

Afghan Driver Says He Saw Soldiers Blind and Strangle Children

By MICHAEL T. KAUFMAN Special to The New York Times

New York Times (1857-Current file); Sep 11, 1979; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2002)
pg. A12

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KABUL, Afghanistan — The man was middle-aged and anguished. He said he was a simple man, a former coal miner and a good mechanic with no political interests. But because of what he had seen, he sought out a foreigner to tell his story, aware of the risks he was taking. He asked not to be identified. This is the story he told.

It was two days before Id, the feast that marks the end of Ramadan, Islam's month of daylight fasting. That would mean Thursday, Aug. 23.

The man was in the shop of Walli Mohammad Pashtoun, a distributor of Soviet books and magazines who came from the same village as one of the man's relatives. Although he says he did not like the bookseller, he visited him from time to time.

He described his acquaintance as being in his early 30's and "a Khalqi No. 1," meaning he was a zealous supporter of the ruling party.

The bookseller told the mechanic he had to deliver some Soviet magazines out of town. Since his driver had disappeared, he asked the mechanic to drive him in his Mercedes. They set out heading southwest to make the deliveries in Kotae Asro. They passed military checkpoints, but the bookseller was known to everyone and they were waved through.

Soldiers Blind Children

At a point that the mechanic described as being beside the village of Bandeshag, about 30 miles from Kabul, they came upon a group of army vehicles and what he said were about 200 soldiers. Twenty-eight civilian men and women were lined up on the side of

the road. Rifles were pointed at them. Across the road soldiers held five children by their throats. There were three girls who appeared to be between 6 and 10 years old and two boys about 10 or 12.

Again some of the officers knew the bookseller and greeted him. The two men left their car. The mechanic said he watched as the soldiers blinded the children with pieces of metal. The women, who presumably included the mothers, shouted for Allah and wailed. The soldiers then strangled the children and threw them down. The mechanic said some men in uniform were taking movies. He said he saw three men in civilian dress and that he recognized the language they were speaking as Russian.

The witness said he begged the book dealer to leave "before I have a heart attack," but that he just laughed and said they should stay and watch all the

villagers die because these people were fighting against the Government. While he pleaded to go, soldiers shot three of the men. The bookseller relented and went back to the car and the mechanic returned to Kabul.

He lost weight and was sleeping badly. He wanted to tell somebody what he had seen so that maybe he would sleep better. There is no way of confirming this story. It is possible that the man who told it was acting and trying to discredit the regime here. His eyes, however, looked like they had seen horror.