

# Making sense of Srebrenica

---



AFP Federal Agent Dean Manning and the team of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia have ensured justice for the victims of the 1995 Srebrenica massacre.



AFP Federal Agent Dean Manning gives evidence at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia.



AFP Federal Agent Dean Manning in Bosnia.

Below: Muslim men, women and children were taken away on buses by Bosnian Serb forces.

Bottom: Blindfolds – such as this one found in the Kozluk mass grave – were crucial evidence for the International Criminal Tribunal trial.



On Thursday 2 August 2001 AFP Federal Agent Dean Manning stood at the side of an open mass grave in Srebrenica in eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina.

It was a day he and other investigators had meticulously worked towards – and were continuing to do so – as part of a difficult investigation of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) into the July 1995 murder of more than 7500 Bosnian-Muslim men and boys in and around Srebrenica during the Bosnian War.

Initially arriving in Bosnia in August 1998 on a leave of absence from the AFP, Federal Agent Manning had already been part of the search for and exhumation of a number of large mass graves and had provided evidence in genocide trials against senior members of the Bosnian Serb military.

Now, he listened to the radio as Presiding ICTY Judge Almiro Rodrigues sentenced former Bosnian Serb Army Major General Radislav Krstic to 43 years in prison in what was the first conviction in Europe for ‘Genocide’ for the horrific crimes.

With less than 10 survivors to give witness testimony about the other accused perpetrators of the Srebrenica massacre, it would be up to Federal Agent Manning and the members of the ICTY team to continue to make the evidence count as part of ‘Operation Casper’.

Bodies are carried from the Zeleni Jadar mass grave site in Srebrenica.



## Back in The Hague

Fast forward 16 years and Federal Agent Manning finds himself back in familiar territory – Wednesday 22 November 2017 brings the sentencing of Bosnian military leader Ratko Mladic, who has been convicted of Genocide for ordering the Srebrenica massacre. He receives life imprisonment.

This time Federal Agent Manning is at ICTY headquarters in The Hague – and listening to the verdict from an annexe room within the building. Having flown there especially, he did not place himself in the main court room – leaving more space for the relatives still living in the aftermath of the massacre.

In all, he had worked at the ICTY during a six year leave of absence from the AFP from 1998 to 2004, predominantly on the Srebrenica genocide, as well as crimes committed by Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic in Croatia.

“Milosevic was the serving head of a country, and we took him from Serbia to The Hague to face justice,” he said.

“To try someone like that was new stuff – even Nuremberg wasn’t at that sort of level. But in the end there were too many charges brought against him.

“Trying to prove a country-wide, organised criminal enterprise to massacre people takes a lot of witnesses and evidence – and he died before the matter was dealt with.”

The ICTY trials were complex. The law had not been tested and the judges were from a mix of common and civil law backgrounds.

Late in the conflict, too, the Serbian military had moved many Srebrenica related bodies from primary mass graves to secondary ones – making the recovery of those bodies and the chain of evidence even more challenging.

It was also difficult to bring witnesses to The Hague.

“One older woman flown in from Sarejevo had never been on a plane before, never been out of the woods before. In her case she had a bag of potatoes – she didn’t know if she’d be fed.

“When I first got there my ICTY team leader was asked in an interview for a European paper ‘what would we achieve?’ This was very early on, when Krstic was arrested – and he said he didn’t know, but in the end ‘if we just made it difficult for them to sleep at night, then maybe we’d achieve something’.”

“Well, I left the court after the Mladic verdict and I thought to myself ‘I’m not sure he’s not sleeping at night, but at least I know where he’s sleeping for the rest of his life. And that’s some comfort for me and hopefully some comfort for the victim’s families.’”

Giving evidence to the ICTY, while confronting, has been satisfying.

“When I gave evidence against Milosevic particularly – he was horrible – and I was of course nervous.

“It’s a big issue, a big forum and it’s being broadcast – literally millions of people in Bosnia and Serbia and in Croatia are watching you give evidence. He said to me ‘well these people committed suicide’... I got angry and turned that into a focus on the evidence I had to give.”

Mladic, too, was a difficult personality throughout his trial.

“He was an arrogant, oafish man who could do what he wanted – and we made him sit in court and listen to the witnesses and the evidence,” Federal Agent Manning said.

“Just when I finished giving evidence he got really angry – swearing and carrying on, telling his lawyers that I was an ‘f-ing’ this and f-ing that’. I got a great deal of satisfaction out of that.

“It was good to go to The Hague for the verdict – I went over by myself because my family wanted me to go – and insisted I go – because they knew how important it was to me.

“To sit there and listen to the judge say that this man who committed those crimes, who made it happen, who drove it – get life imprisonment and was shown to be guilty of those things.

“You sit there and you say to yourself ‘it doesn’t bring anyone back, it doesn’t change anything, it doesn’t stop all that pain. But the person in charge of the whole country’s military – the leader – we got him and we made him sit in the witness dock and we made him listen to all of it’.”



**Verdict at the International Criminal Tribunal:** Former Bosnian military leader Ratko Mladic reacts as he is convicted of genocide and sentenced to life imprisonment for ordering the July 1995 Srebrenica massacre.

## History unfolds

Until 1991, Bosnia and Herzegovina was a part of the Republic of Yugoslavia. As the break-up of Yugoslavia progressed, the three main ethnic groups of Bosnian Serbs, Croats and Muslims began a war which lasted into 1995.

In April 1993, a UN resolution saw the creation of an enclave called ‘Srebrenica’ to protect the Muslim population, with a Dutch UN battalion providing security for the area.

Eventually encompassing several hundred kilometres – including the village of Potocari – it housed up to 30,000 people, and was surrounded by Bosnian Serb Forces with entry via armed checkpoints only. Despite the UN’s mandate to demilitarise Srebrenica, Bosnian Muslim forces launched armed raids from the enclave into the surrounding Serbian villages.

Bosnian Serb forces eventually attacked, and on 11 July 1995, General Ratko Mladic and his troops entered Srebrenica. The city was largely abandoned as the women, children and some elderly men had fled to Potocari. Meanwhile, up to 15,000 men and boys gathered in the area of ‘Susanjari’ (also within the enclave) with the intention of fighting through to Muslim held territory.

The number of shoes found in mass graves gave an indication of the number of bodies in the immediate area.



Tens of thousands of those in Potocari were subsequently removed and transported by buses to other Muslim-held territories. The remaining men and boys were taken prisoner under the guise of screening them as war criminals and transported to schools, warehouses, community halls, farms and dams.

Over the next several days, all 7,500 of them were executed in a planned and coordinated military endeavour that was supported by elements of local civilian and police authorities.

To accommodate their bodies, at least ten primary mass graves were created using military and civilian earth moving equipment. At one massacre site – the Branjevo Military Farm – not only was this equipment visible from aerial view, but the tracks of the buses

used to bring the victims to their death could also be seen.

Following the public release of aerial images of the massacre sites, the offenders launched a secret operation in September and October 1995 to open the primary mass graves at night, load the bodies into trucks and relocate them to 34 smaller secondary graves in even more remote locations.

This further disassociated their bodies, leaving the remains of some victims spread across both sites. It presented a complicated evidentiary scenario for Federal Agent Manning, who used his findings and thousands of artefacts, identification documents, and other forms of evidence recovered from the graves to support the prosecution of offenders to the ICTY.


## Staying committed

“It’s very easy to stay committed to this work when you see the victim cost,” says Federal Agent Manning.

“When I went to my first mass grave and opened up the ground I saw skulls and bones – and there were shoes on the surface of the grave.

“So I’d see 4,5,6,8... 10 shoes and I’d see bodies and then look at them and go ‘that’s not just one body stuffed in a hole, that’s 100... and now there’s 1,000 bodies. They used to be people – and someone decided one day to kill them all.

“When you see that sort of stuff – when you see an individual in a grave with their hands bound and he’s blindfolded and shot in the back of the head – and his friends are the



When you see that sort of stuff – when you see an individual in a grave with their hands bound and he’s blindfolded and shot in the back of the head – and his friends are the same... you think ‘wow, I’ve got to do something about all of this’

same... you think 'wow, I've got to do something about all of this?'

"You can't be too emotional or you can't do your job. So you go to a mass gravesite and you think 'how do I turn this into evidence and link it to other parts of the investigation?'"

"It's pretty confronting, it's very difficult and you think 'wow, that's a piece of evidence', there's a blind fold there with a bullet through it...or you can see that the configuration of the bodies means that they were thrown into the grave – whereas at another grave you see that the people were made to kneel in broken glass and were shot.

"And there was evidence of intent – Serbian Military police went and scoped out areas that would become mass graves and execution points.

"You can see that – that's evidence and I found that very helpful in terms of dealing with it: 'take this picture and make it real and show the court'."

### Coming to terms

Between direct work on the ground and numerous requests to give video and in person evidence, Federal Agent Manning has lived the Srebrenica massacre – on and off – for close to 20 years.

"It's hard to give it up and not think about it anymore," he said.

"Every time I'd go back to give evidence – you'd think 'I've got to immerse myself in this, I've got to learn it all again, I've got to know it all, I've got to be able to answer every single question'. So I've never got away from it, and I never wanted to.

"I thought that I could draw a line through all of the work that I've done there, but I don't think I will, I don't think I want to, and I don't think I can. I was part of something that was unique and a defining moment in my policing career.



### Post Script

During his investigations Federal Agent Manning's team assisted with the creation of two documentaries on Srebrenica – one for the BBC and the other for National Geographic.

On BBC 4's 'A Cry from the Grave' they helped tell the story of the victims, even picking up the camera and filming when crew members couldn't accompany them.

In National Geographic's production 'Savage Evidence in Srebrenica', Federal Agent Manning discussed the identification of victims uncovered in the mass graves.