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# Details of Srebrenica Emerge as Hague Prepares for a Trial

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THE HAGUE - To carry out mass murder in Bosnia, the organizers devised an elaborate ruse. They stole the blue helmets and white vehicles of United Nations peacekeepers so they could trick and capture their victims. They blocked access roads to keep away outsiders like Red Cross workers and journalists.

On July 11, 1995, as gunshots rang in the night, the Bosnian Serb military leader, Gen. Ratko Mladic, met in a local hotel with a man summoned to speak for the frightened people in the mountain town of Srebrenica. "I guarantee that all those who surrender their weapons will live," the general said. "I need a clear answer so I can decide both as a man and as a commander."

But the next morning, a five-day killing frenzy began. By the time it was over, the Bosnian Serb Army and police forces had systematically tracked down and executed close to 8,000 boys and men.

General Mladic and the Bosnian Serb political leader, Radovan Karadzic, who were indicted as the main architects of Europe's worst massacre since World War II, have evaded capture. But many men from their inner circle are now in jail.

Prosecutors at the United Nations war crimes tribunal in The Hague are preparing a joint trial of nine of the highest-ranking officers accused of playing integral roles in the Srebrenica killings. Such a large joint trial would dwarf any other proceedings the court has held.

All nine men face charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity, and five of them are accused of complicity to commit genocide.

A joint trial is possible because eight of the generals and senior officers from the Bosnian Serb Army have arrived in The Hague in recent months, their "voluntary surrender" largely a result of international pressure on the Serbian authorities. One remains at large.

Judges at the tribunal that deals with the former Yugoslavia must still approve prosecuting the men as a group, and no trial date has been set. Some lawyers who follow the court have said they fear that a joint trial could become a management nightmare, involving at least 18 defense lawyers and many prosecutors. Several defense lawyers have already objected to a joint trial.

But prosecutors argue that trying the men together would avoid much duplication, minimize hardship for victims and witnesses and ensure consistency in dealing with crimes committed during the same campaign.

Prosecutors also say their case has been strengthened by a cache of documents that NATO troops obtained recently from the archives of one of the main military entities, the Drina Corps. The archives are said to include statements and papers signed by several of the accused.

Until now, the trials dealing with the wars of the 1990's that tore up Yugoslavia have been short on a paper trail and have had to rely heavily on witnesses' testimony.

Much of what happened at Srebrenica, which had been a United Nations protectorate, is now known. Crucial details came out during two trials of three high-ranking officers who are now serving long sentences. Another three men - two senior officers and a soldier in a firing squad - pleaded guilty and provided lengthy testimony.

The picture painted during those many hours in court shows that the capture and killing of the men and boys of Srebrenica were coordinated by the military security and intelligence branch of the Bosnian Serb Army and militarized police. The forces were supplied and paid by a special department of the Serbian government in Belgrade, whose president was Slobodan Milosevic. His war crimes trial here is now in its fourth year.

The killing at Srebrenica began soon after General Mladic's troops had overwhelmed the 300 United Nations peacekeepers protecting about 40,000 people who had sought refuge in the town or already lived there.

The Bosnian Serb troops immediately separated more than 1,000 unarmed Bosnian Muslim men and boys from the families that had fled to the town. Several thousand others, former fighters as well as civilians, were ambushed as they tried to escape through the woods. Others unknowingly surrendered to Serbs disguised as United Nations peacekeepers, witnesses have testified.

The captives were executed at various places in the area, at a warehouse, on a farm, near a dam, on the banks of a river. Many bodies were later found in mass graves with their hands tied behind their backs. The Red Cross list of the missing has close to 8,000 names.

"It was a huge logistical undertaking, moving prisoners, then moving bodies and to do all of this out of sight of the U.N. and the press," said a prosecutor who has long worked on the case. Under tribunal rules, only official spokesmen, not prosecutors, can speak for publication.

If the group trial goes forward, the accused will include those thought to be "the real hands-on guys, the guys on the ground that made all this possible," the prosecutor said. Among them are Ljubomir Borovcanin, a police commander charged with capturing and

killing fleeing men. In court, prosecutors have shown a photograph of him during the operation, wearing a United Nations helmet.

Two of the other defendants from General Mladic's inner circle are Col. Ljubisa Beara, the security and intelligence chief of the army's main staff, and one of his deputies, Lt. Col. Vujadin Popovic. Their indictment says they supervised the deportation of women and children and saw to it that men and teenage boys were rounded up, put in temporary holding facilities and taken to the killing fields.

A radio intercept from July 15, during the killing, seems to record the rate of progress. On the tape, played in court during an earlier trial, a man identifying himself as Colonel Beara reports to his boss and asks for assistance, because "I have 3,500 parcels to distribute," a reference, prosecutors say, to captives and bodies to be disposed of.

On the afternoon of July 17, on another radio intercept played in court, Colonel Popovic calls his boss, Gen. Radislav Krstic, from a farm where, on that day, in a span of five hours, an estimated 1,200 captives were executed.

"Hello, it's Popovic, boss," he says. "Everything has been brought to an end. That job is done. No problems. I am here at the place. Can I just take a little break, take a shower? Basically that all gets an A. The grade is an A."

That night, according to the intercepts, Colonel Popovic called General Krstic again, but could not reach him. By then, 500 more prisoners had been killed, at a cultural center at Pilice. On the intercept, the man identifying himself as Colonel Popovic says: "Tell the general I finished the job. I was there on the spot." He adds, "It was horrible, horrible."

Among the questions that prosecutors hope to answer in any future trial dealing with Srebrenica is when, how and by whom the decision to commit the mass killings was made. They will also be looking for another crucial piece of the puzzle: what exactly was Mr. Milosevic's role in the killings and deportations of Muslims during three years of war in Bosnia that ended in late 1995.

Another trial already under way is dealing with war crimes by the Muslim forces before the fall of Srebrenica. But the prosecution says that while war crimes were committed by Serbs, Croats and Bosnians during the wars of the early 1990's, evidence is overwhelming that most were committed by Serbs and that the gravest crime of all took place at Srebrenica.

Mark Harmon, the lead prosecutor in the case against General Krstic, who was sentenced to 35 years in prison, told the judges in that trial that Srebrenica was about "the triumph of evil - a story about how officers and soldiers of the Bosnian Serb Army, men who professed to be professional soldiers, men who professed to represent the ideals of a distinguished Serbian past, organized, planned and willingly participated in genocide."

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