

FORENSIC ASSISTANCE PROJECT

Consultant Report 1999-022

Čemerno I

Republika Srpska Commission on Tracing Prisoners and Missing Persons
27 - 29 May 1999

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November 1999

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Financed with support of International Commission on Missing Persons

ICMP
International Commission
on Missing Persons

Summary of Events

On May 27, 28, and 29, 1999 a mass grave containing 19 bodies was exhumed at the eastern edge of Čemerno Cemetery, a remote Serbian Orthodox Cemetery located near the summit of Čemerska Planina. All individuals within the mass grave reputedly died on June 10, 1992 during or following the fall of a local village to BiH Army forces. Villagers using a backhoe dug a 2 m deep pit 6 m X 6 m and employed a large amount of lumber to construct a framework and covering for the bodies, after wrapping them in plastic sheeting and covering them with blankets. The soil was clayey and poorly drained and the construction of the grave also retained water, contributing to significant saponification of all of the bodies. Eight bodies were confirmed at the time of exhumation as female. Nine bodies were confirmed as male, with seven buried in military clothing. Body 1 was buried with an M72 machine gun. The two remaining bodies were burned beyond identification at the time of exhumation but were reputed to be males. Bodies were transported to Lukavica for postmortem examinations. These examinations had not been completed at the time of writing.

(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

Republika Srpska Commission on Tracing Prisoners and Missing Persons

AVLIJAŠ Slobodan	Member
BOGDANIĆ Milan	Member
DANE Jamina	Judge, Lukavica
KARAN Dr. Željko	Forensic Pathologist, Banja Luka
MARIĆ Milko	Crime Technician
MRŠIĆ Ranka	Prosecutor
ŠKRBA Slobodan	Member

Federation Commission on Missing Persons – Bosniak Side

BAŽDARENIĆ Izet	Judge, Sarajevo
KOSO Sejid	Member, Sarajevo

Physicians for Human Rights (PHR)

BOAZ Dr. Noel	Forensic Consultant (Anthropologist)
TORLAKOVIĆ Azur	Field Assistant

Office of the High Representative (OHR)

CHILVERS Peter	Exhumations Officer, Banja Luka
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International Police Task Force (IPTF)

TOCCHETTI Girogio	IPTF, Vogošća
KOVACS Zsolt	IPTF, Vogošća
MEMON Tariq	IPTF, Vogošća

Police

Ilijaš Cantonal Police

Media

SARAČ Edina	Journalist for Dnevni Avaz newspaper
PARADINA Tanja	Journalist for SRNA Television

Other

Six grave diggers

Site Description

The exhumation team investigated a mass grave dating from 1992 (Figure 1; Map Name: Vareš; Sheet: 2783 II; Edition: 6-DMA; Series: M709; Horizontal Datum: WGS84; Scale: 1:50.000; Grid Zone designation: 34T; all grid coordinates determined using a Global Positioning System Unit). The mass grave exhumed was located at MGRS grid coordinate BP 890 804. The site occupies a topographic high 1200 m above sea level along the Čemerska Planina that has a commanding view of the surrounding terrain (Photo 1). The site was reached by logging road. The location of the mass grave was marked by a raised mound of earth approximately 1 m in height, at the eastern extremity of the Serbian Orthodox Cemetery at Čemerno. Some crosses in the cemetery had been vandalized (Photo 2).

Site History

The individuals buried in this mass grave were reportedly killed on June 10, 1992 in or following a battle with the BiH Army at the end of a siege of a local village. There were four separate witness reports with estimates of numbers of the buried varying from 19 to 22. The identities of the alleged victims were stated in witness reports. Some reports indicated that children were included in the mass grave, but this was not borne out by the exhumations. The RS Commission stated at the inception of the exhumation that all the buried were civilians, but this was also contradicted in part by the results of the exhumation (see below).

The mass grave was constructed by a backhoe to a depth of between 1.5 and 2.0 m (Photo 3), being deeper on the southern side. Cross beams were laid at intervals in the pit and bodies placed inside them (Figure 2). Three layers of wooden planks were laid in a criss-cross manner above the bodies (Photo 4), and then the whole construction was covered with earth.

Exhumation Process and Condition of Remains

Because of the remoteness of the site and its difficult access, a backhoe was not used in the exhumation. Excavation of the site was therefore done by hand with shovels. In three days some 72 m³ of earth were removed by the six grave diggers.

There was significant standing water in the grave, particularly in the lower, southern half of the grave. All the bodies, except Bodies 6 and 7 which were burned remains, showed significant saponification (Photo 5).

After the removal of the earth, three layers of wooden planks had to be removed. A chain saw was utilized for part of this process (Photo 6). Below the wood was a layer of blankets which had been laid over the bodies. Finally, each body had been wrapped in plastic sheeting.

Figure 2 is a map of the 19 bodies as discovered in the mass grave. Bodies were arranged in two rows separated by a heavy beam dividing the mass grave into northern and southern halves. Each of the two halves was further divided by beams into thirds. Some beams were laid over bodies and caused deep impressions (Photo 7). In the case of Bodies 10 through 15 the heavy beam forming the southern margin of the grave was placed over the feet and lower legs of the bodies. This made their extraction difficult and contributed to the disarticulation of the lower extremities in these bodies during exhumation (Photo 8).

The remains were photographed in the grave prior to removal, with numbers placed on them (Photo 9). After removal from the grave, the remains were transferred to body bags labeled with site name and body number (Photo 10). Bodies were transferred by van to the Lukavica autopsy facility for postmortem examination.

Eight bodies were confirmed in the field as female (Bodies 3, 5, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, and 16), based on clothing and external morphology. Nine bodies were confirmed as male (Bodies 1, 2, 4, 10, 14, 15, 17, 18, and 19), with seven buried in military clothing. Body 1 was buried with an M72 machine gun. The two remaining bodies were burned beyond identification in the field but were reputed to be males. Official results, however, were not available because postmortem examinations had not been completed at the time of writing.

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Maps and Photos

Figure 1 is a map of the exhumation site. Figure 2 is a map of the 19 bodies exhumed at this site. Presumed identities of bodies are listed in Table 1, but pending results from the postmortem examinations presumed identities cannot be matched with exhumed body numbers. A comprehensive photo log was compiled and is filed separately. Photos 1 through 10 are photographs cited in this report.

Table 1. Names and Presumed Identities of Exhumed Bodies, Čemerno

BODY NO.	NAME	SEX	DATE OF DEATH	ETHNICITY
¹	BUNJEVAC Đorđe	M	10 VI 92	Serb
¹	BUNJEVAC Goran	M	10 VI 92	Serb
²	BUNJEVAC Koviljka	F	10 VI 92	Serb
¹	BUNJEVAC Rajko	M	10 VI 92	Serb
²	BUNJEVAC Mirošava	F	10 VI 92	Serb
¹	BUNJEVAC Ranko	M	10 VI 92	Serb
¹	BUNJEVAC Miloš	M	10 VI 92	Serb
²	BUNJEVAC Slavojka	F	10 VI 92	Serb
²	DAMJANOVIĆ Staka	F	10 VI 92	Serb
¹	DAMJANOVIĆ Zdravko	M	10 VI 92	Serb
²	DAMJANOVIĆ Jadranka	F	10 VI 92	Serb
²	DAMJANOVIĆ Ranka	F	10 VI 92	Serb
²	DAMJANOVIĆ Spasenida	F	10 VI 92	Serb
¹	TRIFKOVIĆ Milenko	M	10 VI 92	Serb
¹	TRIFKOVIĆ Rajko	M	10 VI 92	Serb
²	TRIFKOVIĆ Janja	F	10 VI 92	Serb
¹	PANTIĆ Miro	M	10 VI 92	Serb
6 or 7	JANKOVIĆ Miroslav	M	10 VI 92	Serb
6 or 7	KAPETANOVIĆ Sjetozar	M	10 VI 92	Serb

¹ Body 1,2,4,10,14,15,17,18, or 19

² Body 3,5,8,9,11,12,13, or 16

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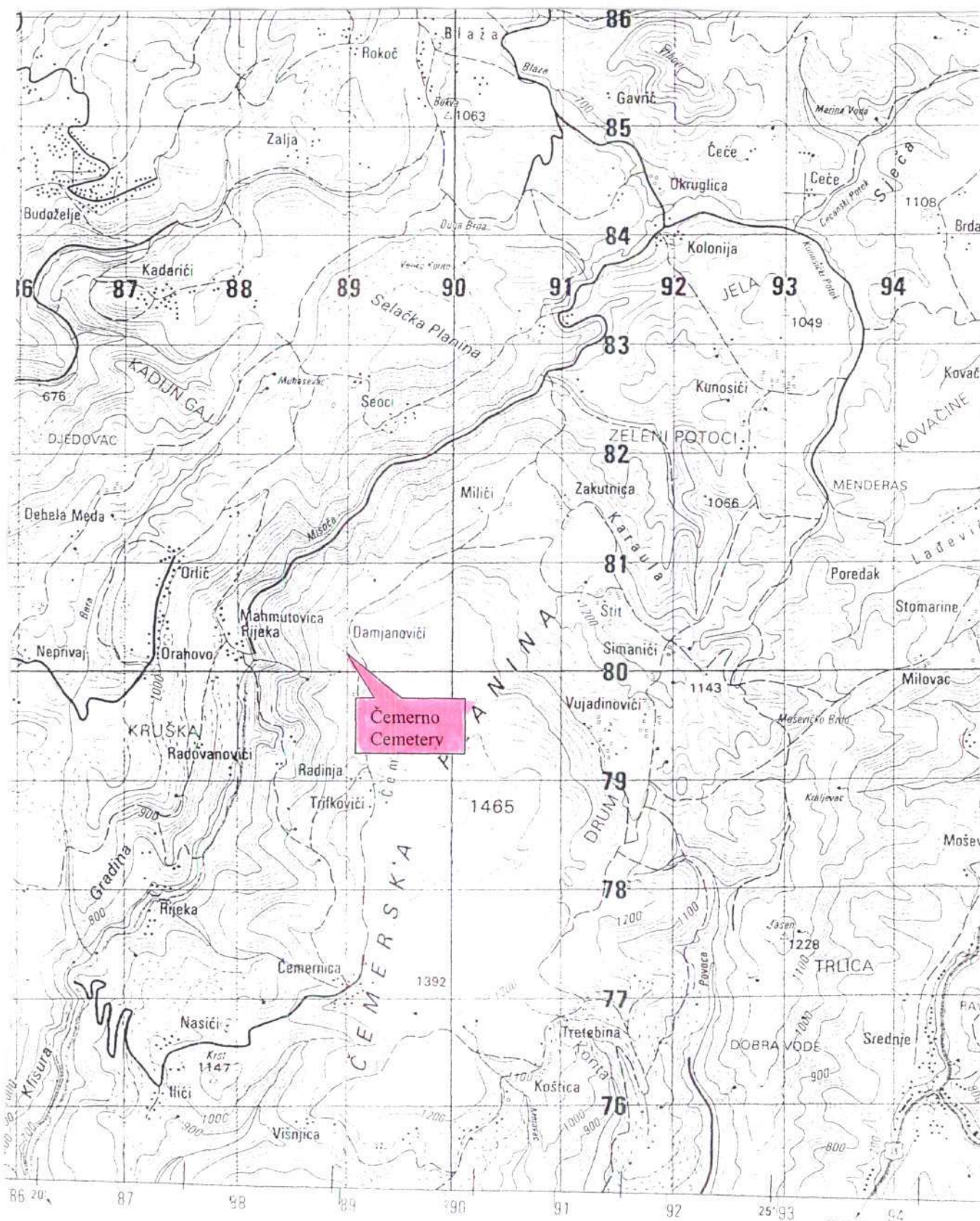


Figure 1. Location of Čemerno Cemetery.

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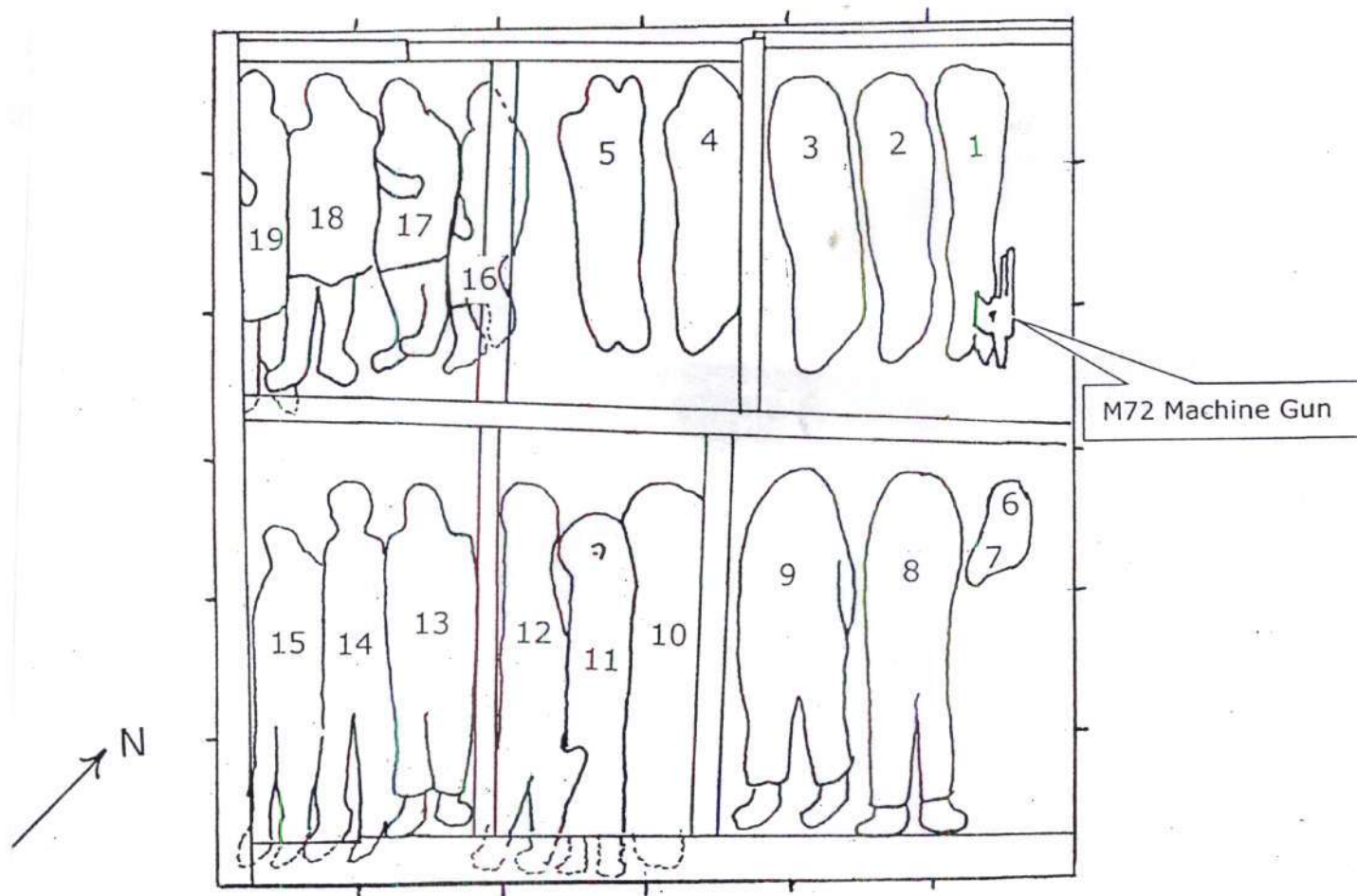


Figure 2.

Map of the mass grave at Čemerno. Scale 1:50.



Photo 1. General view of the Čemerno site looking west.



Photo 2. Vandalism resulting from gunshots in a cross in the Čemerno Cemetery.



Photo 3. Depth of the Čemerno mass grave. Scale is in the center of the exhumation and marks 1.5 m. Depth in the southern part of the site was 2 m.



Photo 4. View of a layer of wooden planks overlying bodies.



Photo 5. The southern part of mass grave was lower-lying and had a deeper layer of standing water when excavated. These bodies are in the southwest part of the grave and like the other bodies in the site were saponified.



Photo 6. Use of a chain saw in the removal of the second layer of wooden planks.



Photo 7.

After removal of the beams some bodies showed deep indentations. In this case Body 19 shows a linear depression along its left side.



Photo 8.

Removal of boots and disarticulated tibia (see in worker's left hand) of Body 15 after removal of the rest of the body. The heavy beam at the bottom of the photograph prevented easy extraction of the lower limbs of several bodies.



Photo 9. Numbers placed on Bodies 1 through 5 in the northeastern part of the site.



Photo 10. Bodies 13 through 19 in labeled body bags ready for transport from the site.