



In August 1992 I was Her Majesty's Assistant Collector of Customs and Excise at Gatwick Airport. (The Senior HM Customs and Excise Officer at the Airport) That month, the London Balkan Conference was opened by the Prime Minister, John Major with the agenda firmly focused on trying to find peace in that troubled region of Europe. The Serbian Delegation to the conference flew into Gatwick and consisted of Slobodan Milošević the First President of the Republic of Serbia and Radovan Karadžić, the President of of Republika Srpska (Serb Republic) comprising the area of Bosnia and Herzegovina populated by Serbs (with a large Muslim population). The Minister of State at the Foreign Office had been delayed by horrendous traffic and as the Queen's Senior Representative at the Airport it fell to me to greet the Serbian delegation. Little did we realise that within 3 years that delegation would be involved in mass genocide. Milošević was arraigned on various charges, including genocide before the the International Court of Justice in the Hague but died before his trial could be concluded. Karadžić, on the other hand was convicted of Genocide, Crimes against Humanity and War Crimes and sentenced to life imprisonment. I am not sure whether or not Ratko Mladić, was involved in the delegation, but in any event he was very much involved in the ethnic cleansing that later took place.



Head of HM Customs and Excise, Gatwick Airport, London



Slobodan Milošević



Radovan Karadžić



General Ratko Mladić

THE BREAK-UP OF YUGOSLAVIA

Following the death in 1980 of the Yugoslavian dictator Josip Broz Tito, the architect and uncontested leader of post-war Yugoslavia, the tensions between the various entities that made up Tito's Yugoslavia had started to show. Even before Tito's death, growing nationalist tendencies, due as much to new economic and political rivalries as to old ethnic and religious tensions, were causing strains between the six constituent republics. Following his death, the unwieldy political and constitutional system with its rotating federal presidency, which he had arranged to succeed him, proved incapable of lessening these strains and the conflicts began. The last decade of the 20th century saw four Balkans wars: Slovenia (1991), Croatia (1991-95), Bosnia (1992-95) and Kosovo (1998-99); it is Bosnia that is our concern at this period in time

THE SREBRENICA OFFENSIVE



Srebrenica is a town and municipality located in the easternmost part of Republika Srpska, an entity of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is a small mountain town, with its main industry being salt mining and a nearby spa which until the Offensive had a substantial population of Bosnian Muslims.

The Srebrenica Massacre involved the killing of more than 8,000 Bosnian Muslims; boys and men, perpetrated by Bosnian Serb forces in and around Srebrenica. In addition to the killings, more than 20,000 civilians were expelled from the area—in a process we now know as 'Ethnic Cleansing'. The massacre, which was the worst episode of mass murder within Europe since the end of World War II propelled the European Union and the West generally, to press for a cease-fire to end three years of warfare in the area. However, the cease-fire did not really address or heal the deep emotional scars caused by this dreadful occurrence

The offensive by Bosnian Serbs commenced on 6 July 1995, with Serb forces advancing towards Srebrenica from the south, burning Bosnian Muslim homes as they advanced. Amid chaos and absolute terror,

where a contingent of about 200 Dutch United Nations peacekeepers was stationed. Some of the Dutch surrendered, while others withdrew; none fired on the advancing Bosnian Serb forces. On 11 July the Bosnian Serb military leader Ratko Mladic walked through Srebrenica declaring, *“We give this town to the Serb nation... The time has come to take revenge on the Muslims.”*

On that night (11 July), more than 10,000 Bosnia Muslim men and boys set off from Srebrenica through dense forest in an attempt to reach safety. Beginning the following morning, Bosnian Serb officers using captured UN equipment made promises of security to encourage the men to surrender; thousands gave themselves up or were captured. The so called promises were absolutely false and many men and boys were murdered. Other Bosnian Muslims were forced out of Potočari that day through the use of terror, including individual murders and rapes committed by Bosnian Serb forces. The women, children, and elderly were placed aboard buses (some of which had been brought from Serbia) and driven to Bosnian Muslim held territory. The men and boys were taken on 12 and 13 July to various holding sites

Some ethnic murders of Bosnian Muslims occurred on the evening of 12 July, but mass evacuation to the execution sites of mostly blindfolded Muslim men and boys began in earnest on the evening of 13 July. The destinations were primarily north of Srebrenica, in a 35-mile long band along the River Drina which marks much of Bosnia's border with Serbia. They included a football field in Bratunac, several meadows and fields near Vlasenica and Nova Kasaba, a warehouse in Kravica, a factory in Karakaj, a school in Orahovac, a dirt road in the Cerska Valley, and a cultural centre in Pilica. The executions continued at least to 16 July, when hundreds of people were reportedly shot at a state farm in the village of Branjevo. Although Bosnian Serb forces were primarily responsible for the killings, a police unit from Serbia was recorded on video participating in the execution of six Bosnian Muslims. It was discovered later that many of the victims of the massacre had had their arms and feet bound. Many of the bodies also showed signs of mutilation.



*Some background information is taken directly from
the Twentieth Report of the Parliamentary Select Committee on the European Union*

THE SREBRENICA PRAYER

We pray to Almighty God; May grievance become hope, May revenge become justice, May mothers' tears become prayers, That Srebrenica Never happens again To no one and nowhere.