

PANJWAI: WAS THERE ONE KILLER AT ALKOZAI BUT MULTIPLE AT NAJIBAN?

I'm working on a theory about the Panwjai killings: that there was just one gunman at the village of Alkozai, but multiple soldiers were present at Najiban. At this point, it's just a wild guess, but it is consistent with what at least some of the witnesses say, and it might explain conflicting stories about timing and the purported helicopter search for Sergeant Robert Bales.

While there remain inconsistencies on the number dead, for this post I will assume the dead consist of Mohammed Wazir's 11 family members, with Ismatullah counted as female, Mohammad Dawood, Syed Jaan's 4 family members, and one additional girl, probably killed at Alkozai.

While reading this post, it may be useful to open the sources listed at the bottom.

Alkozai

Alkozai is the village north of the base. Nalida Hakim suggests the shooting happened here first; WSJ suggests it was second. Given that Sergeant Bales reportedly returned to the base between villages and his roommate didn't believe he had been shooting Afghans, Najiban would have had to have been second, given that moving victims as happened there would have—and apparently did—leave his clothing bloodied.

In Alkozai, multiple reports describe people running into a central (and larger) house in the village, that of Habibullah's father, where at least Syed Jaan's family members were killed. See Global Post for a diagram. In addition to Jaan's family members, most of the wounded appear to come from Alkozai, as well. Both Hakim's footage—showing bullets splattered all

over the room—and WSJ’s report suggest the shooting was less accurate here than in Najiban.

Of the witnesses at Alkozai, Habibullah says there were 2-3 soldiers (though not in the range of 12-20 like reports from Najiban), though he admits he doesn’t remember well. Jan Agha, in his confusing or inaccurate Reuters report, says there were multiple soldiers; in his apparently more accurate—based on the number of dead and wounded—interview with McClatchy, he appears to say it was a single soldier.

Najiban

Najiban is the village south of—and further—from the base. Mohammad Dawood—the husband of Massouma and the brother of Mullah Baran (who in addition to his comments to the WSJ is one of the two men in Hakim’s report)—and Mohammed Wazir’s 11 family members died in Najiban. WSJ states that Dawood was killed first, then Wazir’s family.

Massouma and “Aminea” (which Hakim says is not her real name) may be the same person, because Baran describes scraping up his brother’s brain in WSJ, which is consistent with Aminea’s description of capturing her husband’s brain in her hands, and because Aminea has the same number of children as Dawood, 6 (though Global Post says 7; it’s not clear which of Aminea’s very young children would be the 7-year old son of Massouma described in the Global Post, though biologically, barring twins, one of them must be that old). That said, you would think Baran would have accompanied Hakim for the interview, as he guarded his sister-in-law from journalists elsewhere. In any case, Massouma refers to one soldier doing the killing, but a number more searching her compound. Her and Dawood’s children have also repeatedly said there were multiple soldiers with lights standing outside of their home.

That, added to the circumstances surrounding the killings in Wazir’s home—both the layout over four rooms and the attempt to burn the

victims—suggest the involvement of multiple soldiers in Najiban.

Agha Lala, who hid in his Najiban home and then checked his neighbors after the soldiers left, spoke of multiple soldiers. He also said the attack started around 2:00, a time when both US sources and the Afghan guards at the base would have placed Bales at the base.

The children

In addition to the statements of the guards—who describe a single soldier leaving, then returning, then leaving again by himself (though none attest that it was Bales or that the departing soldier was the same man), the statements of two children support the government's claim there was just one killer. Both the young boy Hakim filmed (Sediqullah, according to the transcript) and another that doesn't appear on film but whom she references in her follow-up spoke of just one soldier doing the shooting.

But then there are the comments of Noorbinak, the 8-year old girl Hakim films. While Noorbinak speaks of just one soldier shooting her father, she said "others were standing in the yard holding lights." Now, that sounds precisely like what Dawood and Massouma's kids said—that there were a bunch of soldiers in the yard with lights. And at least given what we know about victims, it seems likely her father was Dawood. That's because there were no survivors from Wazir's household. so she can't be from that family and therefore none of his dead relatives could be Noorbinak's deceased father. And while Syed Jaan notes that two of his nephews and a niece were wounded (presumably the children of his brother who died), the niece's head wound was so bad she was not expected to survive. Noorbinak was wounded only in the knee. That is, the imperfect information we have about the dead seems to rule out Jaan's brother being Noorbinak's now deceased father, which seems to leave just Dawood as a deceased adult male who could be Noorbinak's father. Therefore her

report of men with lights in the courtyard repeats the same thing her siblings have said. (Note, this makes it less likely that Massouma and Aminea are the same woman.)

The wounded in the charge sheet

While trying to discern anything from a redacted charge sheet is fraught with problems, and there are more problems matching descriptions of the wounded with the charge sheet than the dead. Nevertheless, the charge sheet may also support the possibility that Noorbinak is from Najiban.

Bales was charged for assault and attempted murder of 6 people:

- Adult male wounded in the neck
- Girl wounded in the head
- Boy wounded in the thigh
- Adult female wounded in the chest and groin
- Boy without grievous wounds
- Girl without grievous wounds.

As a threshold matter, if the two children in Hakim's video are among those named in Bales' charge sheet, they're probably the last two, as they don't have apparent grievous wounds and certainly not the thigh and head wounds described for the other two wounded children.

In the section listing the dead, I believe Specifications 6 through 17 describe the Najiban dead; that's because the long string of female victims listed in specifications 7 through 14 probably describes 6 female victims from Wazir's family plus Ismatullah. If the charge sheet is separated by village, that would mean either specification 6 or 17 would name Dawood (the adult males seem to be the longer redacted names).

If I'm right—and now I'm building on a wildarsed

guess by assuming regularity from the government—then it's possible the wounded are also listed by village. Certainly, the wounded girl listed under specification 2 sounds like Syed Jaan's niece Zardana, who was gravely wounded in the head (assuming of course she hasn't since died and become victim number 17). Specification 1 might be Habibullah's father. Curiously, there's still a discrepancy, as there are just two other boys listed among the wounded, but Sediqualah does not appear to be either of Jaan's two wounded nephews, who are named Rafiullah and Shokriy and who were wounded "in the lower part of their bodies," though Sediqualah appears to be roughly the same age as these boys, who are 7 and 8. In addition, Jan Agha's more accurate McClatchy report says his brother-in-law, as well as his daughter and son were injured, plus two from Jaan's family; none of these 5 wounded account for the adult female also listed as wounded.

Note the soldiers in Hakim's video say 15-16 were killed or wounded "in this area" while they were showing her Alkozai; it's not clear whether they meant between both villages (in which case they would be short by at least 7) or just in Alkozai (in which case there are up to 6 more people wounded in Alkozai).

All of which is a very elaborate way to say that a series of guesses might support the notion that Noorbinak is the last listed wounded victim, which might support her living in Najiban.

Implications

To repeat, this is all a wildarsed guess. But I'm suggesting that it's possible Bales went first to Alkozai and in a spray of gunfire killed 4 or 5 and wounded at least 5 more, then returned to the base, told others what he had done, and more followed him in helicopters to Najiban. That would explain the larger number of men described by Dawood's children, how 11 people in 4 rooms were killed in Wazir's home, and also how Bales was able to drag all 11

bodies to one room and attempt to burn them (though the timing is still short, given that Najiban is at least a mile from the base and Bales was reportedly gone just an hour total on that second trip). If some men followed Bales to join in the killing—rather than to find him, as the government claims—it might explain why they claim it took at least a half hour to search the FOB when what purportedly initiated the search was an Afghan guard telling the Americans one of their men had left the base (that is, the “search” story is a way to fudge the timing).

Mind you, I’m not saying that’s what I think happened, but I did want to establish that it’s not necessarily the case that the same number of men were present at Alkolai as at Najiban.

Sources

Bales’ charge sheet

CNN, Extended Yalda Hakim video (transcript): Includes footage from Alkozai and then Najiban, interviews with Afghan guards, non-witness family members Mohammed Wazir and Mullah Baran, boy Sediquillah, girl Noorbinak, and “Aminea” (possibly the widow of widow of Mohammad Dawood).

CNN, Yalda Hakim video: Includes mention of second boy who spoke of single killer.

WSJ: Includes detailed descriptions of the two killings, though suggesting Najiban came first. Interviews with non-witness family members Mohammed Wazir, Mullah Baran, and Syed Jaan.

Reuters: Includes interviews with Jan Agha (which appears to be inaccurate) and Agha Lala.

McClatchy: Includes interview with Jan Agha.

Global Post: Includes diagram and interviews with Habibullah and Massouma, as well as non-witness family member Mullah Baran.