



## Physical Anthropology Section – 2010

### H127 Mapping Forensic Evidence Onto the Story of Srebrenica: Augmenting the Historical Record Through Analysis of Archaeology, Anthropology, and DNA

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand how forensic activities, conducted by the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) since 2001, are integrated to augment the historical record relating to war crimes and human rights violations resulting from the fall of Srebrenica

This presentation will impact the forensic community by serving as an example of multi-disciplinary amalgamation of data to objectively reconstruct a large-scale genocidal event within a post-conflict setting.

By July of 1995, over 25,000 Bosnian Muslim refugees had overwhelmed the United Nations designated "Safe Haven" in Srebrenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). On July 11, the United Nations controlled zone fell to the Army of Republika Srpska (VRS) forces, resulting in the largest mass murder in Europe since World War

II. According to many witnesses, investigative reports and accumulated lines of evidence – and as detailed in multiple war crimes/crimes against humanity indictments – approximately 8,100 men and boys were killed, either during flight from Srebrenica on foot across mountainous terrain or when separated from a larger civilian contingent and systematically executed. The detainees were taken to various execution sites and killed, mainly by gunshot. The victims were buried in large primary mass graves within or near the executions sites. In order to hide evidence of the atrocities and prevent discovery of the remains of the victims, the primary graves were crudely exhumed, over several months, by heavy machinery and the victims deposited in multiple secondary mass graves scattered throughout remote countryside. This caused the remains of the victims to become fragmented and commingled, with the partial remains of many victims being deposited in two or more separate secondary graves. These actions significantly confounded the detection and recovery effort and have necessitated an integrative approach in the detection of mass grave locations and the determination of linkages between graves.

The ICMP has provided technical assistance to the BiH and international authorities in the assessment and excavation of some 250 Srebrenica-related grave sites since 2001. This has resulted in the recovery of thousands of partial and complete sets of human remains and artifacts of forensic significance. Furthermore, the ICMP has provided technical assistance in the application of a DNA-led process towards identification that integrates pathology, anthropology, DNA, and circumstantial evidence (such as personal effects). As of August 2009, the ICMP has revealed the identity of 6,186 persons missing from the fall of Srebrenica, by analyzing nuclear DNA profiles extracted from bone samples of exhumed mortal remains and matching them to the DNA profiles obtained from blood samples provided by relatives of the missing.

The complex nature of the Srebrenica graves has defined all aspects of the search, recovery, and identification efforts. Since the remains of single individuals may be scattered amongst numerous locations, there are profound consequences for reassociation of body parts, with concurrent repercussions regarding legal case closure, family notification and acceptance of the identification, repatriation, and dignified burial. Thus, analysis of evidentiary linkage between graves is important not only in establishing a historical record, but in prioritization of grave excavation, so that series of interconnected graves are completed together to enable closure of individual cases.

This presentation will outline the patterns of evidentiary connections within and between Srebrenica-associated graves that have been documented as a result of the ICMP's work, and summarize how this evidence contributes to and fits with the larger reconstruction of the events associated with the fall of Srebrenica that comes from a variety of sources. More detailed analysis of selected grave assemblages will be highlighted as examples with focus on DNA-matched body parts recovered from specific deposits within graves to assist in reconstructing the sequence of events. These links have served in criminal justice proceedings as supplementary evidence supporting the scale and organization of the executions and the subsequent attempts to conceal the evidence.

#### **Srebrenica, Event Reconstruction, Integration of Forensic Sciences**