

## **Wartime Bosnian Serb Officer Blames Arkan for Sanski Most Crimes**

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Defence witness recalls Muslims and Croat living in the municipality until the paramilitaries arrived.

A former Bosnian Serb army officer told the trial of Ratko Mladic this week that the paramilitaries known as Arkan's Tigers were responsible for crimes against non-Serb civilians in the Sanski Most area in 1995.

Defence witness Dusko Corokalo, an ex-security officer in the 6th Sana Brigade, said that Muslims and Croats were still living in the municipality before Zeljko Raznatovic, known as Arkan, moved his Tigers into the area.

"Until the arrival of Arkan in 1995, there were several neighbourhoods with more than 1,000 inhabitants of Muslim and Croat ethnicity in Sanski Most. Arkan and his men did harm to these non-Serbs and also arrested and mistreated Serb army members," the witness statement read out by defence lawyer Dragan Ivetic said.

The Tigers became known for brutal crimes against civilians during the takeover of towns in Bosnia and Croatia.

Arkan was indicted by the Hague tribunal, but was assassinated in Belgrade in 2000 before he could be arrested to face trial.

Prosecutors allege that Mladic was responsible for crimes of genocide, persecution, extermination, murder and forcible population transfer. He is accused of the massacre of more than 7,000 men and boys at Srebrenica in July 1995, and of planning and overseeing the siege of Sarajevo that left nearly 12,000 people dead.

Corokalo claimed that residents of the villages of Hrustovo and Vrhpolje had been supplying Muslim fighters with weapons. He was tasked with interviewing able-bodied men from those villages and gathering intelligence from them.

During the cross-examination, prosecutor Edward Jeremy read from a police report describing a May 1992 incident in Sanski Most in which 2,000 civilians were captured but "no significant amount of weapons had been found".

The witness disagreed with this statement, arguing that it came down to "a difference in terminology".

"They use this term there in this report, but whether a significant quantity is five or ten, or what that means to an ordinary man, that's a debatable issue. But weapons were there," Corokalo said.

Jeremy moved on to discuss the departure of non-Serbs from Sanski Most.

"You're aware that in August 1992, the civilian and military organs of Sanski Most launched an initiative whereby Muslims and Croats who wanted to stay in Sanski Most were required to make a written request to stay and to provide a declaration of loyalty," he said. "You're aware of that, yes?"

The witness said he was.

"This was the procedure that had been followed by those Muslims and Croats who were still in Sanski Most in autumn 1995 when Arkan was present, yes?"

"I suppose that's how it was, I don't really know for certain. I had a [Muslim] colleague who worked at the bank and who until the very end was with me and he played football with me," Corokalo said, adding that he never asked any non-Serbs whether they had signed a loyalty oath.

The witness reiterated that it was Arkan and his men who were "absolutely" responsible for all the crimes against non-Serbs in the area. "because those [Muslim] men who were there, there was no reason whatsoever - I mean had we wanted to do anything, we could have done it a long time before. But when they arrived there, Arkan's men, then they handled these people, and I was busy at the time but I know that there were ten or so people I knew that I didn't see there any more."

Jeremy went on to show the witness a memo signed by Mladic, dated September 23, 1995 and sent to several parties including Bosnian Serb president Radovan Karadzic and the interior ministry.

The despatch noted that Arkan and his men had been “bullying VRS [Bosnian Serb army] officers” as well as “arresting and abusing non-Serbs.

“The presence of Arkan’s paramilitary units precipitated armed clashes and incidents with individuals and some VRS units, and upset the population at large after word got out that he arrested all the Muslims in Sanski Most and liquidated a certain number of loyal Muslim citizens – including family members of some VRS servicemen – justifying it publicly as liquidation of an infiltrated sabotage group,” the memo read.

Mladic then called on Karadzic to revoke the powers of arrest granted to Arkan.

Turning to Mladic’s wartime notebooks, Jeremy described how the army head subsequently raised Arkan’s presence in Sanski Most with two senior figures in neighbouring Serbia, Momcilo Perisic, who was chief of the general staff of the Yugoslav army, and Jovica Stanisic, who headed Serbia’s State Security Service.

Arkan was then moved to Prijedor and tasked with arresting Serb military deserters.

“Following the conduct of Arkan and his men as described by you and Mladic, rather than arrest Arkan or kick him out of the VRS area of responsibility, the VRS started coordinating with Arkan in Prijedor. Were you aware of that?” Jeremy asked.

Corokalo said he had known nothing about that decision.

Jeremy went on to ask the witness whether he was aware Arkan went on to commit the same crimes in Prijedor that he had carried out in Sanski Most.

“No, I couldn’t possibly have known that,” the witness replied.

Jeremy then read from a newspaper article from the time about Arkan’s subsequent actions.

“According to field reports, after the launch of the offensive on western Bosnia, Arkan’s men launched a campaign of enforcing order in a manner already seen in eastern Slavonia, by forcibly recruiting people, shaving their heads and beating them if necessary,” the report said. “Nevertheless, it seems that for now, Zeljko Raznatovic works more for the benefit than the detriment of the Republika Srpska authorities. One of the reasons why the misunderstandings have been so quickly ironed out might be the unequivocal success of the operation launched in late September in which the area around Prijedor was cleansed of Muslims and Croats.”

In his re-examination of the witness, defence lawyer Ivetic read out part of the testimony of a survivor of an incident in late May 1992 – long before Arkan arrived in the area – in which Muslim villagers were captured and killed.

“That unit which came to our village on May 25, 1992 was commanded by a commander with long black hair tied in a ponytail. He wore round dark glasses; he wore black leather gloves which he never took off,” Ivetic read.

Corokalo said he had not had anyone fitting that description in his brigade.

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