

Savo Heleta's Experience of the Bosnian War: A Timeline

- Summer 1991: Bosnia and Herzegovina marks its first multiparty election. The new political parties – strictly ethnic in their making (Serbian, Muslim, and Croatian) – win by an overwhelming majority. Ethnic fighting erupts and escalates into an armed conflict, commonly known as the Bosnian War.
- May 4, 1992: The first bullet is fired in Goražde, a small, predominantly Muslim city situated on the banks of the river Drina. At the age of 13, Savo Heleta, a Serb, suddenly finds himself living in a war zone where his family is perceived as the enemy by his Muslim neighbors.
- June 1992: The first wave of killing begins. Savo's physical education teacher is arrested and murdered. Savo's parents, Slavko and Gordana Heleta, are interrogated on suspicion of spying.
- July 1992: Along with his parents, his grandparents, and his 11-year-old sister, Sanja, Savo is taken by the police to a detention center, already crowded with more than 70 Serbian men, women, and children. No food, water, or explanations are provided. For four months, the prisoners endure a harrowing ordeal, living in constant fear of being killed by passing missiles or dying from starvation. Slavko's father fears the detention center is serving a plan to use Serbian civilians as human shields.
- October 1992: The Heletas are abruptly released and allowed to return to their apartment in Goražde. Despite losing half his body weight in the detention center, Slavko is forced to do hard labor, digging ditches and sweeping the city streets, while people laugh at him. He is barely able to feed his children. The city's schools reopen, but only for Muslim children. Savo and Sanja, among the 10 or so Serbian children who remained in Goražde, did not attend classes.
- April 1993: Fired by Bosnian Serb forces, 36 missiles wreak widespread destruction and carnage in Goražde. The United Nations Security Council votes to make Srebrenica, a small town in eastern Bosnia, a safe haven for Muslim refugees of war.
- April 21, 1994: Savo and his family escape Goražde during the dark of night by swimming for nearly an hour in the frigid Drina river.
- April 24, 1994: The Serbian military action on Goražde officially stops, after long negotiations with the United Nations. The UN enters the city the same evening. Despite millions of bullets and tens of thousands of missiles fired on Goražde, Savo's hometown did not give in.

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