

## FORENSIC MONITORING PROJECT REPORT

Bivolje Brdo Exhumation  
State Commission on Missing Persons  
(17-19 June 1998)

### FINDINGS

Report by:  
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**ICMP**  
*International Commission  
on Missing Persons*

## BIVOLJE BRDO EXHUMATION

### Summary of Events

The State Commission on Missing Persons (Bosniak) recovered the skeletal remains of 12 individuals on 17-19 June 1998 in a quarry near Gravica, south of Mostar. The remains were badly burned and commingled. A Forensic Monitor from Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) was on site during the exhumations and assisted in delineating and removing the bone fragments.

No PHR Forensic Monitor was present for the autopsies. A summary of postmortem examination information, provided by the State Commission representative in Mostar, indicates that the decedents were male and ranged in age from 44 to 85 years. The cause of death in all cases was determined to be "violence." The decedents were identified as individuals from Bivolje Brdo, approximately 2 km north of the quarry. All were listed as missing 16 July 1993. The identifications were on the basis of the association of individuals, witness testimony, and material with the bodies, such as cigarette cases.

## BIVOLJE BRDO EXHUMATION

### Participants and Observers (not inclusive)

#### State Commission on Missing Persons (Bosniak)

AZIĆ Mujo	Crime Technician
DRAGONOVIĆ Kemal	Member
KOSO Sejid	Member
MAŠOVIĆ Amor	President
MEHRIMIĆ Huso	Senior Crime Technician
MUJKIĆ Muhamed	Archivist, Crime Scene Investigator
About six laborers	

#### Federal Commission on Missing Persons - Croat Side

CVITANOVIĆ Berislav	Member, Federal Commission on Missing Persons - Croat Side
TOMIĆ Miroslav	Police Technician, Mostar
ZOVKO Gordana	Police, Mostar

#### Physicians for Human Rights

CONNOR Melissa	Forensic Monitor
LIVADIĆ Mirela	Translator

#### Office of the High Representative

ZOFAL Werner	Exhumations Officer
KULJUH Klaudija	Special Assistant and Translator

#### International Police Task Force - Čapljina Office

#### German Stabilization Force

At least a dozen family members were present. Many participated in the exhumations.

### Site Description

The site is in the bottom of a large, deep quarry off the road from Mostar to Čapljina (Map: Čapljina, 8-DMA, M709, Sheet 2681 II, grid coordinate YH 264 809) (Figure 1). This quarry is east of the road between Bivolje Brdo and Domanovići. The quarry is accessed by a path to the north of the disturbed area that follows a trail through a crevice to the bottom of the quarry. This is a steep, rocky trail covered in rock talus. The limestone walls of the pit are approximately 50 m from the top to the bottom. Except for two areas where the sides of the pit had slumped, the walls were vertical (Figure 2). The bottom of the pit was covered in clay, probably an alluvial layer deposited since the excavation of the pit. There was vegetation in the bottom of the pit, including a small tree, the presence of which suggested that the quarry had not been used in several growing seasons.

On the top of the quarry and between the quarry and the road, investigators found cartridge cases (Figure 3). These were collected and documented on a sketch map by the crime technicians. There were no indications of human remains on the surface of the bottom of the quarry.



## Site History

According to a 1996 report on missing persons by the State Commission for Gathering Facts on War Crimes, the Croatian Defense Council (HVO) began attacking Bosniaks in the Čapljina Municipality in April 1993 (*Missing Persons – Analysis of Causes and Circumstances in Territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina April 1992 – December 1995*, State Commission for Gathering Facts on War Crimes, Bosnia and Herzegovina Presidency, Sarajevo, December 1996). The report says a general arrest of all the Bosniak men in the region was made in June 1993, and access to the town of Čapljina was blocked on 1 July. Most of the missing persons in this region were registered as missing in June and July 1993.

The same report states that the members of the HVO Čitluk Unit entered Bivolje Brdo on 14 July 1993, the men were arrested, and women and children were forced to leave. According to members of the exhumation team, twelve people from Bivolje Brdo were captured, taken to this quarry, and executed. The perpetrators were said to live approximately 10 km from the execution site. A witness saw two groups of six bodies each lying in the quarry. The exhumation team knew the names of the deceased and the alleged perpetrators.

## Exhumation Process and Condition of Remains

The mine assessment was completed by the United Nations Mine Action Center. The assessment determined that the potential for mines was low in this area and no de-mining needed to be completed. Work at the quarry began with an attempt to locate the bodies. The witness had said only that the bodies were located in two groups within the quarry. Laborers from the team were skimming soil and moving rocks on the trail to the quarry bottom when they spotted small, charred fragments of human bone. They were directed to use shovels to skim the soil from the surface starting at the bottom of the trail and working uphill. In the immediate vicinity of the charred fragments, trowels and shovels were used to delineate the area containing the remains. In the trail the remains were contained in a circle approximately 2 m in diameter.

Meanwhile, more specific information on the location of the second group of bodies was obtained. Using shovels, the laborers began digging in the alluvial soil at the bottom of the quarry on the south side. The soil was a thick, wet clay loam that stuck to shovels, shoes, and clothes. At approximately 50 cm below the surface, the shoes and remains were encountered. As each digger uncovered potential evidence, the material was covered with plastic sheeting and the diggers moved to the adjacent area (Figure 4). In this way they delineated an area approximately 2 m in diameter.

In both areas, the remains were skeletal and charred. A dense layer of burned rubber and wire over the top of the bodies indicated that tires were thrown on top of the remains and burned. Charred remnants of other unidentifiable materials were also in this layer. Most of the material had a lava-like consistency and may have been the remnants of the rubber portions of the tires; other sections had different textures and may have been other artifacts or clothing. Most of the material was carbonized and crumbled when removed from the ground.

The bones in the first area were charred, calcined, and extremely fragmentary. In a few areas, the team uncovered the fragments of complete bones in the ground, but when removed from the ground, they fell apart. The excavation technique was to use trowels to uncover the



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remains as much as possible. When cranial fragments or evidence (e.g., a cigarette case, a pen) were uncovered, work was stopped and photographs were taken. Fragments of bones were placed in one large plastic bag and all soil was bagged and removed with the intent of sifting through it later for the fragments of bones. Four concentrations of cranial fragments were found and numbered in this first area (Figure 5). No clothes were recovered.

In the second area, at the bottom of the quarry pit, the remains were more intact and it was possible to lift skeletal elements from the soil in their entirety. Here, skeletal remains were found lying on top of each other. Two pairs of legs could be distinguished at the south end of the mass, overlying each other. The team worked from the edges of the mass of remains delineating the bones and freeing them for removal. As was done previously, all soil was bagged for later sifting. At approximately 6 p.m., a cap of soil remained over the center of the mass (Figure 6). No arrangements had been made for overnight security and it was decided to lift the remains and place them in body bags. Seven body bags of remains were numbered and removed from this area. No clothes were found in association with the remains.

### **Postmortem Examination Findings**

No PHR Forensic Monitor was present for the autopsies. A summary of postmortem examination information was given to Adnan Rizvić (PHR) by Sanja Mulać (State Commission member, Mostar). Autopsies were completed and the remains accepted by the relatives as the missing individuals from Bivolje Brdo. These identifications were on the basis of the association of individuals, witness testimony, and personal effects with the bodies, such as cigarette cases.

All victims were male. The pathologist listed the cause of death in all cases as violence. The individuals were born in 1908, 1921, 1922, 1931 (2 individuals), 1932, 1933, 1934, 1938, 1941, 1947, and 1949. All were listed as missing 16 July 1993. Thus, the decedents ranged in age from 44 to 85 at the time of death.



# BIVOLJE BRDO EXHUMATION

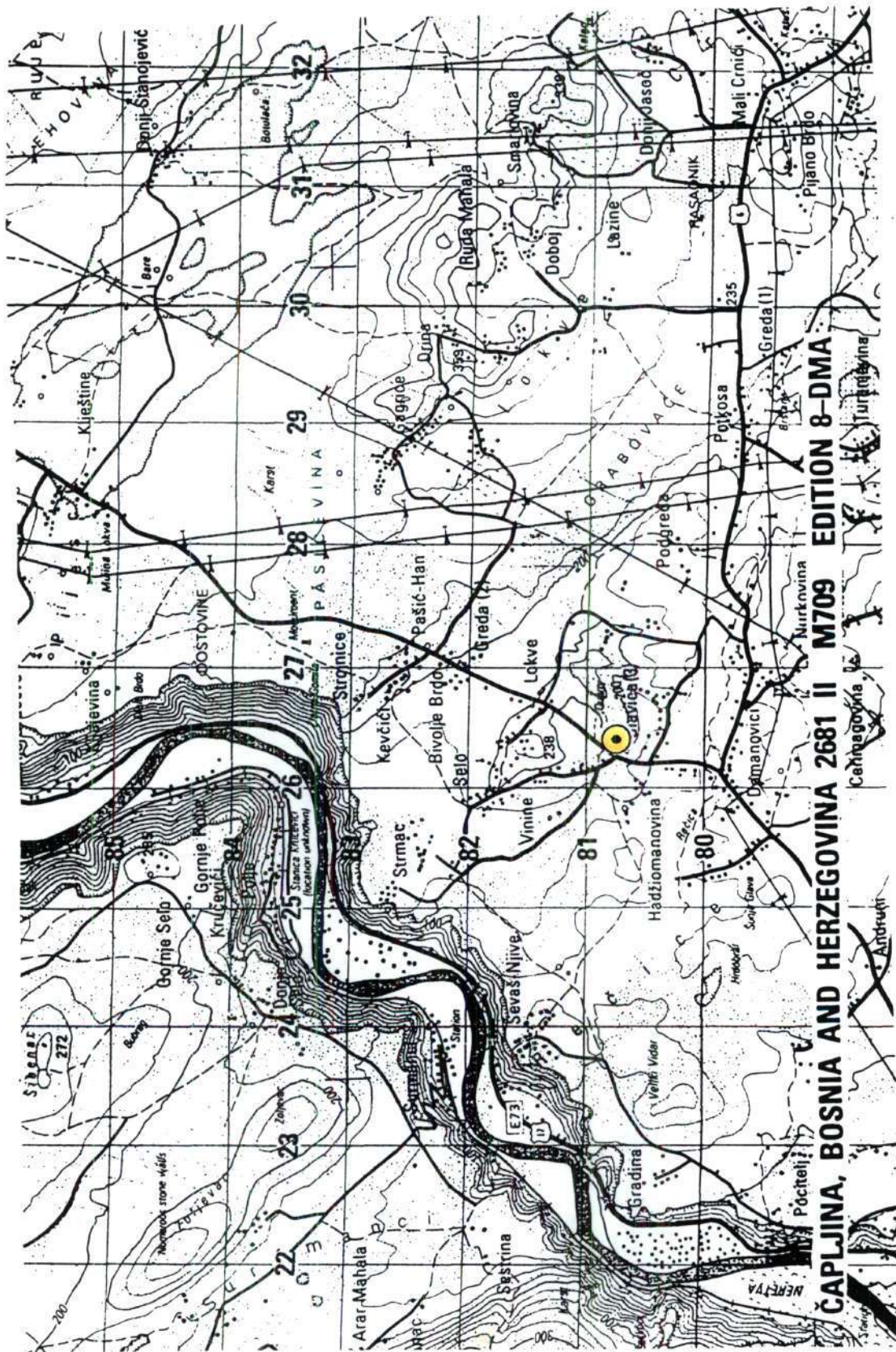


Figure 1. Site location.





Figure 2. View to the southeast at the bottom of the quarry, looking at the rock sides.

BIVOLJE BRDO EXHUMATION

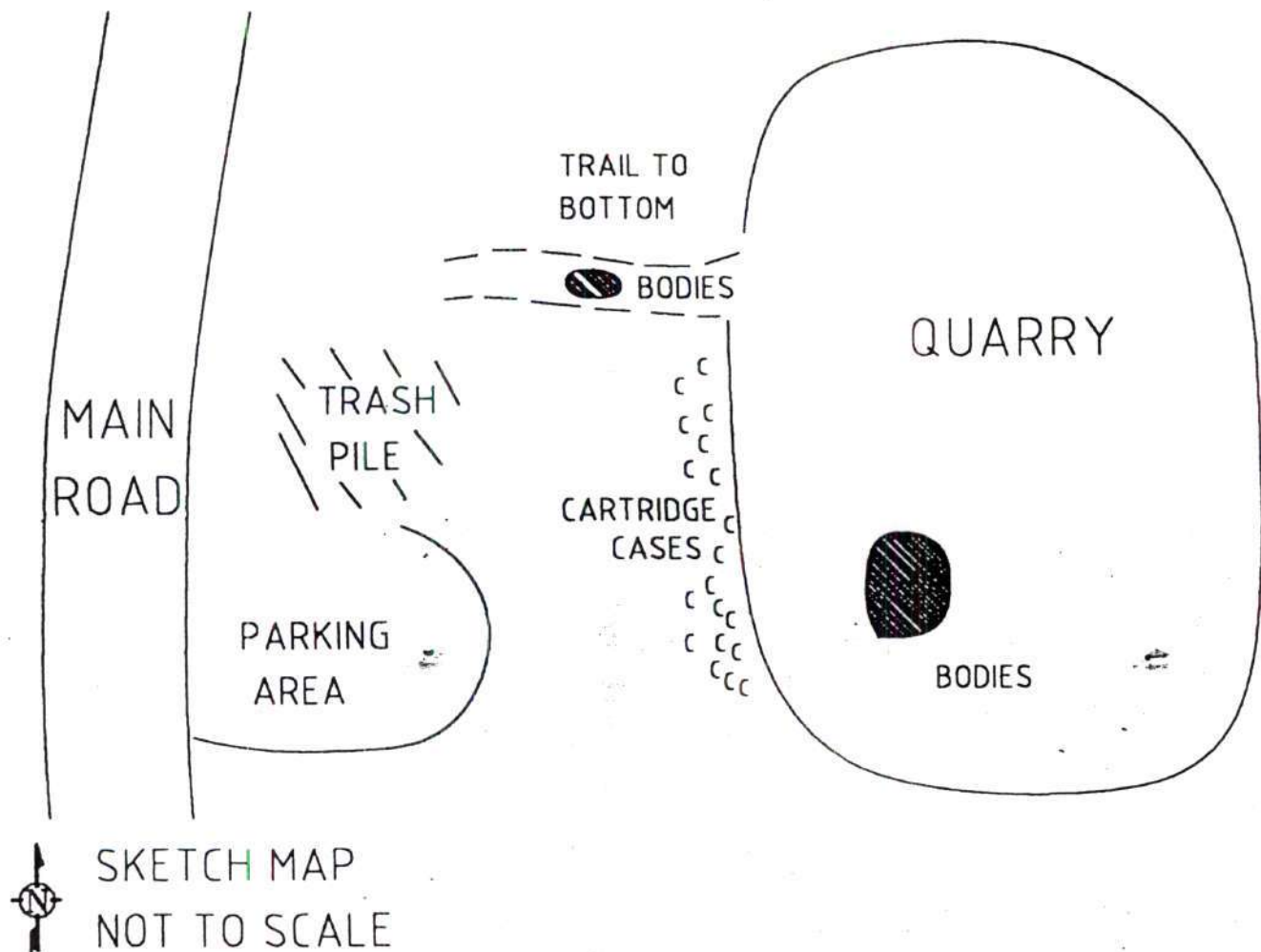


Figure 3. Sketch map of site area.



## BIVOLJE BRDO EXHUMATION



Figure 4. Excavation in progress at area in quarry bottom. Only workers in vests and coveralls are those of the exhumation team; the others are family members. Plastic in soil in center of photograph covers human remains.



Figure 5. Photograph of remains in the trail to the quarry. The numbers indicate the first three areas of cranial fragments before removal.





Figure 6. Remains at the bottom of the quarry before removal. Numbers indicate areas of cranial fragments. Remains are in the dark soil. Note the cap of lighter covered soil over the center of the concentration of remains.



## **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.

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