

FORENSIC MONITORING PROJECT REPORT

Bihać Jezero-Privilica Exhumations
Republika Srpska Commission on Missing and Tracing
(17, 18 and 20 August 1998)

FINDINGS

Report by:
Heather P. York, M.A.
Forensic Monitor
Forensic Monitoring Project
Tuzla, Bosna i Hercegovina
January 1999

Physicians for Human Rights
100 Boylston Street, Suite 702
Boston, MA 02116 USA
Tel. (617) 695-0041
Fax. (617) 695-0307
Email: phrusa@phrusa.org
<http://www.phrusa.org>

Physicians for Human Rights
Pere Ćuskića br.24
75000 Tuzla
Bosna i Hercegovina
Tel/fax: 387-75-250-639

Financed with support of International Commission on Missing Persons

ICMP
*International Commission
on Missing Persons*

BIHAĆ JEZERO-PRIVILICA EXHUMATIONS

Summary of Events

On 17, 18 and 20 August 1998, the Republika Srpska Commission on Missing and Tracing exhumed 25 bodies from two areas of unmarked graves inside an established cemetery. The cemetery is in the village of Jezero on the southern outskirts of Bihać.

A Forensic Monitor from Physicians for Human Rights was present on 17 and 18 August. No monitor was present for work conducted on 20 August. However, no bodies were recovered on that day.

No information regarding postmortem examinations of these remains was available at the time of this report.

BIHAĆ JEZERO-PRIVILICA EXHUMATIONS

Participants and Observers (not inclusive)

Republika Srpska Commission on Missing and Tracing

BOGDANIĆ Milan	Member
IVANČEVIĆ Milan	Member
KARAN Dr. Željko	Forensic Pathologist, Banja Luka
KRČMAR Goran	Member
MAKIVIĆ Aleksandar	Morgue Assistant
MARIĆ Milko	Crime Technician
VESELINOVIĆ Slaviša	Morgue Assistant
Laborers	

State Commission on Missing Persons (Bosniak)

Local Police

Office of the High Representative

YOUNG Steve	Exhumations Officer, Banja Luka
-------------	---------------------------------

Physicians for Human Rights

ŠTIKIĆ Sandra	Translator
YORK Heather	Forensic Monitor

Site Description

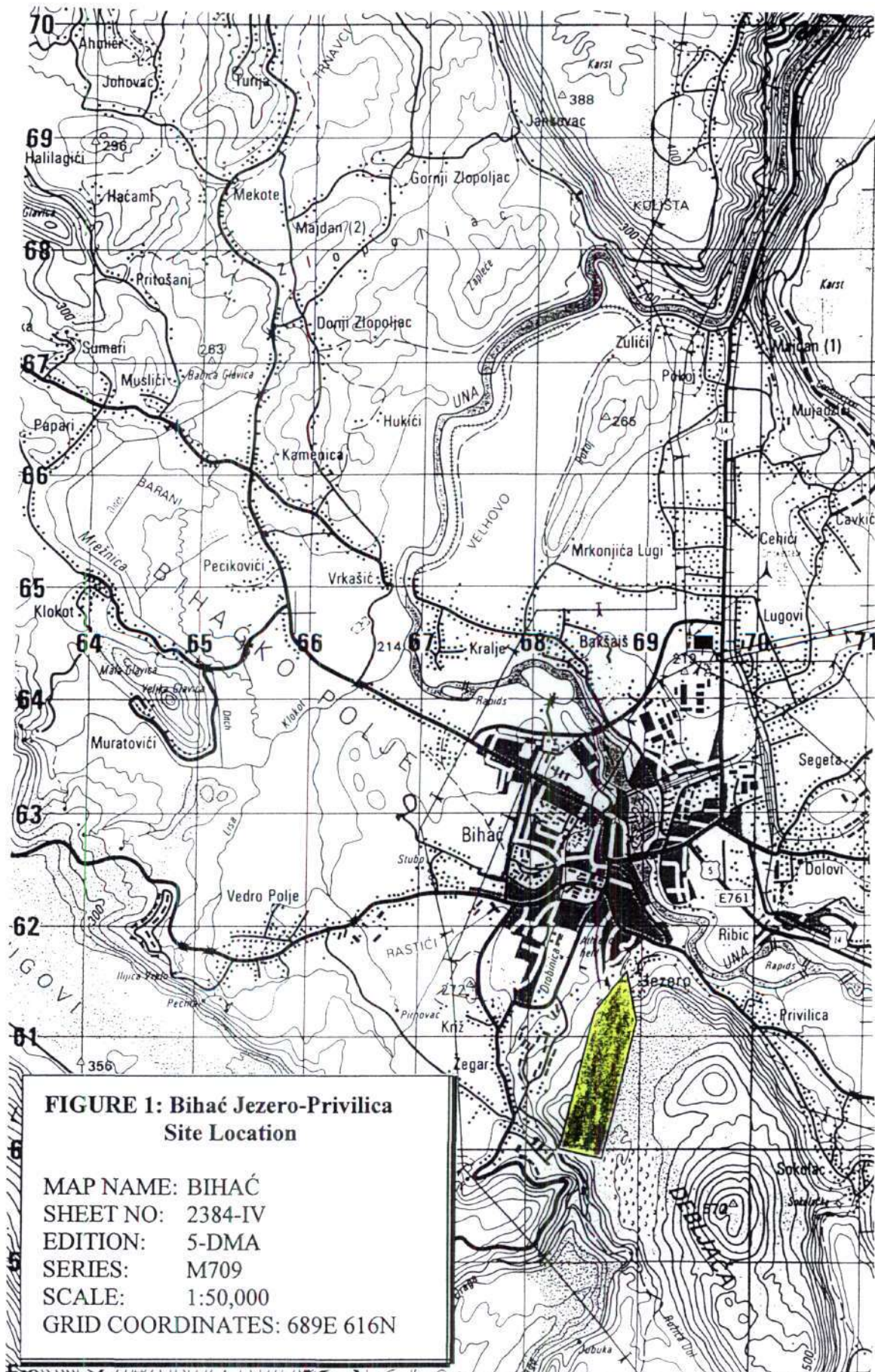
The site is accessed by driving southwest on National Route 11 from the town of Bihać. Just east of a large athletic field, a gravel road running southeast of the National Route enters a cemetery in the village of Jezero on the southern outskirts of Bihać. The cemetery can be found at Bihać topographic map coordinates WK 689E 616N (Sheet 2384 IV, Edition 5-DMA, Series M709, and Scale 1:50,000; Figure 1).

Inside the cemetery, digging was concentrated in two areas. The first, Area 1, lies to the north and west of the marked graves of the main cemetery (Photo 1). Area 2 is approximately 20 m north of Area 1. It is partially covered by a line of trees and bushes at the base of a hill upon which several houses sit (Photo 2). International Route 11 is parallel with the row of houses (Figure 2).

Many shrubs and small trees are growing in the cemetery surrounding Area 1, but none were present in a section of approximately 10 m X 5 m where digging was concentrated. The ground was clearly mounded and had a slight depression surrounding the mound on all sides. Grass covering the mound and the surrounding area looked as though it had been recently flattened by large vehicles.

According to witness information, a wooden post at the edge of the treeline on the northwestern edge of the cemetery served as a landmark for the graves in Area 2. The ground in this area was covered with dense vegetation uniform with the surrounding terrain.

BIHAĆ JEZERO-PRIVILICA EXHUMATIONS



BIHAĆ JEZERO-PRIVILICA EXHUMATIONS

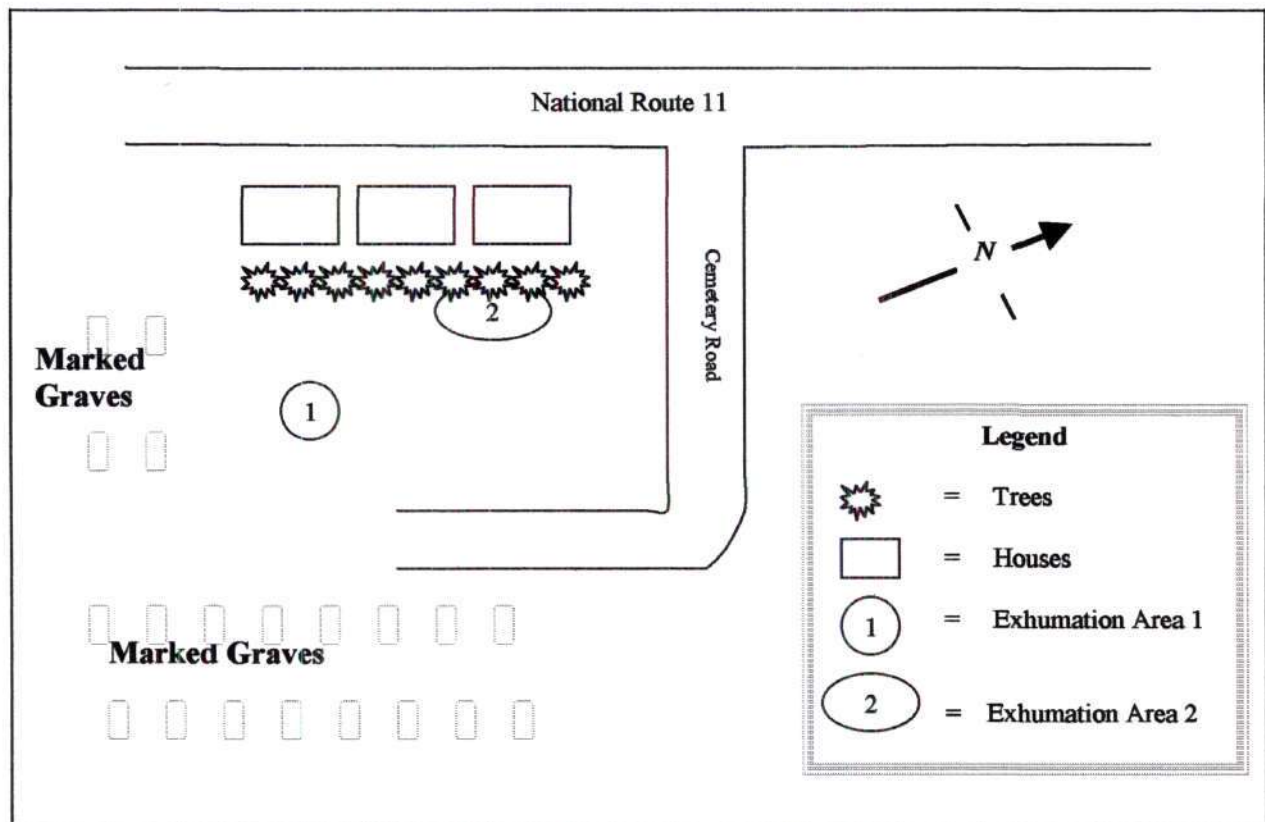


Figure 2: Site Area Sketch Map (Not to scale)

Site History

Information provided by witnesses suggested that some bodies had already been exhumed, at least from Area 1, and traded to the Bosnian Serbs for Bosniak bodies during the war. One witness present at the site claimed to have participated in the exchange of bodies. The Commission was interested in determining whether any bodies remained buried after this trade. All individuals buried at this site allegedly died in 1992.

Exhumation Process and Condition of Remains

A few coring probes were made in Area 1. At a depth of 1.5 m, the probe brought up an odor of decomposing tissue and a piece of plastic. Shovel-digging into the mounded area at that location revealed a sheet of yellow and clear plastic at a depth of only 5 cm (Photo 3). More plastic was found at 10 cm. The plastic proved to be the wrapping for the first set of remains. Digging near the remains was done by pick and hand trowel. Small bones of the hands and feet were sometimes placed in separate plastic bags.

Ten bodies lying one on top of the other were exhumed from a single pit in Area 1. Nine were wrapped in yellow and clear plastic that was bound with wire at approximately 20-40 cm intervals along each body (Photo 4). Upon closer inspection, the plastic was found to be bags for insecticide. The plastic wrapping slipped from the wire and frequently fell away as the bodies were being lifted out of the ground (Photo 5). All remains were skeletonized, with

BIHAĆ JEZERO-PRIVILICA EXHUMATIONS

some clothing present. The type of clothing (military or civilian) was not determined by cursory exhumation due to advanced decomposition.

Beneath the first three bodies was a decomposing blanket. Clothing was found beneath the fourth body. Inside a jacket pocket were a knife, three keys, a sewing kit, and a watch, all of which were placed inside a small plastic bag. Body 10 was found at approximately 20 cm, beneath all the others, wrapped in a blanket and nothing else.

When all ten bodies had been recovered from Area 1 (Photo 6), one more intact insecticide bag was discovered in the southern end of the pit. When it was removed from the ground, fragments of a left and a right parietal bone were found underneath. These were bagged separately from the bodies. No other remains were associated with the bag.

Area 1 was dug to a depth of 0.75 m. The pit was continued as a trench toward the south until the first regular, marked crypts were reached, but no other unmarked burials were encountered.

Area 2 was probe-tested, and three or four short trenches were dug by shovel to a depth of about 20 cm. A piece of white plastic was found at this depth in one of the trenches. The plastic turned out to be the foot-end of a body whose head was oriented toward the northwest (Photo 7). In all, 13 bodies were recovered by shovel and trowel from Area 2. With the exception of Body 14, they were all lying side by side with heads oriented toward the treeline bordering the cemetery in the northwest (Figure 3).

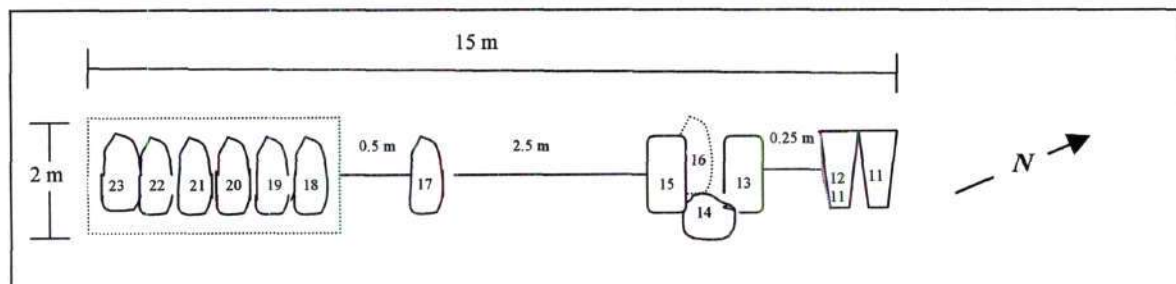


Figure 3: Spacing of Bodies in Area 2 (not to scale)

Bodies 11 and 12 were in adjacent wooden coffins and covered by a very shallow (less than 5 cm to the coffin lids) layer of earth (Photo 8). Bodies 13 and 15 were inside heavy, green canvas body bags buried under a few centimeters of dirt (Photo 9). A disarticulated collection of bones and clothing (Body 14) was lying exposed on the surface on top of Bodies 13 and 15 at the southeastern end (Photo 10). Directly beneath 13 and 15, Body 16 was wrapped in dark plastic that may have been a garbage bag. Body 17 lay 2.5 m to the southwest of Body 15. It was wrapped in torn, clear plastic. Bodies 18 through 23 were in a single pit that began 0.5 m to the southwest of Body 17, lying side by side and in direct contact with one another. All six were wrapped in white plastic body bags that were tied together at either end (Photos 11 and 12). These were buried slightly deeper than the other bodies at a depth of approximately 0.5 m. All the remains from Area 2 were skeletonized, with clothing and some occasional soft tissue adhering (Photo 13). Military-type clothing was associated with Body 17, but no other clothing could be identified by cursory field exhumation.

BIHAĆ JEZERO-PRIVILICA EXHUMATIONS

Workers probed between the two main site areas, but there was no indication of other buried remains.

Bodies 1 through 16 were exhumed on 17 August. Bodies 18 through 23 were left exposed and *in situ* until 18 August because the Commission's transport vehicle would not hold any more bodies. The Forensic Monitor did not witness the exhumation of Bodies 24 and 25 on 18 August. More trenches were dug in the cemetery on 20 August, but no other unmarked burials were discovered. No Forensic Monitor was present on that day.

Postmortem Examination Findings

As of the date of this report, no information was available from the R.S. Commission regarding the postmortem examinations of remains from this site. No Forensic Monitor was present when these examinations were carried out.

BIHAĆ JEZERO-PRIVILICA EXHUMATIONS



Photo 1. Area 1; site overview, facing southwest. (Roll HY-020, Exp.7)



Photo 2. Area 2; site overview, facing west. (Roll HY-017, Exp. 8)

BIHAĆ JEZERO-PRIVILICA EXHUMATIONS



Photo 3. Plastic found at 5 cm depth, Area 1. (Roll HY-017, Exp. 12)



Photo 4. Area 1; bodies wrapped in yellow and white insecticide bags and tied with wire at 20-40 cm intervals along each body. (Roll HY-017, Exp.16)

BIHAĆ JEZERO-PRIVILICA EXHUMATIONS



Photo 5. Area 1; Body 4 being lifted out of the ground and falling out of its wrapping. (Roll HY-018, Exp. 8)



Photo 6. Area 1; Bodies 1-10. (Roll HY-018, Exp. 22)



Photo 7. White plastic covering first remains found at Area 2. (Roll HY-018, Exp.1)



Photo 8. Area 2; view to the north of Bodies 11 and 12 in wooden coffins. (Roll HY-019, Exp.2)

BIHAĆ JEZERO-PRIVILICA EXHUMATIONS



Photo 9. Area 2; Body 13 in a heavy, green canvas body bag. (Roll HY-019, Exp.10)



Photo 10. Area 2; Body 14; disarticulated collection of bones and clothing (Roll HY-019, Exp.10)

BIHAĆ JEZERO-PRIVILICA EXHUMATIONS



Photo 11. Area 2; view to the north of Bodies 18-23 in white plastic body bags. (Roll HY-018, Exp. 24)



Photo 12. Area 2; view to the south of Bodies 18-23, fully exposed. (Roll HY-019, Exp.19)

BIHAĆ JEZERO-PRIVILICA EXHUMATIONS



Photo 13.

Area 2; Bodies 18-25. (Roll HY-020, Exp. 3)

PHYSICIANS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) mobilizes the health professions and enlists public support to protect and promote the human rights of all people.

PHR believes that human rights are essential preconditions for the health and well-being of all members of the human family.

We use medical and scientific methods to investigate and expose violations of human rights worldwide.

We work to stop violations of human rights.

We demand the perpetrators of human rights violations be held accountable for their actions under international law.

Since its founding in 1986, PHR has carried out forensic investigations, including exhumations and autopsies, of alleged torture and extrajudicial executions in Afghanistan, Brazil, Israel, the former Czechoslovakia, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Iraqi Kurdistan, Kuwait, Mexico, Panama, Somalia, and Thailand. PHR has also devoted considerable energy and resources, under the auspices of its Chicago-based International Forensic Program, to assist the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (and its predecessor the U.N. War Crimes Commission) and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, to collect evidence of genocide in those nations.

The President is Charles Clements, M.D., M.P.H., the Vice President is Carola Eisenberg, M.D., the Executive Director is Leonard Rubenstein, J.D., the Deputy Director is Susannah Sirkin, the Advocacy Director is Holly Burkhalter, the Senior Program Associate is Richard Sollom, the Director of Communications is Barbara Ayotte, the Campaign and Education Coordinator is Gina Cummings, the Membership Development Coordinator is Steve Brown. William H. Haglund, Ph.D., is Director of PHR's International Forensic Program. Vince Iacopino, M.D., Ph.D., is Senior Medical Consultant. The director of Bosnia Projects is Laurie Vollen, M.D., M.P.H.