

Srebrenica Trial: Dutch Soldiers Recount Fall Of Enclave

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Tribunal Update 170, Last Week in The Hague (27 March - 1 April, 2000)

Three former members of the Dutch Battalion, DutchBat, stationed in the enclave in July 1995, appeared for the prosecution - corporal David Vaasen, captain Leendert van Dujin and protected witness "F".

The witnesses explained that following the DutchBat's failed attempt to protect the safe area with a human shield of around 30 Dutch soldiers, the 'blue helmets' were issued with orders, "not to be aggressive towards the Serbs." DutchBat command ordered the soldiers to shoulder their light infantry weapons or place them inside their armoured vehicles.

DutchBat in Srebrenica did not have enough people and the officers were under considerable stress, the witnesses said. The chain of command fell apart, leaving the soldiers to provide what help they could to the Muslim refugees flooding into the United Nations base at Potocari.

Over the next two days, however, the base and the surrounding area were emptied of around 30,000 refugees and at least 7,500 people went "missing" in the process.

In contrast to the ineffectual DutchBat operation, the witnesses testified that the Army of Republika Srpska, VRS, under the command of General Ratko Mladic "functioned perfectly."

Witness "F" described the capture of Srebrenica as a "well planned, organised and precisely executed operation." According to him, the Bosnian Serb chain of command, "functioned very well, everything was properly oiled, it was precisely known who should do what."

The same witness said that the Drina Corps, under the command of Krstic, comprised "disciplined and experienced soldiers" under a "very good command" and that Krstic had "excellent control" over the operation to cleanse the enclave.

According to witness "F", Krstic was a constant and central presence during all the events at Potocari. Krstic was always in the area between the entrance to the UN base, the place where the refugees were boarded onto buses and trucks, and the so-called White House, where separated Muslim men were interrogated and, as it later turned out, killed.

Part of a group of between eight to ten senior VRS officers, Krstic supervised proceedings, ensuring "everything was unfolding according to plan." From his command post by Potocari, Krstic "issued orders and received reports from the field," witness "F" said.

Laughter often drifted from the group of VRS officers, leading witness "F" to conclude that Krstic and his colleagues found everything "very amusing."

Van Dujin testified that during a conversation with Mladic, when the Dutch officer had described Holland's multi-ethnic society, the Bosnian Serb commander had retorted that in ten years time the VRS "will be defending Holland from Muslims."

The prosecution's final witness last week was Kenyan Colonel Joseph Kingori, a former UN Military Observer in Bosnia. Kingori testified that on the eve of the attack on Srebrenica, VRS officers openly threatened to wipe out the entire Muslim population of Srebrenica "if they don't leave." Kingori said he believed it was obvious that "something was being planned."

Krstic's defence team, led by Belgrade lawyer Nenad Petrusic, also managed to score some points during cross-examination of the prosecution witnesses.

The witnesses confirmed that the various armed units, which entered Srebrenica on July 11 - including paramilitary units like Arkan's "Tigers", the "Drina River Wolves", VRS infantry and the Drina Corps - acted independently and had their own chains of command.

According to witness "F", the "disciplined army" took part in the first phase of the operation. The "Rambo-like types," who "went on a rampage, plundering and killing appeared after them," witness "F" said.

A significant number of civilian and military police also appeared in Potocari on July 12 and 13, the witnesses confirmed. The defence argues that it was these forces, which were not under Krstic's command, which perpetrated the worst atrocities, including the mass executions of detained men.

Finally, the DutchBat witnesses confirmed that, in the days preceding the fall of Srebrenica armed Muslim forces did put up some resistance to the Bosnian Serb advance.

Kingori, however, who had been responsible for the demilitarisation of the safe haven, testified that the VRS had little to fear from the Muslim forces, which had surrendered virtually all their heavy weapons over to the UN peacekeepers.

Last week, the trial chamber also heard from several Srebrenica survivors. Some had survived by chance, others thanks to help from Serb colleagues and friends. One, protected witness "H", had feigned madness.

These witnesses described what happened in and around the UN base at Potocari during the two days following the arrival of Bosnian Serb forces - the panic among the refugees, the separation of the men from the women and children, the removal of girls, the killings and the suicides.

During cross-examination, the defence attempted to highlight inconsistencies in the witness statements given to Bosnian and Hague investigators and during the testimonies given to the court.

The trial of General Krstic will continue this week.

Location: Bosnia and Herzegovina

Focus: International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia

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