

Trbic Said Srebrenica "Under Control"

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ICTY

Intercepted conversation suggests Bosnian Serb officer may have been aware of Srebrenica massacre was taking place.

A Bosnian Serb officer said everything was "under control" during a radio conversation intercepted around the time of the massacre in Srebrenica, according to transcripts submitted as evidence at his war crimes trial in Sarajevo.

A former soldier whose identity is being concealed for safety reasons and who is known only as A5 told the trial of Milorad Trbic that he had intercepted the conversation while serving in the Bosnian government army, and identified the handwriting of the transcript as his own.

The Bosnian Serb army or VRS seized the enclave of Srebrenica in July 1995, separated out 8,000 males and killed them - Europe's worst act of mass murder since the Second World War.

Trbic, a former captain in the security detachment of the VRS Zvornik Brigade, is accused of conspiring to kill men from Srebrenica who had either surrendered or been captured. He is also accused of trying to conceal the killings by reburying bodies exhumed from mass graves.

The conversation under discussion in court was between VRS officers Radislav Krstic, Vinko Pandurevic and Trbic, and the transcripts were made by Bosnian army specialists on the opposing side in the conflict.

At the time of the massacre, Krstic was commander of the Drina Corps and Pandurevic was commander of the Zvornik Brigade.

Krstic was sentenced to 35 years in prison for crimes committed in Srebrenica, while Pandurevic is on trial in The Hague along with six other former high-ranking Bosnian Serb police and military officials.

Krstic only took over his role in the town on July 13, 1995, so the monitored conversation is likely to have been around the time when most of the killings took place.

According to part of the transcript read out in court this week, Krstic at one point asked Trbic whether there were any new developments, to which the latter replied, "Everything is under control".

Three other protected witnesses also gave testimony this week at Trbic's trial, all of them testifying from a separate room and under special protective measures.

In July 1995, witnesses A22, A10 and A6 were stationed at a Bosnian army radio interception post on Mount Majevisa, north-west of Sarajevo,

Witness A10 described the equipment used to intercept radio communications, as well as the procedures followed when reporting conversations. He described how intercepted conversations were recorded and the transcripts filed in log books, with the time, date and names of the participants clearly marked.

“After this was completed, we would write a report and send it to army headquarters,” he said.

According to A10, strict filing procedures meant there could be no mistakes.

During cross examination, prosecutor Kwai Hong Ip presented copies of log books, although their contents were not discussed.

Defence lawyer Milan Trbojevic protested fiercely against introducing these documents because they were “almost illegible”.

He said there was no proof that the witnesses giving the testimony were in fact those who had made the transcripts of the alleged conversations between Trbic and his superior officers.

However, the trial chamber ruled to accept the documents.

The second witness, A22, said his unit had to “intercept, record and report” radio traffic from Serb forces in the area.

He confirmed that the names of participants in these conversations were always noted down, because they would either introduce themselves or the listener would recognise the voices.

Witnesses A22 and A5 spoke about the importance of reporting everything they heard as accurately as possible, because they knew that their reports would later be used for planning military operations so any mistake could potentially cause losses on their side.

“All the records had to be made accurately. The written notes were typed into a computer and someone would then take the documents to headquarters,” testified witness A5.

The trial will resume on January 21, with more testimony from prosecution witnesses.

At that hearing, the trial chamber is also expected to rule on whether to allow the prosecutor to admit as evidence copies of testimony given by witnesses at other trials concerning Srebrenica, instead of inviting them all to the Bosnian court.

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Focus: International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia

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