters from two locations, Okresanica and Golija. On August 2, 1995, both stations recorded the conversation.

Operators who intercepted the message, wrote it down by hand in their notebooks, later typed it out and sent it to higher command for analyses, testified last week.

Still under dispute, however, is when the prosecution came into possession of these recordings and why the intercepts were not presented during the prosecution case.

Defence lawyers argue the tapes should have been disclosed alongside other prosecution evidence.

Location: Bosnia and Herzegovina

Focus: International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia

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