

SREBRENICA

RAPPORTEN +
COMMENTAREN

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4. Developments in June: an imminent VRS attack?

After the skirmishes in early June and the capture of OP-E, it was again reasonably quiet in Srebrenica, also compared with the state of affairs elsewhere in Bosnia. The situation resembled a status quo. There was a change in the situation towards the end of the month. The number of reported Firing Close Incidents on Dutchbat OPs and patrols increased sharply, so that the number of incidents in June ultimately exceeded the number for the entire period from January to June 1995.[1]

Around the time that the hostage crisis consequent to the Pale bombings in mid June was resolved, the ABiH started an offensive around Sarajevo. June was also marked by heavy fighting around Sarajevo, which radiated out to other areas in Bosnia, and also did not leave Srebrenica unaffected. In Gorazde, the fighting that had started in May continued. In comparison, it was still quiet in Srebrenica. After mid June, however, the number of incidents between the combatants increased around Srebrenica too, with provocative actions that extended beyond the enclave borders. This was largely concerned with the offensive started by the ABiH at Sarajevo. These actions around Srebrenica at the end of June appeared to create an atmosphere that led to increasing embitterment on the side of the Bosnian Serbs and that paved the way for more drastic measures.

Matters were brewing in the south of the enclave especially. Skirmishes between VRS and ABiH in the area around OP-E continued. The ABiH reinforced its positions and fired with mortars and weapons of all calibres at the factory complex at Zeleni Jadar.[2] The VRS showed that they were not satisfied with the occupation of OP-E, and after 4 June they attempted to occupy the area of Turija (between OP-F and OP-E) too. In the early evening of 5 June, there was another attempt by the ABiH to recapture the surroundings of OP-E. The VRS replied with mortar and tank fire. The pressure waves from the explosions could be felt on OP-U. As darkness fell, the fighting ended, however; the attack had failed. The resistance was too great for the lightly-armed ABiH. On 6 June there were new attacks by the VRS on Turija.[3]

In all the confusion during the ABiH's attempts to recapture OP-E, the three thousand residents of the Swedish Shelter Project fled yet again, only to return because of the lack of accommodation in Srebrenica. Many left their possessions behind in Srebrenica in anticipation of another quick escape. The rumour machine, fed from outside the enclave, continued to run at full speed.[4] Representatives of the Swedish Rescue Service Agency heard on *Sky Radio* that the VRS had threatened to fire on Dutchbat if Dutchbat were to try to recapture OP-E, and that in response, Dutchbat had threatened air strikes. There were no grounds for either assertion.[5]

The VRS, through Major Nikolic, complained to Dutchbat that the ABiH was continuing to send patrols to lay ambushes outside the enclave. The VRS would keep quiet if the ABiH did too, according to Nikolic. But if the ABiH attacked, the VRS would repulse the attack with heavy weapons and attack the ABiH positions to oust them not only from the positions, but, if necessary, also from the entire enclave. Nikolic took the opportunity to repeat

that the attack on OP-E had been provoked by the ABiH. The VRS nonetheless had some understanding for the fact that Dutchbat had to keep doing its work, and Nikolic promised that the battalion would therefore no longer be attacked directly.[6]

In the meantime, the ABiH was busy improving its positions, and digging trenches and bunkers. The ABiH denied Dutchbat access to some areas. For instance, for no clear reason, Dutchbat was no longer allowed on Zanik hill near OP-R. On the Kvarac hill, on the opposite side, there were many positions that controlled the eastern access road to Srebrenica via Zalazje. Dutchbat personnel were able to use a thermal imaging sight to observe forty to fifty people digging day and night in the surroundings of OP-Q. Dutchbat turned a blind eye to Bosnian Muslims carrying weapons in the enclave, because of the threat of the presence of the Bosnian Serbs. The battalion staff indicated that they disregarded the practice and did not deny the ABiH the right to self-defence, although this was not in line with orders from higher echelons.[7]

Dutchbat knew almost nothing of what was going on outside the enclave. There was only an occasional sighting of VRS troop movements, which were mainly in the south, where the occasional tank was spotted.[8] On rare occasions, the lights of the columns could be observed with thermal imaging sights on a clear night as they moved along the Drina, although it was impossible to say whether this was on the Bosnian or the Serbian side. Dutchbat also saw that the ABiH regularly patrolled with two or three men. They left the enclave at OP-Q and OP-R, and then proceeded through a valley in the direction of Bratunac and Sase as far as the Drina. Mines were also said to be laid, and now and again they went off.[9]

Otherwise, there all sorts of events that Dutchbat did not immediately understand. For instance, in the night of 5 to 6 June, helicopters were spotted several times at various places around the enclave. Also, a number of pieces of VRS artillery that had been set up to the northwest of the enclave, disappeared. Not that it became any quieter there: there was also intimidation of OPs by the VRS in the north of the enclave, and bullets flew over various OPs. On the same night, an ABiH patrol encountered a VRS patrol in the surroundings of OP-E, which led to exchanges of fire, with the VRS using mortars and tanks.[10] This exchange of fire arose more or less by coincidence; the ABiH said that it was not planning to attack there. [11]

From the battle noise that Dutchbat observed, however, it could be concluded that something was brewing. For instance, on 8 and 9 June, the battalion counted 1165 small calibre shots, 316 heavy calibre shots and 27 explosions in a period of 24 hours, the great majority of which were outside the enclave.[12] Nevertheless, Dutchbat still expected no change in the situation in the short term.[13] The Military Intelligence Service of the RNLA also expected the skirmishes to continue for some time, but the Service assessed the probability of an attack on one of the eastern enclaves under these circumstances as low.[14]

Signs of a VRS attack?

The Dutch Military Intelligence Service's assessment that a VRS attack was improbable suddenly appeared to change when the Commander of the 28th Division, Ramiz Becirovic, and his intelligence officer, Ekrim Salihovic, called an emergency meeting with Dutchbat on 8 June. They informed the liaison team that a VRS attack was to be expected during the evening of 8 June or the morning of 9 June. General Mladic was said to have personally ordered the attack and the neutralization of all Dutchbat OPs. Troops concentrated in the area of Brezani (four kilometres to the east of OP-E). One axis of attack would be to the south of OP-R towards Srebrenica town, while the other would run alongside OP-F and then bear off to the north towards the town. In addition to the VRS Skelani Brigade, special units, which were involved earlier in the capture of OP-E, were to take part in the attack. Because the message

came from the same source that announced the attack on OP-E, Karremans considered it to be reliable.[15]

The intelligence report that the liaison officer of the 28th Division of the ABiH, Ekrem Salihovic, sent to the 2nd Corps in Tuzla, was less alarming in its tone. Although this report indicated that data on the possible attack had been passed to Dutchbat, the VRS activities that were mentioned related mainly to the north-western part of the enclave. The VRS may have been performing intensive reconnaissance at Zalazje near OP-R, but the ABiH themselves had not observed it in the field.[16] Other ABiH sources did consider that the situation was alarming and that a VRS attack on the enclave was imminent: Captain Nijaz Masic, who was responsible for the morale of the 28th Division, concluded from the intensification of the propaganda from the VRS side, the logistics support that was said to be received from Serbia, and the improving VRS morale, that the VRS finally wanted to conquer East Bosnia.[17] An intelligence officer of the 2nd Corps also said that on 6 June military engineers from Serbia had arrived with equipment, artillery and direction finding equipment in Pribicevac, where the VRS had an advance command post.[18]



Karremans mentioned in his *Srebrenica: Who Cares?* that, on 8 June, the British Joint Commission Observers (the JCOs) attached to the battalion, also approached him with the suspicion that the VRS would attack all enclaves within two weeks. In his book, Karremans said that he passed reports from them and from the ABiH regarding a possible attack on to the higher echelon,[19] but the specific message that Karremans sent to Tuzla, Sarajevo and The Hague only included the information that had been provided by the ABiH on an attack, and not the JCOs' suspicions. Neither did the JCOs make their own report, although they did report to Sarajevo that the warning from the ABiH regarding an 'imminent attack' was reason for concern, but that they themselves had heard such rumours on several occasions and attached little value to them. The JCOs said they could not provide Sarajevo with any confirmation of the VRS plans.[20]

The Military Intelligence Service (MOD) in The Hague analysed the report from the ABiH and came to the conclusion that there were no indications of large-scale troop concentrations. On the other hand, according to this Military Intelligence Service (RNLA) analysis, the VRS were strong enough around the enclave to perform a limited operation in the enclave border area, and it did not appear unlikely that, as in Gorazde, the VRS would attempt to gain control of parts of the enclave. However, the MID (Military Intelligence Service) considered it premature to view the limited operation against OP-E as an overture for further operations. In Gorazde, similar warnings from the ABiH reached UNPROFOR. However,

After the alarming reports that reached Dutchbat from the ABiH side on 8 June of an imminent attack, relatively little happened. On the contrary, the situation even appeared to become more relaxed and the battle noise declined. Only in the north of the enclave did the VRS fire 25 rounds at OP-M. OPs in the southern part of the enclave, and in particular OP-K, may well have seen regular movement of the VRS, or were told so by residents, but the movements did not appear to be hostile. The VRS occupation of OP-E was actually reinforced with thirty men, and there was movement in the factory complex near Zeleni Jadar, but that had more of an economic than a military significance: groups of VRS soldiers were dragging slabs of marble away. A number of days saw no change in this picture of relative quiet. There was also frequent traffic again between Srebrenica and Zepa for supply purposes, with horses. [27]

On the face of it, therefore, the message that originated from the ABiH about an attack was incorrect. However, there could have also been more strategic factors at that time for not persisting with an attack; the VRS' attention was needed on other fronts. The strategy of the 2nd Corps of the ABiH was to attack at as many locations as possible, so as to confuse the VRS soldiers about where real attacks were going to take place. In this way, the VRS were tied up around the enclave, and the ABiH prevented these VRS men being deployed elsewhere (around Sarajevo). The VRS indeed had a shortage of men and had lost the initiative. The Bosnian Muslims were out to gain time and to avoid significant defeats. It was not the intention to get involved in a real fight, because then the ABiH would be no match for the VRS.

The VRS was probably also keeping its powder dry around the Srebrenica enclave in the light of the imminent ABiH offensive around Sarajevo; in the event of it becoming necessary to fight there, it would be better for them to conserve their strength now. The ABiH had already concentrated 25% of its total strength there. Closer to home, there were ABiH troop movements around Tuzla, division command posts were moved forward, and a new attack seemed likely on the Stolice communication towers and on positions in the Majevica hills and Mount Vis, from which it was possible to fire on Tuzla. The VRS strategy was mainly oriented to the conduct of a counter-offensive in those areas and the strengthening of units there.

In mid June, the assessment of the Army Intelligence and Security Departments was still that a large scale attack on Srebrenica was improbable. In addition, the strategic importance of Gorazde to the Bosnian Serbs was not considered to apply to Srebrenica. [28]

In mid June, Dutchbat too expected no change in the fairly quiet situation in the coming days. [29] Karremans stated that Dutchbat was completely surrounded, but a withdrawal of the OPs was no longer an option. In the light of a possible UNPROFOR regrouping and some relief of the fuel shortage problem, Karremans did speak on this subject with the Chief of Staff of Bosnia-Herzegovina Command in Sarajevo, Nicolai. Withdrawal of the OPs was no longer urgent for Sarajevo, however. Karremans also stated that it was no longer an option to hold fuel in reserve for a possible hasty departure of Dutchbat from the enclave. [30]

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[1] NIOD, Coll. Karremans. Letter Commanding Officer 1(NL)UN Infbn (Dutchbat3) to Commander Sector North East, 07/07/95, No. TK95112.

[2] SMG, 1001. Milinfo 07/06/95, period 060600-070600B.

[3] NIOD, Coll. Koreman. Diary of Koreman, 36th week, p. 7; NIOD, Coll. Sitreps. Dutchbat Milinfo period 040600 - 050600 B Jun 95; SMG 1001. Daily Sitrep of 041600B Jun 95 - 051600B Jun 95, C-BCie to Dutchbat; Interview Hazrudin Kisić, 17/05/99 and 18/05/99.

[4] MSF Brussels. Capsat MSF Srebrenica to MSF Beograd, 05/07/95 15:56 No. Out 709.

[5] CRST. UNHCR Srebrenica to UNHCR Belgrade, 5/06/95 20:56.

their import appeared to be that Dutchbat should vacate the OPs so that the ABiH could take them over themselves. It was conceivable that the Bosnian warnings in Srebrenica had the same purpose. Another possibility seen by the Military Intelligence Service (MID) was that the ABiH warning could be intended to lay the responsibility for any escalation at the door of the VRS in advance. The minister was informed of the matter.[21]

Later in July 2000, this 'warning from Karremans' would emerge in the media as evidence of advance knowledge of an attack on the enclave, and as evidence of the fact that The Hague had paid no attention to the matter. It was stated that Deputy Commander Van Baal did not consider it necessary to inform Minister Voorhoeve about Karremans' message, but, as stated above, Voorhoeve definitely was informed. According to a Ministry spokesman, the fact that Voorhoeve did not respond was because the message was also addressed to UNPROFOR: Defence said that it was the UN's task to respond, and not the Army's.[22]

Another accusation was that UNPROFOR had done nothing with Karremans' information that the entire enclave would be attacked. This was with reference to the report from the British JCOs, but it was argued that it involved no more than a warning and not a probable event.

Analyses of the MID (MID/RNII) regarding a possible VRS attack went no further than to assume that the VRS might continue capturing OPs and that the ABiH would attempt to step up the tension through provocation, resulting in: shelling of ABiH positions and possible civilian targets.[23] This analysis was confirmed a few days later: according to an analyst, a repetition of the scenario that was applied in the capture of OP-E was possible, but as long as the hostage crisis had not been resolved, this would be politically unacceptable to the command of the Republika Srpska. Should the VRS nonetheless resort to action, they would probably limit themselves to OPs; the occupation of large parts of the enclave was unlikely for the time being.[24] At the time, neither did anyone within Dutchbat have the notion that the Bosnian Serbs might capture the entire enclave. The idea did exist that the VRS would try to nibble away at parts of the enclave, in particular OP-A, OP-R and OP-Q.[25]

Provocations from the side of the ABiH were meanwhile a cause of great concern for UNPROFOR. The Commander of Sector North East in Tuzla, the Norwegian Brigadier General Haukland, demanded that General Sead Delic, as commander of the 2nd Corps of the ABiH, take steps to ensure that the ABiH refrained from making their way outside the enclave. The fact was that this would only aggravate the situation in which Dutchbat and the population found themselves. The concerns also included 'Slivo-firing', which was the warring factions' practice of firing bullets and shells while under the influence of drink. ABiH soldiers regularly fired on the VRS, which led to escalation if the VRS fired back with heavy equipment.

Delic, however, responded by washing his hands in innocence: he did not see how firing a couple of rounds could provoke someone, and the ABiH only responded to actions by the VRS. According to him, the men in the enclave had no choice but to defend their families. Delic announced that he feared for the safety of the enclave, and that the ABiH and Dutchbat should defend it together. He also proposed that Dutchbat lay mines in front of the OPs, but he received the answer that there were no mines in a peacekeeping force's arsenal. At the same time, Delic did not think that the VRS would resort to combat with Dutchbat about the OPs. However, should Dutchbat withdraw from them without firing, it would be a sign of weakness that the VRS would want to exploit. This led to Delic's announcement that he had ordered the ABiH 'with all means to provide security for UNPROFOR'. In other words, the protector was to be protected by a nominally disarmed ABiH in Srebrenica! Haukland did not ask for any explanation of the meaning of this announcement. Delic did say that he was satisfied with Dutchbat's presence; according to him, the Netherlands was one of the few countries able to do the work there, and he would not want to see the battalion replaced by one from another country.[26]

- [6] SMG 1004/23. Capsat Maj Franken to Cap Groen, 06/06/95. NIOD, Coll. Sitreps. HQ Sector NE Daily Milinfosum from 051700B to 061700B Jun 95.
- [7] Debriefing statement of First Lieutenant L.C. van Duijn, 12/09/95; interview L.C. van Duijn, 02/07/99.
- [8] NIOD, Coll. Sitreps. HQ Dutchbat to Sector HQ North East, Daily Milinfosum from 061700 to 071700B Jun 95.
- [9] Interview L.C. van Duijn, 02/07/99.
- [10] NIOD, Coll. Sitreps. Milinfo 05 and 07/06/95, period 040600-050600 and 060600-070600B.
- [11] SMG 1004/23. Capsat Maj Franken to Cap Groen, 06/06/95.
- [12] NIOD, Coll. Sitreps. Milinfo, 09/06/95, period 080600-090600B.
- [13] NIOD, Coll. Sitreps. HQ Dutchbat to Sector HQ North East, Daily Milinfosum from 061700 to 071700B Jun 95.
- [14] MID/RNLA INTSUM 106/95, 061200Z Jun 95.
- [15] SMG 1004/25. Fax Dutchbat to CO-SNE, COS-BHC info CO-RNLA Crisis Staff, 08/06/95, UNPROFOR Confi. This document does not exist in the Coll. Karremans, neither is it included in *Srebrenica: Who Cares?*.
- [16] NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH Komanda 28. Divizije to Komanda 2. Korpusa, 08/08/95, Str. Pov. Br. 02-06-27/95.
- [17] NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH Komanda 28. Divizije to Komanda 2. Korpusa RBiH Odjeljenje morala, 09/08/95, Str. Pov. Br. 04-93/95.
- [18] Interview Hazrudin Kistic, 17/05/99 and 18/05/99.
- [19] Karremans *Srebrenica: Who Cares?*, p. 149.
- [20] Confidential information (1).
- [21] Bstas. Memorandum Head of Operations (Col R.S. van Dam) to the Minister, State Secretary, CDS, PCDS and SCOCIS, 09/06/95, unnumbered. It is unclear whether and how Karremans was informed of the MID's findings. The MID also pointed out that in the preceding days the ABiH had fired over the newly equipped OP-U towards the VRS, with the apparent purpose of provoking the VRS and involving the UN in the conflict.
- [22] See current affairs section NOVA of 11/07/00 and: 'Alarm Karremans over enclave werd genegeerd' (Karremans' alarm about enclave ignored), in: *De Volkskrant*, 12/07/00.
- [23] MID/RNLA, INTSUM 107/95, 071200Z Jun 95.
- [24] MID/RNLA, INTSUM 109/95, 091200Z Jun 95.
- [25] Interview L.C. van Duijn, 02/07/99.
- [26] UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 118, Civil Affairs-Sector North-East, 1994-1995. Minutes of Meeting with Brig Delic/Comd 2 Corps on June 7th 1995. Author MA/Comd Sec NE Maj Valved.
- [27] SMG, 1001. Capsat OPS 61 to OPS 90, 9/06/95 11:00; C-BCie to Dutchbat, 9/06/95 13:22; NIOD, Coll. Sitreps. HQ Sector NE Daily Milinfosum from 081700B to 091700B Jun 95; NIOD, Coll. Sitreps. HQ Sector NE Daily Milinfosum from 091700B to 101700B Jun 95; CRST. HQ Sector NE Daily Milinfosum from 101700B to 111700B Jun 95.
- [28] CRST. HQ Sector NE Daily Milinfosum from 081700B to 091700B Jun 95; NIOD, Coll. Sitreps. UNMO HQ Sector NE to UNMO BHC, Weekly Milinfosum 23/95, 111000B Jun 95; NIOD, Coll. Theunens. Interoffice Memorandum G2 Military Information Branch UNPF-HQ, G2 to COS, 12/06/95. Appendix A (Milinfosum) to HQ UNPROFOR Sarajevo dated 13/06/95; NIOD, Coll. Svensson. G2 Briefing SRSG 12/06/95; MID/RNLA. DOKL, Dept Intelligence and Security, Sect Information: Weekintsum No. 23/95, 7 June - 12 June, Confi.
- [29] MSF Brussels. Capsat MST Srebre to MSF Beo, 13/06/95 15:43.
- [30] NIOD, Coll. Nicolai. Diary of Nicolai 11/06/95.

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Part III

The fall of Srebrenica

Chapter 5

The period from 25 May 1995 to 6 July 1995

3. The days of late May and early June 1995: the VRS threaten around OP Echo

The area around OP-E at Zeleni Jadar, in the south-eastern corner of the enclave, had long been a disputed area. There were several reasons for it being of strategic importance: it was on the three-forked road that controlled the southern access to the enclave. Important Bosnian-Serb places in the region could be reached easily via Zeleni Jadar, including Milici, Vlasenica and the military stronghold Han Pijesak. If the route via Zeleni Jadar was unusable for the Bosnian Serbs, a detour was necessary via the northern side of the enclave.

In addition, both warring factions had economic interests at stake in Zeleni Jadar. For the Muslims, without control over Zeleni Jadar, the important route from Srebrenica to Zepa would be more difficult, because it was on the connecting route to that enclave. For the Bosnian Serbs, on the other hand, Zeleni Jadar formed the access to the bauxite mines on the southern side of the enclave. It was also important to both parties that the Srebrenica drinking water supply could be controlled from this location.

Apart from Zeleni Jadar itself, the industrial area to the south was of potential importance. According to a member of the Opstina, the Deputy Mayor of Srebrenica, the Canadian battalion (Canbat) in Zeleni Jadar had had an observation post behind the factories. This is why the industrial area formed part of the enclave before the arrival of Dutchbat I, and the Muslims therefore considered that it belonged to the enclave. However, according to this Opstina source, immediately after its arrival in March 1994, Dutchbat I took up an observation post in front of the industrial area for security reasons, so that the factories fell to the Bosnian Serbs. The Opstina were said to have pointed out the wrong position of OP-E, but they received the answer that Zeleni Jadar was a Bosnian-Serb area according to Dutchbat I.[1]

Moreover, a Canadian source refuted that in 'their' time the industrial area had belonged to the Bosnian Muslim territory: both Canbat battalion commanders were unanimous in their opinion on the matter. Dutchbat had simply taken over the OPs that Canbat had set up. OP-E was then also within the enclave, and then too - as some Muslims asserted - had not been situated to the south of the factory complex.[2] However, the OP had been moved: originally it was 200 metres outside the factory complex. Because of the shooting there, and because the ABiH had occupied positions there, the OP was moved,[3] but not to the south: the Canadians did attempt to include the local water plant in the area, but they were unsuccessful. Therefore, the Srebrenica drinking water supply remained a point of dispute between the warring factions.[4]

OP-E was a thorn in the VRS' flesh because it cut through the roads to the south of the enclave, and interfered with supplying the units around Srebrenica. The Bosnian-Serb side had nurtured the desire to be able to use the road to Milici for a long time. There were various meetings in which the use of the road was raised for discussion, but no agreement was ever reached because military traffic was involved, which no one wanted to permit.[5]

For instance, the Bosnian Serbs asked as early as September 1994 to be able to use the road to Milici, at a meeting between the VRS, Naser Oric and Battalion Commander Vermeulen of Dutchbat I (all of which was covered in Part II).

The War President of Srebrenica, Osman Suljic, did not agree with the use of the road by the VRS; he did not want to accept such a proposal. Suljic made no report to Sarajevo on this meeting because, he said, it was difficult to convey the information. The Civil Affairs Officer of Sector North East, Ken Biser, also heard of the meeting and did make a report. He was on a visit to Srebrenica. On 22 September he met Professor Nikola Koljevic, the Vice President of the Republika Srpska, and they discussed the use of the road. Koljevic originally wanted direct UNPROFOR assent to the use of the road, but finally agreed to discuss the matter in a meeting of the Joint Demilitarization Commission, in which there were also Bosnian representatives. This would not then happen in Srebrenica but in Sarajevo.[6] If UNPROFOR, as a goodwill gesture to the VRS, were not to permit the road to be used, then the Bosnian Serbs would feel obliged to open the road by force, Koljevic said. In this sense, the capture of OP-E could not have come as a strategic surprise.[7]

In March 1995, General Mladic had also requested General Smith to withdraw the UNPROFOR units in the south-eastern part of the enclave. According to Mladic, the UNPROFOR presence there permitted the ABiH to occupy territory, as well as 'an important road that was by rights Serbian.' Smith refused.[8] In April/May 1995, Koljevic found himself back at OP-E for the same purpose, but War President Osman Suljic did not meet him then.[9]

The events of 30 May

In spite of the apparent quiet in the enclave at the end of May, there were indeed rumblings in the surroundings of Srebrenica. On 30 May at 20.30 hours, the VRS requested an emergency meeting in the vicinity of OP-P in the north of the enclave. This came entirely out of the blue for Karremans. Dutchbat was represented by Section 5, the section for military-civil contacts; the VRS was represented by Major Nikolic and an unknown officer from Pale, who were apparently nervous. Nikolic announced that he had intelligence that the ABiH would attack OP-A and OP-C within two days and would take over all the equipment. The message was clear: when the ABiH was to take over OPs, the UN personnel must no longer be in that area. Otherwise, they would be a target for the VRS. Furthermore, the VRS complained that too many ABiH soldiers were in the vicinity of the Dutch OPs, especially OP-R in the east of the enclave, on the Zanik hill. If the ABiH were to attack the OPs, the message from the VRS side went, then Dutchbat personnel were welcome in the VRS lines, as long as they brought along their weapons and ammunition. Otherwise, Dutchbat was free to leave the enclave whenever it wanted.

Karremans did not know how to react to these statements. This could be a new approach from the VRS, or some kind of trick. The offer to Dutchbat of an unopposed withdrawal from the enclave and the offer to escape to the VRS lines had been made at an earlier stage, and complaining voices about too many ABiH soldiers in the vicinity of OPs were familiar. What was new, however, was that Dutchbat was considered to be a VRS target should the ABiH take over an OP. Under the prevailing circumstances, the Battalion Commander did not consider it very likely that the ABiH would adopt the position that the VRS predicted: that would be an upside-down world. Karremans had sensed earlier that the VRS were looking for a pretext to start an offensive operation, but again Karremans saw no necessity to abandon OPs.[10] In Gorazde, in the meantime, two OPs had been taken over by the VRS.

On the same day, 30 May, in the south-eastern part of the enclave, at OP-E, VRS Colonel Vukota Vukovic personally made clear to the OP crew that his men had already

surrounded OP-E.[11] This was evident when, half way through discussion, Vukovic hurriedly departed because there was shooting from a hill opposite the OP. The previous night, Sergeant Ceelen had already heard the sound of falling rocks, but he was unable to see anything with vision.[12] In the evening, fires could be seen in the hills. When the OP crew whistled, the VRS whistled back. Muslims, who under other circumstances would be waiting at the gate to the OP for bread, batteries, aid, sweets and tobacco, were no longer to be seen.[13] Shortly after midnight on 31 May, a powerful explosion was heard about one hundred metres from the OP: it appeared to be an attempt at intimidation.[14] Following an order from his company Commander, Captain Groen, Ceelen went to investigate by daylight, and to measure the crater that had resulted from the explosion. It turned out to be a large crater in the road.

The events of 31 May

The following day, 31 May, the VRS fired at Ceelen during a patrol. It was clear to Ceelen that the VRS were staging incidents around OP-E as a way of putting pressure on Dutchbat. Company Commander Groen decided to reinforce the OP: Sergeant Smit and a number of soldiers were added to the OP crew, bringing the crew strength up to twelve. At the same time, Groen ordered a foxhole to be dug in an area of higher ground behind the OP, and to have it occupied during the day by one of the two sergeants and a soldier.[15] The purpose of this observation post was to give warning of a VRS arrival, to facilitate denial of access to the enclave entrance road by any armoured personnel carriers.[16] For this purpose, the post was equipped with AT-4 short range anti-tank weapons.[17]

On 31 May, the combatants in the vicinity of OP-E were indeed fighting with each other, although Dutchbat had little relevant information. There was also fighting at OP-F, which was a little further away. It is possible that during the previous night there had been VRS infiltrations in the vicinity of OP-K and OP-D to the south of the enclave. Reconnaissance patrols stumbled across each other on two occasions in the vicinity of OP-E on 31 May, and two ABiH soldiers were wounded, and two from the VRS died.

More problems appeared to be on the way, because the ABiH had understood from intercepted message traffic that Zeljko Raznjatovic, better known as Arkan, had arrived in Bratunac on 1 June to prepare sabotage and terror actions. The VRS Drina Corps had also ordered the Milici Brigade to lay ambushes in the area to the south of Srebrenica with the intention of regaining control of the area between Srebrenica and Zepa, where - as is evident from a Milici Brigade report - the Muslims were then lord and master. This resulted in three operations in the night of 31 May to 1 June, in which ten ABiH soldiers died, six were wounded and one was taken prisoner. Messages from the ABiH confirmed the events, but spoke of seven dead on their own side, including four soldiers (of the 284th ABiH Brigade), who were carrying a wounded soldier who had trodden on an anti-personnel mine; they were taking him from Zepa to the hospital in Srebrenica.[18]

What the warring factions were after was OP-E, from where the southern part of the enclave and the access to the town could be controlled. In a letter to Bosnia-Herzegovina Command, Karremans adopted the position that he would continue to defend OP-E with support from the Quick Reaction Force. If the ABiH were going to attack the OP, the VRS would close the road between OP-E and Srebrenica. In that case the VRS would find themselves confronted with the Quick Reaction Force. Dutchbat did not have a mind to give up OPs, was in a position to defend each OP, and would act accordingly, Karremans said in his letter. It was unacceptable for the VRS to cross the confrontation line: when that happened, Dutchbat would resist with all means at their disposal. Karremans added that there was a 'massive reserve echelon'. The VRS had announced that they would not start any offensive actions against UN units. The VRS wanted to maintain good relations with UNPROFOR in

general, and on a local level with Dutchbat in particular. The VRS were unable to understand Dutchbat's firmness. Nevertheless, Karremans concluded from a meeting with VRS officer Vukovic on that day, that the VRS were looking for a pretext to start an action, and that the VRS were trying everything to step up the pressure on the battalion.[19]

The VRS also expressed their rage through Colonel Vukovic regarding an ABiH infiltration on 28 May that had cost the lives of seven Bosnian Serbs. Whereas earlier Karremans had dismissed the murder of these seven Bosnian Serbs as an irrelevant historical fact towards General Nicolai, he now saw it as a pretext for the VRS to start an action. Another point that the VRS had brought up in discussions was that they expected the ABiH to provoke an attack near OP-E. OP-A and OP-C in the west, about which this fear had been expressed earlier, were now apparently out of the picture. In the event of an attack by the ABiH, the VRS would defend themselves, and the VRS were concerned about the fact that OP-E would then be in the line of fire. Vukovic therefore came up with the proposal that, in the event of an attack, the crew could seek shelter with the VRS. In any case, the OP would have to be evacuated as rapidly as possible. Later in the afternoon, Section 5, for military-civil contacts, informed the ABiH of the substance of the discussion with the VRS.[20] The ABiH response was not recorded.

The events of 1 June

On 1 June, VRS Colonel Vukovic again had a discussion with a Dutchbat representative, this time at OP-E. Karremans agreed to a discussion, and this time attended in person, although De Ruiter in Sarajevo had expressly told him two days earlier not to go himself; the fact was that experience in Zepa and Gorazde had shown that one hour before the meeting troop movements would take place near the venue.[21] After the Dutchbat liaison team had arrived at the post, the VRS was called on the phone. Despite the guarantee of their safety, the VRS negotiating team did not wish to come to OP-E, however: Vukovic did not consider it safe. The VRS therefore proposed another venue, between the OP and the VRS positions, three hundred metres to the south, which the Dutchbat negotiators could reach by foot or APC.[22] Karremans was unwilling to do this, in view of the experiences in Gorazde, where two days earlier the VRS had taken two OP crews hostage. Karremans therefore later spoke briefly with Vukovic through an interpreter, on a phone line that ran between the OP and the VRS positions, while standing on the lookout tower of the OP.

Vukovic notified Karremans on behalf of the Commander of the Drina Corps, Major General Zivanovic himself, that the VRS intended from that moment on to use the road to the south of the enclave that led to the bauxite mine area. Dutchbat was therefore requested to open the road at OP-E, and to evacuate the OP.[23] Karremans rejected this request. In the evening, Vukovic also received written confirmation at OP-P of the rejection of his proposal: the fact was that OP-E lay within the borders of the Safe Area, and it was Dutchbat's duty to man OPs along the confrontation line, Karremans said.[24]

According to Corporal de Vries, Sergeant Ceelen on OP-E asked Karremans after the discussion between Karremans and Vukovic whether there were any details that he should be aware of. According to De Vries, the Company Commander had answered Ceelen by saying that this was not the case. Ceelen confirmed this, and added that Captain Groen had asked Karremans the same question, and had also received the answer that nothing had been discussed that was of interest to the crew of the OP. The Dutchbat soldiers on the OP had other ideas, however; the pressure from the VRS increased. Ceelen heard later on the Netherlands World Service radio that Vukovic had demanded the evacuation of an OP. If that was indeed the case, which it was, Karremans should have said so, in Ceelen's opinion, because the OP was in danger from that moment on. Furthermore, Ceelen heard from the interpreter about the VRS plans to take the southern point of the enclave.[25]

The 28th Division was preparing for further hostilities, and in the meantime sent extra ammunition to the various brigades. Altogether this was a reasonable quantity, but in proportion to the number of available rifles it was not much more than twenty cartridges each. The ammunition that was distributed consisted of 43,000 rifle rounds, 4500 machine gun rounds, 280 hand grenades, 45 M-57 anti-tank rockets, 30 82 mm mortar shells and 52 rounds for a 60 mm rocket launcher.[26]

It remained unsettled in and around the enclave. In the town of Srebrenica itself, men with weapons became an increasingly common sight.[27] According to the Canadian UNMO Captain Bob Patchett, there was a hint that something was about to happen, but it was unclear when it would be. The VRS had been complaining for weeks that the ABiH were digging trenches and were walking around heavily armed, but now more positions than before were being occupied on both sides. According to Patchett, another signal was being shown a map by the VRS with new confrontation lines. These lines implied that the Swedish Shelter Project - whose entrance was not far from OP-E - would come under Bosnian Serb control.[28]

The ABiH liaison officer requested to be able to discuss the situation with UNMOs on a daily basis, and also requested information on the state of affairs in Gorazde. However, the UNMOs did not have this. In turn, the UNMOs requested the ABiH to refrain from provocation. The population had already been warned not to allow cattle to graze in the vicinity of the confrontation line, and not to cut wood there.[29]

In the morning of 1 June, there was an exchange of fire to the south of the enclave. Residents reported that the VRS had laid an ambush in the hills of Sucasca in the vicinity of OP-K (two kilometres west of OP-E), which was located on one of the smuggling routes to Zepa, along which a group had just returned to Srebrenica. According to an ABiH source, eleven people died in this ambush, including several ABiH soldiers.[30] The ABiH then formed a special unit to retrieve the bodies, including those of several boys under the age of sixteen. According to an ABiH source, a local Dutchbat commander was said to have told the VRS that the ABiH men had been in combat action, and that, although only flour was found in their rucksacks brought from Zepa. There was no publicity on the incident.[31]

The crew of OP-K had indeed counted 46 ABiH soldiers, who were walking to the ambush site. The OP crew also saw that the VRS were unloading weapons from a vehicle and were setting up weapon mounts. Later the same day, Dutchbat also observed a T-55 tank there. A returning group of Bosnian Muslims smugglers even reported that the VRS had ten tanks to the south of the enclave, and that the VRS regularly entered the enclave via this smuggling route. Even more remarkable was that this group (35 men, 20 of whom were armed, and 35 horses) said that they had bought five armoured personnel carriers (type BTR-60) from the Ukrainian battalion in Zepa. Karremans had the story of the purchased armoured personnel carriers investigated and came to the conclusion that it was untrue.[32]

On the other hand, UNMOs reported, as the 'oddest item of news', that two such armoured personnel carriers had entered the enclave at night. The crew of OP-K is said to have seen the armoured personnel carriers, fired flares, and even tried to shoot at them, but the vehicles were out of range. The corresponding OP-K report indicated that two wheeled vehicles, probably armoured personnel carriers of the same type BTR-60, entered the enclave via the road that ran 250 metres to the east of the OP, and subsequently made their way to the north.[33]

One month later, more reports emerged on these armoured personnel carriers: during the night of 1 July, OP-C in the southwest heard heavy engine noises from the adjoining Bandera triangle. A resident reported that ABiH BTR-60s were involved.[34] No further indications regarding the presence of this type of armoured personnel carrier in the enclave were found. There was a story that they had continued through the lines on to Tuzla.

The events of 2 June

Confusion and fear reigned in these days in the enclave. A contributory factor was that the UN had withdrawn its Civil Police from the town to the Dutchbat compound in Potocari.^[35] UNHCR also reported that the tension was increasing hand over fist. This was not only a consequence of the ambush laid by the VRS at OP-K, but also of reports that could be heard on Radio Bratunac: 1500 Arkan troops were on the way to Bratunac to capture Srebrenica, and the VRS intended to capture OPs from Dutchbat by force.^[36]

Dutchbat heard still more panic reports. 10,000 VRS soldiers were reported to be on standby on the Drina and they were to attack that same evening. All they were waiting...

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- [1] Interview Hamdija Fejzic, 03/02/98.
 - [2] Interview Pierre Desjardins, 12/11/99.
 - [3] Interview Yvan Bouchard, 15/11/99.
 - [4] Interview Thomas K.D. Geburt, 18/11/99.
 - [5] Interview Petr Uscumlic 14/09/99.
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 - [7] UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 25/77, File 1.1.57, SNE 4 April - 23 August 1995. Fax Biser to Corwin, 09/06/95, unnumbered.
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 - [9] Interview Osman Suljic, 04/03/98.
 - [10] CO Dutchbat to HQ UNPROFOR Sarajevo through HQ BH Sector NE, 30/05/95, No. TK9583. Appx. 19 in Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?* See also p.141.
 - [11] SMG/Debrief. Diary of E.R. de Vries.
 - [12] Interview W.A. Ceelen, 02/0799.
 - [13] SMG/Debrief diary of E.R. de Vries.
 - [14] Dijkema, *Dutchbat in vredesnaam*, p. 157.
 - [15] Interview W.A. Ceelen, 02/07/99.
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 - [17] Debriefing report M.J. Koper, 08/09/95.
 - [18] ICTY (IT-98-33) D122/a, D53/a, D52/a. Command of 1st Milici Brigade to Command of Drina Corps, 01/06/95, No. I/02-495-1. ABiH 28th Division Command, Asst Commander for Security Captain Nedžad Bektic to Command of 2nd Corps Security Department, 02/06/95, No. 13-05-77/95; ABiH 28th Division, Distribution of materiel and technical equipment, 02/06/95, No. 02-35/95.
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 - [20] CO Dutchbat to HQ UNPROFOR Sarajevo through HQ BH Sector NE, 31/05/95, No. TK9584. Appx. 20 in Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?* See also p. 141.
 - [21] Karremans, *Srebrenica: Who Cares?*, p. 140.
 - [22] NIOD, Coll. Karremans. CO Dutchbat to BH Command, 01/06/95, No. TK 9586.
 - [23] Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?*, p. 144 and Appx. 21.
 - [24] NIOD, Coll. Karremans. CO Dutchbat to Col Vukovic, 01/06/95, No. TK9585.
 - [25] SMG/Debrief. Diary of E.R. de Vries; interview W.A. Ceelen, 02/07/99.
 - [26] ICTY (IT-98-33) D122/a, D53/a, D52/a. Command of 1st Milici Brigade to Command of Drina Corps, 01/06/95, No. I/02-495-1; ABiH 28th Division Command, Asst Commander for Security Captain Nedžad Bektic to Command of 2nd Corps Security Department, 02/06/95, No. 13-05-77/95; ABiH 28th Division, Distribution of materiel and technical equipment, 02/06/95, No. 02-35/95.
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 - [28] Interview Bob Patchett, 19/11/99.
 - [29] SMG 1001. Capsat TX to TA info Dutchbat LO Team, 012130B Jun 95.
 - [30] Interview ABiH Captain Hazrudin Kistic, 17/05/99 and 18/05/99.
 - [31] Confidential interview (51).
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Part IV

The repercussion and the aftermath until the end of 1995

Chapter 1

The journey from Srebrenica to Tuzla

1. Introduction

The population of Srebrenica, numbering roughly 40,000 at the time of the enclave's fall, was already on the move on 10 and 11 July. The people were heading for the Dutchbat compound and for an assembly point in the north-western corner of the enclave. Meanwhile the VRS offensive continued unabated, eventually resulting in the Bosnian Serb occupation of much of the enclave. This marked the beginning of a period in which the people of Srebrenica, and the men in particular, would be subjected to horrors of unparalleled atrocity. In a mass exodus, a large group of the men attempted to flee the VRS and to reach the safe territory of the Muslim-Croat Federation. To do so they had to cross an area in the hands of the Republika Srpska. Those who surrendered or otherwise fell into the hands of the Bosnian Serbs became the victims of mass executions, as described in the following chapter.

Over the years, many versions of the march from Srebrenica and the circumstances by which it was prompted have been given, leading to some confusion regarding exactly where the truth lies. This report attempts to relate the events as dispassionately as possible, reconstructing the chronology of events in as far as this can be ascertained. The recollections of a few survivors are included to provide some insight into the emotions which prevailed at the time.

However, it is far from easy to offer an accurate reconstruction of the journey to Tuzla. The existing source material allows the route to be ascertained, and provides some information regarding the decision to set out on the march with the column as well as some information regarding the VRS actions against the Muslim men. The locations of conflicts between the column and the VRS can also be ascertained with reasonable accuracy, enabling us to pinpoint where victims fell.

Far less is known about the internal dynamics of the column, in terms of the communication between the various sections (becoming more spread out as the column progressed), how decisions were taken, the effects of disagreement and internal fighting, and the fate which befell the groups which remained behind. It has proven particularly difficult to ascertain exactly *when* certain events took place, people's sense of time being less developed than that of location. This is clearly demonstrated by the various witness statements.

There are no diaries or journals to provide any *aide-mémoire*. The column, some kilometres in length, became increasingly spread out as it progressed and it is sometimes difficult to ascertain whether the events described took place at the fore, middle or rear. There are no reliable statistics regarding the numbers of victims or the number of people who actually reached Tuzla or when they arrived.[1] Existing reports and studies tend to concentrate on the number of missing people, omitting to state how many people arrived safely in Tuzla.[2]

We can distinguish two main groups of refugees. First, there was that comprising

mostly of elderly people, women and children who assembled at the UN compound in Potocari under the supervision of Dutchbat. Second, there was a group which assembled near the village of Jaglici in the north-western part of the enclave and at Susnjari slightly to the south, with the intent of fleeing to Bosnian territory. This group, estimated to be between 10,000 and 15,000 strong, included enlisted military personnel, able-bodied men of military age, the political leaders of the enclave, the medical staff of the local hospital and family members of those who had played some prominent part in life within the enclave. They set out from the north-western corner of the enclave with the intention of reaching on foot the area controlled by the Bosnian government.

A third and somewhat smaller group of refugees attempted to escape into Serbia via Mount Kvarac via Bratunac, or across the River Drina and via Bajina Basta. According to the Humanitarian Law Centre in Belgrade, this group numbered some 700,^[3] although the organization Women of Srebrenica estimated that approximately 800 men had crossed the Drina on the way to Serbia. It is not known how many were intercepted, arrested and killed on the way.

In April 1996, the Serbian authorities handed 211 persons over to their Bosnian counterparts.^[4] Most of these refugees did not wish to return to Bosnia as they expected to experience difficulties when asked to explain why they had chosen to flee to Serbia in the first place. They therefore proceeded to other countries.^[5]

A fourth group headed for Zepa, possibly having first tried to reach Tuzla.^[6] The size of this group is not known. Furthermore, not all the names of those who actually reached Zepa were recorded. The estimates of the numbers involved therefore vary widely, from 300 to around 850. The only firm figures in existence are provided by a report stating that 25 civilians arrived in Zepa on 16 July along with 82 soldiers of the 28th Division. (The Commander, Ejub Golic, was not among them).^[7] Chapter 9 of this part will describe how those who managed to reach Zepa were again forced to flee at the end of July, when the population had to leave the Safe Area due to the continued VRS offensive. At this time, many of the military and civilian personnel fled - with the assistance of the Serbian authorities - across the Drina or followed more or less the same route to Tuzla as had previously been taken by the men from Srebrenica. Some arrived only months later.

By far the largest group was that which followed the notorious route towards Tuzla through the forests and mountains. The journey to Tuzla - a distance of 55 kilometres as the crow flies - entailed crossing extremely hilly terrain in the height of the summer heat. The progress of the column which set out from Srebrenica is charted on the map added to this part. The locations of the events described in the text are indicated using the figures 01 to 16.

The largest group to complete the journey safely did so in five days, their progress marked by continual skirmishes with the VRS, severe shortages of food and water, and the general exhaustion of all concerned. The column was completely cut off from all food supplies. In general, each individual had started out with enough rations for only two days, everyone having a just little bread and sugar. Shortages began to become apparent on the third day, whereupon the people had to turn to leaves, grass and snails for sustenance.^[8] Alongside under-nourishment, the high summer temperatures caused dehydration. Finding sources of drinking water or moisture became a major problem, solved in part by eating any fruit which could be found along the way. The terrain over which the route passed was inhospitable and densely wooded. Much was at high altitude. For water, the people had to descend into the valleys and the water was not always clean. The enormous difficulties caused by hunger and thirst were further compounded by lack of sleep and the sheer effort required. This was a physically exhausting undertaking. Soon after setting out, the men faced a choice between acceding to the VRS call to give themselves up or carrying on. The latter option would inevitably entail ongoing armed conflict with the VRS which would in turn bring much death

and destruction. Some people began to show symptoms of severe mental distress. Some turned on others, killing them outright. Others committed suicide.

There was little cohesion or sense of common purpose in the column. This would have been difficult to achieve given that the string of people stretched back several kilometres. Depending on the situation at any given moment, the column could be anything between five and ten kilometres in length. This made it a particularly easy target for the VRS and contributed much to a gnawing sense of uncertainty regarding the fate of friends and family elsewhere in the column. This uncertainty gave rise to much speculation, such as rumours that poison gas had been used. (The question of whether the VRS had indeed used chemical weapons is examined in the Appendix 'Chemical weapons used?') There were also rumours that the people captured by the VRS had managed to buy their freedom by offering the Bosnian Serbs money.

Many people in the column had been exhausted even before setting out on the march, following the siege of Srebrenica, the fighting with the VRS, the lack of food and the arduous conditions in general. The vast majority of the people from Srebrenica later reported as missing were among the 10,000 to 15,000 people who undertook this perilous journey. Some six thousand were active military personnel, although not all were armed at the time. With such a large proportion of troops in the column, it be claimed that it formed a legitimate military target for the VRS. Indeed, during the trial of the Drina Corps' Chief-of-Staff, General Radislav Krstic, the military advisors to both the prosecution and the defence agreed on this point, and the Tribunal chose not to consider it further, nor whether there had been any breach of the law of war in this regard.^[9] The charges against Krstic did not therefore include that of deliberate hostilities on the part of the VRS against the civilian personnel of the column. However, it is certain that VRS action contributed greatly to the extremely tragic series of events affecting this group of people.

The sources and reference material for this chapter of the report have been derived from both sides, but mostly from the archives kept by the Bosnian Muslims. The majority of the Bosnian witness statements are taken from the records of the 'State Commission for the Collection of Information on War Crimes Committed in Bosnia-Herzegovina', based in Sarajevo. In order to ensure the anonymity of the witnesses concerned, their statements are not annotated in this report. The NIOD has been able to supplement the information previously available with that gained through interviews with those involved in the events described.

The General Staff of the ABiH provided the NIOD access to certain documents, including transcripts of intercepted telephone conversations held between VRS personnel and several orders and situation reports from their archive. To date, the ABiH has made little attempt to chronicle the relevant events in a structured manner.

The time of departure and the route adopted by the column were both contrary to the instructions of the 2nd Corps of the ABiH and were therefore construed as a sign of deliberate disobedience. The members of the 28th Division who survived the journey felt betrayed by their own army, pointing to the extremely limited support they had received. This may have resulted in the exact motives for the action on the part of the Bosnians having been ignored. Although a few ABiH officers were debriefed by the 2nd Corps upon arrival in Tuzla,^[10] only one debriefing report has been found among the records of the 2nd Corps itself. This is actually a supplement to an earlier debriefing of the Deputy Commander of the ABiH's 28th Division, Ramiz Becirovic.^[11] The General Staff of the ABiH in Sarajevo have another undated - document which may have been the result of a debriefing. However, it is very limited in scope and its focus is on the situation prior to the fall of Srebrenica and the subsequent executions rather than on the journey to Tuzla itself.^[12] The material derived from the ABiH archives must be approached with a certain degree of caution in that the selection was made by persons other than the authors of this report. A further source of information is

provided by certain trial documents used in the case against the Chief of Staff and later Commander of the Drina Corps, General Radislav Krstic. These are documents which originally derive from the VRS Drina Corps and from the VRS General Staff. The material from the VRS archives consists partly of documents seized from the ABiH and partly from material acquired specifically for the purposes of the Tribunal. Here too, there is a danger of the selection being too restrictive.

In Bosnia, the fall of Srebrenica resulted in a constant stream of publications in local daily and weekly press reports, in anthologies of such reports, of eye witness accounts and full-length treatments of the conflict. An important work for the Dutch-speaking region is the anthology Srebrenica: *'Het verhaal van de overlevenden'* (Srebrenica: the survivors' story).^[13] The only work published in Bosnia itself to make use of the ABiH records is *'Otprecaceni koverat'*, a book by the journalist Sefko Hodzic, who was given access to a limited number of ABiH documents. While the NIOD has enjoyed access to a rather larger range of documents, Hodzic nevertheless provides some important supplementary information. Where relevant, the content of the documents consulted and interviews conducted by Hodzic has been incorporated into this report verbatim (in translation). Of the other publications about Srebrenica, such as those by David Rohde, Chuck Sudetic, Both & Honig and Westerman & Rijs, only Rohde briefly mentions the journey to Tuzla.^[14]

Some of the source material requires some comment. The statements made by survivors were taken within two or three days of their arrival in Tuzla by the 'State Commission for the collection of information concerning war crimes committed in Bosnia-Herzegovina'. These statements, 184 in all, often give contradictory accounts of the events. Most of those questioned were still disoriented at the time, confused with regard to the exact location of the events (i.e. unable to provide any geographic indicators) and lacking a focused sense of time. Few people seemed to have had the same experiences. Moreover, almost every statement contains information which was based on rumour and speculation rather than on personal observation. This is certainly the case with regard to the alleged use of chemical weapons by the VRS (examined in greater detail in the Appendix 'Chemical weapons used?'), the alleged infiltration of VRS soldiers in civilian clothes into the column, and the 'infighting' within the column itself.

On numerous occasions during the interviews, the survivors proved to be extremely reticent and cautious in their descriptions of the events and in offering any sort of comment. The horrors of the journey and their experiences en route had served to traumatize many. Witnesses often felt both bitter and guilty: in their own perception they had failed as soldiers. Their statements often emphasize the fact that they were the very last to leave their posts and to abandon the enclave. The bitterness reflects the view that neither the ABiH, the political authorities of Bosnia-Herzegovina or the UN took any action to protect the enclave or rescue its inhabitants.

There is a further circumstance which complicates the survivors' statements. During their three-and-a-half years in the Safe Area, they lived in almost complete isolation from the outside world, completely reliant on each other. The dramatic journey highlighted this reliance yet further. Although they were spread out over some distance, most travelled in groups. Many of the survivors, both those who later remained in Bosnia and those who have since been granted asylum in other countries, still live in these groups. Their experiences during the journey were regarded in the group context and the process of dealing with the psychological effects of the experiences has also been marked by the group context. Accordingly, not all elements of personal recollection are necessarily based on personal observation. There can be said to be an 'authorized version' of the account of the journey.

To summarize, we can therefore state that a relatively large quantity of material concerning the journey to Tuzla is available, but that this information is extremely fragmented

and is based on individual accounts. There can be no general, all-embracing overview. This makes it particularly difficult to reconstruct the journey as a whole, particularly when considering the various factors that caused the column to split up at a relatively early stage. Experiences differed. The ongoing fear and sense of insecurity, the loss of family members, the apparent proximity of death and the sense of helplessness felt by the people may have influenced their perception. Memories may have been corrupted by information gained since. There was great confusion even before setting out for Tuzla and this certainly did not diminish as the column progressed. However, there is no reason to cast doubt on the veracity of the witness accounts recalling the many traumatic events they faced. The differences are largely in the details.

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[1] Hren, *Srebrenica: Het verhaal van de overlevenden* (Srebrenica: the survivors' story), p. 23.

[2] See e.g. Report of the Secretary General submitted pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1010 (1995), 30/08/95, No. S/1995/755.

[3] Interview Natasa Kandic, 14/03/00.

[4] Hren, *Srebrenica: het verhaal van de overlevenden*, p. 23-4. See also Masic, *Srebrenica*.

[5] Interview Natasa Kandic, 14/03/00.

[6] Interview Hazrudin Kistic, 17 and 18/05/99.

[7] <http://serbianlinks.freehosting.net/srebrenica.html> consulted 29/04/99, referring to a message sent by Major Ramo Cardakovic to the ABiH 2nd Corps on 22/07/95 at 2.20pm. Also interview Muhamed Durakovic, 22/11/99.

[8] Interview Osman Suljic, 04/03/98.

[9] ICTY, (IT-98-33) Exh. D160, Radinovic Report, § 3.25, (IT-98-33), Judgement, para. 163.

[10] Interview Smail Mandzic, 18/05/99.

[11] ABiH Tuzla. ABiH 2nd Corps. Supplementary statement by Ramiz Becirovic, 16/04/98, based on an earlier statement on 11/08/95.

[12] ABiH Sarajevo, 'Armutovic Archive'.

[13] Hren, *Srebrenica: Het verhaal van de overlevenden* (Srebrenica: the survivors' story), *passim*.

[14] See the Bibliography and References section for further details.

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Part IV

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3. The motives for the flight

Many of the people who took part in the exodus and who were later interviewed stated that their reason for fleeing the area was fear of reprisals by the VRS, although they did not explicitly refer to the events prior to the establishment of the Safe Area or the later activities beyond the boundaries of the enclave. Some cited doubt concerning the ability of Dutchbat to offer them adequate protection. The general opinion seemed to have been that Dutchbat neither intended to nor was able to defend the enclave. On this point, the statements are unanimous: flight offered the only hope of survival. 'Had we fallen into the hands of the Cetniks, we would have been killed on the spot. Leaving gave us a chance. We knew what to expect if they caught us.' According to witness statements, most of the men were convinced that they should flee before the VRS managed to enter the enclave. Few if any believed that the VRS would offer a chance of survival or allow them to leave later without any reprisals.

'Few if any believed that there would be any exchange of prisoners of war. If a member of the ABiH fell into the hands of the VRS there was a very high probability that he would be killed. Knowing this, most thought it wise to flee the area. The people did not therefore leave the enclave on the basis of any concrete warning of what would happen but on the basis of experiences of events elsewhere.[1] For example, the fact that 762 Muslims had been killed in Zvornik on 1 June 1992 left little doubt as to what would happen if men of military age fell into the hands of the Bosnian Serbs. A similar massacre had taken place in Cerska on 9 September 1992, when a group of 6000 refugees from Konjevic Polje, Cerska and Kamenica tried to reach Tuzla. The VRS had laid ambushes and opened fire on the column, killing many and taking hundreds of prisoners.[2] Some 500 people were killed close to Snagovo, as the moving column came under fire from artillery and aircraft. Human remains were still to be seen as the column of July 1995 passed on its way to Tuzla. Most refugees were forced to return to Cerska, later arriving in Srebrenica where they recounted their experiences. It was also clear that the VRS wanted to take revenge for the murders of 1992 and 1993 by Muslims in Serb villages. Almost everyone in the column going to Tuzla would have taken this into account.[3]

The pessimism was not universal, however, in that some hoped and believed that the VRS would be willing to leave a corridor open through which the column would be able to proceed to Tuzla without hindrance. The reasoning was that the Bosnian Serbs' primary objective was the territory itself rather than the killing of the men. However, there were only rumours concerning the existence of a corridor; there was never any actual information.[4] The topic was regularly raised. Indeed, it had been mentioned in previous years, but the idea of safe passage for the entire population had met resistance from the Bosnian Government. For the Bosnian Serbs, the corridor was a useful element in their psychological warfare against the citizens of Srebrenica. The most cogent example of this was the broadcasts made by Radio Bratunac between 10 and 20 July 1995, calling on the people of the enclave to leave and

proceed into the territory of the Muslim-Croat Federation of their own volition. These broadcasts explicitly stated that the VRS would open up a corridor to allow all citizens (including military personnel unless guilty of 'war crimes') free passage. Apparently, these broadcasts led to it being rumoured throughout Srebrenica that the VRS would indeed open up such a corridor.^[5] Even ABiH officers stated that this would be the case.^[6] Military personnel therefore accepted the rumour as true. However, there were no orders from the *Opstina* and the usual couriers on horseback brought no information.^[7]

Some people did not expect there to be any announcement by the authorities and tried to organize something themselves, hoping to set out for Tuzla without attracting attention or confrontation.^[8] So it was that some broke out of the enclave as early as 10th July. This was strictly against orders and any military personnel involved were then regarded as deserters.^[9] Many were incensed that such groups had simply walked out of the enclave having hired a local guide from Konjevic Polje or Cerska.^[10]

However, the VRS did not open a corridor after 11 July. The men's departure came as a surprise to the Bosnian Serbs too. During his discussions in the Hotel Fontana on 11 and 12 July, Mladic had tried to force the surrender of the ABiH but failed due to the unexpected flight of the men. The Bosnian Serbs had not expected the Muslim men to leave the women behind. It was traditional for them to remain together. Without the women, there was little left to fight for. Furthermore, it would have been more usual for the civilian population to leave followed by the military, not the other way around.^[11]

Later, the Bosnian Muslims construed the fact that no corridor had been opened as evidence of the Bosnian Serbs' intent to kill. That ambushes had been laid even before the column arrived in the area was seen as yet another indication that the VRS planned to dispose of the men once and for all. The VRS would have expected the column to proceed to Tuzla via Kladanj, Palogi, Baljkovica, Barasinovac and Mehmedici. A second, alternative route would have passed through Spidanska Stena and then on to Zepa. According to the ABiH, the VRS prepared accordingly, laying mines along the entire route in advance, even before the column had left the enclave.^[12] However, there is no evidence to support this view. The VRS did not lay any ambushes or obstacles in advance for the simple reason that they did not foresee any breakout from the enclave. There are no indications that the VRS prepared in any way for the breakout or that they knew anything about it until the column was well under way. The ambushes were laid later and, according to an ABiH soldier who came from the area, the mines around Buljin which proved to be such a major obstacle had been there for some time.
[13]

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- [1] Interview Semsudin Muminovic, 17/05/99.
- [2] Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, p. 81.
- [3] Confidential interview (55).
- [4] Interview Ilijaz Pilav, 22/10/97 and Hamdija Fejzic, 03/02/98.
- [5] Interview Hamdija Fejzic, 03/02/98.
- [6] Interview Omer Subasic, 19 and 20/10/97.
- [7] Confidential interview (55).
- [8] Interview Hamdija Fejzic, 03/02/98.
- [9] Interviews Damir Skaler and Muharem Mujic, 17/05/99.
- [10] Interviews Damir Skaler and Muharem Mujic, 17/05/99.
- [11] Interview Manojlo Milovanovic, 18/10/98.
- [12] Interview Semsudin Muminovic, 17/05/99.
- [13] Confidential interview (55).

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8. 12 July: the VRS deploys heavy weaponry

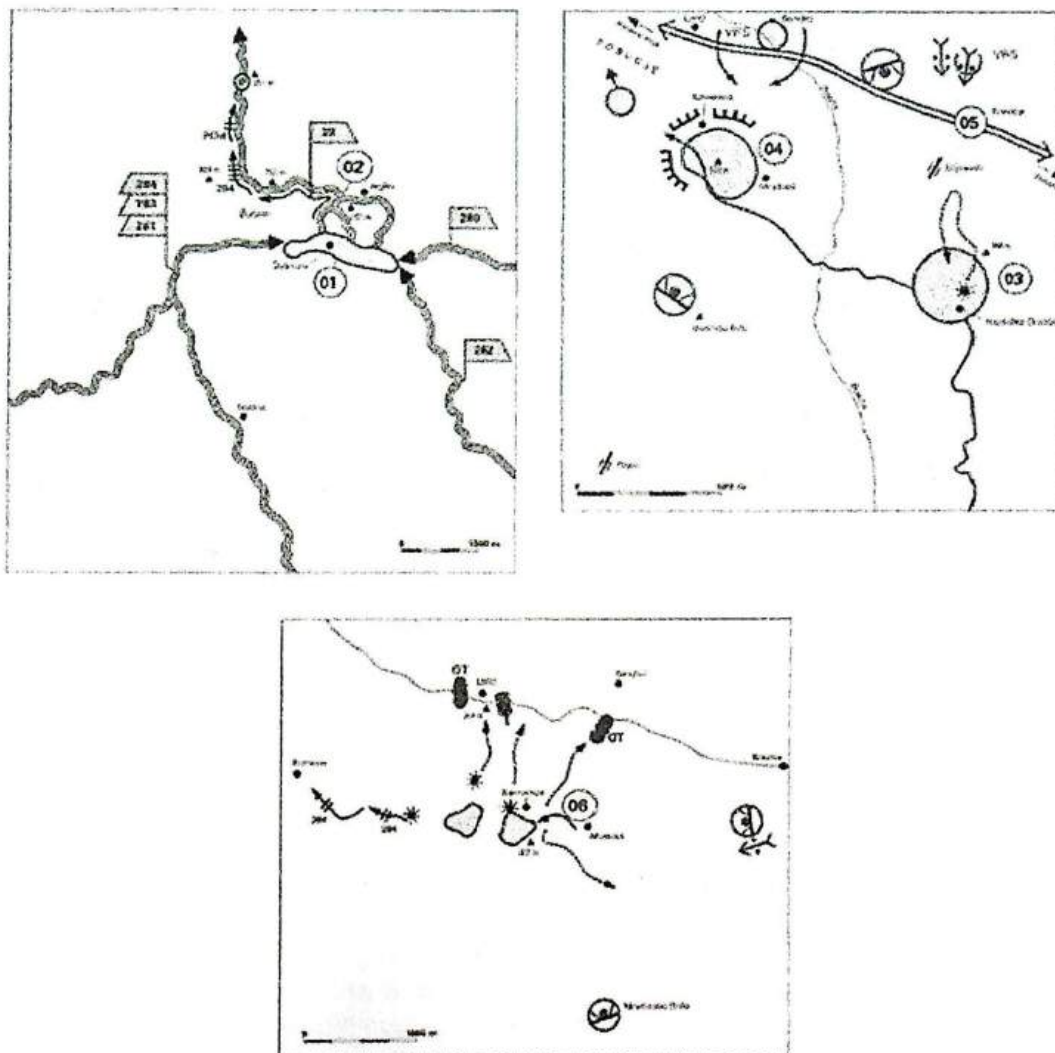
One of the concerns of the column as it left Susnjari was whether it would be possible to cross the main Bratunac - Konjevic Polje - Nova Kasaba road before sunrise. Given the short time remaining and the sheer length of the column, this concern proved founded - it was not possible.[1] After the VRS had discovered the column's movements, there was an immediate movement of troops and equipment, whereby VRS artillery opened fire from the villages of Siljkovici, Rogac and Mratinsko Brdo (in area number 03 on the map). At this stage, the VRS was unable to come close to the column and was therefore firing on it from the mountains. Meanwhile, the VRS had also begun to lay ambushes along the asphalted Bratunac - Konjevic Polje road, in the villages of Kamenica, Sandici and Lolic (in area 04 on the map).

From the village of Susnjari, the column moved to nearby Jaglici, in which the now abandoned Dutchbat OP-M was located. The 281st Brigade set out at precisely 01.30 hours and arrived on the Buljin plateau at around 05.30 hours.[2] The main part of the column did not move off until 05.00 hours. By the time the rear set out it was almost light, while the intention had been to pass the Buljin plateau before daybreak.[3] One group at the very rear of the column did not move off because the VRS was already too close. They were forced to divert to Zepa.[4] At first, the journey between Susnjari and Buljin went well[5] (see 01 and 02 on map). After Buljin, there was a descent and it became necessary to cross a number of rivulets. In the centre of Buljin was a VRS bunker but it was deserted.

The vanguard of the column, including the 284th Brigade under Vejz Sabic, reached the Hajducko Groblje mountain at approximately 07.00 hours (see 03, 04 and 05 on maps). Sabic and a few of his troops then turned back to guide the rest of the column. For the past three years, this region had been the front line of the conflict and both sides had mined the area extensively. Under normal circumstances it would have been possible to cross the plain in two hours. With the mines in place, it became necessary to carefully crawl on one's knees, whereby it took an average of fifteen hours. The mines in the Hajducko Groblje section had not been cleared but were marked with white paper flags. Experts went on ahead to determine the position of the minefields; they had nothing but pieces of paper with which to mark them. Instructions were then passed back by word of mouth - 'watch out, there's a mine right here!' The men then had to proceed in single file, picking their way between the flags. They were fortunate in that there was fog until about 10.00 hours.[6] Because of the delays, the rear of the column did not reach Hajducko Groblje until 10.00 hours, by which time the head had already reached Islamovici (in the region 06 shown on map), while the centre of the column was level with Kamenica (04 on map).

From Mratinci (04 on map), the head of the column moved on towards Kravica (05 on map). It was not possible to enter Kravica itself, since the village was occupied by the VRS. It was decided not to proceed immediately but to wait until nightfall before crossing the road. By

this time, however, the VRS had located the column and opened artillery fire. Many people in the column gave up at this stage and many were killed. There was also some infighting among the refugees themselves as the effects of hunger began to take effect. Tensions were high. This was partly due to the artillery bombardment and partly because no one knew exactly what was happening. Furthermore, there were rumours that VRS personnel in civilian dress had infiltrated the column at Kravica.[7] Kasim Mustafic, who wandered the area to the south of the Bratunac to Konjevic Polje road for two days, later testified that a group of about one hundred Bosnian Serbs had approached the column at Kravica from the direction of Bratunac. They were dressed in black casual shirts and trousers, and armed with knives and garrotes. They mingled with a group of some three hundred Bosnian Muslims and began to kill them. This continued for about half an hour, after which between 30 and 50 mutilated bodies, some now missing legs, arms, ears or genitals, were loaded onto a truck and driven off in the direction of Bratunac. Some were murdered on the spot and thrown into the river alongside the road. Shortly thereafter, a tanker arrived to hose the blood off the tarmac.[8]



The story goes that other infiltrators gave directions during the march, claiming to know the way. It would indeed have been possible to infiltrate the column as the refugees from Srebrenica did not know each other particularly well.[9] When they began to suspect that infiltrators were present, the people checked on each other although the fact that they came from seven different Opstinas made this difficult. Because there were no differences in

language, it was difficult to distinguish friend from foe.^[10] Infiltration has often been reported as a tactic, and sightings of bodies with their throats cut certainly supported the notion of there being Bosnian Serbs at large within the column. However, such stories may also be a reflection of the fear and confusion that had seized the people, particularly in that these stories emerged just as the column was in danger of being ambushed.^[11]

The rear of the column, at this time still at Hajducko Groblje, was the first section to come under fire. Suddenly, it seemed as though gunfire was coming from all sides at once. Several men fell. No one knew exactly where the gunfire was coming from. Witnesses have since stated that the shooting began as one group of refugees entered a minefield. That some people had indeed unwittingly fallen victim to the mines was confirmed by an intercepted communication in which a VRS soldier said that he saw a group of refugees walking into a minefield near the Kamenica junction between 7 and 8 p.m., and that at least twenty people had been killed. The full-scale VRS assault began shortly thereafter, with a combination of infantry and artillery fire. There was widespread panic within the column.^[12]

One member of the 281st Brigade has described the events. According to his testimony, as the Brigade was about to descend from the Buljin Plain, shooting and machine gun fire opened up on all sides. The VRS were in the hills, the Muslims among the rivulets on the marshy land. The VRS bombarded the group with grenades and machine gun fire. As the first thirty or so casualties fell, panic broke out. The first fatality was Nihad 'Nino' Catic, a radio reporter who had made the last report from Srebrenica on the morning of the fall.^[13] According to other accounts, some men had entered the woods at Kamenica to rest for a while and to wait for the remainder to catch up. Close by, an enormous beech tree was split in two by a grenade. Artillery fire began and continued for some twenty minutes. This was the point at which the column began to disintegrate rapidly. Statements describe the episode as an absolute nightmare: there were bodies everywhere, the wounded were crying out for help, many people lost sight of their loved ones; fathers, sons and brothers who had been together up to this point were parted from each other. A few found each other days later; most never did.^[14]

A section of the 281st Brigade assembled in the woods and held an impromptu strategy meeting. It would, they decided, be possible to attempt to carry on to Konjevic Polje, but they suspected that even if they came that far it would then be impossible to reach Tuzla. No fewer than 34 members of the 281st Brigade had already been killed and 70 wounded. Of the wounded, six or seven now had to be carried, others taking it in turns to act as bearers. They discussed the route. It was clear that if they continued straight on they would have to cross the main road at Konjevic Polje no matter what. This section of the 281st Brigade decided not to do so, but to turn off at Burnice (in the area of number 06 on the map) and to turn back to Zepa. At 03.00 hours on 13 July, the 40 surviving members of the Brigade left Burnice. As they went, they saw corpses everywhere.^[15]

The head of the column halted to find out what had happened to the rear. Because the shooting continued throughout the day and the night of 12 July, hope of being able to regroup was abandoned and the front of the column resumed the march. Exactly who made the relevant decisions and how they were made is not known. As the foremost group of the column continued on its way, the rear lost contact and panic broke out once more.^[16]

The VRS artillery fire directed at the column as it tried to cross the road at Konjevic Polje and Nova Kasaba split the column in two. Only about one third of the men managed to cross the road before the VRS opened fire with full force.^[17] As far as can now be ascertained, some 300 to 400 people died even before the rear of the column had reached Konjevic Polje.^[18] The ABiH's own figure is somewhat higher still, at between 500 and 2000.^[19]

The central section of the column managed to escape the shooting and reached Kamenica (on map 06) at about 11.00 hours and waited there for the wounded. Ejub Golic

turned back towards Hajducko Groblje to help the casualties. Because many had to be carried, there were major delays. It was 09.00 hours before the column could continue, by which time the survivors from the rear had joined those in the central section of the column.

The foremost part of the column succeeded in reaching and passing Kamenica (on map 04) before 10.00 hours, thus escaping the shooting. This section spent the evening on Mount Udrc (map 08) waiting for the rest of the column to catch up. The very first section, the 284th Brigade, and the mountain battalion managed to cross the road at Konjevic Polje (map 07) without any difficulty. This news filtered back to the other sections of the column.^[20] This raised hope, but that hope proved to be unfounded. Hamdija Fejzic heard of the first group's success as he was under way somewhere between Nova Kasaba and Konjevic Polje. He managed to cross the road during the hours of darkness, closely followed by a group of some three hundred armed men. There was not only the road to contend with, but also the River Jadar which was ten metres wide at some points and ran parallel to the road.^[21] The ill-fated rearmost part of the column continued to come under heavy VRS artillery fire throughout the day and the following night. Survivors described it as a relentless manhunt; many gave up.^[22]

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[1] Sefko Hodzic, *Otpacaceni koverat*, p. 271.

[2] Confidential interview (51).

[3] Interview Hamdija Fejzic, 03/02/98.

[4] ABiH Tuzla. ABiH 2nd Corps, unnumbered, additional statement by Ramiz Becirovic, 16/04/98, based on an earlier statement of 11/08/95.

[5] Interview Vahid Hodzic, 08/03/99.

[6] Confidential interview (51).

[7] Interview Hakija Meholjic, 02/02/98 with additional comments of 19/04/98 and 21/05/99.

[8] ABiH Sarajevo, 'Arnautovic Archive', see 14/07/95. Kasem also reports having seen someone drinking the blood pouring from the wounds of a Bosnian man who had been stabbed in the back.

[9] Interview Hamdija Fejzic, 03/02/98.

[10] Interview Hakija Meholjic, 02/02/98 with additional information supplied on 19/04/98 and 21/05/99.

[11] *Refugee Report*, Vol. XVI, No. 5, 31/07/95, p. 6 and pp. 9-10.

[12] ABiH Tuzla. ABiH 2nd Corps, report of 12/07/95, no. 02/8-10-1253. Contents based on intercepts.

[13] Interview Salih Brkic, 02/02/98.

[14] Interview Hamdija Fejzic, 03/02/98.

[15] Confidential interview (51).

[16] Interview Hamdija Fejzic, 03/02/98.

[17] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, para. 62.

[18] Interview Hamdija Fejzic, 03/02/98.

[19] ABiH Sarajevo, 'Arnautovic Archive', see 12/07/95.

[20] Confidential interview (51).

[21] Interview Hamdija Fejzic, 03/02/98.

[22] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, para. 62.

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Part IV

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Chapter 1

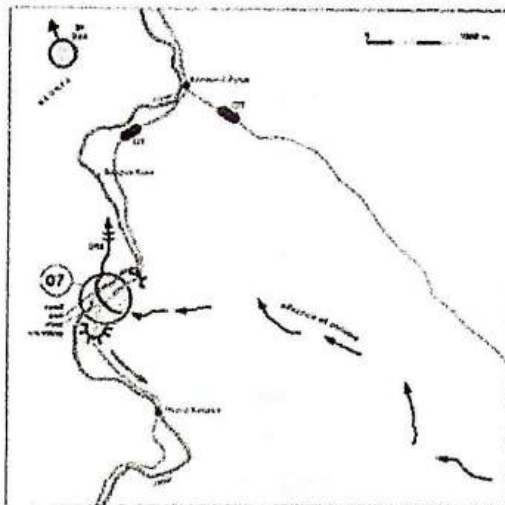
The journey from Srebrenica to Tuzla

9. 12 July: the first prisoners are taken

Units of the Bosnian Serb Drina Corps which had not been deployed for the attack on Zepa were ordered to intercept the column and block its further progress. A number of other units were given similar instructions. They included a brigade of the Special Police of the Republika Srpska's Ministry of the Interior (MUP), sections of a the Military Police battalion of the 65th Regiment and several regular police units. An intercepted communication suggests that all police units were sent from Zvornik to Velja Glava to stop the column in its tracks.[1]

The result of the ambushes and shooting was that the Bosnian Serbs were able to take large numbers of men prisoner along the Bratunac to Konjevic Polje road on the afternoon and evening of 12 July. The prisoners had all been at the rear of the column.[2] The VRS closed the road completely and, using an APC seized from Dutchbat, proceeded in the direction of the villages Pobudje and Kravica (numbers 05 and 06). From these villages, the VRS opened fire with an M84 rocket launcher, causing considerable death and destruction. The wounded had to be left behind. The vast majority of the 28th Division gave themselves up to the VRS on the road. The ABiH estimates of the number concerned run into the thousands. The gunfire and the roadblocks had succeeded in splitting the column up. The front section had now moved off in a north-westerly direction. During the afternoon of 12 July, they crossed the Nova Kasaba - Konjevic Polje road using the bridge at Begova Kuca and then marched onwards towards Mount Udrc.

Not only did the VRS lie in ambush along the Bratunac - Konjevic Polje road. They also called upon the men who were hiding in the forest to give themselves up, promising that if they did so the Geneva Convention would be observed. These actions were carried out by the Special Police under Borovcanin, while the 65th Regiment was sent in the direction of Nova Kasaba. The VRS used stolen UN uniforms and equipment to convince the Muslim men that the operation was being carried out under the supervision of the UN or the International Red Cross. Various witnesses report seeing armoured vehicles seized from Dutchbat by the VRS and further report seeing the VRS use the APCs to persuade refugees to give themselves up. The VRS was now all along the road, with a man posted every fifty metres. There were artillery posts at various points, most notably in Sandici where the command post had also been set up.[3]



At various other locations, the VRS fired with anti-aircraft guns into the woods wherever the presence of Muslim men was suspected. One result of this action, as a Zvornik Brigade intelligence report of 12 July indicates, is that the Bosnian Muslims fled in panic, control over them was lost and many surrendered to the MUP or VRS units, either individually or in groups.[4]

Once taken prisoner, the men were robbed of their personal belongings. In some instances they were executed on the spot. The VRS sent one of the civilians who wished to surrender back towards the column: one of his eyes had been gouged out, his ears had been cut off and a cross carved into his forehead.[5] A small number of women and children, and a few elderly people who had been part of the column and who fell into Bosnian Serb hands were allowed to join the buses which evacuated the women and children out of Potocari to Kladanj on 12 and 13 July.[6] Among them was Alma Delimustafic, a woman soldier of the 280th Brigade. The VRS surrounded her group, took them prisoner and transported them to Konjevic Polje. In a field near Konjevic Polje, a VRS captain interrogated the group, asking about the movements of other groups and the senior officers. He also asked if anyone knew the whereabouts of a Dr Branka and the nurse Sister Namka, a friend of Naser Oric. There were various other occasions on which the VRS displayed unusual interest in persons thought to have a connection with Oric. At this time, Delimustafic was in civilian clothes and was released because the VRS did not realize that she was a soldier. She reported seeing two of the captured men being taken off, supposedly to Bratunac but they were killed on the way.[7] There are also statements from four young boys who had surrendered, who had been taken prisoner at the roadside, but who were then released by the VRS and allowed to join the buses carrying refugees from Potocari. One managed to escape by himself.[8]

Close to Sandici, on the main road from Bratunac to Konjevic Polje, one witness recalls seeing the scene with which the rest of the world was later to become familiar from Zoran Petrovic's video footage: the Bosnian Serbs were forcing a Muslim man to call others down from the mountains. Some 200 to 300 men followed his instructions and descended to meet the waiting VRS. The witness reported that some were then shot on the spot. The brother of the witness was among those who gave themselves up expecting that some exchange of prisoners would take place. The witness himself was more cautious and hid behind a tree to see what would happen next. He heard Bosnian Serbs shouting to ask whether there were any more men in the hills. Despite the assurances of those below that there were not, the VRS fired artillery shells into the cover. The witness watched as the two to three hundred men below were lined up in seven ranks, each some forty metres in length, with their hands behind their heads. He then watched as they were mown down by machine gun fire. His own brother was among the victims, shot while he looked on.[9]

Bosnian survivors report that there was indeed panic at Sandici and that chaos then reigned. A number of people committed suicide, some with a rifle, most with hand grenades which inevitably killed those in the immediate vicinity as well. The witness statements also include reports of a number of Cetniks in civilian clothes who posed as guides and then led people to the VRS lines. They were then executed on the spot. Many people recalled seeing groups walk straight into the hands of VRS soldiers and then falling to the ground in a hail of bullets.

There was also a story that VRS soldiers, having infiltrated the column, gave some people poisoned water and killed others from the remains of the scattered column with knives and rifles on the spot. However, it can be asked whether VRS guides would risk their own lives to lead refugees into the ambushes and if they would give poisoned water on purpose.

Later witness statements allege the use of chemical weapons in the form of poison gas grenades, which would certainly explain the panic which broke out. The problem with such observations in the various witness statements is that they cannot be verified. The investigation of the possible use of chemical weapons is covered in a separate appendix to this report.[10]

Exactly which units were responsible for the ambushes at Konjevic Polje and Nova Kasaba could not be established at the time of General Krstic's trial before the International Criminal Tribunal in The Hague. It was indeed the subject of some disagreement. The famous video footage made by the journalist Zoran Petrovic, accompanied by Lt. Col. Ljubisa Borovcanin (Deputy Commander of the MUP Special Police unit) along the road between Bratunac and Konjevic Polje, suggests the involvement of MUP units. However, at the Krstic trial, the prosecution contended that units of the Drina Corps were (also) responsible, since the MUP units were of insufficient strength to seal off the entire road between Bratunac and Nova Kasaba. The defence challenged this. There was some confusion regarding the origins of the equipment seen in the video, which included a tank. It was difficult to determine whether this belonged to the VRS or to the MUP. On closer scrutiny it proved to be an MUP vehicle. However, the other vehicles shown belonged to the 4th Battalion of the Bratunac Brigade and to the 2nd Romanija Brigade. Footage of the military personnel dealing with the Muslim men clearly shows that these were members of the police units and not from the VRS.

There is no conclusive evidence to show that personnel of the Drina Corps were present on the football field at Nova Kasaba where the Muslim men were assembled. However, there are several reported sightings of VRS men in the meadow near Sandici, another location at which a large number of men were brought together. The Muslim men who had been in the second section of the column and who had managed to reach Tuzla reported that both VRS and MUP units had been involved in taking prisoners. They could be recognized by the colour of their uniform.[11]

At the time of the trial, it was also impossible to state with any certainty whether units of the Drina Corps had been involved in taking prisoners, although the command of the corps must have known what was going on. There was, after all, close cooperation and coordination between the MUP units and the Drina Corps, and in particular the latter's engineering battalion which assisted the MUP units in blocking the path of the column. The staff of the Drina Corps were in constant communication with MUP units along the road from Bratunac to Konjevic Polje and followed progress of the events. This can be established by a conversation between General Krstic and Lt. Col. Ljubisa Borovcanin, Deputy Commander of the MUP.[12]

During the course of 12 and 13 July, the VRS was able to intercept radio communications within the column, thereby obtaining information about the present position and the route to be followed. This has been established by a communication intercepted at 16.40 hours on 12 July, from the chief-of-staff of the Zvornik Brigade, Major Dragan Obrenovic, discussing various matters concerning the activities of the column and those of the MUP units which were deployed to lay ambushes along the road to Konjevic Polje.[13] In a

communication timed at 19.00 hours on 12 July, the Drina Corps Commander General Zivanovic issued orders for an intervention to the north-west of Cerska, where a group of approximately 1000 refugees had been sighted. The VRS sent a platoon of the Zvornik Brigade to the location.[14]

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[1] ABiH Tuzla. ABiH 2nd Corps, rapport van 12/07/95, no. 02/8-10-1253. Contents based on intercepts. ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, para. 162.

[2] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, paras 63 and 167.

[3] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, para. 63.

[4] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, paras 63 and 168.

[5] Interview Damir Skaler, 31/01/98.

[6] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, para. 61-3.

[7] ABiH Tuzla. Tuzla (Intel Dept) to 2nd Corps, 25/07/95, (Tuzla no.) 11.6.-1-414/95 (2nd Corps no.) 06-712-24-30/95, Results of meeting with persons from Srebrenica. This report was signed by Sarajlic Osman.

[8] Witness statements before the 'State Commission for the collection of information concerning war crimes committed in the Republic of Bosnia Hercegovina'.

[9] Confidential interview (55).

[10] Confidential interview (60).

[11] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, para. 173-4.

[12] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, para. 176. The conversation took place at 8.40pm on 12 July.

[13] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, paras 162 and 165.

[14] ABiH Tuzla. ABiH 2nd Corps, report based on intercepts, 12/07/95, no. 2/8-10-1253.

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10. 13 July: the hunt continues

On 13 July, the Drina Corps received orders from the VRS General Staff to take the men of the column prisoner. At the same time, the General Staff ordered the Bratunac - Konjevic Polje road to be closed to all non-military traffic to ensure that no military secrets could be exposed. All personnel were ordered not to divulge any information to the media.[1] VRS General Milan Gvero briefed those brigades most closely involved, describing the column as 'hardened and violent criminals who will stop at nothing to prevent being taken prisoner and to enable their escape into Bosnian territory.' The Drina Corps and the various brigades were ordered to devote all available manpower to the task of finding, stopping, disarming and taking prisoner the men of the column. To do so, they were expected to lay ambushes along the Zvornik - Crni Vrh - Sekovici - Vlasenica road. Gvero stipulated the procedure to be followed when prisoners were taken. This included taking the men to suitable locations where they could be guarded by a minimum of personnel and reporting the arrangements made to the General Staff.[2] That afternoon, General Zivanovic issued orders confirming Gvero's instructions. The order was identical to Gvero's and was directed to all units of the Drina Corps. Round-the-clock ambushes were to be set up and all Serb villages were to be given extra protection. All ABiH prisoners were to be taken to the designated locations and treated as prisoners of war in compliance with the Geneva Convention. Superiors were to be informed of all groups of ABiH prisoners immediately.[3]

That same day - 13 July 1995 - the Zvornik Brigade of the VRS reported to the staff of the Drina Corps that all troops not required for the attack on Zepa had been deployed in dealing with the ABiH soldiers travelling to Tuzla. The Zvornik Brigade also reported ongoing skirmishes with units of the 2nd Corps of the ABiH from Tuzla itself. These ABiH units were attempted to exert pressure on the VRS elsewhere as a diversionary tactic, drawing attention away from the column.

Of the VRS units hunting down the sections of the column which had succeeded in crossing the road at Konjevic Polje, the Zvornik Brigade was the most actively involved. The Bratunac Brigade had very little armed contact with the column, being primarily involved in cutting off its progress and surrounding the area to prevent escape.[4]

During the evening of 13 July, the VRS was still occupied in tracking the movements of the column, and at 20.35 hours Major Obrenovic, Chief of Staff of the Zvornik Brigade reported. An unidentified general then instructed him to take immediate steps to ensure that no Muslims could get through, come what may.[5]

The information obtained by the VRS by listening into the internal communications between the groups in the column proved to be an accurate reflection of the actual situation on the ground. The Zvornik Brigade had a special signals section whose task it was to monitor communications and this was particularly successful in following both the movements and the

intentions of the column.[6] Similarly, the ABiH 2nd Corps' Signals Intelligence unit was monitoring VRS frequencies and could therefore follow events. In many cases, the intercepts were of instructions and orders issued by VRS commanders, whereby the ABiH could follow the route and the progress of the column.[7] However, it was not possible to pass crucial information back to the column itself since there was no direct radio link.

A document produced by the Drina Corps' Intelligence staff on 13 July notes that three large groups of men from Srebrenica had been sighted. An initial group of approximately 300 men preceded the second which was approximately 2000 strong. The third group was bringing up the rear and was also some 2000 men strong. At the time of sighting, the first group was on the Cerska – Kamenica - Crni Vrh road. The second group followed the first almost immediately and they agreed by radio to assemble 'by the line'. This has been taken to mean the Sekovici - Zvornik road and the VRS line from Baljkovica to Ravno Brdo. The third group was sighted close to Kravica, in the village of Siljkovici where they were engaged in combat with VRS units. The leader of this group, who referred to himself as 'Phantom' over the radio, asked the ABiH command for instructions. He reported that there many had been killed or wounded and that the VRS were now using a megaphone to demand their surrender. His group had split up and had fled into the forest. They had lost contact with the rest of the column. Apparently, small pockets of resistance had also remained behind in the former enclave. An ABiH source learned this from communications made by a VRS officer in the enclave and intercepted by the ABiH. There was still some shooting going on there, but the ABiH within the enclave had no lines of defence left. They had been chased into one small area comprising two or three mountain tops. The VRS instructed these remaining resistance fighters to reveal themselves and surrender. They were given until 13 July to do so and if they still remained hidden they would be killed the following day. This ABiH soldier moreover learned that the VRS expected the ABiH soldiers who did not surrender to attempt to reach Kamenica or Pogled by road. To reach Kamenica would involve a journey of 20 or 30 kilometres through densely wooded terrain before any reasonable progress could be made. According to the ABiH source, the VRS officer in the field said that it would take at least another 20 days to search the woodlands thoroughly.[8]

It is not known how many prisoners the Bratunac Brigade was able to take in the area around Srebrenica after the 'sweep' operation ordered by General Krstic (as prompted by General Staff) on 13 July.[9] OP-A remained manned for some time after the fall of Srebrenica because the personnel were unable to withdraw as the dirt road to Potocari was impassable for their APC. From this OP, in the western part of the enclave, heavy gunfire in the immediate vicinity was reported on 15 and 16 July, although it was not possible to determine exactly what was happening.[10]

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[1] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Butler Report, OTP Ex 401, para. 9.7.

[2] ICTY, (IT-98-33), OTP Ex. 532/a. Main Staff of the Army of Republika Srpska (illegible signature) no. 1-1223. See also ICTY, (IT-98-33), D 81/a, General Staff, to Drina Corps Headquarters, Drina Corps Forward Command Post, 13/07/95, no. 03/4-1620.

[3] ICTY, (IT-98-33), OTP Ex. 462/a. Command of the Drina Corps, 13/07/95, No. 03/156-12.

[4] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, para. 164-5.

[5] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, para. 164.

[6] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Butler Report, OTP Ex. 401, para. 7.62.

[7] Interview Sefko Tihic, 08/03/99.

[8] ABiH Tuzla. ABiH 2. Korpusa, 13/07/95, Str.pov.br. 02/08-01-1262.

[9] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Krstic Judgement, para. 193.

[10] Interview R.A. Franken, 18/05/01.

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11. 13 July: the journey continues

In the early morning of 13 July, the remaining members of the column regrouped on Mount Udrc (map 08). At a rough estimate, the column now comprised 5000 people, i.e. about half of its original size. According to Ramiz Becirovic, it was at this point that the 28th Division command first heard about the VRS road blocks on the Bratunac - Konjevic Polje road. At first, it was decided to send 300 ABiH soldiers back in an attempt to break through the blockades. When reports came in that the column had nevertheless succeeded in crossing the road at Konjevic Polje, this plan was abandoned. Approximately 1000 men managed to reach Udrc that night.[1]

There was another unfortunate situation that day, prompting some people to consider turning back. The Police Chief Hakija Meholic reported having listened to Radio Sarajevo on which he heard ABiH Army Commander Rasim Delic say that the men should turn back to Srebrenica, the situation there having 'normalized' whereupon it was now possible for people to return to the town. 'We were supposed to go back to be killed,' according to Meholic. There was considerable confusion and disagreement concerning Rasim Delic's order, since Delic had no up-to-date information regarding the situation in Srebrenica. Some of the men wished to turn back. Delic's order threw many into utter confusion and there was even the threat of some infighting. The men seemed ready to shoot each other and it was only with some difficulty that this could be prevented. Meholic did not know whether any of the other groups had a radio and had heard Delic's message, nor what consequences this might have had. Meholic was able to calm the men. He believes that many now thought that neither side wanted them to leave the enclave alive. Many in their anger may even have thought, 'Let's make sure we leave the enclave, then we can fight the ABiH.' Everyone then wanted to proceed to Tuzla in order to 'clear things up'.[2]

When asked about the radio message of 13 July calling on people to return to Srebrenica, Rasim Delic was vague. 'I would have to know the context. I can only imagine that departure would have undermined the morale of those remaining behind. It was important to us that they remained in the enclaves to ensure that Bosnia comprised more than just two free areas. Had the Vance-Owen peace plan been signed, to include a link between the enclaves and the free areas, that would have been a good thing. But that would have been impossible if the enclaves were then deserted.'[3]

At 16.00 hours on the afternoon of 13 July, the reassembled head and central section of the column left Udrc and headed for the village of Glodi. One group took another route, probably unintentionally, to Cerska. Some managed to reach Zepa, others arrived in Tuzla after 20 July. The VRS assumed that the entire column would now take a route farther to the west, taking it to Mount Caparde.[4] When the main contingent reached Snagovo (no. 12 on the map), the next main staging post on the journey the following morning - 14 July - it came

as a complete surprise to the VRS. Reconnaissance parties had reported VRS ambushes on the road to Caparde, particularly around Mount Velja Glava (no. 11 on map in this section). These reports forced the decision to abandon that route. A report from the Zvornik Brigade revealed that the VRS had indeed prepared itself on the assumption that the column was proceeding to Velja Glava.[5]

At Glodjansko Brdo (no. 09) the head of the column under Commander Vejz Sabic waited for the remainder to catch up. The intention was to lead them on to the village of Redzici (no. 10) and from there to Snagovo (no. 12). It was assumed that those left behind (who probably included Ibro Mandzic's brigade) had taken the route to Caparde. The losses that this part of the column sustained during a confrontation with the VRS at Kamenica Gornja (no. 09), could be due to miscommunication between the various groups in the column. They had emerged from cover at precisely the wrong place and had walked straight into the VRS ambush that other parts of the column had managed to avoid.

On that same afternoon, the ABiH made preparations to receive the men of the column into Bosnian territory. The 2nd Corps set up a forward command post at the village of Medjedja on Mount Nezuk, from where units could come to the assistance of the 28th Division. Two of the 2nd Corps' battalions stationed around Sarajevo were ordered to move to Medjedja. There they were joined by Naser Oric and several other officers who were themselves originally from Srebrenica, such as Semso Murinovic and Velid Sabic (brother of Vejz), one of the ABiH brigade commanders. They were ordered to make contact with the 28th Division,[6] but were unable to do so. Oric had several radios with him and had hoped that someone in the column would recognize his voice and that he would recognize those of one or more people in the column.[7] However, no communication was received from the 28th Division on the frequency that had been agreed between Becirovic and Budakovic during their last communication. Oric and the others had received orders to prepare for combat situations.

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[1] ABiH Tuzla. ABiH 2nd Corps (unnumbered). Additional statement by Ramiz Becirovic, 16/04/98, based on an earlier statement of 11/08/95.

[2] Interview Hakija Meholic, 02/02/98 with additional material supplied on 19/04/98 and 21/05/99.

[3] Interview Rasim Delic, 21/04/98.

[4] NIOD, Coll. MUP Republika Srpska. *Ministarstvo Unutrasnjih Poslova Republika Srpska kabinet ministra to CJB Zvornik, nacheľniku, sstad komande policijskih snaga MUP-a*, Bijeljina, 13/07/95. K/p-416/95.

[5] The report was made at 09.10 hours on 14 July. ICTY, (IT-98-33), Krstic Judgement, para. 321.

[6] Interviews Andjelko Makar with Vejz Sabic, 12/00.

[7] *Dani*, 17/03/00, interview Vildana Selimbegovic with General Sead Delic.

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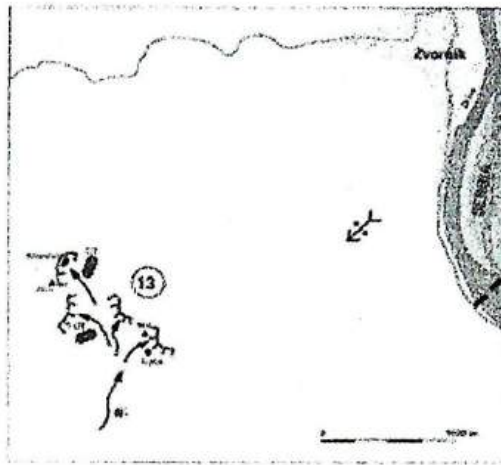
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12. 14 July 1995

The Zvornik Brigade of the VRS was acting on the assumption that the column was heading for Velja Glava. However, at this time the brigade had no units which could be deployed to halt the column's progress. A battalion of the MUP Special Police under the command of 'Mane' (Captain Mendeljev Djuric, who had earlier been in Potocari and whose unit was later at Konjevic Polje), was instructed to proceed to the area. Further troops would arrive the following morning, having been withdrawn from around Zepa. Until then, the orders from the VRS were to maintain pressure on the column and to continue its observation.[1]

Early in the morning of 14 July, the head of the column reached Josanica Gaj (map 12). The men halted here to rest and recuperate until 16.00 hours that afternoon. The reconnaissance parties had now arrived at Snagovo Gornje (on map 13).[2] When it moved on, the column passed Snagovo and crossed the Tuzla to Zvornik road later that night. Once again, this came as a surprise to the VRS, since they had expected the column to cross the road somewhere near Caparde. Because the chosen route was somewhat more to the east than had been expected, the VRS now feared an attack on the town of Zvornik, less than two kilometres from the column's route and, given its various crossings over the River Drina, of significant strategic importance. Units of the 24th and 25th Divisions of the 2nd Corps ABiH in Medjedja conducted decoy radio communications which appeared to be in preparation for just such an attack. They actually succeeded in making the VRS believe that an attack on Zvornik was imminent.[3] The VRS hurriedly sent reinforcements to the town. However, opportunities to divert the route of the column to the east and actually attack Zvornik were little more than hypothetical. According to Ramiz Becirovic, the men were physically incapable of any such attack, having spent the last few days in the woods.[4] But the VRS failed to take this into consideration. Only when the column, now two to three kilometres in length, had passed Maricici (map 13) did it become apparent that the men were heading for Baljkovica and Nezuk.[5]



Meanwhile, the 2nd Corps of the ABiH increased the pressure on the VRS. The VRS observed troop movements of the 2nd Corps to Sapna and Medjedja and opened artillery fire on these reinforcements. For its part, the ABiH mortar-shelled the positions now held by the most northerly battalion of the Zvornik Brigade. This action then escalated: in the early morning of 15 July, the 4th, 6th and 7th Battalions of the Zvornik Brigade, holding the lines near Baljkovica where the column was now heading, came under an artillery barrage lasting all of an hour. The VRS sustained only three casualties. The ambulance carrying these wounded men to Zvornik was shot upon by the column at Planinci (map 15), whereupon the driver and a medical orderly were killed. The ABiH soldiers in the column were able to cut the VRS' field telephone lines near Planinci, forcing the battalions to revert to radio communications which were more liable to interception.[6]

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[1] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Krstic Judgement, para. 321.

[2] Interviews Damir Skaler and Muharem Mujic, 17/05/99.

[3] Interview Andjelko Makar, 12/00; see also Sefko Hodzic, *Otpacaceni koverat*.

[4] Interview Ramiz Becirovic, 18/04/98.

[5] ICTY, (IT-98-33), OTP Ex. 550/a. Command of the 1st Zvornik Infantry Brigade to the Command of the Drina Corps, 14/07/95, no. 06-216/2.

[6] ICTY, (IT-98-33), OTP Ex. 597/a. Command of the 1st Zvornik pbr to Command of the Drina Corps, 15/07/95, No. 06-217.

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13. 15 July 1995

In the early evening of 14 July, the ABiH scouts established the presence of VRS ambushes near the villages of Liplje and Maricici (map 13). Likewise, shortly after midnight on 14-15 July, the VRS observed that a column, 2.2 kilometres in length, passed nearby Liplje and, would meet the 4th and 7th Battalions of the Zvornik Brigade early in the morning. These battalions were ordered to muster as much manpower as possible to fire upon the column.[1] The VRS brought in reinforcements from various quarters and a Bosnian Serb police unit also lay in wait for the column. The column was unable to avoid this ambush and a full-scale battle resulted. Some survivors recall this as the worst of all the ambushes they encountered. The VRS fired on the column with tanks and anti-aircraft guns. Many were killed.[2] The Zvornik Brigade reported one hundred ABiH fatalities.[3] According to Ramiz Becirovic, some 300 Muslims were killed. Again, the foremost sections of the column were relatively unaffected, it being those farther back which suffered the greatest number of casualties. The fighting was fierce and Becirovic learned after the war that 88 Bosnian Serbs were killed,[4] although this figure has not been corroborated by the VRS's own reports or casualty lists.

On 15 July, the VRS command called the commander of the first Zvornik Brigade, Vinko Pandurevic, back from Zepa to organize the defence of Zvornik. Units of the brigade which had been involved in the fighting around Srebrenica and Zepa were also recalled. In the morning, Pandurevic familiarized himself with the current situation: the Zvornik Brigade had absolutely no reserves. No major problems had yet been experienced on the front line, though units of the 2nd Corps were however firing, with varying intensity, upon the Zvornik Brigade with artillery and tanks. The outer areas of the town of Zvornik were also hit. Once the column commenced its attack at approximately 04.30 hours, the battalions which were supposed to lay the ambushes came under yet heavier fire. Four VRS men were killed and ten wounded.[5] Pandurevic learned that Naser Oric was coming to meet the column. However, reports that Oric had already broken through at that moment were based on misinformation.[6]

The foremost section of the column had by now crossed the Zvornik to Caparde road and was engaged in an assault on the two battalions of the Zvornik Brigade. This was a cause of great concern to the Intelligence section of the 1st Zvornik Brigade since it would be impossible to hold back the column (now thought of as 'kamikazes') with only the 500 VRS and MUP men available. It was felt that the higher command should deploy strong units to advance into the area between Udrc, Liplje and Krizevici. The Zvornik Brigade's Intelligence section then advised the command of the Drina Corps to consider opening up a corridor to allow the front section of the column, estimated to comprise some 1500 men, to pass. This corridor would then be closed off and the area swept. Pandurevic told the Drina Corps that he had contacted the ABiH and had offered to allow the civilians in the column to pass if the remainder would give themselves up. If this offer was not accepted, reinforcements would be urgently required. Because Naser Oric was also in contact with the column, the Zvornik

Brigade feared an attack on the front line where it stood.[7]

At 20.00 hours on 15 July, the column reached the area by Krizevici (no. 16 on the map), only two kilometres from its own lines. The second section of the column regrouped in the area close to Liplje (no. 13 on the map). The livestock which had been brought along was left by Udrc, as was the meagre logistic support that had been available.[8]

The evening of 15 July saw the first radio contact between the 2nd Corps and the 28th Division, established using a Motorola walkie-talkie taken from the VRS. After initial distrust on the part of the 28th Division, the brothers Sabic were able to identify each other as they stood on either side of the VRS lines.[9] An unexpected turn of events was the capture of a VRS officer, Major Zoran Jankovic, near Liplje. This provided the ABiH with a significant bargaining counter. The 28th Division made Jankovic contact his commanding officer, codenamed 'Janez', to negotiate free passage. Semso Murinovic, then at the forward command post in Medjedja (the village on Mount Nezuk) conducted the negotiations on behalf of the 2nd Corps, dealing directly with the Commander of the Zvornik Brigade, Vinko Pandurevic, to obtain free passage to Tuzla for all the men.[10] Pandurevic offered to allow the civilians to pass and the military personnel to surrender. However, this was not acceptable to the ABiH commander on 'the other side'; everyone must be allowed to pass.[11]

These negotiations were far from straightforward and took considerable time. The VRS demanded two hours to consider whether unarmed men could or should be allowed through. When these two hours had elapsed, the VRS demanded another hour. The VRS then announced that the column had been completely surrounded and that all personnel should now surrender under the terms of the Geneva Convention. The response from the ABiH was that the troops had no intention of giving themselves up and were prepared to engage in armed combat to break through the VRS line.[12]

According to some reports, Zulfo Tursunovic was also in radio contact with the VRS on 15 July (from his position at Krizevici) and he too requested free passage for all. If this was granted, his soldiers would not open fire. The VRS demanded that they should hand over their weapons, whereupon Tursunovic proposed an agreement whereby the wounded and unarmed civilians would be allowed to pass. But the VRS continued to demand that all personnel should surrender and that all weapons should be relinquished. Zulfo Tursunovic repeated his request in what was to be his final radio communication. When the VRS once again refused Tursunovic told his troops to 'fight until the very last man'.[13]

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[1] ICTY, (IT-98-33), D 100/a. Command of the 1st Zvornik Infantry Brigade, 14/07/95, number illegible.

[2] *Refugee Report*, Vol. XVI, No. 5, 31/07/95, p. 8.

[3] ICTY, (IT-98-33), D 101. Lt Col. Vinko Padurevic to Drina Corps Command, Extraordinary Combat Report, (15/07/95).

[4] Interview Ramiz Becirovic, 18/04/98.

[5] ICTY, (IT-98-33), D 101. Lt Col. Vinko Padurevic to Drina Corps Command, Extraordinary Combat Report, (15/07/95).

[6] ICTY, (IT-98-33), OTP Ex. 608/a. Intercept Tuzla CSB, 15/07/95.

[7] ICTY, (IT-98-33), OTP Ex. 596/a. 1st Zvornik Infantry Brigade, Intelligence unit to Drina Corps Command, 15/07/95; ICTY, (IT-98-33), D 101. Lt Col. Vinko Padurevic to Drina Corps Command, Extraordinary Combat Report, (15/07/95).

[8] Interviews Andjelko Makar with Vejz Sabic, 12/00.

[9] Interview Hakija Meholic, 02/02/98, with additional material supplied on 19/04/98 and 21/05/99.

[10] Interview Semsudin Muminovic, 16/06/00.

[11] ICTY, (IT-98-33), OTP Ex. 609/a, Command of the 1st Zvornik Brigade, 15/07/95, no. 06/217-1.

[12] Interview Hakija Meholic, 02/02/98 with additional material supplied on 19/04/98 and 21/05/99.

[13] Interviews Damir Skaler and Muharem Mujic, 17/05/99.

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14. 16 July: the breakthrough at Baljkovica

The hillside at Baljkovica formed the last VRS line separating the 28th Division from Bosnian-held territory. The VRS cordon actually consisted of two lines (map 17), the first of which presented a front on the Tuzla side against the 2nd Corps and the other a front against the approaching 28th Division. The VRS troops in position here included the 1st Zvornik Brigade under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Vinko Pandurevic and the Drina Wolves under the command of Captain Jolovic, codenamed 'Legenda'. Troops commanded by Major Obrenovic and the 4th Zvornik Brigade were also deployed here.

Following an unsuccessful attempt to reach the ABiH front line on 15 July, the head of the column assisted by the 2nd Corps succeeded in doing so on 16 July. At approximately 05.00 hours on 16 July, the 2nd Corps made its first attempt to break through the VRS cordon from the Bosnian side. This took place close to Baljkovica. The objective was to force a breakthrough close to the hamlets of Parlog and Resnik. Companies drawn from the 211th, 242nd and 243rd Brigades of the ABiH took part in this action, having been transported here from Srebrenik north of Tuzla. They were joined by Naser Oric and a number of his men. Sead Delic, Commander of the 2nd Corps, told Malkic, Commander of the 24th Division, that Naser Oric was expected to make physical contact with the 28th Division.

At 06.00 hours, the 2nd Corps made a second attempt to force a breakthrough and this time it was successful. Semsudin Murinovic was the Commander of the group which managed to drive a wedge through the line. Oric was involved but, according to Murinovic, was under the latter's command.[1] According to Sead Delic, it was certainly not Oric who was responsible for the breakthrough but the other units.[2] The Zvornik Brigade, the three battalions of which formed the target for this operation, described this as a very heavy combined artillery and infantry attack. The objectives of the VRS were clear: the ABiH was trying to penetrate the VRS defences in order create conditions to enable a large number of soldiers and civilians to leave the area.[3] The VRS lines were indeed penetrated, defence being hampered by heavy rainfall and hail. This was a combined offensive: the 28th Division carried out an action on one side of the front, while the foremost section of the column carried out a desperate all-out storm action on the other. After a brief reconnaissance raid, Ejub Golic with his battalion and Vejz Sabic with the 284th Brigade attacked the VRS line. They were able to capture several heavy arms including two Praga self-propelled anti-aircraft pieces which were then turned on the VRS. Ejub Golic was killed during this action and Vejz Sabic was wounded. Becirovic believed that the heroic actions of Ejub Golic accomplished the opening of the corridor.

From the direction of Tuzla, the VRS line was penetrated near Poljane at approximately 08.00 hours. This was accomplished by 26 soldiers of the 2nd Corps' 242nd Brigade, under the command of Senahid Hadzic, together with five of Naser Oric's men. It

proved possible to drive a two-kilometre-wide breach in the VRS lines, although the VRS later maintained that the opening was no more than 300 to 400 metres. The foremost section of the column was thus able to pass through the corridor, but because it was not possible to keep the corridor open for the groups which arrived later, many among these groups were killed.[4] The captured anti-aircraft pieces had to be relinquished once more and the hunt for stragglers was resumed with the same intensity as before the temporary ceasefire. [5] The rearmost section of the column was therefore the worst affected, just as it had been when crossing the road at Konjevic Polje.

At 10.00 hours, the command post at Medjedja reported to the 2nd Corps command in Tuzla that it had established contact with the 28th Division. A huge procession with a company of troops at the fore had been sighted. By this time, six soldiers had managed to reach the 2nd Corps' positions. They reported that the 28th Division had sufficient ammunition but little or no food.[6] Some men had thrown away their weapons on reaching the VRS lines in case they were taken prisoner. Others had taken up these weapons. One person recalled having started the journey with no weapon at all and finishing with a machine gun, having had three different weapons en route and having collected a large amount of ammunition.[7]

Early in the afternoon, the 2nd Corps and the 28th Division of the ABiH met each other in the village of Potocani (no. 17 on the map). The moment was recorded by a photographer, Ahmed Bajric. The presidium of Srebrenica were the first to reach Bosnian terrain. Remarkably, a group of ABiH soldiers managed to reach Medjedja in a captured jeep bearing Yugoslav army identification marks, having killed the five original occupants of the vehicle. This was the only indication that the Yugoslav army may have been involved in any action against the column.[8]

The opening-up of the corridor had not been subject to very much advanced planning. It was largely the result of a desperate attack. Intercepted VRS radio communications describe a mass assault carried out by the 28th Division. In many instances, unarmed Bosnian Muslims took on the VRS soldiers with their bare hands. Lieutenant Colonel Pandurevic, Commander of the Zvornik Brigade, stated that he had taken the decision to open up the corridor to allow unarmed personnel in the column to pass, in view of the enormous pressure being placed on his men.[9] As a VRS soldier later recalled, 'we did not believe that any of the Muslims would leave Bosnian Serb territory alive.' In fact, the VRS troops found themselves surrounded by men who had already made their minds up: they would break through this line or would die in the attempt. They were extremely highly motivated and really had no other choice having already come this close to Tuzla.[10]

During his interview with the NIOD, Ramiz Becirovic declined to put a figure on the ABiH's losses at Baljkovica Donja. However, it is known that a considerable number of VRS personnel (mostly of the Drina Wolves) were killed, having been caught between the column trying to reach Tuzla and the forces which had come from the other direction to assist. According to Becirovic, the help of the 2nd Corps came too late as the 28th Division had already managed to fight its way through the VRS lines. Becirovic did not know the strength of the ABiH support force.[11]

Pandurevic reported to the Drina Corps that, in view of the pressure being exerted on his brigade and the losses already sustained, it was no longer possible to offer effective resistance. To avoid further losses among his own men, Pandurevic had decided to open up a corridor for the civilian population. In doing so he had reached agreement with Semsudin Murinovic. It seems probable that a number of ABiH soldiers were also able to escape through this corridor, although the majority of people passing through it were indeed civilians. In return for allowing this safe passage, Pandurevic had demanded the release of a policeman and several soldiers who had been taken prisoner.[12]

The corridor remained open for three hours. Pandurevic had orders given orders that

the men were not to be fired upon unless his own troops were under direct threat. He also ordered the artillery bombardment to be suspended. One Bosnian source reported that three thousand Muslim men would have been able to pass through the corridor, but also contends that better advantage could have been taken of the confusion that was then rife among the Bosnian Serbs. Once the VRS had regrouped, the temporary ceasefire came to an end. During the night of 16 and 17 July, the VRS made it their business to track down and deal with any remaining ABiH troops in the area.[13]

Pandurevic did not consult his superiors about opening up the corridor. When Karadzic heard about it, he asked the headquarters of the General Staff for further information. The General Staff, Mladic was later told, could not contact Pandurevic in the field to prevent him from taking any unauthorized action.[14] Pandurevic's decision was born of necessity because the Zvornik Brigade did not have the strength or resources to block the further progress of the column. Pandurevic made at least two complaints about the problems laid at his door during this period. One small section of his own unit together with a number of other units attached to his brigade, were involved in seeking suitable sites to hold 3000 Muslim men before going on to execute them and, later still, to obscure the evidence. At the same time, he was not only expected to block the progress of the column by force, he was also responsible for much of the confrontation line with the 2nd Corps of the ABiH. Pandurevic was in a particularly awkward situation because Zvornik could no longer be defended, whereupon its people were to accuse him of forsaking them as the price for the capture of Srebrenica.[15] On 16 July he was provided with some assistance from the Krajina Corps.[16]

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[1] Interview Semsudin Muminovic, 17/05/99.

[2] *Dani*, 17/03/00, Vildana Selimbegovic's interview with General Sead Delic.

[3] ICTY, (IT-98-33), OTP Ex. 612/a. Command of the 1st Zvornik Brigade to Command of the Drina Corps, 16/07/95, no. 06-218.

[4] Interview Salih Brkic, 19/04/98.

[5] *Slobodna Bosna*, p. 28-31, 11/07/98. (FBIS translation).

[6] Sefko Hodzic *Otpjecaceni koverat*, p. 277.

[7] Interview Muharem Mujic, 17/05/99.

[8] John Pomfret, 'Bosnian Soldiers Evade Serbs in Trudge to Safety', *The Washington Post*, 18/07/95.

[9] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Krstic Judgement, para. 165.

[10] Zeljko Palmancic, 'The call for help goes out to the rest', *Banja Luka Srpska Vojska*, 03/11/95. (FBIS translated text).

[11] Interview Ramiz Becirovic, 18/04/98.

[12] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Butler Report, OTP Ex 401, para. 7.72.

[13] *Slobodna Bosna*, p. 28-31, 11/07/98. (FBIS translation).

[14] ICTY, (IT-98-33), OTP Ex. 636/a. Intercept Tuzla CSB, 16/07/95, No. 664.

[15] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Butler Report, OTP Ex 401, para 7.71 and 7.75.

[16] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Dannatt Report, OTP Ex. 385/a, para. 56.

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Part IV

The repercussion and the aftermath until the end of 1995

Chapter 1

The journey from Srebrenica to Tuzla

15. 17-20 July: the battle with the stragglers

Following the successful breakthrough at Baljkovica, the VRS stepped up its efforts to 'sweep the area clean'. Around Srebrenica, the Bosnian Serbs - including a number of MUP units - had already expended considerable energy in combing the area. On 13 July, when it became apparent that a number of pockets of resistance remained, General Krstic ordered units of the Bratunac and Milici Brigades and the Skelani Battalion to scour Srebrenica thoroughly.[1]

On 15 July, Colonel Ignjat Milanovic, the Drina Corps' officer in charge of Air Defences, suggested that Colonel Vidoje Blagojevic, then Commander of the Bratunac Brigade, should be placed in charge of all units then engaged in cleansing the area around the enclave. Krstic agreed. On 16 July, Blagojevic was able to report that he had personally visited all units, including those of the MUP, in order to coordinate their action. However, the coordination of such activities was taken over by the General Staff on 17 July.[2]

General Mladic sent instructions concerning the coordination of operations to round up and destroy the remaining ABiH directly to the brigades of the Drina Corps. Mladic assigned three colonels from the General Staff to the Zvornik Brigade to assist in planning and leading the combat operation to be undertaken by the VRS and MUP around Kamenica, Cerska and Udrc. Lieutenant Colonel Keserovic, staff officer representing the Military Police on the General Staff, was also assigned units of the Bratunac and Milici Brigades, the Military Police Battalion, the 67th Signals Regiment, the 65th Regiment and MUP units, with orders to sweep the areas around Bratunac and Milici. This task was to be completed by 20.00 hours on 19 July. Immediately thereafter, Keserovic was expected to submit a plan to Mladic to continue operations towards Cerska. The brigade commanders approached the civilian authorities to provide additional manpower to search the area.[3] One explanation for the rather unusual step of placing officers of the General Staff in charge of this operation is that the Zvornik and Bratunac Brigades had by this time become involved in the attack on Zepa, whereupon the presence of the brigade commanders was required elsewhere.[4]

On 18 July, two battalions of Bratunac Brigade together with a number of civilians mobilized to help them, were engaged in searching the territory around the Pobudje hills, south of the Bratunac to Konjevic Polje road, which the column had crossed. They were also scouring the area around Konjevic Polje itself. There were still several small groups of men in this area, trying to reach Tuzla via Cerska.[5] The next day, the search was extended to cover a wider area around Potocari.[6] The Bratunac Brigade continued the search for several more days. On 20 and 21 July, the Brigade found several groups of men in the Pobudje and Konjevic Polje areas. They had been trying to break through to Tuzla. Every day, sections of the terrain were 'cleansed' and groups of fugitive men were murdered on the spot.[7]

During the search, the Bratunac Brigade discovered four children aged between eight and fourteen among the prisoners they took. They were taken to the barracks in Bratunac

where they were placed in confinement. When one of them had described seeing a large number of ABiH soldiers committing suicide and shooting at each other, Brigade Commander Blagojevic suggested that the Drina Corps' press unit should record this testimony on video.[8] It is not known whether any such recording was made. The fate of the boys also remains uncertain.

Elsewhere in the region, the Zvornik Brigade spotted several small groups close to Snagovo, moving in a northerly direction. At the same time, ABiH infantry units were firing on Zvornik Brigade battalions to the north of Baljkovica in an apparent attempt to prevent these units being able to move south to reinforce the VRS in their hunt for the remaining refugees.[9] The ABiH units' pressure continued on 19 July, but the intensity of fire was not great. The Zvornik Brigade had been joined by other VRS units, but the strength was still no more than a company together with one platoon. Units of the MUP were by now preparing to close off the area. The Zvornik Brigade's losses on 19 July were just one man killed and another wounded. The Brigade took two ABiH soldiers prisoner that day and 'eliminated' thirteen.[10] The exact course of events can be reconstructed from the testimony of one of the ABiH prisoners of war, related below.

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[1] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, para. 287, 318.

[2] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, para. 287, 324.

[3] ICTY (IT-98-33), OTP Ex. 649/a. Command Colonel General Ratko Mladic to DK Command for information, 1 zpbr, 1 blpbr, 1 mlpbr, 67 pv, 17/05/95, no. 03/4-1670.

[4] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Butler Report, OTP Ex 401, para. 12.15.

[5] ICTY, (IT-98-33), OTP Ex. 382/a. Command of the 1st Bratunac Light Infantry Brigade to the Drina Corps Command, 18/07/95, No. 03-253-107.

[6] ICTY, (IT-98-33), OTP Ex. 377/a. Command of the 1st Bratunac Light Infantry Brigade to the Drina Corps Command, 19/07/95, No. 03-253-108.

[7] ICTY, (IT-98-33), OTP Ex. 383/a and 3834/a. Command of the 1st Bratunac Light Infantry Brigade to the Drina Corps Command, 20/07/95, No. 03-253-109 and 21/07/95, No. 03-253-110.

[8] ICTY, (IT-98-33), OTP Ex. 375/a. Command of the 1st Bratunac Light Infantry Brigade to the Drina Corps Command, 17/07/95, no. 03-253-106/1.

[9] ICTY, (IT-98-33), OTP Ex. 676/a. Command of the Zvornik pbr to the Command of the Drina Corps, 18/07/95, no. 06-223.

[10] ICTY, (IT-98-33), OTP Ex. 693/a. Command of the Zvornik pbr to the Command of the Drina Corps, 19/07/95, no. 06-224.

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Part IV

The repercussion and the aftermath until the end of 1995

Chapter 1

The journey from Srebrenica to Tuzla

16. A prisoner of war's story

So far, the events during the march to Tuzla have been considered at the broadest level. Next, the attention is shifted to a much narrower perspective, that of a single soldier in the rearmost part of the column, in order to illustrate the horrific experiences people were forced to undergo.

On the morning of 19 July, a soldier of the 284th Brigade was one of a group of ten men which arrived at a spot close to the VRS line at Baljkovica. They had been at the rear of the column and were now exhausted. They wanted to rest before attempting to cross into their own lines. The group hid themselves among pine trees and a clump of tall nettles and fell asleep. It was 14.00 hours when they were awakened by the noise of rifle bolts being drawn. The soldier looked up and saw a weapon. He lay there with a neighbour and his son-in-in-law, while his brother, four other neighbours and a friend lay just ten metres away. The Bosnian Serbs began to scream: 'We have seen you. You are surrounded. Stand up!' His brother-in-law, neighbour and family duly stood, as did an uncle and his son-in-law, but the soldier himself did not wish to stand up. The order to do so was heard several more times, but he remained crouching, waiting for the sound of a rifle shot. Twenty-five metres away stood a line of VRS soldiers. They fired shots into the bushes. Yet again they demanded that the group should give themselves up, and then again. The soldier then realized that those who had indeed already given themselves up were being shot.

This soldier had obtained a weapon in Kamenica. He considered opening fire, but realized that this would give his position away. He therefore waited in silence, and noticed that the Bosnian Serbs were doing nothing. He heard someone order the men on to search the next section. This was where he was hiding and he really did not believe that he could now survive. He was not sure whether any of his companions were still alive. He decided to stand up in order to increase his chances of survival. The Bosnian Serbs asked him where he had been all that time and he replied that he had been fast asleep, this being his first opportunity to sleep at all for the last seven days. The Bosnian Serbs then asked if there was anyone else among the bushes, to which he replied that he did not know. The butt of a gun was pushed against his hip and he was prodded forwards and made to walk down the hillside. He then saw that his brother also stood up, he too had a rifle. (Almost everyone in the column had the opportunity to arm themselves in one way or another, some taking weapons from dead VRS soldiers.)

Apparently, the Bosnian Serbs thought that the soldier's brother was about to shoot. The commander gave the order to open fire. The soldier then saw four people, his own brother among them, shot dead on the spot. In all probability, they were later buried in an old trench along the former front line. Five others from the group who had surrendered half an hour previously were lying on the ground and were being interrogated. Jewellery such as rings and watches were taken off them, whereupon the paramilitaries began to haggle among themselves

as they divided up the spoils. The men on the ground remained unharmed for the time being.

The Bosnian Serbs asked the soldier whether he was indeed military personnel. He did not know what the others had been asked and whether they had already said that he was a soldier. Furthermore, if he denied it he might be shot. He therefore admitted that he was a soldier. This proved to be the right answer, since the response was, 'that's what you should say, at least you're honest'. Those who had been interrogated before him had all denied any military involvement, whereupon the next question was: who had actually been fighting to protect Srebrenica?

The others in the group were moved just four or five metres away. One was then shot in the back as the soldier in question looked on. When his brother-in-law's turn came, the man said, 'please... I was not a soldier!' He too was shot in the back but the bullet re-emerged just below his shoulder and the brother-in-law survived.

At first the ABiH-soldier was threatened with another method of execution. He was told that he was to be killed with a knife. One of the Bosnian Serb paramilitaries was indeed playing with a knife, but his commander ordered that this was not to be used: perhaps it would be possible to exchange the soldier for one of their own prisoners. Apparently the VRS needed thirty ABiH soldiers to exchange for one of their own officers who had been taken prisoner. This soldier owed his life to this arrangement.[1]

These incidents involved no regular VRS units. Rather, they were the work of the Special Police and police personnel from Zvornik. The senior officer at the location wrote down the names of the people who had been killed. Throughout the operation he was in radio contact with one Vukasinovic (possibly of the Military Police), from which it became obvious that he had no authority to act independently. Only when the commanding officer asked what he should do with the others was he told to decide for himself.[2]

Having been taken prisoner, the ABiH soldier was first interrogated in Karakaj. He was asked why he had become a soldier, where he had been in action, how many people he had killed, and if he knew who had killed the persons they mentioned. He named only people whom he knew were already dead.

For three days he was held prisoner in a paint factory in Zvornik, tied up in a toilet with his hands fastened to a tap above his head. He was the first to be confined at this location, but was to be followed by another 39 Muslim men who had been taken captive in various places. They included children of about 14 or 15 years of age. All were later transferred to the prisoner of war camp at Batkovici. There, he was put to work in a flour mill every day. The food in the camp was poor, but the advantage of working in the mill was that he was able to eat the flour and could smuggle some out in socks for the other prisoners in the camp.

Some prisoners from this camp were exchanged. The wounded and anyone who did not feel well were the first to be considered for such exchanges. There were inspections by the International Red Cross but according to this soldier, they had been instructed to look only in certain places and were allowed to stay no longer than half an hour. The prisoners' treatment improved only after the Dayton Accord had been signed. For example, clothes were distributed. The soldier was himself exchanged late 1995. At that time, there were still 229 men from Srebrenica in the Batkovici camp, including two men who had been taken prisoner in June or July 1994. These had not taken part in any combat action but had merely been working in the fields close to the confrontation line.[3]

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[1] Confidential interview (55).

[2] Confidential interview (55).

[3] Confidential interview (55). Other sources give the number of 230 men. They too complained of poor food and poor living conditions in the camp, the only positive point being that there was little or no physical abuse. Of the 230 prisoners, approximately 180 had been captured during the march to Tuzla. (Hren, *Srebrenica*, pp. 219-221 and 233).

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Part IV

The repercussion and the aftermath until the end of 1995

Chapter 1

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17. After 20 July

Many members of the ABiH 28th Division and Muslim men in the column heading for Tuzla lagged behind, stranded for the moment in Bosnian Serb-held territory. They chose to follow the clearly visible tracks of those who had preceded them. Given the large number of missing persons, it could reasonably have been expected that many groups would follow, even after 20 July. The VRS observed a group of around 200 to 300 men close to Snagovo, most of whom were armed. Some were taken prisoner; two committed suicide.[1] The following day, further groups of armed ABiH men were found during the search of the area. The Bircani Brigade, sent as reinforcement to the area along the confrontation line, reported that they now had matters under control but they too were beset by difficulties due to the ABiH activity along the front.[2]

The VRS continued to suffer losses. Lieutenant Colonel Pandurevic of the Zvornik Brigade complained that his unit had been involved in active operations for too long and that he had been given no time for rest. This, he claimed, had resulted in his unit suffering 39 deaths, 6 men missing and 91 casualties. A large number of armed groups were wandering the rear-area of the brigade, while the ABiH was still making attempts to break through the front line.[3] The 2nd Corps tried unsuccessfully to reopen the corridor by means of an assault. The morale of the ABiH troops had fallen; Oric was no longer in the battlefield and the attack could now be conducted on one side only.[4] General Sead Delic would later berate Oric for not having remained in the corridor to defend it and to organize matters there. Instead, he had proceeded onwards with his men.[5]

At about 21.00 hours on 22 July, the ABiH commenced a three-pronged attack on the 3rd Battalion of the Zvornik Brigade. This VRS battalion was occupying the lines further to the north of Baljkovica. The assault was followed by another shortly after midnight on the area held by the 4th Battalion of the Zvornik Brigade, which was closing the line near Baljkovica. Again, the objective was to force another breakthrough. In a situation report, the VRS battalion commander estimated the strength of the ABiH attacking force, now exerting considerable pressure, to be in the region of fifty men. Six of these were killed. In the morning of 23 July, the ABiH launched yet another attack, this time to the south of Baljkovica. This was also unsuccessful. Thereafter, the fighting was limited to sporadic gunfire aimed at the VRS positions. The VRS losses were one dead and one injured. The ABiH did not enjoy sufficient strength of numbers and its actions were restricted to infantry attacks. By contrast, the VRS was in the highest possible state of readiness. This was essential since the groups attempting to pass the confrontation line would stop at nothing to do so. Twenty Bosnian Muslims were killed in the attempt, while seven were taken prisoner. Another group of some 50 armed men and 200 unarmed men were spotted approximately one kilometre from the forward line.[6]

Further to the south, along the route between Planinci and Brezik (no. 14-15 on the map) units of the Zvornik Brigade and the MUP were still combing the terrain for remaining Muslim refugees. Ten men were killed in this area. According to VRS reports, most were carrying automatic weapons. Twenty-three men were taken prisoner; the reports describe these as soldiers but unarmed. In all probability they were civilians. At another location, a further 17 men were taken prisoner. Brigade Commander Vinko Pandurevic asked the Drina Corps to waste no time in setting up a committee to oversee the exchange of prisoners, and further requested instructions regarding where he should take his prisoners and to whom he should hand them over. On interrogation, it seemed that several groups had turned back to Udrc (no. 08 on the map) when they found it impossible to pass the VRS posts, cross the lines at Baljkovica or establish a route to Kladanj along the Caparde road.[7]

Yet farther south, numerous refugees found themselves cut off for some time in the area around Mount Udrc. They did not know what to do next or where to go. They managed to stay alive by eating snails, leaves and mushrooms. The atmosphere was one of tension, hunger and desperation. None knew how the others had fared. On or about 23 July, the Bosnian Serbs swept through this area too, and according to one survivor they killed many people as they did so.[8]

The reports of the Bratunac and Zvornik brigades say little about the activities of the Bosnian Serb civilian population in tracking down the remaining refugees. It is known that for a while some civilians had been forced to join in the hunt in the area under the control of the Bratunac Brigade. The Zvornik Brigade makes no mention of civilian assistance. Nevertheless, a father and son - both VRS conscripts - were given three days' detention for failing to report the sighting of 'enemy forces', having supplied four Muslim men with food and clothing and explained to them how to pass the lines. The men concerned, however, lost their way, were exhausted and decided to give themselves up in a Bosnian Serb village. They revealed the names of their erstwhile benefactors to the Military Police in Zvornik.[9] The names of these four men are included on the list of missing persons but it is possible that they were survivors of the mass-executions at the Branjevo Military Farm. The village where they made contact with the father and son conscripts was not far from Branjevo, less than twenty kilometres north of Baljkovica. According to one of the Bosnian Serb benefactors, the men's clothes were soaked in blood. This ties in with the story of another Branjevo Farm survivor who reported that he had left the execution site along with four other men.[10]

The Zvornik and Bratunac Brigades had by no means given up their search for stragglers, although the large-scale executions now seemed to have come to an end. (The full story of these executions is recounted in Chapter 2 of this part). However, this is not to say that the killing had stopped; reports of 'liquidations' continued to come in from the field but many of those who were captured or who gave themselves up after 20 July were taken to the prisoner of war camp at Batkovici.

As said, on 22 July, the commanding officer of the Zvornik Brigade, Lieutenant Colonel Vinko Pandurevic, requested the Drina Corps to set up a committee to oversee the exchange of prisoners. He also asked for instructions with regard to the prisoners of war his unit had already taken: where they should be handed over and to whom.[11] On 25 July, the Zvornik Brigade took a further 25 ABiH soldiers captive. They were taken directly to the camp at Batkovici. The same fate befell another 34 ABiH men the following day. The Zvornik Brigade reports until 31 July continue to describe the search for refugees and the capture of small groups of Muslims.[12] On 26 July, the Bratunac Brigade also reported the presence of small groups of men in its area, and as late as 18 October 1995 Major Nikolic of this brigade suggested closing of the village of Slapovic within the former enclave in order to track down remaining Muslim men.[13]

Meanwhile, the VRS had commenced the process of clearing the bodies from around

Srebrenica, Zepa, Kamenica and Snagovo. Work parties and municipal services were deployed to help. In Srebrenica, the refuse that had littered the streets since the departure of the people was collected and burnt, the town disinfected and deloused.[14]

The ABiH 2nd Corps' forward command post at Medjedja closed on 30 July, indicating that they too had given up any hope of further refugees being able to pass the lines at Baljkovica. Nevertheless, small groups and the odd individual did manage to reach Bosnian territory. On 5 August 1995, during a meeting of the SDA party council in Zencia, ABiH Commander Rasim Delic said that he considered it likely that another 500 to 600 soldiers would soon reach Tuzla to join the 3600 men who had already arrived.[15] Between this day and 16 April 1996, no fewer than 270 days after the fall of Srebrenica, around 1000 more men managed to reach Bosnian territory. The exact number is not known, neither is it known how many were military personnel. The Bosnian Government has never released these figures.[16]

From the situation reports sent by the Zvornik Brigade to the Drina Corps, it is possible to deduce from the ammunition usage exactly when the fighting between the column and the brigade and between the brigade and the units of the 2nd Corps of the ABiH which came to the assistance of the column, was most intense. Each situation report was prepared at the end of the afternoon and covers the preceding twenty-four hours. We thus see that the Zvornik Brigade first became embroiled in combat with the column on 14 July.

The table below shows the various types of small-bore ammunition used, together with the various calibres of artillery and mortar shells. On 17 July, the brigade also used 364 hand grenades and light mortar shells.[17]

Table: Ammunition used by the Zvornik Brigade of the VRS, 13-19 July 1995

	Small bore (infantry)	Large bore (artillery)
13 July	-	187
14 July	?	?
15 July	31,950	-
16 July	125,780	272
17 July	129,560	239
18 July	37,040	43
19 July	14,000	-

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[1] ICTY, (IT-98-33), D 110/a. Command of the 1st Bircani Infantry Brigade to Command of the Drina Corps, 20/07/95, no. 03/1-721.

[2] ICTY, (IT-98-33), D 110/a. Command of the 1st Bircani Infantry Brigade to Command of Drina Corps, 21/07/95, no. 03/1-722.

[3] ICTY, (IT-98-33), D 103/a. Lt. Col. Vinko Pandurevic to the Command of Drina Corps, 21/07/95, no. 01-272.

[4] Interview Semsudin Muminovic, 17/05/99.

[5] *Dani*, 17/03/00, interview by Vildana Selimbegovic with Sead Delic.

[6] ICTY, (IT-98-33), OTP Ex. 391/a. 1st Zvornik pbr to Drina Corps Command, 23/07/95, no. 06-230/1.

[7] ICTY, (IT-98-33), OTP Ex. 708/a. 1st Zvornik pbr to Drina Corps Command, 22/07/95, no. 06-229.

[8] Hren, *Srebrenica*, p. 238.

[9] ICTY, (IT-98-33), OTP Ex. 707/a and 706/a. Zvornik Military Police, 23/07/97 and 25/07/95.

[10] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Butler Report, OTP Ex 401, para. 10.12 - 10.17.

[11] ICTY, (IT-98-33) OTP Ex. 708/a. 1 Zvornik Brigade to Drina Corps Command, 22/07/95, no. 06-229.

[12] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Butler Report, OTP Ex 401, paras 10.20 and 10.21.

[13] ICTY, (IT-98-33), OTP Ex. 380/a. 1st Bratunac lpb to Drina Corps Command, 26/07/95, no. 03-253-116.

ICTY, (IT-98-33), 00706671. Working meeting of commander with command staff and battalion commanders, 16/10/95.

[14] ICTY, (IT-98-33), D 102/a. Drina Corps Command, Deputy Commander of the Rear, Col. Lazar Acamovic, 24/07/95, no. 18-146/95.

[15] *Dani*, Special edition, September 1998.

[16] Nijaz Masic, *Srebrenica*, p. 209.

[17] ICTY, (IT 98-33), OTP Ex. 540/a, 597/a, 612/a, 641/a, 676/a. Command of the 1st Zvornik pbr to Command of the Drina Corps, 13/07/95, no. 06-216, 15/07/95, no. 06-217, 16/07/95, no. 06-218, 17/07/95, no. 06-219, 18/07/95, no. 06-223.

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Part IV

The repercussion and the aftermath until the end of 1995

Chapter 1

The journey from Srebrenica to Tuzla

18. The fate of those remaining in Kamenica

The VRS took the largest number of prisoners on 13 July, along the Bratunac - Konjevic Polje road. It remains impossible to cite a precise figure, but witness statements describe the assembly points such as the field at Sandici, the agricultural warehouses in Kravica, the school in Konjevic Polje, the football field in Nova Kasaba, the village of Lolic and the village school of Luke. Several thousands of people were herded together in the field near Sandici and on the Nova Kasaba football pitch.^[1] The men who had surrendered were intimidated and bullied, both physically and verbally. They were searched and put into smaller groups. In a video tape made by journalist Zoran Petrovic, a VRS soldier states that at least 3000 to 4000 men had given themselves up on the Konjevic Polje - Nova Kasaba road. By the late afternoon of 13 July, the total had risen to some 6000. A radio communication intercepted at 17.30 hours that day states that there were indeed approximately 6000 prisoners at this time. The following day, Major Franken of Dutchbat was given the same figure by Colonel Radislav Jankovic of the VRS. Many of the prisoners had been seen in the locations described by passing convoys taking the women and children to Kladanj by bus, while various aerial photographs have since provided evidence to confirm this version of events.^[2]

One hour after the evacuation of the women from Potocari was completed, the Drina Corps staff diverted the buses to the areas in which the men were being held. Colonel Krsmanovic, who on 12 July had arranged the buses for the evacuation, ordered the 700 men in Sandici to be collected. The soldiers guarding them made them throw their possessions on a large heap and hand over anything of value. During the afternoon, the group in Sandici was visited by Mladic who told them that they would come to no harm, that they would be treated as prisoners of war, that they would be exchanged for other prisoners and that their families had been escorted to Tuzla in safety. Some of these men were placed on the transport to Bratunac and other locations, while some were marched on foot to the warehouses in Kravica. The men gathered on the football ground at Nova Kasaba were forced to hand over their personal belongings. They too received a personal visit from Mladic during the afternoon of 13 July. On this occasion, he announced that the Bosnian authorities in Tuzla did not want the men and that they were therefore to be taken to other locations. The men in Nova Kasaba were loaded onto buses and trucks and were taken to Bratunac or the other locations.^[3]

In Bratunac, many were forced to spend the night in the buses and trucks which had brought them there. Some were locked in sheds and warehouses in Bratunac, where they spent the night. Throughout the night, VRS soldiers came to the places in which the men were being held, probably looking for people from certain villages, perhaps their own. The next day, 14 July, the prisoners were once again to be transported onwards. Most had not left the vehicles. Some remained in the buses and trucks until the afternoon when they were finally taken to the execution sites. What happened next is described in the following chapter.

It is not known precisely how many people gave themselves up to the Bosnian Serb forces. It is thought that up to one third of the original column, mostly the foremost sections, managed to reach Mount Udrc. According to witness statements, many reached Udrc only later, in some cases several months later. The testimony of the people who managed to avoid falling into the hands of the Bosnian Serbs at Kamenica reveals an atmosphere of absolute desperation and disorientation. Some descended from the mountains at Kamenica in order to drink fresh water from the streams and to rest a while. Others were unable to rest as the hunt went on.

At one point, the group heard the sound of a truck. This heralded the arrival of a large group of VRS soldiers, some 150 to 200 in number. About one in every three was accompanied by a sniffer dog. The VRS lined up and swept the area, forcing those present to head off in the direction of the tarmac road at Konjevic Polje. People were desperately looking for some hiding place; some of the Muslim men found a small hut, just two metres by two, used for smoking meat. They huddled inside hoping to find safety. They did not. The VRS merely shot straight through the hut.

Many people in the part of the column which had not succeeded in passing Kamenica did not wish to give themselves up and decided to turn back towards Zepa. Others remained where they were, splitting up into smaller groups of no more than ten. Some wandered around for months, either alone or groups of two, four or six men. Few knew the way and attempted to navigate by following overhead power cables or the paths which had obviously been trodden recently. They had exhausted their supplies. Occasionally they would walk for days only to arrive back where they had started. They often found corpses, by now in a state of decomposition. Sometimes one group met another group from Srebrenica who knew of a deserted Muslim village in the region. They would then proceed there together.

To feed themselves, the Muslim men took potatoes and other vegetables from the fields around the Serbian villages at night. The local Bosnian Serb population therefore began to mount patrols around their villages. The Muslims would generally sleep by day and wait for the cover of darkness before moving on. Some arrived in Tuzla after many months, having been wandering around the area between Srebrenica and Udrc with absolutely no sense of direction. This continued for a long time. For example, the people of Milici, a village on the route to Tuzla, discovered the disappearance of livestock in November 1995. A group of some ten to twenty of them went in search of stragglers from the column, armed with shotguns.[4]

Some of the Muslim men decided to retrace their steps towards the Srebrenica region, since this was familiar territory and they knew where to find food. From here, they would once again set out towards Zepa or attempt to reach Tuzla. A few hundred managed to reach Zepa just before the VRS occupied the enclave on 25 July. They were able to meet up with the local ABiH units. Once Zepa had succumbed to the Bosnian Serb pressure, they had to move on once more, either trying to reach Tuzla or crossing the River Drina into Serbia. (See the final Chapter of this part: 'The fate of the other eastern enclaves'.) Some men were able to join the refugee convoys which began to leave Zepa for Kladanj on 25 July, under the supervision of UNPROFOR.

There are countless stories recalling the experiences of those who lost contact with the column, their wanderings and the horrors they saw. They include the account of a 54-year-old engineer who lost touch with his group near to Kravica and who was attacked by a Bosnian Serb civilian wielding a metal pipe. The engineer was beaten unconscious and left for dead. When he came round, he went into hiding for a day before meeting a group of six other men from Srebrenica. Together, they lay low for another two days, living on mushrooms and the few rations they had remaining. During the next few days, this group grew to include approximately 50 men. They were surrounded by VRS troops who demanded that they should give themselves up. Most did so immediately, but the engineer and seven others managed to

remain hidden. This group split up, later met yet another VRS patrol and once again managed to escape capture. Hunger forced them to turn back to Srebrenica in the hope of finding something to eat in one of the abandoned villages. Eventually, the engineer reached Zepa where he managed to find a place on one of the last buses to transport the evacuees out of the town. At first, VRS soldiers refused to allow him to board, but he was able to get onto another bus. Mladic was there to bid a personal farewell to the passengers, assuring them that no harm would come to them on the way. A CNN camera team was there to record the scene and the Bosnian Serbs thus managed to create the impression of being 'not that bad after all'.^[5]

During the night of 17 and 18 July, a group of approximately 40 men who had turned back from Kamenica towards Srebrenica were hiding in the former enclave close to Slatina (where OP-A had been). A VRS truck was here, with two VRS soldiers waiting for their colleagues to return. Most of the houses had been burned down. Close to a stream stood a Dutch vehicle. The men found some eggs and a little sugar in one of the houses; in another the oven was still hot. It transpired that it had been lit by another group of nine Muslim men. That night, the men ate fresh bread for the first time in over a week.

On the way to Zepa, the group of refugees arrived at an unidentified village. One of them knew how to open a beehive and extract the honey. This group included a man whose throat had been slit. In order to give him moisture, a length of corn grass was inserted into the wound like a straw. This man reached Zepa and was later treated in hospital in Sarajevo. By this time, the group had grown to include some 50 men and so they decided to split into two smaller groups. They now had a substantial supply of honey, flour, oil and potatoes, as well as some small livestock found wandering about. Fires were lit over which they made pancakes. Two goats were killed and skinned. Suddenly an anti-tank rocket exploded close by. The VRS had spotted the smoke from the fire. Bosnian Serbs shouted that the group was now completely surrounded. However, this proved not to be the case. The group knew the area extremely well and could therefore escape in the nearby woods. The VRS dared not take up pursuit. One of the group members had his family home in a house along the route and here they were able to find some clothing and more food in the form of walnuts and plums. The VRS was very close by but was far too busy looting other houses to take any notice of this group. The men then moved on towards Zepa and managed to enter the enclave some time later.^[6]

Some men had remained behind in the former enclave of Srebrenica and had spent many days just wandering about. One reports seeing eight men killed during a razzia which took place in the village of Sukeska, in the south-western corner of the enclave, on 10 August. On 18 August, the same man, together with about 30 others, found himself in the village of Pale, not far from the former UN compound at Potocari. They were assembled in a house, discussing the possibility of breaking out. That night, the house was surrounded. There was gunfire and then the house was set on fire. The man and six others managed to escape but they were chased and three of them were killed. The VRS continued to scour the area for another two days. The man later returned to Pale where he discovered that the bodies of his fellows had been mutilated. He and a few others remained in Sukeska until 1 September before setting out for Tuzla.

On the way they discovered another group of six men from Zepa and Srebrenica. This group had been trying to find a way of crossing the front line at Olovo (between Tuzla and Sarajevo) but had lost their way and turned back to Srebrenica. Not far from Zepa they fell into an ambush. It was here that this man found their bodies, as his group was also forced to turn back through lack of food. On 18 September, the man whose testimony this is formed part of a group of ten trying once again to reach Tuzla. By this time he was forced to walk without shoes. The group moved only at night, thus successfully avoiding two ambushes. The group saw many corpses along the way, and it was particularly poignant that many had been killed only a few kilometres from the safe territory. Following a nine-day march, the group reached

Tuzla, 75 days after the fall of Srebrenica.[7]

Yet others remained in hiding in Cerska for two full months. They would remain concealed by day and emerge at night to prepare food with whatever could be found in the village. The VRS searched the area on several occasions and some men were killed or taken prisoner. Eventually, those remaining decided to set out for Kladanj, despite not knowing the way. They arrived there on 12 September.[8]

A number of Muslim men were still wandering the immediate area months after being forced to turn back from their efforts to reach safe territory, while others found themselves in Serbia where they were arrested and transferred to various camps (from which 211 people were later released). One of these camps, Sljivovica near Uzice, had a particularly bad reputation. Muslims were physically and mentally abused here; they had to sleep on the floor and were given little food, despite provisions being supplied by the International Red Cross and UNHCR. These rations did not reach the prisoners. The prisoners were made to strike each other, perform certain sexual acts and to use Serbian names. Although the International Red Cross exercised due supervision and recorded all reports of abuse, the guards' attitude never changed.[9]

A particularly memorable story is that of three young men aged 17, 18 and 19.[10] On several occasions they attempted to cross the main Konjevic Polje to Nova Kasaba road but were unsuccessful in doing so each time. They eventually managed to reach Zepa only after the enclave had fallen. They had set up camp in a couple of deserted Muslim villages where they managed to hide out for several months without attracting attention. They stole a cow from a Serbian village, slaughtered it and dried the meat. They were able to survive on this for several months, while also giving some to passers-by from Srebrenica. Sometimes the teenagers would escort groups of refugees as far as the next obstacle before eventually returning to their base. Finally, on 26 April 1996, a full six months after the signing of the Dayton Accord, they crossed the Drina into Serbia. They hid their rucksacks and pistol on the riverbank, intending to hitch-hike to Uzice. A driver stopped and they told him that they had come from Srebrenica. The man took them to the police station in Uzice where they made a statement. One of them was then required to accompany a police officer back to the Drina to look for the rucksacks and pistol. The rucksacks were recovered but not the weapon. The three youths were then taken to the camp at Sljivovica where they met other people from Srebrenica. In June 1996, the entire group was transferred to Padinska Skela, the largest prison in Belgrade. Here they met representatives of the International Red Cross and a number of senior Serbian politicians. They stated that they had been treated well at all times. The conversations were friendly in tone. They were asked to recount their experiences; they gave interviews to a Serb newspaper. Eventually, in October 1996 they were given the choice of returning to Bosnia or emigrating to Finland. Most of the people then detained in Padinska Skela, 23 in all, opted for Finland. The three young men chose Tuzla, where they were eventually reunited with their mothers.[11]

Another group of seven men wandered about in occupied territory for the entire winter. On 10 May 1996, after nine months on the run, they were discovered in a quarry by American IFOR soldiers. The seven men immediately surrendered to the Americans. They were searched and their weapons - two pistols and three hand grenades - were confiscated. The men said that they had been in hiding in the immediate vicinity of Srebrenica since the fall of the enclave, and had set out for Tuzla only seven days previously. This story did not stand up to scrutiny: their clothes and footwear were reasonably clean and certainly not in keeping with having been on the road for seven days, let alone almost a year in hiding. Some of the men were clean-shaven and were wearing only parts of a uniform. They did not look like soldiers and the Americans decided that this was a matter for the police. The operations officer of this American unit ordered that a VRS patrol should be escorted into the quarry whereupon the men would be handed over. A unit of the International Police Task Force which happened to

be in the area would supervise this operation.[12] A Bosnian Serb court convicted the group - known as the Zvornik 7 - for illegal possession of firearms and the murder of four Serbian woodsmen. This conviction was later quashed (for 'procedural reasons') following pressure from the international community.[13]

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- [1] ABiH Tuzla. ABiH 2nd Corps, report of 12/07/95, no. 02/8-10-1253, contents based on intercepts.
[2] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, para. 64, 83, 171.
[3] ABiH Tuzla. ABiH 2nd Corps, report of 12/07/95, no. 02/8-10-1253, contents based on intercepts; ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, para. 171, 177.
[4] Interview Rajko Dukic, 14/06/00.
[5] *Refugee Report*, Vol. XVI, no. 5, 31/07/95, p. 6-7.
[6] Confidential interview (51).
[7] Hren, *Srebrenica*, pp 40-42.
[8] Hren, *Srebrenica*, pp. 244-245.
[9] Hren, *Srebrenica*, pp. 24, 149-151 and 201-203.
[10] Witness statements given to the 'State Commission for the Collection of Facts Information concerning War Crimes committed in Bosnia Hercegovina.'
[11] Interview Mevlida Salihovic, 10/12/99, who had produced a radio report on the group in question.
[12] <http://www.linder.com/berserk/berserk.html> (on line 19/07/99). 'The Soldiers Who First Encountered the Zvornik Seven' and 'The Officer Who First Took Charge of the Zvornik Seven', 24/05/96.
[13] *Ljiljan*, 04/02/98. For a first-person account, see Hren, *Srebrenica*, pp. 111-114.

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Part IV

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Chapter 1

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19. The arrival of the men in Bosnian territory

Only a few journalists were present to witness the arrival of the column in Bosnian-held territory after its eventful march across country. Most attention was being devoted to the reception of the women and children at the Air Base in Tuzla. The few items that appeared in the press and on television described the arrival of 'an army of ghosts': men clad in rags, totally exhausted and emaciated by hunger. Some had no more than underwear, some were walking on bleeding feet wrapped in rags or plastic, and some were being carried on makeshift stretchers. There were men walking hand in hand with children. Many were still visibly frightened.[1] Some were delirious and hallucinating as a result of the immense stress and privations they had endured. One soldier began to fire on his own unit as they arrived in Baljkovica; he had to be killed to prevent further bloodshed.[2] The medical station set up by the ABiH in Medjedja handed out large quantities of tranquillizers. As one survivor said, anyone who had not been on the march could not possibly begin to imagine what it had been like.[3]

When the men arrived in Bosnian territory they were not required to report in. UNPROFOR was not involved in the men's reception and had not been asked to provide any assistance.[4] At Medjedja, the ABiH set up tents for the first refugees. The wounded were taken to hospital. For the others, there were trucks standing by to take them to Tuzla to meet up with family or friends.[5] Many of the ABiH soldiers in the column were taken to an airfield near Zivinice where they were kept away from journalists by the ABiH. According to Othan Zimmerman, a reporter for the Dutch national daily *Algemeen Dagblad*, these men were forbidden to contact anyone, even their own families.[6] However, this was certainly not the case for all ABiH troops.

While others were heading for family or friends, ABiH soldier Damir Skaler had no one to turn to: he was a Croat. He arrived in Tuzla between 21.00 and 21.30 hours, still armed, looking for the local barracks where he could rest and recuperate. He could barely walk. An elderly man approached him and said, 'You still have your weapon. You must be from Srebrenica.' Damir Skaler asked the way to the barracks. The old man said that it was some way further and saw that Skaler could not possibly hope to walk such a distance in his condition. He promised to arrange transport and flagged down a car on the street. The driver took Skaler to the barracks. The Officer of the Guard told him that he must relinquish his weapon before he could be given any help. Skaler did not wish to do so and the officer did not dare to take the gun from him by force. 'The people from the enclaves were like wild men.' Eventually, Skaler decided to hand over his weapon. He then telephoned a captain he had known in Srebrenica and who had been in Tuzla since 1992. He wanted to ask the officer to confirm his identity. For unknown reasons, Skaler had already been reported dead.[7]

When Damir Skaler left the barracks the next day, he was given a car and driver to help

in the search for his wife, whose whereabouts he did not know, and to help him arrange accommodation. He first went to Tuzla Air Base where he found his wife almost immediately. She told him that she knew where to lay hands on a tractor to take them back to Tuzla. Skaler said that this really wasn't necessary since he had a chauffeur-driven Mercedes standing by. His wife replied that it was nice to see that he was still alive, but that he was obviously delusional. When they arrived at the car to find the chauffeur stood holding its door open for them, she was forced to admit that he had no mental problems.[8]

Almost everyone who had arrived here from the enclave had contacts among the refugee population in Tuzla to whom they could turn for help. Alternatively, they would seek out relatives at Tuzla Air Base, where many of the women and children from Srebrenica had been taken. One witness, Muharem Mujic, reports having spent an entire day at the Air Base looking for his wife with no success. He spent that night in student lodgings. The next day he borrowed some money from a friend and took the bus to Kladanj where he did find his wife. It was while he was sitting on the bus from Tuzla to Kladanj that the effects of the long journey began to emerge. Having survived the harshest of privations, he had reached safety. Yet he completely forgot that you have to buy a ticket to travel on a bus and was visibly surprised when he was asked him to produce one. The bus driver said simply, 'Oh, you must be from Srebrenica.'[9]

The men who had managed to reach safety spoke of little else besides the atrocities they had seen, the fighting they had endured and the fact that many of their comrades had been killed. The survivors felt a certain bitterness towards the UN because it had not been able to protect the 'Safe Area'. [10] That bitterness and resentment was also directed towards the 2nd Corps of the ABiH. The column's arrival on Bosnian soil was marked by a number of incidents. In one, a member of the 28th Division opened fire at his own Corps Commander, Sead Delic. A Military Police bodyguard was killed, while another returned fire and killed the sniper. The tensions were so great following the crossing of the line of engagement that staff officers of 2nd Corps removed their insignia so that they could not be recognized as staff officers at all. According to the Deputy Corps Commander, the division had turned against the 2nd Corps. In fact, the lack of confidence in the 2nd Corps was nothing new, as the 28th Division had felt abandoned in Srebrenica. This lack of confidence was increased by a general feeling that the 2nd Corps had done little to help the column as it fled the area. [11]

The Chief of Staff of the ABiH, General Hadzihasanovic, and ten other officers were sent to meet with the 2nd Corps to try to bring the situation with regard to the remaining members of the 28th Division under control. It now proved remarkably difficult to keep any form of military discipline among the 28th Division following their arrival in Tuzla. The 2nd Corps' Military Police were called in to assist. The Deputy Commander of the 2nd Corps, Brigadier Makar, attributed the problems to poor organization, lack of discipline and lack of any enforcement of discipline. No one had been able to tell Oric and his men what to do when they had been in Srebrenica, and that was still the case now.[12]

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[1] Julian Borger, 'Return of the Ghosts of War', *The Guardian*, 18/07/95 and John Pomfret, 'Bosnian Soldiers Evade Serbs in Trudge to Safety', *The Washington Post*, 18/07/95.

[2] Interview Semsudin Muminovic, 17/05/99.

[3] Julian Borger, 'Return of the Ghosts of War', *The Guardian*, 18/07/95 and John Pomfret, 'Bosnian Soldiers Evade Serbs in Trudge to Safety', *The Washington Post*, 18/07/95.

[4] Chris Hedges, 'Muslim Refugees Slip Across Serb Lines', *New York Times*, 18/07/95.

[5] Interview Smail Mandzic, 18/05/99.

[6] Interview Othan Zimmerman, 28/04/00.

[7] Interviews Damir Skaler and Muharem Mujic, 17/05/99.

[8] Interviews Damir Skaler and Muharem Mujic, 17/05/99.

[9] Interviews Damir Skaler and Muharem Mujic, 17/05/99.

[10] Julian Borger, 'Return of the Ghosts of War', *The Guardian*, 18/07/95 and John Pomfret, 'Bosnian Soldiers Evade Serbs in Trudge to Safety', *The Washington Post*, 18/07/95.

[11] UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 42, File 2.2 Sector Command Matters General. Fax from Biser to Pedauye, info BH Commander, 23/08/95.

[12] UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 42, File 2.2 Sector Command Matters General. Fax from Biser to Pedauye, info BH Commander, 23/08/95.

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Part IV

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Chapter 1

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20. The disbandment of the 28th Division.

There was indeed considerable bitterness concerning the fall of Srebrenica and the events that followed. This bitterness was felt by civilians and military personnel alike. The civilians brought together at Tuzla Air Base, considered themselves to have been used by the Bosnian Government as pawns in some political game. As far as the refugee problem was concerned, the government had passed the buck to UNPROFOR with the intention of laying the consequences of the fall of Srebrenica open to international scrutiny. This, it was felt, was why the refugees had been brought to Tuzla Air Base and accommodated in a hastily improvised 'tent city', despite more suitable facilities being available elsewhere in Bosnia. The people's disquiet was further fuelled by the fear among family members that the 28th Division was to be disbanded and its members posted to units in other parts of Bosnia much further afield.[1]

On 4 August 1995, a parade was held in Banovica, involving the 3651 remaining soldiers of the 28th Division (of the original 6500). This went some way towards reassuring people that the unit was to remain in existence. The 2nd Corps had re-equipped the men with weapons and uniforms. The ABiH Commander Rasim Delic led the parade and made an optimistic speech.[2] The salute was taken by Brigadier General Naser Oric who also inspected the men. In his address, Rasim Delic said that despite the tragic losses of Srebrenica and Zepa - the responsibility of the international community- there was light at the end of the tunnel and that the beacon was being held up by the soldiers of the 28th Division. After all, it was they who had managed to break out of the VRS siege and it was they who had managed to reach Bosnian territory under the most arduous circumstances. These soldiers represented the guarantee that Srebrenica and the Podrinje would continue to exist. Delic said that it was an honour to command these men and the task was now clear: to return home. Delic stated that he could guarantee this return because he had the strength of the 28th Division behind him, strength which would be felt by the Bosnian Serbs who had never before proven able to erode down the 28th Division's resilience. [3] The following day, during a council meeting of the SDA (Izetbegovic's political party) in Zenica, Delic said that the soldiers who had arrived in Tuzla (and those yet to arrive) would form part of the regrouped 28th Division. As long as there were still soldiers from Srebrenica and Bratunac, he said, it would be possible to show the people that Srebrenica had not been lost.[4]

Following all this heady rhetoric, the announcement that the 28th Division was indeed to be disbanded came as an even greater blow. However, given the incidents between the Srebrenica soldiers and the 2nd Corps staff officers at the front line, together with the general lack of discipline and of leadership during the march, the ABiH Command decision could hardly have come as a total surprise. The command of the 2nd Corps were of the opinion that the 28th Division was still operating at the level of professionalism it had shown at the very beginning of the war in 1992. Neither officers nor men had developed their tactical or technical skills.[5]

It is possible that the remaining 28th Division men were seen as a threat to the military and political elite, whereupon such arguments may well have played a role in the decision to decommission the unit. However, the main argument was that the men of the 28th Division were so poorly disciplined. They seemed to regard the ABiH as an organization to be used to their personal advantage, rather than one which provided any leadership. The demise of the division led to some unrest. The soldiers demonstrated a strong loyalty to their unit but wished to fight only in those places where they had family. This gave rise to insurmountable organizational problems since families were scattered far and wide. Furthermore, there was a marked enmity towards the parent unit, the 2nd Corps, and towards the UN. The local population objected strongly to having members of the 28th Division in the immediate area, since this led to not only the intimidation of Serb minorities in the Tuzla region, but to aggression towards Muslims as well, not to mention theft and looting.[6]

The General Staff of the ABiH determined that the 28th Division must be incorporated into the 24th Division before 17 September 1995. The 24th Division also comprised refugees from Eastern Bosnia, but was somewhat better drilled. The continued existence of the 28th Division as an independent unit was now beyond any discussion. The officers of the 28th were puzzled as to why their division was to be disbanded.[7] Following their heroic march, many had hoped to be allowed to continue as an independent unit.

The survivors' resentment was directed not only at the military leaders but also at the politicians. During the night of 21 and 22 July, President Izetbegovic and General Rasim Delic were both in Tuzla where they held a two-hour meeting with the former staff of the *Opstina* of Srebrenica. The fall of the enclave was discussed, but Izetbegovic later refused to make any comment to journalists regarding what had been said.[8] According to one source who had been at the meeting, Delic had not been given an opportunity to speak. Apparently, Izetbegovic was asked to set up an independent inquiry into the fall of Srebrenica to determine who had been responsible: the international community, the government, the army as a whole, the 2nd Corps or the civilian population. Izetbegovic is said to have been against any such investigation, saying only that a plan was now in existence for the return to Srebrenica.[9]

The hostile attitude of the refugees and the survivors of the march was also apparent when the Bosnian premier Haris Silajdic visited Tuzla Air Base: he was pelted with stones.[10] He had already committed a major faux pas in the eyes of the refugees in that he had failed to attend the parade on 4 August, he had been supposed to take the salute of ABiH Commander Rasim Delic after inspection of the division.[11] The episode with the stones would seem to be a demonstration of the refugee's feeling of having been 'left out in the cold'. This frustration went back a long way - not just to the final days of the enclave but many years previously, when the people felt confined as they lived under such abominable conditions.

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[1] UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 42, File 2.2 Sector Command Matters General. Fax from Biser to Pedauye, info BH Commander, 23/08/95.

[2] Confidential interview (51).

[3] BBC Monitoring Summary of World Broadcasts, 08/08/95, Source: Radio Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sarajevo, in Serb Croat, timed at 0000 GMT on 06/08/95.

[4] *Dani*, Special edition September 1998.

[5] BBC Monitoring Summary of World Broadcasts, 08/08/95, Source: Radio Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sarajevo, in Serbo Croat timed at 0000 GMT on 06/08/95.

[6] NIOD, Confidential collection (5). Fax MIO Sector North East UNMO to BH Comd UNMO, Zagreb UNMO, 231415B Aug 95, Secret, 'Final Milinfo Update', 23/08/95, no. MIO.GEN/001.

[7] Confidential interview (51).

[8] BBC Monitoring Summary of World Broadcasts, 24/07/95, Source: Hiraqi News Agency, Zagreb, in English, timed at 0757 GMT on 22/07/95.

[9] Interview Hakija Meholic, 02/02/98, with addition information supplied on 19/04/98 and 21/05/99.

[10] Confidential interview (51).

[11] Confidential interview (51).

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Part IV

The repercussion and the aftermath until the end of 1995

Chapter 1

The journey from Srebrenica to Tuzla

21. Summary and conclusions

The men's breakout from the enclave and their attempts to reach Tuzla came as a surprise to the VRS and caused considerable confusion. The VRS had expected the men to go to Potocari. This explains why the first group was able to cross the main Bratunac to Konjevic Polje road with relative ease: at this stage the VRS was not yet adequately organized to start the battle.^[1] During the march, the VRS therefore left the foremost part of the column relatively unscathed. The second section was not so fortunate. It was here that the privations were greatest and it was here that the majority of casualties fell.^[2] As a result of the ambushes, there was little unity or cohesion in this central section. As the march progressed, many people fell behind, lost the way or decided to turn back into more familiar territory in the Srebrenica region and to attempt to reach Zepa from there. Others tried to push onwards in the wake of the vanguard of the column, following the signs that people had passed here, which included corpses and abandoned possessions. Such signs remained visible for many months. The groups who managed to complete the journey to Tuzla took widely varying times to do so. In a few extreme cases, people reached Bosnian territory only after several months.

As described in Part III of this report, the 28th Division faced major problems following Naser Oric's departure in April 1995. There was a lack of good leadership and there was little cohesion in the division. There were conflicts between the commanders. Ramiz Becirovic had already complained to the 2nd Corps command that he could not keep his officers under control. The lack of adequate military leadership had major consequences for the breakout from the enclave: it proved impossible to arrive at any effective decision and there was no one who was clearly 'in charge'. Even where commanders did fulfil their responsibilities in this sphere, the internal relations were so poor that there could be no good, coordinated leadership as such. This seriously hampered communications between the various parts of the column, as well as that between the column and the various brigades.

The column was ready to depart shortly after midnight on 12 July, according to the radio message from Ramiz Becirovic to Tuzla. Initial progress was very slow, due not only to the mines along the first section of the route but also the disagreements and lack of decisiveness among the military leaders. Much valuable time was lost, whereupon the VRS was able to take measures as soon as word of the breakout was received. The rearmost section of the column thus came to suffer serious losses. The delays also hampered the column in passing Kamenica, as the VRS had been given the opportunity of laying ambushes which would form an insurmountable obstacle for the larger part of the column. The assaults on the column in the area around Kravica, Konjevic Polje and Nova Kasaba were therefore responsible for the heaviest death toll. A second area in which many victims fell was that around Baljkovica, the final obstacle standing between the column and Muslim-held territory.

[3]

Many refugees later stated that the ABiH could and should have provided more assistance from Tuzla. The column's general route was known as it had been used for earlier journeys to Tuzla. However, because there was no radio contact between the column and the 2nd Corps headquarters throughout the march, the ABiH in Tuzla had to rely on little more than guesswork to determine the exact route and the men's progress.

Only at the very end of the journey was the column able to contact Tuzla using a radio set captured from the VRS. From intercepted VRS communications, the 2nd Corps had already deduced that a large number of men had been taken prisoner. As officers of the 2nd Corps later revealed, the 'intercepts' served to apprise the unit of the actions, ambushes and intentions of the VRS. The 2nd Corps also listened in to the orders issued to VRS units which were sent to lay ambushes along the major roads which the column would have to cross. It was frustrating for those at the headquarters in Tuzla to know what was happening without actually being able to do anything about it, as one of the officers concerned later stated.[4]

This situation has to be seen in the light of the fact that not all 'intercepts' could be interpreted immediately, the information becoming available only some time later. Intelligence concerning what actually happened between 12 and 15 July might have been scarcer than now supposed. Indeed, some intercepts became available only years later since, according to the Bosnian newspaper *Slobodna Bosna*, it would otherwise be apparent how little support the ABiH had provided during the battle of Srebrenica and thereafter.[5]

The men in the column were embittered by the perceived lack of assistance from the ABiH. It was frequently claimed that the 2nd Corps did absolutely nothing to help the column, but this is not true: measures were indeed taken. Two battalions of the 2nd Corps were sent to the area from Sarajevo, as were various companies from nearby divisions. Pressure on the VRS units in Majevisa hills was increased so that they would be unable to offer support to the Zvornik Brigade. The 2nd Corps also successfully used hoax communications to persuade the VRS that an attack on Zvornik was imminent, whereupon VRS units were diverted to other regions. One group was sent to Snagovo with the intention of confusing the VRS. Such tactics met with some success as the VRS launched an attack on the wrong place. The 2nd Corps was also successful in opening up a breach in the VRS lines for the use of the column, although this was only temporary.

The units of the 2nd Corps which had been recalled from Sarajevo arrived too late to take any effective action. Only on 20 July, and with the fullest support of the 2nd Corps, could the assault on the VRS be renewed. This failed and no new corridor was opened. It can thus be seen that the 2nd Corps did attempt to provide appropriate support. However, Lieutenant Colonel Semsudin Murinovic, who had come from Tuzla to provide assistance, later said that he had never experienced such a shortage of weapons and ammunition as that he suffered during the period of 17 to 20 July. Murinovic declined to comment on whether Naser Oric had received adequate support from the 2nd Corps in his attempts to break through the lines at Baljkovica. He believed that the 2nd Corps became fully active only after it had been learned from the intercepts that the VRS had taken large numbers of prisoners.

Meanwhile, a number of volunteers had been assembled and, without the knowledge of the 2nd Corps command, proceeded to the front. They counted on receiving the support of the troops in the area. Small reconnaissance units were sent into the area, but it was only on Murinovic's initiative that a full brigade was later sent to the front line. [6] (Murinovic was himself from Srebrenica). According to Naser Oric, and contrary to Sead Delic's testimony, it was not true that a substantial section of the 2nd Corps had attempted to [7]drive a breach through the VRS lines in order to allow the troops and civilians from Srebrenica to pass. Oric claims to have done this himself together with fifteen volunteers [8] The Deputy Commander Makar also denies that there was any large-scale assistance from the 2nd Corps.[9] However, some members of the column have pointed out that while the small number of ABiH troops

sent from Tuzla could not have hoped to make much difference in forcing a breakthrough, they did indeed offer some help.[10]

The criticisms of the Bosnian politicians and military personnel have been persistent. Ibran Mustafic, a Srebrenica politician who survived being captured and held by Bosnian Serbs, finds it remarkable that no one has yet been called to account for the tragedy in Bosnia and its aftermath. Army Commander Rasim Delic has been accused of distancing himself from the conflict because he wished to have a full strength of men for the Sarajevo campaign. By contrast, Oric's reputation was enhanced when he came forward from Tuzla to provide assistance after the fall of the enclave. Oric is said to have complained to Sead Delic about the lack of support he received. This is alleged to be the reason for Oric's dismissal from the army, another reason was, that Delic did not want a 'criminal' on his staff.[11]

The units of the 2nd Corps were deployed for too short a period and did too little to keep open the breach in the lines. Many blamed the large number of fatalities at Baljkovica on the 2nd Corps which, it is claimed, should have done more. There was said to be an air of complacency in Tuzla regarding the fate of Srebrenica.[12] Likewise, the column should have told the 2nd Corps that the corridor must remain open, since those at the front knew that there was at least another 2000 or 3000 men following on behind. The 2nd Corps is said to have relinquished the corridor because of fears that the VRS would fire upon Tuzla itself.[13]

When confronted with such criticisms, Sead Delic stated that his Corps had done everything in its ability. However, there was no contact with the column; the Corps was constantly waiting for information and signs of life. Against this, it should be remembered that Delic had access to the 'intercepts' of VRS radio communications and must therefore have had some knowledge regarding the progress of the column. Delic claims that an attack was indeed launched to open up a corridor through the VRS lines as soon as it was known at which point the men were trying to reach Bosnian territory. The first attack, led by Oric, was unsuccessful. This was largely due to the lack manpower. Later it was possible to open a breach in the lines by deploying 2000 men.[14] There was also some criticism directed at Sead Delic in person: he is said to have moved forward only after he had heard that the column had reached safe territory. He remained far from the front line and was afraid of aggression on the part of the column because he had not offered adequate support.[15] There is little evidence to support these claims. The 2nd Corps set up a forward command post to coordinate assistance to the 28th Division as early as 13 July.

There has also been fierce criticism of such people as President Izetbegovic, Premier Silajdzic and Commander Rasim Delic with regard to their lack of commitment. After all the emotional stress and loss of life, it would have been difficult for those in the column to appreciate the balance between what was desirable and what was actually possible. When the full extent of the mass murder began to emerge, rumours began to circulate among the refugees to the effect that the 'Safe Area' had fallen as the result of some exchange of territory between President Izetbegovic and the VRS. (Part III of this report establishes that such rumours were already in existence prior to the fall of Srebrenica). Izetbegovic is said to have refrained from ordering assistance to the enclave with a view to this exchange. These rumours were further fuelled by the refugees' firm belief that no one had attempted to prevent the fall of the Safe Area. In their view, the government, the ABiH and the UN all failed to do anything to avoid the situation that developed.

The rumour that nothing was done to prevent the fall of the enclave was further based on the supposed order from some higher authority to evacuate the enclave. However, the actual decision to move out of Srebrenica was taken by the commanders of the 28th Division and the local political figures. As far as can be established, there was never any order from anyone at national or regional level.

Neither UNPROFOR nor Dutchbat played any part in the breakout or the subsequent

march. The events took place without the knowledge of the United Nations. Dutchbat exerted no influence whatsoever on the decision to evacuate the enclave, nor did it influence the organization of the evacuation or the subsequent course of events. Dutchbat did not even know about the march, although the movement of a few small groups of men towards the north-western part of the enclave had been observed and reported. It may therefore be concluded that some groups left the enclave before the march to Tuzla was undertaken in earnest. During the hours in which the march was being planned and the departure prepared, Dutchbat was no longer in contact with the representatives of the 28th Division. Furthermore, Dutchbat was not in a position to see the area in which the people were assembled nor what happened to them thereafter. The observations post OP-M, nearest the assembly point, had already been abandoned.

The refugees in and around the compound at Potocari were, like Dutchbat, unaware of the whereabouts of the men. Only during the course of the next two days, 12 and 13 July, did the women who had been taken to Kladanj by bus or truck realize that the route taken by the column ran parallel to the Potocari - Konjevic Polje -Kladanj road for some distance. This was in fact the route taken by the men in the rear of the column who tried to cross this road after the VRS had blocked the more direct route to Tuzla.

It was in much the same way that a number of Dutchbat military personnel first noticed something of what was happening. However, like the women in the convoys, they caught no more than the briefest glances of the men as they assembled at the side of the road. The Dutchbat personnel who had escorted the convoys and those detained by the VRS in Nova Kasaba when their vehicles were confiscated, could not see very much of what was going on. They were kept away from the conflict areas with the argument that it would not be safe there. Because many Bosnian Serbs had by now donned United Nations gear and were driving Dutchbat vehicles, it was now almost impossible to tell the genuine Dutch peace-keepers from the Bosnian Serb impostors. Major Zoran Malinic, who had set up his headquarters in the school at Nova Kasaba, wanted to prevent the Dutchbat personnel from returning to Potocari, saying that it would not be safe there either. He told Lieutenant Egbers that there were Muslims waiting to blow themselves up with hand grenades, intending to take as many Bosnian Serbs as possible with them. For their part, the Dutchbat men considered the so-called MUP troops (units of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republika Srpska) who now occupied positions along the road to be extremely undisciplined.

The Bosnian Serbs were extremely tense, as Egbers saw for himself when the school in Nova Kasaba in which the Dutchbat troops were stationed came under attack from Bosnian Muslims. There were actually only a few men responsible for the attack, armed with small bore weapons. However, VRS major Malinic initiated a full-scale action in response. He took two Muslim men from a house where prisoners were kept and used them as a human shield for himself. He ordered machine gun fire and mortar shells to be fired in the direction of the source of the gunfire, and took a section of ten men to hunt down the attackers. Malinic later returned without having located the snipers. The two Muslim men used as a shield also returned. Egbers interpreted this VRS action as demonstrating a certain concern on the part of the VRS for the safety of the Dutch troops, although it may also have been prompted by a desire to ensure that no one could observe what the VRS was doing.^[16]

The Bosnian army of 1995 did not include a place for the 28th Division as a separate entity. The level of training, organization and discipline of these men did not justify an autonomous position within the ABiH. Because both the Division and the civilian population demonstrated a strong enmity towards the military and political leaders following the fall of Srebrenica, it being thought that they had done too little to protect the enclave, the continued existence of the 28th Division would have entailed a serious threat to the unity within the ABiH as a whole. For the soldiers of the 28th Division, after the severe stress and privations of the preceding weeks, the decision to disband the unit came as a severe disappointment and one

which was difficult to reconcile. It served to reinforce the feelings of dissatisfaction concerning ABiH leadership and this too had consequences in the long term.

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- [1] Confidential interview (52).
 - [2] Interview Sefko Hodzic, 24/05/99.
 - [3] Interview Hakija Meholic, 02/02/98 with additional material supplied on 19/04/98 and 21/05/99.
 - [4] Interview Semsudin Muminovic, 17/05/99.
 - [5] Mehmed Pargan, "We have fifty of theirs in one grove, and we will have to kill them", *Slobodna Bosna*, 11/07/98 (FBIS translation).
 - [6] Interview Semsudin Muminovic, 17/05/99.
 - [7] Interview Naser Oric, 23/10/00.
 - [8] Interview Naser Oric, 23/10/00.
 - [9] Interview Andjelko Makar, 21/10/00.
 - [10] Interview Hakija Meholic, 02/02/98 with additional material supplied on 19/04/98 and 21/05/99.
 - [11] Interview Ibran Mustafic, 16/04/98.
 - [12] Interview Isnam Taljic, 18/05/99.
 - [13] Interview Hakija Meholic, 02/02/98 with additional material supplied on 19/04/98 and 21/05/99.
 - [14] Interview Sead Delic, 10/03/99.
 - [15] Confidential interview (87).
 - [16][16] Interview V.B. Egbers, 02/09/99.

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Part IV

The repercussion and the aftermath until the end of 1995

Chapter 2

The executions

1. Introduction

'The events of the nine days from July 10-19, 1995 in Srebrenica defy description in their horror and their implications for humankind's capacity to revert to acts of brutality under the stresses of conflict. In little over one week, thousands of lives were extinguished, irreparably rent or simply wiped from the pages of history. The Trial Chamber leaves it to historians and social psychologists to plumb the depths of this episode of the Balkan conflict and to probe for deep-seated causes. Thus, the Trial Chamber concentrates on setting forth, in detail, the facts surrounding this compacted nine days of hell and avoids expressing rhetorical indignation that these events should ever have occurred at all. In the end, no words of comment can lay bare the saga of Srebrenica more graphically than a plain narrative of the events themselves, or expose more poignantly the waste of war and ethnic hatreds and the long road that must still be travelled to ease their bitter legacy.' [1]

It was with these words that the judges of the Yugoslavia Tribunal expressed their sentiments in their verdict in the case against the VRS General Krstic. Even in the context of the war in Bosnia, here was something truly extraordinary, both in the scale and in the degree of brutality displayed. It was some time before the full extent of the executions which had taken place after the fall of Srebrenica became known to the world at large. The process by which the international community became aware of the dreadful events is described elsewhere in this report. This chapter presents a brief account of the limited sources of information and forensic evidence available, followed by an attempt to explain the motives for the mass murder and an estimate of its extent. The locations of the mass executions are listed in chronological order together with an account of the methods employed. The chapter concludes with a consideration of the responsibilities of the VRS officers involved.

It will remain difficult to provide a concise description of the mass murders or any analysis of the motives while researchers continue to meet a wall of silence on the part of the Bosnian Serbs involved and other witnesses. Sources of information regarding the planning and the carrying out of the executions themselves are extremely scarce. Most of the scarce information that is available derives from a single Bosnian source: intercepted VRS messages. However, the forensic evidence gathered in later years provided irrefutable proof that mass murder had indeed been committed, although it could not yet prove the full extent of the atrocities.

Ten survivors of the executions at various locations came to play an important role in reconstructing events for the benefit of the Tribunal, in that they were able to recount the methods adopted. Although their evidence was not particularly detailed, it provided sufficient to have perpetrators

such as Major General Radislav Krstic and soldier Drazen Erdemovic convicted for their war crimes. Krstic was the Commander of the attack on Srebrenica itself, while Erdemovic was proven to be a member of the firing squad which carried out the executions nearby the Pilica school.^[2] At the time of writing, other suspects including Vodoje Blagojevic (Brigadier of the Bratunac Brigade), Dragan Obrenovic (Deputy Commander of the Zvornik Brigade) and Dragan Jokic (Operations Officer of the same brigade) are in custody awaiting trial.

The criminal investigation served a purpose quite different to that of this historical survey. Nevertheless, the reconstruction made for the Tribunal is of great value given the paucity of other sources of information. In particular, the NIOD has been able to make good use of the information which emerged during the trial of VRS General Radislav Krstic, Chief of Staff and, after 13 July 1995, Commander of the Drina Corps. The trial was held between December 1998 and August 2001. Communications intercepted by the ABiH and subsequently made available to the Tribunal and to the NIOD also formed an important source of information. The Bosnian Serbs had by this time abandoned the caution which marked the careful preparations for the attack on Srebrenica. Even so, the picture that has been constructed is not a particularly detailed one. In many cases, the only evidence available was a snippet of conversation, couched in vague or deliberately cryptic terms. However, once placed alongside each other and brought into context, the intercepts did provide an important source of evidence. The recurring word 'package' was recognized as code for a condemned man.

Much of what follows here is derived from the Krstic trial report. In some cases, the NIOD was also able to speak directly to survivors of the mass executions or could rely on the work conducted in 1995 by the organization Human Rights Watch. The most striking examples are Alexandra Stiglitz (for *Time* and *The Boston Globe*) and David Rohde (for *Christian Science Monitor*). This report also draws upon the publication *Srebrenica: Het verhaal van de overlevenden*.^[3] The NIOD had access to a number of VRS documents, most of which relate to orders and to the organizational aspects of the VRS brigades' persecution of the men from the column bound for Tuzla. However, of the few Bosnian Serbs who might be able to shed any light on matters and who agreed to an interview, there was absolutely no willingness to discuss events following the fall of Srebrenica. In this respect, the NIOD researchers met a wall of silence.

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[1] ICTY, (IT-98-33) Judgement, 02/08/01, para. 2.

[2] ICTY, (IT-96-22), Judgement of 29/05/96.

[3] *Human Rights Watch/Helsinki*, 'Bosnia-Herzegovina: The Fall of Srebrenica and the Failure of U.N. peacekeeping', Vol. 7, No. 13, October 1995; Hren, *Srebrenica*, passim. The anthology does not include the articles by Rohde and Stiglitz.

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Part IV

The repercussion and the aftermath until the end of 1995

Chapter 2

The executions

2. The extent of the mass murder and the number of missing persons

In the account of the journey to Tuzla given in Chapter 1, we have read that the Bosnian Serbs took a large number of prisoners on the road from Bratunac to Konjevic Polje on 12 and 13 July 1995. One estimate puts the number of men from Srebrenica held on the Nova Kasaba football field at between 1500 and 3000. Witnesses who gave evidence before the Yugoslavia Tribunal estimated that there were also between 1000 and 4000 men being held in a field near Sandici.[1] Other Bosnian sources talk of 'a few thousand men' in a field near Sandici and of 1500 men in the Nova Kasaba stadium.[2] The estimates are therefore highly approximate. The exact number of people held at these two locations and elsewhere is impossible to state with any accuracy. The intercepted communications suggest that the Bosnian Serbs were holding between 3000 and 4000 prisoners by 15 July. This number would have increased over the ensuing days. The intercepts suggested that some 4000 to 5000 thousand people had been killed by 18 July. In all probability, this figure referred only to the victims of organized executions and did not include casualties of the fighting with the column on the march.[3] Major Franken was told by VRS Colonel Jankovic that the VRS had taken 6000 prisoners of war. As far as he could later recall, Franken believes this statement to have been made on 14 July.[4] Given his position as Intelligence Chief on the VRS general staff, it is reasonable to assume that Jankovic was well informed. A further group of men, numbering about 1000, had been separated from the women, children and elderly in Potocari and were taken to Bratuna (see Chapter 4). There, they were grouped with the men taken from the column. The Bosnian Serbs made no effort to keep the two groups of prisoners apart.[5] It is probable that Jankovic's figure of 6000 included the Potocari contingent.

The Yugoslavia Tribunal was able to conclude that some 7000 to 8000 men had been executed, not counting the murders committed in Potocari itself. The Tribunal did not attempt to set a figure on the number of victims in Potocari, but we may be certain that it was a substantial figure. This would also be true of the number of men killed in Bratunac between 12 and 14 July, during the night.[6] The Tribunal's estimate of the total number of executions seems to be somewhat higher than can be substantiated on the basis of evidence, since it fails to take into account other causes of death among those on the road to Tuzla. Thus, the Tribunal's figure actually refers to the total number of missing persons.

Indeed, it is very difficult to put an exact figure on the number of 'missing' Bosnian Muslims. Various figures have been cited, and press publications occasionally offer some astonishing estimates. [7] According to the Minister of Defence of the Republika Srpska, Manojlo Milovanovic, the Bosnian Serbs did not keep any record of the number of casualties following the fall of Srebrenica, neither was there any documentation recording the number of fatalities among Bosnian Muslims.[8]

The most prominent and reliable non-governmental organizations to have collected data concerning missing persons after the fall of Srebrenica include the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Physicians for Human Rights (PHR). The International Commission of Missing Persons (ICMP) does not actually try to trace missing persons, but is mainly occupied with applying political pressure on those who have committed human rights violations, provides assistance to the

families of victims and provides financing to trace missing persons.[9]

It was particularly difficult to estimate the number of missing persons in the first weeks following the fall of Srebrenica, there being no reports or testimony from family members on which to rely. In the first instance, the estimates were based on the assumed population of the enclave before the attack. However, the number at the time of the attack itself had never been accurately established, whereby all subsequent calculations were inevitably flawed. According to the Bosnian Government, the correct figure was 42,000 while UNHCR assumed a population of 42,600. This figure dated from 1993, but may have been artificially inflated in order to acquire more humanitarian aid for the enclave. According to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the number of people in the enclave in July 1995 would have been between 38,000 and 40,000.[10]

An additional problem was that the estimates of the number of missing persons soon were all equated with the number of people that the Bosnian Serbs were known to have murdered. As we have already seen, this is a false correlation since in addition to those executed, there were those who perished on the road to Tuzla. During the march, fighting between the VRS and ABiH, ambushes, fighting among factions within the column, suicide, exhaustion and the rigours of the journey would have claimed an unknown number of lives. The bodies of these people remained unburied in the woods. According to journalist Saleh Brkic, human remains could still be found along the road to Tuzla - the *route des mortes* - many years later. He claims to have seen hundreds of corpses with his own eyes. Add those found alongside the Zvornik to Vlasenica road and in the area around Baljkovica, and the figure could quite easily reach two thousand, he believes.[11]

It is thus impossible to arrive at even a general approximation of the number who perished on the road to Tuzla and in the areas of the major ambushes, nor of the number of persons who surrendered to, or were captured by, the VRS. The quoted figure of 6000 prisoners of war - the only 'hard' figure cited by any source - derives from the VRS itself. This, set against the figure of 7500 missing persons (calculated in the manner explained below) would suggest that approximately 1500 people died on the road to Tuzla, whether under gunfire, in combat, killed by mines, suicide or starvation. No reliable figure has ever been put forward by the Bosnians.

Following the events of July 1995, and under pressure from local people, the Bosnian State Commission for Tracing Missing Persons attempted to determine the number of victims on the march. However, the commission was unable to devote sufficient attention to this question, because shortly thereafter the problem of the Zepa enclave arose. It was not until the summer of 1996 that the commission's president, Amor Masovic, was able to join a Finnish mission in visiting the area to the north of Srebrenica. There he saw many human remains. It was not possible to retrieve these for burial. Some bodies had been eaten by animals or dragged away, while others had been burned, possibly deliberately to prevent identification. Later, in September and October 1996, the Bosnian Serbs permitted the retrieval of a limited number of remains, whereupon some 300 bodies were recovered. A further 400 bodies were found in the area of Milici, Nova Kasaba and Lazarici. It is likely that countless other corpses remained undiscovered, especially in areas such as the Ravni Buljim valley, where the shooting began, and in the woods around Burnice, near Nova Kasaba, where 300 men are known to have been killed. The Bosnian Serbs withdrew permission to search the area shortly thereafter. According to Masovic there were occasional 'exchanges' of remains following direct negotiations between the families concerned.[12]

The question of exactly how many people from Srebrenica went missing is one which two Norwegian demographers attempted to answer in a report they compiled at the request of the Office of the Prosecutor of the Yugoslavia Tribunal, on behalf of the Krstic trial.[13] The researchers, Helge Brunborg and Henrik Urdal, took this opportunity to analyse the reliability of the figures compiled by the ICRC and PHR. It must be noted that the objectives of the two organizations were different, and hence the nature of the information kept was also different. The International Red Cross kept data with a view to assisting the families of missing persons, while the Physicians for Human Rights recorded missing persons information in the form of an *ante mortem* database to serve as an aid to identification, whereby the focus was on persons who went missing *after* the fall of Srebrenica. The International Red

Cross has compiled a register of all missing persons in Bosnia between 1992 and 1995 but was not concerned with the question of whether the persons went missing before, during or after the fall of Srebrenica. The International Red Cross began its registration of missing persons immediately after the fall as it was believed at the time that these people were still alive and being held as prisoners of war. The advantage was that the data was still reasonably concise and uncontaminated, although it was derived at a time of enormous physical and emotional distress and exhaustion. In most cases, the information could not be corroborated due to the absence of identity papers. Physicians for Human Rights began its registration a year later. Here, the objective was to gather as much information as possible about the physical characteristics of victims and their clothing. Because relatives realized the emotional strain which could attach to such questions, most had prepared well and were often able to show the relevant identity papers.

Over the course of the ensuing years, the International Red Cross published four different versions of its list of missing persons. The final version appeared in July 1998 and lists 7421 missing persons for Srebrenica alone, from a total 19,403 for Bosnia as a whole. Of this number, the fate of only 85 is known for certain: 22 are still alive and 63 are deceased. The list produced by Physicians for Human Rights includes fewer missing persons, its total being 7269. This is because the organization only registered missing persons around Tuzla and Sarajevo, not elsewhere in Bosnia. The conclusion that Brunborg and Urdal drew was that neither list was necessarily any better than the other. Each had strong points and weak points. Taken together, they offered more reliable information.

They then compared the lists with the electoral rolls for 1997 and 1998 and with the census of 1991. Nine persons proved to have been erroneously listed as missing. The ICRC's investigations found a further six of the listed people to be still alive. Eventually, the researchers were able to draw up a consolidated list of at least 7475 persons who were either known to be dead or whose current whereabouts were unknown. Brun

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3. The motives for the executions

As a wartime objective of the Bosnian Serbs, Srebrenica was not different to any other target: ethnic cleansing would be applied to bring about an ethnically homogenous region. However, the extent to which the population would fall victim to this policy took on unprecedented proportions, giving rise to widespread astonishment and disbelief. After all, UNPROFOR forces were there and it was their duty to break the spiral of violence into which the civilian population had been plunged. How was it possible that the war could nevertheless sink into the depths of sheer barbarism?

Originally, the primary objective of the VRS military operation which began on the 6th of July was to limit the territory of the Srebrenica enclave and to create an intolerable situation for the population within. In the fullness of time, this strategy would lead to such hardships that the population would be forced to move on elsewhere. The original plan of operation 'Kravija 95' made no provision for the civilian population whatsoever, although it did explicitly stipulate that the usual rules and conventions of war should apply. When the decision to take the entire enclave was made on the 9th of July, no guidelines for dealing with the civilians existed other than to state that the safety of the people in the area controlled by the VRS or the Bosnian Serb police should be guaranteed.[1]

The question of why the executions took place at all is not easy to answer. During the Krstic trial before the Yugoslavia Tribunal, the prosecution's military advisor, Richard Butler, pointed out in taking this course of action, the Bosnian Serbs deprived themselves of an extremely valuable bargaining counter. Butler suggested that the Bosnian Serbs would have had far more to gain had they taken the men in Potocari as prisoners of war, under the supervision of the International Red Cross and the UN troops still in the area. It might then have been possible to enter into some sort of exchange deal or they might have been able to force political concessions.[2] Based on this reasoning, the ensuing mass murder defied rational explanation.

There is no surviving documentation concerning the organization of the executions. Indeed, it is unlikely that any orders so flagrantly flouting humanitarian law would be committed to paper in the first place. Even during the Krstic trial, it proved impossible to answer the question of when the decision to kill the men had been taken. The judges could not exclude the possibility that plans for the executions were originally hatched by the General Staff of the VRS, and that the Drina Corps which actually carried out the attack on Srebrenica had not been consulted about them beforehand. The Tribunal found that there was sufficient evidence to link Krstic with the organization of the removal of the women and children from Potocari, but that there was insufficient evidence that he actually made any arrangements for the executions. Because the Tribunal was unable to establish the date on which the decision to execute all able-bodied men was taken, it could not be determined whether the murders in Potocari on the 12 and 13 of July formed part of a larger plan. The men who were captured on the road to Tuzla were not admitted to recognised war camps (such as that at Batkovici) but were confined in appalling conditions in sheds, vehicles, sports halls, etc., without food or water. This suggests that a decision to execute the men had indeed been taken at some central level. As in Potocari, these men had their identification papers confiscated and burnt, which was also seemingly irrefutable evidence of

malicious intent on the part of their captors.[3]

Emotional factors such as revenge, anger and frustration seem to have gained the upper hand in prompting the executions. This column of men was on its way from the captured enclave to the safety of Tuzla, and seemed to be escaping the clutches of the Bosnian Serbs. Revenge for the murder of Bosnian Serb civilians in and around the enclave in 1992 and 1993 is frequently cited as a motive for the executions, both in the Muslim Croat Federation and in the Republika Srpska. There was, after all, considerable animosity between the various ethnic groups. According to a UN official, that animosity was so great that nowhere else in Bosnia was there so little peaceful negotiation between the combatant parties, and nowhere else were there so many skirmishes around a Safe Area as in that around Srebrenica.[4]

The situation obtaining at the time may also have contributed to the fateful decision. In the previous chapter, it was stated that the breakout from Srebrenica came as a complete surprise to the Bosnian Serbs who were totally unprepared. The conflict between the VRS and the 28th Division of the ABiH had taken a new turn by sundown on the 11th of July, by which time the VRS no longer knew exactly where the ABiH was positioned. On the orders of General Mladic, the VRS troops regrouped in the centre of the newly captured enclave. By noon the following day, they had left once more, en route to their next target, Zepa. Only reserve troops - a few MUP units and Military Police - remained in the enclave.[5] This may well have contributed to the feelings of uncertainty or even panic on the part of the Bosnian Serbs, particularly when the VRS discovered that the ABiH troops had withdrawn and there was now to be a movement across Bosnian Serb-held territory without any prior preparation.

The sheer size of the party of men, both soldiers and civilians, which fell into Bosnian Serb hands soon thereafter would also have come as a great surprise. The rules and customs of engagement required that shelter, food, water and medical care be provided. This presented yet another unexpected problem: an extensive logistic operation would have to be launched at the very moment that the capture of the fleeing column was already causing so many problems. At the same time, it was necessary to ensure that the territory of the former enclave remained 'cleansed', while the operation against Zepa also demanded full attention. To establish the identity of each of these men, to question them as POWs and to determine any involvement in war crimes would take considerable time and would have exceeded the capacity of the VRS and Security agencies.[6]

These factors suggest that there was no proof that the mass murder of the men may have formed part of the plans for the capture of Srebrenica before the operation itself. The Security and Intelligence units of the Drina Corps and the VRS Military Police had originally been ordered to assemble and guard prisoners of war upon the capture of Srebrenica.[7] There is therefore no indication that the VRS had harboured the intention of killing the ABiH soldiers and men in the column proceeding to Tuzla.

During the second meeting with the Dutchbat Commander Karremans in the Hotel Fontana, held on 12 of July, Mladic stated that all men of combatant age would be 'screened' for their part in war crimes. Such screening and the interrogation of prisoners of war is, under the international rules of engagement, permitted.[8] On the same day the VRS' Bratunac Brigade had made a list of Muslims who were suspected of war crimes. From notes made by members of the Bratunac Brigade, the Tribunal was able to deduce that some had indeed been questioned about their involvement in such crimes around this time.[9] Dutchbat sources were also able to confirm that this was done in Bratunac.[10] The VRS had a list of approximately 100 people from the enclave who were wanted for questioning in connection with war crimes.[11]

However, it soon became apparent that the Bosnian Serbs did not plan to interview the men in compliance with international law. At first, some were rounded up and interrogated, but the number involved soon became unmanageable for the Bosnian Serbs. This could well have influenced the decision to execute all male prisoners. Rather than spend any more time in interrogating people to establish guilt or innocence, they seized all men and boys, regardless of age. No exceptions were made, no distinction drawn between civilians and military personnel. All personal belongings and identity papers were confiscated and were subsequently destroyed to avoid any evidence being left.[12] This

process, as it affected the men in the immediate vicinity of the compound at Potocari, is described in further detail in Chapter 4 of this section. The current chapter deals with the executions beyond the immediate area of the compound.

Exactly when was the decision made to discontinue screening and to execute the prisoners instead? During the Hotel Fontana meeting with Karremans on the morning of July the 12th, Mladic stated that it would be better for the ABiH troops to lay down their arms rather than be killed. If he was sincere in this belief, we may deduce that any plan for a mass murder could have emerged no sooner than the end of that morning. It was then that the Bosnian Serbs learned that the men were planning to escape, and that the disarmament envisaged by Mladic was unlikely to take place. There is little sinister in the statements made by Karadzic in Pale that day. Karadzic boasted that there had been no civilian casualties during the fighting and that he had no objection to the continued presence of UNPROFOR. He dismissed all admonitions from the international community, but did not make any threats with regard to the men fleeing to Tuzla. [13]

The Tribunal was of the opinion that the Bosnian Serbs eventually intended to kill as many men of combatant age as possible. Although a number of women and children were murdered, together with a relatively large number of older men, the main focus of the VRS was on able-bodied men between the ages of 16 and 60. The buses which transported the women and children were systematically searched for men. Some, although very few, exceptions were made. They included the casualties in Bratunac hospital who had previously been treated in the Dutchbat compound at Potocari. In these cases, it seems as though the Bosnian Serbs were doing their best not to attract international attention, particularly when Dutchbat personnel were present and observing the proceedings. [14]

A key question is that of where the idea of the mass murders emerge

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The majority of the missing men were killed during the mass executions. However, not all executions could be described as 'mass'. Some Muslims were murdered individually or in small groups by the troops who had taken them prisoner. Some were murdered at the temporary prison camp locations. The executions began on 13 July. In the ensuing days, prisoners were transported to the execution sites to the north, where most executions took place between 14 and 17 of July.[1] The Tribunal established that the executions had followed a set pattern. The men were first transported to disused schools or warehouses where they were held for several hours. Then they were loaded onto transport and taken to some remote location. Measures were taken to ensure that there was little or no resistance: the men were required to remove their footwear and their wrists were tied behind their backs. The prisoners were then lined up and killed, one at a time, with rifle fire. If any appeared to have survived, they were then shot again. In a few cases there were survivors who managed to 'play dead' convincingly enough and, although wounded, could later make good their escape. They reported that directly after - and sometimes during - the executions, earthmoving equipment would arrive to bury the victims where they lay, or in some convenient spot nearby.[2]

On the 12 and 13 of July, buses which were transporting the women and children to Kladanj were taken out of the convoy in Potocari. These were to transport the men from Potocari to Bratunac, where some were confined for between one and three days in various sheds and a disused school, others in the buses and trucks which had brought them there. The prisoners were given neither food nor water and suffered a torrent of abuse and other indignities.[3] According to witnesses, the people of Bratunac used to take men from these groups at night, and shots and screams could be heard. The events would appear to be a repetition of those which took place in the spring of 1992, shortly after the outbreak of the war in Bosnia. After 1995, the bullet holes could still be seen in the stands of the football stadium at Bratunac and in the classrooms of the Vuk Draskovic school.[4]



The buses and trucks which had transported the women and children to Kladanj became available on 13 July. On the two subsequent days, the Military Police of the Bratunac Brigade escorted prisoners to locations farther to the north. The conditions under which the men were held in the trucks in Bratunac were atrocious. Having spent the night in the trucks, a group of approximately six hundred men proceeded to Kravica on the morning of the 14th of July. As the convoy reached the village, the vehicles halted and the men were left for hours under the tarpaulin of the trucks in the full heat of summer. Some passed out. In the afternoon, the trucks proceeded to Karakaj, north of Zvornik. Here the convoy stood outside a school for two hours. When the men were ordered out of the trucks to be held in the school, some were found to be dead.^[5]

The Bosnian Serbs employed several methods to keep the prisoners as quiet and compliant as possible, using lies and deceit where necessary. Mladic was certainly guilty of such practices. For example, the men who were found attempting to escape by the Bratunac-Konjevic Polje road were told that the Geneva Convention would be observed if they gave themselves up. In Bratunac, men were told that there were Serbian personnel standing by to escort them to Zagreb for an exchange of prisoners. The visible presence of UN vehicles and UN vehicles, stolen from Dutchbat, were intended to contribute to the feeling of reassurance. Bosnian Serbs wearing Dutchbat uniforms encouraged the men to give themselves up. At the same time, individual VRS soldiers continued to intimidate the captives with both words and actions, taking pot-shots in the dark with weapons taken from the prisoners themselves.^[6]

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[1] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, 02/08/01, para. 67.

[2] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, 02/08/01, para. 68-9.

[3] Confidential information (77).

[4] Confidential interview (64).

[5] ABiH Sarajevo. Arnautovic archive, 20/05/99, 'Report of 14/07/95'; ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, 02/08/01, para. 66, 180, 184.

[6] Interview Omer Subasic, 19/10 and 20/10/97; confidential information (76).

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5. The morning of 13 July 1995: executions alongside the River Jadar

The first small-scale executions took place on the morning of 13 July 1995, alongside the River Jadar near Konjevic Polje. One survivor later told of how he was taken prisoner at Konjevic Polje earlier that morning, and then taken to a house for interrogation. He was then taken to another house, and later still to a shed by the Jadar where he was beaten. A bus then arrived at the shed. It transported the seventeen men a short distance to a spot by the river, where they were lined up and shot. The surviving man had been hit in the hip, and managed to jump into the river and escape. This execution site was behind the headquarters building of the 5th Engineering Battalion of the Drina Corps, which had various facilities in Konjevic Polje. It is not possible to state with any certainty who actually carried out this execution: possibly personnel from the engineering battalion or perhaps a company of the MUP's Special Police.

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[1] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, 02/08/01, para. 196-198.

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6. The afternoon of 13 July 1995: executions in the Cerska valley

The first large-scale mass executions began on the afternoon of 13 July 1995 in the valley of the River Cerska, to the west of Konjevic Polje. One witness, hidden among trees, saw two or three trucks, followed by an armoured vehicle and an earthmoving machine proceeding towards Cerska. After that, he heard gunshots for half an hour and then saw the armoured vehicle going in the opposite direction, but not the earthmoving machine. Other witnesses report seeing a pool of blood alongside the road to Cerska that day. Muhamed Durakovic, a UN translator, probably passed this execution site later that day. He reports seeing bodies tossed into a ditch alongside the road, with some men still alive.[1]

Aerial photos and excavations later confirmed the presence of a mass grave near this location. Ammunition cartridges found at the scene reveal that the victims were lined up on one side of the road, whereupon their executioners opened fire from the other. The bodies - 150 in number - were covered with earth where they lay. It could later be established that they had been killed by rifle fire. All were males, between the ages of 14 and 50. All but three of the 150 were wearing civilian clothes. Many had their hands tied behind their backs. Nine could later be identified and were indeed on the list of missing persons from Srebrenica.

For the prosecutors in the Krstic trial, these executions provided the first evidence of prior planning. The headquarters of the Drina Corps must have been involved, since these executions corresponded precisely with information gained from an intercepted communication in which Colonel Milanovic, the Drina Corps' air defence officer, had requested an earthmoving machine to be sent to Konjevic Polje. However, this in itself did not provide any evidence that units of the Drina Corps actually carried out the executions in the Cerska valley.[2]

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[1] Interview Muhamed Durakovic, 20/11/99.

[2] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, 02/08/01, para. 201-204.

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7. The late afternoon of 13 July: executions in the warehouse at Kravica

Later that same afternoon, 13 July 1995, executions were also conducted in the largest of four warehouses (farm sheds) owned by the Agricultural Cooperative in Kravica. Between 1000 and 1500 men had been captured in fields near Sandici. They were brought to Kravica, either by bus or on foot, the distance being approximately one kilometre. A witness recalls seeing around 200 men, stripped to the waist and with their hands in the air, being forced to run in the direction of Kravica.[1] An aerial photograph taken at 14.00 hours that afternoon shows two buses standing in front of the sheds. At around 18.00 hours, when the men were all being held in the warehouse, VRS soldiers threw in hand grenades and opened fire with various weapons, including an anti-tank gun.[2] In the local area it is said that the mass murder in Kravica was unplanned and started quite spontaneously when one of the warehouse doors suddenly swung open.[3]

Supposedly, there was more killing in and around Kravica and Sandici. Even before the murders in the warehouse, some 200 or 300 men were formed up in ranks near Sandici and then mown down with machine guns.[4] At Kravica, it seems that the local population had a hand in the killings. Some victims were mutilated and killed with knives. The bodies were taken to Bratunac or simply dumped in the river that runs alongside the road. One witness states that this all took place on the 14th of July.[5] There were three survivors of the slaughter in the farm sheds at Kravica. One recalls:

‘...all of a sudden there was a lot of shooting in the warehouse, and we didn't know where it was coming from. There were rifles, grenades, bursts of gunfire and it was – it got so dark in the warehouse that we couldn't see anything. People started to scream, to shout, crying for help. And then there would be a lull, and then all of a sudden it would start again. And they kept shooting like that until nightfall in the warehouse.’[6]

Armed guards shot at the men who tried to climb out the windows to escape the massacre. When the shooting stopped, the shed was full of bodies. Another survivor, who was only slightly wounded, reports:

‘I was not even able to touch the floor, the concrete floor of the building (...) After the shooting, I felt a strange kind of heat, warmth, which was actually coming from the blood that covered the concrete floor, and I was stepping on the dead people who were lying around. But there were even people who were still alive, who were only wounded, and as soon as I would step on one, I would hear him cry, moan, because I was trying to move as fast as I could. I could tell that people had been completely disembodied, and I could feel bones of the people that had been hit by those bursts of gunfire or shells, I could feel their ribs crushing. And then I would get up again and continue.’[7]

When this witness climbed out of a window, he was seen by a guard who shot at him. He then pretended to be dead and managed to escape the following morning. The other witness quoted above spent the night under a heap of bodies. The next morning, he watched as the soldiers examined the corpses for signs of life. The few survivors were forced to sing Serbian songs, and were then shot. Once the final victim had been killed, an excavator was driven in to shunt the bodies out of the shed. The asphalt outside was then hosed down with water. In September 1996, it was still possible to find hair, blood, human tissue and traces of explosives on the walls to be used in evidence. Some remnants of bones were discovered near one of the outer walls.[8]

Ammunition cartridges found at the scene established a link between the executions in Kravica and the 'primary' mass grave known as Glogova 2, in which the remains of 139 people were found. No blindfolds or restraints were found. In the 'secondary' grave known as Zeleni Jadar 5, there were 145 bodies, a number of which were charred. Pieces of brick and window frame which were found in the Glogova 1 grave that was opened later also established a link with Kravica. Here, the remains of 191 victims were found.[9]

Precisely which Bosnian Serb units were involved in the Kravica executions cannot be stated with any certainty. There were certainly personnel of the Drina Corps in the area at the time, and the headquarters of one of the Bratunac Brigade battalions was only four hundred metres from Glogova. However, there are also indications that a detachment of Military Police could have been involved in burying the victims. One Bosnian Serb witness observed soon after the executions that both VRS and Special Police could well have been involved. Given the proximity of the headquarters, the request for the earthmover, and the fact that military transport was making regular use of the road through Kravica, it is almost inconceivable that the Drina Corps could have been unaware of what was going on in the area.[10]

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[1] ABiH Sarajevo. Arnoutovic archive, 13/07/95.

[2] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, 02/08/01, para. 205, 208.

[3] Confidential interview (65).

[4] Confidential interview (55).

[5] ABiH Sarajevo. Arnoutovic archive, 14/07/95, witness Kasim Mustafic.

[6] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, 02/08/01, para. 205.

[7] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, 02/08/01, para. 206.

[8] ICTY, (IT-98-33), OTP Ex. 140, Manning Report, p. 6. ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, 2/08/01, para. 207-8.

[9] ICTY, (IT-98-33), OTP Ex. 140, Manning Report, p. 4-7. ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, 02/08/01, para. 210-4.

[10] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, 02/08/01, para. 211-5.

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8. 13 and 14 of July 1995: executions at Tisca

Tisca was the place at which the buses from Potocari stopped, whereupon the women and children were forced to proceed to Kladanj on foot, crossing the demarcation line as they did so. Some men had also managed to find a place on these buses, particularly on the first convoys of 12 July. This had been possible because the matters were not yet being organized according to the VRS plans: the men had not yet been separated from the women, while the presence of (Bosnian) Serb camera teams in Potocari may also have played a role. When the buses arrived in Tisca, they were searched by VRS troops who forcibly removed the men.

A survivor recalls that he and 22 others were escorted to a school in the vicinity of Tisca on the 13th of July. Their wrists were tied with telephone wire. A Muslim woman (called 'Turk') was ordered to identify the men, but recognized only one of them.

In the late evening, everyone was ordered to board a waiting truck which, escorted by a stolen UN vehicle, proceeded to an execution site. In transit, the prisoners overheard the order that the truck had to head to a specific location, which had been the destination of a previous transport.

On arrival, two of the men attempted to escape. They were shot on the spot. One of the men had managed to free his wrists and to loosen the tarpaulin at the side of the truck, thus making his escape. Shots were fired, but he managed to reach the nearby woods. About half an hour later, he heard salvos of gunfire. While still in the truck he had recognized the road to Vlasenica, and could thus orient himself to find the road towards Mt. Udrac. There he met several people from the column, together they arrived in Tuzla fifteen days later.[1]

The Chief of Staff of the VRS' 1st Milici Brigade, Major Sarkic, was in Tisca at the time. His presence was duly noted by Dutchbat personnel. However, it could not be established beyond doubt that he or any of his men were involved in the murders in Tisca. Likewise, it is not known whether the executions were carried out by MUP units or by the Military Police.[2]

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[1] Confidential interview (74).

[2] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, 02/08/01, para. 216.

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9. 14 July 1995: executions at the Grabavci school and elsewhere in Orahovac

In the early morning of 14 July 1995, a convoy of thirty vehicles arrived at the Grabavci school in Orahovac. On board were prisoners who had been held overnight in Bratunac. Among them were many men who had been forced to leave the UN compound at Potocari. Part of this group had originally been held at the Nova Kasaba football stadium where they heard Mladic announce that the younger men would be part of a prisoner exchange scheme and the older men would be taken to Tuzla and to safety. This did not happen: instead they spent the entire night in Bratunac, confined inside the trucks with no food or drink.[1] Two survivors later recalled seeing a UN armoured vehicle carrying soldiers in UN uniforms (who happened to speak fluent Serbo-Croat) escorting six buses out of Bratunac. The intention would seem to have been to make the prisoners believe that they were being taken under UN escort to some place where an exchange of prisoners would take place.[2]

This was very far from the truth. On arrival at the Grabavci school, a survivor noticed that the school gymnasium was already half full of men who had arrived earlier that morning. Within a few hours, the entire school was crowded. Survivors give various estimates of the number of people there, from 2000 to 2500, including some teenage boys and many old men, but at least 700 to 800 men of combatant age. In any case, the gymnasium was overcrowded and cramped. Every now and then, one of the guards would fire a shot into the ceiling in an attempt to quieten the panicking prisoners. There were two men walking around in UNPROFOR uniforms, accompanied by a 'civilian' who was posing as an interpreter. This would seem to be another ploy to persuade the men that the proceedings were under UN supervision. Some prisoners were taken outside where they were killed. Eventually, General Mladic himself arrived and announced, 'Well, your government does not want you, and I have to take care of you'. Another survivor recalls seeing Mladic at the execution site, where he witnessed several executions.[3]

Having been held in the gymnasium for several hours, the men were taken outside in small groups. Each was blindfolded and given a mouthful of water. They were told that they were being taken to a camp in Bijeljina. In reality, they were being taken to an execution site only one kilometre away. There, they were lined up and shot from behind. Those who survived the first round were shot again. The execution site comprised two adjacent fields. Once one was full of bodies, the firing squads simply moved into the other. The digging machines began work while the executions were still in progress.[4] A survivor later recalled:

'When we reached the location, I jumped down from the truck and pulled the blindfold from my eyes. I saw that the field was full of people who had been shot dead. They had brought us here to kill us too. We were formed up in two ranks with our backs to the Cetniks. To our left was a yellow bulldozer. I stood close to the people that had already been shot before us. I grasped my amulet and fell to the ground among the other bodies just before they began to shoot. There was screaming and shouting all around me. I heard the command, 'Fire!' and then again: 'Fire!' The young lads were crying out for their parents, the

fathers for their sons. But there was no help.

I lay motionless between the bodies and heard the Cetniks ask: 'Is anyone wounded? We'll take him to the hospital. If anyone replied, they would go over to him and finish him off. I remained silent. The man who had fallen on top of me was still alive. They came closer and finished him off. He convulsed and kicked my shoe off. They stopped shooting. I heard laughing and talking. Another truck arrived and then the bulldozer started up. It began to move the bodies into a heap and to crush them. It came very close to me and though it was going to crush me too. Then it would have been better to have been killed with a bullet. Suddenly the bulldozer stopped and a tall, stocky man got out and lit a cigarette. I could see everything because the light of the reflectors was on him. He turned and walked over to the group of Cetniks who were now in the middle of shooting another group of prisoners. I thought: this is the right moment. I pushed away the man who lay on top of me, found my shoe and began to crawl towards the woods, pulling myself over dead bodies all the way.' [5]

These executions began in the afternoon of 14 July and were completed shortly before midnight. The process of burying the victims was then stopped and resumed the next morning. As the executions started, the Zvornik Brigade of the VRS had not yet engaged in combat with the column from Srebrenica on its way to Tuzla. At this time, the column was approximately nine kilometres from the execution site at Orahovac. Fighting began at 1800 hours, and a few hours later the column saw the opportunity to break through the ambushes and reform. It then proceeded in a string of about two to three kilometres in length, passing only three kilometres from Orahovac where the executions were being carried out. [6]

Two primary mass graves were later discovered in this area: 'Lazete-1' and 'Lazete-2'. In the former, 130 bodies were found, together with 138 blindfolds. Lazete 2 contained 243 bodies and 147 blindfolds. The vast majority of the men had been killed by a rifle shot. Bodies had been removed from Lazete 1 and 2, and re-interred some time between 7 September and 2 October 1995 in secondary graves designated Hodzici Road 3, 4 and 5. At least 184 bodies were found here, and again the vast majority had been killed by rifle fire. [7]

The Zvornik Brigade of the VRS was responsible for these deaths. Not only was Orahovac in this brigade's area of responsibility, but a vehicle belonging to the Zvornik Brigade was positively identified. It is also known that at detachment of the brigade's Military Police had been sent to Orahovac. Later, attempts were made to obscure this fact by means of forged duty rosters. Moreover, a survivor identified a former colleague, one Gojko Simic, Commander of the anti-tank platoon of the Fourth Battalion, 1st Zvornik Brigade, who was heard to say, 'Collect your ammunition and let's go to the meadow to kill the men.' Logbooks of the Zvornik Brigade's engineering section reveal that a truck belonging to the unit made two trips to Orahovac that day, while another towed an excavator. The logbook also states that a machine spent five hours digging and that 200 litres of diesel oil was issued for this purpose on 14 July. In addition, on both 15th and 16th of July, an excavator and a bulldozer belonging to the Zvornik Brigade's engineering section were deployed in Orahovac and a truck made three of four journeys between the base and Orahovac. Survivors report seeing these two vehicles with their lights on, working at the execution site. [8]

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[1] Hren, *Srebrenica*, p. 53; ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, 02/08/01, para. 220.

[2] David Rohde, 'Bosnia Muslims Were Killed by The Truckload', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 02/10/95. According to Surem Huljic, some 300 to 400 men were involved. The other witness was Mevludin Oric.

[3] ICTY, (IT-88-33), Witness L., 10/04/00. ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, 02/08/01, para. 220-1.

[4] Hren, *Srebrenica*, pp. 53-54. ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, 02/08/01, para. 221.

[5] Hren, *Srebrenica*, pp. 53-55.

[6] ICTY, (IT-98-33), OTP Ex 401, Butler Report, para. 7.66.

[7] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, 02/08/01, para. 222-3.

[8] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, 02/08/01, para. 224.

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10. 14th and 15th of July 1995: executions at the school and the dam in Petkovici

On the 14 and 15 July 1995, another large group of prisoners numbering some 1500 to 2000 were taken from Bratunac to the school in Petkovici. The conditions under which these men were held at the Petkovici school were even worse than those in Grabavci. It was hot, overcrowded and there was no food or water. In the absence of anything else, some prisoners chose to drink their own urine. Every now and then, soldiers would enter the room and physically abuse prisoners, or would call them outside. A few of the prisoners contemplated an escape attempt, but others said it would be better to stay since the International Red Cross would be sure to monitor the situation and they could not all be killed.[1]

The men were called outside in small groups. They were ordered to strip to the waist and to remove their shoes, whereupon their hands were tied behind their backs. During the night of 14th of July, the men were taken by truck to the dam at Petkovici. Those who arrived later could see immediately what was going on there. A large number of bodies were strewn on the ground, their hands tied behind their backs. Small groups of five to ten men were taken out of the trucks, lined up and shot. Some begged for water but their pleas were ignored. A survivor described his feelings of fear combined with thirst thus:

'I was really sorry that I would die thirsty, and I was trying to hide among the people for as long as I could, like everybody else. I just wanted to live for another second or two. And when it was my turn, I jumped out with what I believe were four other people. I could feel the gravel beneath my feet. It hurt. (...) I was walking with my head bent down and I wasn't feeling anything. (...) And then I thought that I would die very fast, that I would not suffer. And I just thought that my mother would never know where I had ended up. This is what I was thinking as I was getting out of the truck. (...) I was still very thirsty. But it was sort of between life and death. I didn't know whether I wanted to live or to die anymore. I decided not to call out for them to shoot and kill me, but I was sort of praying to God that they'd come and kill me. But I decided not to call them and I was waiting to die.' [2]

After the soldiers had left, two survivors helped each other to untie their hands, and then crawled over the heap of bodies towards the woods, where they intended to hide. They spent the night on a hillside. As dawn arrived, they could see the execution site where bulldozers were collecting the bodies. On the way to the execution site, one of the survivors had peeked out from under his blindfold and had seen that Mladic was also on his way to the scene.[3]

Aerial photos confirmed that the earth near the Petkovici dam had been disturbed, and that it was disturbed yet again some time between 7 and 27 September 1995. When the grave here was opened in April 1998, many bodies appeared to have disappeared. Their removal had been accomplished with mechanical apparatus, causing considerable disturbance to the grave and its

contents. At this time, the grave contained the remains of no more than 43 persons. Other bodies had been removed to a secondary grave, 'Liplje 2', prior to 2 October 1995. Here, the remains of at least 191 individuals were discovered. One remarkable discovery in this grave was that of pages from Dutch newspapers, also found at three other burial sites.[4]

It is not known precisely who carried out these executions. However, it is known that the Zvornik Brigade was involved, with two of its trucks driving between Petkovici and the dam no fewer than ten times on 15 July, presumably to transport the prisoners to the execution site. It is also known that two diggers belonging to the Brigades' engineering company were deployed at the scene on the days in question. The execution site was only two miles from the command post of the 6th Battalion of the Zvornik Brigade in Baljkovica.[5]

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[1] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, 02/08/01, para. 226.

[2] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, 02/08/01, para. 227.

[3] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, 02/08/01, para. 228.

[4] ICTY, (IT-98-33), OTP Ex. 140, Manning Report, p. 44, Annex C, p. 4/17, 9/17, 11/17 and 13/17. Pages from Dutch newspapers were also found at Hodzici Road 5 and at Cancari Road 3 & 12. In one case it could be established that the newspaper dated from April 1995. In the grave at Konjevic Polje 1, a Dutchbat Laundry ID Card #15 in the name of Muminovic was found. This bore the photograph of a woman. No conclusions were drawn with regard to this find.

[5] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, 02/08/01, para. 229-31.

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11. 14 to 16 July 1995: executions at the Pilica school and the Branjevo Military Farm

On 14 July, the prisoners from Bratunac were taken even further to the north. Buses took them to a school in the village of Pilica, some twenty kilometres north of Zvornik. Here too, the 1000 to 1200 prisoners were denied food and water, some dying of dehydration in the gymnasium of the school itself. The men were confined for two full days.[1] Although the executions at Orahovac and Petkovici had already taken place, the officer commanding the Zvornik Brigade, Lt. Col. Vinko Pandurevic, who on 15 July had been recalled from Zepa where his unit and others had been active, complained about the onerous burden which had been placed on his shoulders. He was required to find room for large numbers of prisoners in his area, guard them and dispose of the dead. His unit was no longer able to perform this task satisfactorily, lacking as they did the necessary resources. Pandurevic threatened to release the prisoners if no one else could be found to take responsibility for them. Even after the executions, Pandurevic declared it incomprehensible that 'someone' should have sent 3000 men to be confined in the schools, while he was also expected to deal with the fleeing column and engagements in which his units were being attacked by the ABiH.[2]

It may have been due to the lack of resources that the VRS did not remove the men from the school until 16 July. The prisoners were loaded onto buses, their hands tied behind their backs, and transported to the 'Branjevo Military Farm' (the farm bred pigs to supply the VRS). The prisoners were lined up in groups of ten and then shot. The 10th Sabotage Detachment, under the direct command of the General Staff of the VRS, carried out these executions.[3] During the morning of 16 July, Drazen Erdemovic and other members of the 10th Sabotage Detachment were given orders for the executions, and proceeded via the headquarters of the Zvornik Brigade to the Branjevo Military Farm. They were accompanied by two officers of the Drina Corps' Military Police and a Lieutenant Colonel without any distinguishing insignia, but the latter departed again shortly after their arrival. About half an hour after his departure, the first busloads of prisoners began to arrive. The Military Police escorted the buses (which belonged to *Centrotrans Sarajevo* and *Drinatrans Zvornik*) and supervised the disembarkation of the prisoners in groups of ten, and their last steps to the site of the execution. The first shots were fired at 10.00 hours and the entire procedure was completed by 15.00 hours. An additional ten VRS soldiers arrived to assist some time between 13.00 and 14.00 hours. It was said that they had come from Bratunac, which could also be deduced from the fact that they appeared to know some of the Muslims. Forensic examination of the ammunition cartridges found here failed to establish any similarity with the rifling marks on cartridges found elsewhere. It therefore seems likely that these were not the troops which formed the firing squads at other execution sites.[4]

Drazen Erdemovic, later convicted of war crimes by the Tribunal, was one of the VRS soldiers active here. According to his account, 'the men in front of us were ordered to turn their backs. When those men turned their backs to us, we shot at them. We were given orders to shoot.' Erdemovic reports that only one of the victims was in military uniform. Another had put up some resistance and had attempted to escape, but the remainder had shown full compliance. On occasion, the members of the

Sabotage Detachment displayed remarkable cruelty. If they happened to recognize one of the prisoners, he would be humiliated and beaten before being put to death. Machine guns were used, which tended to cause wounds rather than being immediately fatal, thus serving to prolong the suffering.^[5] On this point, one of the survivors recalls:

'When they opened fire, I threw myself on the ground. (...) And one man fell on my head. I think that he was killed on the spot. And I could feel the hot blood pouring over me. (...) I could hear one man crying for help. He was begging them to kill him. And they simply said "Let him suffer. We'll kill him later."' ^[6]

Between 1000 and 1200 men were killed at this site on 16 July. The killing continued the next day. Aerial photographs taken on 17 July show a large number of bodies around the Branjevo Military Farm site and the tracks of an earthmoving machine which had been collecting the bodies together. In the mass grave at the Branjevo Military Farm, the bodies of 132 men were later discovered. These victims ranged in age from 15 to 61. At least 130 had died as the result of gunfire. It was possible to establish that thirteen men were from Srebrenica. Another grave, known as 'Chanceri Road 12', proved to be a secondary grave connected with the Branjevo Military Farm. Here, 174 bodies were found.^[7] In other words, only a small proportion of the total number of bodies were ever discovered.

That units of the Drina Corps were involved in the executions at the Branjevo Military Farm is beyond any doubt. The farm fell under the direct control of the 1st Battalion of the Zvornik Brigade. An earthmoving machine belonging to the Zvornik Brigade spent more than eight hours at the site on 17 July, the aerial photographs shown that a pit had been dug on that day. Moreover, intercepts established that the staff of the Drina Corps were involved. On the afternoon of 16 July, the Zvornik Brigade requisitioned 500 litres of diesel fuel for the use of Lt. Col. Vujadin Popovic, Security Officer of the Drina Corps, who had threatened to stop the 'work' he was doing if this was not forthcoming. The diesel was to be transported to Pilica and Col. Krsmanovic, the Transport Officer of the Drina Corps, was to make the necessary arrangements. The fuel was required to move prisoners from Pilica to the Branjevo Military Farm.^[8]

It is noteworthy that two of the three survivors of the executions at the Branjevo Military Farm were arrested by local Bosnian Serb police on 25 July and sent to the prisoner of war compound at Batkovici. One had been a member of the group separated from the women in Potocari on 13 July. The prisoners who were taken to Batkovici survived the ordeal and were later able to testify before the Tribunal.^[9]

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[1] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, 02/08/01, para. 233, 236.

[2] ICTY, (IT-98-33), OTP Ex 401, Butler Report, para. 7.71 and 7.75. From this number, it could be concluded that the executions in the area under Zvornik Brigade control (Orahovac, Petkovici, Branjevo Military Farm, Pilica Dom Kultura and Kozluk) involved some 3000 victims in all (Butler Report para. 9.33).

[3] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, 02/08/01, para. 233-4.

[4] ICTY, (IT-98-33), OTP Ex. 140, Manning Report, p. 17. ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, 02/08/01, para. 239-40.

[5] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, 02/08/01, para. 234.

[6] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, 02/08/01, para. 235.

[7] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, 02/08/01, para. 236-8.

[8] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, 02/08/01, para. 241-2.

[9] ICTY, (IT-98-33), OTP Ex 401, Butler Report, para. 7.42.

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12. 16 July 1995: executions in the Dom Kultura in Pilica

The 10th Sabotage Detachment completed the executions at the Branjevo Military Farm at approximately 1500 hours on 16 July 1995, whereupon Erdemovic and his companions-in-arms refused to carry out any more executions. They were told that a group of five hundred prisoners had tried to escape from the Dom Kultura in nearby Pilica. The soldiers were then ordered to proceed to a café in Pilica where they were to await the arrival of the Lieutenant Colonel without identifying insignia who has already been mentioned in this chapter. While in the café, they could hear gunfire and grenades being detonated. This noise continued for 15 to 20 minutes, whereupon an soldier from Bratunac arrived and reported that 'everything' was over.[1]

There were no survivors to explain exactly what had happened in the Dom Kultura. However, it is remarkable that this was no execution at some remote spot, but one in the centre of town on the main road from Zvornik to Bijeljina. Over a year later, it was still possible to find physical evidence of this atrocity. As in Kravica, many traces of blood, hair and body tissue were found in the building, with cartridges and shells littered throughout the two storeys. It could also be established that explosives and machine guns had been used. Human remains and personal possessions were found under the stage, where blood had dripped down through the floorboards.[2]

The personnel of the Bratunac Brigade were involved in this incident. Two platoons of the Bratunac Brigade had been attached to the Zvornik Brigade, and a section of the Military Police platoon was in Pilica to guard prisoners. They carried out the executions in Pilica after those at the Branjevo Military Farm had been completed.[3]

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[1] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, 02/08/01, para. 244.

[2] ICTY, (IT-98-33), OTP Ex. 140, Manning Report, p. 1-3.

[3] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, 02/08/01, para. 246.

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13. Kozluk

The exact date of the executions at Kozluk is not known, although it can be narrowed down to the period of 14 to 17 July 1995. The most probable dates are the 15 and 16 July, not least due to the geographic location of Kozluk, between Petkovici Dam and the Branjevo Military Farm. It therefore falls within the pattern of ever more northerly execution sites: Orahovac on 14 July, Petkovci Dam on 15 July 1995, the Branjevo Military Farm and the Pilica Dom Kultura on 16 July. Another indication is that a Zvornik Brigade excavator spent eight hours in Kozluk on 16 July, and a truck belonging to same brigade made two journeys between Orahovac and Kozluk that day. A bulldozer is known to have been active in Kozluk on 18 and 19 July.[1]

Among Bosnian refugees in Germany, there were rumours of executions in Kozluk, during which the five hundred or so prisoners were forced to sing Serbian songs as they were being transported to the executions site. The interest subsequently shown in Kozluk can be explained by the fact that most of the six thousand inhabitants of the village (which had been 'ethnically cleansed' in 1992) were Muslim.[2] Although no survivors have since come forward, investigations in 1999 led to the discovery of a mass grave near Kozluk. This proved to be the actual location of an execution as well, and lay alongside the Drina accessible only by driving through the barracks occupied by the Drina Wolves. The grave was not dug specifically for the purpose: it had previously been a quarry and a landfill site. Investigators found many shards of green glass which the nearby 'Vitinka' bottling plant had dumped there. This facilitated the process of establishing links with the secondary graves along Cancari Road.

The grave at Kozluk had been partly cleared some time prior to 27 September 1995, but no fewer than 340 bodies were found there nonetheless. In 292 cases, it was clear that they had died as the result of rifle fire: 83 by a single shot to the head, 76 by one shot through the torso region, 72 by multiple gunfire wounds, five by wounds to the legs and one person by gunfire wounds to the arm. The ages of the victims were estimated as between 8 and 85 years old. Some had been physically disabled (occasionally as the result of amputation) or had suffered from chronic disorders such as curvature of the spine or arthritis. Many had clearly been tied and bound using strips of clothing or nylon thread.[3]

Along the Cancari Road are twelve known mass graves, of which only two - Cancari Road 3 and 12 - have been investigated in detail. Cancari Road 3 is known to have been a secondary grave linked to Kozluk, as shown by the glass fragments and labels from the Vitinka factory. The remains of 158 victims were found here, of which 35 bodies were still more or intact and indicated that most had been killed by gunfire.[4] Cancari Road 12 was the site of the re-interment of at least 174 bodies, moved here from the mass grave at the Branjevo Military Farm. Only 43 were complete sets of remains, most of which established that death had taken place as the result of rifle fire. Of the 313 various body parts found, 145 displayed gunshot wounds of a severity likely to prove fatal.[5]

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- [1] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, 02/08/01, para. 252.
- [2] ABZ, DEU 508363. Memorandum DIO/JS to DEU/OE, DPV/PZ, DAV/MS, JURA, nr. 643/92, 28/09/92.
- [3] ICTY, (IT-98-33), OTP Ex. 140, Manning Report, p. 45-7. ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, 02/08/01, para. 249-50.
- [4] ICTY, (IT-98-33), OTP Ex. 140, Manning Report, p. 48-51. ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, 02/08/01, para. 251.
- [5] ICTY, (IT-98-33), OTP Ex. 140, Manning Report, p. 19-21.

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14. Other execution sites

In addition to the mass executions, various smaller scale executions took place. They include those conducted in the immediate vicinity of the Dutchbat compound in Potocari.^[1] The executions of 12 and 13 July in Bratunac are discussed elsewhere in this chapter.

After the closure to the corridor at Baljkovica, several groups of stragglers nevertheless attempted to escape into Bosnian territory. Most were captured by VRS troops in the Nezuk - Baljkovica area and killed on the spot. On 19 July, for example, a group of approximately eleven men were killed at Nezuk itself by units of the 16th Krajina Brigade, then operating under the direct command of the Zvornik Brigade. Reports reveal that a further thirteen men, all ABiH soldiers, were killed at Nezuk on 19 July. The report of the march to Tuzla includes the account of an ABiH soldier who witnessed several executions carried out by police that day. He survived because some ABiH soldiers were needed for an exchange of prisoners following the ABiH's capture of an VRS officer at Baljkovica.^[2]

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[1] See Chapter 4.

[2] Confidential interview (55). ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, 02/08/01, para. 254-5.

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15. Obscuring the evidence

The attempts to obscure the extent of the mass murders began in September 1995. They involved opening the mass graves at the execution sites and moving the bodies from these 'primary' graves to several 'secondary' graves. Immediately following the executions, victims' bodies were buried in fourteen primary graves. In September and October 1995, re-interment in the secondary graves, usually in more remote locations, took place.[1]

This suggests an orchestrated attempt to obscure evidence as Srebrenica became the focus of increasing world interest. Such measures would not have been found necessary if the victims had all been killed in combat, in which case the bodies could have been returned to the enemy forces under the usual customs and conventions of warfare.

Why the operation to 'cover the tracks' took place when it did remains a mystery. The aerial photographs which suggested that executions had taken place had been presented to the Security Council by the American Permanent Representative Albright some weeks previously, on 10 August 1995. The Bosnian Serbs had therefore known for some time that the existence of the mass graves was no secret. However, it should be noted that at this time, only the graves at Konjevic Polje were known to the UN, not those at more northerly locations. It soon became clear that there had been survivors of the executions, able to testify to the events that had taken place. Their stories gradually emerged.[2] The manner in which the executions became public knowledge is discussed in the following chapter. It remains the case that it was several weeks after the publication of the aerial photographs that a start was made to the removal of remains from the mass graves. No witnesses to the extensive activity of excavation, exhumation and re-interment have ever been found. Neither is there any firm evidence indicating who was responsible for the decision to undertake such activity. However, a letter dated 14 September 1995 and signed by Mladic reveals that the General Staff of the VRS issued five tons of diesel fuel to the Drina Corps and the Zvornik Brigade. The Tribunal believed this to be in connection with the excavations. Fuel was a scarce commodity for the VRS, while the involvement of the Zvornik Brigade (familiar with the locations of the graves) and the VRS' security department indicated a deliberate effort to cover up the mass killings. Aerial photographs confirm that there was considerable activity at the original grave sites during this period. It is also known that a meeting of the Bratunac Brigade staff took place on 16 October 1995, at which the Security Officer Major Momir Nikolic indicated that activities involving the re-interment of human remains were being conducted on the orders of the General Staff. All in all, the excavation of the primary graves, the removal and reburial of bodies in the secondary graves must have involved considerable effort. There would also have been many truck movements over distances of up to forty kilometres.[3]

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[1] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, 02/08/01, para. 71, 78, 80.

[2] ABZ 00797. Code Biegman 721, 11/08/95.

[3] ICTY, (IT-98-33), Judgement, 02/08/01, para. 257-60.

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20. Review

Following the fall of the Srebrenica enclave, thousands of Muslim men were put to death by Bosnian Serb military units. Most of the victims were taken from the column which was attempting to reach Tuzla via woodlands and forests. It has not yet been possible to determine the exact number of people who were executed. The Norwegian demographers Brunborg and Urdal arrive at a total of at least 7475 missing persons, although this includes those who died as the result of fighting during the march to Tuzla. The Yugoslavia Tribunal concluded that between 7000 and 8000 men were executed, although this does not allow for the possibility that some will have died during the march for any of a number of other reasons. Based on the Bosnian Serb figure of approximately 6000 'prisoners of war' captured by the VRS, it seems that of the 7500 missing persons, approximately 6000 faced execution while the others met their end through some other cause.

There is absolutely no doubt that the mass murder was committed by Bosnian Serb military units. It is however difficult to answer most of the questions relating to their motives. It is hardly surprising that the information available on the Bosnian Serb side is extremely scarce. Even where available, it is not particularly reliable and frequently contradictory. Most of the available information was collected by and on behalf of the Yugoslavia Tribunal, most notably in the case against the Bosnian Serb General Krstic. It is this information, together with some information obtained further to the NIOD's own investigations, which forms the main source for the current chapter. This review section considers the questions of motive, the degree of preparation and the responsibility for the executions in greater detail.

There can be little doubt that the mass executions were carefully planned and organized. The hypothesis that they were more or less spontaneous as things 'got out of hand' is untenable. This said, certain of the smaller scale killings, such as those at Kravica, Konjevic Polje, Bratunac and Baljkovica, may have fallen into this category. It has not yet been determined who gave the order for these mass executions and whether the decision to proceed in this manner was a political or a military one. The larger scale executions certainly demanded a degree of prior planning and organization. In a generally well-structured and disciplined army such as the VRS, this would have required the foreknowledge and cooperation of the commanders. Transport had to be arranged for both prisoners and firing squads. Bulldozers had to be deployed to - literally - cover up the consequences. It may still be possible to contend that the first executions were carried out by special units on the orders of the General Staff and by units of the Ministry of Home Affairs. However, it is clear that regular VRS units became embroiled in the crimes, supplying both personnel and equipment. These units would also have been involved in seeking locations for temporary detention of the men and suitable locations for executions, these locations being found at ever greater distances from Srebrenica.

It seems improbable that the mass murder was planned well in advance, although some Bosnians believe otherwise. Premier Siladjic thought that the executions were part of a 'grand plan'. He said that Srebrenica was far from an isolated incident and claimed that an even greater number of people had been killed at Prijedor earlier in the war.[1] The Minister for UN Affairs, Hasan Muratovic,

also pointed to the general practice of killing men between the ages of 18 and 55. 'We knew that the men and women would be separated. That was a premeditated plan and an old VJ (Yugoslav Army) strategy which had previously been employed in Croatia and Zvornik.' [2] The former Foreign Minister Sacirbey was nevertheless puzzled why so many people had been put to death. He had not expected the killing to be on this scale. [3]

Western Intelligence Services, however, point out that mass executions were not common practice. Their analysts therefore concluded that the operation was commanded and organized from above. [4] However, this does not tell us who was doing the commanding and organizing, nor how far in advance the planning commenced. There are no indications that the plans for the attack on Srebrenica included a specific plan whereby the population would be put to death. As described at length elsewhere in this document, the initial plans with regard to Srebrenica were developed in early July, whereupon the decision to take the enclave in its entirety was not taken until 9 July. In the relevant written orders, the need to comply with and enforce the usual laws and conventions of war was explicitly mentioned.

On 11 July and even on the morning of 12 July, Karadzic, Koljevic and Mladic still seemed to have assumed that suitable arrangements could be made for the civilian population and that the ABiH troops would surrender. The problem was that the Bosnian Muslims had very little trust in such arrangements. Whether the VRS' intentions were honourable and whether they genuinely intended to transfer the ABiH troops to prisoner of war camps after 'screening' for war crimes cannot be established one way or the other. No arrangements for the movement of prisoners were laid down in the written orders. However, the fact that the interrogations were commenced may indicate that such an intention did exist, but was abandoned soon thereafter.

It is therefore plausible that the decision to execute all Muslim men of combatant age was taken some time after 11 July 1995. Very broadly speaking, the motive may have been to 'ethnically cleanse' Serbian territory, which was seen to include Eastern Bosnia. Murder would not have been the only means of accomplishing such an aim, but history has shown that parties in the region did not shrink from massacring the enemy in their search for solutions. In this specific instance, we may confidently state that revenge was also a contributory factor: revenge for the events of a dim and distant past, but also for the events of 1992 and 1993, and for the violent excursions from the enclave made by the ABiH in 1995 in particular. When the Bosnian Serbs seemed set to capture the enclave in April 1993, there were already fears that this would end in a bloodbath due to the desire for revenge that had emerged in the very first year of the conflict. Even Milosevic himself feared that the Bosnian Serbs' arrival in the town would lead to mass murder, given the mutual hatred that existed. It is said that Milosevic personally instructed Karadzic not to take the town at this time, whereupon it could be declared an official 'Safe Area' shortly thereafter. [5]

Besides the revenge motive, there was a further complication in that on 12 and 13 July, the VRS found themselves in a situation which no one had foreseen. The attempts of the ABiH to break out of the enclave and to reach Tuzla came as a complete surprise. It had been assumed that the ABiH and the civilian population would surrender, and that the problem of transport and screening the men for involvement in war crimes could be settled from Srebrenica and Potocari. Indeed, on the evening of 11 July, Mladic announced in Bratunac that now operation 'Krajiva 95' had been completed, the attack on Zepa could go ahead. In this light, the ABiH escape was far from convenient for the VRS. Suddenly, it became necessary to engage in combat with the column and to 'cleanse' an extensive area beyond the confines of the enclave itself. Furthermore, there was now a large contingent of prisoners of war for whom arrangements had to be made.

Although no explicit (written) order for the mass executions has ever been discovered, it seems likely that the accumulation of motives and problems led to a deliberate and premeditated decision. To kill all these men required organization and logistic preparations. In other words, there was indeed planning - not very far in advance, but more in the nature of an improvised way out of an unexpected problem. There were many indications that the order had been given centrally, whereupon first the special troops and later the regular VRS units (the Drina Corps in particular) were dragged by the VRS

General Staff into a plot to 'settle old scores' by murdering thousands of men from Srebrenica.

That the intention was to execute all captives became obvious when no further measures were taken to establish whether any had been involved in alleged war crimes and when no preparations were taken to set up prisoner of war camps or arrange prisoner exchanges. The men were denied food and drink, their identity papers were burnt, and the VRS did not make any distinction between military personnel and civilians. Logistic problems prevented the plans being implemented immediately, which prolonged the men's suffering in that they would sometimes have to wait two or three days for their execution without food or water, even though the Bosnian Serbs with Mladic at their head tried to make them believe otherwise. Only when the evacuation of the women and children from Potocari was complete did sufficient transport become available to transport the men to the ever more remote execution sites.

Once the process of mass executions had begun, it built up an unstoppable momentum. The executions in Kravica and in the Dom Kultura in Pilica were particularly bestial in their savagery, carried out by herding the prisoners, tightly packed, into a closed room and then opening fire with machine guns and throwing hand grenades among them. Atrocities of such magnitude were unheard of, even for the war in Bosnia. Media reports soon began to draw comparisons with the razzias and other horrors of the Second World War. That the executions in Bosnian represent the most terrible mass murder in Europe since that war seems very likely.

Apparently, it was eventually realized even among the Bosnian Serbs themselves that this had been an excessive and culpable outburst of violence. This much is suggested by the efforts that were made to obscure the true extent of the slaughter by exhuming bodies and re-interring them in graves in more remote locations. Such activities could not escape the keen eye of satellites and reconnaissance aircraft, nor above all the expertise of those who analyse aerial photographs. A lack of communication security when using radio communications revealed who had been involved in the mass murder. Furthermore, because many of the executions had been carried out in a rather haphazard manner, there were survivors who were later able to testify against those responsible.

Although it is not (yet) possible to point to the persons and organizations responsible, some general comments regarding involvement can be made. It seems likely that the overall decision to proceed with this mass murder was made by the General Staff of the VRS. It must then be asked whether there was any coordination with the political authorities of the Republika Srpska or possibly even those in Belgrade.

Indeed, some have expressed a suspicion that the attack on Srebrenica was coordinated with Belgrade, or in any event could not have been undertaken without the prior knowledge of Belgrade. Given the many close ties between the Republika Srpska and Serbia, such foreknowledge certainly seems possible. However, there is no evidence to suggest participation in the preparations for the executions on the part of Yugoslav military personnel or the security agency (RDB).^[6] In fact, there is some evidence to support the opposite view: when the executions became public knowledge, the mood in Belgrade was one of incredulity and total disbelief. That the column should have been intercepted was understandable; that the prisoners should be murdered in cold blood was not. According to the Western liaison officer in Belgrade at the time, VJ officers had great difficulty in accepting that executions had taken place. At first, senior Yugoslav officers denied that these gruesome events had occurred. Soon afterwards, the Srebrenica affair was totally overshadowed by the Croatian attack on Krajina, with all attention diverted to the 150,000 Serb refugees there.^[7]

Later, there were clear indications of the annoyance felt in VJ circles regarding the killings. Milosevic is reported to have told the European Commissioner Hans van den Broek and the Spanish EU President Javier Solana, 'I cannot find words for what had happened there.'^[8] The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs interpreted Milosevic's words as implying that he was aware of what had happened following the fall of Srebrenica, even though this was not explicitly stated in his words.^[9] The VJ officers considered that the UN and NATO had been needlessly provoked. It was then doubtful whether Mladic could be kept under control. The VRS had manoeuvred itself into a particularly tricky situation in that, after Srebrenica, no ABiH soldier would be likely to give himself up for fear of facing

the firing squad.[10]

The extent of the coordination with senior political figures of the Republika Srpska regarding the executions is not known. As Commander-in-Chief, it was Karadzic who issued the formal instruction to keep Srebrenica and Zepa separated and to reduce the size of the enclave. He also gave his approval to the decision to capture the entire enclave, but whether he was actively involved in instigating the that took place after that, is not clear. The strained relations between Karadzic and Mladic suggest that communication was not exactly intensive. The onus of responsibility seems to lie in military circles.

Within those military circles, the key role played by Mladic is not open to question. Although as Chief of Staff he would not have had direct authority to intervene in the chain of command, he was a person who tended to dominate any situation. He gave the central orders, and he maintained a high profile by ensuring his personal presence at various locations. Those locations included the execution sites. He was also seen at various assembly points, sometimes playing the part of the competent senior figure there to reassure the prisoners. But that was pure deceit and deception.

The central role played by Mladic does not detract from or mitigate the involvement of other people and units. Both the special units and the Drina Corps played a prominent part throughout the operation as, of course, did their commanders. During the cases so far considered by the Yugoslavia Tribunal in The Hague, two of the most senior figures - the Generals Krstic and Zivanovic - have attempted to shift the blame and to minimize their own responsibility. Clearly, they are unable to do so, as are such persons as Col. Blagojevic the Commander of the Bratunac Brigade, Lt. Col. Obrenovic, second-in-command of the Zvornik Brigade, and Major Jokic, the Staff Operations Officer of the Zvornik Brigade.

Most is known about General Krstic since the first phase of his trial has already been completed. His defence mainly relied on the contention that his role was a limited one: he had been in charge of the attack on Zepa and nothing more, whereby he had no knowledge of the executions. Furthermore, he claimed, he took command of the Drina Corps only at a much later stage in the proceedings, i.e. 20 July. Until that date, General Zivanovic had been the Commander. Krstic stated that Zepa had demanded his full and undivided attention and that he was therefore completely unaware of the events in and around Srebrenica, and was equally unaware that Mladic had assumed control. Krstic further claimed that the prisoners had been executed on the direct orders of General Mladic and Colonel Beara. He did not know what their motives were.[11]

Mladic had assembled a group of confidants around him: people he had known from the earliest days of the conflict and who had served under him in Knin. He had appointed them to different posts. They now occupied various posts and played a prominent part during the executions. They included General Tolimir (Deputy Chief of Staff for Security and Intelligence), Colonel Ljubo Beara (head of the General Staff's Security Force) and Lieutenant Colonel Vujadin Popovic (head of the Drina Corps' Security Force). The Commander of the Military Police of the General Staff, Lt. Col. Keserovic, was also in command of the command post which Mladic set up in Nova Kasaba.[12] As one Bosnian Serb later described them, this was a group of murderers whom Mladic had assembled around him and who followed him like faithful dogs.[13]

Of course, it was firmly in Krstic's own interests at his trial to claim that the prisoners had been killed on the orders of Mladic and Beara, and this statement cannot answer the question of who bore prime responsibility for the executions.

The Tribunal did not accept this defence. Neither did Krstic's claims sway the Tribunal, which proceeded to convict him for his part in the mass murder of the men of Srebrenica. He thus became the second and by far the most senior military figure to have been held to account for his part in the atrocities which followed the fall of Srebrenica (the other being Drazen Endomovic, a soldier of the 10th Sabotage Detachment). However, others will undoubtedly follow, and it is to be hoped that the evidence produced at future trials will serve to clarify the situation yet further.

For the time being, this report concludes that the executions were prompted by circumstances

(partly unforeseen) and by pressure from the senior officers of the VRS, particularly Mladic, shortly after the fall of Srebrenica. All military units present had a part in carrying out the relevant orders, whereby all commandants are jointly responsible, or in more legal parlance 'contributory parties'. During the operation itself, feelings of hate and the desire for revenge were given free rein. This led to extremely violent scenes of slaughter, with many thousands of deaths.

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[1] Interview Haris Silajdzic, 16/04/98.

[2] Interview Hasan Muratovic, 30/01/98.

[3] Interview Carl Bildt, 13/12/00. Bildt expressed some surprise that Sacirbey had reacted so calmly when the mass murder was revealed.

[4] Confidential interview (52).

[5] Confidential information (43).

[6] Confidential information (3).

[7] Confidential interview (2).

[8] ABZ, DPV, ARA 00797. Code Bon COREU 649, 23/08/95.

[9] ABZ, DPV, 499488. Code Hag COREU 501, 24/08/9595. The Spanish presidency was again to have approached Milosevic to request that he use his influence in Pale and among the ranks of the VRS to gain further information regarding the fate of the missing refugees.

[10] MID/CO: Developments in the former Yugoslav Federation, 47/95, closed 141200B, September 1995. Strictly Confidential.

[11] ICTY, (IT-98-33), OTP Ex. 399/a bis, Interview of Radislav Krstic, 18/02/00, p. 65.

[12] ICTY, (IT-98-33), OTP Ex. 399/a bis, Interview of Radislav Krstic, 18/02/00, p. 38. Major Malinovic was Commander of the Military Police battalion in Nova Kasaba but he was not among the inner circle of confidants.

[13] Interview Rajko Dukic, 14/06/00.

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Part IV

The repercussion and the aftermath until the end of 1995

Chapter 3

The news of the executions and the mass graves

1. Introduction

Today the name of Srebrenica is indissolubly linked with what is sometimes called the biggest massacre in Europe since the Second World War. In 1995, however, it proved very difficult to piece together a picture of what had happened there. It took a considerable time before the outside world became aware that executions really had taken place there on a large scale and proof of these atrocities could be made available. Knowledge of the events in Srebrenica only developed very gradually, and it was a long time before not only the scale of the executions but in particular the location of mass graves could be ascertained.

This chapter describes how this knowledge developed and what sources played a role. In broad terms, a distinction must be drawn here between organizations such as UNPROFOR, UNHCR and the ICRC (International Red Cross) as sources and public sources like articles by journalists who had spoken with witnesses and survivors of executions. These witnesses and survivors were of crucial importance because they provided information that allowed the Americans to make reconnaissance flights and satellite images showing traces of mass graves.

The interaction between the various kinds of sources did not make the search for further knowledge any easier. The image emerging from these sources was initially confusing and fragmentary at best. For example, it was thought for a long time that the missing men had been detained by the Bosnian Serbs.

While satellites and reconnaissance flights did deliver pictures of men who had been taken captive, there are no pictures taken from the air showing the executions. The reason for this must be sought in the poor weather conditions prevailing in the region in question after 13 July. The initial reports about a possible massacre therefore initially met with disbelief from Western Intelligence services, since the general practice had been that exchanges of prisoners would ultimately lead to the release of those who had been taken captive.^[1] Full details of precisely what the Intelligence services know about the news of the mass executions as it broke are given in the separate Intelligence Appendix of this Srebrenica report.

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[1] Confidential interview (8).

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Part IV

The repercussion and the aftermath until the end of 1995

Chapter 3

The news of the executions and the mass graves

2. The search for the facts

It took several days after the first executions before Bosnia-Herzegovina Command could start piecing together a picture of what had happened in Srebrenica. No one at all was thinking about the possibility of executions. Just how unprepared UNPROFOR was for the idea of a massacre appears from the following passage, taken from a study of the consequences of the fall of Srebrenica: 'the Bosnian Serbs have, from their point of view, attempted to act in a humanitarian manner, probably in an attempt to avoid too much international intervention'.^[1]

Bosnia-Herzegovina Commander General R.A. Smith initially thought that the fatalities reported had occurred in battle or in ambushes after the troops had made contact with one another, and that the corpses had been collected *en route*. He assumed that the Bosnian leadership had initially also been unaware of the murders. In response to a query about the massacre to Sarajevo, he was informed that the Bosnian government also knew nothing about it.^[2] It was not until 22 July that the Bosnian premier Haris Silajdzic phoned General Smith to inform him that 4000 men must have been murdered to the west of Srebrenica. It seemed as if, up to this point, the Bosnian Muslims had not known what had happened to the men held captive in Bratunac, though Bosnia-Herzegovina Command found this difficult to believe: it was suspected that the Bosnian Muslims must have known more about the events that had occurred.^[3]

However, the Bosnian government did not know at this time that the massacres had started on the afternoon of 13 July. While it is true that the first indications of 'alarming news' came on 13 July from the Bosnian Foreign Minister Sacirbey, his statements at this time referred only to a few murders committed by 'Serb criminals' and 'Arkan Tigers'. Sacirbey had also stated that women between 15 and 35 had been separated from the men and sent to camps. All that was known about the men at that time was that they were being 'screened for war crimes'.^[4]

It was common practice in Bosnia to separate men from women. According to General Smith, the ABiH did precisely the same thing when they had captured large villages. He had thus not been unduly alarmed when he received reports about the separation of men and women in Srebrenica. The same was true of mediator Carl Bildt: he had heard of such cases before, and thus did not regard the reports as exceptional. In fact, he felt quite reassured, taking this as a sign that the men would be treated as prisoners of war. The VRS was often keen to exchange prisoners to fill up the gaps in its ranks, while the ABiH with its much larger forces sometimes refused such proposals. It was certainly not an automatic reaction for captors to kill prisoners of war, although there was a constant fear of excesses. The flight of large numbers of people was not remarkable either: it had not occurred to anyone that this might lead to massacres.^[5]

However, it became clear soon after the Bosnian Serbs had deported the last refugees from Srebrenica on 13 July that something was wrong. The number of people arriving at Kladanj differed very appreciably from the estimated population of the enclave. The ICRC had counted the people brought to Kladanj in the refugee convoys on 12 and 13 July, and noticed in addition that 90 to 95% of these were women, children and the elderly. This meant that the destination of roughly ten to twenty thousand

persons – mainly men – was unknown.[6]

This finding led to a search for the missing persons. The Bosnian Minister for UN affairs Hasan Muratovic said on 13 July that he had summoned the American ambassador in Sarajevo and had asked him whether the United States could do anything with the aid of their satellites and spy planes to offer protection to the men who appeared to be on the run. Muratovic said that he phoned the ambassador every day to ask whether there had been any signs of the men: 'you can discover where they are, they will all be killed'. The first information that Muratovic claimed to have received was the well known images of mass graves which the American ambassador to the United Nations Madeleine Albright showed the Security Council on 10 August.[7]

The first news of executions did not reach Washington until after rumours to this effect had been circulating in Tuzla. The authorities in Washington had also not been unduly concerned about reports of the separation of men and women, since they were aware that this had happened before in Bosnia and was thus not particularly surprising in the present case. While it is true that rumours of terrible deeds committed in Srebrenica were quick to arise, no one had any idea how many of these rumours was true or how many executions had taken place.

The Bosnian Muslims did not pass on to the Western Intelligence services the messages from the VRS that had been intercepted by the ABiH, referring to the hunt for escaped prisoners.[8] These intercepted messages were not made public until several years later, which helps to explain why it took so long for more detailed knowledge of the massacres to appear. But even in the days following the executions, very little was known about them: the ABiH had never noticed any preparations, and the Bosnian Muslims were thus unable to derive any indications about the fate awaiting the men from the messages they had intercepted at that time.[9]

Possible ways of gaining information about the situation were also being examined at the UN headquarters in Zagreb. On 12 July, General Janvier discussed the possibility of using NATO reconnaissance aircraft for this purpose. These aircraft were available, and included Dutch F-16s equipped for photo reconnaissance. Subsequent to this internal discussion, Janvier and his deputy Ashton had a teleconference with NATO Commander Admiral Smith at 6 pm the same day, dealing with the events in Srebrenica and possible ways of gaining information. The main focus at that time was on Zepa and Gorazde, which were thought to be the next targets that might be attacked by the VRS. It was, however, decided not to use NATO reconnaissance aircraft over Srebrenica in view of the risks to which they might be exposed, since the Bosnian Serbs still had usable anti-aircraft guns. [10] This was also the reason why the Netherlands did not want to use its own F-16s for that purpose (see Chapter 9).

The next question was how an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) could be deployed above the region. While there seemed to be a window of opportunity for this in the morning of 13 July, air reconnaissance over Western Bosnia was considered to have a higher priority on that day. The poor weather conditions over Eastern Bosnia also influenced this decision. However, a C-130 Hercules plane equipped with infrared cameras did detect the presence of prisoners late in the evening of 12 July. These C-130 aircraft were carrying out nightly flights over Bosnia from bases in Italy if the situation permitted this. The infrared equipment was intended to track the advance of the VRS towards Zepa and Gorazde. The infrared photos taken that night showed campfires by the roadside, and the warm motors of tanks and trucks. It is not known, however, what happened to this information regarding the presence of prisoners. [11]

Another unmanned aerial vehicle (a Predator) appears to have flown over Eastern Bosnia during the night of 14 July. However, priorities were still on the region round Zepa and Gorazde. Potocari and the column making its way to Tuzla had a lower priority. On 15 July, a Predator was used again to see whether men were still being held captive in the football stadium at Bratunac. However, the image quality was too poor to allow any conclusions to be drawn. Satellites were not being used to look for traces of a massacre at this time, since there were still insufficient indications of this possibility.[12]

High-level contacts with the Bosnian Serbs which could be used to gain information about prisoners did not yet exist at this time. General Smith, who had returned to Sarajevo in the meantime,

wanted to arrange a talk with General Mladic on 13 July, but disagreement with Janvier seems to have arisen about this. Janvier handled all the talks with Mladic for some time, because Smith and Mladic had not been on speaking terms since the hostage crisis at the end of May. The problem solved itself, however, since Mladic was not prepared to talk to any senior staff member at UNPROFOR.^[13]

On 14 July, the UN headquarters in Zagreb announced that no information was available on about four thousand able-bodied men. The headquarters staff assumed that these men were being held captive in Bratunac, and repeated this assumption on 16 July. In view of the large numbers involved, it was considered of vital importance that UNPROFOR, UNHCR and the ICRC should be granted access to Bratunac and Srebrenica for the purposes of an investigation about these men. The Bosnian Serbs refused categorically to grant access to these regions, however, and maintained this stance for a long time.^[14]

The presumed presence of several thousand men in Bratunac also influenced the departure of Dutchbat from Srebrenica. The Dutch peacekeepers could not leave before the fate of these men had been ascertained. The Dutch permanent representative to the UN, Biegun, therefore informed The Hague that 'at my suggestion' Deputy Secretary-General Kofi Annan had taken active steps on 13 July to study the problem of the men who had been moved to Bratunac. To this end, Annan contacted Sommaruga, president of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and UN High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata.^[15] Prime Minister Kok sought support from his British counterpart John Major to get UN observers sent to the region round Bratunac.^[16] The Dutch Defence Staff had already made similar suggestions to Biegun.^[17] Nevertheless, the sending of UN observers to Bratunac was not high on the agenda at UN headquarters in Zagreb; according to Carl Bildt, the fear that these observers could be taken hostage made this idea a non-starter.^[18]

It thus remained uncertain for some considerable time whether there were a large number of men in Bratunac. UNPROFOR's Civil Affairs department and UNHCR still assumed on 14 July that 5000 men between the ages of 16 and 60 were being held captive in the football stadium at Bratunac. Another possibility that was considered was that not all the inhabitants of Srebrenica had left the enclave.^[19] During discussions in Belgrade on 15 July, Stoltenberg, Bildt and Milosevic talked, as requested by Boutros-Ghali, about aid for the population of Srebrenica and access to the enclave. Mladic was also present at this meeting. The mediators Bildt and Stoltenberg still assumed that the men had been collected at Bratunac for registration and screening for war crimes and that those who had not committed war crimes would be released while the others would be put on trial in the Republika Srpska or transferred to the War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague.^[20]

Those taking part in the discussions in Belgrade had hardly any idea what had happened in Srebrenica. It could be concluded from the reports received from Dutchbat that some murders had been committed, while the refugees in Tuzla quite soon gave indications that they had witnessed terrible scenes on their way there; there was however as yet no suspicion that massacres had taken place. This was not revealed in Belgrade either. Mladic claimed that the men were being held prisoner because they were soldiers. He initially refused the ICRC the access to Srebrenica they had requested. General Smith was convinced, however, that not all the prisoners could be soldiers. Mladic finally gave way, promising that the International Committee of the Red Cross would be able to visit the prisoners.

Although Milosevic had put pressure on Mladic, Carl Bildt was not convinced that this was decisive: according to him, Mladic made the decision himself. While it cannot be denied that Milosevic could exert a certain degree of influence on Mladic, it was unclear how far this went. It would indeed appear later that Milosevic had little influence on the granting of access to the region where the massacres had occurred – or he may have been pretending that this was the case.^[21]

According to the participants at the Belgrade discussions, the International Committee of the Red Cross was in no hurry to visit Srebrenica. Both Carl Bildt and the US Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke put pressure on the organization to go, but it was not keen to do so because of the fact that access had been granted on the basis of agreements at a political level. This might give the impression that the ICRC was being used as a political tool – which the organization naturally wished to avoid. The International Red Cross did not want to be put under pressure by the Bosnian government either.^[22] It should not be thought, however, that the International Red Cross had not made any attempts