

SERB'S NAME ON MILITARY ROSTER

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Byline: CARRIE WEIMAR, Times Staff Writer

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Highlight: He could be deported for an omission on his immigration form.

Body

In his search for war criminals, U.S. Army intelligence analyst Richard Butler collected more than 17,000 documents from the former Yugoslavia.

The military orders, administrative records and personnel rosters Butler found list the thousands of men who served in the Bosnian Serb army during the country's civil war in the early 1990s.

On a handful of those documents, including an active duty roster, the name "Branko Popic" appears. Prosecutors say that proves Popic served in the Army of the Republic of Srpska, which he didn't list on immigration papers.

Popic, 59, a St. Petersburg resident, is being tried in U.S. District Court in Tampa on one charge each of fraud and making a false statement for allegedly failing to disclose his military service when applying to be a permanent American resident.

If convicted, he faces a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison or deportation.

On Tuesday, Popic's attorney, Adam Allen, focused on a different document: An order declaring Popic unfit for military service because of his history of emotional problems. The order recommended Popic serve in civil defense, which Allen argued shouldn't be viewed as military service.

During opening statements, Allen told jurors Popic was forced to leave his home in Bosnia because it had been peppered with land mines by a warring faction. He was told not to list his military service by immigration officials because he would be barred from America.

"Mr. Popic is not an individual who, through lies and deceit, attempted to enter the United State illegally," Allen said. "He is a confused, lost, foreign refugee."

Popic was among more than 3,000 Serbs who fled their country and settled in St. Petersburg in the 1990s. He is one of nine local men arrested during a sweep of Bosnian Serbs in December that netted 16 men from six states.

Graphic

PHOTO: Branko Popic, 59, did not intend to deceive, his attorney says.

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