

BORJE ALMQVIST

During the period from late July through early August [1982], the Swedish journalist Borje Almqvist visited Logar province in eastern Afghanistan [south of Kabul], where Soviet troops launched a major operation at the end of June. Almqvist visited some 30 villages in the Baraki area and collected a great number of eyewitness accounts of Soviet aggression against the civilian population. These accounts obtained during his visit confirm the information provided by Carl Schonmeyer, SIDA [Swedish International Development Authority] official and vice-chairman of the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, in an interview in Dagens Nyheter [Stockholm] published in July 1982.

The Soviet news agency TASS, as well as its counterpart [Bakhtar] agency in Afghanistan, dismissed Schonmeyer's statement as lies, at that time.

Eyewitnesses to Afghanistan at War*

- Women, children, and old men executed.
- Civilians tied up and used as shields during the fighting.
- Terror bombings of the houses and farmlands of the peasants.
- Old men forced to carry 30-kg loads of ammunition for long distances while being beaten.
- Homes and shops looted.

These are accusations against the Soviet troops and their allies, the Afghan government troops, which were made in signed eyewitness accounts [taken] from victims and eyewitnesses in Baraki-Rajan.

Baraki-Rajan is just one of the many villages which were attacked by the Russians during a three-day-long offensive in the Baraki area at the end of June this year [1982].

*Translated from *Dagens Nyheter*, Stockholm, 12 September 1982.

Apart from the signed statements, people in many villages gave information about executions of civilians, looting of houses and shops and terror bombings since last year. They also tell about burned crops and poisoned food.

Terror Bombings

Terror bombings of farmers' villages have become part of the everyday life of the farmers throughout Logar province. The daily morning terror has been going on since the end of April, but the real, well-organized mass destruction was experienced by the population at the end of June.

At that time, Soviet helicopters and MIG planes hit a great number of villages in the Logar valley simultaneously and many houses were leveled to the ground. The farmers also saw many fields, vineyards and trees destroyed by the bombs and the rockets.

The heavy bomb attacks marked the beginning of three days of shock and horror for the farmers in the area. After the bombardments, Soviet troops and minor units of the Afghan government army attacked the villages in a force not earlier experienced by villagers in the area.

In the beginning, those armed peasants who formed part of the village defense—the Mujaheddin [guerrilla resistance]—managed to keep the attackers out of the villages. In the village of Baraki-Rajan, a bitter struggle took place.

“At first we managed to keep them out of our village, but when they started to shoot at us from tanks we were forced to retreat,” said the commander of the farmers who are members of the *Harrakat* guerrilla group. “When we ran out of ammunition, we were forced to escape and hide wherever we could. By then the defense of our village had already cost many deaths. Many people were unarmed and were killed in the fields where they were working when the first attack came.”

Bloody Revenge

After the defense of the village had collapsed, the Russians and the government troops took a bloody revenge on the civilian population.

“I saw seventeen people being executed,” says one eyewitness. “Nine of them were shot by the Russians in the bombed-out school building and eight [others] were taken outside the village before they were shot. When we were about to bury them, we found that seven of them had been robbed of their watches and their money.”

Another eyewitness, a man in his forties, followed the battle of Baraki-Rajan from his rooftop:

“I saw how eight women, children, and old men were dragged out of their houses and shot in the streets,” [he stated]. “It was obvious that they were not guerrilla soldiers and still they were shot. After that, I saw how the Russians threw out landmines in a wheatfield. When the guerrillas who had hidden there started to run away, they were shot.”

One guerrilla soldier who was not discovered and survived the massacre tells about the fighting:

“When the Russians tied up our friends and relatives and started to use them as shields for themselves in the fighting, and when they drove other villagers in front of the armored cars, we did not know what to do. We wanted to defend our village, but we could not shoot at the Russians when they did that [because] we would have killed our own people.”

His account is confirmed by an eyewitness.

When the Russians looted the partly-burning bazaar in the village, they found a group of old men. “They tied us up. They threw me, tied-up, into my own burning shop,” says one man in his seventies. “If my wife had not pulled me out after the Russians left, I would have been dead today.” The man, who still does not understand why he was given such treatment, shows his burned hands, feet and legs, and says, “Why did they do this to me? I am an old man and I have not done any harm to these barbarians.”

Abandoned Villages

During the three days of fighting in the Baraki area, 298 villagers were killed in Baraki-Rajan. Out of those, 203 were members of different resistance groups and 25 were children.

Another witness tells how he saw executions of civilians outside two other villages in the Baraki area during the fighting: In Shah Mazar 24 people were dragged outside the village and shot in front of the other villagers, and in Padkhawab-Roghani the same thing happened to eighteen people. In both places, the Russians told the villagers that the same thing would happen to them again if they continued to support the guerrillas.

Nobody knows exactly how many people have been executed or died in battle or from the bombings. In each village where the war finds its victims, the relatives bury their dead without reporting to any authority. The exact figures will probably never be clarified. However, the people throughout the Logar valley are saying that the executions and looting in the villages this past summer were not the first, and that they are not likely to be the last either.

One of these villages is the destroyed and abandoned village of Sidiq:

“On March 12 this year my village was bombed by helicopters and MIG planes,” says one 17-year-old boy. “Then the tanks came and the destruction continued. Russians and government soldiers came with the tanks. After executing ten boys between the ages of 10 and 12, they left the village with the helicopter. My brother and five of my cousins were killed in the attack.”

In his account, this boy also says that there were other foreign soldiers with the Soviet troops. In another eyewitness account, a guerrilla soldier speaks about East Germans, Vietnamese, and Cubans who participated in an attack against the village of Baraki-Barak on the same day [March 12, 1982] that Sidiq was attacked.

All over Logar, destroyed villages and graves bear witness to the mass destruction.

Men Are Being Caught

Some villages with populations up to one thousand inhabitants are completely abandoned, and the farmlands are being transformed into deserts.* In other villages, only the families [women, children, and old people] have fled. The men return periodically from the refugee camps in Pakistan to work the fields and keep the village free from invaders.

In these villages people are very nervous: the villages are within the so-called “helicopter territories”—areas where the helicopters shoot at anything that moves and where it is fatally dangerous to move outdoors in daytime.

Since the month of May, Soviet troops have started to encircle the villages in the Baraki, Mohammad Agha, Denow, and Kulangar areas, searching for guerrillas and trying to catch every man between 18 and 45 for impressment into the government army. When the Russians do not find the guerrillas or their relatives, they loot the houses. If the people are at home, they are killed, say innumerable witnesses in the Logar valley.

*Farming in much of Afghanistan is dependent on millenium-old irrigation systems which must be regularly maintained. In 1219, for example, Genghis Khan wiped out agriculture in southwestern Afghanistan, a breadbasket for centuries, by destroying the irrigation system; it remains a desert area today. Soviet destruction of such systems throughout Afghanistan, and the inability of farmers to maintain them under war conditions, are having a similar effect in various areas.—Ed.