

TAB 373A

Major General
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18 December 2002

Attack on soldiers in Landovica village
26 March 1999
Statement

To:
COMMISSION FOR COOPERATION
WITH THE ICTY
- Team of Experts -

On 26 March 1999 the 549th mtbr /motorised brigade/ and RS /Republic of Serbia/ MUP /Ministry of the Interior/ units continued combat operations in the Suva Reka – Orahovac – Velika Kruša sector. A support unit comprising a 122 mm /artillery/ battery (four weapons) and part of the 128 mm SVRL /self-propelled multiple rocket launcher/ battery were partially in positions on the Landovačko Brdo /hill/, and partially in the *Progres* PG /food processing plant/ building at Landovica. The brigade units took up these positions very often, particularly in peacetime because the 549th mtbr reserve command post, 122 mm had /howitzer battalion/, čv /communications company/, čVP /military police company/ and idč /reconnaissance-sabotage company/ positions were situated there. These positions were immediately above Landovica village; there are only 200 – 300 m to the first houses as the crow flies. The positions were taken up many times during 1998, and a few times in 1999. It can be concluded that this position had been detected because it was bombed many times during April and May.

The operations were planned in the Suva Reka – Orahovac – Velika Kruša village pursuant to the PrK /Priština Corps/ command order on the basis of the assessment that Landovica village was quiet and in the close vicinity of our positions, that fire was never opened from it and that we never had any problems with the local people. Due to such assessments this village was put outside the blockade line on 25 March 1999. I also wish to note that soldiers were forbidden to enter villages without officers or buy any items from the shops on the territory, especially food. However, this order was occasionally breached, with or without the knowledge of junior officers. Later interviews with soldiers revealed that soldiers from Landovačko Brdo occasionally went down to the shops in Landovica village to buy cigarettes, juice, sweets, etc.

At about 0930 hours on 26 March 1999 a group of four soldiers – Milo KRUŠČIĆ, Vladimir MIRKOV, Slobodan GAŠPARIĆ and Dejan FILIPOVIĆ went to Landovica village without their commander's authorisation, according to their statement, to buy cigarettes and get water.

They reached the centre of the village without problem. The village appeared to be completely calm. They came to the shop, which was closed. One of the soldiers

banged on the shop door and kicked it a few times. When the soldiers started going back gunfire was opened on them from all sides. KRUŠČIĆ, GAŠPARIĆ and MIRKOV fell immediately. Private FILIPOVIĆ managed to escape and alert his unit. Before the unit arrived terrorists came out of the houses, approached the wounded soldiers KRUŠČIĆ and MIRKOV who were screaming with pain. They riddled their bodies with bullets at close range and took their weapons. Soldier KRUŠČIĆ pretended he was dead and the terrorists took only his weapons. They threw some blankets over the soldiers and left.

When the forces arrived from the positions fighting started in the village. I was informed of the incident after 1000 hours, perhaps around 1030. I ordered Major PARAVINJA to detach one reserve platoon from the blockade forces and Major NIKOLIĆ, the BG /combat group/ - 1 commander, to send one tank. Until reinforcement arrived part of the unit from the 122 mm /artillery/ battery positioned on Landovičko Brdo engaged the terrorists in combat. The problem was the sniper who kept part of the road and the approaches to the village under fire from the mosque. Only after he had been neutralised did we start pulling out the dead and the wounded soldier. The inhabitants of Landovica had already left the village. We fought the terrorists until dark. Part of the terrorists had already pulled out towards Atmađa and Tupec villages from where they were opening fire, and part pulled out toward Gornja Srbica village. A search of the village yielded a small quantity of weapons and a considerable amount of military equipment. One house in the village was turned into the headquarters and in a few places in the village combat bunkers were built. We were therefore surprised in the village, where we believed there would never be a terrorist base.

STATEMENT GIVEN BY:

Major General
Božidar DELIĆ
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