H120 The Work of the ICMP in the Detection, Excavation, Documentation, and Analysis of Clandestine Graves Relating to the 1995 Fall of Srebrenica: A Review of Activities and Challenges Encountered

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand how forensic activities conducted by the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) have contributed to the detection, excavation, documentation, and analysis of clandestine graves relating to the Fall of Srebrenica 1995.

This presentation will impact the forensic community by increasing understanding of how best practices in forensic archaeology and evidentiary recording can be applied to a complex series of mass graves to result in historical documentation and enable the large scale re- association and identification of victims.

Investigations into alleged mass killings related to the Fall of Srebrenica in Eastern Bosnia began in earnest following the release of aerial imagery by the U.S. Government. Evidence collected through humanitarian and judicial inquiries confirmed that several mass executions had occurred in areas surrounding the town of Srebrenica which were at the time under the control of Bosnian Serb forces. Each execution was reported to have involved many hundreds of individuals with an overall estimate of ~8,000. The victims were subsequently buried in various primary mass graves located at or in the near vicinity of the execution sites. The following months saw Bosnian Serb forces return to the primary sites and, in an attempt to destroy any potential forensic evidence, the graves were crudely exhumed using heavy machinery and the victims reburied in multiple clandestine secondary graves in many different locations throughout Eastern and North Eastern Bosnia. This resulted in significant postmortem trauma demonstrated by high fragmentation, disarticulation, and commingling rates amongst the remains and between different graves and deposits.

For over a decade, graves have been located mainly by testimonies provided by survivors, eyewitnesses, and also perpetrators. Technical strategies employed by the International Criminal Tribunal for foramer Yugoslavia (ICTY), the ICMP, and other investigative teams to detect and confirm sites have included the use of invasive techniques such as probing and test trenching, as well as non-invasive techniques such as aerial and satellite imagery analysis. Ground teams have primarily relied on the visual identification of disturbance patterns during systematic ground searches, GIS analyses, and to a lesser degree, the use of selective geophysical techniques such as resistivity and ground penetrating radar.

The excavation of Srebrenica-related graves has enabled the implementation of a significantly standardized yet methodologically flexible set of procedures based on integrated principles of forensic archaeology, forensic anthropology, and crime scene processing. The overall goal of this approach is to maximize the collection and documentation of all human remains, forensic artifacts and site features for the purposes of establishing an objective historical record, supporting the criminal justice process, and contributing to the victim identification process.

Accurate and detailed documentation is critical to the excavation process and is implemented by the ICMP via the application of global positioning systems, 3D surveying, and a suite of tailored recovery and chain of custody forms, supplemented by digital imagery and extensive note taking. Substantial post-excavation data management and analysis, together with computer-generated mapping results not only aids in accountability of the excavation strategy itself but also in the determination of intra- and inter- grave characteristics and variability, and ultimately in event reconstruction. The ICMP has developed a comprehensive forensic database software application (fDMS) which includes a module to manage all data related to field activities.

Despite the significant progress made towards the excavation of all known Srebrenica-related graves over the years, there have arisen a number of political, operational, and technical obstacles and limitations – many of which persist to the present day. Some relate to difficulties inherent in working in an immediate post-conflict environment, with the necessary and desirable involvement of nascent governmental/institutional structures that provide the context of rule of law and applicable jurisdictional standards. Others are based purely on practical aspects of the infrastructure required to excavate and process several thousand sets of remains. It is important to note that in its forensic archaeological work, the role of the ICMP is to provide technical assistance to authorities under whose auspices the excavations are officially conducted.

For the past nine years, the ICMP has provided technical assistance to local and international authorities in the assessment and excavation of over 250 Srebrenica-related sites. This has resulted in the recovery of

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thousands of partial and complete sets of human remains and artifacts of forensic significance. This presentation will review the sources of background information, utility of detection methods, benefits to standardized yet flexible excavation and documentation strategies, and results of field activities as they pertain to the most complex grave assemblages relating to the Fall of Srebrenica.

Forensic Archaeology, Srebrenica, Mass Grave

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