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http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/years-later-a-flattened-afghan-village-reflects-on-us-bombardment/2013/08/25/d8df9e62-05cf-11e3-bfc5-406b928603b2_story.html

Years later, a flattened Afghan village reflects on U.S. bombardment

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TAROK KOLACHE, Afghanistan — It took 50,000 pounds of American explosives to level Niaz Mohammad's village.

The village had become a Taliban stronghold, a virtual factory for bombs that killed and maimed American soldiers. At the height of the U.S. offensive in late 2010, commanders chose what they considered their best option: They approved an airstrike that flattened all the buildings in town, more than 40, including Mohammad's home. Though no civilians were killed, the bombardment

quickly became one of the most controversial attacks of the war in Afghanistan. Yesterday's Photos of the day

Mohammed Badie's trial on incitement charges signals "all-out war" against the Islamist group.

Three years later, the village is a sandy ruin, symbolizing the gains and losses of America's longest war. A handful of villagers, among them Mohammad, have trickled back. The U.S. Army withdrew this summer from the valley where Tarok Kolache is located. The Taliban has mostly fled to other districts.

Relative peace came to Tarok Kolache, but only after it was demolished.

"What did we win in this war? We lost our homes. We lost our village," said Mohammad, 47, the village's de facto patriarch, with thick black eyebrows and a wavy salt-and-pepper beard. "The Taliban do not live here anymore, but they were only fighting in the first place because the Americans were here."

On the other side of the world, the man who decided to bomb Tarok Kolache, Army Col. David Flynn, sits in his office at a base in Oklahoma, hoping that his "painstaking choice" has paid off.

"I think about Tarok Kolache every day," Flynn said. "There were no good options there."

Mohammad was one of the few who have returned to his ancestral village, now only partially rebuilt. In a country still peppered with rusty 40-year-old Russian tanks and long-decayed 130-year-old British forts, Tarok Kolache already feels like another relic of war.

To compensate the villagers for the loss of their 100-year-old homes, the U.S. military built them square, concrete rooms. But those structures — oddities in a valley of mud-baked dwellings — are cracking. Locals refuse to live in them, so the buildings sit empty, full of wasp nests, the subject of mockery. There are still the barbed wire and blast barriers brought here to protect the U.S. base at the edge of the village. The base itself, constructed after the Tarok Kolache bombing, has since been dismantled.

Mostly, there are sand, rocks and empty space where there once were homes. Some residents received up to \$10,000 in compensation from the U.S. military and moved elsewhere. Some said it was too dangerous to stay in Tarok Kolache after the U.S. base was established. Some said it still smelled like death after several Taliban members were killed. Many said the Americans failed to rebuild what they had promised.

"For us, it was like a deadly poison," said Abdul Hamid, a former resident who moved to the nearby city of Kandahar after the operation, claiming he was compensated for a fraction of his property.

Mohammad felt compelled to go home, though now he wonders whether it was a good idea. His family has been in Tarok Kolache for 150 years, farming acres of nearby land. The Taliban insinuated itself into the village around 2008, turning it into one of the most prolific bomb

factories in Kandahar province, according to U.S. officials. Soldiers started referring to its “house-borne improvised explosive devices,” a play on “vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices,” the military expression for car bombs.