



APPENDIX B:
***'The picture that
fooled the world'***

The picture that fooled the world

reprinted from *Living Marxism*,
issue 97 — February 1997

THIS IMAGE of an emaciated Muslim caged behind Serb barbed wire, filmed by a British news team, became a worldwide symbol of the war in Bosnia. But the picture is not quite what it seems. German journalist Thomas Deichmann reveals the full story



The picture reproduced on these pages is of Fikret Alic, a Bosnian Muslim, emaciated and stripped to the waist, apparently imprisoned behind a barbed wire fence in a Bosnian Serb camp at Trnopolje. It was taken from a videotape shot on 5 August 1992 by an award-winning British television team, led by Penny Marshall (ITN) with her cameraman Jeremy Irvin, accompanied by Ian Williams (Channel 4) and the reporter Ed Vulliamy from the Guardian newspaper.

For many, this picture has become a symbol of the horrors of the Bosnian war - 'Belsen '92' as one British newspaper headline captioned the photograph (*Daily Mirror*, 7 August 1992). But that image is misleading.

The fact is that Fikret Alic and his fellow Bosnian Muslims were not imprisoned behind a barbed wire fence. There was no barbed wire fence surrounding Trnopolje camp. It was not a prison, and certainly not a 'concentration camp', but a collection centre for refugees, many of whom went there seeking safety and could leave again

if they wished.

The barbed wire in the picture is not around the Bosnian Muslims; it is around the cameraman and the journalists. It formed part of a broken-down barbed wire fence encircling a small compound that was next to Trnopolje camp. The British news team filmed from inside this compound, shooting pictures of the refugees and the camp through the compound fence. In the eyes of many who saw them, the resulting pictures left the false impression that the Bosnian Muslims were caged behind barbed wire.

Whatever the British news team's intentions may have been, their pictures were seen around the world as the first hard evidence of concentration camps in Bosnia. 'The Proof: behind the barbed wire, the brutal truth about the suffering in Bosnia', announced the *Daily Mail* alongside a front-page reproduction of the picture from Trnopolje: 'They are the sort of scenes that flicker in black and white images from 50-year-old films of Nazi concentration camps.' (7 August 1992) On the first anniversary of the pictures being taken, an article in the *Independent* could still use the barbed wire to make the Nazi link: 'The camera slowly pans up the bony torso of the prisoner. It is the picture of famine, but then we see the barbed wire against his chest and it is the picture of the Holocaust and concentration camps.' (5 August 1993)

Penny Marshall, Ian Williams and Ed Vulliamy have never called Trnopolje a concentration camp. They have criticised the way that others tried to use their reports and pictures as 'proof' of a Nazi-style Holocaust in Bosnia. Yet over the past four and a half years, none of them has told the full story about that barbed wire fence which made such an impact on world opinion.

It was through my role as an expert witness to the War Crimes Tribunal that I first realised that something was wrong with the fa-



mous pictures from Trnopolje. As a journalist with a track record of reporting on Bosnia, I was asked to present the tribunal with a report on German media coverage of Dusko Tadic, a Bosnian Serb accused of war crimes. Reviewing press articles and video tapes which had been shown on German TV, I became aware of the major importance of the Trnopolje pictures. The picture of Fikret Alic behind the barbed wire, taken by Penny Marshall's team, could be seen again and again.

One night, while I was going through the pictures again at home, my wife pointed out an odd little detail. If Fikret Alic and the other Bosnian Muslims were imprisoned inside a barbed wire fence, why was this wire fixed to poles on the side of the fence where they were standing? As any gardener knows, fences are, as a rule, fixed to the poles from outside, so that the area to be enclosed is fenced-in. It occurred to me then that perhaps it was not the people in the camp who were fenced-in behind the barbed wire, but the team of British journalists.

My suspicions were heightened by a conversation I had with Professor Mischa Wladimiroff, Dusko Tadic's Dutch defence advocate at the War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague. The main witness against Tadic, Dragan Opacic (later exposed as a trained liar), had told the court about the barbed wire fence surrounding the camp at Trnopolje and had even made a drawing of where it was. But when Professor Wladimiroff went to Bosnia to investigate for the defence, it became clear to him that Opacic had lied in the witness box; he could find no evidence of a barbed wire fence surrounding Trnopolje camp (see interview below).

I decided to go back to Bosnia, and to review the British news team's coverage of Trnopolje, in order to unravel the real story of how those pictures had come about.

The British news team's trip to Bosnia in the summer of 1992 took place against a background of mounting hysteria, as the first reports claiming that the Bosnian Serbs were running brutal internment camps were published in the West. On 19 July 1992, the American journalist Roy Gutman wrote in *Newsday* about the camp at Manjaca, and Andre Kaiser's pictures of prisoners with shaven heads at Manjaca were shown around the world. On 29 July in the *Guardian*, Maggie O'Kane quoted eye-witnesses who claimed that Muslims had been crammed into cattle cars and shipped off from

Trnopolje station. On 2 August Roy Gutman published another article in which he called the Bosnian Serb camp at Omarska a 'death camp'. Gutman's and O'Kane's articles drew heavily on hearsay and unconfirmed claims. Nevertheless, they caused an international sensation.

When Marshall, Williams and Vulliamy arrived in Bosnia at the end of July 1992, they were under intense pressure to get the story of the camps. Roy Gutman's article about the 'death camp' Omarska, published while the British team were in Bosnia, had further raised expectations in the London editorial offices. After her return Penny Marshall told how she and Williams had received orders from the managing editors of ITN and Channel 4 to do nothing else before they had the camps story in the bag: 'They had set Ian Williams and myself loose with an open-ended brief to find and visit the detention camps, and with orders to file nothing until we had come up with the story.' (*Sunday Times*, 16 August 1992)

As the end of their trip approached, however, the British news team had been unable to find the camps story they were after. Their final stop was to be the refugee camp at Trnopolje, next to the village of Kozarac which had been overrun by Bosnian Serb units a few months earlier in May 1992. This was to be their last chance to get the story which their editors wanted.

The pictures they shot at Trnopolje camp on 5 August were edited in Budapest the next day, then sent to London and broadcast the same night. The broadcast centred on shots of the journalists talking to Fikret Alic and the group of Bosnian Muslims through the barbed wire. These were the pictures which were widely interpreted as evidence that the Muslims were penned behind a barbed wire fence, and which the international media seized upon to make a symbolic link to the Nazi camps. But how did the British team get them?

I have looked through the rest of the team's film from Trnopolje, at the pictures which were not broadcast. They reveal a lot more about the story.

The camp at Trnopolje consisted of buildings that had previously been a school, and a community centre which housed a medical centre and a public hall, alongside a large open area that had been a sports ground. The only fences around parts of the camp were little more than a metre high, of the kind you might find around any school

centre in the school. Dragana confirms her brother's account. She adds that there was a metal fence about one metre high in front of and around the school building, to prevent the children from running on to the road. That fence can be seen on the ITN tapes. Refugees lean on it, others jump over it to enter the camp area. Dragana also remembers a small wire mesh fence about 1.2m high, 'as is used for keeping hens', running from the road up to the community centre and adjacent to the barbed wire fence. This wire mesh fence, which stood before the war, can also be clearly seen on the ITN pictures.

I met Pero Curguz in his office in Prijedor. He manages the regional Red Cross, and was stationed in Trnopolje during the operation of the refugee centre. He was interviewed by the British journalists in August 1992. He says he told them that the people had come to the camp of their own free will for protection. He told me that, during the entire time of the operation of the camp, no fence had been erected. On the contrary: when the other camps in Keraterm and Omarska were closed, and Trnopolje became overcrowded with up to 7500 people, the refugees had pulled down fences and taken all other available materials to build shelters. Curguz stressed that this was no internment or prisoner camp; it was a collecting camp for exiled Muslims. Everybody I spoke to confirmed that the refugees could leave the camp area at almost any time.

When I showed the picture of Fikret Alic behind the barbed wire to people in Trnopolje, I saw always the same reaction: anger and disappointment. They had expected fair treatment from the Western journalists and had welcomed them. Veljko Grmusa and his family were exiled from Bosanska Bojna near Velika Kladusa and were assigned the house of an exiled Muslim in Trnopolje. In the middle of August 1992 he worked as a guard in the refugee centre for a couple of days, before he was sent to the front. He was glad when I told him that Fikret Alic had survived the war, but angry about this image. His wife Milica told me that she assisted in the camp by order of the local authorities during the war: 'We wanted to help the journalists at that time, we had no idea how the Western newspapers work. Later we received orders not to talk any more with reporters who could not produce a special authorisation.'

Misa Radulovic, 68, was a teacher in Kozarac and Trnopolje. Now he walks with a stick and is nearly blind. But like all other men

considered able-bodied, he was enlisted in the army during the war and stationed as a camp guard in Trnopolje for three days. 'We protected the Muslims from Serbian extremists who wanted to take revenge', he said. 'The people could leave the camp without papers, but this was dangerous. A barbed wire fence existed only at this corner around the barn, this little shop for rural products and the electricity station.'

Without doubt most of the refugees in Trnopolje were undernourished. Civilians were harassed in the camp, and there were reports of some rapes and murders. Yet the irony is that, if this collection centre for refugees had not existed under the supervision of Bosnian Serb soldiers, a far greater number of Muslim civilians might have lost their lives.

The collection centre was spontaneously created by refugees when the civil war escalated in the Prijedor region. In May 1992 Bosnian Serb forces took the town of Kozarac and drove its Bosnian Muslim occupants out, just as Serb and Croat civilians had been driven out of their homes elsewhere in the war zone. Many of the fleeing Muslims sought refuge on the school grounds at Trnopolje. They congregated there in the hope of avoiding being picked off by Bosnian Serb militia or press-ganged into the war by Bosnian Muslim forces. Many of the Bosnian Serb guards sent to the camp were local civilians, mobilised a few days before, who knew the refugees. And there was a permanent Red Cross presence under Pero Curguz, who told me that he too had met many old acquaintances in the camp.

For all that, in the middle of a bloody war zone, the camp could never be completely safe. But many refugees preferred to stay there rather than risk their lives outside. There are reports of refugees who left the camp briefly to visit their fields and homes, hoping to find food and belongings, and were never seen again.

Paddy Ashdown, the British Liberal Democrat leader, visited the camps in Manjaca and Trnopolje a few days after Penny Marshall's team. Ashdown is no ally of the Bosnian Serbs, and had been a loud advocate of British military intervention in the conflict. Yet his impressions of Trnopolje, described in the *Independent* on 13 August 1992, struck a more sober note at a time of widespread hysteria about the camp: 'They have gathered here because they have to go somewhere. Their houses have been burnt and their lives threatened.'

Muslim extremists pressurise the men to join up with the guerrillas, so they have come here for safety. But on most recent nights the unprotected camp has been raided by Serbian extremists who beat them, rob them of what little they have left and, it is claimed, rape the women. Things are better now.'

In the eyes of the world, however, the dramatic pictures of Fikret Alic apparently imprisoned behind barbed wire in Trnopolje had left the impression that the Bosnian Serbs were running Nazi-style camps. This set the tone for the coverage that followed. Misa Radulovic told me that, after the British team visited Trnopolje, other Western journalists came to the camp: 'Every one of them wanted to see only the front part of the camp area and take pictures of the most emaciated bodies. I had a dispute with a journalist and requested him to take his pictures somewhere else, for example in the school building. But he did not want to enter it.'

Ed Vulliamy's first article on Trnopolje was published in the *Guardian* on 7 August 1992, the morning after the ITN pictures had been broadcast for the first time. Vulliamy had probably not seen the edited ITN broadcast when he wrote it. This article did not mention the barbed wire fence, and stated that Trnopolje should not be called a concentration camp. Vulliamy presented quite a balanced view of the situation in the camp, quoting Muslim refugees who reported that no force had been used against them, that the place offered them a certain security, and that they would not know where to go otherwise.

However, by the time Vulliamy came to describe his impressions of Trnopolje in his 1994 book *Seasons in Hell*, the *Guardian* reporter's tone had changed. The barbed wire which he had not considered worth mentioning in his first article had now become the focus of attention. In his book, Vulliamy described his first impressions of Trnopolje in these terms: 'More dirt tracks, more burned villages, and finally what was formerly a school in its own grounds, and another startling, calamitous sight: a teeming, multitudinous compound surrounded by barbed wire fencing.' (p106)

The tone of some of Vulliamy's discussions with local people also seemed to have changed between his original report and his later writings on Trnopolje. For instance Inar Gnoric, a Bosnian Muslim, told Vulliamy that she had come to Trnopolje of her own

will, seeking safety. In the *Guardian* article of August 1992, Vulliamy quoted her as saying that 'The conditions are very hard here, but there was terrible fighting and we had no food at all. It is safer here, but we don't know what kind of status we have. We are refugees, but there are guards and the wire fence'. What fence she was talking about is not clear. In Vulliamy's book, however, Gnoric clearly talks of a barbed wire fence around the camp.

Penny Marshall did mention the barbed wire fence in the first report she wrote after returning from Trnopolje, published in the *Sunday Times* (16 August 1992). About her first visit to the camp she simply wrote that 'Outside was barbed wire'. Describing her second visit to the camp in the same article, she noted that 'Outside, the camp had changed in the week since our original report. The barbed wire fence had been removed and the Serbians had left building materials for the prisoners to make shelters'.

This was true; the barbed wire fence (and the ordinary wire mesh fences) which Marshall's cameraman had shot during the first visit had indeed been removed before her return. But Penny Marshall had left open the question of precisely whereabouts 'outside' the barbed wire fence had been located. She thus failed to correct the false interpretation which so many people had placed upon the pictures. Similarly, Ed Vulliamy wrote in his book that 'Four days after our visit to Trnopolje, the fence came down' (p 113). This left untouched the impression which had settled in the public mind - that the camp had been fenced-in with barbed wire.

A year after the ITN pictures were first broadcast, Penny Marshall reacted to the suggestion that her report might have been sensationalist: 'I bent over backwards, I showed guards - Bosnian Serb guards - feeding the prisoners. I showed a small Muslim child who had come of his own volition. I didn't call them death camps. I was incredibly careful, but again and again we see that image being used.' (*Independent*, 5 August 1993) Despite her plea of objectivity, however, she did not explain how 'that image' of Fikret Alic behind barbed wire had been produced by her team.

In a German television programme 'Kozarac - Ethnically Cleansed', broadcast on 11 October 1993, Marshall told German movie producer Monika Gras about the impact of the Trnopolje picture: 'That picture of that barbed wire and these emaciated men made

alarm bells ring across the whole of Europe. I believe that the report would not have caused such a reaction had it been transmitted without that picture, although the facts would have been the same.' Marshall said that the Bosnian Serbs did not know how to deal with the Western press: 'It was a PR mistake in the Bosnian Serbs' terms.' She did not mention her team making any mistakes in their presentation of the Trnopolje story.

The notion that there was a barbed wire fence around Trnopolje camp, and the comparison with Nazi concentration camps, have been widely accepted as matters of fact. 'When the first journalists had arrived there a few days earlier, barbed wire surrounded the place and there was no welcoming banner', Peter Mass wrote in *Love Thy Neighbours: A Story of War*, about his visit to Trnopolje in the late summer of 1992. (London, 1996, p 41) 'I walked through the gates and couldn't quite believe what I saw. There, right in front of me, were men who looked like survivors of Auschwitz.' Marshall, Williams and Vulliamy have not used such language themselves. But neither have they corrected the false interpretation of the picture of Fikret Alic apparently imprisoned behind the barbed wire.

When the ITN pictures of Trnopolje were broadcast around the world, they sparked widespread calls for the Bosnian Serbs to close the camps. Sir John Thomson, head of a CSCE investigation committee in Bosnia, warned the West against leaping to premature conclusions: 'If some camps were just opened, I have the impression some of the prisoners would not get very far - there would be nearby graves.' (*Guardian*, 5 September 1992) But the international pressure on the Bosnian Serbs had already had its effect.

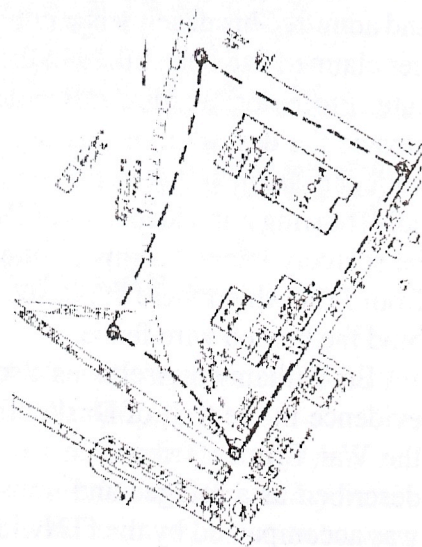
Omarska camp, which the ITN team had also filmed, was shut down in August 1992, and most of the refugees from there along with other Muslims from Keraterm and Manjaca were taken to Trnopolje, which was transformed from a refugee camp into a transition camp in a couple of days. The International Committee of the Red Cross complained that, thanks to the global excitement caused by the ITN reports, every chance had been lost to attain a solution which would allow the Muslims to remain in the region. On 1 October 1992, the first big Red Cross convoy set off from Trnopolje to ship 1560 refugees over the border into Croatia. In a sense, the exile of thousands of Muslims from their home in Bosnia Herzegovina

was thus inadvertently facilitated by the international reaction to the ITN reports from Trnopolje.

Roused by the pictures, British prime minister John Major summoned cabinet colleagues back from holiday for an emergency meeting. Shortly afterwards, his government announced that British troops would be sent into Bosnia. In the USA, where the 1992 presidential election campaign was in full swing, Democratic Party candidate Bill Clinton and running mate Al Gore used the ITN pictures to demand that president George Bush should take military action against the Bosnian Serbs. In Brussels, meanwhile, Nato staff responded by planning a military intervention in the Balkans.

The pictures of Fikret Alic in Trnopolje were also to influence the work of the War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague, set up by the UN Security Council to prosecute those accused of atrocities in the former Yugoslavia. The tribunal has relied heavily on the report of an expert commission, led by Frits Karlshoven, who was later replaced by Cherif Bassiouni. The report, published in the summer of 1994, mentions the barbed wire fence in Trnopolje in several places. Although the report is full of contradictions, it does state clearly in Annex V, 'The Prijedor Report', that 'The camp was surrounded by barbed wire, and a number of camp guards watched the detainees'. The same chapter describes Trnopolje as a Serbian concentration camp: 'Albeit Logor Trnopolje was not a death camp like Logor Omarska or Logor Keraterm, the label "concentration camp" is none the less justified for Logor Trnopolje due to the regime prevailing in the camp.' As a source for this chapter, Ed Vulliamy's book *Seasons in Hell* is referenced several times.

The story of the barbed wire fence played a prominent part in the



Dragan Opacic's draft showing the barbed wire fence he claimed surrounded the camp, given in evidence against Dusko Tadic at the War Crimes Tribunal

trial of the Bosnian Serb Dusko Tadic, the first case heard before the War Crimes Tribunal. Tadic was accused by witness 'L', later revealed as Dragan Opacic, of committing atrocities at Trnopolje. On 15 August 1996, Opacic made a drawing in the courtroom to show how the barbed wire fenced-in the camp area. Questioned by the British defence attorney Stephen Kay, he insisted that the barbed wire fence had enclosed the entire camp.

By the end of October 1996, however, the accusations against Tadic with regard to Trnopolje had been dropped; the prosecution's main witness Opacic had been exposed as a liar trained to make false statements by the Bosnian authorities. Opacic finally broke down and admitted his deceit when confronted by his father, whom he earlier claimed had been killed in the war. Tadic's Dutch defence advocate, Professor Wladimiroff, told me that he interviewed Dragan Opacic the day after he was exposed as a liar. Opacic said that the police in Sarajevo had schooled him for the witness box by repeatedly showing him videotapes of Dusko Tadic and of Trnopolje, which he scarcely knew. Prominent among these tapes were the pictures from ITN which were supposed to show Muslims imprisoned behind the barbed wire fence.

Ed Vulliamy himself was also invited by the prosecution to give evidence in the trial of Dusko Tadic. In June 1996, Vulliamy gave the War Crimes Tribunal his impressions of Trnopolje, which he described as a refugee and transition camp. Much of his evidence was accompanied by the ITN videotapes. But when Vulliamy came to the point where the barbed wire and Fikret Alic were shown on screen, he asked the judges to switch the tape off while he described the news team's meeting with the refugees: 'I am going to describe who was behind the wire with the video off because I can do it better if I am not trying to accompany the picture.' Why did Vulliamy not want the court to see this impressive sequence?

Thomas Deichmann is a freelance journalist who writes regularly for the German magazine Novo. This is an edited translation of the article 'Es war dieses Bild, das die Welt in Alarmbereitschaft versetzte' published in Novo's January/February 1997 edition.

Novo can be contacted at Novo, PF 60 08 43, D-60338 Frankfurt.

Phone 00 49 69 452035.

Fax 00 49 69 452036.

Thomas Deichmann can be contacted on e-mail at Thomas.Deichmann@t-online.de



'They were looking for best picture'

Professor Mischa Wladimiroff told Thomas Deichmann about his investigations into the barbed wire at Trnopolje

The story of the barbed wire fence at Trnopolje camp featured prominently in the trial of the Bosnian Serb Dusko Tadic before the War Crimes Tribunal at The Hague. The main prosecution witness against Tadic, Witness 'L' (Dragan Opacic, later exposed as a trained liar) told the court that there was a barbed wire fence around Trnopolje, and drew a picture of where it stood. As part of his work in defence of Tadic, the leading Dutch lawyer Professor Mischa Wladimiroff went to Trnopolje to investigate.

Thomas Deichmann: You mentioned that during your research, by accident you obtained information that something could be wrong with those pictures of thin people behind a barbed wire fence.

Prof Wladimiroff: Yes. One of the elements we felt we should check on was this reference of witness 'L' to a barbed wire fence around the camp site, that reminded us of the Penny Marshall pictures. Later

when I was back in the area we found a man who worked as a guard in that camp, and he was able to provide us with all kinds of details and names, and from that point we were able to go deeper and deeper into the matter. During my October 1996 visit I very specifically focused on that barbed wire issue, and then I approached that man again and he showed me where this fence was.

It became clear to me what actually must have happened. According to this man Penny Marshall entered an area which is at a side of the camp where there is a barn and an electricity house. And the area with the barn and the electricity house was surrounded by barbed wire and poles. He told us that the camera crew must have walked into that area and from there filmed the camp. I videotaped the area and his explanation fits with all the images I have seen.

Later when I interviewed Dragan Opacic after he had told a UN investigator that he had lied, he told me that he had been forced to do so and that he had been trained by the Bosnian police. He also told me that he had been shown the videotapes of Penny Marshall. This is how he got this very strong image of men standing behind barbed wire.

Thomas Deichmann: Is it possible that some evidence, for example this barbed wire fence, was taken away from Trnopolje camp?

Prof Wladimiroff: I have no indication that at the Trnopolje site things were taken away in order to hide things. The school is still partly used as a refugee place. The other large building, the local community centre, is empty now. The houses around Trnopolje camp were empty too when I last went there. Having seen the Penny Marshall footage again recently I realised that at the very end of that area surrounded by barbed wire, close to the electricity house, there must have been some kind of small building. It may have been a small garage. This construction is no longer there. The other buildings are still there. You can simply reconstruct how it looked in those days.

Thomas Deichmann: If your suspicions about the ITN pictures are correct, how would you explain what happened?

Prof Wladimiroff: I think what has happened is that while being

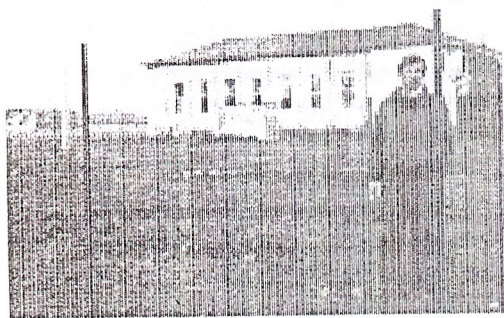
there Penny Marshall and her crew were looking for the best picture, as every TV crew and journalist crew would do. And later on I think she may have realised that it was a very suggestive, a very strong image, a very direct remembrance to the camps of the Second World War. Then she did not feel the necessity to explain more about these pictures. It is for her to explain why she did not. I have no idea. But as a matter of fact I can say that in some ways it was good that she made these pictures, because it helped us out. If 'L' had not collapsed and confessed that he had lied, we could have used the videotape as evidence against him.

Professor Wladimiroff, 52, of the leading Dutch law firm Wladimiroff and Spong, is chairman of the Netherlands Bar Association for Criminal Lawyers. He lectures at several universities, including Sarajevo.

Before taking over the Tadic case, he helped the War Crimes Tribunal to formulate the Rules of Procedure and Evidence concerning its work with defence lawyers. These are extracts from an interview Thomas Deichmann conducted with Professor Wladimiroff at The Hague on 9 November 1996.

Photos taken December 1996

by Thomas Deichmann



Former camp guard Veljko Grmusa, leaning on the barbed wire fence pole. The community centre is in the background. Three and a half years earlier ITN took their picture from approximately this spot.

The barn in the small compound which was ringed with barbed wire. The fence poles still show remnants of barbed wire.

