

## FORENSIC MONITORING PROJECT REPORT

Raštani and Vojno Exhumations  
State Commission on Missing Persons  
(21-22 May 1998)

### FINDINGS

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

### Summary of Events

On the 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> of May, 1998, the State Commission on Missing Persons (Bosniak) exhumed the remains of four individuals from seven sites north of Mostar in the vicinity of Raštani.

At the time of the reconnaissance visits, Mr. Amor Mašović stated that these sites were collectively expected to contain the graves of approximately 100 prisoners killed by an HVO military unit led by Maka Radić. These prisoners were alleged by Mr. Mašović to have been initially taken by Bosnian Serbs and then handed over to Bosnian Croats in 1993 and early 1994. According to Mr. Mašović, the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia may have an interest in this situation.

The incomplete remains of at least one individual were found at the site of Raštani 1 in the village of Raštani on the west side of the Neretva River. Burned and fully skeletonized elements were found both inside a destroyed house and buried in a garden behind the house. A cartridge case was found inside the house.

At Raštani 2, approximately 1 km to the southeast of Raštani 1, another body was buried within a stand of trees outside a destroyed and abandoned house. The remains were wrapped in a blanket except for a few exposed elements, all of which were completely skeletonized.

The team investigated what appeared to be eight previously exhumed graves at a site called Vojno 0 on a small plateau west of the Neretva River, 4 km north-northeast of Raštani. Several of the existing depressions contained pieces of body bags, clear plastic and blankets; one yielded a single human bone fragment and decomposed soft tissue.

The skeletonized remains of a single individual were found at the Vojno 1 site on a bluff above the west bank of the Neretva River, 1 km southwest of Vojno 0. The remains from this burial were entirely skeletonized with no cover or clothing present.

No human remains were found at the remaining three Raštani area sites that were investigated by the State Commission exhumation team over these two days.

Two Forensic Monitors from Physicians for Human Rights observed all exhumation activity on both days with the exception of about one hour spent away from the Vojno 0 site for work at the Vojno 1 site.

Postmortem examinations were performed on the human remains found at Raštani 1, Raštani 2, and Vojno 1 by Forensic Pathologist Dr. Ilijas Dobrača. All three individuals were determined to be males, ranging in age from 37 to 76 years old at the time of death. Cause of death was reported as violent homicide for each of the three individuals. No Forensic Monitor was present for these examinations.



## RAŠTANI AND VOJNO EXHUMATIONS

### Participants and Observers

Participants and observers at the exhumations included, but were not limited to, the following:

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

DRAGANOVIĆ Kamal	Member
KOSO Sejid	Member
MAKSUMIĆ Halil	Judge (East Mostar)
MAŠOVIĆ Amor	President
MUJKIĆ Muhamed	Archivist
RAHIMIĆ Munevera	Judge (East Mostar)
Crime Scene Technicians	
Laborers	

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

CVITANOVIĆ Berislav	Member
ZOVKO Gordana	Police, West Mostar

#### Office of the High Representative

KULJUH Klaudija	Special Assistant & Translator, Sarajevo
ZOFAL Werner	Exhumations Officer, Mostar

#### Physicians for Human Rights

HARRINGTON Dr. Richard	Forensic Monitor
RIZVIĆ Adnan	Translator
YORK Heather	Forensic Monitor

#### Others

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) representatives  
CAÑADAS, Lt. Maria - Spanish Stabilization Task Force  
Spanish Stabilization Task Force (SFOR) personnel  
Family members and witnesses

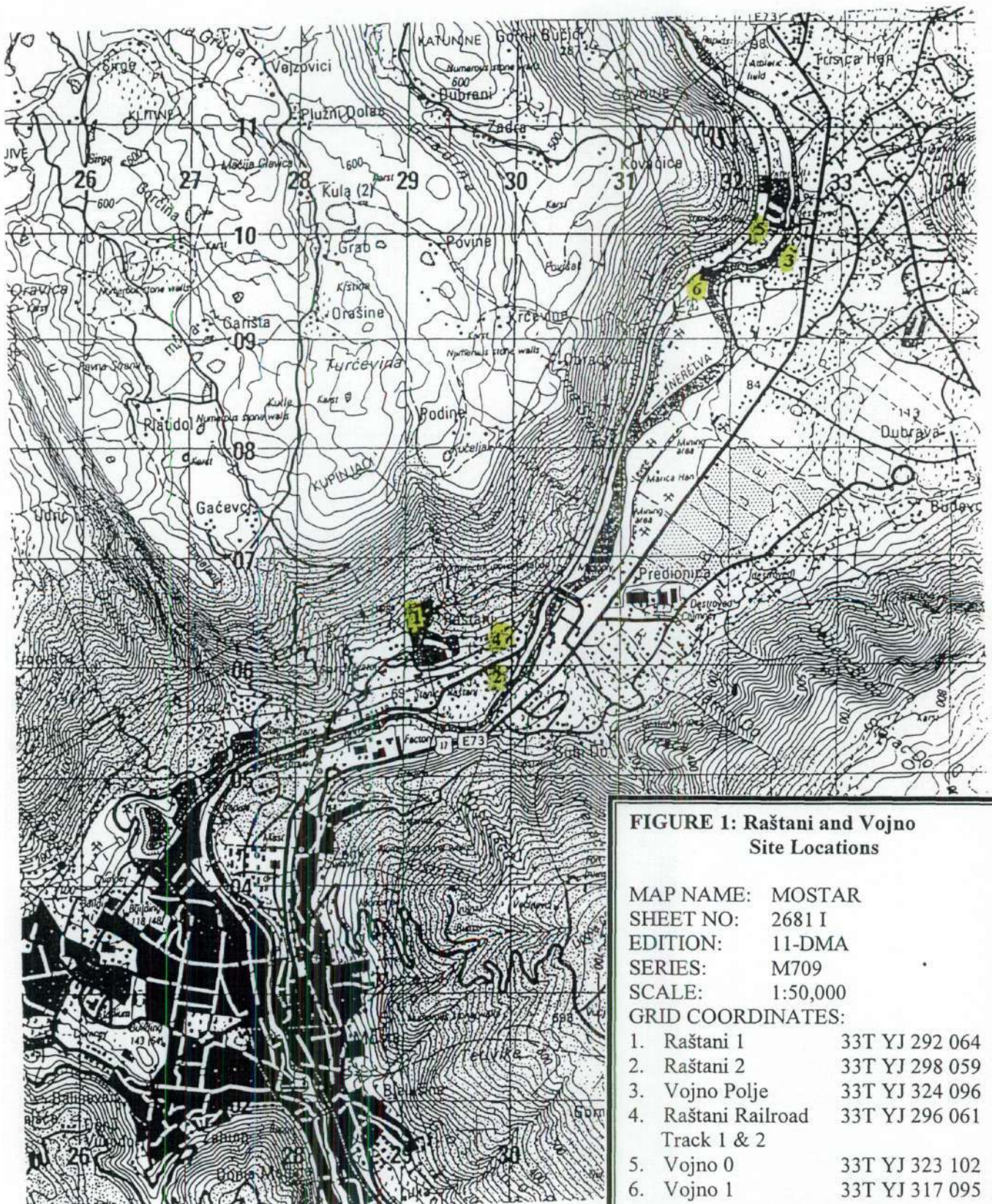
## RAŠTANI 1

### Site Description

This site is a 6.5 km drive north-northeast from Mostar on the west side of the Neretva River. It is within the village of Raštani at Mostar DMA map coordinates 33T YJ 292 064 (Sheet #2681I, Series M709, Edition 11, Scale 1:50,000; Figure 1). The search for remains took place in an approximately 4 x 7 m garden outside an abandoned house and later within the house as well. A low concrete wall surrounds the garden area to the south and west, a concrete slab and well lie to the east, and the wall of the house and a small storage area lie to the north (Figure 2). Thick, uneven vegetation covered the entire garden area except for a single hole about 25 cm deep that was apparent near the center of the garden. There was no surface visibility. The house had only a partial roof, but the rooms were fairly clear of debris, and the concrete floors were visible.



# RAŠTANI AND VOJNO EXHUMATIONS





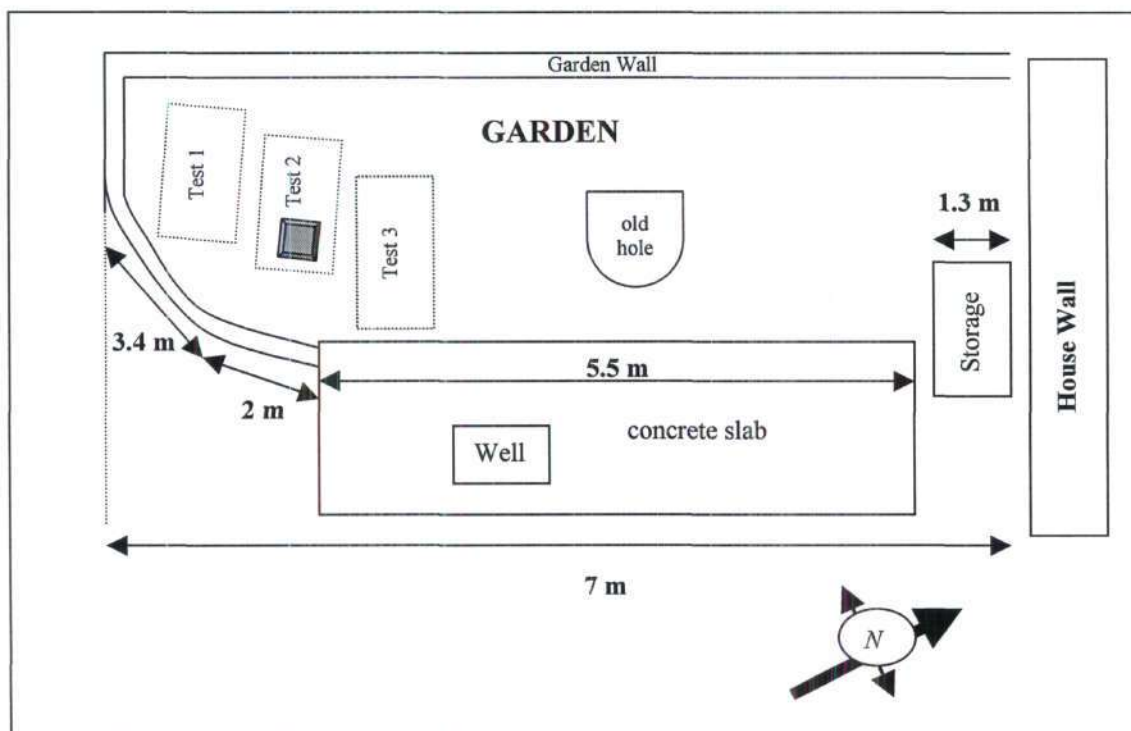


Figure 2: Raštani 1 Sketch Map (not to scale)

### Site History

At the time of the reconnaissance visits, Mr. Amor Mašović stated that these sites were collectively expected to contain the graves of approximately 100 prisoners killed by an HVO military unit led by Maka Radić. These prisoners were alleged by Mr. Mašović to have been initially taken by Bosnian Serbs and then handed over to Bosnian Croats in 1993 and early 1994. According to Mr. Mašović, the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia may have an interest in this situation.

Based on information from the alleged victim's family, Mr. Mašović told the PHR translator that the remains found at this site were those of a 38-year-old Bosniak male. Judge Munerva Rahimić told the PHR translator that in 1993, the victim was burned inside the house and then taken outside to the garden for burial.

According to Mr. Mašović, the family members had previously attempted and failed to find the remains, thus creating the existing hole in the garden.

### Exhumation Process and Condition of Remains

No information regarding mine assessment was provided to the PHR monitors at the time of exhumation.

Under the direction of Mr. Mašović, crime technicians from the Bosniak team photographed the garden site before clearing began and at various stages of the exhumation process. They measured the garden perimeter and made a sketch map that included the surrounding structures.

Vegetation was removed from the entire garden area by pick, rake and scythe. One test hole (Figure 2, Test #1) was dug in the SW corner to a depth of approximately 0.5 m and abandoned. Another two test holes (Figure 2, Test #2 and Test #3), roughly parallel to the first and about 1 m apart, were dug to about 10 cm (Photo 1). The middle test area yielded broken garden pottery and fragments of charred bone (see Figure 2, blocked area inside Test #2). The first skeletal elements were encountered at a depth of 37 cm from the top of the garden wall, or 27 cm below surface level. From that point, digging continued with a single shovel and pick (Photo 2). Trowelling was especially careful around the thoracic area in order to search for bullets or cases, although there was no screening. The Forensic Monitor (Harrington) was asked to remove the exposed skeletal elements to a body bag. Trowelling continued until sterile soil was reached.

The entire remains-bearing deposit was 12 cm deep. Elements found in the garden include a scapula, ribs, right and left innominate, sacrum, cervical, thoracic and lumbar vertebrae with singed spinous processes, several tarsal bones, a right femur and a right fibula (Photo 3).

From the positions of the elements found in the garden, it appears that the torso was lying *in situ* on its right side, facing the garden wall, with the cranial-end oriented toward the south. The positions of other elements clearly indicate that the remains had been disturbed since death. For example, a cuneiform was found next to a scapula, and a talus was found next to a femur.

All of the ribs appeared to have perimortem fractures. A nail was found between two right ribs, but it was unclear as to how it got there. There was some apparent damage to the right innominate, and the pubis had broken loose. However, it was not known whether this occurred during the disinterment.

A few other skeletal elements were found in the southwest corner room inside the house (Photo 4). The only cranial fragments from this site were found in the house, along with a tibia fragment, a metatarsal, and a femoral condyle. Near the cranial fragments, a cartridge case was also found. The case was placed in an evidence bag and labeled "RAŠ 1". A tuft of black, straight hair was also found in the room.

Most of the bone fragments found in the house were charred, although one small cranial fragment found in the southern/ central part of the room appeared unburned.

There was no evidence to indicate that more than one individual was represented between the house and the garden. It is possible that portions of a single body were removed from the house at some point after decomposition had commenced and taken to the garden for burial.

The remains and the evidence were placed into the State Commission team's truck for transport to the Sutina City Mortuary autopsy facility in East Mostar.

The PHR Forensic Monitors remained at this site for the duration of exhumation, which took approximately one hour and 40 minutes.



### Postmortem Examination Findings

A postmortem examination was performed on the human remains found at Raštani 1 by Forensic Pathologist Dr. Ilija Dobrača. The individual was identified as a 38-year-old male. Cause of death was reported as violent homicide.

## RAŠTANI 2

### Site Description

The Raštani 2 site is located at Mostar DMA map coordinates 33T YJ 298 059 (Sheet #2681I, Series M709, Edition 11, Scale 1:50,000), 1 km southeast of Raštani 1 on the west side of the Neretva River (Figure 1). It is 8 m southeast of a road that parallels the road to Sarajevo (International Route E73) on the west side of the Neretva River. The search for remains was confined to a small area within a circle of trees to the southwest of an abandoned house and east of a large warehouse-type building (Figure 3; Photo 5). The entire area under the shade of the trees was sparsely covered by a uniform growth of dry grass and weeds. Ground visibility was 15-20%.

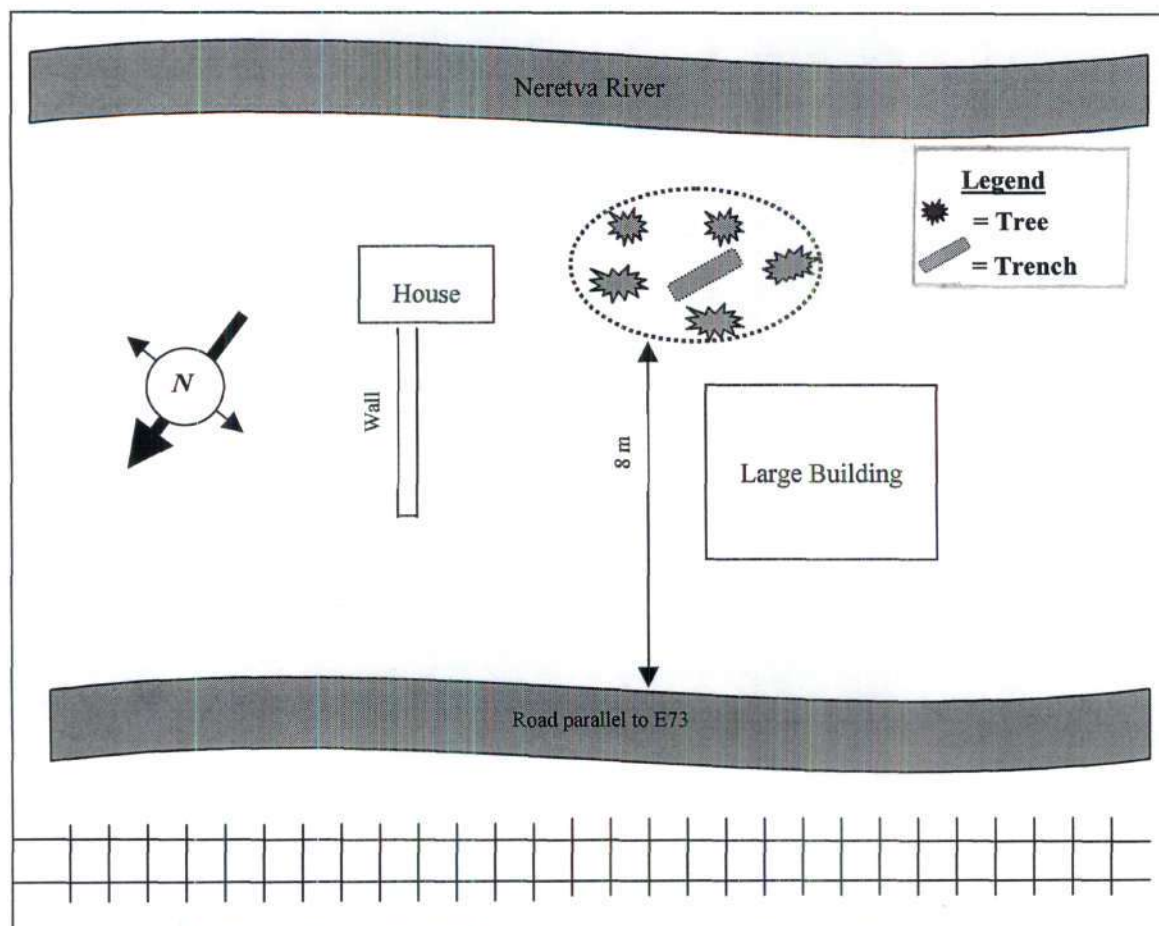


Figure 3: Raštani 2 Sketch Map (not to scale)

### Site History

According to Mr. Mašović, family members claimed that remains buried within this ring of trees were those of a 76-year-old Bosniak male, an invalid and a relative of the deceased at Raštani 1. Born in 1917, he was allegedly killed in November of 1993.

### Exhumation Process and Condition of Remains

The PHR Forensic Monitors were unable to obtain any information on mine assessment at this site.

The crime technicians took photos and measurements. The vegetation was cut back with scythes, and more photographs were taken. The laborers shoveled through loose soil mixed with small, rounded stones near the center of the ring of trees until an orange and white print blanket was exposed at a depth of about 12 cm below ground level (Photo 6). The skull protruded from the blanket at the southern end of the grave. A corner of the blanket was pulled back to reveal the skeletonized remains of a right hand.

One of the PHR Forensic Monitors (Harrington) was asked by Mr. Mašović to expose the blanket. The blanket was photographed before being lifted out with the remains still inside and placed in a body bag (Photo 7). The Forensic Monitor then examined the soil beneath the blanket, but no further remains were encountered. There was no screening at this site.

The visible cranium and right hand were completely skeletonized. The mandible was edentulous, with one lower molar possibly lost slightly antemortem. The right maxilla had a single molar, premolar, canine, and lateral incisor.

Time spent at this site by the PHR Forensic Monitors was one hour and 20 minutes.

### Postmortem Examination Findings

Forensic Pathologist Dr. Ilija Dobrača performed the postmortem examination of the remains from Raštani 2. The individual was identified as a 76-year-old male civilian. Cause of death was reported as violent homicide.

## VOJNO POLJE

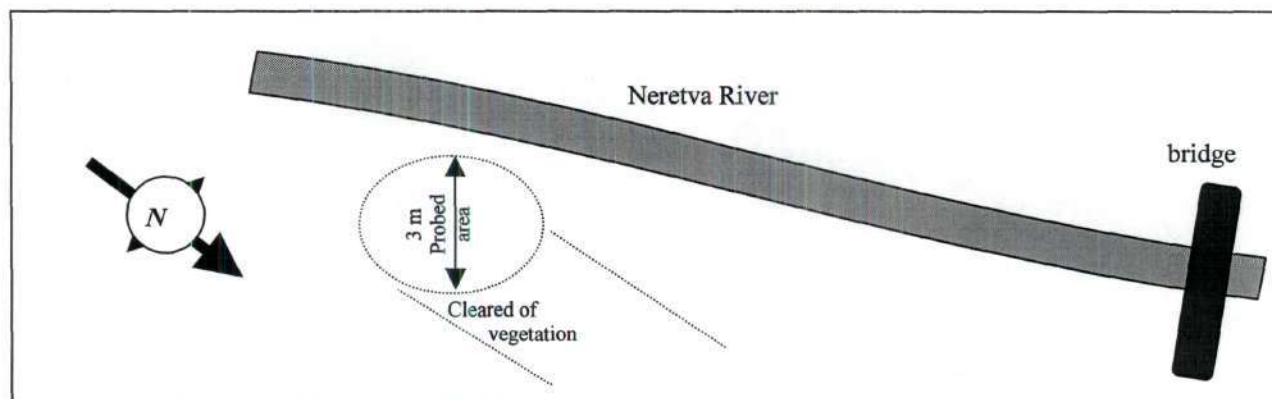
### Site Description

The Vojno Polje site is approximately 0.2 km from Raštani 2, almost directly across the railroad tracks, at Mostar DMA map coordinates 33T YJ 324 096 (Sheet #2681I, Series M709, Edition 11, Scale 1:50,000; Figure 1). This site on the east side of the Neretva River is accessed by driving west off-road from the main thoroughfare (International Route E73), through a field bordering the river. A bridge across the Neretva River was visible approximately 0.5 km to the north. The test area was on a gentle, sloping riverbank covered



## RAŠTANI AND VOJNO EXHUMATIONS

with tall weeds and a large amount of garbage. Nothing in the terrain suggested areas where graves might be located.



**Figure 4: Vojno Polje Sketch Map** (not to scale)

### Site History

According to Mr. Mašović, witnesses believed there were remains of Bosniak individuals buried at this site. However, no one present was sure of the location of the graves.

### Exhumation Process and Condition of Remains

No information regarding mine assessment at this site was made available to the PHR Forensic Monitors.

Under the direction of Mr. Mašović, laborers cleared vegetation from a large swath of the field with rakes and scythes. They then used probes and shovels within an approximately 3 m diameter circle to test for buried remains (Photo 8). Metal detectors were also used to scan the area. Test holes yielded only soil, rocks, old clothing and rubbish.

After one and a quarter hours, the exhumation team abandoned the site, having found no human remains.

### Postmortem Examination Findings

No autopsy was necessary because no remains were recovered from this site.

## RAŠTANI RAILROAD TRACK 1 & 2

### Site Description

Two sites were visited just east of Raštani, north and up-slope of the road between Mostar and Sarajevo (International Route E73) and the railroad tracks. Both are near Mostar DMA

## RAŠTANI AND VOJNO EXHUMATIONS

map coordinates 33T JY 296 061 (Sheet #2681I, Series M709, Edition 11, Scale 1:50,000) on the west side of the Neretva River.

The first of these two sites was a 1.5 m high gravel mound, at least 4 m long and 1.5 m wide. The mound was composed of light colored gravel.

The second area was approximately 3 m to the north and very similar in appearance to the first.

### Site History

Mr. Mašović said only that he was searching for Bosniak victims under the direction of witnesses present.

### Exhumation Process and Condition of Remains

No information was available regarding mine assessment for these two sites.

Four laborers with shovels dug into the first gravel mound, working from the periphery inward (Photo 9). At a depth of approximately 0.5 m, they encountered moist, dark brown soil with a high percentage of gravel. This mound was then abandoned.

The laborers proceeded another 3 m north up the railroad tracks to the second mound, but after some probing and visual inspection, this site was also abandoned.

The exhumation team and the PHR Forensic Monitors spent approximately 35 minutes at these two sites.

### Postmortem Examination Findings

No remains were recovered from this site, so no postmortem examination was necessary.

## Vojno

### Site Description

This site is just over 4 km north-northeast along the railroad tracks from Raštani. It lies on the west side of the Neretva River at Mostar DMA map coordinates 33T YJ 323 102 (Sheet #2681I, Series M709, Edition 11, Scale 1:50,000; Figure 1). From the unnamed main road following the western bank of the river, the site lies to the west of a road sign for the turnoff to Sarajevo Rama. The area examined is just south and upslope of a kiosk and house on a raised plateau, and just downslope and east of the Mostar-Sarajevo Railroad tracks, 38 m from the road. The base of the hill upon which the plateau sits is 28 m from the railroad.

The search area was approximately 25 x 8 m. After the laborers cleared thick, uniform vegetation, eight depressions about 60 cm deep became evident (Figure 5; Photo 10). There were approximately 40 cm between adjacent depressions. No surface remains were visible.



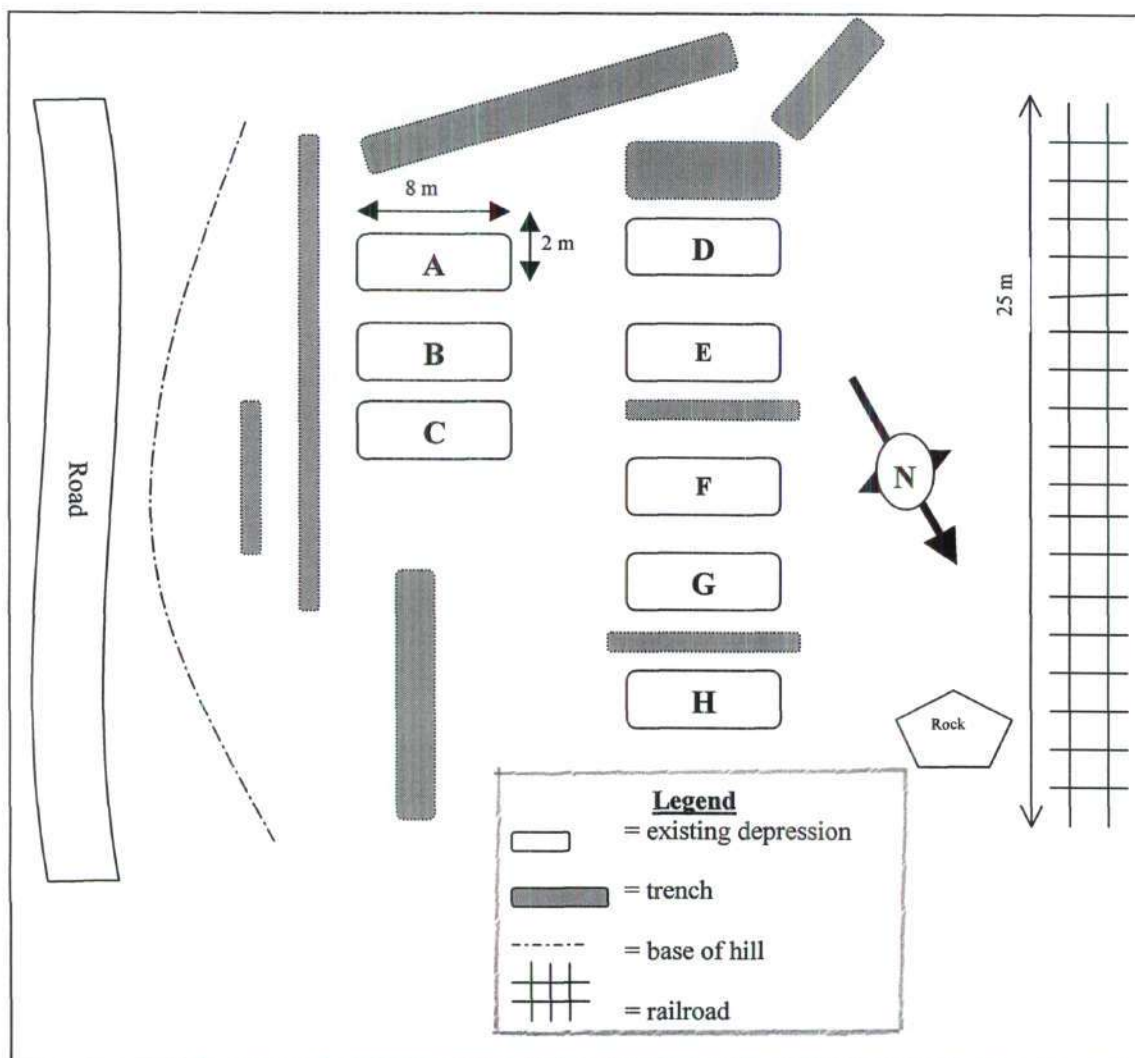


Figure 5: Vojno 0 Sketch Map (not to scale)

### Site History

A witness led Mr. Mašović to this site, claiming that several Bosniaks had been buried there and at least some of the bodies had been subsequently removed.

### Exhumation Process and Condition of Remains

Mine assessment status was unknown for this site.

After clearing of vegetation, a backhoe was brought in to determine whether there were any graves outside of the area of the visible depressions. At this point, part of the exhumation team was called away to Vojno 1 (see below). Mr. Mašović and the PHR Forensic Monitors went along.

When everyone had returned to Vojno 0, a backhoe trench had been dug parallel to the road-side edge of the plateau at the southeastern limit of the existing depressions. Finding nothing

in this trench, the decision was made to use the backhoe to break up the soil in each of the depressions to aid in the search for remains.

The first depression (Figure 5, "A") yielded a large piece of blanket with a sheet of plastic beneath it. Chunks of very decomposed flesh were stuck to one side of the plastic. One laborer shoveled into the bottom of the depression while others sifted through the back dirt by hand and trowel, but no other remains were found.

Shoveling in the depression to the west (Figure 5, "D") revealed a right mandibular ramus and an open and empty silver body bag.

A backhoe trench through the northeasternmost depression (Figure 5, "E") yielded a piece of clear plastic and an orange and white print blanket. A backhoe trench through a depression in the northwest corner of the site (Figure 5, "G") revealed a silver body bag (Photo 11), but no human remains. Another trench through the adjacent depression at the northwestern limit of the plateau (Figure 5, "H") exposed another torn piece of a body bag. A small trench dug between these two depressions yielded one torn, short, white sock.

Other backhoe trenches approximately 50 cm wide and 60 cm deep were dug around the edges of the group of depressions and in between some of the adjacent depressions (Figure 5, shaded areas), but no further remains or body bags were found.

Behind a rock approximately 15 m to the west-northwest and upslope of the depressions, crime technicians found a pair of military pants with cigarettes in the pocket, and a camouflage vest with a knife sheath and holster in another pocket (Photo 12).

All trenches were refilled by the backhoe before departing the site. Decomposed flesh, plastic and blanket pieces were reburied in the trenches. The fully skeletonized mandible fragment was presumably placed in the transport truck with the other human remains, but this was not directly observed by the Forensic Monitors.

The exhumation team spent eight and one half hours at this site. The Forensic Monitors were present for the entire time with the exception of one hour spent at Vojno 1.

### **Postmortem Examination Findings**

No postmortem examination was performed on the single bone fragment recovered from this site.

## **VOJNO 1**

### **Site Description**

This site is on a bluff just above the west bank of the Neretva River. It is less than 1 km southwest of Vojno 0 at Mostar DMA map coordinates 33T YJ 317 095 (Sheet #2681I, Series M709, Edition 11, and Scale 1:50,000; Figure 1). The site can only be accessed by travelling off-road through a field from the unnamed road that parallels the western bank of the Neretva River.



A depression, 140 cm long and 60 cm wide, was readily apparent on approach to the site (Photo 13). A high mound of backdirt covered with sparse vegetation was between the depression and the river bank. Part of a torn plastic sheet, a yellow plastic bottle, a humerus and some right carpal bones were visible on the depression floor at the north end, 60 cm below ground level (Photo 14).

### **Site History**

According to a witness present on site, this grave contained the remains of a Bosniak man who had been shot while a prisoner. The body had allegedly been dumped into the Neretva River and then subsequently removed and placed in this grave by other prisoners.

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

No information was available regarding mine assessment at this site.

Mr. Mašović, SFOR personnel, several diggers, photographer Muhamed Mujkić, and the two Forensic Monitors accompanied a witness to this site. After photographing the remains visible on the floor of the depression, the exhumation team laborers used trowels to further expose them.

The remains recovered from the site were skeletonized and included the entire (though fragmented) mandible, left maxilla, several thoracic vertebrae, one left rib, left humerus, left ulna, left radius, and elements of both hands and feet. Most of the left hand elements were found below the surface and less disturbed than those of the right hand. Foot bones were found at the more southern end (Photo 15). There was a piece of clear plastic within the pit, but no other covering or clothing was found. No evidence was found for more than one individual in this burial. No screen was used at this site to recover smaller remains, but the backdirt was visually inspected as the hole was refilled.

Two laborers with shovels refilled the hole with the backdirt from what was most likely the original burial event. The remains from this site were placed in the back of the PHR vehicle for transport to Vojno 0 and then reloaded into the exhumation team's truck for transport to the Sutina City Mortuary facility in East Mostar.

Travel to this site and exhumation of the remains took one hour. The Forensic Monitors were present for the entire process.

### **Postmortem Examination Findings**

Forensic Pathologist Dr. Ilijas Dobrača performed the postmortem examination of these remains. The individual was determined to be a 37-year-old male. Cause of death was reported as violent homicide via a gunshot wound.





Photo 1: View to north of shovel – testing in the garden at Raštani 1. (Roll 001, exp. 8).



Photo 2: The shallowest remains encountered at Raštani 1; vertebrae near trowel and concrete wall at the top of photo, to the southeast. (Roll 001, exp. 11).



## RAŠTANI AND VOJNO EXHUMATIONS



Photo 3: All elements exhumed from the garden at Raštani 1. (Roll 001, exp. 21).



Photo 4: Amor Mašović searching inside the house at Raštani 1. Photo taken from doorway, facing northwest. (Roll 001, exp. 16).



Photo 5: Cleared ground within a ring of trees at Raštani 2, facing west. (Roll 001, exp. 23).



Photo 6: Shoveling into Raštani 2 grave, facing west. (Roll 002, exp.1).



## RAŠTANI AND VOJNO EXHUMATIONS



Photo 7: Human remains wrapped in orange – print blanket at Raštani 2. (Roll 002, exp. 9).



Photo 8: View toward the west of shovel testing at Vojno Polje on the east side of the Neretva River. (Roll 002, exp. 17).



RAŠTANI AND VOJNO EXHUMATIONS



Photo 9: View to the northwest of digging into the gravel mound at Raštani Railroad Track 1. (Roll 002, exp. 20).



Photo 10: View to the north of depression at Vojno 0. (Roll 003, exp. 19).





Photo 11: Empty body bag unearthed from depression at Vojno 0. (Roll 004, exp. 1).



Photo 12: Clothing found behind a rock at Vojno 0. Photo label is oriented toward the southwest. (Roll 003, exp. 24).



## RAŠTANI AND VOJNO EXHUMATIONS



Photo 13: View of Vojno 1 upon approach from the west. (Roll 003, exp. 4).



Photo 14: Human remains lying on the floor of the grave at Vojno 1. The arm bones are in the northern end of the grave. (Roll 003, exp. 11).





Photo 15: All elements recovered from Vojno 1. (Roll 003, exp. 14).

## **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.