

Iraq: Eyewitness says US helicopter attack killed ITN reporter Terry Lloyd

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11 September 2003

Britain's *Daily Mirror* newspaper has run an exclusive interview with an Iraqi businessman who claims he saw ITN reporter Terry Lloyd shot dead during a criminal attack by a US helicopter gunship on a civilian ambulance.

Lloyd was covering the Iraq war as a non-embedded journalist when he was killed on March 22 on the southern Iraq warfront.

At the time, Lloyd's death caused outrage, as it was believed he had died as a result of US troops opening fire on Iraqi soldiers who appeared to be surrendering.

One of Lloyd's TV news crew, cameraman Daniel Demoustier, said they had been approached by two cars carrying Iraqi soldiers who seemed to want to surrender. But allied tanks had started heavy firing directly at them and the ITN team's car, clearly marked as a reporting vehicle, burst into flames. The Iraqis were all killed.

Demoustier, who was driving with Lloyd in the passenger seat, said at the time, "After we were hit I crouched under the steering wheel, pressing the accelerator to the floor. I looked up just before we crashed, the door was open and Terry was gone."

This was the last Demoustier had seen of Lloyd, and he believed he had died in a hail of bullets.

The September 10 edition of the *Mirror* has now raised the very real possibility that Lloyd survived that first attack by US troops, only to be killed after being rescued by Hamid Aglan, who was intent on driving him to hospital.

Hamid states that Lloyd received only a wound in his shoulder in the original shooting incident. He later picked him up in his Mitsubishi minibus, along with four wounded Iraqi soldiers he had also rescued.

His minibus was travelling well away from the fighting when a US helicopter gunship opened fire on

it, killing Lloyd instantly as well as one of the four Iraqi casualties.

Hamid, 58, told the *Mirror* he was on a routine business trip in his minibus when he had found Lloyd sitting on the road's central reservation surrounded by injured Iraqi soldiers:

"It was a scene of total chaos—destroyed army vehicles and dead and wounded men. There was also a civilian jeep with the letters TV marked on its side.

"Some soldiers flagged me down and begged me to take them to hospital. I was loading them into the back of the bus when the journalist asked me to take him too."

Hamid explained that he was travelling away from any fighting when his minibus was attacked.

"I turned the bus round in the direction of Basra for the hospital. But after only 100 metres I heard a helicopter behind us. It immediately started to shoot with a machine gun. The right back tyre went and the van was difficult to control, but I knew I had to keep on going. It was our only chance. There were bullet holes in the metal floor.

"The helicopter was dark green and about 200 metres behind us. But after another 100 metres, it stopped following."

Ten minutes later, Hamid arrived at Basra Public Hospital. But it was too late for Lloyd: "The journalist looked unconscious so I carried him in where doctors told me to put him on the ground. I was later told he was British and called Terry Lloyd."

A day later, Hamid returned to the hospital to find out what had happened to the men he had tried to save. It was then he learned Lloyd was dead: "I was told he would have died instantly. There was nothing anyone could have done for him after he was hit. I was very sorry to hear that."

Hamid comments, “The journalist would certainly have lived if I’d got him to hospital. He only had a wound in his shoulder and was walking and talking to me. But after the helicopter attack, he stopped moving and was covered in blood. He was dead when we reached hospital 10 minutes later. Doctors said he was shot in the head.

“The helicopter pilot killed him. It shouldn’t have happened.”

It has also emerged that Hamid had relayed this information to British forces just days after the end of the war, but he had been ignored. His name and address was taken at the gates of the new British HQ in Basra, but he was never contacted for an official statement.

Hamid explained that it was only because of a chance conversation three weeks ago between one of his friends, who works as a translator for the British, and a member of the team investigating Lloyd’s death that resulted in him being brought in for an interview.

“The military police seemed amazed by my story,” he said. “I can’t understand why they’re interested now, but weren’t back in April. I hope what I said will help. I believe the US air crew should be punished. They tried to kill me too, but, praise God, I was saved.”

This delay cannot be seen as accidental, given the high-profile nature of the incident and the fact that Royal Military Police are now said to be treating his testimony as “highly credible.”

The most likely explanation for the inaction of the British occupation forces is the possibly damaging repercussions of Hamid’s testimony. If they can be identified, the US aircrew could face war crimes charges under the Geneva Convention for firing on a clearly marked civilian vehicle that was carrying casualties away from an engagement.

An inquest into Lloyd’s death was opened soon after his body was flown home in April, at which Coroner Nicholas Gardiner provisionally ruled that the reporter was “caught between crossfire and died from injuries.” The inquiry was adjourned and that would have been the end of things, except for ITN’s insistence that the death of Lloyd, the first correspondent killed on assignment in ITN’s 48-year history, be investigated.

As a result, Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon ordered an investigation into Lloyd’s death and the disappearance of two of his colleagues travelling in another vehicle, cameraman Fred Nerac and translator Hussein Othman.

ITN has not relied on the government and has sent its own investigators to Iraq. It has reported that US Marines in Baghdad have admitted that they opened fire on Lloyd’s two vehicles. Their commander said the troops involved had seen the “TV” signs on the sides of the ITN Jeeps but suspected this was “a trick,” according to the *Mirror*.

The military has said that Nerac and Othman are believed to have been captured unharmed by Iraqis and delivered to the local HQ of Saddam Hussein’s Fedayeen militia, who executed them and buried their bodies in unmarked graves in the desert. Their vehicle was said to have been found in nearby Az Zubayr and their press cards were in an abandoned building known to be used by the Fedayeen. This is plausible, but given what has emerged about Lloyd’s death, it would be foolish indeed to accept this account without question.

The Royal Military Police are awaiting the results of forensic tests on Hamid’s minibus, the rear of which was peppered by at least six bullet holes. Swabs were taken from patches of Lloyd’s dried blood and investigators are trying to trace the surviving Iraqi soldiers who were travelling with him to confirm that Lloyd was alive and only injured when he was first picked up.



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