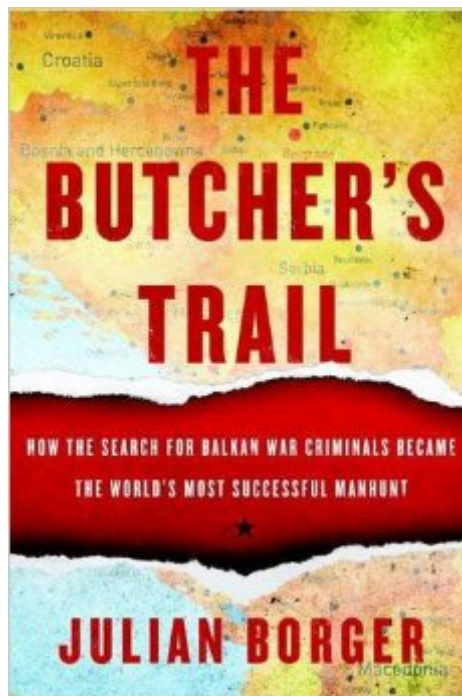


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The Butcher's Trail: How The Search For Balkan War Criminals Became The World's Most Successful Manhunt



Synopsis

The gripping, untold story of The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and how the perpetrators of Balkan war crimes were captured by the most successful manhunt in history. Written with a thrilling narrative pull, *The Butcher's Trail* chronicles the pursuit and capture of the Balkan war criminals indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal in The Hague. Borger recounts how Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic "both now on trial in The Hague" were finally tracked down, and describes the intrigue behind the arrest of Slobodan Milosevic, the Yugoslav president who became the first head of state to stand before an international tribunal for crimes perpetrated in a time of war. Based on interviews with former special forces soldiers, intelligence officials, and investigators from a dozen countries "most speaking about their involvement for the first time" this book reconstructs a fourteen-year manhunt carried out almost entirely in secret. Indicting the worst war criminals that Europe had known since the Nazi era, the ICTY ultimately accounted for all 161 suspects on its wanted list, a feat never before achieved in political and military history.

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Customer Reviews

What made this book interesting to me was that I had travelled thru the Balkans by motorcycle in June 2015 and visited many of the venues mentioned. I saw photos of Ratko Mladic and Radovan Karadzic on the wall of a cafe in Gacko Republic of Srpska (Bosnia). It was akin to seeing a photo

of Nazi war criminals on the wall of a bar in Bavaria. Quite disturbing. The book could use some reorganization as it jumped around quite a bit and at times seemed to assume the reader was already up to speed on important factual background. I am giving it 3 stars because I did like reading it, but it could use an update to reorganize and flesh out some of the factual background.

The Butcher's Trail describes how, over a period of nearly two decades, war-crimes indictees were tracked down, apprehended, and transferred to The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague. Julian Borger, who covered the conflict in the Western Balkans for the BBC and The Guardian, tells the story with authority and insight. Borger describes how Chief Prosecutor Carla Del Ponte and her predecessor Louise Arbour shamed and cajoled governments into cooperating with the ICTY, noting that while Biljana Plavsic, a former leader of the Bosnian Serbs, was the only female indicted for war crimes, she and the two people who did more than any other individuals to ensure the suspects were all tracked down happened to be women. He also describes the toxic cocktail of nationalism and sexism that prompted politicians and media in Croatia and Serbia to shower Del Ponte with derogatory epithets. During the conflict the same mindset fuelled sexual violence on a horrific scale. There are other paradoxes. When German peacekeepers in Bosnia were wounded during the October 2000 arrest of a man indicted for running a wartime centre where detainees (many of them teenagers), were raped, the troops became Germany's first combat casualties since 1945, wounded in the course of bringing a concentration camp commander to justice. The process of apprehending suspects in Serbia and spiriting them into Bosnia and Herzegovina to be charged and then flown onward to The Hague prefigured the practice of rendition that followed 9/11, although those involved in these operations in the Western Balkans insisted that "what we did there was underpinned totally in terms of legality . . . It had nothing to do with what came later." Borger provides excellent portraits of the principal characters. Of Slobodan Milosevic he writes: "Like many tyrants past their peak, he seemed to be the last person in the country to realize his day was done." He gives a vivid and compelling account of the days preceding Milosevic's downfall. Radovan Karadzic, he writes, "wove his own legend, drawing on a life immersed in a cultural tradition in which mysticism, epic storytelling, warfare, and politics were all tightly enmeshed", yet "he cut such a plump, vainglorious figure, with his trademark vertical quiff like a gray cockatoo, that Western reporters who witnessed these performances initially had trouble taking him seriously." A perceptive and accurate description. Despite the ICTY's successes, the number of those who have been tried is

small compared to the scale of the crimes that were committed. People in the Western Balkans have had to live for a generation in the knowledge that guilty men remain free, in many cases residing in the same communities they once terrorized. "There are too many graves containing the bones of all ethnicities for international justice to cope with, given finite resources," Borger concludes. "Such inadequacy does not discriminate against Serbs in favor of Bosniaks, Croats and Kosovars. It discriminates against victims in favor of perpetrators." This is a well-researched and valuable account of events that have a huge bearing on society, and not just in the Balkans. The Butcher's Trail documents the resolute effort to bring those accused of war crimes to justice and by doing so to uphold a key principle of civil society, that crimes cannot be committed with impunity.

As someone who survived the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and who currently works on promoting peace and democracy within BiH and the Southeast Europe region, I thought the author did an excellent job of accurately portraying what happened in BiH. It was a fascinating read and I found the book to be very informative and engaging. While it is horrifying and quite worrisome to see certain political leaders in the Balkans endlessly glorifying the very war criminals that are mentioned in this book, I am glad that a book such as this one was written and published as it helps combat genocide denial and the revision of history which have become widespread in the region.

This book is not only a painstakingly detailed account of the manhunt for some of the worst war criminals in modern history, but it is at the same time a thrilling, fascinating read. Most importantly, it provides a powerful, historically accurate, record of the complicity and complacency of the international community concerning the war crimes committed in Bosnia. Julian Borger speaks candidly of the failures along the way, including a wide network of shameless protection of war criminals by the Serbian army and secret police, as well as outright disregard for international indictments in the aftermath of the war in Bosnia and the Dayton Accords. As someone whose family survived the Srebrenica genocide, I thank Mr. Borger for his dedication to keeping the truth of the war crimes in Bosnia alive, particularly in the age of genocide denial and blatant attempts to rewrite history. I wholeheartedly recommend this book to everyone!

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