

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

27 March 2006

Examination of witness Marinko Vasilčić

From 1990 to the end of April 1992 the witness was the assistant commander of the police station and became its commander after witness K vacated the post. At that time, Miloš Pantelić was the chief of police. When in the first half of June 1992 Pantelić quit office, the witness took up the duties of chief of public security in Zvornik. It was not until a month later that the minister of internal affairs of Republika Srpska appointed him chief of public security.

On 25 or 26 July the witness tendered his resignation and left the police. His reason for doing so was because he was unable to control the security situation and perform his duty normally. The president of the Provisional Government, Branko Grujić, resigned at the same time but later returned.

The expulsion from Kozluk

At the time the Bosniak residents of Kozluk were moved out the witness was the chief of the public security station in Zvornik. He insisted that the Zvornik police took no part whatever in moving the residents out. In his opinion, the Bosniaks moved out because no one could guarantee their security. He knew that Jovo Mijatović went to Kozluk but did not remember who had told him that. Mijatović was in the company of men from the Zvornik SDS but could not identify them. According to him, the Bosniaks left voluntarily and were taken by bus to Subotica via Šepak and Loznica. Although he did not know who provided the buses, he believed that they had been laid on by the men, led by Jovo Mijatović, who had made the arrangements with the residents of Kozluk. He also knew that the residents’ final destination was somewhere abroad.

As far as the witness knew, ‘assistance during the move was rendered by the army.’ He did not know whether witness K was with Jovo Mijatović in Kozluk and insisted that he had no more information about the incident.

The Čelopek camp

The witness knew that the Divič Bosniaks were taken in buses in the direction of Kladanj where they were to have been transferred to territory under Muslim control. The convoy was guarded by his assistant Slavko Erić. Having been turned back the convoy was rerouted to Kalesija with the same outcome. The passengers were therefore accommodated in the Zvornik Sports Hall and then taken by bus to the Čelopek Cultural Centre. They were escorted by the police station assistant commander, Miko Miljanović.

Asked repeatedly who had instructed Miljanović to take the residents of Divič to Čelopek, the witness replied that although he was in charge of the station he gave Miljanović no such order. He also said that Miljanović could have been ordered by the chief, his deputy, and himself as commander. He knew that the men were separated and the women and children transferred to Kalesija. He could not say who separated the men from the women and children.

The witness was adamant that the instruction to transfer the residents of Divič to Čelopek was given by either the Crisis Headquarters or the TO Command and that there was no third possibility. Asked in whose charge the men were placed and where they were accommodated, the witness replied, 'Miko escorted them, the men were placed in that facility, there was a reserve police station in Čelopek. The commander of that reserve police station was Anđelko Vasiljević, they were handed over to them to remain in that facility pending further arrangements.'

The witness said that the commander of the guard at the Cultural Centre was Cvijetko Jović, who had been appointed by Vasiljević. Asked by the Trial Chamber President on whose instructions the Bosniaks were placed in the Cultural Centre, who told Anđelko Vasiljević what to do with the men, and how the commander of the guard was appointed, the witness avoided giving specific answers and insisted that he gave no instructions either to Anđelko Vasiljević or to Cvijetko Jović. At the same time he argued, quite illogically, that the residents of Divič came there voluntarily because they had felt insecure at their homes, that they enjoyed freedom of movement there, and that at any moment they could have walked out of the Čelopek Cultural Centre and gone back to their homes in Divič or to any other place of their choice. He pointed out, however, that they were most secure in the rooms of the Cultural Centre and that free movement in any direction could have endangered their lives.

Observer's notes:

These are completely unfounded, absurd claims: the Cultural Centre in Čelopek was a classic prison where people were locked in. Also, there was an armed guard, the prisoners were not able to leave the camp, and they were robbed, murdered and abused in every way. The witness ought to have been aware of everything that went on in the Cultural Centre because he was the commander of the Zvornik police station and because Vasiljević and Jović were his subordinates.

The witness was aware that after St Vitus Day the prisoners were transferred from Čelopek to the Misdemeanour Court and after 15 July 1992 to Batković but could not recall the source of that information.

Judge Vuković reminded the witness that a policeman by name Sredo Vuković had said in his evidence to the inquest that Vasilić had requested two buses to take the prisoners from Čelopek to the Misdemeanour Court because, as Vasilić had himself said, '[...] they're going to kill them all, come on [...] drive them over.' The Trial Chamber President also reminded the witness of Vuković's claim that he had called in a woman doctor in an ambulance car. The witness replied that he did not recall the incident.

The 'Ekonomija' camp

The witness recalled that 'Ekonomija' was the first facility to receive and retain prisoners and that that was at the very beginning of the war. At that, the Trial Chamber President reminded him that, according to the indictment, men were brought to 'Ekonomija' in May and were tortured and murdered there. The witness replied that he did not have such information. His information was that the men brought to 'Ekonomija' had been taken prisoner at the front lines and therefore brought in by soldiers rather than by policemen. To all further questions, his replies were 'don't know', 'don't remember', 'I didn't', and 'no one'.

The Trial Chamber President brought to the witness's attention the fact that the accused Branko Popović had said in his defence that he had warned the witness and Branko Grujić that men had been beaten at 'Ekonomija' and that they had agreed to summon Žuća, as well as that when the witness summoned Žuća he refused to say who those men were. To this the witness replied that he had no recollection of that episode.

The 'Ciglana' camp

The witness said he knew nothing about the camp at 'Ciglana' other than having learned that men were brought there individually and that they did some work there such as loading bricks. He said he did not know of the existence of a facility in which men were locked in under guard.