

Melissa Connor
and Douglas Scott

Archeologists and the United Nations Tribunals

Not only are archeologists assisting the Croatian government in locating missing people (see Owsley, *et al.*, page 33), but archeologists are also assisting with medico-legal investigations of the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Because these excavations are on-going homicide investigations, they cannot be described in the detail presented in the Owsley, *et al.*, article. The work we have done for the ICTY and the International Tribunal for Rwanda (ITR) is in support of criminal investigations relating to extra-judicial executions that have occurred in these countries during civil unrest. The ICTY and ITR are internationally sanctioned judicial bodies investigating alleged genocide and war crimes in former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. The Tribunals are gathering evidence to indict and prosecute alleged perpetrators. Archeologists and archeological site documentation techniques are a significant part of these international criminal investigations.

Through the Physicians for Human Rights (PHR), an organization that completes forensic investigations for the UN, the archeologists work with other PHR scientists and the UN forensic specialists, as well as lawyers and investigators from the Hague. During 1996, archeologists assisted in site documentation and grave exhumations throughout the Srebrenica area of Bosnia and in the Croatian/Serb transition zone near Vukovar, as well as in the African country of Rwanda. This year, over 1,300 bodies were exhumed for the UN investigations. Archeologists from the United States involved in this effort include Rebecca Saunders, Louisiana State University, and Patrick Meyers, as well as three archeologists from the National Park Service's Midwest Archeological Center—Douglas Scott, Melissa Connor, and Ralph Hartley. The NPS archeologists were requested to assist in the investigations in Rwanda and in Croatia because of their skills in computerized site documentation and mapping as well as photographic documenta-

tion. Archeologists assist in locating clandestine grave sites, direct the excavation of the sites, and are responsible for site and evidence documentation, and mapping. The excavation team usually includes at least one archeologist, several forensic anthropologists, and a backhoe and operator. Many of the forensic anthropologists also have an archeological background. The general location of the graves had been previously determined by UN investigators and the sites verified by UN Senior Forensic Anthropologist William Haglund.

The general methodology starts with the archeologists assisting the team in locating ground features consistent with a mass grave. Next, test trenches are excavated with a combination of the backhoe and hand tools until human remains are located. When remains are located, the grave is treated as a feature. The edges of the grave are determined, usually using the backhoe to trench around the edge of the bodies. The top of the mass of bodies is uncovered, to the point possible without allowing the fleshed remains to dry out. This overall view is then photographed and mapped and body removal begins. One person works as photographer and documenter, photographing each body and filling out a form recording basic data. The body, or at least the crania, are mapped, with the method varying as to the site, although the preferred method is using a total station transit and electronic mapping (we use the Sokkia total station, Sokkia Map, and AutoDesk AutoCad programs). When documentation is complete, the body is placed into a body bag and removed from the grave into a refrigerated storage unit. These units are later transported to the morgues for a formal medico-legal autopsy.

The skills archeologists bring to a medico-legal investigation are critical in documenting how a clandestine grave was dug, the method of body disposal carried out, and in documenting physical evidence associated with the event, such as the locations of expended cartridge cases and bullets. The evidence collected and documented by the archeologists, along with the testimony of forensic anthropologists and forensic pathologists, will be used by the courts in the prosecutions of those accused of genocide and war crimes. Applied archeology/anthropology, in the form of archeological documentation methods, is becoming integral to forensic investigations on this international stage.

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