

## **UK Journalist Recalls Bosnian Detention Camps**

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Mladic lawyer questions Ed Vulliamy on objective reporting.

When British journalist Ed Vulliamy once again took the stand at the Hague tribunal to testify about discovering Bosnian Serb-run detention camps in 1992, lawyers for Ratko Mladic repeatedly questioned his objectivity and partiality.

“Is your testimony neutral or partial?” asked Dan Ivetic, Mladic’s defence lawyer.

“My testimony today is answering questions. If you’re asking me, am I going to give you objective facts? Yes,” Vulliamy replied. “If you’re asking me whether I’m sitting here and going to be neutral between the people who survived and [who have] been bereaved by the camps and massacres, and the people who did it, no. I would be arguing against myself. The testimony itself is objective and factual.”

Vulliamy, a long-term correspondent for the London-based Guardian newspaper, was one of the first journalists allowed inside the Omarska and Trnopolje detention camps in northwest Bosnia during the war, alongside a crew from the ITN television network.

He has written extensively on how he visited the canteen at Omarska and observed “cadaverous” prisoners there, including one who was videotaped telling journalists, “I don’t want to tell any lies, but I cannot tell the truth. Thank you for coming.”

Vulliamy and the ITN crew were not allowed to enter a nearby hangar where they suspected more detainees were being kept.

Video footage taken during Vulliamy’s visit to Trnopolje, showing emaciated prisoners standing behind barbed wire, made headlines around the world. The international uproar that ensued contributed to getting the camps shut down.

The detention camps have been the subject of many other trials at the tribunal, and Vulliamy has testified in seven of them, including that of former Bosnian Serb president Radovan Karadzic. (See **UK War Reporter Testifies in Karadzic Trial**.)

Judges in one case determined that detainees at Omarska were “ferociously” beaten and “tortured in front of each other” before being killed. In previous judgements, conditions in the Omarska camp were found to be “appalling” with detainees given very little food and water.

Hague judges have also found that the Trnopolje camp was “brutal”. though not as bad as Omarska and another nearby camp called Keraterm.

Because Vulliamy has testified previously, prosecutors this week questioned him only briefly and showed video footage from the ITN report.

They also asked him to confirm that his small group was assigned a military escort during the trip to the camps, and that there appeared to be a “seamless” relationship between the escort and the civil authorities running the facilities. At the time, Vulliamy said, “we weren’t making distinctions” between the two.

Prosecutors allege that Mladic, the highest authority in the Bosnian Serb army from 1992 to 1996, is responsible for crimes of genocide, persecution, extermination, murder and forcible transfer which “contributed to achieving the objective of the permanent removal of Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats from Bosnian Serb-claimed territory”.

He is also accused of planning and overseeing the 44-month siege of Sarajevo that left nearly 12,000 people dead, as well as the massacre of more than 7,000 men and boys at Srebrenica in July 1995.

Mladic was arrested in Serbia in May 2011 after 16 years on the run.

During the cross-examination, defence lawyer Ivetic read out quotes attributed to Vulliamy and asked him to comment on them.

One quote, which Ivetic said appeared in a 2009 issue of the political magazine Counter Punch, quotes Vulliamy as saying that “there are times in history when neutrality is not neutral at all, but complicity in a crime”.

Vulliamy did not deny making this statement. "I do think there are times when neutrality is complicit. The neutrality of the international community in the war in Bosnia was one, and there are others," he said.

Ivetic then cited an April 1998 article which Vulliamy wrote about testifying in trials at the Hague tribunal, where he alleged that the United Nations operation in Bosnia adopted a position of "cowardly and callous neutrality".

"Perhaps the language is strong, but I still think that the performance of the United Nations in allowing the slaughter to continue as it did was cowardly, and in some ways callous, yes," Vulliamy said.

Ivetic pointed to another quote attributed to Vulliamy in the British Journalism Review, where the witness apparently said that he was "embarrassed" by how objective he had been in his reporting.

Vulliamy said he had never read that particular publication, but if he did say those words, "what I meant was that I'm embarrassed by how neutral I had been in some of the reporting, in hindsight".

"At the start, one continues to try to see a balance in things, and this balance is in my early reporting. I'm quite embarrassed by that yes, that's what I meant," he added.

Ivetic then read out yet another quote attributed to Vulliamy which states that "with Omarska and Trnopolje, objective coverage of the war became a silly notion".

Vulliamy pointed out that the quote was in Counter Punch magazine, which was itself quoting the British Journalism Review, a publication he had not seen. He did not, however, deny the statement.

"I did, during the three years of experiencing the war in Bosnia as a reporter and a human, come to take the side of what I saw as resistance to what was happening against the perpetrators," he said.

Presiding Judge Alphons Orie then intervened in order to "understand the jist" of what Vulliamy was saying, since the witness had earlier drawn a distinction between objectivity and neutrality.

"Inasmuch as objectivity is fact specific, it is what you see - that is never a silly notion," Vulliamy said.

However, "to have remained neutral over what I saw and what was clearly going on over those three years... it doesn't make sense to me as a human being. I'm unable to be neutral in such situations as camps and massacres and rape," he added.

Later, Ivetic asked whether it was correct that Vulliamy was "glad" when another foreign journalist, Tim Judah, was not allowed to go on the trip to the Omarska and Trnopolje camps.

Vulliamy responded that this was only true in the "professional sense" because Judah worked for a rival newspaper at the time.

"Did you have feeling that this trip was going to be a significant boost to [your] journalism career?" Ivetic asked.

"I did not think in those terms... I certainly don't now," Vulliamy responded.

When asked about the camps, Vulliamy often referred to the ongoing research he has done on the subject since 1992.

Ivetic asked the witness to distinguish between what was "eyewitness, objective, factual observation" and what was "quasi-expert review".

Vulliamy replied that this idea of a "quasi-review" was incorrect and that he had interviewed numerous "survivors and those who had been bereaved".

"Are you testifying in their names, sir?" Ivetic asked.

"No, absolutely not," Vulliamy answered.

The trial continues next week.

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**Location:** Bosnia and Herzegovina

**Topic:** International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia

**Focus:** ICTY - Ratko Mladić Trial

**Source URL:** <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/uk-journalist-recalls-bosnian-detention-camps>