

## **Witness Drove Truckloads of Srebrenica Corpses**

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Dramatic evidence from three new witnesses fails to implicate Bosnian Serb officers in killings.

When prosecutors in the case against Bosnian Serb commanders Vidoje Blagojevic and Dragan Jokic asked the court for four additional days to make their case, they said they had found additional witnesses who would directly connect the accused to the July 1995 Srebrenica massacre in which 7,000 Muslim men and boys died.

They said the four men were crucial to their case, and included the driver of a truck which took bodies from an execution site to a mass grave.

Blagojevic's defence counsel, Michael Karnavas, did not raise objections to the request. "We welcome as many witnesses as they [the prosecutors] can come up with," he said. "And we're sure no one can connect Mr Blagojevic to the crimes of which he stands accused."

This week, when the prosecution called its additional witnesses, it became clear why Karnavas was so confident.

One of the witnesses was former mine worker, Krsto Simic, the driver whom prosecutors had mentioned when they requested their additional days.

Simic gave a harrowing account of what happened during those murderous days of July 1995. However, his testimony did not appear to implicate Blagojevic or Jokic in the crimes, but rather Momir Nikolic, the Bosnian Serb officer who has already pleaded guilty for the crimes he committed in Srebrenica.

Simic told the court that he and five others, escorted by military police, were ordered to drive trucks to Kravica, one of the execution sites, to collect the bodies of the men who had been killed. When he arrived, Simic said he parked his truck next to the others.

"We started loading the bodies, assisted by the civil defence [forces]," he said, visibly shaken by recounting the story.

Simic was shown an aerial photo of the agricultural concern at Kravica, and he was able to show the court where the trucks had been parked, where commander Nikolic stood, and where they had to collect the bodies.

At one point, Simic said, he was asked to operate a loader to carry the bodies to the trucks. "I received an order from Momir Nikolic to replace a colleague of mine who couldn't do it anymore," he said.

When asked why his colleague gave up, Simic said, "I don't know, perhaps he was tired. He was just mentally overburdened, maybe."

He said that he loaded about 20 bodies into his truck, four or five at a time and said that they were all

wearing what appeared to be civilian clothes.

He and the others then drove their trucks to Glogova, where pits had already been dug to bury them.

When they were done, Simic said, he and the other drivers went back to Bratunac, still escorted by military police, and parked. "Water came, we washed the trucks and then we went home," he said.

Some time later, Simic was ordered to assist in the Srebrenica cover-up, relocating the bodies from the Glogova mass grave to a secondary site in Zeleni Jadar.

After they finished, Simic said they went back to Bratunac again. "We parked in the same place we had parked before... We washed the trucks again and then we all went home to bed," he said.

When asked how he felt about the experience, Simic replied, "I felt terribly frightened psychologically."

But he did not express remorse for the dead he helped bury. Rather, he said that he felt badly "because perhaps this very same loader could have buried my relatives during the war in Bratunac".

Simic explained that his family had suffered during an attack by Boslim Muslim forces from Srebrenica in December 1992. "I lost my 30-year old brother, he had 50 wounds in his body. I lost my mother too," he said. "Other relatives were so mutilated that we could hardly recognise them. Our houses were destroyed or burned. I don't want to talk about it any more."

During cross-examination, Karnavas asked Simic whether he had seen his client Blagojevic anywhere during the burial operation he had testified about. Simic was categorical in his denial.

"I didn't see him at any point," Simic said.

Another of the prosecution's eleventh-hour witnesses was Blagojevic's driver, Milan Nideljkovic. But like Simic, he did not link his former boss to the Srebrenica crimes.

Nideljkovic gave a detailed account on the sequence of events after the enclave had fallen and thousands of Srebrenica Muslims were deported.

A soldier with the Bosnian Serb army's third battalion, Nideljkovic said he became a driver in January 1995. He said he drove Blagojevic around the Srebrenica area the day after the fall of the enclave, but he did not provide any evidence about the accused man's involvement in the massacres. He said only that he occasionally stopped so that the officer could inspect his troops.

Prosecutors also called on a witness known to the court only as P-210. The witness, who served as Blagojevic's bodyguard in 1995, said he was with the accused in Bratunac on July 12, 1995 when a group of prisoners from Srebrenica were being held in a school.

P-210 said that he thought Blagojevic had informed the policemen guarding the school how they "shouldn't allow anyone to mistreat the people or provoke them".

Blagojevic also ordered the witness personally to “make sure that there would be no problems... including the people that were at the school”.

In his testimony, P210 did not imply that Blagojevic knew that the prisoners were going to be executed.

When Karnavas cross-examined the witness, he portrayed his client not as a genocidal man who orchestrated the murders in Srebrenica, but as the good Samaritan who often went out of his way to help people, regardless of their ethnicity.

Karnavas asked P-210 if he recalled Blagojevic coming upon a wounded soldier on the side of the road and helping him. When P-210 said that he remembered the incident, Karnavas asked, “Did you hear your commander ask whether he [the soldier] was a Muslim or a Serb?”

“Well, I think the commander heard me ask him for his documents. But he kept silent,” P-210 answered.

“The commander did not ask him what his background was, correct?” Karnavas continued.

“No,” agreed the witness, “At that moment the truck turned up....”

“And,” said Karnavas, finishing his sentence for him, “he asked the truck to take that individual to the hospital so that individual – regardless whether he was a Muslim soldier heading for Srebrenica or a Serb soldier – could get some help.”

The last of the additional witnesses was scheduled to testify on February 26.

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