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How the deadly attack on Afghan army base unfolds

4/26/2017



How the attack on the Shaheen Military headquarters unfolded? How the heavily armed attackers were able to reach the mosque well-inside the base? What the base commander says and what about the morale of the troops?

On Sunday, journalists were invited to visit the base after Friday's Taliban attack that killed and wounded some 200 soldiers --- the single deadliest attack since the Taliban were ousted from power in 2001.

The attack was different from all previous attacks of the Taliban. Since the Friday's bloodbath, no one was allowed to enter the base.

The journalists, who were invited by the Shaheen Military Corps media office, were driven from Mazar-i-Sharif towards Dehdad district --- the scene of the savage attack.

The military base is about 10 kilometres from Mazar-i-Sharif. Abdul Qahar Aram, the corps media personnel, accompanied the reporters to the base.

After a 20-minute journey, the journalists reached the military base's western gate and were told to wait for a few minutes. Greif was visible among security guards manning the gate.

After a few minutes, the journalists were told to enter the base. The first security check post inside the base is about a kilometre from the gate. Aram told the journalists that it was the place where the attackers were allowed without being checked.

Aram said the attackers had fake ID cards which made their entry to the base easy. The journalists and their equipment were thoroughly searched before they were allowed to proceed.

After crossing the first security layer, the second check post was also about one kilometre from the first check post. The journalists were searched again and then allowed to proceed.

After some journey, the journalists reached the third gate, from where the attackers started firing at the troops. It was the place where no outsider was allowed to enter.

Aram said when the assailants reached the third security post, the security guards asked them to hand over their weapons to them, but the assailants, disguised as military personnel, insisted it would take a lot of time and the injured they had brought in their vehicles could die.

But the security guards did not allow them to pass the gate with weapons. It was then a suicide bomber ran towards the guards and blew himself up, allowing the remaining attackers to enter.

Blood spots were seen on the road at the third security gate and mirrors of nearby buildings had been shattered.

The mosque is situated about 200 metres from the third gate. The dining hall is located opposite to the mosque across the road.

As the assailants reached the mosque, they divided into two groups – one attacking troops inside the mosque and the second group attacking the dining troops.

A suicide bomber entered the ablution place and blew himself up among troops had missed the Friday's prayer and were preparing for midday prayer.

From the mosque's *mihrab* to the walls and the dome all had received bullets. Aram said four of the attackers stood in the mosque's gate and opened fire at the helpless worshippers.

Copies of the holy Quran were either burnt or damaged with bullet holes. The attackers then entered the imam's room. The imam was not there and the assailants set his room on fire.

The firing inside the mosque lasted three hours. Officials said the clash prolonged because it was hard to differentiate between the attackers and security personnel.

The second group was simultaneously busy firing at the dining troops. While troops exiting the mosque through its windows were asked by the attackers at the cafeteria gate to "come here."

Four attackers shot dead those trapped in the cafeteria. Formal information shows more than 100 soldiers had died and wounded in the attack, but some reliable sources put the toll at more than 200 dead and wounded.

Former commanders of the Shaheen Military Corps, Mohmand Katawazai, said the attack was pre-planned. He said if he was found guilty of committing negligence, he was ready to stand trial.

"Everyone knows his duty. The fact finding commission should find out the guilty and those who had assisted the attackers."

The surviving troops said they were saddened by the massacre but their morale remained high and vowed to show no mercy for the enemy.