

“The Bomb Drop was reported to have Good Effects” by the U.S. Air Force: Bombing a Village Market in Baghran, Helmand on August 2, 2007

by

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The “August 2: Airpower Summary” posted on the official website of the United States Air Force (USAF) announced, “An Air Force B-1B Lancer dropped guided bomb units on enemies hiding in a tree line near Baghran. The bomb drop was reported to have good effects.”¹ But, on the ground, reality was rather different: Gul Wali, 18, was among the wounded. “Bombs were falling everywhere from the sky into the trees, and I saw pieces of flesh and bone. These were villagers. They were innocent people. They had just come to the *mela* [outdoor traditional weekly market] to buy food for their families. Instead, they ended up looking for their loved ones among piles of bodies.” In the absence of normal shops, most communities mount a weekly trade fair, bringing handicrafts, livestock, farm produce and clothing along to barter or sell. The *mela* was

¹ at <http://www.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123063263>

located close to the holy shrine of Ibrahim Shah Baba. Wali's reference to a line of trees corresponds perfectly with the account given in the US Air Force's Airpower Summary. The luckier ones ended up in a hospital, as this young 10-year old boy with abdominal shrapnel wounds and whose leg needed to be amputated:



Photo from Emergency Hospital in Lashkar Gah, at http://www.peacereporter.net/dettaglio_photogallery.php?idc=11&ida=&idt=&idp=210&page=2&idimm=1

For its part, the U.S. military in Bagram released an official statement proclaiming,

During a sizable meeting of senior Taliban commanders, coalition forces employed precision-guided munitions on their location *after ensuring there were no innocent Afghans in the surrounding area.*²

This type of statement is intended to “grab the news headlines” before any contrary account gets publicly offered, a deliberate ploy of the US/NATO militaries.³ The corporate mainstream media from the *New York Times* to Britain’s *Telegraph* and *Xinhuanet* dutifully reproduced the pronouncement. Faced with contradicting information from the bombed region, the militaries respond with a sequence of tactics: stonewall and cordon-off the bomb site; admit civilians might have been killed, adding contrived tales (Taliban were hiding amongst civilians or bombed must have really been Taliban because no female casualties), and then simply wait for the story to go away.⁴

If there were no civilians, then how to explain wounded such as in these photos? Reporters haven’t been permitted to talk to the injured and they are under heavy guard as part of news management in order to prevent them making known the truth of this slaughter. Moreover, the truth is prevented by a geographic isolation: the U.S. bombing often takes place in rugged, isolated regions, largely inaccessible or only at great risk. Hence, the U.S. and NATO feel much freer to bomb indiscriminately and answer questions later.⁵

Fifty percent of the GBU-31 (Mark 84) bombs dropped upon Bughni are estimated to fall within a 13 meter radius of the target; and the lethal blast or fragmentation range radius out from the point of impact is 400 yards (or 366 meters). Dropping such munitions upon a village area is guaranteed to cause death and injury. Listen to an official description,

² Emphasis added by the author.

³ Something I have explored in my essay, ““Grab News Headlines, Isolate Bombed Area and Stonewall: U.S. Military’s Virtual Reality about Afghan Civilian Casualties. A Case Study of the U.S. Assault upon Hajiyan” (May 28, 2006) at: http://www.traprockpeace.org/marc_herold_hajiyan_24may06.pdf

⁴ I examined earlier U.S. operations in Baghran in “Et Plus Ca Change...Patterns of Death and Deceit in Afghanistan,” *Cursor.org* (March 10, 2003) at <http://cursor.org/stories/morethingschange.htm>

⁵ U.S. and NATO bombs rained down before upon civilians in Baghran in February 2003 (see my “A Rain of Bombs,” in *Frontline* at <http://www.hinduonnet.com/fline/fl2319/stories/20061006000306100.htm>) and in June 2006 (see <http://pubpages.unh.edu/~mwherold/GuAhmadmotherandfather.htm>).

Dropped from a plane and hurtling toward its target at 300 mph, the 14-foot steel bomb uses small gears in its fins to pinpoint its path based on satellite data received by a small antenna and fed into a computer. Just before impact, a fusing device triggers a chemical reaction causing the 14-inch-wide weapon to swell to twice its size. The steel casing shatters, shooting forth 1,000 pounds of white-hot fragments traveling at speeds of 6,000 feet per second. The explosion creates a shock wave exerting thousands of pounds of pressure per square inch (psi). By comparison, a shock wave of 12 psi will knock a person down; and the injury threshold is 15 pounds psi. The pressure from the explosion of a device such as the Mark-84 JDAM can rupture lungs, burst sinus cavities and tear off limbs hundreds of feet from the blast site, according to trauma physicians. When it hits, the JDAM generates an 8,500-degree fireball, gouges a 20-foot crater as it displaces 10,000 pounds of dirt and rock and generates enough wind to knock down walls blocks away and hurl metal fragments a mile or more. "There is a very great concussive effect. Damage to any human beings in the vicinity would be pretty nasty," said Rob Hewson of *Jane's*. "A 2,000-pound bomb has an effective damage radius of at least 800 meters (about 2,600 feet)." ⁶

The 1,000kg Mark 84 Joint Direct Attack Munition (J-DAM) generates a massive fireball and shockwave which also unleashes nearly 500kg of superheated steel fragments, killing anyone within 120 meters and causing injuries out to 1,000 meters. When the US/NATO drops such a bomb upon a populated area, the *killing is intentional*, that is, it is murder, putting the lie to the oft-repeated assertion that while Taliban kill "intentionally", the occupiers kill civilians "unintentionally." Moreover, haven't the Taliban warned people to stay away from occupation army bases, patrols, and employment?

⁶ Mark Sauer, "Precision JDAMs Can Pack Big Punch: On-Board Systems Guide Air-to-Surface Weapons," *San Diego Tribune* (March 21, 2003) at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/news/2003/030321-jdam01.htm>



On that fateful afternoon of August 2nd, hundreds of people had gathered for the traditional weekly market (or ‘mela’) in Bughni (or Bagh-e-Nahi) where local people trade everything from carpets, foods, clothes, to cows. Market day there falls on Thursday, the start of Afghanistan’s weekend. Then, suddenly, the U.S. Boeing-made GBU-31, GPS-guided 2,000 pound bombs fell from the blue sky.

Panic erupted. Many villagers said they lost fathers, brothers, and children in the inferno. Others ferried their wounded to hospitals in the province, providing concrete evidence that simple civilians had been injured and massacred. Some injured were transferred to a clinic in Musa Qala, 100 kms away from Bughni; others were taken to Kandahar, 150 kms away; and yet others were brought to Lashkar Gah, 200 kms away.

Eyewitnesses told gruesome tales of headless bodies piled high in Bughni waiting for identification. A resident, Hafizullah, said, “It was a day of blackness. Almost everyone had lost someone. People did not know where their family members were. I saw people

just sitting on the ground, staring at nothing. There was mourning everywhere.” Another resident added, “We grew tired of collecting the dead.”

At least 20 civilians (including an 8-yr-old boy) with shrapnel wounds were brought to the main Bost hospital in Lashkar Gah, the provincial capital. Three of the injured men died there. Helmand's police chief, Mohammad Hussein Andiwal said. "I can confirm there were heavy bombardments," Andiwal told *Reuters* by phone. "We have heard of heavy casualties too and have sent a team to investigate this." A provincial lawmaker in Kabul, Mohammad Anwar, also received reports of high civilian casualties. In the Lashkar Gah hospital, Shokhi Khan, a relative of one of the wounded, said several hundred civilians were killed or wounded in the strikes. He said people had gathered for picnics and to go to a shrine in Baghran district north of Lashkar Gah on Thursday when the raids started. Twelve wounded men were brought to a hospital in the main southern city of Kandahar, said Sharifullah Khan, a doctor there. Nasibullah, one of the wounded men in Kandahar hospital, said the bombs hit a market. He claimed there were no Taliban there at the time of the attack. An Afghan Defense Ministry said some 40 men had also been brought to hospital in the main southern city of Kandahar. Other injured persons were brought to hospitals in Sangin and Musa Qala districts.

Abdul Karim, a resident of Baghran, recounted, “Many died on the way. One of my sons is in Bost Hospital. I don’t think he will survive. Two other sons are in Musa Qala. Two of my cousins were killed and two more were injured.”

When the claim that no civilians had been bombed could no longer be sustained, a back-up lie was floated by the military, playing upon general public ignorance. Charlie Mayo was the carrier. "It is interesting there were no females," said British Lieutenant-Colonel Charlie Mayo in Helmand Province, suggesting the wounded adult males may have been Taliban fighters. "We are very confident we hit a large meeting of Taliban and they are very sore about it."

But the village of Bughni has long been a Taliban-controlled area where no doubt Sharia prevails and women simply do not attend public gatherings or go out shopping (hence no female victims). Who are you fooling, Lt-Col. Charlie Mayo?

The local (Afghan) attempt at obfuscation was a little less subtle. General Zahir Azimy of the Afghan Defense Ministry put forth the U.S-pleasing lie – no evidence whatsoever offered - that a large gathering of Taliban attending a public execution had been bombed, killing over 100 Taliban and three senior commanders including Commander Mansoor Dadullah. Azimy added, "According to our sources, there were 150 people killed, maybe less, but not more," he told a news conference. "If there were civilian casualties, they were very limited and should not exceed 10."⁷ Since the attack, Mansoor Dadullah has given several media interviews. The evidence of very high civilian casualties is incontrovertible now. How many more accounts from residents are needed? How many more gruesome photos of injured young boys and old men? The general needs to go back to the drawing boards (or U.S. tutorials).

Are these persons Taliban?

⁷ Hamid Shalizi, "Few Civilian Deaths from Afghan Bombing – Officials," Reuters (August 4, 2007) at <http://www.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUSISL7315720070804?feedType=RSS>



Several family members who accompanied the bombing victims seeking treatment gave accounts describing their personal situation. Haji Hakim Jan, 27, said the U.S. bombs killed four of his brothers. Jan added, “I had another brother of mine and an eight-year-old sister wounded in the bombing.” He said that such deaths alienate civilians from Western troops and make people join the Taliban resistance.⁸

The attention by the mainstream corporate media to twenty-one captured South Korean evangelists as compared to the Afghan civilians slaughtered in Helmand is revealing. The villagers of Bagh-e-Nahi are indeed very sore in ways more than one about what happened between 3-4 P.M. on August 2nd. But then, of course, Afghan civilians killed by the US/NATO are bad bodies, unlike dead South Korean civilians who are good bodies. The U.S. Pentagon, the U.S. corporate press, and Human Rights Watch only “see” and count good bodies.

⁸ Abdul Qodus, “Afghans Check Reports of Civilian Bombing Deaths,” Reuters (2:23 PM EDT August 3, 2007)