

FORENSIC ASSISTANCE PROJECT

Consultant Report 1999-073

Derventa I

Federation Commission on Missing Persons – Croat Side
29 October 1999

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on Missing Persons*

Summary of Events

On 29 October, the Federation Commission on Missing Persons – Croat Side conducted exhumations in the region of Derventa, Republika Srpska. On 30 and 31 October, the Federation Commission held postmortem examinations at the Odžak courthouse. Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) Forensic Consultants were able to attend some of the exhumations on 29 October (Table 1) and most of the postmortem examinations on 30 October (Table 2). Some of the postmortem examinations conducted were for individuals exhumed on 28 October; PHR representatives did not attend these recoveries, and therefore these exhumations are not covered in this report.

On 29 October, recovery teams visited three sites and exhumed a total of five adults, including both males and females. All graves were marked, and tentative identifications were assigned. A postmortem examination was conducted on-site for one of the individuals, but the remainder were held until 30 October for postmortem examination and identification by family members.

Table 1. Sites with human remains recovered by the Federation Commission on Missing Persons – Croat Side.

#	Site Name	Label*	GPS**	Date	MNI***
1	Derventa Cemetery	GD-02/1	33T YK 300 827	29 Oct.	1
2	Derventa I	GD-03/1-2	33T YK 284 852	29 Oct.	2
3	Derventa II	GD-01/1-2	33T YK 302 852	29 Oct.	2
Total					5

* Field designation given by investigating teams

** Determined by Global Positioning System

*** Minimum Number of Individuals

Table 2. Sites with human remains autopsied by the Federation Commission on Missing Persons – Croat Side, 30 October.

#	Site Name	Label*	MNI**
A	Derventa I	GD-03/1	1
B	“	GD-03/2	1
C	Derventa II	GD-01/1	1
D	“	GD-01/2	1
E	Zelenike Canton	ZEL-01 1/2	1
F	“	ZEL-01 1/1	1
G	“	ZEL-01 2/1	1
Total			7

* Field designation given by investigating teams

** Minimum Number of Individuals

(Editor’s note: In 1999, it was agreed that the “State Commission on Missing Persons (Bosniak Side)” and the “Federal Commission on Missing Persons – Croat Side” would eventually be referred to as the “Federation Commission on Missing Persons – Bosniak Side” and “Federation Commission on Missing Persons – Croat Side,” respectively. For purposes of simplicity and clarity, any reference to either of these commissions in 1999 reports will use the “Federation” names.)

Participants and Observers

Federation Commission on Missing Persons – Croat Side

ČOLIĆ Marija	Judge
BLAŽANOVIĆ Anto	Forensic Pathologist, Vinkovci, Croatia
RAŠIĆ Anto	Judge
ĆORIĆ Vinko	Member
RADIĆ Jerko	Member
COVRO Ivić	Crime Technician
OMERBAŠIĆ Mithad	Crime Technician
HAVIĆ Emir	Crime Technician
GRUBIŠIĆ Slavko	Crime Technician
LASTAVICA Grozdan	Crime Technician
GRGIĆ Marijan	Crime Technician

Republika Srpska Commission on Tracing Prisoners and Missing Persons

KRČMAR Goran	Member
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Physicians for Human Rights (PHR)

POLLI Maura	Forensic Consultant
YORK Heather	Forensic Consultant

Office of the High Representative (OHR)

KULJUH Klaudia	Special Assistant
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Other

- Local Police
- Stabilization Force (SFOR)
- Drivers
- Witnesses
- Family Members

Sites

1. Derventa Cemetery (GD-02/1)

Excavations took place in three locations inside the Derventa Cemetery. The first two yielded no human remains. The team began digging in an area in the southeast portion of the cemetery. A pit, containing two military helmets, was present in this area of the cemetery. The recovery team widened this pit to 2 x 2 meters with a 1-meter depth and uncovered clothing, blankets, and trash, but no human remains. The Federation Commission suspected this grave had been used for body trading during/after the war. Some small trenches were also dug in the area (2 meters by 50 cm), but no human remains were located. The second area of excavation was marked graves on the northwest side of the cemetery. Grid coordinate 33T YK 300 827 was taken using global positioning system (GPS). There were labeled crosses on both of the graves but there was no ground cover over the area, signifying a recently excavated area. No bodies were found in either of the marked graves.

DERVENTA I CONSULTANT REPORT

The third site of excavation was a grave to the north of the marked graves dug by the team (Figure 1; Map name: Derventa, Sheet No.: 2684 I, Edition: 7-DMA, Series: M709, Scale: 1:50,000). The remains of an individual, wrapped in a blanket and wearing civilian clothing, were recovered from this grave. The family of the decedent was present at the exhumation and the pathologist conducted a field autopsy so the remains could be claimed by the family immediately (Photos 1 and 2). Once the exhumation was complete, the gravesite was refilled and a cross from the first grave dug was placed on top of the now empty gravesite (Photo 3).

2. Derventa I (GD-03/1-2)

Between attempts to locate graves at the Derventa Cemetery, the exhumation team drove to the site of a single grave in the town of Derventa (Figure 1). Grid coordinate 33T YK 284 852 was taken using GPS. The grave was marked with a labeled cross, but there was no vegetative cover over the grave (signifying recent digging at the site). A small area around the grave had been cleared of vegetation, but a wider area was cleared by the recovery team. The cross marking the grave was labeled with "Čavarušić Ivka." Informants had told the Federation Commission that this was the name of the woman who had been buried in this spot in 1992. Her daughter had come to the gravesite the following day to place a candle at the grave and was killed. Her remains were then buried with those of her mother.

Excavation of this grave revealed the bodies of two individuals. The first was wrapped in plastic on top of the coffin (GD-03 3/1). The second individual's skeletonized remains were found inside the coffin (GD-03 3/2). Both sets of remains were photo-documented, placed in body bags, and removed from the site. The coffin was left in the ground.

On 30 October, Dr. Blažanović conducted the postmortem exam of both bodies behind the Odžak courthouse (see Postmortem Examination Findings section for general description of autopsies). GD-03 3/1 had been wrapped in plastic and was well preserved. Comparisons with osteological standards were made with rib ends and os coxae. The pathologist noted the only broken bone on this individual was the hyoid. GD-03 3/2's remains were skeletonized. The clothing was cut off with a knife, and the skull and os coxae were cleaned of soil. The osteological indicators were consulted [auricular surface: 40-50 (L) and 50-60 (R)] and stature estimations taken. The family was brought outside when both postmortem examinations were complete and Dr. Blažanović reported his findings. Their attention was also brought to the associated clothing, and the family made a positive identification. GD-03 3/1 was a 35 year old woman (b. Feb 1957, d. 22 May 1992) and GD-03 3/2 was a 66 year old woman, Ivka Čavarušić (b. 1926, d. 21 May 1992).

3. Derventa II (GD-01 1/1-2)

On 29 October, the exhumation team also drove to another gravesite in the town of Derventa (Figure 1). Grid coordinate 33T YK 302 852 was taken using GPS. Two marked graves were in a wooded area, completely overgrown with vegetation. Unlabeled crosses marked the graves, and candles and plastic flowers were placed on top of the mounded earth. Using shovels and trowels, the exhumation team uncovered the skeletal remains of two individuals. A small portion of the remains were uncovered for photo-documentation. Dr. Blažanović removed the remains, gathered small elements in plastic bags, and sorted through the soil to

determine if all elements had been collected. The remains were placed in body bags and removed from the site.

On 30 October, Dr. Blažanović conducted the postmortem exam of both bodies behind the Odžak courthouse. GD-01 1/1 had a gunshot entrance wound to the posterior of the cranium (Photo 4). The left tibia also had a peri-mortem splinter fracture. The family was brought outside when the postmortem examination was complete, Dr. Blažanović reported his findings, and the identification was confirmed.

GD-01 1/2 was examined by the pathologist. The father of the decedent was present for the postmortem examination and identified the remains.

4. Zelenike Canton (ZEL-01)

A PHR representative was not present for the exhumation.

ZEL-01 1/2 had a number of personal effects including a rosary, identification/driver's licence, and clothing (boots, pants, socks). The pathologist conducted a postmortem examination of the skeletonized remains while the father of the victim was present. The decedent was identified as Jure Kujić.

ZEL-01 1/1 also had a number of personal effects including a rosary, wallet, keys, pants and boots. The pathologist conducted a postmortem examination of the skeletonized remains, the family was brought outside for the presentation of his results, and the decedent was identified as Mija Jeleć.

ZEL-01 2/1 also had associated clothing and personal effects. The pathologist conducted a postmortem examination of the skeletonized remains, the family was brought outside for the presentation of his results, and the decedent was identified as an elderly man (b. 1919, d. July? 1992).

Postmortem Examination Findings

The postmortems, on 30-31 October, took place in a tent (Photo 5) set up in the gravel parking lot behind the Odžak courthouse (PHR was present on 30 October only). The entrance to the lot was taped off to restrict access. The remains in body bags were kept in a garage storage area behind the police station, adjacent to the courthouse. The tent was strung with three light bulbs, but electricity and water were not working in Odžak that day, so the exams were conducted by daylight. Buckets of water were available to clean remains.

If the body was intact, with adipocere, the skeletal elements were cleaned to facilitate observations. If skeletonized, the elements were laid out anatomically. Dr. Blažanović made observations and notes on teeth, sex, age, stature, and trauma. For age estimations, he compared the skeletonized remains with standard osteological articles (encased in plastic sleeves) on pubic symphysis, auricular surface, and ribs. Whether the remains were skeletonized or not, they were cleaned for a better view of the observation surface. Hard scrub brushes and soft paintbrushes were used for cleaning. In one case of non-skeletonized remains, the rib ends were removed to compare with the photographs. Dr. Blažanović

consulted with Ms. York on age estimations, especially when using the auricular surface aging method. Using the femur, osteometric measurements were taken for stature. Since Dr. Blažanović did not have an osteometric board available, he had improvised a method to take length of femur using the dissecting knives and measuring tape (Photo 6). The pathologist examined all remains for evidence of trauma or injury. All evidence of trauma was recorded (suspected gunshot wounds were measured for diameter) while the crime technicians took photo-documentation (using of arrows to illustrate location). The entire process took about 30 minutes per autopsy.

The families, if not present during the postmortem, were then invited outside so that Dr. Blažanović could present his findings to them. Referring to the remains, he drew attention to features such as dental modifications or associated personal effects. The families identified the individual, collected the personal effects if they were desired (such as identification or rosaries), and were informed they could pick up the remains for burial on Wednesday, 3 November.

Dr. Blažanović reported that the autopsies for a total of 17 individuals were completed on 30-31 October 1999. Five were women and 12 were men (9 soldiers). Ages ranged from 28 to 66. Of the original 17, a positive identification was made on 15. In 12 cases, the cause of death was listed as gunshot wound, another was caused by injuries related to an explosion, and one by blunt force trauma. Cause of death in all other cases was unknown.

Process Evaluation: Recovery

Overall, the recovery process ran smoothly. There were enough workers on hand to uncover the remains quickly and they were equipped with enough shovels, trowels, and gloves to handle the work. There were probably a few instances of shovel trauma to the remains, but overall they were careful using the equipment. There was a small problem of actual excavation at Derventa Townsite I. The workers did not dig an area large enough and were standing on the uncovered remains of GD-03 1/1 to widen the pit. PHR representatives requested that the workers not stand on the body during the recovery. This was complied with and did not reoccur during the remainder of the exhumations. Crime technicians were numerous and busy, recording detailed maps of the grave sites and photo-documenting all stages of the exhumation.

As representatives of PHR, we were at a disadvantage because we chose not to bring a translator on site. There were a few individuals who spoke English and could serve in this role, but they had their own jobs to do and could not be relied on to keep PHR informed. The police representatives had also prepared a detailed packet about the scheduled exhumations sites complete with site histories and maps of recovery areas. These packets were distributed to the judge and OHR, but unfortunately PHR did not receive a copy. Since the site details were depicted on paper, it was difficult to get officials to repeat the histories verbally, especially when having to impose on others for translations. The documentary preparation by the police was impressive and would be extraordinarily helpful if these could be prepared for other exhumations.

Process Evaluation: Postmortem

Again, the lack of a translator hindered the observation process and limited the usefulness of the Forensic Consultants. PHR representatives were able to work with the pathologist on a number of cases and some cases of possible trauma were revised after anthropological consultation.

Dr. Blažanović made excellent use of the osteological observations to which he had access. He did not always use the 4th rib when available, but he did make sure to make comparisons with the stage photos using a survey of more than one rib (usually three). All the postmortems that PHR was present for were of known individuals. Even though a tentative identification had been made, the pathologist did a thorough examination of the remains and presented all of the results to the family members present for identification.

DERVENTA I CONSULTANT REPORT

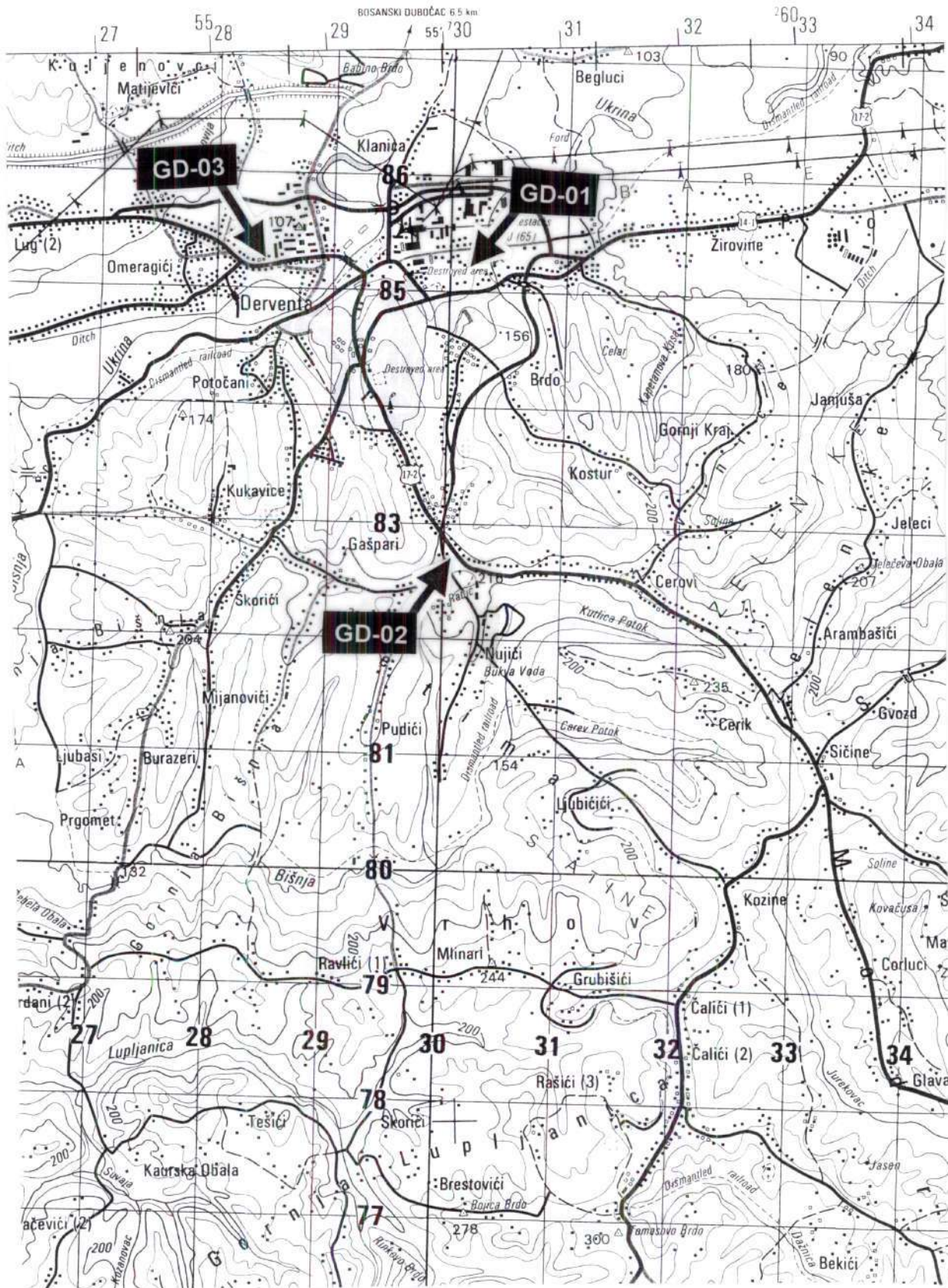


Figure 1. Derвента Cemetery (GD-02), Derвента I (GD-03), Derвента II (GD-01).



Photo 1. Derventa Cemetery. Preparation for graveside postmortem examination.



Photo 2. Derventa Cemetery. Graveside postmortem examination.



Photo 3. Derventa Cemetery. Empty grave (post-exhumation).



Photo 4. GD-01 1/1. Probable gunshot wound to occipital.



Photo 5. Postmortem facilities in Odžak.



Photo 6. Postmortem examination (GD-01 1/1): setting up stature measurement.