

## Appendix 8

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### FILE

#### Naser Oric, war criminal

#### Murderer From Srebrenica

**Muslim soldiers describe him as a man who demanded unquestioning obedience and iron discipline from his men. Mirsad Sulejmanovic "Skejo" remembers that "after the attack on Kravica, Naser's soldiers caught five or six Serbs in the village of Kajici and they slit their throats" by "REPORTER'S" INVESTIGATIVE TEAM**

#### Reporter, Banja Luka, Srpska, B-H, April 10, 2001

During testimony in the case against General Radislav Krstic, accused on the basis of command responsibility for war crimes against the Bosniak population of Srebrenica in July 1995, the chief of staff of the BH Army at that time, retired General Enver Hadzihasanovic was asked in a courtroom of the Hague Tribunal why so many thousands of people were killed after Serb forces took over Srebrenica. Without batting an eyelash, Hadzihasanovic replied as follows: "To this very day, I have been asking myself the question what induced those people in the Republic of Srpska Army to simply murder completely innocent people. Believe me, I have still not found a decent answer."

**Decent answer:** To the extent that there can be an explanation for a crime, in this case it would be that there were guilty people in Srebrenica. General Hadzihasanovic, as ill-prepared as many others in this country to acknowledge the crimes that individual members of his people committed against others, gave a false response because both he personally and the entire Bosniak military and political leadership are fully aware of the fact that crimes that took place prior to April 1993, when Srebrenica was declared "a United Nations safe haven". They are also aware of crimes that occurred later against Serb civilians in Srebrenica, Skelani, Bratunac and Milici municipalities. These crimes were committed by Bosniaks from Srebrenica led by their war commander, Naser Oric.

According to reliable testimony by Serbs and Bosniaks from this region, through April 1993 units of the Muslim army attacked more than one hundred Serb villages and hamlets in these four municipalities (70 of the attacks took place through December 1992), killing approximately 1,000 civilians and members of the Republic of Srpska Army (VRS), and wounding or injuring between 2,800 and 3,200 Serbs. In the book "A Chronicle of Our Cemetery", Milivoje Ivanisevic, listing the names of the people killed and the locations where crimes occurred, presents the fact that 999 persons of Serb nationality were killed but also warns that a completely accurate number of victims is impossible to determine because the fate of persons who were imprisoned, captured or in any other way found themselves in Muslim-controlled territory remains unknown. The majority of attacks on unprotected Serb villages near Srebrenica, Bratunac, Skelani and Milici were led by Naser Oric himself.

Oric's units and Oric personally massacred 87 persons using knives, pitchforks, blunt objects, by crucifixion, castration, setting on fire and torture... During this period (May 1992 - February 1993) almost 800 Serb children lost one or both parents; all villages that came under attack were completely devastated and generally burnt to the ground. Approximately 5,400 families lost their land and personal property while approximately 12,800 Serbs or 45 percent of the Serb population of the region left their homes.

**Milosevic's bodyguard:** Naser Oric was born in 1967 in Potocarska Rijeka, Srebrenica municipality. He is a well-educated and trained policeman, a member of the special forces of the Serbian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MUP) who prior to the war in BH even served as a member of the personal security team of Slobodan Milosevic, then president of Serbia.

At the end of 1991 or the beginning of 1992, he returned to Srebrenica and was given the task by the Bosniak political leadership to organize a training camp for armed paramilitary and para-police groups in Potocari near Srebrenica. He had already formed several separate groups in the town under different command structures. Feuding regarding command authority was brought to an abrupt halt by a dispatch from Sarajevo naming Naser Oric as the Srebrenica commander. It is not known exactly when this order arrived but its effects were felt at the beginning of May 1992 by the Serbs in Srebrenica and the surrounding region.

The first attacks on Serb villages in Bratunac and Srebrenica municipalities were carried out the same day - the feast of St. George [Djurdjevdan] on May 6, 1992. The targets were a part of the village of Bljeceva (Bratunac municipality) and the hamlet of Gniona (Srebrenica municipality). According to testimony by surviving Serbs, the attack on Bljeceva was led by Hasib Ibrahimovic, the attack on Gniona by Naser Oric himself. The people killed in Bljeceva included the elderly woman Kosana Zekic (whose throat was slit inside her house), Milan Zekic and elderly man Gojko Jovanovic, born in 1917. In Gniona two elderly men were killed: Lazar Simic (1936) and Radojko Milosevic (1928), the later an ailing and half-blind man who was burned to death inside his house. The entire village was completely destroyed and burned to the ground. Marko Slijepcevic and Miladin Vukadinovic, who survived the attack on Gniona, testified that Oric, using a loudspeaker, called on the Serbs in the village to surrender and threatened he would kill them all if they failed to do so.

**Oric's crimes:** In order to make it clear to the non-Muslim population of Srebrenica as to what awaited them in the near future unless they moved out of the town, after the attacks described above Oric ordered the murder of Goran Zekic, a respected Srebrenica judge and the deputy of the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) in the [former Yugoslav republic of] Bosnia-Herzegovina Parliament. Zekic was murdered on May 8, 1992 from an ambush near the village of Zalazje on the approach to Srebrenica. On May 9 Serbs began to leave town.

On June 1 Oric organized an attack on the hamlet of Oparci in Srebrenica municipality; six local residents were murdered and 22 Serb houses were burned to the ground. On June 21 the village of Ratkovici was attacked during which five women and three men ranging in age from 64 to 71 years were killed. Even greater crimes were committed in the village of Brezani, Srebrenica municipality, on June 30 when 19 local residents were murdered. Milos Novkovic (1956) was found beheaded while Vidoje Lazic (1937) was crucified and then set on fire. Also set on fire in her house was Kristina Lazic (1935). Witnesses claim that the attack was led by Oric and also identified several of his infamous accomplices: former convict Zulfo Tursanovic, a native of the village of Sucevka; Hakija Meholic, Akif Ustic (deceased), Huso and Resad Halilovic, Osman Zukic, and Akif and Vehbija Jahic.

In the villages of Krnjici and Oricevi the fighters slew 16 local residents on July 5. The throat of Vaso Paraca (1912) was slit while a pitchfork was driven through the body of Ms. Soka Vujic. On July 12, the same group committed the greatest crime of all during that bloody summer in an attack on the hamlet of Zalazje in the immediate vicinity of Srebrenica. 39 local Serbs were murdered in that hamlet; in addition to the names already cited, Hajrudin Besic; Azem, Nezir and Hajrudin Bezic, and Amir Mehmedovic are mentioned as perpetrators.

After a brief pause, the now hardened murderers attacked the village of Podravanje on September 24, 1992, killing 31 people there. The attackers were particularly brutal toward the local residents: the victims were found burned to death, with their throats slit, beheaded, with their stomachs slit open and killed by blunt objects. On the same day, September 24, Oric personally led an attack against guards on the surface excavation site of a bauxite mine 25 kilometers from Milici. The attack was renewed on December 3 and seven security guards were murdered and massacred. Besides Oric, participants in this attack included Zulfo Tursunovic, Becir Mekanovic, Ibrahim Ademovic "Cagura" and Mujo Bektic from the village of Podgaji in Srebrenica municipality.

**Bloody Christmas:** Attacks on the villages of Fakovici and Boljevic in Bratunac municipality (October 5) and Bjelovac and Sikiric (December 14) and Glogova (December 24, 1992) were preparations for the general attack by Oric's fighters on the large Serb village of Kravica on the road from Konjevic Polje to Bratunac. Nineteen local residents were killed in Fakovici, eight in Boljevic, 24 in Bjelovac, 21 in Sikiric and 16 in Glogova.

With the fall of Glogova, Kravica was completely surrounded by Muslims. On Christmas morning, January 7, 1993, 3,000 Muslim fighters led by Naser Oric attacked. A fierce battle ensued and thanks to the courage of Serb fighters in the village, many civilians managed to make it out of Kravica. Everyone who remained in Kravica was slaughtered. The final score of "the bloody Christmas" was 46 dead and 36 injured soldiers and civilians. According to the testimony of the survivors, even dogs and cats were shot

while all houses in the village, numbering 690, were looted and set on fire. Grave markers at the Orthodox cemetery were destroyed and desecrated, and even the bodies of the deceased were not spared from looting and desecration.

Not even this was enough for Oric and his killers. On January 16, 1993 they attacked the villages of Cosici, Kostolomci, Kusici (Skelani municipality), as well as the municipal seat of Skelani itself. On that day a total of 48 persons were killed in the municipality.

**Prisons in Srebrenica:** Oric did not like to take prisoners. He took them only when he had to exchange them for one of his fighters. Several Serbs have testified that detainees in the basement of the police building, the courthouse and the municipal building in Srebrenica suffered through the most horrible torture; some of them died in hospital after being exchanged. Veselin Sarac, who died as a result of heavy beatings sustained in Srebrenica prisons, testified prior to his death that Oric was among the men who beat him. All surviving prisoners say the greatest perpetrator of evil was Hakija Meholic. Captured Muslim soldiers also testified regarding Oric's crimes. They describe him as a man who demanded unquestioning obedience and iron discipline from his men. Mirsad Sulejmanovic "Skejo" remembers that "after the attack on Kravica, Naser's soldiers caught five or six Serbs in the village of Kajici and they slit their throats".

The crimes of the Srebrenica Bosniaks could not remain without reaction on the part of the Serb units. At the end of February 1993, the joint forces of the VRS Drina Corps launched a counteroffensive, taking Cerska, Konjevic Polje and liberating Kravica. Oric's forces were pushed back toward Srebrenica which on April 17, 1993 was declared a "safe haven" from which they continued to carry out sabotage operations and ambushes deep into RS territory.

**Testimony:** The commander of the [Muslim] BH Army at the time, General Sefer Halilovic, as well as already mentioned General Hadzihanovic, gave the same statements before the Hague Tribunal in answer to the question whether any crimes were committed from the Srebrenica enclave after April 17, 1993. "The enclave did not represent a threat to the Bosnian Serbs because the forces that were protecting it were poorly alarmed. If there were any sabotage operations conducted from the 'safe haven', I think that was a mistake," stated Halilovic, while General Hadzihanovic called the units in the enclave "useless for combat".

"Mistakes by units useless for combat" continued to take lives of Serb civilians. In an attack carried out on May 27, 1995 in the region of Rupovo Brdo in Milici municipality, five Serb civilians who were cutting wood in the forest were killed. An ambush in the area of Skelani municipality on June 23 resulted in the murder of four civilians; three days later, Muslim soldiers from the "safe haven" forced their way into the village of Visnjica in Milici municipality, killing one and wounding two civilians. "In accordance with Oric's good old habit", the village was burned to the ground.

These three attacks (there were many more of them) from the "safe haven" were characterized by the fact that they were not ordered by Naser Oric. Together with 18 "key officers", Oric left Srebrenica in April 1995 for "training in Zenica", according to the testimony of generals Halilovic and Hadzihanovic. If one reads a little between the lines, Halilovic would go on to accuse the Bosniak political leadership of abandoning the Srebrenica enclave to the Serbs. From such a position on Halilovic's part it is possible to draw several conclusions. The Bosniak leadership knew of Oric's crimes committed in 1992 and 1993 and therefore wished to remove him from Srebrenica to prevent him from possibly becoming a live witness in the hands of the Serbs. Second, the sentiment of the Serb fighters toward the Srebrenica Bosniaks after the above described crimes could be discerned. This sentiment was further fanned by the above cited sabotage operations carried out on the eve of the Serb offensive against Srebrenica. Whether anyone wants to admit it or not, the Serbs wanted revenge and this development was favorable to those who wanted to suppress information about Oric's and all other crimes committed by Bosniaks against Serbs in the municipalities of Srebrenica, Bratunac, Skelani and Milici.

**Hague logic:** After Serb crimes in Srebrenica, there were few who wanted or dared to mention Naser Oric and his bloody works in this region. The complete documentation on the case was submitted to the prosecutors of the Hague tribunal as early as July 1996 by Marko Arsovic, the then RS justice minister,

and his deputy and the RS liaison officer to the tribunal, Goran Neskovic, personally. It makes sense that at that time the Hague prosecutors did not do anything to initiate procedures regarding any of the documented crimes because protests such as those recently held in front of the UN headquarters in Sarajevo at that time were not only the privilege of the women of Srebrenica.

Oric, however, sooner or later had to come before the Hague investigators. The political moment is right because Serbs in both Belgrade and Banja Luka are far less nauseated at the very mention of the Tribunal and Slobodan Milosevic is in jail. In the Public Security Center in Zvornik, *Reporter* learned that tribunal investigators have already spent five days in Milici and Zvornik, where they are questioning exclusively Serb witnesses regarding Bosniak crimes. A Public Security Center source told us that this is their third visit in the past two years and assessed their work as "very thorough and professional". The Zvornik police has also provided them with new documentation and turned over 10 cases of criminal charges filed against Naser Oric and his subordinates, whose criminal activities were proven long ago. The Hague indictment against Oric is slowly gathering momentum but it will be finalized, *Reporter* has learned, depending on political conditions, as always. Ultimately, it will not be stopped by the "incomplete" generals' testimony in The Hague, protests or the destruction of the fence in front of the UN headquarters in Sarajevo, or even by statements given under coercion, such as Klein's "Oric has not been arrested and indicted". The truth and justice are on the side of the victims of the Srebrenica butchers. Justice is slow but, we hope, within reach.

### "The Chronicle of Our Cemetery"

In preparing this article *Reporter* is deeply indebted to Milivoj Ivanisevic and his book "The Chronicle of Our Cemetery" in which everything that occurred from May 1992 to February 1993 in the areas of Bratunac, Milici, Skelani and Srebrenica municipalities is described and demonstrated in a distinctly objective and clear manner.

Ivanisevic is an outside associate of the Belgrade Committee for Gathering of Data on War Crimes, Crimes against Humanity and International Law. This book was published as far back as 1994, translated into English and French, and sent to all relevant international political and legal institutions, as well as the media. If an appropriate response had occurred at that time, it is possible that further tragedies of both Serbs and Bosniaks in this region could have been avoided.

"The Chronicle of Our Cemetery" is also the primary source for the book "Bloody Christmas" on crimes in the village of Kravica, written by reporter and publicist Boro Miljanovic. The book was originally published by Belgrade publisher "Magenta" in 1996; a second edition was published in 2000. Some facts and information from this book were also used by "Reporter" in preparation of this article.

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Translated by S. Lazovic (Pascha, 2001)

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