

Witness "Did Not Hear" Mladic Order Killings

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But ex-army head "would have seen" the infamous Directive Seven.

A witness testifying this week at the trial of former Bosnian Serb military commander Ratko Mladic said he had never heard the accused issuing an "explicit" order for the murder of more than 7,000 Bosniak men and boys after the fall of Srebrenica in July 1995.

Ljubomir Obradovic, a retired general in the Bosnian Serb army, VRS, appeared at Mladic's trial as a prosecution witness. He has already testified at two other trials at the Hague tribunal: the trials of Radivoje Miletic, who was Obradovic's direct superior in 1995, and Zdravko Tolimir, Mladic's former assistant for intelligence and security.

Ratko Mladic is accused of the massacre which ensued after VRS forces overran Srebrenica in July 1995, resulting in the death of more than 7,000 Bosniak men and boys. The indictment accuses him of crimes of genocide, persecution, extermination, murder and forcible transfer in Srebrenica and other parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

At the time of the Srebrenica massacre, Obradovic was the chief of the Operations and Training Administration in the VRS Main Staff. In the summary of his testimony, which was read out loud in court by the prosecution, Obradovic explained how the VRS Main Staff was structured and how it operated.

Addressing the judges this week, Obradovic described his position as "somewhat bureaucratic", but admitted that it allowed him to have an eye on everything that was going on in the Main Staff.

He confirmed that the 10th Diversant Squad, which took part in the killing of more than 1,000 captured Bosniaks at the Branjevo farm on July 16, 1995, was directly subordinate to the Main Staff. A former member of this squad, Drazen Erdemovic, testified at Mladic's trial two weeks ago about these killings (See **Former Soldier Recalls Branjevo Farm Killings.**)

"Personally, the ones responsible for [this squad] were [Zdravko] Tolimir and a subordinate of his, the head of the intelligence directorate, Petar Salapura," the witness said, adding that "Mladic gave them the permission to order this squad".

In 2012, Tolimir was convicted of genocide and sentenced to life imprisonment.

Speaking about Directive Seven, an order which former Bosnian Serb president Radovan Karadzic issued to the VRS in 1995 to create "an unbearable situation of total insecurity with no hope of further survival or life" for Bosniaks in Srebrenica and Zepa, Obradovic said that Mladic must have seen this document before it was signed by Karadzic.

Last month, former Bosnian Serb defence minister Bogdan Subotic, testifying as a defence witness at Karadzic's trial, claimed that this order was written by the VRS Main Staff and that Karadzic probably hadn't even read it before signing (See **Karadzic Had "No Control" Over Army**)

"I personally believe that he [Mladic] would have seen the document before it was signed by Karadzic, it wouldn't make sense if he didn't," Obradovic added. "It was necessary that the Main Staff took part in the creation of this directive as Karadzic's staff didn't have the necessary resources to supply the wording."

Mladic's defence counsel, Branko Lukic, then asked the witness whether he had heard Mladic order the shooting of prisoners or surrendered Bosniak civilians.

"No, I didn't," Obradovic answered, adding that he had not heard "such an explicit order from either Mladic or any of other senior officers of the VRS".

Lukic also showed the witness a copy of Directive Seven. The witness said that although there was no signature from a representative of the Main Staff on the order, it did not mean that it was created "merely to bypass the VRS and the Main Staff".

The witness added, however, that he could not be certain of that fact.

As for further orders to and from other VRS units which were directly signed by Karadzic rather than Mladic, "it is possible [that Mladic was bypassed], but I don't know anything about it" Obradovic said.

He added that he was absent from the Main Staff during "those days in July 1995" due to an injury.

The trial continues next week.

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