

Update on my report about Lee Shapiro's death

Erwin Franzen
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The story told by Lee Shapiro's interpreter Abdul Malik, on which I based [my account](#) of how the two journalists died in Afghanistan, turns out to have been totally false, as I found out much later.

In fact, according to former Afghanistan correspondent Edward Girardet in his 2011 book "Killing the Cranes: A Reporter's Journey Through Three Decades of War in Afghanistan" (page 190 – paperback edition), Abdul Malik himself admitted later that there were "no Red Army troops in the vicinity" when Shapiro and Lindelof were killed. Girardet wrote that other sources of his confirmed this fact and told him the journalists were killed in crossfire when fighting broke out between the mujaheddin of the Hezb-e Islami Hekmatyar party with whom they were traveling and other fighters belonging to the Jamiat-e Islami group. If Shapiro wanted to meet the famed guerrilla leader Ahmadshah Massoud he would have had to switch to Jamiat-e Islami, of which Massoud was a member.

Girardet found that the US Embassy in Pakistan and the CIA insisted on regarding Gulbuddin Hekmatyar as the most effective mujaheddin leader and made sure he received the lion's share of the arms, ammunition and other materiel they provided to the Afghan resistance. This was mainly because the US government relied on Pakistan's intelligence service ISI for information on the mujaheddin and liaison with them. Most seasoned correspondents in Afghanistan knew well that Hekmatyar's forces fought other mujaheddin groups more often than they attacked the Soviets or the Afghan Army, and they also murdered many critics of their activities with impunity, as Girardet describes in detail in his book.

For anyone interested in Lee Shapiro's tragic journey through Afghanistan, the best book to read is "Blood on the Lens: A Filmmaker's Quest for Truth in Afghanistan" by Jim Burroughs, published in 2007. It contains a lot of details on Shapiro's quest and on the search for his body in the following years. Burroughs believes, as he writes on page 186 of the hardcover edition, that Hekmatyar's men "sacrificed Shapiro and Lindelof for hard cash near Jalrez, a town known for its conspiracies."

He also writes the following on pages 63-64: "Strangely enough, Jan Goodwin [the head of Save the Children in Peshawar and a journalist herself] told us in an interview in 1989 that an Aaton movie camera (what Shapiro had used) complete with lenses, batteries and a tripod had shown up in the Peshawar marketplace several months after the reported murders. Had the Soviets turned the "seized" equipment over to scavengers? I doubt it."

--Erwin Franzen