

Case: Branko Grujić *et al* – ‘Zvornik’
War Crimes Chamber
Belgrade District Court, Republic of Serbia
Case number: KV.5/05

Trial Chamber: Tatjana Vuković, Trial Chamber President, Vesko Krstajić, Judge, Trial Chamber Member, Olivera Anđelković, Judge, Trial Chamber Member

War Crimes Prosecutor: Milan Petrović

Accused: Branko Grujić, Branko Popović, Dragan Slavković a.k.a. Toro, Ivan Korać a.k.a. Zoks, Siniša Filipović a.k.a. Lopov, and Dragutin Dragičević a.k.a. Bosanac

Report: Nataša Kandić, Executive Director of the Humanitarian Law Centre (HLC), and Dragoljub Todorović, Attorney, victims representatives

1 December 2005

Branko Popović’s defence

Branko Popović’s counsel, attorney Perković, said that his client was unable to defend himself and that nothing he had said the day before (30 November) should be accepted as his defence because he had been in a specific psychosomatic state and therefore unable to present a defence. The accused confirmed this and counsel requested an in-camera hearing at which his client would tell the Trial Chamber what had happened to him the day and night before he gave evidence.

After the in-camera hearing, counsel asked the Trial Chamber to appoint an expert witness to examine his client’s mental state and his capacity to attend the trial and present a defence at the main hearing on 30 November and 1 December.

The Trial Chamber agreed and ordered that the accused be examined by the expert witness, Dr Branko Mandić.

Defence of Dragan Slavković a.k.a. Toro

The accused was mobilized at the beginning of October 1991 in his village near Kraljevo. He was a sniper assigned to a reserve JNA unit. In November 1991 he underwent sniper training at the JNA barracks at Bubanj Potok near Belgrade and he scored the top marks.

After the training at Bubanj Potok and Šabac the accused was demobilized and returned home. He was mobilized again at the middle of April 1992 and deployed as a sniper in the Serb part of Sarajevo where, he said, he performed his tasks with success. He returned home after three days. At home, Mirko Jović of the Serb National Renewal party, Arkanites, Šešeljites, and representatives of the Serbian Radical Party in Kraljevo urged him to join them as a volunteer but, in his own words, he replied that he would go to war only under military command.

Early in May 1992 the accused arrived in Zvornik with a Saša from Kraljevo and about 10 men from Vukovar. They were received by Grujić as president of the Provisional Government and Major Marko Pavlović as TO Staff commander. They were housed in a kindergarten and issued with camouflage uniforms and sniping rifles. Major Pavlović then assigned them to the unit led by men named Pivarski and Niški and told them that they belonged to the outfit commanded by Pivarski who, Pavlović said, was under TO Zvornik command.

Count three: The ‘Ekonomija’ and ‘Ciglana’ crimes

Slavković said that he went to ‘Ekonomija’ after an evening meal at the home of a woman by the name of Ana Stević. Pivarski, Zoks and a number of others were there too. Slavković heard there that during the Muslim occupation of Zvornik a Muslim nicknamed Bubica pulled Stanić out of a bread queue and asked her, ‘What are you, Serb woman, doing in the Turkish country called Bosnia?’ One of the guests threw in that Bubica was detained at ‘Ekonomija’. Next day the accused went to ‘Ekonomija’ in the company of men called Saša, Sava, Zoran, and a territorial called Čoda. They found Bubica and the accused asked him whether he had insulted a person on grounds of her nationality. Bubica remained silent and the accused slapped him across the face. Sava then threatened to confront him with Ana Stević and asked him whether he had torn her bra; Bubica admitted and Sava slapped him too.

The accused insisted that after that visit to ‘Ekonomija’ he never saw Bubica again.

Asked by the Trial Chamber President to describe what he saw at ‘Ekonomija’, the accused replied that he saw 20 or so prisoners guarded by four or five reserve policemen. The prisoners sat on the floor, some of them in camouflage uniforms. The accused took out a prisoner in camouflage uniform to interrogate him in the guard room. When 10 minutes later he returned to the room where the rest of the prisoners were, he saw several of them naked to their skin engaged in homosexual intercourse under the direction of Zoran, Čodo and others. He asked them to lay off and stop humiliating these people. He also told them that he was Pivarski’s deputy and that that was an order. At that, Sava, Zoran, Čodo and others pointed their rifles at him. Saša defused the situation by saying, ‘Men, surely we aren’t going to kill each other over Muslims.’

Besides the accused, Saša too took out a prisoner to interrogate him.

Later the accused worked at ‘Ciglana’ as head of security engaged by the brickworks manager, Mišo Jović. There were about 20 prisoners there kept in two rooms. Workers employed at ‘Ekonomija’ guarded them to prevent any escape. The prisoners were given food and allowed to wash themselves. The accused said that he bought them cigarettes out of his own pocket. Occasionally Serb refugees would arrive, storm in and maltreat the prisoners. Armed groups also entered and abused them. The accused was informed that a man nicknamed Pufta had broken into ‘Ciglana’ and killed a prisoner. The accused found the man in a restaurant in Zvornik; the man was either under the influence of drink or drugs and had no idea that he had killed a man.

The Trial Chamber President read out to the accused a part of the indictment alleging that prisoners were taken to Zvornik to help loot abandoned Muslim homes. The accused replied,

‘There was an outbreak of jaundice in Zvornik because people helped themselves to food from open fridges, so there was an order, signed by the municipal Secretary Stevo Radić, to collect all the fridges and store them at “Ciglana”. The prisoners did that too.’ The accused insisted that the prisoners were not forced to steal things.

Count two: The crimes committed in the Čelopek Cultural Centre

The accused said that he visited the Cultural Centre in Čelopek on two occasions. The first time, his commander Pivarski sent him out to bring back from the camp three engineers or technicians needed at the Glinica factory. He went, took out three mechanical engineers and one electrical engineer and brought them to Pivarski, who kept three and ordered one back.

The second time, the accused visited the camp in connection with the death of a Serb fighter named Boško in Drinjača. The territorials were outraged. Someone said that relatives of the Muslim who had killed Boško, Šehovići or Mehovići by surname, were imprisoned in the Čelopek camp. A large number of territorials, accompanied by Pivarski and the accused, burst into the camp, beating and abusing the prisoners. The accused admitted to beating prisoners himself.

The accused finally admitted to paying at least two more visits to the Čelopek camp: once he took prisoners out to hand over hidden weapons and the second time he took out a prisoner accused of hiding a light machine gun at home.

Observer's notes:

Although the accused did not admit to the criminal offences with which he is charged, by his own admission he was at all the three camps – ‘Ekonomija’, ‘Ciglana’, and Čelopek – beating prisoners in all of them, working as head of security at ‘Ekonomija’, and repeatedly entering the Čelopek camp, taking out prisoners, interrogating and beating them and asking them to hand over weapons.