

# FORENSIC MONITORING PROJECT REPORT

Bijelo Polje Exhumations  
State Commission on Missing Persons  
(15 June 1998)

## FINDINGS

A Report by:  
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**ICMP**  
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## BIJELO POLJE EXHUMATIONS

### **Summary of Events**

The State Commission on Missing Persons (Bosniaks) recovered two human bones (a phalanx and a metacarpal) on 15 June 98 at Bijelo Polje, north of Mostar. Backhoe trenches were excavated around the site area based on locational information from a witness. Workers meanwhile excavated the bottom of an nearby, existing shallow depression and recovered a blanket with a four-hole button, a jacket button with a loop back, a piece of cloth, a bullet, and two human bones. The area around the depression was further excavated, but no additional remains were located. The findings are consistent with a human burial having been previously partially exhumed.

No autopsy will be performed.

The PHR monitor was present on site during all activities.

## BIJELO POLJE EXHUMATIONS

### Participants and Observers

#### State Commission on Missing Persons

MAŠOVIĆ Amor	President, State Commission on Missing Persons
MUJKIĆ Muhamed	Archivist and Crime Scene Investigator, Sarajevo
KOSO Sead	Member, State Commission on Missing Persons
DRAGONOVIĆ Kemal	Member, State Commission on Missing Persons
ULUHEAVED Ulujkić	
Laborers	

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

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

#### Physicians for Human Rights

CONNOR Melissa	Forensic Monitor
LIVADIĆ Mirela	Translator

#### Office of the High Representative

ZOFAL Werner	Exhumations Officer
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Several local men also appeared. One appeared to be a witness with knowledge of the burial location. Their names were not given.

### Site Description

The site is north of Mostar (DMA Sheet 2681 1 YJ 323 087), of the road between Mostar and Sarajevo (E73) and west of the hydroelectric plant (HE Mostar). It is accessed by the first road south of the gasoline station at Bijelo Polje. The site is west on this road and then south on the first cross street, which is a dirt road. There is a cemetery, not on the map, about 150m to the north. The area was mined to the north of the lane prior to exhumations and unexploded ordinance was found throughout the site area by RONCO.

The site itself was in the vineyard and orchard of a destroyed house. The groundcover consisted of thick grasses, poppies, and other unidentified material. Visibility ranged from 0 to 5% of the ground surface. The soil was a loam, relatively homogenous, and with no inclusions for the first 30 cm, then including large gravel and cobbles in the soil.

## BIJELO POLJE EXHUMATIONS

### **Site History**

Little information on the grave was shared with the international observers. One member of the exhumation team thought that bodies might have been moved from this area in 1995 or 1996.

### **Exhumation Process and Condition of Remains**

The site was demined by RONCO before the team arrived. A minefield was located north of the lane and at least one mine was marked with the triangular mine marker. The OHR representative also mentioned that an unexploded grenade was found in the area that RONCO demined.

The team was on the site from 8:45 am to 11:10 am 15 June 98. The monitor was present on site at all times during the proceedings. The monitor's participation mainly consisted of watching the backhoe and was asked twice to confer on whether bones found were human or not. In one instance it was human, in the other the bone was not human.

The site was in an area approximately 200 square meters. The Bosniak team trenched five areas south of a ruined house using a backhoe on a JCB tractor. The first two trenches were through trash pits. A man arrived who appeared to have information on the location of the grave, and the team moved the backhoe to the south end of the demined area into the treeline south of the orchard. Multiple trenches were excavated in the area at the southwest corner of the demined area, and the excavations extended, outside the mine tape, into the area that had not been checked for mines.

While this was going on, the laborers were looking into a shallow depression in the demined path. This pit was present when the team arrived and a blanket was present at the bottom of the depression. The laborers found a metacarpal and called Mr. Mašović over to examine the area. A bullet and a phalanx were also found in the depression. The laborers unfolded the blanket and two buttons were stuck on the inside. One was a four-hole shirt button and the second a loop-back jacket button. The remains and evidence found were consistent with one set of remains having been previously removed from this location.

The exhumation team documented the proceedings with film and digital still photography and a video camera. All artifacts, including the two bones, were collected by a crime technician.

### **Postmortem Examination Findings**

Due to the paucity of remains, no autopsy was scheduled.

BIJELO POLJE EXHUMATIONS

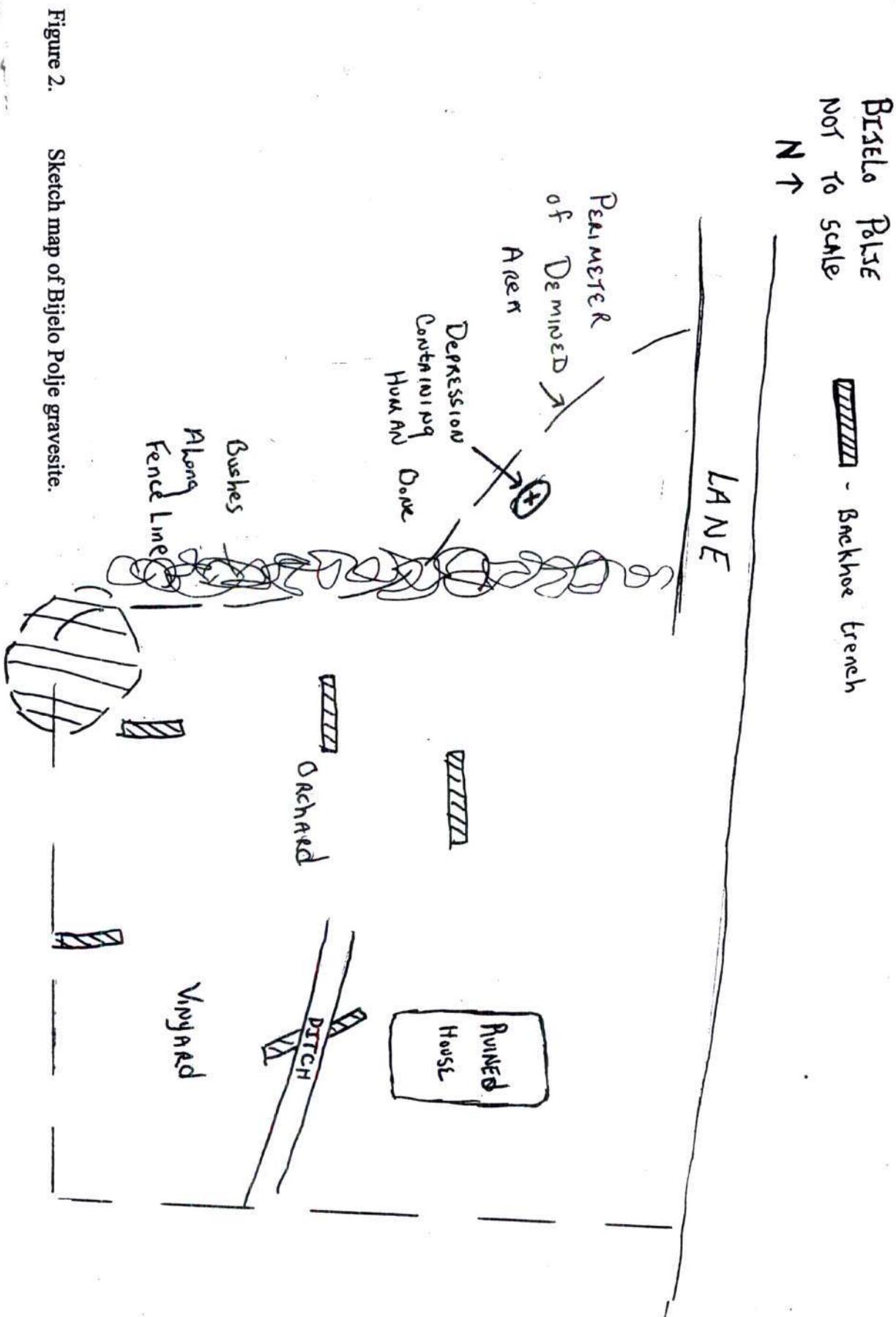


Figure 2. Sketch map of Bijelo Polje gravesite.



BIJELO POLJE EXHUMATIONS



Photograph 1. View to east. Abandoned house adjacent to site location.



Photograph 2. View to southeast. Backhoe testing near house.

## **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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