

Stories from Fallujah

By [Dahr Jamail](#)

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These are the stories that will continue to emerge from the rubble of Fallujah for years. No, for generations...

Speaking on condition of anonymity, the doctor sits with me in a hotel room in Amman, where he is now a refugee. He'd spoken about what he saw in Fallujah in the UK, and now is under threat by the US military if he returns to Iraq. "I started speaking about what happened in Fallujah during both sieges in order to raise awareness, and the Americans raided my house three times," he says, talking so fast I can barely keep up. He is driven to tell what he's witnessed, and as a doctor working inside Fallujah, he has video and photographic proof of all that he tells me.

"I entered Fallujah with a British medical and humanitarian convoy at the end of December, and stayed until the end of January," he explains, "But I was in Fallujah before that to work with people and see what their needs were, so I was in there since the beginning of December." When I ask him to explain what he saw when he first entered Fallujah in December he says it was like a tsunami struck the city. "Fallujah is surrounded by refugee camps where people are living in tents and old cars," he explains, "It reminded me of Palestinian refugees. I saw children coughing because of the cold, and there are no medicines. Most everyone left their houses with nothing, and no money, so how can they live depending only on humanitarian aid?"

The doctors says that in one refugee camp in the northern area of Fallujah there were 1,200 students living in seven tents. "The disaster caused by this siege is so much worse than the first one, which I witnessed first hand," he says, and then tells me he'll use one story as an example. "One story is of a young girl who is 16 years old," he says of one of the testimonies he video taped recently, "She stayed for three days with the bodies of her family who were killed in their home. When the soldiers entered she was in her home with her father, mother, 12 year-old brother and two sisters. She watched the soldiers enter and shoot her mother and father directly, without saying anything." The girl managed to hide behind the refrigerator with her brother and witnessed the war crimes first-hand. "They beat her two sisters, then shot them in the head," he said. After this her brother was enraged and ran at the soldiers while shouting at them, so they shot him dead.

"She continued hiding after the soldiers left and stayed with her sisters because they were bleeding, but still alive. She was too afraid to call for help because she feared the soldiers would come back and kill her as well. She stayed for three days, with no water and no food. Eventually one of the American snipers saw her and took her to the hospital," he added before reminding me again that he had all of her testimony documented on film. He briefly told me of another story he documented of a mother who was in her home during the siege.

“On the fifth day of the siege her home was bombed, and the roof fell on her son, cutting his legs off,” he says while using his hands to make cutting motions on his legs, “For hours she couldn’t go outside because they announced that anyone going in the street would be shot. So all she could do was wrap his legs and watch him die before her eyes.”

He pauses for a few deep breaths, then continues, “All I can say is that Fallujah is like it was struck by a tsunami. There weren’t many families in there after the siege, but they had absolutely nothing. The suffering was beyond what you can imagine. When the Americans finally let us in people were fighting just for a blanket.” “One of my colleagues, Dr. Saleh Alsawi, he was speaking so angrily about them. He was in the main hospital when they raided it at the beginning of the seige. They entered the theater room when they were working on a patient...he was there because he’s an anesthesiologist. They entered with their boots on, beat the doctors and took them out, leaving the patient on the table to die.” This story has already been reported in the Arab media.

The doctor tells me of the bombing of the Hay Nazal clinic during the first week of the siege. “This contained all the foreign aid and medical instruments we had. All the US military commanders knew this, because we told them about it so they wouldn’t bomb it. But this was one of the clinics bombed, and in the first week of the siege they bombed it two times.” He then adds, “Of course they targeted all our ambulances and doctors. Everyone knows this.” The doctor tells me he and some other doctors are trying to sue the US military for the following incident, for which he has the testimonial evidence on tape.

It is a story I was told by several refugees in Baghdad as well...at the end of last November while the siege was still in progress. “During the second week of the siege they entered and announced that all the families have to leave their homes and meet at an intersection in the street while carrying a white flag. They gave them 72 hours to leave and after that they would be considered an enemy,” he says. “We documented this story with video-a family of 12, including a relative and his oldest child who was 7 years old. They heard this instruction, so they left with all their food and money they could carry, and white flags. When they reached the intersection where the families were accumulating, they heard someone shouting ‘Now!’ in English, and shooting started everywhere.”

The family was all carrying white flags, as instructed, according to the young man who gave his testimony. Yet he watched his mother and father shot by snipers-his mother in the head and his father shot in the heart. His two aunts were shot, then his brother was shot in the neck. The man stated that when he raised himself from the ground to shout for help, he was shot in the side. “After some hours he raised his arm for help and they shot his arm,” continues the doctor, “So after awhile he raised his hand and they shot his hand.” A six year-old boy of the family was standing over the bodies of his parents, crying, and he too was then shot.

“Anyone who raised up was shot,” adds the doctor, then added again that he had photographs of the dead as well as photos of the gunshot wounds of the survivors. “Once it grew dark some of them along with this man who spoke with me, with his child and sister-in-law and sister managed to crawl away after it got dark. They crawled to a building and stayed for 8 days. They had one cup of water and gave it to the child. They used cooking oil to put on their wounds which were of course infected, and found some roots and dates to eat.” He stops here. His eyes look around the room as cars pass by outside on wet streets...water hissing under their tires.

He left Fallujah at the end of January, so I ask him what it was like when he left recently. "Now maybe 25% of the people have returned, but there are still no doctors. The hatred now of Fallujans against every American is incredible, and you cannot blame them. The humiliation at the checkpoints is only making people even angrier," he tells me. "I've been there, and I saw that anyone who even turns their head is threatened and hit by both American and Iraqi soldiers alike...one man did this, and when the Iraqi soldier tried to humiliate him, the man took a gun of a nearby soldier and killed two ING, so then of course he was shot." The doctor tells me they are keeping people in the line for several hours at a time, in addition to the US military making propaganda films of the situation.

"And I've seen them use the media-and on January 2nd at the north checkpoint in the north part of Fallujah, they were giving people \$200 per family to return to Fallujah so they can film them in the line...when actually, at that time, nobody was returning to Fallujah," he says. It reminds me of the story my colleague told me of what he saw in January. At that time a CNN crew was escorted in by the military to film street cleaners that were brought in as props, and soldiers handing out candy to children. "You must understand the hatred that has been caused...it has gotten more difficult for Iraqis, including myself, to make the distinction between the American government and the American people," he tells me.

His story is like countless others. "My cousin was a poor man in Fallujah," he explains, "He walked from his house to work and back, while living with his wife and five daughters. In July of 2003, American soldiers entered his house and woke them all up. They drug them into the main room of the house, and executed my cousin in front of his family. Then they simply left." He pauses then holds up his hands and asks, "Now, how are these people going to feel about Americans?"

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