



Glenn Luther's Afghanistan Diary

Photojournalism major Glenn Luther spent eight months in Kabul, Afghanistan, working as an assistant instructor of photography and as the first undergraduate foreign correspondent in that area. His first-hand accounts and images present an unvarnished perspective on a nation torn by decades of war and a people struggling to reconstruct their lives in its shadow.





On the Cover

Angry Afghans shout during an anti-Pakistan rally after news reached Kabul that the Pakistan army had begun invading Afghanistan.

Dedication

This Digital Newsbook is dedicated to Bill Gentile and Manoocher Deghati for having faith in me and giving me an opportunity to develop into the journalist I have always wanted to become.

Glenn Luther's Afghanistan Diary

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Digital Newsbooks

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Looking Closer: An Outsider's View of a Nation Scarred by War

My name is Glenn Luther. I am 24 years old and a senior photojournalism major at Kent State University. I recently spent more than eight months teaching for a humanitarian non-government organization called Aina in Kabul, Afghanistan. This diary chronicles my experiences from a little over a year after the fall of the Taliban, until now.

For a year and a half before I left, Afghanistan had been the subject of everything I had heard or read about in the media. But no news reports could have prepared me for the shock I felt when I actually saw the country first hand.

I came to Kabul in the middle of a winter so cold that it felt like my breath was frozen inside me. As my plane landed, I could see the destruction left by 23 years of war.

Kabul International Airport looked more like an airplane graveyard, with commercial and military airplanes scattered across the ground in pieces. Women walked down the city streets, fully covered in burkas. Old men struggled to push heavy carts through traffic. Children crawled up to me with tattered clothes and missing limbs to beg me for change.

Those sights made a strong first impression, and it took a while for me to see the country for what it really is. Despite the destruction and poverty that greeted me, Afghanistan is one of the most



▲ QuickTime Video

Downtown Kabul (above) serves as a subject for photography students at Aina. Instructor Glenn Luther brings his class into the city to practice their skills.

Glenn Luther stands in front of a wall pitted with bullet holes in central Kabul.





Once illegal under Taliban rule, the game of Buzkashi has returned as a popular Afghan pastime. In this sport, men on horseback try to score points for their team by riding away with a headless goat.

beautiful places I have ever visited.

The Hindu Kush Mountains that surround Kabul are snow-capped in winter. With the mixture of the central Asian climate and the dusty atmosphere, the sunsets are unlike anything I have ever seen.

Kabul itself has an energy that

is hard to describe. Whether it comes from a simple ride in a taxi or the sound of a bomb exploding down the road, the lively intensity of the city can be felt all around.

In the streets, cars and taxis weave furiously in and out of what Westerners would call the “right” lanes. In the local bazaar, vendors and shopkeepers shout

the prices of their products to passers-by. In ice cream shops, customers sit mesmerized by the Bollywood (India’s version of Hollywood) movies on the television while local musicians play their instruments outside. Both movies and music had been outlawed by the Taliban.

Games were illegal under the

Taliban, too. Today people can play cards, volleyball, and even the popular Afghan sport, Buzkashi. This involves about 20 men on horseback who try to grab a headless goat and ride away with it to score points for their team.

Two years ago, Afghanistan was totally different. Remnants of former regimes and battles are evident in the abandoned rockets, bullet shells and other military equipment that turn up in the mountains and villages. People still talk about how al-Qaeda and the Taliban are lurking around Kabul.

The city remains an active war zone. It is normal to hear bombs and grenades go off every week. When they explode nearby, they shake your house as if large fireworks have just been set off over your head.

At night, American military aircraft fly over the city every 20 minutes during routine missions along the eastern and southern borders. International Security Assistance Force and NATO troops keep trying to prevent terrorist attacks. Their armored vehicles are common on the roadways of Kabul.

I never thought that I could find such a place so attractive. Visually, it is incredibly photogenic. Mentally, it can be very draining. Living there for just a few months changed the way I see the world. It changed the way I see the global war on terror and the way I understand democracy.

I came to Afghanistan to teach, and before I even began, it started to teach me.



A curved bridge support serves as a makeshift pedestrian overpass. The bridge was blasted to slow enemy access to Kabul.



Travelers and taxis zip past the broken buildings of downtown Kabul. The city is one of contrast and contradiction, with its crumbling urban landscape marred by decades of warfare juxtaposed with the peaceful beauty of the Hindu Kush mountain range.

February 3, 2003

Beginning the Journey

It's 3:30 p.m. Monday, February 3, and I just said good-bye to everyone I know in the U.S. I'm nervous. In two days, I will be half a world away from everything that I call familiar. Two months ago, I was offered a job in Afghanistan to assist photojournalist

Manoocher Deghati, who teaches for a French non-governmental organization called Aina, which is the Persian word for "mirror." Bill Gentile, my documentary and photojournalism professor, gave me five days to decide whether to take this job.

It isn't easy to put your life on hold, especially when you have a cell phone contract, car payments, and a lease on a house (which I just moved into). It's even harder to leave behind everyone you love as you head to one of the most dangerous places in the world for Americans.

My total experience as a world traveler has consisted of vacations in Canada. Something tells me this might be a little different.

Afghanistan's entry requirements obliged me to obtain a passport, visa and health card. The health card shows I have received shots for typhoid, hepatitis A and B, tetanus-diphtheria, and other inoculations that will keep me from getting deathly ill.

Right now, I am at Pittsburgh International Airport, the first of five airports I'll pass through in the next two days. My itinerary takes me from Pittsburgh to JFK in New York, and then on to London, where I have a four-hour layover. From London, I head to Baku, a city in Azerbaijan. There I'll have an 11-hour layover before finally boarding a plane to Kabul, Afghanistan. I will be traveling for about 33 hours straight and I've already been awake for about nine hours.

For the first time today, I am getting excited. Soon I will board a plane that will take me to a place I know will change my life forever.

Some people have asked me why I am going to Afghanistan. I just tell them, "Why not?" There's a big world outside of Kent, Ohio, and I plan to find it. I have never felt so alive.



The colors of the national flag decorate a Buzkashi field as a spectator momentarily takes his eyes off the game. Buzkashi, once outlawed by the Taliban, is a popular sport in Afghanistan.

February 23, 2003

In the Shadow of War

War protests have begun around the world. About a million people marched in London last week. The word on the street here is that if the U.S. attacks Iraq, al-Qaeda will retaliate against Afghanistan and quite possibly the U.S.

At the Aina Media and Culture Center, all ears are tuning in to the world-band radios as we try to follow what is happening in the world around us. News can be very hard to get in Kabul because most of the city lacks electricity, and our Internet connection doesn't stay connected.

Being an American in Afghani-

stan is risky, so precautions are necessary. We expats are not allowed to go into crowded public places like Chicken Street, the location of Kabul's modern western goods bazaar, on busy days. To avoid attracting attention, we are not allowed to wear bright or flashy clothes when we go into the city. I hate the fact that I speak only English. It really makes you stand out in a crowd. Afghans learn a little English in their school systems, so when they hear you speak English, they can recognize you as an American. Some days, I feel vulnerable. Today I feel safe, but if the U.S. attacks Iraq, I worry that my safety will become a constant problem.

Still, I travel a few miles into the city every morning to teach photo-

journalism to my students. This is such an incredible opportunity. These students may one day have their work carried by some of the world's largest media outlets. They have incredible access to Afghanistan since they have lived here all their lives. Right now, it's a slow and painstaking process teaching the simplest camera lessons to the students, like how to focus. Most of these students had never taken a picture before coming to Aina. This is the right time to teach journalism. Things could be different in a year, and this chance might not be as available as it is now.

The past few nights, there have been waves of fighter planes flying over Kabul. American F-16s patrol the sky over Kabul most of the day. This morning, U.S. helicopters flew close to the treetops and made the windows shake in the house where I'm staying. I am not sure why the U.S. is making such an obvious appearance over Kabul, but I think it might be the start of the U.S.-led war on Iraq. This is the first noticeable presence of the U.S. military I have seen in Kabul. Chances are, it will not be the last.

March 4, 2003

A New Home, A New Hope

After three weeks in Afghanistan I'm still feeling overwhelmed. I'm staying at Manoocher Deghati's home in Karte Se. His house on the west side of Kabul is among the few in this city that have been reconstructed.



Early morning sunlight streams through the windows of Manoocher Deghati's home in Karte Se.

Much of Kabul is in ruins. Everywhere you look you can see bullet holes in walls, buildings that look like the Oklahoma City building after it was bombed. Yet people still manage to live in large numbers in and around these frail structures.

Deghati's house is structurally modern, but it's a far cry from my home in Ohio. There are no couches and no chairs. We sit on floor mats when we eat. There is no TV either. English-speaking radio stations on the world-band radio are my main sources of news and entertainment.

It amazes me how dependent I have been on modern electric appliances like microwaves, refrigerators and washing machines. In Kabul, they are essentially useless. The only electricity we have is pulled from a diesel-powered generator. People fortunate enough to have generators ration their use

because diesel fuel is expensive here — the price is about the same as in the States.

The house I live in has electricity for about two hours a night. When the generator is turned off, lanterns are the only light available.

We have tap water, but the pumps inside the house are barely able to push the water through the faucets. There is no hot water. "Baths" are taken only after you heat a kettle on the stove, enough to fill half a bucket.

My bedroom is heated by a diesel stove. It only holds about three or four hours of fuel. I turn it off before going to bed to avoid breathing fumes after the diesel runs dry.

I sleep on a two-inch-thick floor mat. There are pillows lining the wall beside my bed to insulate me somewhat from the cold air outside. The blankets are heavy

enough to keep me warm. I am very fortunate; few people here can afford such a luxury.

A nine-foot wall surrounds the house. Plain-clothes security guards stand watch 24 hours a day. At night, we put lanterns on the porch so the guards can keep a close eye on the house from their guard building in one corner of the yard.

March 12, 2003

Learning to Teach Others

The Aina headquarters in Kabul is about four miles away from the house. A driver takes me there every morning shortly after the sun comes up and brings me back home again hours after the sun goes down.

When you arrive, you are dropped off at the main gate, where you must pass through the guardhouse — a small shelter with a chair and a table — to reach the driveway. As you walk along the driveway you see signs in Dari and broken English, telling drivers not to park their cars near the buildings. Before entering the Aina complex, you must stop at another guardhouse, where plain-clothes guards keep watch and check incoming visitors with a hand-held metal detector.

Once inside, you see a small, muddy courtyard surrounded by buildings with doors that face inward. The buildings house Kabul Weekly, the Afghan women's magazine *Malalai*, the Institute for



A guard watches the installation of a security gate at Aina.

War and Peace Reporting, a radio studio and also provide a place for conference rooms, classrooms and a guesthouse.

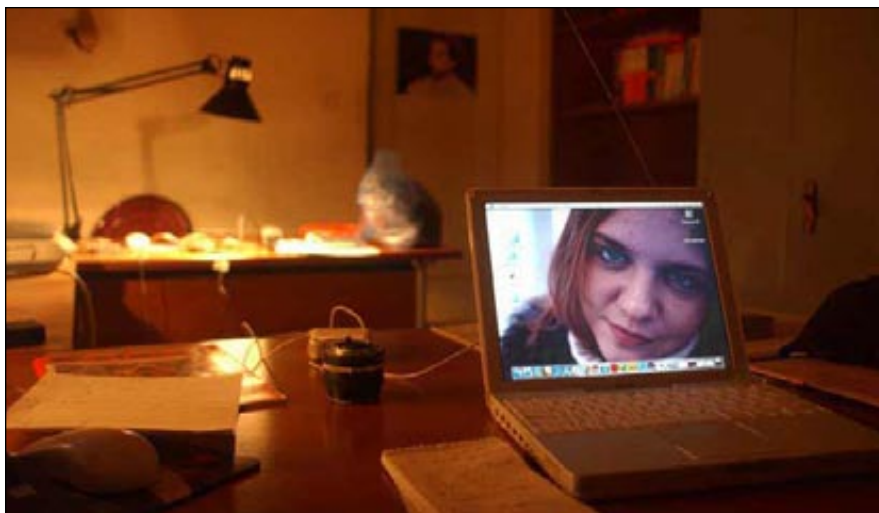
When you walk into the complex you enter one of the most technologically advanced areas in Afghanistan. There is electricity. When the municipal power fails (which it often does), there

are many generators here to keep things running. A satellite dish links about 50 computers to the Internet. Access often is slower than a phone line and never reliable, but it's still the best connection we have to the outside world.

My office has three small desks. Three wall outlets do their best to support the 17 plugs we have

jammed into cheap power strips.

I work with the photojournalism students in a classroom next door. A few years ago it served as an interrogation room for the Taliban. When it was remodeled, workers found bloodstains in the room. Some people suspect these rooms were used for torture. The building that houses the photo-



Students ask questions

after a photography class at Aina. Pictured from left to right are Zubaida Akhbar, instructor Glenn Luther, M. Ali Omid and Farzana Wahedi.

An image of his girlfriend,

Rachel Myers, peers out from Luther's computer screen on his desk at Aina.

journalism and videography department was a Taliban jail. Now this building is used to help foster a free democracy through the use of images and the support of a free press in Afghanistan.

The photojournalism students each use a 35-mm camera. None of the cameras has a light meter and some have focusing problems. But in Kabul this is the best equipment available.

All students speak Dari, which is similar to Farsi, the language spoken next door in Iran. Most students also speak some English, but a few students can only say hello. I work every day with a translator who explains my lessons beyond simple English sentences.

I am taking Dari classes twice a week so that I can have an easier time communicating with people here. Right now, I can get by with a few words and gestures, but I still find it difficult to ask for simple things like matches to light my stove.

Even with less-than-ideal equipment and ideas that can only be understood through gestures and broken language, the students are eager to learn. They also are eager to show the rest of the world the real Afghanistan, the part that western media fails to show.

When I asked one of the students why he wanted to be photojournalist, he answered (through an interpreter): "I am tired of the way the rest of the world sees us. It is time that we give Afghanistan a new image, not one of destruction and war, but one that shows our condition and the hope and pride in all of us who live here."

Sharing Their Visions of Hope

Photojournalism has emerged from the rubble of the former Afghan regimes and is beginning to assert itself through the lenses of the Aina Photojournalism Institute's students.

Fourteen Afghans were selected from hundreds of prospective students who wanted to attend the institute for one year. They were evaluated for qualities such as work ethic and willingness to learn since photojournalism had been illegal under Taliban rule and they would therefore have no portfolios.

"I believe that the freedom of expression is essential to democracy," said Farzana Wahedi, one of the students. "It is something I have never known before."

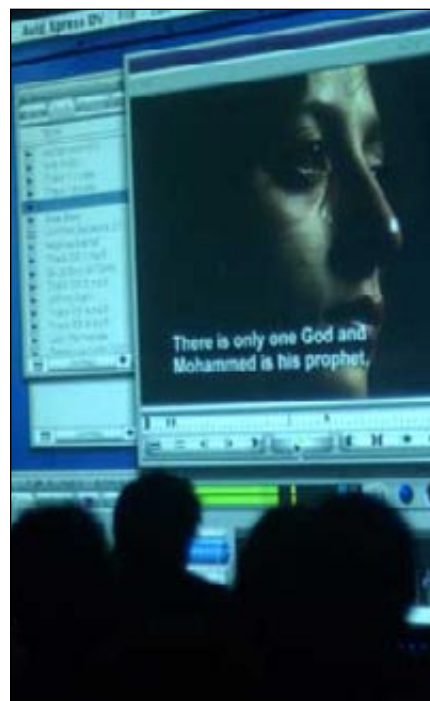
Each student has seen the results of terrorism in their city. One student, Najibullah Musafer, was placed in a Taliban prison and tortured for seven grueling months for the crime of carrying a camera.

Some of the students fled their homes during the Taliban rule. Others stood and fought against them.

Wakil Kohsar, now age 23, fought for two years against the Taliban and helped the Northern Alliance force the Taliban from control in Kabul. Wahedi, who could not leave her home, waited patiently for the world to notice as she secretly attended school under the cover of occupational seamstress.

But all of the students are determined to make a difference as they document life after the Taliban. They see their world in different ways. They know how the rest of the world views them, and they understand how important it is that they begin to communicate their perspectives. Their message is in their photographs.

In a small office in Kabul, Afghanistan, voices that were kept silent for so long are finally being heard.





A young Afghan orphan bites his nails as he waits with about 700 other boys at the Allahuddin Orphanage to see if he will receive aid from a private American donor.

February 23, 2003

A Song for Tomorrow

About 20 children are gathered in front of the large metal gate to greet us as our car pulls up to the orphanage on the west side of Kabul. From their respectful silence, you would never guess hundreds

more are living inside. Allahuddin Orphanage is the second largest institution of its kind in Kabul. Some of the children have families who cannot afford to feed them; others have no families at all.



Two small boys play at the edge of their bed at the Allahuddin Orphanage. The orphans are facing serious problems from overcrowding and lack of funds.

I am here on my first photo assignment with two videographers from Aina to document a private donation of cups, lunch boxes and clothes from people in the U.S.

As we are led into a small room outside the office of the orphanage director, we are surprised to see about 700 boys lined up single file. They are dressed in military-style clothing, like little soldiers. They stand noiselessly at attention, waiting for the director to speak.

A small boy, no older than 6, is

guided to the front of the room. The director tells us he has a gift for us. The boy turns to face the other children and begins to sing.

His face is red, but his voice is strong and sure as he stares at the wall on the other end of the room. He sings about the power of the Taliban and the destruction it brought to the Afghan society. He sings about Massoud, the leader of the Northern Alliance, who was assassinated days before 9/11. He sings of freedom from war, corrupt regimes and oppression.

Some of the children have families who bring them items when they can afford it; that happens infrequently. Others have nothing but the clothes on their backs. As I walk through their classrooms and sleeping areas, this becomes more obvious.

Their rooms are nearly empty. Some of the children have beds, and some sleep on mats on the floor. There are shoes lined up in one corner — most of them are made of plastic, and many kids wear sandals, even in winter. It's

about 15 degrees outside, and a wood-burning stove provides the only heat.

When the director begins passing out donations, he tells me (through translators) that each child will get something. However, there are not enough clothes for all of them, so most will receive only a cup or lunch box.

Standing outside the cafeteria at lunchtime, we overhear the children chanting in unison. The Afghan-American woman who has donated items to the orphanage tells us they are saying, "We're not happy here."

She explains that they are not ungrateful; they are desperate, having learned to cope with the roughest of conditions. They know many of the people who visit them are much better off, especially Westerners. They can tell by a person's clothes and shoes. They know enough about the outside world to ask me if my camera is digital.

Children are routinely checked to see if they are "smuggling" food outside the eating quarters. It has been a real problem. There is not enough food to keep each child satisfied, and it can cause serious fights if a child takes an apple to his room.

But food smuggling isn't the greatest problem the Allahuddin Orphanage must contend with. Despite help from non-governmental organizations in Italy and Greece, the orphanage is in desperate need of funding.

The director tells us he expects another 1,000 children next year, and he is not sure what to do. The



On a cold winter day, two boys pump water from a well outside the Allahuddin Orphanage.



Two boys run down a hall at the second largest orphanage in Afghanistan.

children appear to be well taken care of. But as their numbers increase and worldwide attention toward Afghanistan slips away, another hardship looms: the possibility of the Taliban's return.

Saudi businessmen have been at the orphanage this week trying to help with the funding. While they promise to provide such amenities as computers and money for education, the director says there is one catch: Some of the businessmen have strong Taliban influences. If their money is used, the director fears, they will require control over what the children are taught.

For now, the children run across the muddy playground with no shoes and no heavy coats to protect them from the cold. Here in Afghanistan, their problems are more serious than a lack of warm clothes.



Shiite Muslims mark the death of the prophet Muhammad's grandson on the last day of Ashura, a holiday of mourning in Afghanistan. Many have recently revived a religious tradition that had been outlawed by the Taliban: self-flagellation.

March 13, 2003

A Rhythm Returns

The Shiite Muslim community has gathered this week to observe one of its most sacred holidays: Ashura.

On this holiday, Shiite Muslims remember the death of the prophet Muhammad's grandson, Imam Hus-

sein, whose death marked the division between the Shiites and Sunni Muslims. The Taliban had restricted the celebration of this holiday of mourning. Now, in a free country, Afghans practice Ashura as they had so many years ago.

I visit the Takya Omomi, the common religious place, on the last day of Ashura. Hundreds of people crowd the courtyard at midday, and music blares from the loudspeakers.

The three floors of the Takya Omomi are packed tightly with even more people. The music seems to intensify as I inch my way inside.

The beat of the music echoes steadily as the men chant a low, melodious tune. They beat their chests in time with the music before lifting their hands toward

Heaven. It is said that they do this to feel the pain Hussein suffered when he was martyred in battle.

A man speaks to the crowd, urging them to think of their dead countrymen as well. Many of the worshippers are in tears, remembering ancestors, friends and family. The atmosphere is so emotional that although I only understand a few words, I find myself sharing their grief.

Exiting the mosque, people toss money on a blanket to support their local place of worship. Shortly after walking outside, I

notice a group of young men and boys surrounded by people. I make my way to the front of the gathering as someone with a bullhorn starts to chant.

The boys, wearing shirts with large holes in the front and back, kneel in rows as they echo the chanting from the bullhorn. They stretch their palms skyward before slamming into their chests with alternating hands, leaving large, red marks on their skin.

Five minutes later, someone pulls out a handful of chains, seven inches long with a five-inch



Worshippers contribute alms to support the town's mosque after an intensely emotional prayer session.



Young men beat their chests in rhythmic unison while a crowd of worshippers looks on.

handle. He first hands the chains to the youngest children, who are only 8 or 9 years old.

As people in the crowd beat their chests rhythmically, the children stand and begin to whip their own backs with the long chains, leaving link-shaped welts. Then they pass the chains to a group of older boys who whip themselves more aggressively, giving themselves about 20 lashes. After that, they swing blades that lacerate their skin and draw blood.

No one cries, and no one lets on that he is in pain. They choose to bear this self-flagellation in honor of their fallen martyr, Imam Hussein.



Even boys as young as 8 years old take part in the Ashura rituals.



Blood colors the pavement where young men and boys whipped themselves with chains and blades during the holiday of Ashura. Shiite Muslims perform the ritual to honor the pain experienced by Imam Hussein, the grandson of the prophet Muhammad and a martyr who died in battle.

Islam: A Religion of Peace

Young men in the Darul-e-Markazi Madressa, a Sunni religious school, diligently listen to the Mullah teach the principles of Islam, sunlight peeking through the holes rockets have left in the walls.

The students are learning how to become spiritual leaders for the next generation of Afghans. They are not learning how to become terrorists.

In the past, the Taliban manipulated madressas in refugee camps to disillusion Afghan youth and persuade them to join their fundamentalist jihads. This religious school is not owned or run by the Taliban. It does not advocate violence.

Having been victims of the extremists that have occupied Afghanistan, the majority of people do not condone the actions of groups like al-Qaeda or the Taliban. Instead, they believe Islam is a religion of peace.

Yet Islam is more than a religion in Afghanistan — it is a way of life. It is woven tightly into the fabric of society; it is integral to the laws enforced by the government, to the past that still haunts the countryside and to the history books that fill Western schools.

Many people in the United States still con-



Two Afghan men study at Kabul's central madressa, a school for Islam. All students at the Darul-e-Markazi madressa are Sunni Muslims studying to be spiritual leaders in their community.

fuse the War on Terror with a battle between Islam and Christianity. But Afghans want no such crusade. They beg for the freedom to practice their beliefs and live peacefully — without being stereotyped as terrorists.

Winning the War on Terror begins with understanding. If we cannot discern Muslims from terrorists, then we have lost the war already.



A U.S. helicopter fires flares above a crowded bazaar about a week before the first attacks in Iraq. The flares are used to divert the sensors of heat-seeking missiles and rockets.

March 19, 2003

‘They Will Forget Us’

War has commenced. The sound of it is beginning to echo in every corner of the world. News of the initial attacks has paused movement of foreigners going to and from Aina. Executives declared the

organization would be closed March 20 because of the start of the American-led military campaign in Iraq.

In Kabul, this war has been foreshadowed for many weeks by the increased number of U.S. forces in the air.

F-16 Fighting Falcons have circled the city for hours on end. It is a deliberate act on the part of the U.S. to remind the remnants of the Taliban and al-Qaeda of America's constant presence.

Low-flying U.S. helicopters have also been spotted frequently in the skies of Kabul. A few days ago, one such helicopter fired heat-emitting flares over a crowded section of the city. Flares like this are typically dropped to defend against heat-seeking missiles and rockets by misdirecting their sensors.

If U.S. ground forces have been deployed, they have made their presence invisible. Their base in Baghram is about an hour's drive from the city. The distance ensures air traffic will be kept quiet, away from the eyes of millions in more populated areas.

Inside Aina, foreign journalists are operating under high caution. Movement to and from the facility, near the center of Kabul, has been restricted. We are prepared for a possible evacuation. It is speculated that if Afghanistan is targeted, terrorists will focus on Westerners. Their actions could reflect those of the notorious suicide bombers in Israel. The threat of al-Qaeda hangs heavy over us.

"I am very afraid for my future," says Mohammed Omead, 22, a top photojournalist at Aina. "I think al-Qaeda will attack us. They are still here."

The Afghan native's hands begin to shake as he continues in a trembling voice.

"Our future will be very dark here in Afghanistan if the war begins," he says. "They (foreign



A soldier monitors the Nauroz festivities from atop a wall surrounding the courtyard of a mosque.

military forces) will forget us."

Only a few hours have passed since the first American missile hit Baghdad. All attention here is tuned to the world-band radios and the single television linked to the satellite network. News is still developing.

In the words of President Bush, these are "the opening stages of a broad and concerted campaign."

April 1, 2003

Ghosts of the Past

The Mullah's voice echoes throughout the large valley, where a crowd of over 10,000 people gather to celebrate Nauroz, the

Afghan New Year.

Via loudspeaker, the spiritual leader opens the commemoration of another year of peace after 23 years of destruction and war between factions.

Reminders of a violent past linger in the otherwise jovial atmosphere.

Soldiers and police officers armed with heavy automatic rifles and batons line the streets outside the mosque. They also patrol the wall surrounding the mosque, keeping a close watch on the festivities. It has been made clear that anyone trying to climb the wall and enter the courtyard without explicit permission will face harsh opposition.

The celebration is interrupted momentarily when an explosion



The shadows of children at play drift over the graves of their ancestors during the Nauroz festivities.

erupts, and a man's body falls about 20 feet down the mountain-side. One of the many landmines that dot the countryside have claimed yet another victim. Most people seemed unfazed.

A flag, known as the Biraq, is brought out of the mosque, and a brief chaos ensues. Large numbers of people struggle to climb over the fence and up the flagpole in a desperate attempt to touch the Biraq and receive a spiritual blessing.

Security forces begin to beat the patrons with batons to maintain order. But bruises can't deter the determined.

Elsewhere in the valley, the festival resembles a typical American fair – at first glance.

People dance and play games inside one of Kabul's largest cemeteries, and a bazaar sells food and souvenirs just outside. Vendors even sell toy guns that resemble the artillery carried by the soldiers.

Children skirt through the graveyard, innocently aiming their fake rifles at passers-by. Even in their carefree games, these children re-enact the violence that haunted their ancestors, who lie underneath the very ground on which they play.



A small boy walks among the gravestones dotting the landscape.



Thousands of people (above) cover the hillsides near the mosque, blanketing the landscape with an undulating texture. The area is mined, and a single misstep can result in a lethal explosion.

Dancing near the gravestones that cover the festival grounds (right), a man celebrates the Afghan New Year as onlookers clap their hands to help keep a rhythm.





Security forces (above) pry worshippers away from the Biraq, a sacred flag outside the mosque. Drove of people climb over each other just to touch the Biraq, creating a potentially unsafe situation. Guards frequently use batons to force the people apart in the name of maintaining order, only to shove their way toward the Biraq themselves.



The Biraq, (left) is believed to bestow spiritual blessings upon those who touch it.



The austere Panjshir Valley has proved to be a formidable battleground for foreign invaders.

April 15, 2003

The Valley of the Legend

No one has ever invaded the Panjshir Valley and won.

Located northeast of Kabul, it was here that Alexander the Great and the U.S.S.R. were defeated. It is the scene of many legendary battles — but of only one legend.

Ahmad Shah Massoud, the leader of the Northern Alliance, was assassinated two days before 9/11. He fought for the freedom of Afghanistan until his death.

The War on Terror did not begin with the collapse of the Twin Towers. It began here in the Hindu

Kush mountain range of Afghanistan. It began with violence followed by a vision.

For 23 long years, no city in Afghanistan has been able to escape war. The evidence is clear. Bullet holes mark the sides of homes. Rotting tanks lie crippled along roadsides. Entire communities have been reduced to ruins.

Old men remember a time before the fighting. Then Afghanistan's peace collapsed and the future seemed to grow dim. Hope was lost. Massoud was determined to find it.

While he felt war was not a panacea to his troubled nation, Massoud knew freedom would come at a high price. Struggling

through decades of combat, he defeated the Soviets nine times in the narrow valley of Panjshir before spending the next five years fighting the Taliban.

The Taliban soon realized that to control Afghanistan, they would need to control the Panjshir Valley. Outnumbered two to one, Massoud and his Northern Alliance army managed to overcome the Taliban every time they invaded the Panjshir Valley.

In 2001, Massoud became what many Afghans call a “martyr” when he was assassinated by a group of al-Qaeda suicide bombers posing as photojournalists. They killed the leader, but not his cause.

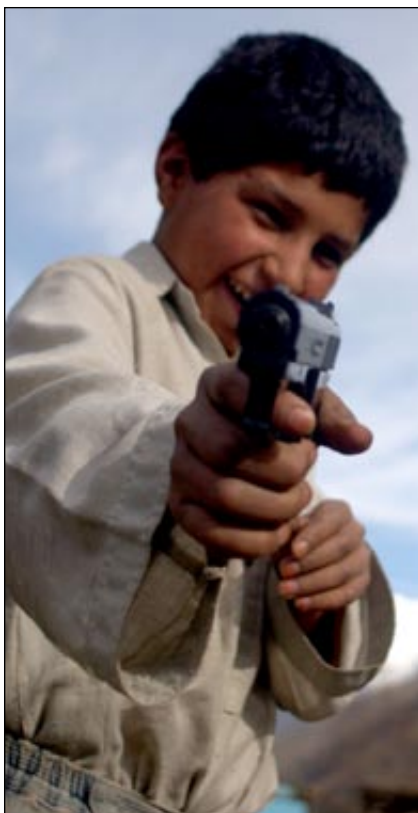
Two days later, the World Trade Center was taken down by terrorists of the same regime, launching a worldwide conflict that continues today.

Pictures of Massoud, with his dark and determined eyes, peer out from nearly every street corner and home as a reminder that war is not the answer. He represents hope for the children who battle one another with their toy guns in the weathered streets.

His body lies in a grave in Panjshir, still guarded by Northern Alliance troops. Their leader has fallen. But one fact remains: No one has ever invaded the Panjshir Valley and won.



The eyes of Massoud seem to watch over the people of Afghanistan, his picture as ubiquitous as his memory.



A heritage of violence trails the children of Afghanistan, even as they innocently play.



Remembering their leader, Massoud's Northern Alliance soldiers pray near his tomb in the Panjshir Valley. Though Massoud was assassinated in 2001, his men continue to fight for his cause.

**A weary soldier**

(above) reflects on the toll war has taken on his troubled nation, where men normally live to be 46 years old. Nik Mohammed Kohsar is almost 70 and has seen over 23 years of fighting.

Time and rust eat away at the carcasses of broken tanks (left). Northern Alliance troops have been fighting their enemies in this valley for decades, each time emerging victorious. But their struggle for a lasting peace has been a much harder battle.



A woman in a bikini emblazoned with the stars and stripes of the American flag is undeniably at odds with the conservative cultural standards in Afghanistan. The photo is one of many controversial images intended to provoke discussion and awareness among the people attending the exhibit.

April 4, 2003

World Press Photo Exhibit

An Afghan soldier shouts inside the Kabul Freedom Publishing House: "These photos will cause an earthquake in this city!" He is referring to the pictures on display at the World

Press Photo Exhibit. Photographs of women in bathing suits, as well as the stunning images of 9/11, hang just a few hundred yards from the site of missile attacks during the previous week.



An Afghan soldier stares at an image of Northern Alliance troops executing a Taliban operative.

One particular image of Northern Alliance troops executing a Taliban prisoner has the soldier pacing nervously.

While spectators gaze at a photo of the second plane slamming into the World Trade Center, several more heavily armed soldiers patrol the roof and perimeter of the building.

The publishing house, which had long been abandoned, has been chosen by Aina to hold the exhibit. Scribbled in Persian lettering across the printing presses remain phrases such as, "Damn War," and "I am a dying land; my name is Afghanistan."

The controversial photos do more than tell the story of journal-



Two women pause in front of a printing press to look at a series of photos on male swimmers.

ism in the past year. They boldly define the new lifestyle of Afghans. The exhibit itself is an indication of freedom from the Taliban, which was torn from power just two years ago.

Back then, it was forbidden to take or even possess pictures anywhere in Afghanistan. This year, the best of photojournalism have come to the capital.

Some photos, particularly those of women, are considered highly offensive by standards of the Afghan culture.

As a result, protesters kept the security guards awake the entire night before the show, pelting rocks against the sides of the building.

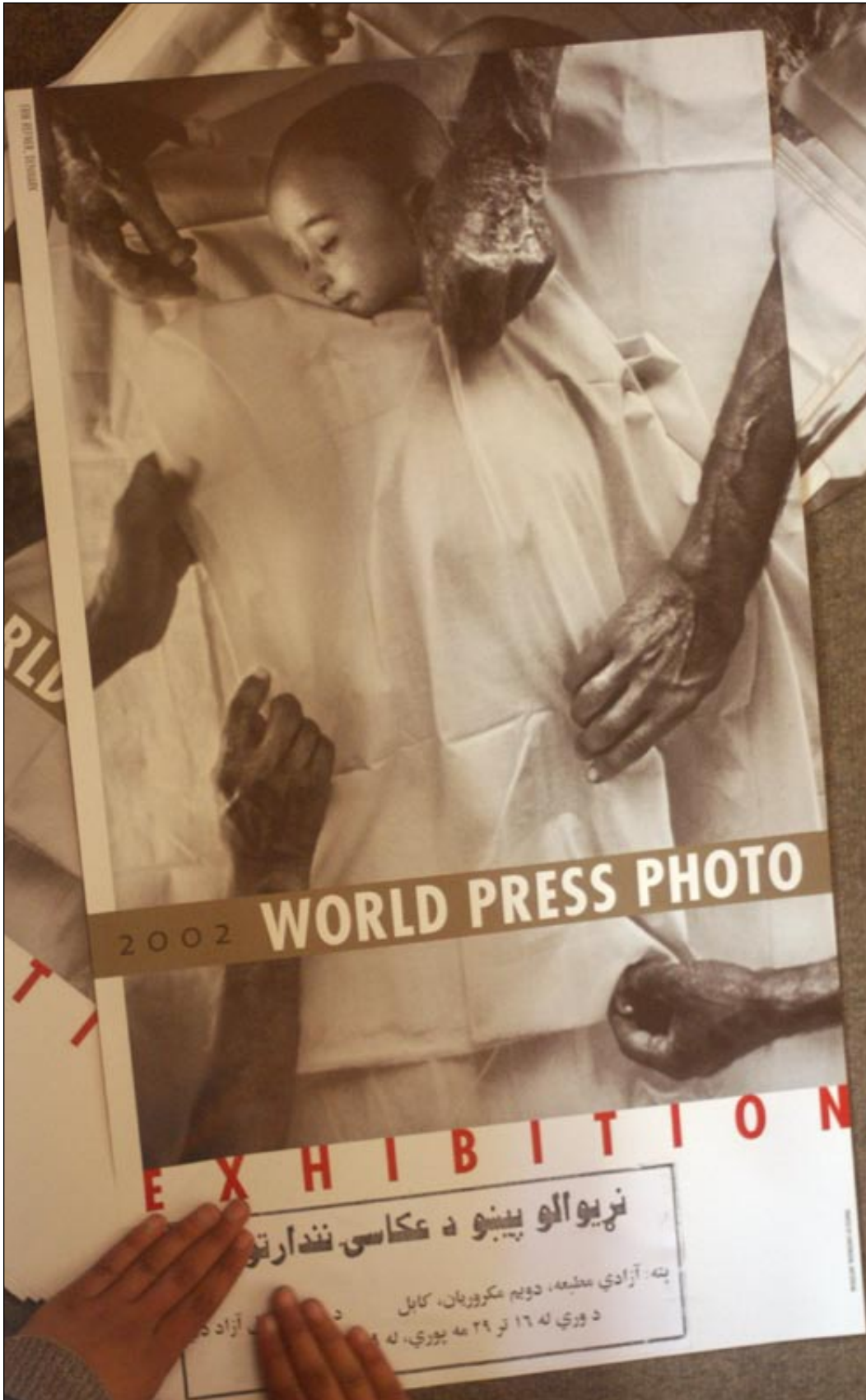


Aina workers survey an array of photographs that will be showcased at the World Press Photo Exhibit. The images represent the best work of photographers from around the world.



The Minister of Information and Culture, Dr. Sayed M. Raheen (above), addresses the crowd while students document the event with still photography and video. Standing next to Raheen is Manoocher Deghati, a photojournalist who teaches at Aina.

An Aina worker (left) positions a photo of a plane crashing into one of the Twin Towers on Sept. 11, 2001 as the other tower burns.



A baby in a body bag is just one of the powerful images on display at the World Press Photo Exhibit. This poster was used to publicize the show.



An Afghan businessman observes the money market through a web of power lines.

Afghan police and ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) teams keep a close eye on people moving in and out of the exhibit — even from up to a mile away. The entire block around the publishing house is closed.

Posters previously hanging throughout the city had advertised the time and place of the event, making it an easy target for an attack.

Invitations to Kabul's most important political and military figures were delivered days before the exhibit, but few made an appearance. Even the World Press Photo staff, which travels

with every exhibit, has opted not to attend because of the possible danger.

But some have come anyway. Over 200 people bravely gather at the opening ceremony, as if to say Afghanistan is, in fact, changing.

April 13, 2003

The Wealth of a Nation

Lights wired to car batteries flicker on at 9 a.m. as the money market opens in Kabul.

Far from Wall Street, hundreds

of men with large stacks of money begin to flood the dusty courtyard. They are exchanging foreign currency for new bank notes called Afghani.

Before the Afghani emerged four months ago, the country had been divided economically as well as socially. Warlords printed and circulated their own notes. At least four forms of currency were widely accepted. The Afghan government issued the Afghani to standardize the inconsistent system.

Western alternatives to currency such as checks and credit cards can't be used. The facilities are not yet equipped to handle

modern transactions. After all, the banks in Afghanistan have not been fully operational for 10 years.

There are no electronic tickers or high-tech computers in any of the exchange offices. Until the market expands, Afghan society must revolve around a cash-based system.

After 23 years of fighting, even the market itself is partially in ruins. Broken walls and windows are still waiting to be repaired. The rooms where currency exchanges take place have no electricity or running water.

The wars of the past are



New banknotes called Afghani are an attempt to standardize financial transactions.

echoed in the precautions many entrepreneurs take. Security guards roam the market with assault rifles, and steel bars have replaced glass windows to deter possible thieves.

But for these businessmen, it's all in a day's work. They shout to their fellow marketers from inside the decrepit buildings as they carry out their transactions.

Monetary security is key to rebuilding Afghanistan, but achieving it is a slow process. Here in the dusty corners of the money market, the nation is taking its first steps toward a stable economy.



Shouting exchange rates, businessmen convert currencies. About 52 Afghani equal one U.S. dollar.



A refugee remembers returning from Pakistan to find her home destroyed by bombs.

May 1, 2003

Life Among the Ruins

The past 23 years have devastated the city of Kabul, leaving it completely in ruins.

Homes, businesses and government buildings have been reduced to rubble and sowed with anti-tank and anti-personnel landmines, crippling society and the rebuilding process.

It is hard to find a building without a bullet hole in it. Some houses have thousands of bullet holes in the exterior walls.

One Afghan man tells me through a translator that in one day about 3,000 bombs were dropped in Kabul. People had to hide in their homes and pray that they would not be the next unofficial targets.



Sisters play in what remains of their house after bombs tore off the roof. They and their family had taken refuge in neighboring Pakistan during the war, only to return to find their home blasted and mined. Like many other refugees, they now have to sleep in tents.



A small girl leans against the one of the remaining walls of the old Soviet apartments that were destroyed by war. Refugees have been pouring into Afghanistan's capital since coalition forces drove out the Taliban in early 2001. The cost and lack of housing in Kabul have forced refugees to live in Kabul's ruins, where families of 15 or more must share a single room with broken walls, no electricity and no water.

Millions of Afghans were forced to take refuge with their families in neighboring Pakistan for the next few years, until the war had subsided.

Locals say as they were fleeing the country, the Taliban were planting landmines in and around the ruined homes and buildings to prevent the Northern Alliance from taking refuge inside.

Mining bombed out areas was

a simple war tactic used by the Northern Alliance, the Taliban and the Soviets for more than two decades. Rebuilding Afghanistan has been a long process because of continued terrorists attacks and the need to deactivate those mines.

As I follow them on small pathways through the minefields around their homes, I can see the difficulties people in Kabul must face each day. Some of them bear

the scars of their warring nation, their bodies maimed or missing limbs.

The streets of Kabul look more like scenes from a war movie than a capital city. The buildings have caved in as though they were bombed yesterday. Soldiers and police officers carry their AK-47s as if the Taliban could seize Kabul within a few moments.

Security guards protecting



Like a fallen empire, the ruins of Kabul stand as a constant reminder of the city's grand past as well as its uncertain future.

the military zones warn me that even though parts of the ruins have been de-mined, extremists have been known to secretly plant landmines to hinder the rebuilding process.

Still, the resilient Afghan people move in and out of the ruined areas, continuing their daily life. Since the fighting has ended, small marketplaces are emerging from lower levels of the destroyed buildings. But full reconstruction is still many years away.

In west Kabul, the place where great governmental buildings once stood is now a mess of brick and dust. The crumbled buildings in Kabul remind me of the ruins in Athens, Greece. The structures here were developed in the same fashion as the ancient Greek empire, and they, too, have been left in pieces.

The Darlamon, a former palace for the old kings of Afghanistan, has been stripped of its splendor by terrorists. Inside, a guard shows me a haunting reminder of their presence.

My eyes follow a trail of blood up to the 20-foot ceiling. Two men recently tried to lay a mine inside the Darlamon and accidentally set it off as they were attempting to conceal it. Their bodies were thrown about 30 feet before crashing to the floor below. The place where they had been standing is now a hole in the ground.

The sight makes me wonder how long this war on terror will last. After 23 years of daily violence, the grandeur of Kabul remains a dim and distant memory.



A 16-year-old Mujahedeen soldier carries his rocket-propelled grenade launcher around the mud-brick military complex near Nawah in southeast Afghanistan. Nawah is one of the most active areas in the war against the remaining Taliban and al-Qaeda.

May 20, 2003

An Unfinished Mission

As part of my work in Afghanistan, I had been corresponding with journalism students at Kent State. But when the university's spring 2003 semester ended, so did my weekly dispatches. I never really stopped work-

ing on them; in fact, I tried to dig deeper and discover the truth about Afghanistan and what really happens beyond the reports we see in the news.

There are many dark secrets behind Afghanistan.



A frail infant cries in a Kabul hospital. The severely underweight girl is dying from malnutrition.

For over two decades, outside influences have aided and funded several groups such as Communists, Mujahedeen, Northern Alliance and the Taliban. It continues today. Nothing has changed.

The people are not used to democracy because it does not fully exist there. Government officials present a façade of democracy, but these same officials deny citizens their rights on a daily basis. Women still suffer tremendously throughout Afghanistan. The health care system is almost non-existent, the locals fund reconstruction, security is very unstable, and most Americans have no idea how bad it really is.

In the months after the semes-



Denied from attending school by the Taliban, some Afghani girls now are able to pursue an education. However, females are still fighting for equal rights in other areas of society.



Rachel Myers, a print journalism major from Kent State, joined Glenn Luther at Aina to assist in the production of *Malalai*, Afghanistan's first women's magazine, and to prepare educational materials for students.

ter ended, I explored these issues and tried to find photos that showed the desperation.

My stay in Kabul was only supposed to last for five months. But I realized that wasn't long enough. I felt that if I had a few more months, I would be able to help push Aina Photojournalism Institute one step closer to becoming one of the premier photojournalism schools in Asia.

Aina asked me to stay in Kabul, and they told me that they would bring my girlfriend, Rachel Myers, to Kabul because they knew how much I missed her. I was easily persuaded.

Even though I knew that we would be spending more time working than actually seeing each other, it was nice to have someone from home there with me to share this incredible experience.

Rachel, a print journalism

student from Kent State University, was going to be the English Editor for Aina and *Malalai*, the first and largest women's magazine in Afghanistan. Her job was to educate the reporters and redirect the magazine toward professional journalism standards.

I continued to work with my 14 students and create projects that would help them after I left Kabul. I began to work on a Web site, an advertising campaign and a workbook for the students to follow when training other students outside Kabul. None of this would have been possible if Rachel was not there to help. We worked between 12 and 16 hours a day, with no days off, just so we could finish all our projects before returning home.

I took my students into the regions around Kabul to apply the lessons they learned in the

classroom. We traveled around the Shamali Plains, exploring the former front line where the Northern Alliance and the Taliban fought as the American-led coalition forces helped to drive the Taliban from Kabul. We climbed the mountains deep in the valley of Panjshir, past the place where Afghanistan's great Massoud once lived and beyond the small prisons that hold suspected members of al-Qaeda.

The students began to make incredible progress as they applied their talents in the field. The last trip outside the city of Kabul led one student and myself southeast as we followed the trail of one of the Afghan warlords in Ghazni. The trip was originally supposed to be a few hours outside Kabul, but it ended up taking us into the heart of the War on Terror.

August 28, 2003

Into Enemy Territory

The dust in the air blanketed our windshield as we drove down Kabul-Kandahar road. A student and I were on our way to interview the governor of Ghazni, a province southeast of Kabul.

The small military jeep jolted back and forth, struggling down the war-torn road. In the passenger seat, our escort clutched a Kalashnikov assault rifle.

Our trip was supposed to have ended in the capital city of Ghazni, four hours south of Kabul. But it didn't happen that way because we were told the governor had left



Looking over his shoulder, a Mujahedeen soldier helps to load a rocket-propelled grenade launcher.

the capital.

Our new destination, then, was a small military compound in a city called Nawah. The governor was commanding his Mujahedeen troops, and the only way to find him was to traverse the rugged mountains in southern Afghanistan.

We were heading straight for the front lines, in the middle of the largest operation against the Taliban since Operation Enduring Freedom.

The sun was about to slip behind the mountains as we pulled off the dirt road into a small area full of soldiers. They wore traditional Afghan clothing, with long flowing turbans. Each man carried an assault rifle or a rocket-



Mujahedeen soldiers loiter beside their pick-up, beginning their day along the front lines in southeast Afghanistan. Warlord governors privately own their forces and pay the soldiers about two dollars a day.



Patrolling the front lines, two Mujahedeen soldiers look out for Taliban and al-Qaeda forces, which have recently regrouped and begun terrorizing the provinces along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

propelled grenade launcher as they loaded six trucks with large amounts of ammunition.

My legs became weak as I stepped out of the jeep. I turned to my colleague and asked him, “Did we just walk into a trap — are we on the right side?”

The soldiers looked so much like my mental image of the Taliban that I was visibly nervous. But I managed to take a few photos between cigarettes as they were loading artillery into small Toyota pick-up trucks.

About 40 soldiers stared at us as we documented them handling massive amounts of ammunition. I had never seen any photo that showed the warlord’s militia arming themselves, and I realized I

had something unique.

As excited as that made me, I was also very uncertain about my safety. I tucked my digital camera cards into a secret pocket around my waist, thinking that if the soldiers took my gear, I might still be able to keep the photos.

I heard a commander shouting in Persian at his troops to hurry so we could leave. The sun was going down over the mountains, and he said we were going to have to drive the rest of the way to Nawah in the dark.

The Kabul-Kandahar road has been the most dangerous in Afghanistan because the Taliban and al-Qaeda haunt it as they try to keep a grip on the region outside Coalition control.

We were about to drive into Hell in a jeep, and all I had was my camera.

The trip began slowly, as we trudged down the barren roads at around 15 or 20 m.p.h.. We made frequent stops as we waited for the two large trucks that followed our convoy carrying large anti-aircraft machine guns. We were told to drive directly behind the commander and to keep up at all costs. The soldiers in back were there to protect us, but we would have to stay close to the front of the convoy. To me, that meant we were the first targets for guerilla fighters.

After midnight, about three hours into the Taliban heartland, we began to see motorcycles in the distance, circling our convoy.

Motorcycles are the vehicles of choice for Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters because they can move faster than the pick-up trucks and SUVs that the Mujahedeen freedom fighters use.

A motorcycle appeared on one side of us, followed by another on the opposite side. Then a third emerged in front of us. We were surrounded in darkness with no idea of who was stalking our convoy.

It was not long after we saw the motorcycles that we noticed we had been separated from the two trucks that carried the heavy machine guns, along with two other pick-up trucks full of soldiers.

Suddenly, the commander stopped his vehicle and ordered his remaining troops to cut the power from the lights and engines. We sat stock-still for about 10 minutes. The motorcycles continued to circle us.

The soldiers started to panic. The commander said there might be three or four possible al-Qaeda or Taliban guerilla fighters, and that we should brace for a fight. But as the news spread to the soldiers by word of mouth, the number somehow became 400 instead of four. The soldiers were more afraid of the possibility of enemies they couldn't see than they were of the individuals prowling around us.

The tension in the air was as solid as the darkness that enclosed us. The Taliban could have been a few feet away from us, and we would have never known.

The commander directed his

soldiers to take their positions along the roadside. The men stood motionless, like plastic toy soldiers in heroic form, prepared to face whatever surrounded them.

One motorcycle slowly approached us from the front. The rider seemed to be looking for us beneath the night sky. A cloak of darkness hid us from view.

Just then — like a climatic punch at the end of a movie — the rest of our convoy appeared



A soldier carries an AK-47.

behind the motorcycle in front of us. They had taken a different road by mistake and were coming back to meet us.

We turned on our lights, and the motorcycles scattered. We raced forward to trap them, but the trucks could not keep up with the motorcycles as they sped down a narrow path away from the road.

My heart still pounding, I watched them disappear from the spotlights. The commander gathered his soldiers in the middle

of the road to coordinate the rest of the trip to prevent an ambush.

As they were meeting, a large convoy of vehicles about the size of ours drove up ahead of us. The commander quickly sent two trucks full of soldiers to evaluate the situation. The men prepared for a standoff.

Again, we cut the lights and engines, and everyone stopped moving. Sitting in the back of the jeep, I could only think, "Man, I really need to get out of this vehicle."

Suddenly, the commander began to shout over the radio, trying to figure out why the troops he had just dispatched were now speeding back toward us. The men around me aimed their weapons at the approaching convoy.

I climbed into the front seat to get a good view of the impending action. As I lifted my camera, I noticed that the soldiers, silhouetted against the headlights of the vehicles behind them, were waving their arms.

The first truck pulled up near us, and the troops inside said a few words to the commander in a language I didn't know. Then the truck sped away.

But the convoy was still heading in our direction. I was confused. In Afghanistan, there is never traffic at night, let alone an entire convoy.

Then it stopped, and a man stepped out of one of the vehicles. As he walked toward us, the soldiers lowered their weapons and began to shout.

The man leaned into the open window in the passenger side of



Pockets of disorderly conduct are found by the Afghan police during the celebration of freedom from the Soviet backed-communist rule in Afghanistan. The excessive brutality from the police adds to the confusion and instability of Kabul and surrounding regions.

our jeep and said, "It is all OK."

I was shocked. I had been expecting the worst.

He told us that he had his troops lined up at undisclosed check-points all the way into Nawah and assured us that our safety was his priority.

I found out later that he was the highest-ranking Afghan commander of special operations on the front lines in southeast Afghanistan.

Two years ago, I would never have guessed that I, a student from Kent, Ohio, would be speaking Per-

sian to one of the most influential military leaders in Afghanistan, whose job was to keep me safe as I headed into the eye of a hurricane called the War on Terror.

September 11, 2003

Fighting on the Forgotten Front

Baba Jan wishes that he could go back home, open a small shop and live in peace.

"I'm tired of fighting," the

Afghan Mujahedeen commander repeated while on the front lines in southeast Afghanistan.

He has been fighting for nearly 20 years.

Baba Jan is just one of the many Afghan soldiers who are waiting for peace in Afghanistan. But the fight is far from over.

Since the United States has shifted its global war on terror to Iraq, Taliban activity in Afghanistan has steadily increased.

Lately, the Taliban has been regrouping in southern Afghanistan, using guerrilla tactics to

terrorize aid workers, western organizations and coalition forces.

But a few months ago, U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld announced that the major military operations in Afghanistan were finished, and the U.S. would start to slowly pull their forces out of the country.

The United Nations have been planning to help the central government in Kabul disarm the warlords so the country could begin to stabilize. These governors, a.k.a. warlords, have been fighting among themselves in order to gain

control beyond their designated regions.

Yet outside influences, including the United States, have been funding the warlords' militias because the Afghan National Army cannot fight terrorism on its own. The Afghan National Army, now around 3,000 strong, will take years to become as large as the 20,000 troops controlled by individual governors through out Afghanistan. Afghan Mujahedeen armies are the best Afghan defense against the Taliban, but the Mujahedeen cannot fight every battle.

In Kabul, women fight for

freedom in their own way. Female protestors take to the streets as they march against the decision of the Minister of Culture to imprison two journalists for writing about Islam. Their burkas hid their faces as they chanted, "Women deserve equal rights."

Afghans are desperately fighting, whether it is from behind veils or artillery lines.

There is hope that the Afghans will one day enjoy freedom, but it is not today. If the world does not realize how fragile the country is right now, Afghanistan may lose its chance forever.



Their faces covered by traditional burkas, women walk down a street during a protest against the actions of the Minister of Culture, who imprisoned two journalists for printing a newspaper article questioning Islamic views on gender and other issues. They chant, "Women deserve equal rights."

Glenn Luther's Afghanistan Diary

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