

Interviewing *Deep Throat*, Balkan-Style

An Insider's shocking account of the logistics of genocide

By Robert Leonard Rope

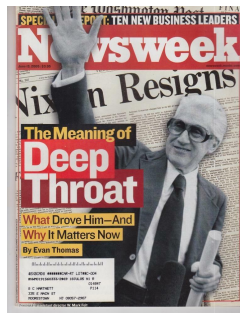
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"Facts do not cease to exist because they are ignored." - Aldous Huxley

When journalistic icons Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein tracked down an insider source who helped reveal explosive details of Richard Nixon's Watergate scandal, they nicknamed him *Deep Throat*. The moniker was a sly and cheeky nod to a popular adult film from the early 1970s, while also denoting a journalistic source on 'deep background,' someone who speaks only on condition of strict anonymity.

Deep Throat's confidential information provided key details of Nixon's direct involvement in the Watergate scandal, and eventually helped to bring down one of the most corrupt and controversial politicians from my early university years. Woodward and Bernstein went on to become folk heroes for journalists worldwide. Eventually this unlikely over-the-top, real life drama was turned into a hit film starring the legendary Hollywood superstars Robert Redford and Dustin Hoffman.

While his true identity remained a mystery for some 30 years, *Deep Throat* was finally revealed to be former associate director of the FBI. Case closed.



The original *Deep Throat* helped to bring down a corrupt president.

For an investigative journalist, sources are everything. We honor our sources, we are indebted to them, and, when necessary, we must guarantee their anonymity.

After years of searching, we managed to locate such a source, an extraordinary insider contact, who was willing and able to confirm key details of our 2010 war crimes report, [Burning Secrets from the Balkans](#). Exactly how and where we met, we must not presently divulge.

Like Woodward and Bernstein, we had to promise to interview our source on 'deep background' for reasons both obvious and complex. The main difference being that we were dealing with a female source. We had to vow to keep her identity completely confidential.

And so we have nicknamed her *Deep Throat*.

Here is the back story: We have been working on an unsolved Balkan murder mystery, off and on, for the last two decades. It concerns the attempted genocide - and its cover-up - of Kosovar Albanian men, women and children from early Spring, 1999.

When the war ended, after an extensive 78-day NATO bombing campaign, thousands, mostly ethnic Albanians, were dead, and thousands of people had gone missing. Gradually, over the years, many of their bodily remains were discovered - nearly 1,000 of them alone hastily buried in pits in a Serbian police training ground outside Belgrade.

When I visited Belgrade in 2003 I asked Serbia's much celebrated human rights advocate, Sonja Biserko, where all of the bodies were buried. She responded, with deep irony, that we were standing on top of them. It was a breathtaking cover-up of crime scene evidence, of almost unimaginable proportions.

Once all of the suspected pits and wells and mass graves were fully exhumed, over 1600 men, women and children still remained missing. How was such a thing possible? Another Balkan enigma? And that was the starting point of our war crimes report. We discovered that, in fact, many hundreds of bodies were actually cremated in mines and industrial facilities throughout Kosovo and Serbia by Serbian military and police forces. It was a ghoulish-sounding thesis, and despite all of the extensive evidence cited, one that many people could not and would not accept, up until today.

We desperately needed a validating insider source. *Deep Throat* ended up confirming nearly all major details of our original war crimes report, though with a few significant addendums. She offers an authentic insider voice, matter-of-fact and rich in detail. She provides at least a partial answer to the lingering and most vexing issue in Kosovo - what is the fate of our missing loved ones?



Missing family members have not been forgotten. (Pristina)

Over 1600 families still await news of the fate of their beloved fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers. People of all ethnicities. They have the right to know the truth, despite the corrupt politics, despite the endless lies, despite the deafening silence. And *Deep Throat* speaks that truth.

And now we will allow *Deep Throat* to speak, in her own words:

RLR The original, pioneering [American Radio Works](#) investigative report was one of our original sources. It has been attacked, ignored and nearly forgotten. Do you still stand by it?

DT I still stand by everything in there. The only thing I found problematic is the reported numbers. Upon further scrutiny we came to believe that the actual number of people who 'evaporated' there is down to several hundred bodies, maybe down to a couple of hundred at worst. Furthermore, bear in mind that the number of unaccounted for (the Missing) in Kosovo is 1647 as of the end of 2018 and that number includes several hundred Serbs and Gypsies (Roma). Thus the total number of missing Albanians is unlikely to exceed 800 - 900, so I was told by a EULEX (European Law Mission in Kosovo) prosecutor.

RLR Why did your team focus its investigation of mass cremation of bodies at the Trepca mine complex?

DT We had similar tip-offs after the war but we almost exclusively focused on Trepca as we had access to the site unhindered and multiple sources who didn't know each other and were assigned to the dirty task at different times.

RLR What about the other cremation sites mentioned?

DT We heard stories about Bor, Surdulica, Kostolac and Suva Reka which reportedly were also used ad hoc for body disposals and incinerations. However, I think that in all those places the number of dumped/destroyed bodies doesn't exceed several dozens. The security forces faced multiple problems in terms of accessibility, complicity of the employees/local population, technical problems to fit the bodies inside the furnaces, etc.

RLR Tell me about your personal experiences at the Trepca complex?

DT We returned to Trepca several times and then back to our sources as we had some unresolved issues about the methodology and techniques that we had overlooked in our initial interviews. My colleagues can tell you more on that as they were often in Trepca and spoke to international forces and the field experts. Since we were lacking the concrete evidence we had to gather as much intelligence as possible from our Serb sources in order to establish the truth and the pattern of behavior inside.

RLR Were you also able to directly communicate with Serbian high officials?

DT None of our sources were high up in the security structure, and they had limited knowledge on what was going on. On the other hand one of our high up sources in Belgrade was aware of the situation but he didn't witness the disposals.

RLR Did you have access to additional evidence that was never mentioned in the original report?



The Trepca mine complex, site of massive genocide cover-up

DT Yes, I was given access to a video and some photographs taken inside the Trepca compound made during the war, but I could not keep them as the owners demanded crazy money to hand them over. Thus I could not independently confirm them but, in my humble opinion, I believe they were authentic as I recognized one big shot in the

Milosevic security apparatus on the video, and the photos were no doubt taken inside the Trepca complex.

Furthermore, our sources, the Serbian fighters, proved that they had been inside and knew what they were talking about.

RLR What is your perspective now on the precise number of cremated bodies you originally reported on?

DT You are probably aware that in any armed conflict the number of casualties reported is initially much higher than it really is. When people see splattered blood the impact on their mind is always a way above the real one. It's a psychological thing common to human nature and mind, and irrelevant of ethnicity, race, etc.

The horrors that our sources were exposed to - although some willfully and proudly took part therein - left an indelible trace in their mind that they had to cope with and somehow entombed it in their subconsciousness.

Thus I believe that we were somewhat reckless to report their estimate of 1500 burned corpses. Upon further scrutiny we discovered that Trepca was not "operating" all the time of the war to burn bodies but only a few days in the beginning of the NATO intervention and a few days in late April and early May, 1999.

RLR What do you know about exactly when the furnaces at Trepca were actually operating?

DT At least one furnace was operating throughout the war to melt the ore. The local population was vehemently against such practices and the employees were not that happy to service such an endeavor.

Thus the Serbian security forces had to deploy their own troops to do the job - sometimes, they forced men who were being disciplined for earlier subordination or excessive looting and killing inside Kosovo. So all of that forced RDB (Resor Drzavne Bezbednosti - Department of State Security) to keep a low profile and use alternatives in Serbia proper - industrial facilities or the pits in eastern Serbia and the notorious SAJ compound (Police training grounds) near Belgrade.

RLR Do you believe that genocidal policies against the Kosovar Albanians were formally planned from Belgrade?

DT To answer your question, the Serbian leadership did endorse asanacija (in Serbian), “Sanitation,” aiming to destroy the traces of atrocities in Kosovo. I think that was first brought up at the meeting with Milosevic by police General Streten Lukic and army General Lazarevic toward the very end of March 1999, and again in late April.

The Sanitation Plan was again reiterated to the lower levels in May of the same year when it was apparent that Serbia would have to pull out of Kosovo. We got this information from a staff officer in Belgrade who was present at two meetings and was informed of the last one, as far as I can remember.

RLR Do you believe there are valid comparisons between the genocide and subsequent “cleansing” undertaken by the Milosevic regime and the actions of the Nazis?



An installation with the names of the 116 children still missing from the Kosovo war, unveiled in Prishtina (Photo: Fikret Ahmeti / K2.0/ 2016)

DT The Serbs never had a fully elaborate plan that was executed all the way down to the ground level - something that the Nazis had. And then, the Serbs were pretty sloppy and/or lousy in the asanacija execution and lacked any zeal as there was no money to extort or steal. So most of the job was done grudgingly.

Sometimes the mass burning of bodies wasn't executed at all as the troops disobeyed orders. It's always more fun to loot and destroy than to disinter bodies and rebury them or burn them. You must bear in mind that for most Serbian army and police forces the main incentive was not to defend Kosovo as part of Serbia, but to steal money from Albanians as they had a big and pretty wealthy diaspora.

Of course there were some real nasty nationalists and racists who wanted to exterminate the Albanians. But they were not in charge.

RLR In your opinion, was Serbia guilty of genocide in Kosovo?

DT The Serbs did expel more than 800 thousand people, and they also killed a few thousand civilians to spread panic and encourage the mass exodus. Often the civilians were killed in retaliation for Serbian police officers killed in combat. But they never came even remotely close to what was going on in Rwanda.

Had the Serbs wanted, they could have committed the real genocide and turn Kosovo into a giant graveyard. But they never did anything like that. The main goal of Milosevic and his lunatics was to flood the neighboring countries with refugees, to destabilize them and also sow the seeds of discord among the NATO countries.

Anyway, had the Allied ground invasion taken place they might have resorted to genocide over the remaining Albanians in Kosovo. But that's very MAYBE. We have no proof of that either in written documents or in testimonies.

The RDB (Serbian State Security) resorted to ad hoc actions when it concerned the body disposals. First, they weren't happy with the tasks - there was no money to extort there. Secondly, the local population in Trepca, Bor, Kostolac were even less thrilled to do such a disgusting job.

RLR So did you get much pushback when the ARW episode first aired back in 2001?

DT It's a very gruesome episode of the war which gave us a lot of trouble upon publication. The Serb organizations in the US were furious and threatened to sue us for libel against the Serbian nation, etc.

We aired our stuff on National Public Radio and hence got the anger of the American Serbs. In fact, the reporting on Kosovo gave us a lot of headaches, first from "crazy" Serbs and then later from some Albanians who found our exposure of KLA (Kosovo Liberation Army) thugs as an attack on the Albanian nation. We never had any agenda either pro or against. We were just keen to bring the truth out.

After that, we were frequently under police surveillance. Then later on we were accused of being paid 1 million euro each to slander the honorable and saintly KLA crooks. That would have been nice though, to have received that money but alas. Just imagine all of the beautiful jewelry I could have purchased!

Anyway, bear in mind that northern Kosovo is still utterly divided, and Mitrovica is a place with a very fragile peace ruled by Albanian and Serbian mafia in their respective turfs. I doubt that the internationals will be willing to tip the fragile balance at all with endorsing any new story of the mass cremations. Back in 2001 OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) tried to hamper us because they felt that we were jeopardizing the peace process with our reporting.

We were genuinely hoping that something would come up in the new democratic Serbia, so to speak, that would corroborate our findings. However, I am aware that even the new Serbian government was keen to control the damage so nothing beyond the fridge truck and the SAJ training camp turned into mass grave was disclosed. To admit that the Serbian government (of Milosevic) incinerated the bodies of women, children and elderly was too much to expect. If you can imagine.

RLR Thank you, *Deep Throat*, for speaking out.

So now *Deep Throat* has at last had her say. She has offered specific names, locations, and times. She has articulated terrible war crimes committed by Serbia's Milosevic regime, as well as those of individual bad actors from the Kosovo Liberation Army. *Deep Throat* has bravely borne witness to unspeakable crimes that have been unrelentingly covered up, even as amoral Balkan politicians continue to hide and obscure the fate of over one thousand still missing people. But are we listening to her?

Postscript:

Since the initial writing of this article, I returned to the western Balkans, visiting with close friends and contacts in Sarajevo, Belgrade and throughout Kosovo. Two additional and remarkable sources came to my attention: Humanitarian Law Center's (HLC) 2017 incisive Special Dossier: [The Concealment of Bodies Operation](#) ; and a recent report by Youth Initiative Belgrade: [Secret Mass Graves in Serbia - Burning of Bodies](#).

Both sources document, in stunning detail, multiple locations where the bodies of Kosovar Albanian men, women and children were thrown, deposited and destroyed. These reports elucidate already well known mass grave sites: so far, bodies have been found in the Belgrade suburb of Batajnica, in Petrovo Selo in eastern Serbia, at Lake Perućac in western Serbia, and at Rudnica near Raška in southern Serbia, near the border with Kosovo.

The reports then go on to highlight sites where some of those bodies were deliberately destroyed - by industrial cremation - during the Spring of 1999: Mackatica complex, “Feroniki” factory, and the Bor Mine and Smelting Basin.

The HLC dossier, in particular, is amazingly comprehensive, and a potential starting point for further war crime investigations. I asked the person from HLC why there was no mention of Trepca in the HLC report. He replied that he was “unaware of any firm and solid evidence associated with that specific site.”

One thing is certain: where war crimes remain unacknowledged and unpunished, they will surely be repeated. Writes genocide scholar Nora Weller, “Silence is a victory for every genocide.”

Robert Leonard Rope, San Francisco



Forensics specialist, Dr. Arsim Gerxhaliu, helps prepare for the formal interment of recovered remains of Kosovo’s victims