

EXTERNAL

AI Index: EUR 63/23/96

Action Ref: AF 263/96

October 1996

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA **ŠEVAL TURAN AND 163 CAPTURED NEAR GRABOVICA:** **WHEREABOUTS UNKNOWN**

Among those still unaccounted for following the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina are 163 men who were captured by the Bosnian Serb Army (BSA) near Grabovica, in Bosnia-Herzegovina while they were trying to escape to Bosnian Government-held territory in November 1992. The group was briefly detained in a school in the town of Grabovica; although women and the elderly were eventually transferred to Bosnian-Government territory, the fate of the men is unknown. Many of them came from the town of Hrva_ani.

Hrva_ani was a medium-sized village of around 100 houses, with a primary school, a general store, small library and even a telephone exchange - its inhabitants describe it as being "just like a little town". The population was Muslim, although like many villages in Bosnia-Herzegovina the houses were dotted about rather than built according to any rigid plan, and it practically shaded into the neighbouring villages which were predominantly Serb. Relationships with these locals were reportedly harmonious. It was the most prosperous Muslim village in the area.

On 5 June 1992 Serbs from the neighbourhood rounded up the local teachers and officials and took them away. Nothing is known of their fate. Hrva_ani itself was attacked on 11 June 1992. It appears that on this date or the day before it was surrounded by the BSA, who ordered a deputation to represent the village. Ševal Turan, his brother Hašim, and Kasim and Djasim Menzil made up this deputation. They were ordered to hand over their arms, and told that if all did so no-one would be touched, and were then released. The others refused to hand over their arms, and the following day the village was burned and abandoned by its inhabitants. The villagers took refuge in neighbouring villages or slept in the open. During this period clashes continued between the BSA and the Territorial Defence forces (TO), which later became the Army of Bosnia-Herzegovina (ABiH).

Many of the villagers from Hrva_ani withdrew to the village of Ve_i_i in mid-June 1992, which became an *ad hoc* meeting point for those that had been forced or thought it wise to abandon their own village. Ševal Turan, however, remained behind, and reportedly surrendered to Serbs on or around 15 June 1992. A villager reported that Ševal Turan and two other people from Plitska were killed at the town's football field.

Ve_i_i was a relatively large, fairly prosperous, predominantly Muslim village of some 400 scattered houses. At this time it was the only remaining seat of resistance in the area, and was heavily shelled and subject to attacks from the air. Before the war, the majority of the male working population was employed away from home, some in the relatively well-developed Yugoslav Republics of Slovenia and Croatia, others further afield in Germany, Austria or Switzerland. Many used their savings from this work to build their own large, often three-story, houses, or to return and start a small business of their own. Those that remained were usually employed in agriculture.

Despite coming under heavy attack during October 1992, the inhabitants of Ve_i_i and the more recent arrivals managed to hold out until the beginning of November. Nevertheless, the

situation was becoming ever more uncertain, the village was under attack, and there was a shortage of food threatened. Although at this time in 1992 it was reportedly possible to arrange transport out of the village for payment, this option was not available to the men who had taken up arms as they were automatically regarded as "war criminals" by the Serb forces. On 1 November 1992 those remaining in the community held a meeting and decided that the soldiers (which meant every male of military age) should try to break out to the larger town of Travnik in the mainly Bosnian Government-controlled area, about 40 kilometres away as the crow flies, where they would be safer. Some of them had already been in Travnik, and had come to Ve_i_i to try to find their families and get them to safety. It was also agreed that the younger women should go with them, for fear of being raped if the BSA were to capture the village. Children were to go as well.

On 3 November there was an attack from all sides and much confusion. At least two parties set off at around 8pm that evening, one intending to make its way to Proboj, and the other heading for Travnik across the wilderness. This second group reportedly contained 163 men who had served in the TO, plus a number of women and children. Many of those in the group were related to one another by blood or marriage.

Soldiers belonging to the BSA ambushed the group near the village of Grabovica on 5 November 1992. The Serbs ordered all of them to lie down with their hands clasped behind their necks, and threatened to kill 150 of them immediately. Some of the soldiers lifted the hod_a (Muslim spiritual leader) of Ve_i_i off the ground and accused him of being responsible for everything. They then began to punch, kick and beat him. All were then robbed of money, possessions, identity papers and photographs of relatives - everything they had managed to bring with them from their homes. They were then taken to a school in Grabovica, where the men and women were separated, the men being taken to the first floor while the women were held on the ground floor. They spent the night there. The women were interrogated but not ill-treated, although some report that they heard the sound of beatings coming from the first floor. Early the next morning the men and women were allowed to see one another. At this time the men were all reportedly alive and in relatively good health. At 10am the women were put onto a bus that took them to the village of Vrbanjci, where delegates of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) were reportedly present. The men remained behind in Grabovica, and have never been seen again.

One woman interviewed in connection with this group of the "missing" told Amnesty International about her hopes: "If they are alive then they are alive; if they are dead, well, it's a war and you have to accept that. But we want the truth."

Amnesty International's concern:

Amnesty International is concerned that 163 Muslim men who were captured by BSA forces near Grabovica village on 5 November 1992 are "missing" after being held in detention in a school in Grabovica. The organization is further concerned for the safety of Ševal Turan and by the reports that he was killed after surrendering to local Serb authorities in the town of Hrva_ani on or around 15 June 1992.

Details about some of the "missing"

Ševal TURAN, born 29 November 1962

A taxi driver and the father of two young children, Ševal Turan also worked in agriculture with his brother. His cousin Sedjida Menzil describes him as a gregarious man, well known and liked over a wide area because of his work, and that he has a great many Serb friends. One of these, a Serb soldier who had been a close friend, told his wife that Ševal was alive.

Samir MENZIL, born 15 December 1972, Hrva_ani.

By profession a mason, and a keen footballer, Samir Menzil had just finished his training at a vocational school for construction and was performing his military service in the Yugoslav National Army based in Belgrade when the war in Croatia started in 1991. Although he was ordered with his unit to take part in the siege of Vukovar, in Croatia, he deserted and succeeded in returning to Hrva_ani. He joined the TO in Bosnia-Herzegovina when the war started in his area.

Namko TURAN, born 19 August 1965, Hrva_ani.

Namko Turan is a member of the village football team which took part in local tournaments. He worked in the town planning department of Kotor Varoš commune. He and his wife Ramiza had two children, a boy and a girl - Nedim and Nera. They are now in Germany.

Ševal OPAKI_, known as Ševo, born October 1975 in Hrva_ani.

When the war started Ševal Opaki_ was still at secondary school, where he was an excellent pupil, and his mother was very proud of him - she says that he "knew as much as a professor". She still keeps copies of his school reports and certificates with her, although they have been soiled and damaged during her journeys. Ševo, as he is known, is a voracious reader, particularly interested history or scientific subjects, and would spend a lot of his time alone with a book. Very curious, he likes to be with older people, who he pesters with questions about anything that comes into his head.

When the war started he joined the TO in Hrva_ani, and withdrew to Ve_i_i with the rest of his unit. He had been slightly wounded by a grenade fragment.

Sead AGANBEGOVI_, born 26 April 1969 in Banja Luka.

In April of 1992 Sead Aganbegovi_ was sent a call-up paper and ordered to present himself for service in the BSA. He fled to relatives in the Kotor Varoš area, and from there made his way to Ve_i_i.

Mustafa PAŠI_, born 9 October 1964, Hrva_ani.

Mustafa Paši_ is a private taxi-driver, who although he lived in Hrva_ani worked out of Kotor Varoš, covering the Banja Luka area. He had been doing the job for about 6 years, and liked it - his wife says that it is a job that comes naturally to him. Nevertheless he had to work hard, and had little free time - what there was he would mostly spend at home. His wife, Hazira Paši_, who lives as a refugee in Croatia with the couple's three children, she says that she lives "from day to day in grief and hope."

Said ALAGI_ born approx. 1961

Said Alagi_ was born in Ve_i_i itself, and is married with a son, Ibrahim (age 11 years) and a daughter Amra (age 6 years), who are all now in Zenica, Bosnia-Herzegovina. He had been working for 11 years in Zagreb as a mason, but was in the habit of returning to Ve_i_i every month to see his family. He joined the TO on the outbreak of war. His brother **Sadik ALAGI_**, born 1963, who is married with one son (wife Sedina, son Amrudin) is also among the "missing". Sadik

Alagi_ is a skilled, experienced craftsman and naturally good with his hands. He had been working in Austria as a machinist since about 1990, and had previously worked in Slovenia. Their relatives **Mujo Alagi_**, **Huso Alagi_**, and **Hajro Alagi_**, all from Ve_i_i, are also among the "missing".

Mehmedalija PAŠI_, born 19 September 1964, Kotor Varoš,

Mehmedalija Paši_ worked for a shipbuilding firm in Pula, Croatia. His family remained in Kotor Varoš, and he visited them frequently. He was with them on such a visit on 10 May 1992, when the roads leading out of the town were closed by the Serbian forces, and they were unable to leave. He managed to escape from the town and got as far as Ve_i_i, where he fought for four months.

His wife describes him as sociable, home-loving, fond of company and the local music. His brother **Sakib Paši_**, born 1958, was also captured at Grabovica and is now "missing".

Mustafa TURAN, born 10 August 1959, Hrva_ani.

Mustafa Turan is married, with two children - a daughter, Ferida, and son Ferid. He was a machinist for a firm in Kotor Varoš which made machines which exported to Austria and Russia, but had ambitions beyond that. He had managed to save much of his wages and with the help of his father managed to fulfill his dream to open a shop which sold provisions and drinks in the centre of the village. Mustafa proudly opened its doors in February 1992, just a few months before the start of the war.

His passion was chess, and he is the undisputed champion of the village. His sister told Amnesty International, "This is just as well, since he hated losing".

Ibro MENZIL, born 27 July 1964, Hrva_ani.

Ibro Menzil was a machinist who worked in Austria. He was home on holidays when the village was cut off and could not get out again.

Sead RAHMANOVI_, born 13 October 1960, Hrva_ani.

Sead Rahmanovi_ had been a machinist and bulldozer operator, and had worked in Croatia, Slovenia and for the Bosnian Post and Telecommunications undertaking. He is skilled with his hands, and sometimes made a little extra money by mending televisions and cassette recorders. Sometimes he even did this for free, as a favour or simply because he enjoyed it. When war started he made his way to Travnik, where he joined the TO. While in Travnik he learned from Muslims who had been recently expelled from their homes that his wife Hajrija was trapped in Ve_i_i. He made his way there to try to bring her out. Hajrija Rahmanovi_ reports that after their capture in Grabovica she was permitted to see him in the morning, and even to speak briefly to him.

Hajrija Rahmanovi_ was with the group that was captured at Grabovica. They had been married for a short time, but had decided not to have children until the war finished. His wife describes him as very out-going, a heavy smoker, with an eye for the ladies which used to make her jealous, but says that he was good to her all the same. She told Amnesty International in 1995: "Three years and no news. I have become sick - not just with rheumatism, but in the head. I miss my home, it was super there, and I miss my husband. Just think about what my life has become here."