



Documenting the Past
1 May 2002

**Operation Flash
The Ethnic Cleansing of Western Slavonia
1 May 1995**

This report is based on statements given to the Humanitarian Law Center in June and July 1995, in Eastern Slavonia, by Croatian Serbs expelled from Western Slavonia.

The appearance on 17 August 1991 of roadblocks in the Krajina region marked the beginning of the rebellion of the Serbs in Croatia. On 25 June 1991, the Croatian Parliament declared the republic's independence from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), which meant that only laws passed by that legislature were in effect in Croatian territory. By late 1991, the Croatian Serbs, with the help of the Yugoslav National Army (JNA), and police and paramilitary units from Serbia, had taken control of one-third of Croatia's territory, including parts of Eastern and Western Slavonia and the Krajina, and declared their own Republic of Serb Krajina (RSK). Slightly more than 12 percent of the 581,969 Croatian Serbs lived in these predominantly Serb regions, from which more than 80,000 Croats moved out, either under pressure or as the result of direct expulsion.

The rump SFRY Presidency asked the United Nations to dispatch a peacekeeping force to the region. The Vance Plan, signed in February 1992 by Franjo Tudjman and Slobodan Milošević, then the presidents of Croatia and Serbia respectively, guaranteed security and continuing political power to the Serbs in areas under their control, and envisaged the simultaneous deployment of the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR) and the withdrawal of the Croatian forces and the JNA from those areas. This in effect meant that the JNA had to pull out of the entire territory of Croatia. JNA officers were seconded to the Serb Territorial Defense,

which was later renamed the Serb Army of Krajina (SVK). The situation on the front lines in Croatia was relatively quiet from 1992 to 1995, because both Serbia and Croatia were preoccupied with the war against Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Croatia re-established its presence in Western and Eastern Slavonia and the Krajina in 1995. On 1 May that year, it unleashed Operation Flash to regain control of Western Slavonia. With the launching of the attack, Serb civilians and the SVK's 18th Corps left the region, crossing the Sava River into Serb-held territory in Bosnia. What Operation Flash accomplished was the ethnic cleansing of Western Slavonia: of the 13,000 Serbs who lived there up to 1 May 1995, only about 1,000 remained.

Three days before Flash, a Croat shot dead a Serb at a gasoline station near the separation line between the Serb and Croatian forces. Serb forces responded by opening fire on civilian vehicles on the Zagreb-Belgrade highway, killing three Croats. Though this incident was cited by the Croatian government as the reason for Flash, the evidence is unequivocal that the operation was carefully planned beforehand.

With this 59-hour operation -- from 5 a.m. on 1 May to 4 p.m. on 3 May -- Croatia regained 500 square kilometers of Serb-held territory in Western Slavonia. Croatian sources said that some 7,500 members of the Croatian armed forces and special police were pitted against the 5,500-strong SVK. Serb sources, however, asserted that there were 17,000 Croatian troops and police against 3,500 SVK.

Gojko Šušak, then Croatia's defense minister, stated that 450 people were killed, mainly civilians. Veritas, an organization

that investigates and documents war crimes committed during Flash and the subsequent Operation Storm, came out with the figure of 362 Serb civilians killed. Of these, 283 have in the meantime been positively identified, while the identities of 79 remain unknown. The highest casualties among both civilians and combatants came during the shelling of refugee columns on the road from Novi Varoš to Bosanska Gradiška. The dead were left on and beside the road, and many were run over as the column advanced under fire. All the indications are that the Croatian authorities buried corpses and body parts in several secret mass graves.

During and following the operation, the Croatian military and police captured about 1,500 Serbs, mainly men of military age, who were imprisoned and interrogated in the towns of Slavonska Požega, Varaždin and Bjelovar. Most were released after questioning. While imprisoned, these Serbs were subjected to torture and other physical abuse and degrading treatment. When the armed conflicts ended, Croatian courts indicted 4,438 members of the SVK and the JNA

on counts of war crimes. One hundred and seven Serbs are serving sentences in Croatian prisons.

On 25 July 1995, the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) indicted Milan Martić, the RSK president during Operation Flash, and charged him with ordering the rocket attacks on Zagreb on 1 and 2 May, which caused the deaths of seven civilians and injured dozens of others.

Life Prior to Operation Flash

M.D. a nurse from Okučani, had been hopeful that a peaceful settlement would be reached. In her statement to the HLC, she said:

I was sure that Western Slavonia would be a part of Croatia again, but that the Krajina would have some kind of autonomy. When the highway reopened on 21 December 1994, I hoped that things would settle down, that the problem would be solved through negotiations. Speaking in Pakrac on 25 April 1995, Martić said everything was all right and that "we are firmly holding our territory."

SVK member A.S. of Pakrac (III Battalion, I Brigade, 18th Corps) first fled to Serbia on 16 August 1991 and returned to Slavonia in February 1992, after the RSK had been set up. He stayed with relatives in Šeovica, just outside Pakrac, where UNPROFOR troops were deployed. He was mobilized by the SVK but said there were only minor skirmishes up to 5 May 1995:

We didn't do any real fighting; my assignments consisted mainly of sentry duty. They didn't attack and we weren't really an army. I expected things to quieten down and to be able to return to Pakrac.

"The fields had been planted and the animals were breeding. The population lived in peace and without fear of a new war like the one in 1991," said an Orthodox priest from Okučani, describing the life of the Serbs prior to the launching of Flash. The first he heard of the attack was at about 6 a.m. on 1 May, on Radio Okučani, which advised the population to go to the closest shelters and stay there until they received further instructions from the municipal authorities and the 18th Corps command. The soldiers were told to hold out for the first three hours, as help and heavy weapons were on their way from the Republika Srpska in Bosnia.

Refugee Columns Shelled

The Okučani priest recounted that the SVK had no more than 3,500 soldiers, as against the 17,000 Croatian military and police forces involved in Operation Flash. Seeing UNPROFOR members abandoning their positions, the civilians panicked. That first day of the offensive, it was rumored among Serbs that Croatian troops wearing UNPROFOR uniforms, driving UNPROFOR vehicles and armed with UNPROFOR weapons were attacking Serb positions. At the hospital in Banja Luka, the priest met a young man who had been injured in the shelling of Jasenovac at 5.30 a.m. on 1 May, and who told him that such disguised Croatian soldiers had come into his village after it was shelled.

The population started moving out in massive numbers on the afternoon of 1 May. The priest described the situation to the HLC:

People were frightened; the sky was black with shells and the smoke from the houses they had set on fire. The evacuation of civilians from all villages in the Okučani municipality began with all available means of transportation. Refugee columns moved toward Okučani, Dubovac, Novi Varoš, Gradiška, toward the bridge over the Sava River, in order to cross into the Republika Srpska. It was the only road leading out. Everything that moved on the road was constantly showered with lethal ammunition, and there were wounded everywhere. We pulled out the wounded, and some carried their dead.

Making his way from shelter to shelter, the priest told people an evacuation was under way and that they should all go in the direction of Bosanka Gradiška. Okučani was shelled several times and bombed once by Croatian warplanes on 1 May.

The priest left Okučani at about 9 p.m. with his wife and a number of other women and children. They rode in several cars, but without forming a column, each car making its own way. On and beside the road from Okučani to the bridge across the Sava, the priest saw many destroyed vehicles and dead bodies. Shells fell around them and explosions were heard. There were craters just before the bridge, made by bombs dropped from planes, and they had to pass between two of them. The bridge itself had also been considerably damaged.

On the afternoon of 1 May, refugees from Pakrac fleeing to Bosnia found their way blocked at Bijela Stena village by Croatian troops who fired Zolja rockets at the busses. Many women and children in these busses were killed. Refugees who traversed the same section of the road later that day saw water trucks and Croatian soldiers hosing down the blood from the road.

The staff of the Okučani Medical Center -- some 40 people including seven doctors and six nurses -- were the last to leave the town. When they went to the town hall at about 6 p.m. to seek instructions, they found the building empty -- the officials had already left. Up until that time, they had been attending to the wounded and dead who were brought into the medical center; before noon these were combatants, followed later by civilians. The dead were placed in a separate room. The bodies of seven combatants were left in the medical center at about 10 p.m., when the staff left for Bosnia in passenger cars, an ambulance and a van.

One of the nurses, M.D., told the HLC that a wounded high-school boy from Pakrac was brought to the medical center at about 4 p.m. on 1 May. The boy recounted to her that the Croatian military had ordered the inhabitants to assemble on the soccer field in order to be evacuated. When the people had gathered, the field was shelled, on which occasion he was injured.

On its way to Novi Varoš, seven kilometers from Okučani, the medical staff's column passed a military ambulance going in the opposite direction. The driver flashed his headlights, signaling to them that he was taking wounded to the Okučani Medical Center. M.D. said that this was a terrible moment for them all: "The military ambulance was on its way to the medical center, but there was no one there anymore except the dead."

When it reached Novi Varoš, an all-Croat village until 1991, the column came under heavy shelling from the nearby Prašnik woods. The side windows of nurse J.R.'s car shattered. She described what then happened to her and her companion, also a nurse:

We were terrified. I stopped the car and we jumped out. We were lucky they didn't hit us. There were many cars ahead, from which people had fled, just as we had. Somebody had left their headlights on, so I was able to see a dead man at the wheel of the tractor in front of us. There was another dead person next to him, but I couldn't tell if it was a man or a woman. Because it was dark, I saw nothing else, except that there were very many halted cars.

We ran into the woods, intending to make our way through it to Stara Gradiška. But we got lost and wandered around until 2 a.m. on 2 May, when we sat down under a tree and waited for daybreak. We heard shells falling on Stara Gradiška at about 5 a.m., and at 5.30 it was bombed twice by planes. We continued through the woods at 9 a.m. and reached Gredjane, an all-Serb village, at noon. It was completely deserted, with only livestock wandering along the road. We noticed a tractor coming toward us. There were five elderly people and the driver on it, all from the village. They were fleeing to Mlaka, a village on the Sava, where they intended to cross the river into Bosnia, and we joined them. We heard from them that the Croatian army had entered Okučani at about 11 a.m. that day -- 2 May.

At Jablanica on the Sava, we crossed together to Orahovo in Bosnia, ferried over in a boat by Krajina soldiers. On 9 May, I learned from the International Red Cross that my husband Savo and some of my friends had been captured. Savo was imprisoned in Slavonska Požega, Captain Kulić in Bjelovar, Branko Dželajlija and Fedja Krupić in Varaždin. The Krajina Army surrendered. Savo was held from 4 to 7 May.

The others in the medical staff column proceeded through Novi Varoš, "driving around bodies and destroyed vehicles on the road," as nurse M.D. told the HLC.

At about 5 a.m. on 2 May, Croatian warplanes bombed the bridge over the Sava to Bosanska Gradiška, and two bombs hit a house near the hospital, killing two children, Nemanja and his sister, and inflicting multiple injuries on their mother. A man was also killed and four other people were injured during this air raid. Among the latter was Bogdan Popović, whose lower leg was completely severed by a large piece of shrapnel.

At around 9 a.m., after the bombing of the bridge, the priest, accompanied by Milka Kesić, went back to Okučani to see if the Bishop of Western Slavonia was still there. They crossed the bridge, entered Novi Varoš and, when they reached the second house on the right-hand side, came under Croatian machine-gun fire. The priest recounted:

Milka was hit by the first shot, and I felt a bullet hit me in the left shoulder blade but continued driving. The Croatian soldiers kept on firing at the car. I heard bullets striking the car and I felt them hitting me in several places. I drove as long as the car could keep going. In front of me I saw a lot of vehicles, enveloped in smoke and flames, onto which shells fired from Prašnik were falling. When the car stopped, I somehow found the strength to get out and run toward that burning and smoking horror from which screams and moans could be heard. It was the only place I could find some kind of shelter. I saw dead people in their cars and on the road; the wounded were screaming. I managed to stumble to the head of the column, where I fell. Some people gathered me up and carried me into a small house where I was given first aid, my wounds bandaged.

I lay there in the house for some hours, during which time two civilians from Okučani were brought in: Vasilije Rauš, with a belly wound, and Milan Martinović, with a head wound. Milan was alive when he was brought in, but died on the way to the hospital. Members of the Krajina army who were trying to secure the passage of the civilians decided to try to make a breakthrough. They managed to clear the road. Most of the Croatian troops ran away into the Prašnik woods, and some were killed in the fighting.

The column continued moving to the Sava bridge. So far as I could see, it was about three kilometers long, with vehicles going in files across the whole width of the road. They took me to the hospital in Bosanska Gradiška and then to Banja Luka. The doctors found I had been hit by nine bullets: two in the shoulder, one on the right side of the spine near the kidney, one dum-dum in the hand, which destroyed a lot of muscle tissue, and the rest in the legs.

B.M., an SVK member from Smrtići village, and his unit were assigned on 2 May to secure the withdrawal of civilians from Okučani municipality. They escorted the several-kilometers-long column of cars, tractors and busses on foot. B.M. said the column was not attacked until it reached Novi Varoš, where it came under heavy small arms and artillery fire from the Prašnik woods. People tried to get away, some making it and some not. A plane flew over the column but did not open fire on it.

From his friend and co-villager Rade Vujinac, B.M. heard that Rade Čakmak, Anka Treskanica and several other Serbs had been killed in Medari village.

C.R., a member of the 54th Brigade's sabotage unit, was on 1 May assigned to deliver ammunition to the front lines. He described the situation at the Serb positions as chaotic: the soldiers refused to take up arms and were preparing to pull out. At 3:30 a.m. on 2 May, the Serb soldiers were ordered to break the

Croatian blockade. The whole 54th Brigade, consisting of some 120 men, most of them young, moved out to unblock the road and enable the civilians to pass. Though there were some cars and tractors, most of the civilians were on foot. The Croatian forces opened fire from the direction of Novi Varoš and Stara Gradiška. The witness, at the wheel of a truck loaded with ammunition, was forced to drive over dead bodies lying on the road. The blockade was broken at about 11 a.m.

Following the breakup of his unit, S.M., an SVK member from Rajići village, joined a refugee column heading to Bosanska Gradiška. Describing the Croatian forces' attack on the column at Novi Varoš, he said:

Fire was opened on the column from the Prašnik woods. The entire column, some three to three-and-a-half kilometers long, came under fire, even though there were far more civilians than soldiers in it. In my estimate, the column consisted of 500 to 700 cars and between 2,000 and 2,500 people. After the first salvo, we soldiers rushed out and took shelter behind some houses.

There were six of us in my group: me, one of my brothers, and four men from the battalion. We gradually pushed forward, giving each other cover and moving from one covert to the next, eventually reaching almost the head of the column at the entrance to the village. We realized that we couldn't get through there: the road was blocked, the vehicles at the front had been hit and the column had been forced to stop because of the obstruction. This was at the Šeik Cafe, exactly at the exit of the village. The halted column was still under fire. Some people tried to crawl past the obstruction. They were all killed. Vehicles that had been wrecked earlier, the previous day, were standing on and beside the road. I saw dead people, some lying on the road, some dead in their vehicles. I saw at least 50 bodies and hadn't even been down the whole column. People behind were hit and fell, and there were many wounded calling for help. I saw four dead soldiers, two of whom I didn't know and two I recognized: Major Tešanović and a combatant, Milan Mikanović, from my brigade.

It was a horrible picture: people who had been killed earlier were already completely deformed, some without parts of their bodies, blood everywhere. There was no sign of UNPROFOR. At the very least they could have helped us to evacuate the women and children.

I and my four brothers were in the fighting in those two days. One of my brothers is missing; I don't know if he was killed or captured. His name is Jovan Marić. I heard that some of my friends and acquaintances were also killed in combat: Petar Dragojlović, Mladen Vučić, Djordje Panović, Nikola Savić -- all soldiers from Rajići.

As I crossed the bridge over the Sava at about 2 p.m., I threw my rifle into the river. I was very disappointed in our authorities for letting so many civilians be killed. I don't want to fight for anyone anymore. I went to the reception center in Nova Topola and found my family there. It was there I heard that Croats from

Borovac village, who had stayed with us after 1991, had also fled their homes because they were afraid of reprisals by the Croatian forces.

Z.Lj. of Bodegraj village was called up for military duty at 2 a.m. on 1 May and told to report to his unit in Stara Gradiška. He took over an armored car and was given orders to go in the direction of Okučani to help break the blockade. Reaching the command post at noon, he found the situation had descended into total chaos: only junior officers were present because their superiors had already fled Okučani. The soldiers were told they could disperse at will. On 2 May, Z.Lj. joined a refugee column making its way to Bosnia and was in it when it was attacked by Croatian forces:

The column moved very slowly, often stopping. Shells were falling between the Prašnik woods and the village. I saw a shell hit a car and destroy it. I don't know who was inside. There were more and more dead as we approached the end of the village. The head of the column was at the exit of Novi Varoš, at the Šeik Cafe, where its passage was blocked, and more people were coming up from behind. There were a lot of wrecked cars and tractors. Most of the victims were in places where there were no houses. Every car or other vehicle that tried to get through in these places was the target of either sniper or rocket fire. Shells kept falling on the column, guided in by Croatian infantry.

We started breaking through in the morning. It lasted several hours or maybe more. We would make only a few meters progress an hour. There were an awful lot of wrecked automobiles, tractors and bodies around us. Some of the bodies were lying on the road, others were in the automobiles and tractors. Children, women, old people had been killed, some were missing parts of their bodies -- an arm, a leg, a head. All the bodies were of a pale green color, trampled, deformed. There was blood on the asphalt and grass, running in rivulets because of the rain. The hardest thing for me was when we came upon children mutilated like that. It's a terrible thing to remember; I want to forget it but don't know how. The images are constantly in my mind. At first, I went around the dead but as we came closer to the end of the village, there were more and more of them on the road. I couldn't avoid them, as the road was blocked. I had to drive the van over bodies. I saw the bodies of people I knew and of people I didn't know. I can't keep bringing it back. I saw Nedeljko Živković from Okučani and Joca Bogičević, an invalid without one arm, also from Okučani. Both were civilians. I saw an old man from Rajići carrying his dead son on the trailer of his tractor. I saw a tractor that had been hit by shell; it was completely destroyed. I saw an old man I knew by sight, lying run over on the road.

Our region was betrayed, sold. Most of our commanding officers had run away. They would spend five days at a time in Slavonski Brod. Up until the last day, there was a lot of smuggling with the Croats. Instead of organizing our defenses, the command cadre organized trade. That's why so many civilians were killed. The bulk of the army got out on 1 May, and the bulk of the 54th Brigade started

out in the morning of 2 May. Some of them went through the woods via Gredjani. There were a lot of civilians with them.

I can't believe the Croatians fired on a column of women, children and old people. Salvos from all weapons were fired at the column. The Croatian troops used all kinds of means. At Gorice, for example, they opened fire on Serb soldiers while wearing UNPROFOR uniforms. A great many soldiers died there.

I spoke with Stojan Abramović in Banja Luka. He was on the road to Bosanska Gradiška at about 2 o'clock on 2 May. He saw the blocked road and the scattered bodies of civilians who had been killed the evening before. He saw a tractor with a man on it surrounded by Croatian soldiers. The Croatian soldiers first started pulling the man off the tractor, then Stojan saw a flash and the man fell down dead. Stojan switched on his headlights and the soldiers fired at him. He jumped out of the car and hid in a house. Just before morning, he went through the woods to the Strug canal and from there to Bosanska Gradiška.

SVK member V.K. from Ratkovac was also in the column that was attacked at Novi Varoš on 2 May:

The column was made up mainly of women and children and old people. When its head was at Pustara, where the Nepalese battalion of UNPROFOR had their base, the tail was three kilometers away, in Dubovac. Civilians from Okučani and the surrounding villages were in the column. I was assigned to secure the passage of civilians to Bosanska Gradiška. There were about 1,000 combatants in uniform with the column. My father and two brothers were also securing the withdrawal of the civilian column. We reached Novi Varoš at about 5:30 in the morning. We came upon the results of the massacre of the previous evening. A bus which had been hit by a Zolja was full of dead, mainly women and children. Wrecked and overturned cars, burnt tractors. Dead people on the tractors and in the cars. Corpses on the road. Body parts everywhere -- you couldn't get by them. There were injured people still giving signs of life. This was all on the road through Novi Varoš, on a 500-meter stretch from the Šeik Cafe to the gasoline station. The road is about 15 meters wide.

Our intention was to clear the way and get the civilians through. But we were immediately attacked from the Prašnik woods. The Croatian army targeted us with mortar, howitzer, tank, recoilless gun and small arms fire. We could hear planes bombing the bridge over the Sava and the hospital in Bosanska Gradiška, five or six kilometers away from us in a straight line. The fighting was fierce from 5:30 to 11:30 in the morning -- a hail of bullets and shells. Only fantastically lucky people survived.

As soon as the attack started, the civilians abandoned their vehicles and ran. They hid in the damaged houses along the road or ran into the woods, but most were killed. It was hand-to-hand fighting. I was at the head of the column. About 500 people were killed, most of them civilians. Father Savo Počuča was wounded in an Aleko car about 9 a.m. Milka Kesić was in the same car and she

was killed. I saw a wounded combatant, Milovan Crnić from Smrtići, who is now listed as missing. Milan Cicvara and Gojko Pucarević, both combatants and in uniform, were killed. Jovan Bogić, a civilian from Okučani, was killed when his Mercedes was hit by a Zolja. Bogić was an invalid; he was without his right hand and wasn't eligible for military service. Three other civilians, including Nedeljko Živković, were killed in the same Mercedes. We got about 50 percent of the column out. I was able to pick up only four wounded and take them to Bosanska Gradiška. I must have driven past some wounded who were unconscious and thought they were dead.

At around 9 o'clock, I thought I saw a wounded relative by the roadside and crawled through nettles by the houses along the road to get to him. But it wasn't him. It was a boy, maybe 20, from Rajići. He had been hit in the belly by a rifle grenade. His intestines had spilled out and he was holding them back with his hands. His small bowels were slithering between his fingers; he might have been dead already. The fighting went on until 11:30. We managed to break through and secure their escape to the Strug canal. By that time, we were no longer under attack by their infantry, only by their artillery in Visoka Greda, a village near Nova Gradiška.

It took us from 11:30 to 1 o'clock to get from the canal to the bridge on the Sava, a distance of about two to two-and-a-half kilometers. During that time, we were constantly pounded by artillery. I remember seeing a tractor that had been hit by a rocket from a shoulder launcher at the Strug canal. There were three dead on it: a man, his wife and a child of four or five. I saw an Osa hit a military ambulance that was taking the wounded to the Banja Luka hospital. It must have been carrying both soldiers and civilians. Only the driver, Gojko Malešević, survived; everybody else was killed. A wounded man fell out of the ambulance and I saw him burning up in flames. I remember shells falling on cars full of civilians. They would hit a car and chunks of flesh flew all around. I saw a young man of about 30 from Subotska village lying on the road without the top of his skull. His brain had fallen out. We put his body on a tractor trailer and took him to Bosanska Gradiška. We gathered up the wounded; we couldn't take the dead.

It rained all day on 2 May and we were soaked through with rain and sweat and covered in mud. The wounded lay around and moaned. The wreckage of destroyed vehicles was scattered all over, broken glass everywhere. Body parts on the road. We were also targeted by snipers from out of the Prašnik woods. They had a contest going on -- who could hit the most of us. At one point, I was so close to the edge of the woods that I heard one of them say, 'I've zapped my sixteenth.' They shelled us as we were crossing the Sava bridge, all the way to the Kozara Stadium in Bosanska Gradiška. That's when they also shelled the Bosanska Gradiška hospital.

The 2 May Death Toll

Witnesses interviewed by HLC field researchers shortly after the exodus from the Krajina confirmed the deaths of the following people during the attack on the refugee column: SVK member "Mudri"; Lt. Col. Tešanović from Rajiči; [first name unknown] Dajić from Medari, whose father was wounded; Migel Radulović and Zoran Vukadinović (21) from Okučani. Sixteen persons from Ratkovac village in Okučani municipality were killed: Vojin Eskić, combatant (born 1940); Milorad Dabić, combatant (1960); Milan Dabić, combatant (1951); Mirko Zubović, combatant (1940); Vojin Zec, combatant (1951); Dušan Cvijetičanin, combatant (1954); Gojko Pucarević, combatant (1956); Milan Cicvara, combatant (1948). Nikola Ljutobina was brutally killed in his home in Ratkovac. Evidence of the murder was seen by Ranko Kondić from Okučani. Stevo Marinković (1951), exempt from military service because of mental illness, was shot dead in his yard. He was alone at home with his seriously ill mother, who covered his body with planks and branches to keep the animals from eating it. His remains were buried by Croats in the Trnava village graveyard. Mile Bošnjaković (1949), a civilian and a psychiatric patient, was also shot dead in his yard. His brother Djordje (1955), a combatant, was killed in action. Miloš Botić (1930), a civilian, was shot dead on or about 10 May. His body was seen by released Serb prisoners.

Disappeared During the Fighting

Rajko Malijević and Savo Grlica from Rajiči, and Draženko Bjelić of Borovac, all officers of the Krajina Serb police force, went missing during the fighting on 1-2 May. They were last seen leaving Rajiči together on 30 April for their positions at the Roždanski bridge. Jovan Marić, an SVK member from Rajiči, also went missing during the fighting. Milovan Crnić (30), an SVK member from Smrtići, was wounded on 2 May, during the Croatian attack on the refugee column in Novi Varoš, after which all trace of him was lost. He was last seen by Vladimir Kerezović of Ratkovac on the road through Novi Varoš. Živko Savelić (born 1970), a combatant, went missing in action during the attack.

Men Arrested in Šeovica

Some 60 Serbs fled Bjelanovci, Pakrac municipality, to Šeovica when their village was shelled. Šeovica, too, was subjected to shelling and they stayed indoors for safety. At about 4 p.m. on 4 May, they heard that a capitulation agreement had been signed and that they had to turn in their weapons. Serbs soldiers went from house to house, telling those inside to hang a white flag in the yard or from a window.

Croatian civil police followed by soldiers came to the house in which L.T. from Bjelanovci was staying:

They came in, said that nothing was going to happen to us, and that the women and children should stand on one side of the road and the men on the other, in double file. There were nine or ten men in our house, including the owner and his two sons. I knew only two of the men: Rade Romanić and Duško Boljić from

Bjelanovci. The others were from Šeovica, so I didn't know them. The military police took all the men away.

SVK member A.S. from Pakrac and some 20 villagers from Šeovica, only three of whom were younger men, were holding positions on the line of separation running through Lipičko and Pakračko Polje. Armed with rifles, they remained at their positions for two days and two nights under shellfire. The inhabitants of Šeovica were in shelters as the village was being shelled. Vasa Dolinić brought to his home the dead bodies of an unknown elderly woman and two girls around the age of 14 or 15 who had been killed when a shell landed on the local soccer field.

A.S. recounted to the HLC that Stevo Harambašić and Veljko Džakula went to Pakrac on 3 May for talks on the surrender of weapons to UNPROFOR. Croatian police, however, arrested them before the talks opened, immediately after Croatian artillery fired three shells from Kusunje into Prekopakra village in Croatian territory at 1.55 p.m. and then accused the Serb side of violating the cease-fire. SVK commanders called on all combatants to surrender their weapons, and a hand-over was organized in Šeovica the same day. Some 450 to 500 men from Šeovica, Japaga, Gavrinci, Krička, Goraj, Šumetica, Brusnik and Kraguj, all villages in Pakrac municipality, gathered near the now empty arms dump. These men were members of the 51st Infantry Brigade of the SVK's 18th Corps. Instead of UNPROFOR as agreed, some 20 to 30 Croatian police and soldiers arrived in Šeovica at 5 p.m. All males from the ages of 15 to 60 were ordered to form a column and marched to the Orthodox church in Pakrac by way of the Japaga-Gavrinci road. Serbs from other locations were rounded up along the way until the column finally consisted of about 1,000 men. Apart from verbal abuse, the men were not ill-treated. Once in front of the church, the men were ordered to line up in two files. Sometime after 10 p.m., busses arrived and drove them to Varaždin, Bjelovar and Slavenska Požega for questioning.

Interrogation in Varaždin

Together with some 500 men, A.S. was taken to the sports center in Varaždin:

We sat outside the center until noon, with orders to keep our legs crossed, our hands behind our backs and our heads down to our knees. A Croatian military truck from Daruvar drove up at one point and an officer got out, pointed to certain men, about 20 of them, and they were taken off somewhere. I don't know what happened to them. We were guarded in the gym by military and civil police. They made a list of our names. They took my Seiko watch. They took more valuable things from others.

On the third or fourth day, a man in civvies and a guard called five of us out by name: me, Vojo Bokan, Slobodan Milićević, Mane Lukić and Milenko Romanić. We were all from the same brigade. They took us to the toilets and ordered us to lean against the wall on two fingers and to spread our legs. About 10 policemen came in. They beat us with nightsticks and punched and kicked us. Then they

lined us up against the wall, ordered us to kneel and put our hands behind our backs, and kicked us until we passed out. Then they poured water over us and continued the beating. I don't know how long it lasted -- it seemed hours to me. Before that, Mane had been questioned in the gym and beaten up. He was in the worst state. A young officer -- tall, about 25, blond, with a broad face and nose, strong, almost two meters tall -- beat Mane in the gym.

Every day, from morning to late at night, officers came, called out men and questioned them. Everyone who was questioned was beaten. The men who were questioned by that young officer who beat Mane got the worst of it. He was the only one without any insignia of rank. They tormented us in different ways. Some men were made to eat pepper and salt. We got two meals a day. The food wasn't bad. What was horrible was that men didn't dare go to the toilets because they knew that was where the Croatian police and officers meted out the worst beatings. So they relieved themselves in the gym. They gave us no peace all night. Every five minutes, we had to get up on our feet and sing "Ljepa naša." They'd let us settle down on the floor a bit and then order us to stand and sing. During the day, they made us sit with our legs crossed, hands behind our backs and heads between our knees. We had to sit like that for hours.

I was lucky they didn't question me in the gym itself. I was beaten in the toilets. The men who were first beaten by officers and then by the guards in the toilets got the worst of it. I saw many men who had been beaten like that. Predrag Pašić from Obrovac was so badly beaten that he couldn't walk. He stayed in the camp after I was let go. They broke the arm of "Milojko" from Lipik, who was between 22 and 25; it was a compound fracture so they put it in a cast. He was released at the same time as I was. "Karas" [30], who was born in Slavonska Požega and lived in Okučani, was beaten so badly he couldn't walk. He stayed in the camp after I left. Nikola Ugrinić [40], who lived in Gornji or Donji Grahovljani until the war, when he fled to Serb territory, was beaten like the rest. He also stayed after I left. Vlado Vranješević from Pakrac, who worked at the Pakrac sawmill before the war, stayed after me. I think they didn't beat my uncle, Veljko Alavuković [60]. They let him go before me. Predrag Lukić, a boy in his first year of high school, wasn't beaten and was released before me.

About 150 men were let go before me. They started releasing older men and children on the second night. Three or four days later, the International Red Cross came. I was registered as No. 322525. It's the only document I have now. I had a Republic of Serb Krajina identity card issued two years before in Pakrac. I destroyed it before I was captured.

Men were taken out of the gym for questioning every day. After three or four days, they called out my name and, with about 10 other men, put me in a patrol wagon. I didn't know where they were taking us and thought we were going to be liquidated. They drove us to a police station in Varaždin, where we were questioned one by one. Some men in civvies questioned us. One of them asked where I was from, where I had been and what I did. He was correct. He

questioned me for about an hour. What he was most interested in were the commanders of our army and who had killed civilians. All 10 of us were questioned at the same time and in the same room, but we each had our own investigator. There wasn't any physical ill treatment. But I had been beaten up the day before in the toilets, as I described before, and I was scared. I can't remember the men who were at the police station with me that day. I remember only Dušan Alavuković, my cousin, and Čedomir Šašić from Lipik. After questioning us for an hour, they took us back to the gym.

A day or two later, they read out some names, and about 100 of us were released. We boarded two busses, and they drove us to Gavrinci by night, at about four in the morning. We had to report to the police a few hours later so they could get our particulars. It was then that I heard UNPROFOR was to take the first convoy of refugees to Gradiška. I got my name on the list before my turn and that's how I crossed. It was the first convoy over the Sava. There were 50 or 60 of us, mostly older men and about a dozen of us younger ones who had jumped the line.

In Gradiška, I met my friend Stevo Ljiljak from Borovac, a village between Okučani and Novska. When the attack started, he and another 40-odd villagers were at positions between Okučani and Rajići. They began retreating, taking about 100 civilians from Rajići and Paklenica with them. They left the civilians in a woods somewhere between Okučani and Bodegraj, thinking that it would be easier to get away without them and that no one would harm the civilians. When the Croatian troops came, they fired on those civilians. The Serb soldiers were ambushed as they were pulling out. Stevo told me that it wasn't Croats, that those men spoke German and wore some kind of white uniforms. They [the Serbs] managed to get away.

SVK member M.M. from Bjelanovac was held in Varaždin from 4 to 7 May:

We were surrounded on 2 May. There was heavy shelling at about three in the afternoon, and we were forced out of our trenches. We retreated toward Gavrinci. There were about 2,000 civilians in Pakrac municipality at the time, and there was nothing we could do except surrender. UNPROFOR joined in the surrender negotiations.

On 4 May, Harambašić signed the surrender. We had to take off our uniforms and hand in our weapons. I went to Šeovica, changed out of uniform and mingled with the civilians. My family had fled Bjelanovac and reached Šeovica on 3 May. The capitulation was signed at 1:45 p.m. and as early as 2 o'clock the Croatian army began to shell Šeovica. I saw them shelling the houses, hitting a Golf and killing a cow. People hid in the cellars. The shelling lasted about 20 minutes. At around 2:30, first the Croatian police and then soldiers entered Šeovica. The head of this Croatian special police force ordered all men between 18 and 60 to step out and form a column and walk toward Pakrac. We did and moved out, and the women and children stayed. They were guarded by

UNPROFOR, who were there the whole time. There were between 600 and 700 of us in the column.

We walked four to five kilometers. The Croatian soldiers began giving us a hard time when we got to Gavrinci. They went from one to another of us, swearing, dragging some men out of the column and beating them. I saw when they beat up Nikola Šeatović from Kobačevac and Nikola "Niger" Dragušin, the battalion commander. They were both beaten by groups of five or six military police, kicked and punched in the kidneys and all over their bodies for about 30 minutes. At about 8:30 p.m. that day, 4 May, they made us board busses, which were so crowded that some men had to stand, and drove us away. The convoy, made up of 10 busses with about 700 prisoners, set off for Varaždin. I stood the whole way. There were four civil policemen in the busses -- special police in black uniforms. One of them went up and down the bus with his pistol cocked, and if he found anyone who had nodded off, he'd put the gun to that man's forehead and threaten to kill him. We weren't allowed to sleep, to turn around or to say anything to each other. They swore and cursed at us, calling us Chetniks and things like that.

We reached Varaždin at 7 a.m. on 5 May. They took us to the sports center. We got off the bus two by two and passed through a cordon of police, who searched us. They took my watch, my driver's license and some money, saying I wouldn't need them anymore. I was left with nothing. We had to strip at the entrance, and then the first questioning started. They asked for my particulars, who my commanding officer was, in which brigade I served, and if I had been wounded. They even asked about my skin rash and checked if I had flat feet. After that we had to take cold showers and dress, and then we were taken into the gym, where we sat down on the parquet floor. We sat with our hands behind our backs, legs stretched out straight in front and looking down at the floor. That was the order, and we weren't allowed to take any other position on the floor. Our backs felt as if they were breaking from sitting like that.

They brought us supper and then started to work. They took our photos and opened files on us. We weren't given a hard time that first day. On the second day, 6 May, they started calling men out by their names and taking them for interrogation. The others had to sit stock-still in the same position all day. When we needed to go to the toilet, we had to ask for permission. When I went, five policemen were waiting for me in the toilets. They threatened to kill me and then slapped, punched and kicked me. One of them said that he was from Ilok, that his brother had been killed in Vukovar and that he would avenge him. Andrija Groznica and Rade Romanić came out of the toilets, badly beaten up. A guard walked up and down the gym, checking to see if we were sitting in the ordered position. At one point, I couldn't stand the pain any longer and put my hands down on the floor behind my back. The guard came up and kicked me in the kidneys. I was questioned that day, in the afternoon. Inspectors in civvies questioned me about 1991: where I was at the time, in which brigade I had

served, and so on. I said I had taken a cold on 15 September 1991 and had fallen ill, so that I was at the medical station in Bjelanovac all the time and didn't take part in the attacks on Pakrac and Lipik. They questioned me for about an hour and then had me taken back to the gym. Croatian Television came and took pictures of us. The International Red Cross came, too. I was registered as No. 322061.

At about six in the morning on 7 May, their commander came into the gym and read out the names of some 100 men, who were then taken someplace. They were brought back at lunchtime. They looked awful: beaten up, their shirttails hanging out of their pants, grass on their backs. I heard later that they had been taken to a field near the Drava river and beaten there, pistols had been put to their bodies, and they had been given a rough time in other ways. That same day, at about five in the afternoon, the commander came again and this time read the names of about 110 men. He ordered them to line up at the toilets. I was among these men. A policeman said, "They should all be killed and their bodies thrown into the Drava to float down to Belgrade." I was terrified, thinking they were going to take us out and eliminate us. Other policemen said we were going to be exchanged. But then they told us they were letting us go home. They let me go look for my watch, but I didn't find it. They jammed us into two busses and, at about nine o'clock, drove us in the direction of Zagreb. We got to Pakrac at about 11 p.m., and then they drove us to Gavrinci and chased us off the busses. They let us go to our homes.

It was the middle of the night -- so dark you couldn't see a thing. I was scared of going to Šeovica alone, so I spent the night with friends at Japaga. The next day I signed on my family to leave in a convoy.

Interrogation in Bjelovar

R.M., member of the SVK 51st Brigade, surrendered to the Croatian forces on 4 May 1995 in his village, Šeovica. With the other men, he was taken to Bjelovar:

When the order came for us to turn in our weapons, we assembled at the arms dump in Šeovica. Our brigade was to hand in more than 500 rifles. There were about 800 of us from the brigade -- men from Kraguj, Smetlica, Krička, Rogalj, Benkovac. We handed in the guns by noon. The agreement was that no one would be taken prisoner if the weapons were turned over. But, at about 5 p.m., the Croatians blocked off everything, took us prisoner and made us walk to Pakrac, where they loaded us onto busses. I know that twenty-two busses started off to Bjelovar, nine of which then went on to Varaždin. The International Red Cross came along, too, in three or four cars.

I stayed in Bjelovar. They put us in the sports center. The camp was run by military and civil police. There were more than 1,000 men there, even men of 75. They had picked up every man they came across. I was there for four days and the forty-first to be questioned. That's why I was there such a short time. Two Serbs were beaten up in the bathroom on the first day; I don't know their

names. A Croat reported it to the Red Cross, and from then on observers were in Bjelovar all the time. They gave me a number on the second day: 511182. When Red Cross delegates came that day, the Croatian policemen gave us soft drinks.

They beat only some men in Bjelovar. The men were separated according to rank, and the officers got the worst of it. They beat men before questioning them. Stevo Harambašić got beaten the most; they kept taking him out for interrogation. In the gym, in front of us, they kept humiliating him, spitting on him and calling him "General." All the commanding officers were beaten. You could see it when they were brought back from interrogations; they were black and blue and could hardly walk. We weren't allowed to talk to each other, but it was evident who had been beaten when he was questioned.

We were questioned at the district prison. They would come into the gym, separate out some men, bundle them into a van and drive them away. I was questioned after two days. When we got to the district prison, they first took our photos from different angles, as if we were criminals or something. They started beating me while I was waiting in the hallway to be photographed. Whichever one of them came by hit me, punched or kicked me. When they finished photographing us, they took down our particulars. We filled in some forms, and in one place I had to write that Croatia was beautiful, that it was my homeland and that I loved Croatia. That's what they said I should write, and I did. In the end, they fingerprinted us.

They took me to a cell, where I waited before they led me to a room upstairs to be questioned. I was questioned by a man in civilian clothes. He was tall, about 40, with brown hair, a bit heavily built. He had a picture of Ante Pavelić under the glass that covered his desk. Seven of us were questioned that day, all in different rooms. I remember Rade Vukadinović from Lipik, a battalion commander, who was beaten, and a Mirko from Pakrac. They accused Mirko of being a war criminal and beat him the most. Ostoja "Braco" Pavić, who was a policeman in Pakrac before the war, came out black and blue from the beating he got.

The civilian interrogated me about all sorts of things: when I joined in the war, who gave me my rifle, which unit I had been in. He was interested in military stuff. Then he gave me an album full of photographs and asked where those men were. He also beat me, hitting me with a long piece of wood on the head and legs. He said the pictures were of Croat soldiers who had been killed, but I didn't recognize any of them. The questioning went on for three and a half hours. Then they took me back to the cell and only in the evening, at about 7:30, to the gym.

The next day, 9 May, seven of us were taken before a first-instance court. They beat us from the moment we entered the courthouse, in the cell and as they led us through the hallways. An old man was the only one who wasn't beaten. The worst beater was a Serb, Dušan Bjelašević from Benkovac; he dealt out a worse

beating than any Croat. Djurić was the first to be told to go into a room. The rest of us were ordered to stand facing the wall. Rade Vukadinović advised us to keep our heads quite near the wall so they wouldn't be able to bang them hard against it. He had been through it before. He was beaten as we stood there. The beating stopped when they took me in to the judge. He questioned me about different things, who mobilized me, about my family. He wrote up a report, and I signed it.

They returned me to the cell and, at about 7:30 in the evening, put us on a bus. We sat inside for a time, and then they dragged out two men and took them back to the gym. I know one of them, Slobodan Madjar of Japaga, came out later. I never heard what happened to the other one, Ilija Bodegrajac, a battalion commander.

We were driven to Šeovica. That was on 9 May. There were three busses altogether. It was worse in Šeovica than in the prison. Domobranci fired their guns around the houses, trying to provoke us. They searched the houses for weapons. In front of her invalid husband and daughters, they drove my neighbor Milica Radonjić all over her house, demanding that she hand over a sniper rifle. They stormed into my brother Djuro's house and robbed him of everything. They took my relative Stojan Radonjić's TV set and wrecked his tractor. They took cars from people, supposedly because they didn't have the papers for them. But many had had to leave all their papers behind in the prison. We left four or five days later, in a convoy. The Serbian police directed us to Eastern Slavonia.

SVK member B.Z. from Pakrac was imprisoned in Bjelovar from 4 to 16 May 1995:

Our commander, Stevo Harambašić, had no other option. He had to agree to the surrender to save us and the civilians. The Croats arrested him when he went to negotiate with UNPROFOR. He sent orders for us to surrender, change from our uniforms to civvies and hang out white flags on the houses. A number of our men didn't want to surrender and took to the woods; some of them were captured there. The Croatian special police came to our lines and yelled for us to come out and give ourselves up. They took us prisoner and formed us into a column on the main road to Pakrac. They kept bringing more and more men into the column while we stood there. There were old men and invalids with artificial limbs. They brought Dr Perić [72] and my brother Goran [29], who was not eligible for military service because he has a 90 percent disability, into the column. Forming of the column took all afternoon. About 20 to 25 busses came in the evening, and they loaded us onto them. Most men had seats, which meant that there were about 50 per bus. My brother Goran and my wife's father Nikola were in the same bus as I was.

We reached Bjelovar soon after midnight on 5 May, and they took us to the sports center. At the entrance, they ordered us to strip and took us to shower. After that, they made a list of us. We were guarded by Croatian military and civil

police. They called us Chetniks, swore at us and threatened to slit our throats. They gave us a blanket each and we lay down on the floor. They kept bringing in new prisoners all that day. There were between 500 and 700 of us. Some were taken for interrogation and then brought back. Some weren't brought back. Some came back badly beaten. There were always a lot of reporters in the gym.

The International Red Cross came on 7 or 8 May, and I got a card with the number 511816. A man from the civil police came on 10 May. He read out the names of seven of us from a list. They bundled us into a police wagon. One of them cursed my Chetnik mother and threatened to kill me. They took us to a building in which there were both civil and military police, and locked us in the basement. The stink in the room was awful because of the privy in the corner. They called our names and took us out for questioning. They took me and another four prisoners up to the second floor. The guard bashed the butt of his rifle into our ribs several times on the way up. In the second-floor corridor, we had to stand facing the wall with our hands behind our backs for about 30 minutes. Behind us, the Croats kept trying to provoke us: "What is it, Čedo? How do you like it in Croatia? Where's your state now? They sold you out; what were you thinking?"

One by one, we were taken in to the inspector for interrogation. The inspector was in civvies. He questioned me about where I had been, what I did and who had killed some of their people there. He yelled at me and made provocations but didn't beat me. He questioned me for about two hours, and then I was taken back to the basement. I was questioned a second time that day. I sat on a chair and four of them in civvies fired questions at me at the same time. One of them kept putting his pistol to my forehead and neck and cocking it. That second time, I was questioned for four hours. One kicked me in the ribs and slapped me. Another hit me on the back of the head with the butt of a pistol. They took me back to the gym at about 8 o'clock in the morning on 11 May.

On 13 May, I was taken to the pre-trial jail to be questioned by the investigating judge. He questioned me for three days and I was released on 16 May. Those of us who had been released boarded six or seven busses and were driven to Pakrac. They told us to go to our homes. I found my family at home; they were all there.

On 17 May, we put our names down to leave. We had to go to the town hall to be interviewed first. Two Croat women who worked there asked why we were leaving, if we had been ill-treated in prison, and why we were leaving behind our house and other property. We got a card for the convoy. No one could cross the border without a card. I left with my wife and son in our Lada car, in a convoy for Bosanska Gradiška. I had to apply for a special permit to take the car. On 4 June, the convoy crossed the border at Sremska Rača, and the Serbian police escorted us to Eastern Slavonia, to Sremske Laze, near Tovarnik. The police said we were to move into the empty houses near the front line. We argued with them because we didn't want to be near the front line and living in looted, empty

houses. With my wife and child, I sought refuge with Pačanac, in whose house we are still living. I don't know what we are going to do here. Pačanac makes his living by farming, and we live off him.

SVK member A.M. from Gornja Šumetica surrendered on 4 May. He was imprisoned at Bjelovar from 5 to 12 May 1995.

The men were separated from the women, children and elderly outside the schoolhouse in Šeovica. A representative of our civilian authorities -- I didn't know him -- spoke to us first and said that the capitulation had been signed, that there was nothing we could do, that Džakula and Harambašić were in prison. The Croatian military and civil police were already there when we arrived. They said that the women and children could go home and that they were to hang out white cloths from the windows and in the yards.

We men were lined up and walked four kilometers to Gavrinci. We were escorted by a Serb who had fought on the Croat side. There were observers, six or seven of them dressed in white, in Gavrinci. We waited for busses; it was already dark. They told us to empty our pockets and so on. The busses took 750 of us to Bjelovar. As each man got off, a policeman led him to the sports center entrance, where they took our particulars and then took us to shower. We were naked, and they took pictures and mocked us. Later on, my sister in Germany said she had seen the pictures of us naked on German television. After we had showered, we were taken into the gym and given a blanket apiece, and we found a place to lie down. There were guards in the stands.

I was questioned at a police station on 6 May by a civilian. They would come into the gym and read out the first and last names of 12 men at a time. I was in such a group of 12 that day. I didn't know any of the others. They put us in a police wagon, drove into a kind of entryway and from there took us into a cell. I wasn't beaten, but I think I was the only one; I don't know why I got off so easily. They beat men as they questioned them one by one. The one who questioned me was a good man. He said that his name was Ante and that he was from Gaj in Pakrac municipality. He asked where my hunting carbine was. I really did have one because I was a hunter. He questioned me for about three hours, and then I was taken back to the cell. One of them wanted to beat me there but another said, "Not him, he's been processed." Sitting in the cell, I heard them beating other men. Some of the 12 in my group came back from the questioning all beaten up. I didn't talk with them much, but one said they hit him with a piece of wood.

They took me to the Supreme Military Court on 8 May. The judge said a warrant for my arrest had been issued in 1991 for rebelling against the state. There were three of us in the room: me, the judge and the clerk, a woman. They had no proof that I had instigated a rebellion. Before he questioned me, the judge said that I had the right to an attorney and that I could use his phone to call one. I didn't know any lawyers and I didn't feel guilty anyway, so I said I didn't need a lawyer. He questioned me according to the statement from the police. I signed in

four places. The only ill treatment there was that we had to stand in the corridor for hours with our faces to the wall. My brother, who was with me all the time during the questioning in the court, had to squat in the corridor, holding his arms out in front of him, and they yelled at him, "Boy, don't you stink, you Chetnik son of a bitch!"

There was no beating in the gym. The International Red Cross came the second day. Men were beaten only in passing and during the police questioning. I saw a lot of men who were black and blue from beatings. Joco Prokopić was among those who got the worst treatment. He was taken out for questioning several times a day. He stayed in prison after I left, and I hear that he's still there. Luka Krajinović was also taken for questioning several times a day, and I heard he died from being beaten. Pero Popadić had four of his ribs broken. I haven't seen Borivoj Dobrić, who was my commander, but I've heard he can't walk anymore. I saw Harambašić being taken out several times, but I wasn't close to him so I can't say if he was beaten, too. A man from Glavice near Bučje, whose name I don't know, was beaten so badly he could hardly drag his legs along. Ljuban Vidović from Čaglice; Mišo Krajinović from Kusunje; Miloš Arsenić from Gornje Šumetice; Milutin Mandić, also from Šumetice; and his uncle Milutin were all beaten. Dr Perić was in the gym with us. He wasn't beaten. But he's an old man, maybe over 70, a highly respected children's doctor who lived in Gavrinci. They wanted to let him go after a few days, but he insisted he was staying as long as the other prisoners were there. He stayed after I left.

I was released on 12 May. The bus was full of released men. Some of the guards kept beating Željko Srbljanin and Stevan Pletikapa while we rode in the bus.

Leaving Croatia

After the arrest of the men, the women and children who had found refuge in Šeovica remained in the village until 12 May. T.L. described those days:

We went out only in the morning to get bread, and twice for relief aid when the UNHCR said we were to come. We tried to stay away from the road. We were scared; the Croatian police and soldiers were all over the place and kept trying to provoke us. They sang Chetnik songs, cursed our Chetnik mothers, made passes at the younger women and fired off their guns as we walked down the road. They said their children had been killed by our grenades. There weren't any destroyed houses in the part of Šeovica where we were staying. The shells fell mostly along the road. The soldiers would come into the houses and demand money. I heard a woman, I don't know her name, complaining how they had barged into her house and slapped her around until she gave them all the money and gold jewelry she had. She went to report it to the civilian authorities, but I don't know what happened afterward. An old woman said they slapped her and demanded money and weapons. She didn't have either and when they realized she didn't, they hit her a few more times and left. One day, six or seven soldiers stormed into the house where we were staying and ransacked it, searching for

weapons. They didn't take anything from the house. In the barn, they found grenades, rifles, ammunition and military uniforms. They said they would throw us out and kill our husbands. We said that they should take it up with the woman who owned the house, that we were refugees and knew nothing about what was in the barn. The owner's name was Jela Prodanović, and her husband Branko and three sons had been taken on 4 May. The soldiers had some kind of argument with her, and I heard her tell them that she knew nothing about the things in the barn, that some soldiers had slept there and she didn't know what they had left behind. They didn't give her a hard time.

Croatian government officials organized the issuing of Croatian citizenship papers in one of the houses. We all had to go there to register. There was a huge waiting line. Some civilians from the Croatian government interviewed us -- 15 minutes per person. They asked me what property we owned, if we had a house, why we had fled, how much land we had, why we wanted to leave Croatia, why we didn't want citizenship papers. They said they guaranteed we would be safe. My husband had been released and found us by then, so we were at the interview together. The UNHCR also registered us. We left for Gradiška in a convoy on 12 May. When we got there, they put us on other busses and drove us to Laktaši, where we stayed until 19 May. A convoy to Eastern Slavonia was organized in Laktaši, and they said we could go to either Serbia or Kosovo later, as we liked. In Eastern Slavonia, the Serbian police escorted us to Tenja, a place on the line of separation. They wanted us to stay there, but we refused.