
CROATIA TRIES SOLDIER ACCUSED OF WAR CRIMES DURING OPERATION STORM

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Not guilty, pleaded Rajko Kričković, a 60-year-old retired war veteran from Zagreb, whose trial for war crimes started at the Rijeka County Court. He is charged with killing three civilians in the region of Lika after Operation Storm in 1995, reports Novi List on January 12, 2017.

The indictment of the County State Attorney's Office claims that Kričković committed a war crime in the village of Kijani near Gračac in the period from 15 to 28 August 1995, as a member of the 118th Regiment of the Home Guard. He is charged for killing three civilians after several of his fellow soldiers were killed on 4 and 5 August in a minefield in the area of Ljubović. Kričković took part in the recovery of bodies of the fallen soldiers from the minefield and afterwards attended their funeral in Zagreb. He returned to his unit in Lika, where he found his family house burnt to the ground.

According to the indictment, Kričković then went to a neighbours house, where he saw 43-year-old Radomir Sovilj and his sister Mira, and fired towards them from an automatic rifle. He is accused of having killed the man by shooting him in the back and head while he was fleeing through an orchard to the woods. His sister Mira was killed on the terrace in front of the house. Their 73-year-old mother Mara, who was in the house, was burned together with the house and cattle.

The key witness is a man who claims that Kričković repeatedly admitted to him that he killed Radomir and Mira, and burnt their mother. The witness said that Kričković told him the story five or six times at his house and on one occasion while they were passing through Kijani. Proceedings against Kričković were earlier suspended and he was automatically released from custody, but the Supreme Court overturned the decision and the indictment was later confirmed.

Kričković emphatically denies that he killed the three members of the Sovilj family. During interrogation, he said that he was on good terms with them. Kričković said he was demobilized on 28 August 1995 and returned to Zagreb. Afterwards, he said to his father that almost all the houses in the village were on fire, and that only the Sovilj family home was intact. He decided to visit the village with his father, in order to possibly save an uncles house in Gračac. When they reached the Sovilj home, they saw a man lying there, while the house was burned. They realized it was Radomir. On the terrace of the house they saw murdered Mira Sovilj. Kričković said they then heard shots in the distance, and fled by car to Gračac. They did not report to the police what they had seen, thinking that another villager would do it.

In his opening speech, prosecutor Nenad Bogosavljev said that they would prove that the defendant killed the three people. However, in his opening remarks, Kričković's attorney Nikola

Sabljar said there was no substantive evidence to suggest that the accused committed the crime for which he was charged, pointing out that the only evidence of the prosecution was a testimony of a man who was not an eyewitness to the event and had no direct knowledge about what happened. The witness made it up and falsely accused Kričković. Defence will prove that he is not telling the truth, that this is a person whose testimony cannot be trusted, said Sabljar, saying that psychiatric-psychological expert opinion indicates questionable personality traits of the witness.

Some media outlets have speculated that this was an act of revenge, since Kričković came to Kijani to find the whole village burned except the house of the Sovilj family, which he allegedly regarded as a proof of their collaboration with Serb forces.

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