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Bosnian Muslims Retrace Final Day of '95 Victims

By DAVID ROHDE

KONJEVIC POLJE, Bosnia and Herzegovina, July 10 -About 500 Bosnian Muslim men set out on foot at 7:30 a.m. Sunday from this quiet farming village in eastern Bosnia on the third and final day of their re-enactment of the "march of death" a decade ago this week.

Bearing Bosnian and Bosnian-Muslim flags, the men completed their solemn retracing of the route taken by an estimated 15,000 Muslim men during the war in Bosnia. They had fled the town of Srebrenica in panic in July 1995, after lightly armed United Nations peacekeepers failed to protect them from advancing Serb forces. The Serbs killed more than 7,000 of the fleeing Muslims in ambushes and mass executions that war crime judges later declared genocide.

On Sunday, the column of Muslims marching through the woods here were again surrounded by hundreds of armed Serbs, but on this day the Serbs were police officers assigned to protect the marchers.

Zoran Rosuljas, a Serb policeman who shook hands with one of the marchers along the route, said it was "no problem" guarding Muslims 10 years after the three-year war that killed more than 200,000 people. Asked if he felt comfortable with his former enemies, he swiftly responded. "Why not?" he said. "Why not?"

That handshake was just one of curious scenes on the final day of the 40-mile march to protest the failure to arrest the two Serbian leaders indicted on charges of genocide in the killings, Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic. As many as 50,000 people are expected to attend ceremonies on Monday marking the 10th anniversary of the fall of Srebrenica. The bodies of 610 men exhumed from mass graves and identified through DNA testing will be laid to rest.

As they began their final leg Sunday morning - actually a reverse tracing of the original march, to end in Srebrenica - the men first passed through the village of Nova Kasaba, the site of two mass graves dug by Serb soldiers. Beginning in 2001, Muslim families moved back into this area under the protection of American military forces that patrolled this part of Bosnia until 2004.

Mehmet Muharemovic, 50, a farmer in the village, said he had encountered no problems with local Serbs or Serb police. Asked about a chicken coop that had been built on top of one of the mass graves after it was exhumed, he said it belonged to another returning Muslim farmer. "It's no problem," he said, with a shrug, a cigarette dangling from his lips. "Everyone lost someone. What can you do about it?"

As the men made their way up dirt roads and mountain paths that, a decade ago, were filled with thousands of panicked Muslims, they spoke calmly. Ali Hodzic Naziv, the man who shook hands

with the Serb policeman, said he was marching in memory of his two teenage sons, who disappeared somewhere in these forests.

Mr. Naziv, 53, a burly man who was evacuated from Srebrenica for medical treatment after he was shot in the left leg in 1993, was in pain after two days of walking. But he said it would make him feel better to see the route his sons, who stayed behind, took during their final hours.

"I have to hold on for my sons," he said as he struggled up a muddy path. "I will make it, if God lets me."

Amir Halicic, a wiry 20-year-old, said he was walking to understand what his father experienced when he successfully fled in 1995. He said his father told him he was too frightened to march, that he never wanted to walk through those forests again.

Mr. Halicic, 10 when Srebrenica fell, said he fled separately with his mother and grandfather. Two of them survived. "I didn't have a childhood," he said. "My grandfather was killed right in front of my eyes."

Near the front of the column was a tall, sunburned man who said he was returning to Srebrenica for the first time in 10 years. That man, Gary Kremer, had been a surgeon with the Dutch peacekeepers who were overwhelmed by Serb forces here in 1995. He said a Muslim he befriended during the war had invited him to march. Survivors from Srebrenica, who have bitterly complained that the Dutch did not do enough to protect them, seemed to treat him well.

Change was evident. When skull fragments were found at a spot where the column stopped to remember those killed in a large ambush, Muslim men came forward to photograph the remains with the cameras in their cell phones. Along most of the route, rebuilt homes and mosques, and newly planted fields, abound in what was a deserted no man's land of burned houses in 1995.

But the reality of what occurred here, and Bosnia's continuing struggles, sunk in as the march ended. The march stopped by a partially exhumed mass grave near Srebrenica. Staring down at exposed femurs, skulls and tibias, some of the exhausted marchers wept.

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