

JEFFERSON INSTITUTE'S MILITARY ARCHIVES PROJECT IN SERBIA

From Ruins of War, a Nation's History Preserved

From bottom left, clockwise: Exterior view of the Zarkovo archive that houses Serbia's digitized military documents; a double security gate protects the archive's basement storage; fragile documents require painstaking restoration before they can be digitized; Maj. Rade Pavlovic, the digitization supervisor, in the storage depot; a scanned document is displayed on a computer screen at Zarkovo.

Analysis by Joan McQueeney Mitric and Djordje Padejski

BELGRADE — A massive excavation of secret graves and long-shrouded historic military files is under way in Serbia. In a potentially transformative convergence of political will and cutting-edge digital tools, this fledgling democracy may finally get the knowledge it needs to confront and freely debate its hidden and often horrific past.

Consider:

- A special commission on secret graves set up in 2010 to find and document those killed by Josip Broz Tito's reviled secret military police has unearthed 190 mass graves at 23 sites across Serbia to date. In January it reported that at least 22,000 people were executed, most without trials in the brutal post World War II years.
- Special prosecutors for 1990s war crimes have opened 35 criminal cases since July 2003, all stemming from the bloody, fratricidal wars of secession that ripped the former Yugoslavia asunder between 1991 and 1999. To date, 61 people stand con-

One in a series of independently reported articles reviewing Knight Foundation's own grant making. To see previous stories in the series, go to www.kflinks.com/ra

victed. Many more await trial.

- Balkan scholars and Serbian historians are beginning to revise academic works and textbooks based on recently opened and publicized archival materials.
- Ordinary Serbs are seeking the truth behind stories their grandfathers once dared whisper only in the night.

This movement toward truth and reconciliation is spurred partly by Serbia's aspirations to join the European Union, and more concretely by the new, searchable, state-of-the-art Serbian Military Archive at the Zarkovo base 40 minutes from Belgrade. Eventually, this archive will preserve some 40 million pages of

ANALYSIS HIGHLIGHTS

THE CHALLENGE

In Serbia, a fledgling democracy emerging from 70 years of despotic rule, military records were off-limits, obscuring a history clouded by military abuses. Records of war crimes, mass killings of unarmed civilians and other horrors were hidden behind the walls of the Ministry of Defense, or scattered haphazardly around Belgrade. After the fall of autocrat Slobodan Milosevic in 2000, Serbia gathered the political will to open its records to public scrutiny. But the archive was in shambles, endangering efforts by the Ministry of Defense to bring its past activities into the sunlight.

THE PROJECT

Building on a \$50,000 seed grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation in 2006, the nonprofit Jefferson Institute designed a system to convert the military's 40 million paper documents into searchable, digital format. Jefferson leveraged Knight's grant to raise an additional \$1 million, mostly from the Norwegian government, to build the software, purchase equipment and pay a staff of 35 to digitize nearly four million records by December 2010, when the ministry took over. Today, users can keyword search to access thousands of records a day.

THE IMPACT

Prosecutors have uncovered evidence to prosecute war criminals. In one case alone, 14 paramilitary thugs were charged with the deaths of 70 unarmed noncombatants on evidence found in the archive. A government commission is using the records to find secret mass graves of citizens gone missing in the country's many years of political killings. The news media is covering these revelations, providing a public airing of long-held secrets.

Serbia's open-records project will be replicated in neighboring Bosnia, building on Serbia's experience and money from other donors. The archive digitization software will be open-source, so that it can be used freely by others.

However, Serbia's showcase archive is controlled by the ministry, so what is put in it remains under tight control and records remain classified for 50 years. Not enough has been done to market the archives, so they are underused, especially by journalists who lack training to mine the archives and to verify information they find there.

ABOUT THIS SERIES

The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation commissions independent journalists to write occasional articles reviewing its grant making and program strategies. Veteran reporters examine grant documents, conduct interviews and offer their perspective on the lessons learned and impact of Knight-supported projects in stories published online and in print.

This report was written by Joan McQueeney Mitric, a freelance journalist, editor and media trainer who divides her year between Washington, D.C., and Serbia, where she covered the October 2000 overthrow of Slobodan Milosevic as a German Marshall Fund reporting fellow. Her work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *International Herald Tribune*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Mother Jones*, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* and scores of other publications here and in Belgrade, Serbia.

Djordje Padejski, a freelance investigative reporter, reported from Belgrade. Padejski is the founder of the Center for Investigative Reporting in Serbia and has worked on global investigations with the Center for Public Integrity in Washington, D.C., and the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, a network of investigative organizations in Eastern Europe. He has also written for Global Integrity in Washington, D.C., and the Serbian publications, *Blic*, *Vreme* and *Republika* magazine, among others.

The series is edited by Judy J. Miller, who oversaw Pulitzer Prize winning coverage while managing editor of *The Miami Herald*. She is former president of Investigative Reporters and Editors.

Nikola Fific, staff reporter for the Belgrade daily *Novosti*, shot the pictures, or they were provided by the Jefferson Institute.

The package was designed by former *Miami Herald* graphics editor Hiram Henriquez, now president of H2H Graphics & Design.

For more information about the series, please visit www.knightfoundation.org.

previously guarded military records that until 2006 lay moldering in basements and scattered in complete disarray across a city still rebuilding from NATO's 1999 bombing.

The brainchild of the Jefferson Institute — which takes its mission statement from Thomas Jefferson's challenge "to pursue truth, wherever it may lead" — the quest to develop an archive and digital-search tool began in 2006 with an early seed grant of \$50,000 from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

Early document preservation and data retrieval done with Knight's grant was so promising that the government of Norway pledged \$900,000 over three years; Canada and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund followed suit, donating \$7,000 and \$130,000 respectively.

Some four years on, Serbia's special prosecutors of 1990s war crimes, as well as those investigating Tito-era extra-judicial killings, are using the archive to speed their research. Perhaps most exciting of all, a new open-source archive using many of the database and digital search tools created for Serbia's military archive — will be replicated in Sarajevo, Bosnia. But with crucial

differences: the Bosnian archive will be a civilian-controlled resource library and the software design will be such that it can be replicated and used for free by archives around the globe.

The Bosnian archive project represents a "180-degree turn" from 1993 when Serbian paramilitary forces were shelling Sarajevo's National Library, destroying Bosnia's mosques and effectively "trying to wipe out its history. Now Serbia is helping to restore it," said

Aaron Presnall, president of the Jefferson Institute.

So what exactly can Serbia's military archive do that puts it ahead of the curve compared to many archives around the globe?

For starters, the archive took Serbia's 40 million military documents, none of which had been digitized, and began to systematically organize and scan them. Starting with the oldest from 1716, and proceeding systematically until today, when almost four million military cables, memos, field maps, letters, discharge papers, battle plans and other records are now in an



Ministry of Defense, shown after its bombing in 1999, housed many of Serbia's military records. Those and other documents remained dispersed and in shambles after NATO's war on Yugoslavia.

accessible, searchable form. This historical collection is simultaneously linked to a larger metadata schematic that can be annotated by researchers as they work, Presnall said.

This means instead of spending days weeding through fragile, oversized paper tomes, researchers can now flip through as many as 6,000 digital documents a day, and access a trove of archival military records dating from the Kingdom of Serbia in the 18th century, through both World Wars, the rise and rule of Yugoslavia's Socialist dictator Josip Broz Tito (1944-1980) and on into the tyrannical, often bloody reign of President Slobodan Milosevic (1989-2000).

All this with a few clicks on the user-friendly interface while sitting at a computer in the archive library at the Zarkovo military base. Most remarkably, many documents are searchable in a way similar to a Google search, using keywords that search the full text of documents.

"We shrunk the time it takes to search and retrieve a document from six months to six seconds," said Jefferson Institute's



*Aaron Presnall,
president, Jefferson
Institute*

TIMELINE

1918

Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes formed following World War I; its name was changed to Yugoslavia in 1929.



1941-1945

Nazi Germany invades and occupies Yugoslavia. After Nazis driven out, Yugoslavia becomes a Socialist Federal Republic under Josip Broz Tito.



Human rights activist Sonja Licht, a founding member of the Jefferson Institute, in her office at the Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence.



Edward C. Papenfuse, Maryland's chief archivist, admires the Zarkovo system but has voiced concerns about military control.

Presnall, who is convinced that the creation of a digitized trove of documents — transparent to all users and easier to contextualize — will prove much more valuable in the long term than a WikiLeaks-style dump.

There's one big caveat: documents are classified for 50 years. So users who want to see records after 1961 must get special permission from Serbia's Ministry of Defense (MOD). Many historians, and international and local prosecutors have done just that. Others have found such access tough sledding.

For Sonja Licht, a leading Serbian human rights activist who heads the Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence, "The archive is a marvelous technological tool in the fight for greater transparency."

"With this new archive, our military history is no longer hidden behind thick walls where we can only guess what's in the record," said Licht, a founding member of the Jefferson Institute and whose husband spent two years in jail in the 1980s for his support of student dissidents.

Edward C. Papenfuse, chief archivist for the state of Maryland who has visited the Serbian archive twice, is bullish on the potential global reach of Serbia's new archive tool. "Really, it has no peer in the holistic archival sense," he said, noting that this archive outstrips many in the United States, where city and state

records remain largely indexed paper collections.

Pleased as he is with the archive's search and security architecture, Papenfuse, like other open-records advocates and media observers, has lingering concerns about its accessibility to ordinary users, given that it is now housed within a military base and controlled by the staff there. "Ultimately, what is put into the system is going to be controlled, or scrubbed or censored, by the entity doing the scanning. In this case, the military."

Echoing his concern, Marko Milosevic, a researcher with the Belgrade Center for Security Policy, an NGO committed to greater civilian and military cooperation, said "it is impossible to know what is missing. Today, there is no real oversight about what is, or is not, in the archive."

Jefferson's Presnall acknowledges no one knows exactly what records may have been destroyed by political decree, military commanders or merely eroded by time, but he believes "remnants" of original documents remain. The archival collection is simply "too big" to scrub entirely, he said.

For Ph.D. candidate Ljubinka Skodric, the speed and organization of the archive is definitely helping her research into the closeted history of Yugoslavia's Fascist movement in the late 1930s. But, Skodric says, the archive's location 90 minutes by bus from Belgrade's center city is an automatic "chilling factor" to

TIMELINE

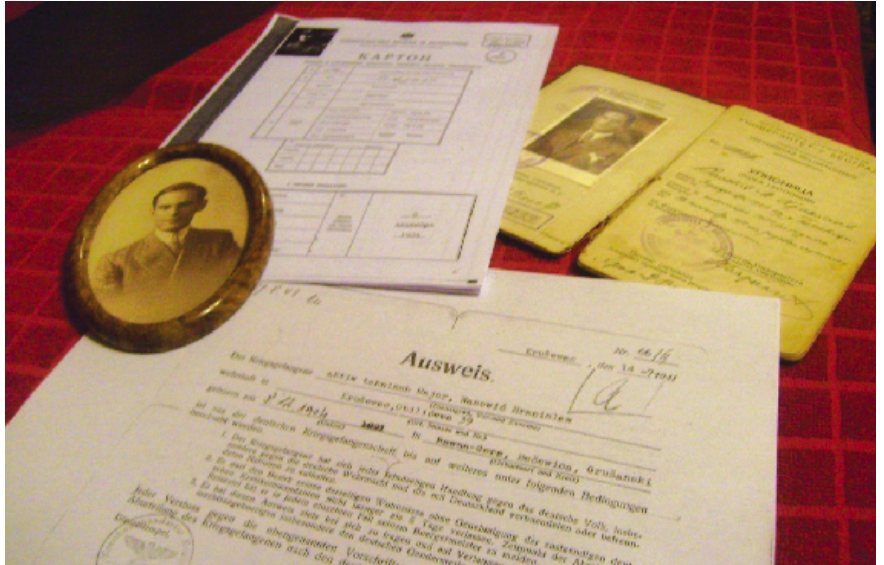
1980

Josip Broz Tito dies after 35 years of iron-fisted rule. Minus his control, nationalist tensions begin to flare within Yugoslavia's six republics: Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Slovenia and Montenegro.



1989

Slobodan Milosevic elected Serbia's president after stoking nationalistic fears over sovereignty of Kosovo, home of Serbia's medieval kingdom. Majority Kosovar Albanians harass Serbs in breakaway effort.



Dusan Vasovic, left, with a pre-WWII photo of his father. At right are copies of documents Vasovic found in Serbia's military archive revealing his father's role in a 1941 coup against Yugoslav officials who signed a secret pact with Hitler's Germany.

would-be users. Requests to the Ministry of Defense to use the archives can take several days to a month, Skodric said.

Acknowledging these concerns, Papenfuss hopes "soon enough, there will be pressure on the Ministry of Defense to open the archives, "perhaps by linking them to places outside the Zarkovo facility. But for now, we have to live with the political realities of the country we're dealing with," he said.



Tanja Miscevic, state secretary to the Ministry of Defense

A thawing in the MOD mind-set may already be afoot. In a recent interview Tanja Miscevic, state secretary of Serbia's Ministry of Defense said, "MOD is seriously considering making more military records available on its official website or over the Internet."

She noted that the archive has attracted numerous military investigators and historians from Germany, Hungary, Bosnia and Norway who are using the archive to gain clarity about their own roles in 20th century Balkan history, and to bring people guilty

of war crimes to justice. Hungarian, Sandor Kepiro, 96, was arrested in December 2010. He is charged with crimes allegedly committed during a 1942 raid by Hungarian Nazi sympathizers on the northern Serbian city of Novi Sad that left more than 1,200 civilians dead.

Secrets from the Grave

Some of the most riveting findings starting to trickle out from the archive's files are the personal stories of ordinary users who are finally learning the secrets their parents and grandparents took to the grave.

When Dusan Vasovic, 75, visited the archives in 2010, he had no idea what he'd find out about his father. When his father died in 1973, his past was buried with him. "I was shocked when I saw my father's name as one of the main figures in a coup" that changed the course of WWII history, Vasovic said.

In Zarkovo's files he learned his father, an army major in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia's forces, was one of the senior officers who refused to go along with a secret pact signed with Hitler's Germany in March 1941. He and his band of like-minded soldiers

TIMELINE

1991

Massive anti-war protests against Milosevic's plans to make war with Croatia and Slovenia bring military tanks, and troops with water cannons and tear gas to Belgrade streets.



1991 - 1993

Slovenia, Macedonia, Croatia and Bosnia announce they will secede from Yugoslavia. Serbia and Montenegro form the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, with Slobodan Milosevic as its leader.



Dobrivoje Tomic, left, examines a cross marking the mass grave site in eastern Serbia where his father may be buried. The pre-WWII portrait at right shows Tomic with his father Dusan. In 1944, Dusan Tomic was “disappeared” by Tito’s reviled secret police. His son, now 80, is looking for his grave with the help of Serbia’s Secret Graves Commission.

took over the offices of the army and navy in Belgrade and supported the coup that brought Serbia firmly into the Allied camp.

“Better graves than slaves,” demonstrators shouted as Vasovic’s father led a group of soldiers from a park to the ministry on Kneza Miloša street. The crowd sang patriotic songs and shouted slogans against Hitler and Mussolini. Vasovic learned for the first time that his father was arrested, jailed for four months and then placed under “house arrest” by German occupation forces, where he lived in fear of being sent off to a labor camp. Vasovic located this information in a secret report (sent to German envoy Victor von Herren in Belgrade) among the Nazi records now part of Serbia’s archive.

Immediately after the war, anyone who wasn’t a card-carrying Communist was hunted down, locked up or killed by Tito’s forces as he consolidated power. Based on what he learned about his

father’s past — Vasovic is convinced his father decided that the only way to protect his family was to renounce any prewar beliefs, stop going to church “and to live out his life as a good Communist.”

There were no dramatic bedside revelations when Vasovic’s father died in 1973. Not only did his stories about his role in the opening days of WWII go with him to the grave, but his sons and grandson never knew that the family patriarch they were burying was a fluent French speaker, who had studied at an elite explosives school in Paris from 1928 to 1930.

Hopes for Justice and Comfort

To revisit post-WWII Yugoslavia is to find a place where ox-carts piled high with bodies of anti-Communist sympathizers rolled through village streets and bludgeoned corpses floated in

TIMELINE

1991 - 1995

Bloody secessionist wars decimate Yugoslav republics of Bosnia and Croatia. More than 300,000 refugees forced to flee to Serbia. Sanctions imposed against Serbia. Dayton Accord in Ohio in 1995 brings end to war. Sanctions lifted.



1997

Parliament elects Milosevic president of the “rump” Yugoslavia (Montenegro and Serbia). Because of term limits, he steps down as Serbian president, the post he won in 1989, in Serbia’s first multiparty vote since WWII.



Workers cover a suspected mass grave in Boljevac, eastern Serbia with a large stone as Dobrivoje Tomic, watches. Tomic is trying to locate the remains of his father, who disappeared in 1944. Bone fragments, right, were found at the site by investigators of Serbia's Secret Graves Commission.

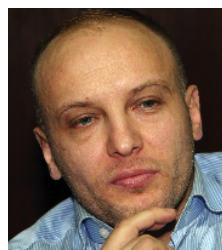
the Danube. People were executed and buried in still-undiscovered mass graves and families had loved ones ripped from home at night never to be seen again. Many living in Serbia today still have no idea what happened to their relatives: where or how they were killed, by whom and where they might be buried.

Today, two different entities are charged with trying to unravel these mysteries: The State Commission for Mass Graves of Those Killed Since September 1944 and the Special Prosecutor for 1990s War Crimes. These investigations into two distinctly horrific and politically repressive eras are giving the archives a meaningful historical role – and hopefully will provide some measure of justice and comfort to descendants of the dead.

Dobrivoje Tomic, 80, a retired dentist, was 13, when the secret police dragged his father from their house one dark night in 1944. Tomic said his father, Dusan, was “neither a soldier nor a politician.” His apparent crime? He was a successful businessman who owned oil and tin factories and a printing press in eastern Serbia.

Tomic said that after 59 days in jail, his father “disappeared.” The Communists confiscated the home he shared with his moth-

er, Radmila, and she was sentenced to death. Somehow, mother and son escaped to Belgrade and then to Austria and Germany, where Tomic studied and worked until he finally felt safe to return home and to search for his father's grave. In 2010, Dobrivoje



Historian Srdjan Cvetkovic heads Serbia's Secret Graves Commission

Tomic told his story to the Secret Graves Commission.

His account, along with records in the military archive, will be used to try to learn his father's fate. Tragically, investigators last year unearthed dozens of skeletons in a mass grave near the Tomic family home. When the ground thaws this spring, exhumations will begin again, and Tomic hopes to find his father's remains among them, if only to finally close a sad chapter.

Srdjan Cvetkovic, the historian who heads the Secret Graves Commission, said much of the hidden story behind a “massive and well-organized campaign of terror by Communists” lies in the military archives. The commission wants to locate, mark and,

TIMELINE

1998 - March 1999

Kosovo Liberation Army rebels against Serbian rule, attacking police, institutions and Serb civilians in a violent bid for independence. Serbia launches brutal crackdown. U.S. and NATO send monitors.

**1999**

Defiance by Milosevic over Kosovo sparks a 78-day NATO war against Serbia. In Kosovo, 300,000 Albanians, Serbs and Roma flee to Macedonia. In June, Serbia withdraws and Kosovo becomes a U.N. protectorate.

where possible, exhume the long-missing remains. Only then will the country's dirty linen from 65 years ago, get the airing it needs for Serbia to move closer to a true democracy, he said.

Perhaps most cathartic for citizens of the former Yugoslavia, are investigations under way by the Special Prosecutor for 1990s War Crimes. Prosecutors would not comment for this report because of pending criminal cases, but their indictments directly cite records from the military archives. They make for grisly reading.

- On Nov. 28, 2007, 14 Serbian paramilitary thugs and soldiers in the Yugoslav National Army were charged with the October 1991 deaths of 70 unarmed noncombatants living in the Croatian village of Lovas. According to the indictment, soldiers killed 21 civilians as they captured the village in a random and sadistic firefight. During the siege, another 27 civilians were physically abused, tortured and killed in an improvised jail. Twenty more civilians were killed while being marched across a minefield.

- Bosnian Croat commander Ilija Jurisic is appealing his recent conviction for killing 50 unarmed soldiers and civilian truck drivers and wounding 44 more. According to the indictment based on records from the military archives, Jurisic ordered a mortar and rocket-propelled grenade attack on an unarmed Yugoslav National Army column as it withdrew from the city of Tuzla.

Toward an Open Society

So, why is it important that cases like these are vetted in the press or tried in open courts? And what does it have to do with the Knight Foundation's grant to the Jefferson Institute? For, one thing, the entire Balkan region has lived under despotic leaders whose goal for nearly 70 years was to keep history under wraps. Following in Tito's repressive footsteps, Slobodan Milosevic used many of the same tactics when he took power in 1989. He jailed journalists who criticized the regime and ordered the assassination of a prominent editor, whose murder remains unsolved. When hundreds of thousands protested his war strategies in Belgrade in 1991, they were gassed, jailed or labeled as "outside agitators," perverts, drug addicts or enemies of the state.

Similarly, when Milosevic tried to steal the 2000 presidential election, he branded protestors as unpatriotic and ordered the sacking of newsrooms and anti-regime radio stations, and wire-tapped and threatened members of a youth resistance movement.



Ivana Micevic, a Belgrade journalist, learns how to use the Zarkovo archive's search engine.

With records of one of Yugoslavia's darkest periods now accessible at the archive, there is hope that citizens of Serbia and the region may finally get the historical reckoning so long denied and continue their slow march toward a truly transparent, open society, Presnall said.

These potentially transformative events in Serbia dovetail nicely with the Knight Foundation's global push for open-records laws, technology tools and a media trained to speak truth to power.

Knight had also hoped the archives would encourage in-depth and investigative reporting on Serbia's military, but here results are mixed.

The reasons are myriad and complicated. Journalists do report the findings of both the Secret Graves and War Crimes commissions and do cite the military documents used to corroborate findings. But ownership of media is not transparent, newsrooms are strapped for resources and most reporters — paid below subsistence wages — frequently work more than one job to keep afloat economically. For these reasons and others, a strong tradition of watchdog journalism has yet to evolve.

And in practice, most journalists are unlikely to make the 40-minute car trip to Zarkovo, "unless they know there's a big payoff," said

TIMELINE

2000 - 2001

Milosevic rigs presidential election. Massive demonstrations ensue, and protesters storm Parliament. Military refuses to turn on civilians, and Milosevic quits. Reformist alliance wins Serbian legislative elections by a landslide. Belgrade Mayor Zoran Djindjic becomes prime minister.



April 2001

Milosevic arrested at his Belgrade mansion and charged with abuse of power. Five years later, he dies in his jail cell in The Hague before a war-crimes verdict is reached.

Ivana Micevic, a reporter for the Belgrade daily *Novosti* who is one of a handful of journalists to visit the archives. The fact that 50 years “of our history remains classified is a also problem,” Micevic said, echoing a concern raised by others in the media.

With unemployment in December 2010 hovering at 26 percent and the pace of reforms sluggish at best, "it's fair to say reporters are more likely to want to train their rage and limited energy toward the current political elite," rather than on understanding the past, said Marko Milosevic of the Center for Security Policy.

Legislation to open classified documents after 30 years – currently stalled in Serbia's Parliament – is critical to changing the press' attitude, as is a new law to formally wrest the archives from military control, said Cvetkovic, the historian who heads the Secret Graves Commission.

"Archives are independent, public institutions in all democratic countries. Serbia needs to get on board," he said.

Commenting on the overall impact of the Zarkovo archives on regional relations and the practice of everyday journalism, media consultant Dragan Kremer said, “Certainly, there’s a strong potential for a searchable archive to help the warming of relations between Croatia, Bosnia, Kosovo and Serbia... At a minimum, the archive could put some facts right on all sides,” referring to the bloody wars of the 1990s.

However Kremer, a former journalist who for years directed media training programs in the region for the International Research and Exchange Board (IREX), said the profession of journalism “has yet to rise to the standard where journalists would use the military archive, even if they knew about it. Which they don’t.”

For whatever reason, publicizing and marketing this resource has not been a top priority of the Ministry of Defense to date. Similarly, journalists who do get MOD's permission to visit the archive are trained only in technical aspects of the system: how to search the database, scroll and flag documents, and how to print or save documents to a disc.

Missing is any organized effort to train journalists in how to verify, cross reference and contextualize information they find in the military archive. Put simply, trainings have yet to materialize that teach reporters — too young to remember Tito or even Milosevic's early days — how to interpret historic military records and events in the context of reporting on complicated defense

[illegible]

From the archives: A secret police execution list from February 1945 shows a few of those targeted by Tito's thugs in Yugoslavia's brutal post-WWII period. At that time, the secret police were part of the military.

issues in present-day Serbia.

Even if such trainings were available, Kremer is not sure reporters would use what they learn. IREX and other international media groups recently ran several in-depth reporting workshops in Serbia and then tracked the impact on actual daily journalism.

"Our research showed most Serbian journalists had no motivation, were not professional enough, and/or forgot about [investigative] tools much sooner than anyone expected," Kremer said.

For his part, Jefferson Institute's Presnall never envisioned that the MOD project would "develop journalists or journalism," but rather would provide "good tools" for journalists to use as the profession evolves.

"You can argue that there are not enough good journalists [in Serbia]. But, as they emerge this fantastic tool will be ready for them," he said.

TIMELINE

March 2003

Reform-minded Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic gunned down in Belgrade after initiating crackdown on corruption. Martial law imposed.



March 2004

Worst inter-ethnic violence since 1999 erupts in Kosovo between Serbs and Albanians. NATO sends reinforcements, but dozens are killed and 10 medieval churches are sacked.

A UNIQUE DIGITAL ARCHIVE

The Jefferson Institute's digital archive system uses one software system to manage all aspects of operations, a "total system approach" that is rarely accomplished in the archive industry, according to the Institute's Aaron Presnall.

Typically, archives have separate systems for functions such as managing scanning workflow at a large scale, for building and managing repositories of data, for researcher interfaces, for facilitating metadata entry and for managing complex granular security and reports of user activity.

The archive created for the Ministry of Defense in Serbia puts all this together in one system. The key advantages to this approach:

- It is simple; you don't have to deal with dueling incompatible systems.
- It is highly flexible; sequencing the workflow becomes less important: you can scan, enter metadata, quality check and rescan simultaneously, across an unlimited number of work stations.

- Predefined system check points minimize input error, and provide tools to catch errors that sneak through.

- Researchers can tag and annotate documents — and that data (with administrator authorization) is fed back to the central repository of metadata that all users search against. This enables crowd-sourced metadata entry. Annotation is a tradition among users of archives — they write notes on the folders for the next researchers to come — and this seamlessly pulls that tradition into the digital age.

- The administrator can see analytical reports indicating not just how many users visit, or how long users stay, but what they look at — so administrators can discover what in their collection is most in demand, and where users may be running into walls — perhaps because of incomplete metadata. Administrators can then take action to leverage opportunities, build special exhibits of high-interest collections, and fix problems as they emerge.



From left to right: A restorer works to stabilize one of the fragile, damaged documents that must be repaired before scanning into the archives; Archive supervisor Darko Marinkovic scans an old document using a camera that digitizes fragile artifacts without touching them; A Ministry of Defense researcher examines a record book in the archive's secure basement storage room.

TIMELINE

June 2004

Democratic Party leader Boris Tadic elected Serbian president. Tadic defeats his extremist opponent by pledging to steer Serbia toward membership in the European Union.



2006

The fracture of the country once called Yugoslavia is completed as Montenegro votes to secede from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) and become a nation state of 600,000 people.

SERBIAN MILITARY ARCHIVES AT A GLANCE

Access

The archives are at a former military technical college in Zarkovo, about 40 minutes by car from Belgrade. To visit, one must petition the Ministry of Defense (MOD) in writing. The wait time varies. Foreign researchers and journalists typically take longer — perhaps 30 days or more — than Serbian citizens. They usually get access within 14 days or less. Serbian journalists can wait almost as long as foreign visitors. For more information, visit the MOD's website http://www.isi.mod.gov.rs/vojni_arhiv02/index.php?lang=en.

Security

Visitors fill out a simple questionnaire, show a passport, get a picture taken and within minutes receive a small, laminated card to use in the document reader. "The card tracks all documents you look at" and stores them on the massive server, said Maj. Rade Pavlovic, digitization supervisor. "If you lose your card, we can recreate a record of where you left off." Video cameras record visitors' every move in all corridors, research rooms, libraries and hallways.

Historical Records

Zarkovo's trove of documents includes the Kingdom of Serbia (mid to late 18th century) through the Balkan Wars (pre-WWI); the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1918-1945); the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia under Josip Broz Tito (1945-1981); the rise and rule of President Slobodan Milosevic (1989-October 2000), to the present. Documents from 1961 to 2011 are classified, but may be viewed with special permission from MOD.

What you will find: geographical maps, the oldest from 1714, military battle maps, campaign notes and some 40 million documents accessible on paper, or a smaller amount by digital scanner and search engine.

Researchers can look for details about entire campaigns, renegade troops, prison camps, Austrian or German reprisal raids, Allied bombing campaigns, and the like. Visitors can choose to print documents or to store them on a CD.

Genealogical Research

This archive is not for genealogical research per se. To be in the archive's database, the person you want information on must have a military association, however small. Come prepared with as many details as possible: military unit, regiment, or rank of your relative; place of mobilization; battles fought; death certificates, if issued by military, etc.

Getting There

By car, the trip takes about 40 minutes; by bus #51 from the main Belgrade station, it takes up to 90 minutes. Go to end of line. From the Zarkovo gatehouse, it is a 15- to 30-minute walk to the archive building, depending on the weather and personal fitness.



Military archive Žarkovo location map



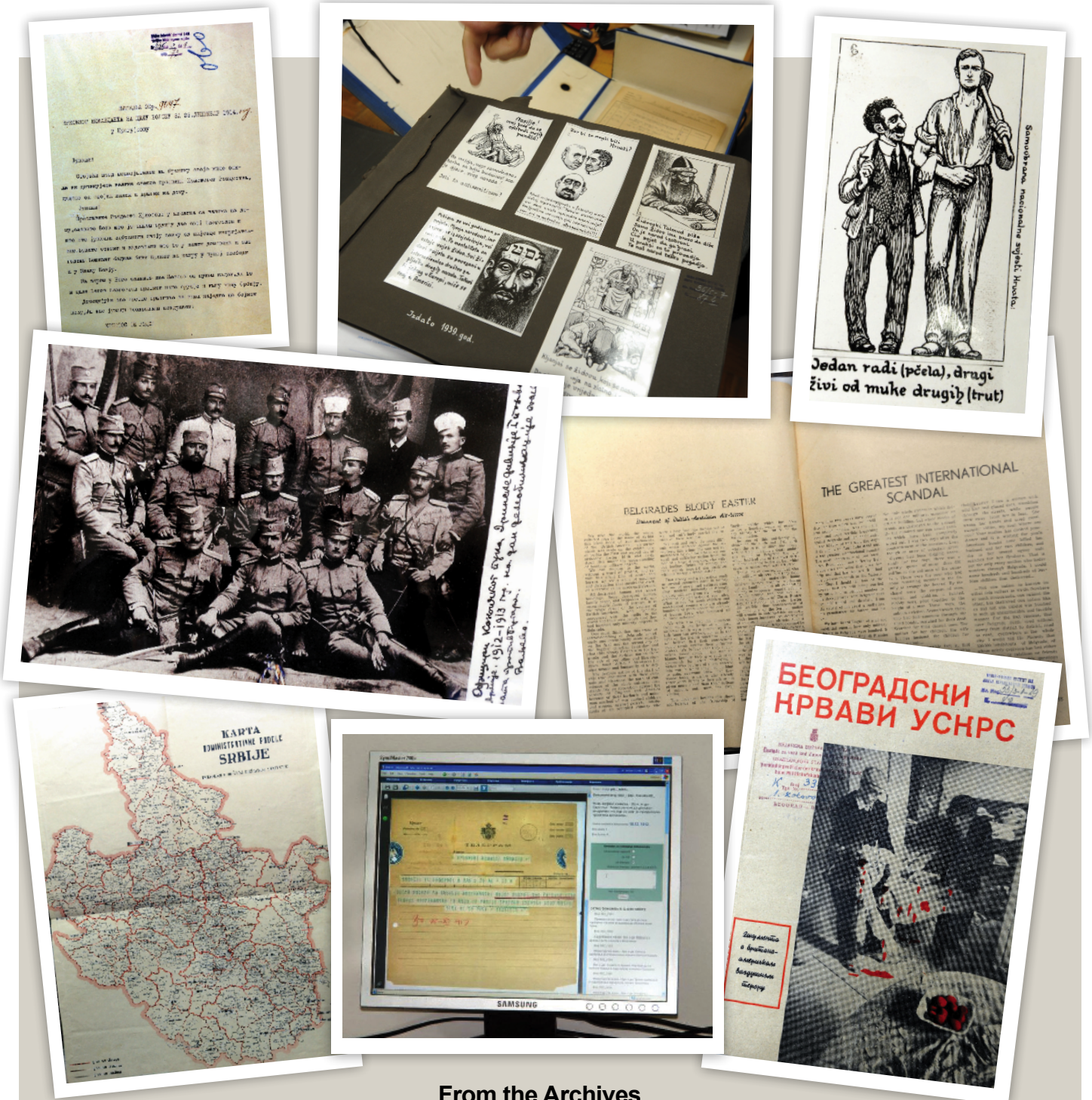
TIMELINE

2008

In February, Kosovo declares independence; Serbia says it's illegal. Serbian military keeps peace in Belgrade as U.S. Embassy attacked. In September, Parliament paves way to eventual membership in the EU.

**2010**

Parliament apologizes for 1995 massacre of thousands of Muslims in Srebrenica by Bosnian Serbs. President Boris Tadic visits Croatian town of Vukovar to apologize for 1991 massacre of 260 civilians.



From the Archives

Clockwise from top left: WWI Christmas letter from Serbia's king regent to the troops in the field urging them to have heart; anti-Semitic postcards circulated in Croatia, 1938-44; Croatian anti-Jewish propaganda, 1938-39; a description of the disastrous U.S.-British Easter bombing of Belgrade in 1944; red and white cover of pamphlet describing the Allies' Easter bombing; a telegram seeking permission for a U.S. major to observe the WWI front; Austro-Hungarian Empire map of Serbia, pre WWI; and WWI soldiers from Serbia's Drinska Brigade, 1912-13.

Nazi POW Camp in Norway: Few Lived to Tell of Horror

By Joan McQueeney Mitric

Spiro Prostran was among the fortunate few.

He survived a notorious POW camp in Nazi-occupied Norway during World War II, and lived to give chilling eye-witness testimony on his return to his native Yugoslavia. Just last summer, Norwegian researchers discovered that story and others in Serbia's military archives. Of the 4,300 Yugoslavs interned in 25 Nazi camps in Norway, 63 percent died or were executed.

It was the summer of 1942 when Prostran, a 34-year-old civilian clerk, was captured along with 900 Yugoslavs – soldiers and civilian supporters of the Allies. They were shipped to the notorious Beisfjord camp near the city of Narvik. Of 25 German-run labor camps in central and northern Norway, Beisfjord was the most odious.

When the war was over, Prostran told Belgrade prosecutors how he had watched as 286 Yugoslav prisoners were shot down on a single day – July 17, 1942. Their sin? They were weaker and sicker than the rest. Prostran said that in the three weeks before the mass strafing, he saw half-naked POWs forced to lug heavy stones, eat gruel standing in icy mud and catch fish for their German jailers, including SS Commandant Karl Matthaues, called The Snake.

Prostran's account is one of 80 reports of similarly sadistic and grisly treatment in Norway that returning POWs gave to Yugoslav war crimes prosecutors in 1946 and that Norwegian researchers unearthed last summer among some four million digitized military documents at Serbia's military archive near Belgrade.

Prostran's testimony is excruciatingly detailed. He recalls Commandant Matthaues yelling at the men "hurry up you Serbian dogs. Norway has plenty of land, and you are going to dig it all," as he pushed and whipped them on the forced march to Beisfjord from the ship that dropped them on Norway's shores.

Yugoslav prosecutors used Prostran's account and that of other survivors to track down and charge 33 war criminals — including Matthaues, who was executed by firing squad, said Michael Stokke, director of the Narvik Peace Museum's POW History project. The project [www.narviksenteret.no] is gathering as much information as possible about former POWs in Nazi



A Yugoslav survivor of the Beisfjord POW camp paid a visit in 1949 to the monument erected by Norwegians to honor the hundreds of Slavs who died in the German-run camp in 1942-43.

camps in Norway by examining archival records and interviewing survivors to document these horrific events and educate future generations. Stokke is now looking for the youngest Nazi to serve in Norway. Born in 1921, he may still be alive.

Svein Tore Aspelund, who heads the Narvik Museum's human rights section, said that of 900 POWs who arrived on



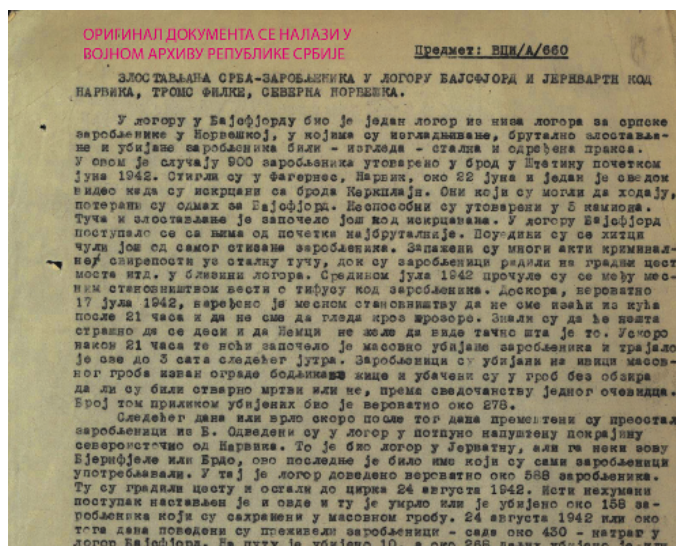
Svein Tore Aspelund and his wife, Svetlana Kalacan, at Norway's Narvik Museum. Aspelund and Kalacan are working closely with Serbia's military archive as they gather stories of Yugoslavs who spent WWII in German-run POW camps in Norway. The Yugoslav POW story will become part of the historical collections of the Narvik Museum (<http://www.narviksenteret.no>).

June 24, 1942, in Beisfjord, 88 were under 18; one was 8 years old and 117 were between 18 and 20. Eighty-three percent of them “were killed, or died of illness or hard work in just four months,” he said.

Aspelund and his Serbian wife, Svetlana Kalacan — along with the Falstad Center, another Norwegian POW research group — continue to collect historical testimonies similar to Prostran's and to look for any survivors to interview. Last summer, researchers found and spoke with 11 Serbs and a smaller number of Croats, many of whom were located through archival records.

Their testimonies, along with other recently discovered and compiled written and oral POW testimonies, will be unveiled June 22, 2011, when the Narvik Peace Museum hosts an international conference on the history of Yugoslav POWs in Norway. Historians from the Balkans, Germany, Hungary and Scandinavia will talk about their work. POWs will be honored with a commemorative plaque and an educational exhibit.

Since 1949, the Narvik Peace Museum — with its expanding POW History Project — has grown from a simple commemorative plaque honoring Yugoslav POWs to an integrated, multiexhibit complex where world scholars, human rights advocates and descendants of former POWs, or their jailers, all come to study WWII and to make peace with the past.



Photos courtesy of the Norwegian Peace Museum in Narvik

A digital copy from the Serbian Military archive of the July 1946 sworn, signed testimony that POW survivor Spiro Prostran gave to Yugoslav war crimes prosecutors about the sadistic killings and treatment he witnessed while held at the German-run Beisfjord camp in Norway.

A Sliver of Family History From Serbia's Military Archives

By Joan McQueeney Mitric

When my turn came to try the search engine at Serbia's new military archive in Zarkovo, I knew exactly what name I would type in: Janko Mitric, my husband's grandfather.

He served in WWI as a mounted cavalry officer, was evacuated to the Greek island of Corfu and then, alongside the Brits, pushed the Germans and Bulgarians north from Thessalonika and out of the Balkans. After the war, Janko returned to Lipolist, his village near Sabac, where he was a successful farmer, a village mayor and briefly a member of Parliament as a representative of the Farmers' Party.

Janko's only son, Dobrivoj, was killed in the early days of WWII when the ferry he and his platoon were on went down crossing the Drina River. He left behind a 20-year-old pregnant wife, Desanka Mitric, my husband's mother. Six months later, the Germans seized the family farm during a reprisal raid, stole the smoked hams and then torched the house and outbuildings after finding the medical bag of a fleeing Jewish doctor under a bed. The family had befriended her, not knowing a Star of David had been sewn in her things.

Then the Germans rounded up all the men, including Janko, and shot them dead in the yard. My mother-in-law, now 92, spent days hiding in ditches and fleeing for her life, along with her newborn son, my husband.

Every other family in Serbia has a story like this.

I couldn't find anything on either Janko or Dobrivoj Mitric, so I typed in "General Josif Djordjevic," the father of my husband's aunt, now 90. Bingo.

In a matter of seconds, the database pulled up a 1913 letter sent to then-Capt. Djordjevic from the king of Serbia, ordering him to return to Belgrade from the Montenegro front to take up service in the military's geographic and mapping division, located in, you guessed it: Zarkovo.

From top: Janko Mitric and his third wife, Katerina, pre-WWI; Dobrivoj Mitric before leaving for WWII, 1940; Desanka Mitric (left) with Ina Djordjevic, daughter of Gen. Josif Djordjevic, circa 1939.





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