

Vukovar Three Defense Case Ends

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The defense case in the trial of three former Yugoslav People's Army, JNA, officers accused of responsibility for the November 1991 massacre in Vukovar finished on December 8.

Mile Mrksic, Miroslav Radic, and Veselin Sljivancanin are on trial for allegedly commanding and supervising the soldiers who killed more than 200 Croat civilians in the eastern Croatian town of Vukovar, after it was overrun by Yugoslav forces in 1991.

The indictment states that on November 19 that year, JNA troops arrived at Vukovar hospital where hundreds of Croats and non-Serbs were seeking refuge. The following day some 300 civilians and patients from the hospital were loaded onto buses, and driven to Ovčara farm. There the prisoners were beaten, and at least 200 were summarily executed.

During the defense case - which began on August 29 and ended last week - the lawyers of the Vukovar Three called a total of 36 witnesses.

The 14-week defense case saw a number of conflicting testimonies.

The lawyer representing Mrksic, the first accused, claims his client went to Belgrade late in the evening on November 20, and was not told about the mistreatment of prisoners at Ovčara.

This contradicted prosecution witnesses who testified that they had told Mrksic that prisoners transported to the Ovčara had been beaten.

Defense witnesses for Sljivancanin testified that he was not in charge of the evacuation of detainees from Vukovar hospital, as alleged by the prosecution. This contradicted statements they had previously given to the tribunal's prosecutors in which they implicated the former major.

The defense for Radic, a former captain, also produced an alibi - witnesses called in his defense corroborated testimony he gave in which he claimed he couldn't have participated in the executions, because he was at a dinner party in Vukovar when they took place.

Marks Moore, prosecutor in the case, said he would be applying for permission to call further witnesses to challenge some of the evidence presented by the defense.

If the chamber agrees to this, the witnesses will testify at the start of next year. Closing arguments will then take place at the end of February and the beginning of March.

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