

is understood as going to take part in a war where there is a threat against Islam or the Islamic nation and such participation comes in response to call to Jihad from a high-ranking Islamic leader such as a Mufti. Once a Muslim decides to undertake Jihad he must be willing to sacrifice himself and whatever he has.

The Grand Ayatollah Khomeini was in the position of being able to declare a Jihad during the Iran-Iraq War; however he did not do so because of the expected consequences. Saddam Hussein called for Jihad on numerous occasions when he felt himself threatened and not Islam! For this reason, he only received a weak response from the Iraqi people and next to no answer from the Pan-Arab nations.

While Jihad has been successfully accomplished at different times in the Islamic era, notably under Salahadin's leadership, no-one apart from Saddam Hussein has ever used Anfal against any group or nation in the known history. He used Anfal operations to try and exterminate a nation, whom he had previously called "our people" and "our brothers."

With the Ba'ath Party coming to power, a process of arabization of Kirkuk City and other Kurdish towns bordering the arab-speaking region of Iraq commenced and continued without ceasing. This process included the confiscation of Kurdish homes

## **Introduction by the translator:**

The genocide committed against the Iraqi Kurds by the regime of Saddam Hussein in 1988 was one of the most systematic mass killings from the post World-War two era.

These multiple acts of genocide came under the name, Anfal: a name that points to the eighth of the Qur'an' 114 Suras. This Sura is composed of 75 verses and almost all of them deal with the extremity with which you treat your enemy: how and when to use extreme action and how to forgive and take a peaceful stand when the enemy declares peace. One of the most forceful verses in this 'Anfal' Sura is verse 60 which states, "Prepare whatever force you can to terrorize God's enemy and your enemy."

Running alongside this Anfal extremity is 'Jihad,' which is already well known to Western media and concerned experts as 'Islamic Holy War.' There is no Sura entitled or dedicated to Jihad but this concept is mentioned several times in different chapters. Jihad

the local inhabitants of every means of making a living and to detain all the inhabitants regardless of age and gender before transporting them to the notorious 'Topzawa' concentration camp near Kirkuk.

Detainees were kept for days with undrinkable water and very poor quality food. The children and babies were separated from their families and were taken away never to be seen again. The babies died from lack of care and feeding. Young girls were sold into prostitution through black market deals and were sent to Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Kuwait. All this happened at the time when Saddams' regime regularly gave out statements saying, "We Arabs are people of chivalry; we do not humiliate human beings, not even our enemies!"

The most severe year in the Anfal operations was 1988. Although 182,000 victims have been documented, there are tens of thousands of victims who have not been recorded: the unnamed newborn infants, the unborn children of pregnant mothers, the many people who were shot at and killed by the infantry and the air force as they escaped on foot and those who died through starvation and diseases rather than give themselves up to the tyrant' army.

It is now clear that several areas in central and southern Iraq were used for the mass executions and the mass burials of the Anfal victims. Numerous graves have been discovered since the fall of

and properties, the deportation of Kurdish families, and the settlement of Arab families into these houses. We could say that Saddam planned to wipe out the Kurds. He caused the demolition of 4,500 villages in the Kurdish region, forcing many of them into collective towns and into remote areas in the south in order to break their cultural identity. In so doing, almost all the villagers were deprived of their sources of income and living.

In the later period of the Iran-Iraq war when there were no international observers in the region, Saddam Hussein caused the bombing of several Kurdish towns with chemical weapons. In Halabja alone, more than five thousand people were killed and several thousands were badly wounded and diseased from the poisoned gas released that day, many of whom are still suffering with chronic illnesses as a result.

It is amazing to think that the Anfal genocide operations were carried out in such an open and arrogant fashion. Commanders such as Saddam's cousin, Ali Hassan Majid ('Chemical Ali') were assigned their position and duties by laws passed in the parliament of Saddam's regime. Local headquarters were established in almost every Kurdish city and had large signs on the buildings that read, 'Anfal Operations Command.' Tens of thousands of troops were ordered to attack Kurdish towns and villages, to demolish houses, to deprive

known by the title, 'Anfal.' We try to collect all the truth by interviewing both the victims and the perpetrators. In this small volume, we will discover the Anfal story through the eyes of Uzer, a direct eyewitness and victim of these events when he was in his mid-20's: a young man who survived in a miraculous way!

## **Abdulkarim uzeri**

Saddam's regime in 2003 and what is distressing is the complete disregard for human dignity and social and religious standards in the creation of the mass graves. Graves were routinely not covered over properly allowing the bodies to be exposed to wild animals. Perhaps the greatest disdain for human values practised by the Ba'athist regime was demonstrated in their burying dogs along with the humans. This is in stark contrast with the 'Anfal-led' Kurds who were keeping the fasting month of Ramadan at the time of their execution - they fasted right up to the time of death by firing squad!

We Kurds have a duty to history to tell the world what the Anfal is all about, why it was carried out and the depths of the repugnant ways of how these genocide operations were implemented.

In translating this book from Sorani Kurdish I am deeply grateful to my friend, Arif Qurbani, who has authored this and other similar books. He himself is from the city of Kirkuk which was the main centre of Anfal genocide operations. Arif has helped me in devoting his valuable time to answer many of my questions in preparing this translation work. I am also much obliged to Dr Andrew Hyde who spared no effort in making this book acceptable to English readers.

My friend and I plan to publish a number of other books about the notorious genocide operations

and a more scientific and expert documentation will result. The necessity of studying the Anfal requires that many centres for academic study and documentation be established, where the most useful sources and the most necessary subject for the renewed teaching of Anfal will be the words of the Anfal eyewitnesses themselves, those who were in the events whether as executioners or as victims. Therefore our task in writing at this level, where it is not possible to study the various sides of the Anfal, is nothing other than to record the history for our future generations so that they can get benefit from the writing down of our people's bloody history.

As the author of this book, and other similar books, I want to faithfully and honestly recite what the Anfal eyewitnesses are telling me. In the meantime, it is my professional task to ensure that all the information given is correct. Therefore it is vitally important to get as many documents together as possible before these eyewitnesses leave us forever and to accurately set them onto the pages of historical texts for that future day when Kurds will need to reach for them and I believe for today as well it should be one of the necessary subjects in Kurdish libraries!

This interview is with Uzer, one of the living eyewitnesses of the Anfal operation massacres, who himself was one of the many young Kurds that were caught up in the Anfal and was forced at gun-point towards an unknown fate and he was one of those thousands of adolescent Kurds who were subject to a firing squad process and buried in mass collective graves. However, he is one of the few, which one can count with the fingers of one hand, that by chance was saved from the hail of bullets hitting the

## **Uzer**

### **A living eyewitness of the Anfal massacres**

#### **Arif qurbany**

One of the characteristics of my work concerning the Anfal is that I have always tried to record the Anfal events according to the most accurate sources and get the best evidence, which in my opinion are the eyewitnesses of the Anfal, those who were directly in the furnace itself. They themselves are the best and most accurate sources of the stories of the Anfal. From another side, my work speaks of the Anfal as an act, a disaster, a barbarian process that is unique in human history. It hasn't been recorded as it should have, but in the period of 18 years since the last Anfal operation, it has been neglected to such a degree that many truths and Anfal events have become hazy and confused. The lack of an academic research centre for recording the details of the Anfal and proper archiving has meant that many of its secrets and details have literally gone into the ground with the death of each 'Anfal'-ed person. I believe that this neglect of the Anfal should never ever have happened and a day is coming when a greater and more faithful sense of compassion will appear

**Anyway, as I have said, I thank you and I am pleased that we can have this meeting here in Kurdistan. If this were not so, I would have had to come to America. Luckily, Kurdistan has become the setting for this interview. So are you ready, let's begin.**

- The important thing is that I agree, and I do agree. However, I will only answer the questions where I know the answers.

**So let's start with your full name and your place and date of birth?**

- My full name? Let us start according to the name I am known by.

**What do you mean?**

- I am known as Uzer.

**But what is your real name?**

- According to my ID card, I am Aziz.

**So how have you come to be known as Uzer?**

- Well, by God, I am not exactly sure. I believe from the very beginning I was called Uzer, but when I went to school there was a dear teacher, who has since died, who said why not let us change the name Uzer to Aziz, it is nicer. Well I said, as you like, and he made my name Aziz. Later on when an ID card was made for me according to the words of this teacher, they named me Aziz.

**Aziz who...?**

- Aziz Wehab Muhammed Suleiman.

victims and could make his way back to Kurdistan bringing back the most information and the most detailed account of one of the most hidden events of the Anfal ... and he has held that information until this day when he could tell all the details ... that which you read here is product of his complete recollections as recorded in a seven-hour journalistic interview.

This if it were not for these eyewitnesses, most of the information and details of the Anfal, would remain hidden forever. My hope is that with writing down the experiences of this eyewitness will be useful now for Kurds and Kurdish libraries and that I will be considered as having done a small service for my nation. I am certain that for the future as well it will be one of those golden and necessary books for the libraries of Kurdistan.

**The Interview:**

**Mr. Uzer, welcome back again and you have made the way shorter for me on behalf of the Kurdish folk.**

- Thank you very much.

**You know that this book, the fourth in the Anfal series was delayed for a year waiting for this interview. In the end, you have borne the burden of travelling and attending here to make the meeting possible. I really appreciate it.**

- Dear God, Mr. Arif, I ask your pardon, for a time I was very busy and also for the way that I spoke with you on the telephone to refuse the interview ... I have been quite a bit disgruntled by the little work that has been done to relieve the Anfal tragedy.

**And according to what you remember when you were young, how did your father's family live ... how did they make their living?**

- My father's wider family were all farmers who grew wheat and barley and, secondly, they were also raising flocks of sheep.

**How many people were you in the home?**

- We were... don't hurry me so I can tell you exactly, because we were a large family... now I'm ready. We were six brothers and six sisters from my father's two wives. Two brothers and two sisters are from my other mother, the new mother. My own mother, his first wife, gave birth to four brothers and four sisters.

**You were from which of them?**

- I am from the older one.

**Which of your brothers and sisters are like you from this mother?**

- My brothers, Jihad is the oldest of us all, after Jihad comes my brother Karim, after that your little servant (myself), and after myself came my brother Nuri.

**And your sisters?**

- My sisters, Nejme, Naeel, Sebih and Shindan are from my mother. From the other, she is also my mother without making any difference between them, I have two brothers Fakhredin and Muhammed and my sisters, one is called Kizhe and the other Nihayet, which is the name of a lullaby called Nihayet.

**Mr. Uzer, did your village have a school?**

- Yes, it had a school.

**In which year were you born?**

- 1963.

**Where were you born?**

- In a village called 'Terjeel.'

**Had your father's family always lived there in Terjeel?**

- Yes.

**You were born in that year when the Ba'athists appeared and attacked villages. According to what people tell you, where you born before or after these attacks?**

- According to what people tell me now, yes. I never knew at the time of my birth what was happening but according to what people tell me now, there are some people still alive who know there was a time when we ran away to the Taleban village. Arab tribes had come to our region and had begun with attacks, they burned the village and I don't know how many other villages they burned in our area.

**My question is: where were you born?**

- Did I not say in 'Terjeel'?

**But was it before the troubles or after, according to what your mother told you?**

- Well, by God, I don't know...

**According to what you remember, what are your first memories or what do you feel that you remember, is there something that happened or something in your mind from your childhood?**

- Well, by God, I don't know...

entered the village. Then our people from the Terjeel and Tirkeshkan villages fled to the nearby mountain. I believe that a detachment of Peshmerga were killed (martyred), one of them was Jebar the radioman and they also said also one of the boys called Nesredin, also another injured boy Jum'a was captured.

**Do you not know which year it was?**

- Well, by God, I don't know if it was the end of '74 or in '75. I can't be sure which year it was.

**And in which year were you enlisted to the army? For example, when the Iran-Iraq war began you were already 17 years old...!?**

- The Iran-Iraq war flared up and I guess that was in 1980, I myself was born in 1963 - and so it was probably in 1982 that I became a soldier.

**What were you doing before you became a soldier?**

- I was with the sheep.

**Were you a shepherd in your own village?**

- Yes.

**Did you go to the army when your age was suitable for joining-up?**

- Yes I went into the army.

**Where did you go to when you joined up?**

- I went to the Kirkuk recruiting office and from there they sent us to the Kirkuk military training camp for the three month basic training. However, before the end of the three months we were transferred to barracks south of Baghdad and the next day, they transferred us to Tamuna

**Did you go to school?**

- Yes, I went to school. I had finished the fourth grade and had begun the fifth grade. This was the time when people didn't see the benefits of schooling and I was taken out to help with the shepherding and the work at the house.

**Were your brothers educated and did they go to school?**

- All of my brothers went to school.

**Also those who were older than you?**

- Yes, those who were before me also went to school.

**Did they finish their studies or were they taken out like your self?**

- No, some of them finished it and some of them didn't. For example, my brother Jihad didn't finish school.

**Mr. Uzer, in 1974 in the year of the great disturbances, when you were just eleven or twelve years old, you have to remember what happened to you all...!?**

- Well, by God, what I really remember was that we were always fleeing and we had to flee a great deal. I cannot remember how often when the betrayers came we were on the run ... at that time we were very fearful, we were always moving on to new safe places.

**Do you remember in '74 where you had to flee to?**

- I can only remember one incident clearly that was when the police were guarding the 'Jewel Bor' oil field when the Peshmerga attacked them. Well, I don't know if they were killed or not but the forces of the Kurdish betrayers surrounded our village to look for the Peshmerga and

**You don't know how long you were in Bashbulakh?**

- Really, I don't know.

**So after Bashbulakh, where did you go?**

- They had issued a general pardon or amnesty for those who had deserted from the army - so I returned to the recruiting centre in Kirkuk and returned to the same unit in Basra. So after we had surrendered ourselves to them, they sent us back to the same location. After we had served our official time in the army, they called us up again - but I deserted again!

**So it means that you had been in the army a number of times and you have deserted...?**

- Many times I was made a soldier and when the situation was unbearable, I deserted... however whenever an amnesty was issued, I gave myself up and was returned to my location of duty.

**So, Kak Uzer, when was the last time that you deserted before the Anfal?**

- Well it was roughly between one and a half years and two years before the Anfal. I guess it was in 1986.

**Where were you serving before this last desertion?**

- Haji Omeran.

**Now Haji Omeran was a part of Kurdistan that was less troubled compared with other areas of Iraq, why did you leave it? After all, you said that you deserted when the situation was unbearable?!**

- Of course, there was fighting near Haji Omeran in the areas of Galala and Choman.

Base near Basra. We were there for a time until our leave time - this period lasted four to five months and then we left it to go back to our work - however you describe it, we ran!

**This means you were in the army for four to five months?**

- I don't quite know how long I served in the army - we had deserted and were brought back again a number of times.

**But I am asking about your first time - for that time of four to five months, were there other people from your village with you?**

- It's true that there were other people from our village who were the same age as me; however at this moment I cannot remember who they were, but we were in the army together from the same village.

**After you had deserted, to which village did you go back to?**

- I came to Bashbulakh after I had deserted.

**You were living there?**

- Yes.

**In whose house were you living?**

- There were two houses there. One belonged to my uncle, who has since died, his name was Muhammed Sirwan and the other house belonged to my friend, Kak Bakr, known as Bakr Kuekha Majid. And in general, I don't remember how long I was there!



went on to Zengine district. These were probably in Jafan before me because when I deserted and came the second time to Jafan, they were not there.

**When was Jafan demolished?**

- The second time was in 1987.

**Were you there on that day that they destroyed the village?**

- Yes, I was there.

**How did they destroy it?**

- Well, I guess there had been a prior notification of the demolition. But the notification did not reach the people. My friend Heseb told me that there was a bloke called Baba Ali, who was a bit simple-minded. It seems that he had been given the notification but at the time that he received the paper, he threw it away. They told him they would destroy the village. They were given two choices - either to surrender and be taken to a collective town or to simply leave the area.

**Who told you this?**

- Heseb says that the local governor came to the village.

**Did he come alone to visit the village?**

- No, No! He came with a large troop of soldiers and with some from Kurdish mercenaries working with the government forces.

**Were you all hiding yourselves on that day that he came?**

- On the day that he came bringing the mercenaries, we could not fight them; so we ran.

**Were these battles part of the Iran-Iraq war or were they part of the Iraqi army's fight with the Peshmerga?**

- It was the Iran-Iraq war.

**That final time that you fled, where did you go to?**

- I went to the Jafan village.

**How big was the Jafan village?**

- I don't know exactly, but it was roughly 50 families.

**Where exactly is Jafan?**

- I believe it belongs to the Quara Hanjeer district, east of Kirkuk, originally it belonged to the Quara Hassan district but I've now heard that it is run by Kirkuk due to boundary changes made by the Iraqi government.

**How many other deserters were living in Jafan?**

- Although the village was very small, yet they were looking after quite a few deserters. The people of that region were very good.

**Were there other deserters from your home village living in Jafan village?**

- Well, for a time it was just I there. Then another man from my village came called Star, he was called Sayeed Star. Then, I'm not sure, another man called Kak Muhammed came from my village, he was there for a time. Apart from that, I'm not sure.

**Did they return back to military service or did they go to another village?**

- Well about these, I don't know. That time that I'm referring to is when the village was destroyed and we

single wall remained untouched, the village was all flattened!

**Were there many soldiers?**

- Of course, they were very many.

**Do you know their number?**

- Not exactly.

**Were there helicopters involved?**

- No there weren't, but there were tanks and troop carriers. There were also many Kurdish mercenaries.

**Had you heard about other villages being destroyed before Jafan was demolished?**

- Yes, of course.

**Were these villages near to your place?**

- Well, I don't know where, but it was happening very often.

**So you knew that the Baghdad government was planning to destroy your village?**

- No, No! In general the people just knew that the government was destroying villages.

**So what were those people doing who really knew the government's plan for clearing villages?**

- People couldn't trust the government; we never knew what was going to happen next. When you went too close to them, they got you killed. Even those who did trust the government ended up in the mass graves!

**Was there no fighting in any of those places where you had fled to?**

- When I was staying in these places, there had been no fighting. But there were clashes in these places after I had moved on.

**What happened after this Baba Ali came and told the people about what the local governor had said about the village being destroyed?**

- Baba Ali who had been given the paper from them but he had thrown it away.

**The notification was a written paper?**

- Well, I believe it was a written notification. The people were telling me that Baba Ali had thrown the paper away. Then the village leader, the Mukhtar, had visited the office and was told all about the planned destruction of the village. Also a number of people had come back from the district office of Quara Hanjeer reporting that a notification had been issued and how could it be that they had not informed us. The officials had said that they had given the notification to Baba Ali and the villagers guessed that because he has a mental disability and throws everything away, he had thrown this away as well. Others were told that these were all just rumours and nothing was going to happen. So there was great confusion.

Finally, one day a unit of the army came and commanded the people to collect all their belongings and hand them over to the army. We had no chance to take our items to a safer place. Then on the last time that the mercenary forces came there was nothing left standing, not even a

**No, I mean were the Peshmerga there on the day it was destroyed?**

- Oh no. They weren't there on that day.

**And on the previous day?**

- No, by God. It seems that they had not been there for at least two weeks before the demolition.

**Why because they knew that the soldiers were coming on you all?**

- No, No. They were taken to another place!

**So they left the area completely without defense!?**

- Not exactly. The area wasn't completely empty. But the Peshmergas who remained were largely ill and injured. However, had fighting broken out, they would have been ready to fight despite their illnesses and injuries. They were really heroic.

**Didn't troops come and attack the villages when the Peshmergas were away?**

- Of course.

**So what were the village people doing?**

- Whoever was frightened hid himself. However, many of the older people, the women and the children remained in the villages.

**Where were these people hiding?**

- They hid in holes or beside large rocks

**And those people who didn't trust the government? What did they want to do?**

- They wanted to go to a more remote village where the government couldn't reach them.

**Where did you go when Jafan was demolished?**

- We went to a village called Khidrehan.

**Where is Khidrehan?**

- It's in the Zengine, near to the valley that belongs to Qadr Karim.

**How long did you stay there?**

- I stayed until the Anfal operations began.

**Did many people come to Khidrehan?**

- Which people?

**Did other people come with you to Khidrehan from Jafan?**

- When we left Jafan, I had been staying at Kak Tahir's house, two of Kak Tahir's brothers and some of his children came as well. They also had some cattle and sheep which they led to Khidrehan. The small children of Kak Ali Suleiman also came to there. There were two other families who came from Jafan: Kak Salar's household and Kak Hasib Rashekhana's household.

**Was Khidrehan a big village?**

- Surely, it was a big village.

**Were the Kurdish guerilla fighters in Jafan village on the day it was destroyed?**

- Yes, Yes. Many had come.

where they were planning to attack: whether it was Nawshwan or Jabar or Quarahesen. So we immediately decided to return to the area of Khidrehan which was more remote and quieter. I went to ask the advice of Mr. Aleem, one of my father's friends, and told him of the different rumours that were circulating. However, he only said "It will not happen, if God wills!" However, there were reports of fighting between the Peshmerga and governmental forces as the Peshmerga tried to protect their Kurdish opposition party headquarters. There were also increasing rumours from different sides and the people were increasingly frightened.

Then the day arrived when it was thought that the troops would attack. It was getting near lunchtime and word came that we should not to eat in our houses in Khidrehan but go and eat in the hollows and beside the large rocks. Our house was higher up and on the right side of it there was a stream bed. Well we had taken up our food and tea to drink there, but I can't remember if we had eaten or not. Suddenly on the hilltop above us, a young man appeared and told us to run because tanks had arrived! We went to look and there from the direction of Qaitool we saw the tanks approaching! There was the roaring of tanks mixed with the echoes of bullets from the resistance fighters. Although the Peshmerga tried to stop them, their numbers were insufficient - it was reported that there were only 12 fighters at their stronghold in Gerrawi.

**Were the Peshmerga at Gerrawi?**

- Yes, they were at Gerrawi.

**And you were in Khidrehan?**

- Correct.

**Kak Uzer, when the Anfal came upon the region, did you realise that it was the Anfal operations that had started?**

- Well, concerning the Anfal, one week before these operations a Kurdish political officer, I think his name was Mullah Karim, came to the village and was asking where we would be going. He was speaking to Kak Salar and I. We said that we were going to the Jabar heights. However he told us not to go there because Kurdish mercenaries were capturing and killing those they found there. Kak Salar jokingly asked if we would also end up like that. However he warned us to look after ourselves and said that the government had prepared a large force to attack the whole region. Kak Salar said that we still planned to go there and he was asked by the political officer to visit them when we were returning to Khidrehan.

**Where did you meet this Mullah Karim?**

- We met him in a village called Gerrawi. Unfortunately he was killed in the same place, when he and his comrades encountered an army unit. Once more we were confused and not knowing where to go, we returned to the area of the villages Jafan, Hussein Islam, Khishlakhkon. However, when we returned they had all been demolished and the people remaining had taken up temporary residence beside a stream. They were hoping that the situation would soon improve and that they could return and rebuild their homes, but it was only getting worse. One night soon after we had returned to the village, we encountered one or two people who told us to leave the district. We asked them why we should leave and they replied that a very large regiment of troops in Chamchamal and Tanjaro (near Suleimaniya) were preparing themselves for a campaign. It wasn't clear

planes, helicopters and bombs; while the Peshmerga had only Kalashnikovs and RPGs.

**So apart from the army coming, you did not see them bomb the village?**

- No, they did not bomb Khidrehan.

**Were there helicopters over the village?**

- No, there were no helicopters over the village but some MIG fighters flew over the village. I think it was the same day that Halabja was hit.

**So on the day that the army came, you could escape. Where did you go to?**

- We took refuge in the rugged places in the hills but the army started bombarding us by night. People were so confused, they had just lost their houses and possessions and the concern was how we could look after and feed the children with us. So we decided to send some of the women into the Qadr Kerem village.

**Wasn't the army surrounding the area and wasn't it dangerous to move the families?**

- Of course, Gerrawi had been taken and many Peshmergas were probably martyred - we weren't sure how many had escaped.

**So why did you choose Qadr Kerem as a safe location for the women and children?**

- Qadr Kerem was neither too far nor too close to Khidrehan; it was just a few villages further on.

**Were you under threat?**

- We were always under threat. The Peshmerga were the only force capable of protecting us. We were sure that they would do their best and would not allow the army to come upon us.

**And yourselves, did you have weapons? Were all the people without weapons?**

- Yes, we had no weapons among us.

**Did you not have any supporting forces among you?**

- No, we had no supporting forces among us.

**Well, can you remember the day that the troops came upon you?**

- Well, it was in April. I don't exactly know if it was the 8th of April or the 9th of April. Well it was certainly roughly between the 8th and 10th of April.

**Can you remember what happened when the army arrived?**

- Yes, Yes. When Kak Ramadan said that the army had arrived, most of us looked and saw it arriving from the direction of Gerrawi. I also remember that there was a group of Peshmerga from the 59th Hamrin Unit who were hiding in a stream bed at Khidrehan and then heavy fighting broke out. We were told that we must leave our food and tea. We had two or three small children with us from the families of the village and so each one of us carried one of them. We could hear the sounds of battle from Gerrawi and the governmental forces were using everything against them - tanks, big machine guns,

**Where did you go when the night fell? What did you do?**

- When the night came, we rushed to take the women and children to a safer place. One man who was head of a family, Kak Ali offered to take them to Qadr Kerem. We agreed and we took all the families in that direction. On the way there, however, we met another very large crowd of women and children by another stream in the Chamakam valley. There we decided that the younger men should go back to the Khidrehan area to try and bring the flocks to safety (it was common for the army to loot items belonging to the Kurds).

**Were the people at this stream from other villages?**

- No, they were all from Khidrehan. As you know, this village is a big one and apart from its' original inhabitants there were many others who had sought refuge from the Ba'athist oppression. First of all, we took all the women and children, no matter where they came from, to a place near Qadr Kerem. Then we went back to the first stream to check if others had come there. We didn't find anyone else. We don't know if they had made their own way to Qadr Kerem or whether they had given themselves up to the army. In any case, we stayed at that stream bed until the morning.

**You had left the women and children?**

- Yes, we had left them during the night.

**Did they enter Qadr Kerem?**

- Some of them went in immediately, others waited until the sunrise. In the end, they all entered the town.

**How far was it?**

Well, probably roughly one hour or a little bit more by foot. The local people knew where the tricky places were. But I've forgotten the exact time it took us.

**Was it night or daytime?**

- It was night.

**What time was it when you fled from Khidrehan?**

- Well, it was roughly midday, just after midday because we were eating our lunch. We had decided if they chose to bomb the village, we would be better off in the ditches and hollows.

**Was that hollow full?**

- What with?

**With trees and bushes?**

- No, there were no trees but the hollow had a deep stream in it.

**So you felt that that hollow could save you?**

- Well because this river was in a deep valley it meant that the heavy tanks couldn't reach us. So it was the only place for hiding.

**Where did this valley go to?**

- If one went to the left, it took you to the countryside behind Khidrehan. If you went to the right, it would join the Rokhana stream and flow past Gerrawi, where there was a bridge.

house was near Qadr Kerem and he made it easier for the people to enter the town.

**So Qasm Agha Koya helped the people to enter Qadr Kerem secretly?**

- I only heard people talking about him; I never met him or knew him personally. All I know was that it was Qasm Agha Koya's people who were helping the refugees.

**Can you imagine that it was Qasm Agha Koya's people facilitating the entry of the women and children into Qadr Kerem and in effect protecting them?**

- I don't know, I cannot say that it was them who were helping the people. We must also remember that they couldn't take more than one woman and two to three children extra per household. They were also being employed by the government as part of the militia and had duties from the regime - for that reason, they would not have been able to undertake too much contrary to those duties.

**Good. Where did you men go to after you had left the women to go into Qadr Kerem?**

- We went back to the Khidrehan area. We did not find anyone else in the area and we don't know what had happened to them... all I know is that when we arrived back there, we did not find anyone else. There had been between 50 to 60 people there and now there was no sign of them!

**So it was possible for them to enter the town?**

- Yes, I think so.

**Why did you men not go in?**

- We couldn't go in because we had deserted from the army.

**So it was because you feared the army?**

- Of course.

**But the army was everywhere...?**

- The army and Kurdish informers entered the district dozens of times but we had always hidden ourselves from them. We thought we would be able to do the same thing again...

**And were you all sure that as the women and children went to Qadr Kerem they wouldn't be imprisoned?**

- The idea was that they could stay with friends and acquaintances. They were all speaking one language and it would not be easy to differentiate between them. The people of the towns and cities were very cooperative, they knew what was happening.

**Were there no influential people in the area who you knew would help them getting refuge?**

- Well there was one such person who arrived but was originally from that area ... I'm trying to remember his name...

**Where was he from?**

- He was from Koya. His name was Qasm Agha. He was called Qasm Agha Koya. He was a kind man whose

brought it to us. Also Kak Abas suggested that we go and find as much biscuits and sweet foods as possible. A little later, Kak Hidayet returned and said that it was not good for us to stay together as six people.

### **So you were six people?**

- Yes, we had become six people. Myself, Kak Hidayet, Kak Abas, Kak Ali and another young man who was the nephew of Kak Hidayet. They asked me if I knew the area well and I answered that I was only new to the district. So they put me with Kak Abas who, as a shepherd, knew the region very well. It was also decided that we should go in separate directions until night fell and then we would meet up near to the summit. In this way, the enemy wouldn't find us all together if there was to be a search of the plain by the army units.

### **Who decided this?**

- It was Kak Hidayet who was speaking. Then the army that had been closing in on the plain opened fire on us: shooting this way and that. It was Kak Abas who got us moving from one ditch to another. I followed them but I couldn't be much help as I was only carrying a pistol that I had bought for myself a few days earlier.

### **What kind of pistol did you have?**

- It was a small one called a "Hama." Nevertheless it was a good gun for short range shooting. There was one Peshmerga related to Kak Hidayet who stood at the edge of the stream and was about to throw his guns in there. I asked why was doing that and he answered that it seemed pointless to carry them as all his family had now been killed. I asked him to sell them to me (his

### **Had there been women and children among these or only elderly?**

- There had been women and children among them; there were also babies who depended on their mothers for milk. There had also been many elderly people among them. We then stayed there until the morning. We were only a small group of people: there was Kak Abas Haji Nasridin from Khidrehan and myself, also another friend Kak Hidayet from another village together with his nephew and one or two others. We stayed on the plain near to the village for just two hours after sunrise when another army contingent and a contingent of Kurdish informers arrived from the battle at Gerrawi. The number of Peshmerga had been few at Gerrawi and I guess that while one or two had escaped, most had been killed in the fighting.

### **What had happened to the villagers at Gerrawi?**

- I don't know what happened to them.

### **Were they executed as part of the Anfal or did they escape to another village?**

- I really don't know what happened to the villagers from Gerrawi.

### **What you have spoken about took place over two days; did you have food with you?**

- No, we didn't have food with us.

### **So what did you eat?**

- There was a shop owner called Kak Qadr, who I guess was the brother of Kak Hidayet, and also a local teacher called Mullah Hassan from the village. They were good to us. This Kak Qadr, who was probably the cousin of Mullah Hassan, put all that he had in his shop into sacks and



on them and they had to find better shelter. In that situation, with the enemy so close, we realised that this was no suitable place to hide ourselves. These older people advised us that there was no point in our fighting with such simple weapons to try to challenge military helicopters, and that we should leave this stream bed as quickly as possible. I realised that it was better to get rid of the Kalashnikov and decided to hide it under a bush; I could wrap it up in an old torn shepherd coat that I had found in order to protect it from rusting. I dug a little hole for it and covered it over with some gravel and dried grass. We came further down the stream bed and Kak Abas suggested that we take another valley and head for the high rugged rocks near Qadr Kerem as the place was ideal for finding protection.

After we had finished this discussion and moved on a little, we noticed that a man on a donkey was passing by. Kak Abas said, "Hey that's my father." I didn't believe it and wondered what his father would be doing in this valley. They I looked and saw that it really was his father! When he arrived, he started crying and kept kissing his son over and over on the cheeks and then he kissed me also. He asked about our guns and we told him that we had hidden them: Kak Abas had also hidden his Kalashnikov under a bush and I had placed my pistol in the same hole with my Kalashnikov.

**Did he have a Kalashnikov with him?**

- Yes, but it was a better type known as "Paratrooper."

**Where did he get it from?**

- It belonged to him. I don't know whether he had been a Peshmerga, whether he was a sympathiser, or whether

Kalashnikov and three clips of ammunition). He gave them to me for free and I took his gun. After this Kak Abas, Kak Hidayet and I separated ourselves from the others until the evening.

**Did you divide into two groups of men?**

- Yes, we divided into two groups.

**Who exactly was with you?**

- Me and Kak Abas Haji Nasridin.

**You mean you were just two people!?**

- Yes, we were just two people together. We then entered the stream bed that was away from the enemy's fire. In that way we were able to hide ourselves until night time. In the mean time, three other frightened people turned up in the stream bed. We asked them what they were doing. They answered that they were also seeking a safe place away from the army. In the meantime, we could hear the sound of the enemy coming nearer to us.

**Did you know these other people personally?**

- No, they were from other villages around Khidrehan. When Kak Abas asked them about the sound of gunfire, they replied that the gunfire was coming from the army units and the Kurdish informer forces.

**Good. So where did these three people come from?**

- Well, I don't know where they had come from. However, Kak Abas asked them why they were so anxious and confused. They mentioned that the army and Kurdish informer forces were on the other side of the valley. We asked if they were sure. They replied that is why they had sought refuge where we were: the enemy had opened fire

good. From the conversation, we realised that they were Kurdish mercenaries.

**Did they themselves tell you that they were mercenaries?**

- At first, we didn't know that they were mercenaries. It was only when they themselves said that they were mercenaries. They said that they were 'Governmental gunmen.'

**How did you feel when you found out that they were 'Governmental gunmen?'**

- Well, we felt as if we were the prey that had allowed ourselves to come into their trap. We realised that it was black day for us!

**Was it not possible to run away from them or to persuade them that as because both you and they were Kurds together they should let you go and allow you to hide yourselves somewhere?**

- It was impossible to run away, where could we go? And we didn't try to persuade them. They simply put their hands onto our weapons and took them from us.

**But you have just told me that you had put your weapons in the undergrowth?**

- That is right, please excuse me. I forgot to tell you that when Haji Nasridin, Kak Abas's father, came to us and tried to ask his son to surrender that Kak Abas initially refused to go with him. Later, as his father became more desperate, he had compassion on his father and agreed to go with him. After this, they both asked if I would be willing to give myself up and I also agreed. Haji Nasridin told us what their relative in the army had said; that it

he was simply a tribal leader: I think that his family was always keeping guns. Then Kak Abas asked him about what was happening. He mentioned that half of the people from the district had given themselves up to the governmental forces; the other half had left their homes and were hiding out in the vicinity. They were all homeless and hardly had anything to eat. They did not know what their fate was going to be. After this, Kak Abas' father told his son about a young officer leading a battalion, "He is our relative and he has sent me to let you know about rejoining the army and getting the benefit of the amnesty decree. There would be some questioning for two to three days and then you would be free to rejoin your military unit." I asked the man respectfully whether this had been written in the newspapers. He replied angrily that it had not been in the newspapers. Then I mentioned that if such an amnesty had been agreed, it would surely have been announced on the TV, or at least on the radio. I doubted him and he replied, "This is my only son, do you think I take him to the firing squad? The person who promised me this is our own relative." On the basis of this, we decided to come down from the valley that we had been in. Straightaway, we met a group of gunmen and we hadn't known that they had been so close to us. We didn't know whether they were Peshmerga or mercenaries (from the Kurdish informers' forces). They just looked tired. As we came face to face with them, they spoke in Kurdish. They asked us where we were going and we answered that we were waiting for our children. They asked us whether we were Peshmerga; but we denied it and said that we were tribal people. One of them asked whether we did not want to surrender ourselves to the army and we said that we were not sure if this was

has been issued and that these mercenaries are singing, "We would be glad to kill you." However, they read the agony on our faces and told us not to worry, that an amnesty would soon be issued and we would be free again. Finally, they brought us into the police station at Qadr Kerem and left.

**Who was in the police station - was it army or police?**

- Well, it was police in the station, but there was also a detachment of soldiers opposite the police station. As I walked through that building, I saw Kak Salar behind bars, it was Salar Sheikh Fatih. I also saw that the courtyard of the prison was already full of detainees!

**Salar: the same one that was with you before?**

- Yes, it was that Kak Salar. As we came into the courtyard, the sergeant who had been responsible for our arrest appeared. As we were standing in the courtyard, I realised that despite it being crowded, it was better than being in one of the cells. The sergeant turned to us and asked which of us wanted to go into one of the cells. From among all those people, I was the only one who wanted to go in.

**Why did you want to go inside?**

- Well, I wanted to go into the same cell as Kak Salar to find out when and where he had been captured.

**Did they take you inside to the cells?**

- Yes.

**Was Kak Abas still with you?**

- He was with me.

would be better for us when we had our weapons with us. So we decided to go back and collect our weapons. As we went back, we were really struggling with the idea that we should give ourselves up: what would happen when we give ourselves up and what would happen if we decided not to give ourselves up? It was a black day and no-one knew what was coming.

**Do you know the time when the mercenaries took the guns off you?**

- It was early in the afternoon. After they had taken our guns, they set us to one side where we could see that there were indeed many mercenaries there. They had been in the same valley that we had intended to travel. There had been many other escapees who had taken this route and the mercenaries had just rounded them up. We were taken over to where these other captives were standing. One of the officers sat at a table and was writing down the details of each prisoner into a large notebook - the name of the person and family names, their age and occupation, whether they carried a weapon or not, whether they had been at Gerrawi, and whether they were a Peshmerga or a supporter of the Peshmerga. He was asking all the questions and writing down the answers. At this time, Haji Nasridin asked about their unit and whether they were under the control of the army unit commanded by their relative, but they replied that they were part of the unit belonging to Qasm Agha Koya. It didn't take long before a Landcruiser jeep turned up and we were forced into it. We were being taken to Qadr Kerem. The gunmen were singing songs with terrifying words. We were distressed and we didn't know where they were taking us and what would happen to us! I was thinking to myself, how can it be possible that an amnesty

**captured by the Kurdish mercenaries or had some been captured by the army as well?**

- Some had been captured by the army, some by the mercenaries, others had given themselves in; they had heard news of an amnesty and had handed themselves over voluntarily.

**When you came to Kak Salar what did you speak about, or, what did he say when he saw you?**

- I asked Kak Salar about when he had been brought to the police station. He mentioned that he had arrived the day before and that he had not been caught or forced to come, but that he had foolishly believed an announcement that he could simply register here for a pardon. He was speaking with such a sad tone of voice. He asked about my story and what had happened to me since we last met. I explained to him that I had been detained and brought here at gun-point. I asked him what he thought was going to happen to us. He said that he didn't have any good prospects for the future. I then asked why he didn't have much hope. He replied that he had been captured and furthermore he had seen how many people were being taken away from the station and they didn't know where they were being taken. He also pointed out to me the great number of people captured and being held in the courtyard and the cells...

**Were you taken away from the police station with Kak Salar?**

- No, No. It was with Kak Ramadan that we were taken. As we were drinking our tea at lunchtime they told us that the army had come and were taking us, but not with Kak Salar.

**What happened to Haji Nasridin?**

- Haji Nasridin? After the mercenaries had taken us captive and had written down our names they told him to go away and after that they placed us in the car for Qadr Kerem.

**How could he agree to be separated from his only son?**

- He tried his best to persuade them that he was taking us to the young officer who was waiting for us. However, it was all in vain, and no-one listened to him. In the end, he promised us that he would go to his relative and arrange our release.

**Were you encouraged by his promise ... or were you resigned to the fact that you were under the control of the mercenaries?**

- Of course, we were hopeful that he would sooner or later help us and get us released. For the whole time we were in the police station, our eyes were on the door and we kept saying that soon, Haji Nasridin and the relative would come for us.

**Were all those people who were with you at the police station in Qadr Kerem young people?**

- Well, many of them were young people but there were some older people too.

**Were there any women or children?**

- No, No. There were no women or children there.

**According to what you heard from those people already at the police station, had they all been**

**Can you remember exactly what the policeman said in Arabic?**

- He spoke in Kurdish.

**Was the policeman Kurdish?**

- Well he spoke in Kurdish. Whether he just knew Kurdish or was in fact a Kurd, only God knows.

*(\*Ali Hassan Majid, known as Chemical Ali was the second most hated man in the Ba'athist regime after Saddam Hussein - he is known for his using chemical weapons against Halabja and for supervising the Anfal operations. Bariq was a military leader known for his cruelty. He was killed by the hand of Saddam Hussein himself after gaining a lot of popularity in the army.)*

**When had you last seen Kak Salar before meeting him in this police station?**

- Before the jail, I had seen him at our place in Khidrehan together with his brother. Did I not tell you that we were previously two families who had been in Jafan together? By the way, I saw other acquaintances at the prison - people from the Old Qishlakh village who had also sought refuge at Khidrehan.

**Did you see any other people that you knew?**

- Well, the prison was very crowded. I had gone to be with Kak Salar but there were probably others who I knew in the courtyard and in the different cells.

**How long did the authorities keep you at the police station at Qadr Kerem?**

- We didn't leave the same day. We spent a night there and the next morning we heard one of the police guard who was on the roof shouting that the others should come to attention as Ali Hassan Majid and Bariq\* were coming.

**How far away were you from this guard?**

- I was just in the same building

**I mean were you close enough to hear his voice clearly?**

- I see, yes, we were not so far away. He was on the roof near to our cell.

**Did you hear him yourself or did you hear someone else say that he said this?**

- Yes, Yes. I heard him myself.

**So apart from that utterance, what else did they say?**

- They said that whoever is an Iraqi must raise their hands, that whoever has it written on their ID card that they were born in Iraq should raise their hands.

**So what did you do?**

- In general we raised our hands.

**When you had put up your hands, what did they say after that?**

- Once more they repeated the same question and we had to raise our hands again. After that, we were ordered to stand up and sit down several times; we were also ordered to sit in the squat position. They took some video footage of us and then they left. Shortly after this the transfer process started.

**Apart from that policeman on the roof who shouted about the arrival of Ali Hassan Majid, did anyone else say anything about his presence at the jail?**

- No apart from the policeman on the roof, no-one else said anything.

**So who can say that it was actually Ali Hassan Majid or Bariq; perhaps it had been two other officers of the Iraqi army?**

- I myself did not know them and I can only pass on what the policeman had said.

**During the whole time that you were being questioned or ordered by the officials, did no-one actually say that this was this person speaking? I mean, did no one introduce them to you?**

**You had previously been a soldier, had you seen either Ali Hassan Majid or Bariq before?**

- How could I have seen them before?

**I mean when you had been serving in the Iraqi army?**

- I had never seen them before, neither in a photograph nor in reality.

**And did they come?**

- After a time we heard the noise of helicopters circling over the jail, I looked out of the window and saw two helicopters with military markings and then they landed. It didn't take much more than a quarter of an hour and we were all taken to the station's courtyard, we were all squashed like sardines into that small courtyard area. We were terrified that they were going to execute us; to us Kurds, Bariq was renowned as an angel of death, wherever he went there were always mass killings. We were growing more frightened and more hopeless, despite the fact that there were normal policemen and officials present. Then a number of shock troopers came into the room and it was said that they had come to mow us down with a hail of bullets. However, after them came a number of officials, two of them carrying an officer's stick: it was clear that they were important people as the other officials were surrounding them. One of these two people said: "Look at their faces; they don't even look like Muslims!"

**Did they speak Arabic?**

- Yes, they spoke Arabic.

**Do you know Arabic?**

- Yes, I know Arabic

**What did they use to bind your hands and blindfold you?**

- They just used our belts and our own Kurdish head cloths. Each of us had our belts and our head cloths and these were used to bind us up. Finally, they took us to the Chamchamal brigade.

**How did they take you to Chamchamal?**

- We were put onto military trucks (the kind known as Eva-trucks from East Germany).

**How many trucks were there?**

For that particular group, there were seven or eight trucks.

**How many people could they put in the back of a truck?**

- Well, I don't know exactly. Maybe it was fifty people or even more. Because our hands and eyes were bound, I can't tell exactly.

**Were there any women or children with you?**

- No, No! There were no women or children with us.

**Who else did you know among those people in the seven trucks?**

- Among those seven trucks, there was Kak Salar, Kak Abas, Kak Hasib Reshekhene and Uncle Hamid Qerechewari and a number of other people who I knew: but because our eyes were blindfolded, it isn't easy to say now who exactly was with us.

**Were there soldiers in the trucks to guard you?**

- No-one said anything.

**And nobody talked with them?**

- They were only talking among themselves.

**You yourself, you didn't talk to them?**

- What do you think? Who could dare to talk with them? We didn't even dare to look at them; all of us out of fear were looking at the ground. We said to each other, "If we look at them, they will kill us!"

**After they had left, did none of you ask the policemen or the local officials who these people had been?**

- No, by God. None of us asked them.

**You mentioned that after they had left, they began to transfer you. Did they set you free?**

- No, No! Set us free? They transferred us from the police station over to some military barracks.

**How did they transport you?**

- The barracks were directly opposite the police station with just a road between them - they took us over by foot.

**At the barracks, what did they do to you?**

- First they took our statements and recorded our details again - they asked for the details of our names even to our fourth name, the name of our great grandfather! After this, they lead us back to the police station for us to spend one more night there. In the morning, they again took us out and bound our hands and blindfolded us.

**With what?**

- What do you mean exactly?

**When you were in the trucks and being guarded by the troopers, did none of you speak with them to ask where you were going or why you were still being held or about anything else?**

- Did I not say to you that it was only as we were unloaded from the trucks that we realised that soldiers were with us? Before that we hadn't known that it might have been possible to ask them.

**Would any of you have asked them if you had known they were there?**

- No, I don't think so. In the police station at Qadr Kerem, the soldiers were always coming and going and none of us asked them then about why we were being held.

**So why did none of you ask these questions? Had any of you been threatened about not asking questions?**

- No, they had never informed us not to ask, but we knew for ourselves that it was better to not speak with them. You never know when you might make a mistake or say something that they don't like and then you would have to pay dearly for it!

**When did they bring you to Chamchamal?**

- It was in the afternoon.

**When you got to the military brigade grounds did you meet others that had been detained?**

- Yes, by God. There were so many others that if you had thrown a needle in the air it would not have landed on the ground!

- Well because our eyes were blindfolded at the beginning we didn't know how many vehicles were travelling with us and how many people were kept in each vehicle, whether soldiers were with us or not. But after we had arrived at the Chamchamal brigade barracks and they had taken off our blindfolds, we could see that we had been in military trucks and we could see the military vehicles that had been in front and behind us on the way to the military grounds in Chamchamal.

**If you can remember and if someone had looked at his watch, what time did you arrive at Chamchamal?**

- Really, I cannot remember what time it was. Our journey had lasted less than two hours, perhaps just one and a half hours.

**Were there Kurdish mercenaries with you when you were being loaded on and off of the trucks?**

- No, there were only soldiers. We had only seen the Kurdish mercenaries when they had captured us and took us to the police station in Qadr Kerem, apart from that we didn't see them.

**Kak Uzer, I haven't forgotten about Kak Abas's father, Haji Nasridin, what happened to him? Did you not see him again in Qadr Kerem? Did he not say that he would fetch the influential officer to have you both released?**

- After we had been separated from him, we forgot to think about him and we didn't know what had happened to him. Although we had kept our hopes alive thinking about his helping us to get released, it really appeared to be our Doomsday from which no-one could be rescued...



**How long were you kept at the military grounds in Chamchamal?**

- We stayed just for a single night and then in the morning they brought along normal civilian Glaba trucks and herded us onto them.

**What happened to the military trucks that had brought you from Qadr Kerem to Chamchamal, why didn't they use the same vehicles?**

- Well, I don't know why they didn't use the military trucks. The number of people awaiting transfer was so huge that it was probably not possible to transport them with just military or governmental vehicles alone. They brought along many Glaba trucks and just forced us onto them, we were so crowded together that we were unable to see our own feet!

**Did they not bind your hands and your eyes again?**

- No, no! Our eyes were only blindfolded as far as Chamchamal.

**How many people were on each Glaba truck?**

- Well, by God, I don't know. But the truck was filled and each of us had to stand up on our feet. It was not possible to sit down, each person had to stand. You know how big each Glaba truck is and each of them was filled with detainees.

**Were there women and children in them?**

- There were no women and children in the Glaba trucks, we were only men. But there were many other kinds of vehicles filled with women, children and older men. It seemed as if they had transported all the villagers together, each family was together. However, we were

**Were you able to speak with them?**

- No, we were kept separate from these others. In fact, as each new group of detainees arrived they were kept separated from the others.

**What did they do to you after you had arrived at the military base and had been taken off the trucks? You said that you couldn't mix with other detainees.**

- Once again they took our statements and our details, our names and dates of birth, where we came from and where we had been captured, whether we had had weapons with us or not, whether we had deserted from the army, whether we were Peshmerga or sympathisers, and many other questions as well.

**Did you tell them that you had deserted the army and had been captured with a gun?**

- Yes, I told him the truth.

**Why?**

- Why not? Why should I lie?

**Sorry, it wasn't my intention to suggest that you lied. But so that they wouldn't know that you had a gun or so that they wouldn't know you had run away from the army, you might have said something else, such as that you were just a shepherd...?**

- Well, we had guns with us when we were detained and the number on the weapon was recorded along with our names when we were at Qadr Kerem, how would it possible to say that it wasn't me? At the same time, it was clear that they had detained all the people from the area whether they had been carrying guns or not.

- It seems that the Chamchamal military base had just been as a collecting point for the detainees where they recorded our details and then transported us on further. In this way, group by group, they were transporting us away from this base. As they took us away, we didn't know where we were going to: to Suleimaniya or to Kirkuk? Only God knew their intention for us! One thing you should know about the time when we were in the Glaba trucks and being prepared for transportation: there was the sound of gunfire from Chamchamal itself. Then a number of governmental helicopters appeared and began attacking the town. While we didn't know exactly what was happening, the news spread that the mercenaries and the people of the town were attacking the army units to rescue the people. I didn't know if the people were saved or not, we were all still in the trucks in readiness for transportation. What I do know is that because of the gunfire in Chamchamal we were hurriedly loaded into the trucks and taken off to another military camp near Chamchamal and we were kept there that night. That night we were very frightened: we said to each other, "They are going to kill all of us." We did hear the sound of gunfire from Chamchamal throughout the night until morning. After sunrise, maybe it was six o'clock or seven o'clock; a large number of 24-seater Coaster minibuses arrived and were forced onto them. Then they took us in the direction of Kirkuk. As we arrived at Kirkuk, we said to each other, "They are taking us to Kirkuk." But we passed through Kirkuk and they brought us to Topzawa.

**How many Coaster minibuses were there?**

- Well, I don't exactly know. We were not the same number as had been at the first Chamchamal base; they had already transported many others.

with that group that had been brought from Qadr Kerem and we were kept apart from the others. In addition there were other groups that they were putting onto other Glaba trucks. There were many Glaba trucks and many 'Coaster' minibuses and each one had been filled with people. Until we had been taken to the military grounds at Chamchamal, we had never known that so many people were being detained including women and children.

**Were there any soldiers or guards with you in the Glaba trucks?**

- No.

**With your eyes not blindfolded, you were able to see around you. Who were guarding you?**

- When we were in the military base we were guarded by regular troops but when we were being transported there were both elite troops and Kurdish mercenaries guarding us.

**How did you feel when you saw that it was Kurdish mercenaries who were now guarding you on the road to an unknown destination? I mean, they were Kurds as well: they were armed Kurds who were making sure that you didn't escape from your enemies?**

- It was very disappointing to find people from your own nationality doing this to you and packing women and children into military vehicles. These mercenaries were behaving just like the Ba'athist troops of our enemies. I mean, cruelty and oppression from the regime's officers was understandable but why should our own people be doing the same?

**Where did they take you with these Glaba trucks?**

that there was no possible future for me. How could this large crowd be brought together in order to set them free? Whoever saw this scene understood what the regime's intentions were!

**In your opinion, what was it intended for?**

- The intention that was now becoming a reality, extermination!

**What had been your thoughts as they were still transporting you towards Topzawa?**

- Didn't I explain that before they brought us to Topzawa we had expected to be released but, by God, ever before we arrived at the camp itself, as we saw the terrible sight in Topzawa from a distance we realised that we had no possible future before us.

**So how was Topzawa, if you could give us an overview...?**

- Woe, how should I talk about it? There were probably a thousand vehicles in it... one bus load was being unloaded while another was being loaded up with people for transporting them away. They brought them by military trucks, small coaches, by open lorries - and one didn't know where all these people were coming from. On top of that, there were so many soldiers from different units. I have never seen so many soldiers together in one place; I have no idea where they came from.

**My reason for asking is whether you could give me a description of Topzawa...!?**

- Yes. Well, I had never seen Topzawa previously and that day when we were brought there, there was such a large crowd of people. I guess, Topzawa was a military

**Was it only yourselves on these buses or were there any soldiers or Kurdish mercenaries with you?**

- There were no mercenaries, but there were soldiers.

**How many soldiers were there?**

- Just one.

**What was his uniform?**

- Camouflaged patterned with a red beret.

**What weapons did he carry?**

- He was carrying a Kalashnikov.

**When did you arrive at Topzawa?**

- We did not have any watches with us but it was before noon.

**What did you see at Topzawa when you arrived there?**

- It was indescribable; really a person cannot relate everything that was going there. Whatever area or building there was, whether courtyard, whether storeroom, it was all filled with people. Even as we approached the military base in the minibus, we could see through the bus windows that the place was already overcrowded with people. Believe me: I was giddy from the thought that so many people were squashed in there. Groups of people were being transported away just to be replaced with other groups arriving. Different kinds of transport vehicles were arriving: minibuses, larger coaches, trucks and lorries. They brought us into Topzawa. Up until that time we had hoped that we were going to be released and sent back to our original army units, but as I saw the vast crowds in Topzawa, I realised

discovered just how many people Saddam had captured and sent them to their deaths from Topzawa.

**Were all of these people in their separate groups or was it only yourselves that they had separated?**

- No, no! Do you know how it was? Each group of people arrived it was separated from the others until they had completed registration and questioning. After this they were put into separate areas of the large parade-ground with guards surrounding them or if one of the buildings happened to be empty, they were placed in there.

**You your people who had come from Qadr Kerem via the Chamchamal base, were you questioned and starting from afresh put under investigation?**

- Yes, all those people who were packed in there had been questioned - your name, your work, where were you captured, did you have a weapon with you or not, were you a deserter, have you been in the army, were you a peshmerga, did you sympathise with the rebels, and many other questions.

**What did you say in Topzawa?**

- I answered them just as I had before.

**Did you say that you had been armed when you were arrested?**

- Of course.

**Why did you say that?**

- Well, when I had given my details in Qadr Kerem, they had written down the number of my gun against my name. If I had tried to say otherwise at Topzawa, wouldn't they

training camp as it had several very large buildings and one great hanger-sized building as we have in this region for chicken farming, only much, much longer.

**What did they do with you when you arrived at Topzawa?**

- They immediately took us out of the buses and searched us thoroughly. Whatever we had, they took it from us: money, watch, comb, mirror, hair brush, even chains and rings. They searched us from top to toe. They didn't allow us to mix with other people but they put us in our own distinct area and set us in rows so that they could question us.

**Were you also body-searched?**

- Everyone was checked thoroughly.

**What did they take from you?**

- My ID card, my watch and whatever else they could find in my pockets. However, as I had already passed through some difficult days, I had hidden some money in a secret pocket sown into my underwear. They didn't find it. So apart from this little money, they took everything from me. Of course, this didn't happen to me only, everyone was searched.

**Those other people who were in Topzawa, had they all been captured like you?**

- Well, I don't know if they had been captured or if they had given themselves up voluntarily.

**I mean, were all of these people there under arrest?**

- All of them were imprisoned; I don't believe that any person there was set free. It was only later that we

**What did they do to him when they heard that he was a collaborator?**

- I can only tell you what I saw or heard from others; they said to him, so why hasn't Tahsin Shaweys come to speak up on your behalf - they shoved him and took him away.

**Did they put him with the other people?**

- No, they took him away.

**Did they let him go?**

- What we saw was that they took him away; we didn't hear what happened to him. But to my way of thinking, I don't believe he was released.

**What was his name?**

- Well, I didn't know his name - he was a thin young man with a thin beard.

**What did they do to your group when the questioning had finished?**

- We were taken for questioning four people at a time. When it was our turn, it was me, Kak Ramazan, Kak Abas and another person who I didn't know who were taken together. Then, after we had been questioned in a large room, they pointed to a door and told us to go through there. This door was roughly 6-7 metres across and had a detachment of soldiers in front of it. When the person had pointed us to the door, this group of soldiers came towards us and took us through that door that he had pointed to. As we were brought in there, we saw that it was a huge and long room with a corrugated iron roof. When we entered it, we saw that there were a great number of people in it. It was filled with women and

have just pointed to that paper with the number of the gun?

**Well, those investigators at Topzawa were not the same as those at Qadr Kerem; how would they know?**

- This was something normal with the government. Many of those people who gave themselves up did so with their weapons as they heard it would be better for them. In the same way, Kak Abas's relative who had spoken with his father, Haji Nasridin, had said the same thing; that it would be better if we returned with the weapons. We thought it would be to our advantage to bring them... but only later we discovered that it made no difference whether man, woman or child, with weapon or with no weapon!

**So you didn't fear that it would be worse for you if you were known as armed?**

- Well, we were fearful of both possibilities: we feared if we had had the weapons with us and we feared if we didn't have the weapons with us. This regime wanted to destroy us, so no matter in what situation we had come forward, we faced destruction!

**When you were in Topzawa were all who arrived together kept in one group?**

- Yes, all apart from one young man who at the time of questioning said that he was a Fersan; that he belonged to the Kurdish mercenaries. They asked him how he could prove it and he pulled out a document. He was asked who his connections were and he replied that he belonged to Tahsin Shaweys.

that person's son and that he himself had been guarding their sheep when he was arrested. As we were discussing this, four soldiers with green uniforms burst into the room and told us that they had a message for us and that we should listen.

**Did they have army berets on their heads?**

- No, why?

**I would like to know who they were that spoke with you.?**

- I did say that they wore uniforms.

**Yes, please continue, what did they say to you?**

- One of them said, "Listen carefully and look at our eyes as we speak to you." As he said that, he put his hands towards his eyes. Then he said, "When one of you says stand up, you must get up on your feet immediately." As he said that he pointed his finger at us. "When one of us tells you to get up and you are not quick enough, we will kill him even in this building." There was a young man in the building and I think his name was Doctor Kameran; he had some relatives in Khidrehan. Among all those any people there, they chose him and pointing at him said, "Stand up!" He stood up immediately.

**Had he been among those captured with you?**

- No, but I saw him in this large room

**And what did they say to him?**

- They spoke to him; I don't know what they said. He replied that he was a doctor, and one of the soldiers slapped him so powerfully over the head that he fell to the ground. We were terrified. Before our very eyes, we saw

children. We had seen women and children when we were in Qadr Kerem and in Chamchamal, but we had not been allowed to mix with them. But now inside this huge building, and mixing with the women and children, you could really feel the fear and isolation of us Kurds. It's difficult to say how many hundreds of women and children were there in that single storeroom, let alone the perhaps hundred-fold amount of people that were on the parade-ground, and in addition only God knows how many others had been taken before us and would be taken after us!

**Did you know anyone in that large room?**

- Yes, I knew Kak Abas Haji Nasridin, Kak Ramazan and Kak Salar Sheikh Fatih. I think there were others that I recognised but I can't remember their names just now. There was another thin young man there who was beside me who came from Khalobaziani, I can't remember his name but he had a long beard. He was crying and his body trembling. I asked him why he was crying and he replied that the soldiers had commanded him to shave off his beard. They had warned him that if he didn't shave off his beard, they would kill him. So Kak Ramazan and I asked him how he could shave it off; but he didn't know, he didn't have anything with him for shaving, nor did anyone among us have any scissors. "But they have said that I have to have it shaved or burned off before morning or they will execute me!" We tried to comfort him and he said his name was Sewood.

**Se'uud or Sewood?**

- Well he said, "My name is Sewood and my father's name is Majid." Kak Ramazan said that he actually knew Sewood's father; he was a famous person who was the son of Majid Hussein Mejidy. Sewood replied that he was

let us out, they only permitted four people at a time and did not allow us to look around us as we went outside, we had to keep our heads bowed and our eyes fixed on our feet. Even when we got to the toilet, they didn't allow us to finish urinating - they forced us out of the toilets by hitting us with whips.

#### **Did they give you anything to eat or drink?**

- You've got to be joking! They made fun of us to get even a drop of water. Firstly, when they took us there, we were desperately tired, under arrest and we didn't know our fate, but I said to myself that we were going to die. Some soldiers came in carrying some vegetable broth; they called out, "Food is ready!" Then it was up to each person to struggle forward and take some for their selves. When I saw the slops, I told my friends, Salar, Ramazan and Abas not to eat it. It was just an oily slop and that we would surely fall ill if we were to eat it. They listened to me and none of us ate it. Indeed, whoever did eat it soon had stomach ache and diarrhoea because of it. Apart from this, they only did give us some bread and soup: we were terribly hungry. Then, as God is my witness, on roughly the third day of our being there, I felt very thirsty. I motioned to one of the guards on the other side of the window and begged that he should bring me something to drink. He brought me a small plate with some water in it: it was only after I had drunk it down that I realised that it was either sewage water or urine!

#### **How many days did they keep you at Topzawa?**

- We were there for four nights: but there is something else that I had forgotten and I want you to write it down...

how he was taken out from the room and none of us knew what happened to him after that. They did that to terrify us and to express to us that we were all destined to die and that they were going to kill us in terrible ways!

#### **How many doors were there in that large open room?**

- There was only one door but there many windows all around and through the windows we could see armed soldiers standing there. Each one had their guns at the ready: it was as if they said, "We are just waiting for our orders and we will attack you from every side." Even if they weren't waiting for this order or even if the regime didn't intend to kill us in that building, the sight of these soldiers at the ready and their fingers on the triggers meant just one thing - they were going to do it. At the very least, they wanted to keep us in a state of fear or the terrible expectation that either now or a little later, they would kill us! We knew that we were facing extermination. Here we didn't only lose the hope of survival; we actually hoped that they would press their triggers and end our terrible life. For the first time in my life, I discovered that death is sometimes a greater mercy than suffering at the hands of savage people. As I was looking at all these women and children in the building, I brought to mind my own sisters, brothers and relatives. Even though I was a single man with no wife and family of my own, but there were people who were now separated from their loved ones. How must they have felt as they looked around them in this room? I don't know, but through all this fear, I felt I had to urinate. I said, "I will wet myself, if I can't go." As I spoke with Kak Ramazan and Kak Abas, they also said that they were really bursting to use the toilet. It seems that many others were in the same way, as many were asking to go out to relieve themselves. When they

daughter of Haji Awlrahman was my relative, who was from Sa'dy Hussein Islam's village. Thank God, they are still alive. I saw another person, Uncle Omer who was from the Jaff tribe: he wasn't in our building but when I was taken to the toilet, he was there beside me. There was another woman there, whose name I have forgotten, but she was married to Kak Mustafa Haji Mawlud Hussein Islam. Really, I am sure there were many other people there that I knew but we weren't allowed to look around. If we hadn't been so afraid to look out of the windows, we would have known many people. It seemed as if everyone had been brought there!

Something else happened on the day that they brought in this second group of people. They had not been there for one hour when experienced troopers burst into the room and forcefully took out all the children. All the children whether they were just small babies or those that were ten, twelve years old. Even though the mothers were jumping up and throwing themselves in front of the doors, it did no good. After this there was then such a deep lamenting and wailing in the building: it was so awful, you would have thought a Derwish festival was going on. After a long time with all this terrible wailing and mourning, the soldiers brought back a few of the children... but they were only a few among the very many that had been taken away.

**What did the people do when they saw that many of the children had not been brought back?**

- What could they do, they were powerless. All they could do was cry and mourn. Well, it was a situation that would have brought blood and tears from a stone, but they were so pitiless. I thought to myself, did they have no wives and

**What was it?**

- On the first day after we had been placed in that building, they welded the main door shut. No-one told us why they were doing it. We could only imagine the worst; that they were about to kill us there by asphyxiation. Others thought of it as a kind of psychological torture. Kak Salar had the most fearful explanation, "I heard them say that in Turkey, the army had gathered 400 people into a building and having welded them inside, they set the building on fire." When Kak Salar said this, I was gripped by the same fear, seeing before my very eyes how we would all suffer so greatly when that happened! As I was thinking about this, Kak Salar mentioned, "I also heard them talking about the time when the Barzanis had been captured and brought to Topzawa." I replied that I had heard about that case but I hadn't known whether they had been brought to this place or not. We were all very frightened. Thankfully, soon after this they opened the doors again. They had only been lightly welded together!

**Did they bring any other people into your building while you were there for those four days?**

- Well, on the second day they did bring in another group of older people together with women and children but with these people the building was completely packed. I am sure they would have brought in more people if there had been any extra space!

**Did you find out where they came from?**

- They were also people from our district.

**Did you know any of them personally?**

- Yes, indeed. I had been closely acquainted with some of them, for example, Sa'dy Hussein Islam and Faim the



- They were all from the same area of German as we were.

**How long before your departure from Topzawa were these young men brought in with you?**

- It was just the evening before. That night they recorded our names again and in the morning they took us away.

**They registered you all again at night time?**

- Yes, it was roughly one 'o clock or one-thirty when they came into the building and registered us. They called out our names and we had to answer and come forward and I noticed that the names of the newcomers were among those they called out, who were with us in the building. Just before they did this, they informed us that whoever did not answer the roll-call would be executed immediately; we were all terrified at this. So they read out all the names, and my name was also read out. Now, I had been counting the names as they were read out and my name was the three hundred and seventy-fifth name. I cannot tell you how many other names were read out after my name because as each name was read out that person had to move to another building that had been emptied to receive us all. After they had read out our names, they separated us out and took us to the new building. In this way, the new building was filled up just like the old one.

**Were there people in the first building whose names were not read out?**

- Yes, that's why they called out our names, so that they could separate us from them. If they wanted to take all of us what was the point of calling out our names again? And immediately we were separated from the others, but

children of their own that they could do such things! After a time, a sergeant came into the room and asked the mothers why they were carrying on in such a way. One of the mothers asked, "Where have you taken our children and what have you done to them?" The sergeant replied, "You know why we have taken them. You can take this hardship, but they cannot. We will give them milk and then we will bring them back to you." But they never did bring them back: even as long as the mothers were with us, they never brought them!

**When did they separate the women from you?**

- The day before they transported us again. All of the women who were with us were separated from us and they took them away.

**Where to?**

- By God, we don't know where they took them. A military captain came and ordered the removal of all the women and children who were with us in the building.

**Didn't you say that all the children had already been taken away?**

- Oh, I said that they had brought back a small number of the children. It was these children who went out. When the women and children were taken outside, they organised that other young men be brought in to take their place.

**Where had they been?**

- These young men had been on the military parade ground.

**Do you know where they came from?**

killed during the whole time we had been in captivity, even when we were with the Kurdish mercenaries and even when they told us at Qadr Kerem, "Now we are going to kill you." But now, in this new building with the head coverings and blood on the floor, I was more scared than at any other time! I was sure that this was the last hour of my life and a picture of my funeral came into my mind, I thought about my childhood and my whole family, my mother and father, my brothers and sisters, my relatives and friends - they all came into my imagination and as I thought that they could see me and that I was about to be killed, my whole soul was shuddering. Probably all those people who were with me in that place were as fearful as I was. Under the power of this terrible impression, I paid no attention to anyone else. But a deep sense of pity came on me because of our isolation. I became aware that I was crying but no sound could come out as my throat was so dry, the only relief came as I thought that we were the powerless and the innocent ones.

I thought to myself: if this cruel government is killing us, surely God will answer us on behalf of the women and children? I had always had the assurance that God would suddenly bring the likes of Saddam, Bariq and Ali Hassan Majid to an end and rescue us. I was calling out to God how he could allow that all these beautiful, upright Kurdish girls, whose next-door neighbours had never even seen their hair unloosed, now be made into play-things in the hands of these thugs in these buildings, where their dresses were torn and their oppressors like wolves would fondle them when taking them out to the toilet! I said, "How can God permit this cruelty?" Or how could all these infants, like pretty butterflies, all be taken into the hands of

those who were left were elderly people. Those people who were called out were all young people.

**Do you think that this separation of people was according to those who were carrying weapons when they were arrested?**

- I don't think so. There were people among us who were not deserters, not peshmerga and were in fact just visiting relatives in the villages at the time of the operations, they were just ordinary students.

**Was it a large number of people who were separated out from the others and in the new building? How many people were you from your group and other groups?**

- I don't know exactly, but perhaps we were about seven hundred people.

**Was the new building completely empty when you were brought to it?**

- Yes.

**Were there any signs that people had been in it before you?**

- By God, we were sure that people had been in it before us. In the new building, there were three things that I could see that made me sure it had been a place of torture and suffering. There was fresh blood on the floor, there were male head coverings scattered around and in another corner, I saw a man's jacket with blood on it. I said to myself, "By God, they will kill us here!" I didn't know who all these things belonged to but my heart was feeling bad, and I said, "Here and now, they are going to execute us." I had not been genuinely fearful of being

**Did you know any of the others in this first group?**

- Yes, Kak Salar, Kak Ramazan, Kak Hasib, and Uncle Hamid Qerechewari were all with me. There was also another man from Zhala village, whose name I had forgotten. There were one or two others that I knew but I cannot recall their names.

**Did they take you outside in a group or did they line you up and lead you out in a single column to the vehicle?**

- No, they had grouped us together and lined us up in the building. Then they lead us out in a single column, one after the other. They had also ordered us to keep our heads bowed and not to look to the left or the right. However, as they took us out towards the vehicle doors, I tried to go a little bit to the right towards the rear of the vehicle and they made go towards the left. But in that short moment that I had gotten astray, I had been able to see the rear of the vehicle and recognised the number - it was a police vehicle from Mosul, number 5036 or 5037.

**So your hands and eyes were not bound as you were taken to the vehicles?**

- No, no. Our eyes and faces were not bound. As I got to the vehicle, I could see that it was like one of the large 'Is'af ambulances but it wasn't one exactly. There was a door on the vehicle's side that was opened, a sliding door. As one went inside the vehicle, you discovered that there were no windows to see out of. Behind the driver, there was a place where a seat had been but now there was a very small sliding door that would allow one person in at a time. We were put in through that door and when we were all in, it was closed and locked. There were no windows at

these dogs? It was not known what happened to them. How could all this cruelty and injustice happen to them?

Then, I don't know exactly when, it was perhaps roughly two o'clock or three o'clock in the morning, when we heard the sound of motor vehicles, there was the sound of a constant stream of vehicles coming into Topzawa. But this time it was different, the vehicle noises sounded as if they were coming to a halt inside the buildings and we also felt that one vehicle had come in front of the door to our own building. Then all the motors were cut and there was no sound at all: by God, it was roughly three o'clock in the morning and we could hear was the sound of rain, just like when in winter the rain falls heavily on different vehicles...!

**Then what else happened, after they had brought the vehicles to the doors of the buildings and it was raining...?**

- We stayed in the buildings until morning, and although it was raining we could also see some sunshine. Then, I don't exactly know when it was, but it was probably roughly eight o'clock in the morning, the doors of the building were opened for us.

**As the doors were opened, what was the first thing that you saw?**

- The two soldiers who opened the doors of the building.

**Did they come inside the building?**

- Yes, they came in and set a number of us aside into a group and pushed us towards the door. I was in the first group, we were roughly 35 people; and then they took us outside towards the vehicles.

who was called Kak Salam Qashqe, who was a Peshmerga with the 4th Peshmerga unit.

**How many buses were you in total?**

- I was looking through the little hole between us and the driver, the kind of hole found in a prison cell door. We had gone roughly one hundred metres out from the Topzawa camp and the road was bending. As the road was bending, I could see backwards with the driver's mirror and counted 34 other buses in a convoy behind one another. Also, because of these bends in the road, I looked out through the windscreen and saw a Chevrolet vehicle with armed guards in it and a BKC machine gun on its roof.

**Who were these armed guards?**

- They belonged to the army not the Kurdish mercenaries or anything else.

**Was it only you who was looking through the hole?**

- I was the first one to look and I told the people what I could see. After that they all came up one by one and looked through the hole.

**Did they also see all the vehicles that you had seen?**

- Of course.

**How did you all feel when you were in that prisoner vehicle and with the armed escort ahead of you, and also as you say, there were 34 other prisoner vans with more than 1,000 prisoners...?**

- I am pretty sure it was more than 34 other vans but that is the number that I had seen.

all in rear of the van except a little hole between the guard beside the driver and ourselves. I looked through this hole and could see something of the windscreen and the driver's mirror. Then looking in that mirror, I saw how they brought up other similar vans that were being filled up in the same way as ours.

**Once you were inside, did the vehicle remain standing or did it start moving straight away?**

- When we were inside and they had locked the door, we did move a little bit and then we came to a halt. It seems that they were filling all the buses together and putting them into a convoy. It seems that they wanted all the vehicles to travel together.

**Do you think all the vehicles had a guard just like your had?**

- I don't know about that. We were in our vehicle and others had theirs. But I am pretty sure that all of the buses had a soldier escorting them.

**Did the vehicles have chairs in them?**

- Yes. Didn't I say that we were roughly 35 prisoners? Each of us could be seated. It seems that those who were arranging us into groups in the building knew that each vehicle had 35 seats and were putting us into groups according to that number.

**Who was sitting next to you?**

- Oh, now it comes back to me because of your question, I can remember his name. There was a young man next to me who I knew called Kak Anwar, Anwar Teyari. There was another young man with us the vehicle who I knew

**And how was it in the van?**

- In the van you felt completely squeezed in, just like a grave. It was incredibly hot, just like being in a closed Turkish bath room. There was a terrible smell from the people who had been transported before us (urine and excrement), just the smell of these things was asphyxiating us. Truly it was a terrible heat in the van, we were almost unconscious with it. The only place for some relief were the small holes in the bottom of the van where everyone's urine and stool had slipped out - despite the smell, it gave some slight cooler air from the underside of the van. As we travelled, we were incredibly thirsty and were passing out from lack of water, so we drank our own urine in order to assuage our thirst. I myself, passed urine into my shoes and then drank it down from them. Not only me, but most of my friends did the same. One of my friends, Kak Salar, was so overcome by the situation that he began to cry, he said, "They are going to kill us just by our being in this van!" We asked for water from the guard; but in front of us all the soldier pulled out his water bottle and taunted us by drinking it one little bit at a time. He said, "Don't be in a hurry, you will soon reach the place prepared for you. It is a first class place with cold water and refrigerators." We were in such a terrible and downtrodden state that we really believed him, what he said.

**Did the van never stop on the whole journey or turn aside at all?**

- After we left Topzawa, the van didn't stop before Ramadi. It was only in Ramadi that they stopped but before that they took us to a city with a small market. I wasn't sure where it was, as I didn't know the region. However, Kak Anwar said that he had worked as a driver

**Where did you think they were taking you? Or what were they going to do to you?**

- How should we feel when they put us into these locked vans, we were pretty sure that they were taking us to the Saudi and Jordanian border area...

**How did you know that?**

- As soon as we were put on the vans, we noticed straight away that there were evidences of previous passengers, we realised that others had been transported in these vans. Also in the van, we saw written on the cushions with a blue pen, "They have taken us to the Jordanian border," and "They have taken us to the Saudi border." So we knew that before us, people had been transported to these two border zones.

**Was it written in Kurdish?**

- Yes, it was written in Kurdish: "Jordanian border" but also other places were written... Kuwait, the Ariar desert, and the Nugra Salaman jail. We said, "By God, they are taking us to one of these places."

**Were all the seats facing forwards?**

- All the seats were facing forwards but there was so little space for us to sit comfortably.

**What time was it when you left Topzawa?**

- We did not have any watch with us, but it seems that we left roughly eight o'clock or nine o'clock in the morning.

**Did they give you anything to eat or drink before you set off from Topzawa?**

- Food or drink, of course not!

**So how did they curse you, how did they know that the van had people in it so that they would curse you?**

- Well, it seems that they knew these vans were prison vans, that's how they knew to make the rude gestures. I only tell you what I have seen and what I have heard...

**Until what time did they keep you in that city?**

- They didn't keep us in the city. We only passed through the city and the market. So we simply travelled on, I cannot tell you exactly, but it seems that after five or six towns, a number of our convoy vehicles turned off and took the left turn, all the other vans took the right turn. Then later we saw a bridge in the distance and we crossed over it. Kak Anwar said, "They are taking us to Ramadi." We saw the road leading into the city, but before we reached the city they took us along another road over a bridge that then lead along a road lined with Date trees. A police station was there among the Date trees and then they brought us there and cut the engines.

**How did you know it was a police station?**

- I have said it a few times that we could look through the windscreen from the hole to our cabin and we were also able to look backwards using the driver's mirror.

**What did they do to you after they had cut the engines, did they let you out from the van?**

- Of course not. The vans were stationary and we were still left suffocating in the van. We only waited at this station about ten minutes - this was good as with the van motionless we received only very little fresh air. As it was, even with this short stop, the heat in the van was insufferable and we were feeling tired and powerless. We

and had been in this place previously - he believed it to be Falujah, or a place near to Falujah. As we were leaving Topzawa camp, we were looking through the little hole. One time we came to a crossroads and Kak Anwar mentioned that that the road going to the right lead to the 'Mosul butchery place.' I asked him, "What Mosul butchery place." He said, "The place where they carry out executions." So I asked him, "Why do they want to take us there?" He thought they would execute us. Then I said to him, "Have you never heard that when a person is going to be executed they are normally asked, "Which of your family do you want to see?"" Kak Anwar replied that they may not treat us according to the normal situation, "They describe us as incredible criminals!" However, we moved on from that crossroads taking the left turn, and I said, "Don't be afraid, we are not going to Mosul." As we were on the way, Kak Anwar said, "This is the way towards Falujah or the small city beside it." Later on, we looked through the window in the market area and saw that it was full of Arabs shopping in the market. As they saw our vans arriving in the market, they started making rude gestures as if they were cursing us.

**So where you visible to the people?**

- Didn't I tell you that there was only a small hole between ourselves and the driver.

**I didn't ask where you were looking from, I asked whether the market people were able to see you?**

- No, the van was completely enclosed, it had no windows.

**It's not a matter of not believing you. My purpose in asking is that, you were in an enclosed van, and as you say you could see that your driver was changed. But for the other vans, how did you know that they also had a change of staff?**

- If you were in a room with only a pinprick sized hole you would still be able to see outside! But we had a larger hole, one that was able to take the size of a man's hand and we were looking through that! This is the window that I have been talking about that allowed us to see what was happening outside. Everything that we saw told us that the Kurds were being wiped out; whether from the packed buildings or the parade ground at Topzawa, we felt that all the Kurds were captured and we said to each other, "Probably not a single person has been left behind." A small hole was enough to discern what was happening and what was still to come!

**Did the new driver have the same uniform as the previous one?**

- Well my dear friend believe me I don't know. I will try and remember...

**And the guards?**

- Well, they were also soldiers, in the uniform of shock troops known as "Mughaweer." I could see the same uniforms on the soldiers in the two patrolling Chevrolet vehicles. Two Chevrolet vehicles and two bulldozers were in front of us now. The two bulldozers had joined us at that police station. We set off again. We travelled along a tarmac road for about half an hour and then this road finished. We then continued our journey along a unpaved road way; there were Date palm trees on the right hand side of the road, then after a distance the trees stopped

were all making strange noises as if we were crying but in fact, it was the sound of our gasping for air.

**You say that from the whole way between Topzawa and Ramadi you were not feeling tired, but now in Ramadi you felt this tiredness. Was that because it was very hot in Ramadi?**

- No, it wasn't because it was hot in Ramadi. We realised that it was because of the air coming into the van from the holes in the chassis of the van. Despite the airless atmosphere of the van and the terrible smell of excrement, the van's movement brought some fresh air into the van. However, when we stopped in Ramadi the stuffiness and heat in the van increased terribly so much so that we felt we were dying. It was as if we were in a Turkish bath and the heat was increasing minute by minute!

**Why do you think they stopped at the police station in Ramadi?**

- They wanted to change all the drivers and guards that had been on duty.

**Did they put you into other vans?**

- No. They didn't change the vans, they just changed the drivers and guards.

**Did they change the personnel for all the vans?**

- All of them.

**How do you know?**

- Don't you believe me? From the beginning I said that whatever I saw is what I tell you.

the driver of the bulldozer was very cruel - knowing that we were in the van he had set the prongs of the digging head towards the van. Instead he lifted up the rear of the van and pushed us forwards. Then he released us violently. By God, I don't quite know if it was three or four times that he lifted us up in this way! In this way the van was released from the mud and could start its journey again. It seemed that this was done so they could have their fun and the van had only been stuck in pretence! After this, I said to myself, "It seems they can do this even when God would be displeased, so why did they falsely make the van stuck and using that as an excuse to harm us?"

I'm not quite sure how much further we had gone, but we heard the sound of gunfire. There were bursts of firing for a time and then, following a time of silence, there was another burst of fire. As I first heard the gunfire, I was very happy. I thought that just like in Kurdistan there were Arab peshmerga fighting against the soldiers, as I had previously heard that there were Shia gunmen against the government. I took heart that they might have been these armed Shia gunmen and that they were rescuing us from this cruelty. I said in my heart, "They won't kill us even though we might appear to belong to the government, but then I reasoned, surely they won't kill us when they see that we are prisoners." Then I was afraid that they might be attacking the army from a distance and we would be stuck in the cross-fire. As I was pondering this, I looked at my fellow sufferers in the van, they were all thinking but I don't know what they were thinking. None of us spoke, we were only looking at each other as if we were waiting for something... that is until the sound of shooting came nearer towards us, but in fact, the truth was that we were

and there was a waterway on the left side. We had gone another long distance when there was a farmhouse. Then we left the stream but we kept on travelling... we kept on travelling.

#### **What time was it when you were at that place?**

- Well it's difficult to say as none of us had a watch. It was still daylight, the sun was still above the horizon. Also it was noticeable that we were leaving the unpaved road behind as the road was turning muddy. However we looked from the window, it was all open wilderness and muddy because of the previous rains. We asked Kak Anwar where we were and he answered that he didn't know. It was becoming difficult for our van to move forward because it was slipping in the mud. Then our van became stuck in the mud, the driver accelerated and forced the van out of the mud. After another distance, we were stuck again and despite trying we could not come forward. We became aware that other vans were passing us, we were very frightened as we didn't know where they were taking us and what our fate would be. We didn't know what the fate of those people who were now going ahead of us would be. Would they kill them, or drown them... or would they put them into the ground? In our sense of isolation, we were afraid and we didn't want to be separated from them, even if we were to face death, we would be less afraid if we could all stay together. Suddenly, we felt that something strong was pushing from behind. In my heart I said, "By God, may God have mercy on us and not let us be separated from these others." I somehow felt that it was God that was pushing the van and we somehow felt that God had come to our rescue in our isolation. However, it turned out that it was a bulldozer that was pushing us out of the mud. It was obvious that



Anwar had been looking out through the windscreen and he called out to us to come and look. Then by the light of the headlights, we could see that they were taking people out from another van two by two, blindfolding them and then executing them with a burst of gunfire. So, it seemed that had switched the van's headlights on so that we could see how people were being executed! They were increasing our torture and pain by showing us that our time was coming and that they would execute us as well. We didn't know that we were at the edge of a deep pit that had been dug or what was going on... it seemed that they wanted to show us that we would die with a maximum sense of terror. It was clear that those who had died in the previous group had also witnessed the execution of others before them. At that time when the van's lights were switched on, Kak Anwar Teyar was looking from the small window, then he turned back towards us and was crying, he said, "Here's the group who are going to execute us." When he had said that, I felt as if a large rock had been thrown into a pond - we had all been hoping the same, that we would not be included in the killings. But Kak Anwar had said to all of us in a loud voice, "They are going to execute us." So we all went to look and saw that they took our friends out, two by two, and then for some they bound their eyes with a white cloth and for others they did not.

It seemed to us that they weren't always killed in the same way, it was clear to us that those they blindfolded they shot in the back of the head with a pistol, for others they shot them in the back or in the legs. By their own choosing, the soldiers were killing them by Kalashnikov or by pistol. Now it was clear that a pit had been dug for the bodies because after the shootings they were lifted up

moving closer to the shooting! Finally we arrived at the place of the shooting because the shooting was right beside us. Suddenly, the shooting stopped at the place of our van, it seemed we had reached our final destination. The only sound we heard was of the van's engine and despite halting, the engine was not switched off.

Then the bulldozer went ahead of us, as if they wanted to show us we will now bury you. The bulldozer's driver stepped down from his seat, he was an ugly bearded man wearing a soldier's uniform with a red Arab headdress. In front of us all, he took out a flask of water and he seemed to know that we would be able to see him and he took out the flask in an obvious way, he took a drink from it and then lifting it up he poured out the rest onto the ground. Believe me, it was as if we had never tasted water before in our lives and now we were intensely thirsty and we felt that we were dying because of that wasted water. I felt that bit by bit my mouth was opening. I swear to God, I looked at my fellow prisoners and they were all feeling the same and their mouths were hanging open... also, I don't know, whether this was from their thirst or from the heat, all of them were looking at the bulldozer's driver and at the water that had been poured out! Then the driver returned to his seat on the bulldozer and began to work, then there was the sound of another bulldozer and together they were making much noise with lifting ground, there also come occasional bursts of gunfire.

Then suddenly it was quiet... all of us in the van were in dreadful agony and fear for our lives and we also didn't know what would happen. After a little time, a soldier climbed on board our van and switched on the headlights because it was getting darker outside. At that time, Kak

other, as if we wanted to say, "Forgive me if I have done wrong." Kak Anwar started to speak again, "If you have given a loan and not received it, if you have been spoken badly against, or if someone has done something bad against you since your childhood until now, forgive these people." Believe me, as Kak Anwar said these things, we all had tears coming from our eyes and we wept. Its very difficult for someone to think that they might have only a few minutes left. Then I said, "Brothers, they are going to kill us anyway, they will kill us if we have three minutes extra or not, let us all attack them when the doors are opened up, they will kill us but if one person can escape it will be worth it. If one person can stay alive, he can tell others about this terrible situation of the Kurds."

**What did your friends think of this idea?**

- Well some of them didn't have the strength to stand up from their seats because of their thirst and their hunger. But Kak Anwar, Kak Salam Qashqe, Kak Salar and some others said, "Good, what shall we do?" I said, "Let us as five people tackle a guard together."

**Were people taken out from the van one by one or were they taken out together?**

- Well, the door out from our van could only allow one person through at a time. But when the doors were opened, they took all the people down together. Then they placed them two by two in rows facing the pits. Kak Salam Qashqe, who was the first person lined up to go down from the van said, "I am ready to attack that soldier who opens the door and try to take his weapon and do whatever is possible."

and thrown into the pit. It seems that among the people were those who were just injured, they were also thrown into the pit... that people who had just been shot in the legs were also thrown into the pit. In this way, it seemed that they just wanted the people to die with incredible suffering and psychological torture, this was because those who would be martyred quickly would have less suffering. However, according to their own vile desires, that they just injured some and had them thrown into the pit and the bulldozer would be ready to cover them over with earth. In some ways, I cannot fully describe the full horror of that situation what was happening to us and how much we suffered to see what they did in front of our very eyes and that it was completely obvious that our turn was coming next.

As for our part, we were still alive but living in the most painful moment imaginable, the longer you lived you could see the worst horror possible... but then you could also imagine that the van doors would be opened to allow you to live free again, but to be killed would be better. Then again, as one imagined the doors of the van being opened above the death pits, we would have considered it a reward to stay another ten days in that awful claustrophobic and smelly van: because we wanted to live. No matter how much a person is suffering when he is faced with death he is afraid of it, especially the kind of death that we now saw happening around us. Kak Anwar, may God bless him, called out, "They are just about to kill us, let us say the Islamic creed." We all spoke out together the Islamic creed three times, then we were all silent as if to say that we were ready. God is our witness that we all looked at each other's faces at the same time and that without speaking we said good-bye to each

**After that first person had decided to attack and had been killed, what did the rest of you want to do?**

- Well, before that some of the people didn't have any energy left and were just sitting on their seats. But now that Kak Salam had been killed in that way, whether because of this reason or another, they were all stirred up. Maybe it was because death had entered the van. All of them now said, "Let us all attack them, they are going to kill us anyway." Before the army returned again, we discussed what we should do. The plan was that when they opened the door, one of us would throw himself onto the rail of the door so that it could not be closed again, then the others would pile out and attack them. Kak Ramazan said, "I am ready to put myself onto the door rail and you all attack them." It was dark outside and the lights of the van were still on, so we put out the light that was in the compartment so that we could see them better when they opened the compartment door. I was quietly confident because if they saw how Kak Salam had been killed, they would never suspect that we would attack them again. So our plan was ready, Kak Ramazan would keep the door open and we would go out and tackle the soldiers; they would be unprepared and that this time we would tackle the officer himself and take his weapon.

**This time who was the person that would attack them first?**

- Kak Ramazan was the first who threw himself down onto the doorway ahead of us all, it is by God's grace that he is still alive and you can ask him how it was. Then came Kak Abas Haji Nasridin, may God be merciful to his soul, then after him came Kak Anwar and I was the third person. I know there were others coming after me but I don't remember in what order they came. As they entered the

**What did you all do, were you all agreed that you would attack them?**

- Yes, Kak Salar expressed his readiness that when they would open the doors he would take part in attacking one of them. We were all facing a horrible death and the quicker they killed us the less pain we would feel. We said to ourselves, "If we are able to get the weapon from one of them, it is likely that we can rescue someone of us, and he will be able to tell others how they killed the Kurds." Then the doors of our van were opened and two people stepped in, one of them was an officer, I could see his insignia on his shoulder.

**How rank did he have?**

- By God, I don't know that because as he came into the van I happened to be looking out of the small window. But I am sure that he was wearing an officer's insignia on his shoulder.

**As they opened the door, what did they say to you?**

- As they entered the van, they were first of all in the space between ourselves and the driver's seat. Then they opened the door to our compartment. As they opened it, quick as a flash, Kak Salam Qashqe fell upon the soldier and sought to gain his rifle. Another soldier that was there took aim and put two bullets into Kak Salam and martyred him (killed him). They then locked the compartment door again and went out of the van again. It seems that the person that Kak Salam had attacked had been injured because he went away shouting in pain: they had been surprised by our attack. Then it was probably another two or three minutes before they entered the van again.

Believe me, I have never heard such a terrible, frightening noise like that day that they fired on the van... it was the sound of blood draining from the bullet holes, it was like the sound of air escaping from tyres when it has been punctured. This was because it was so much blood in the van. Then I realised that I was still alive and that half-conscious, I wondered how I could get away and be able to tell others what had happened here. Then by our Great God's intervention, he allowed it that I could get away. I've no idea how long I lay there after the bullets but I realised that I was still living, there had a been a time when I had been unconscious. However, as I came around, I felt that my body felt incredibly heavy as if the world was lying on top of me, to such an extent that I felt unable to breathe and as if both my eyes were blinded by muddy water. The roar of a working bulldozer returned and I became fearful that the vehicle would be shoved into the ground and covered over with earth. I said to myself, "Don't move until they have placed the van into the pit so that they won't discover that I'm alive." But then as I became more aware of the situation, I realised that it would be better for me to escape the van before it was covered with earth. I was just thinking about that when I realised that someone else was moving in the van. I was afraid to move in case the person would discover that I'm still alive. Somebody went past me and I was aware that he went down from the door of the van. I was shocked and thought to myself, "This was that soldier who had been in the van with us, he has also not been killed."

**Which soldier was it that had been in the van?**

- Well, at the time that they opened the compartment door, it was the officer and two soldiers who came into the van. As we attacked the officer, firstly one of them

door, we attacked the officer with the gun, the soldiers were confused and were so surprised to see that four or five of us were after the officer's weapon; they didn't want to fire for fear of killing their officer. One of the soldiers ran away, throwing himself out of the door but another one came up behind us. The officer himself was incredibly strong, he threw us off just as if he were handling a small bag of tomatoes, and we ourselves were weakened through our thirst and hunger. Still he was shaking us off from him, then Kak Abas landed a punch on his face and he cried out, the officer then made a desperate grab at the bullet clip of the rifle he was carrying; and releasing it he threw himself out of the van. We had the weapon but no clip of bullets was with it. I was sure that if we had managed to capture the rifle and the bullets, we would have killed the officer and a number of soldiers as well.

After the officer had thrown himself out of the van, he shouted out the command, "Shoot and set it on fire!" Then immediately following his command, there came a hail of bullets into the van. I didn't feel that I had been hit by a bullet but I knew that I had fallen down and two others had fallen down on me. Then I felt that blood was trickling out of me, I didn't have the pain of a bullet but I knew I was bleeding. It seemed that the soldiers were only one metre away from the van, the sound of the gunfire was so close. The light from the bullets were as bright as a great strike of lightening. They were shooting into the van from three sides but it seems that the officer was on the right side of the van because there was no fire going towards that side. They were hitting us from all sides. They were probably firing for more than five minutes. They made the whole van into a large sieve.

Teyar and he managed to get back to Chamchamal where he is living now.

### **How did you decide to go out from the van?**

- I pushed those two bodies to the side that had been on top of me. I found myself in that space between ourselves and the driver's seat. I carefully came out through the door of the van. There were the lights of a vehicle and the sound of a bulldozer in the distance. I sensed that there was no-one else near me so I decided to move roughly five metres and hid in a deep ditch. I was kneeling on someone's body: I still don't know if it was alive or not. With my weight upon it, a lot of mucus and blood came out from the body and from its mouth and nose, a terrible smell arose. It came upon me and I felt that I had never smelled anything so detestable in all my life. In a moment, it made me completely dizzy. Due to this terrible smell, I decided to run along the ditch; under my feet were the bodies of those who had been killed. I was sure that there were also injured people among them because as I made my way along them, sometimes falling down and picking myself up again, there were some who groaned and shouted out. At other times, when I stood on one body, it made movements as if they still felt me and still had their spirit in them! The pit was very deep, roughly to the depth of two adults standing on each other. It was very dark down there and I made my way along only with the light from the night sky. Then finally, I felt that I was coming up again to the surface where the bulldozer had cleared a path for itself to get out of the pit. As I came out of the pit, I looked around to see if there was anything else there. There was nothing to see only darkness. I decided that I should distance myself from the pit and started to run without exactly knowing where I was running to. I ran and

escaped out the door but the other one stayed inside. As the officer jumped out of the door and gave the command to shoot, this other soldier was in the van with us and faced the hail of bullets from his colleagues. I was afraid that this son of a bitch was alive and would reveal me, telling them that I was also alive, so I pretended to be dead. After he had left, a few minutes later, I saw another person going out from the van but it seemed he had only gone a few metres away from the van when a volley of gunfire went off and there was a cry as if he had been hit. However, I don't know which of my friends it was that had gone out or what had become of the soldier, only God knows. Then I was filled with a growing fear, more than I had experienced at any other time. I wished that I could be like the two people on top of me or like Kak Salam who had been already killed and delivered from this terror; they could not tell that they were dead and they didn't have the fear that I had. After another time, another person got down from the van and went away. I listened for a long time and didn't hear anything happening to him. I thought to myself that this was the right time for me to make a move. I shoved those two human shields away from me and realised that I was alive because of them.

### **How many other people could escape from the same van?**

- Haven't I told you that three people had gone out ahead of me. One of them had been shot but the other two had escaped.

### **Who were they who had escaped?**

- I didn't know at that time who had escaped but I later found out that one of them was Kak Ramazan, who by God's grace is still living. The other one was Kak Anwar

the headlights of vehicles coming and going. I was aware that all of these people were being killed but that somehow I had been saved from the hail of bullets but I still didn't know where to go in that open plain. It was very difficult being unfamiliar with the area and weighed down by a feeling of hopelessness, going back was the easiest option!

**You went past so many pits, did you not meet any others who like yourself had by chance survived the massacres, or did you not hear any injured people who called out to you or who shouted...!?**

- Well, because I had survived in a way that I hadn't imagined, there were probably others who had been saved just like me but it wasn't likely that we would see each other. Yet, there were injured people in the pits, they were groaning and crying out. There was one injured person that I saw when I had fallen into one of the pits; his upper body was pinned down by other corpses and his legs were free to move around, it seemed that he was not too badly injured, he was pinned down by the corpses and he was trying to get himself free by moving his feet. Perhaps you will ask me, why didn't I help the injured person to get free from the corpses... I often think this very thing, "Why didn't I do that?" But at that time my thought processes had seized up, I was completely confused and I didn't even know what I myself was doing, it was as if I had become crazy. On my way back, I saw something in the distance that scared me, I thought that it was a corpse... then as I got closer, I realised that it was moving. I said, "By God, he is a survivor just like me or he is injured." It was still night-time and very dark and one could only see things clearly when one was close to them. When I actually came to the place, it was only a large

on several occasions I fell into pits that were full of bodies. As I was barefoot, I often stood on thorns in the ground, but I didn't seem to feel them because my feet were feeling numb.

**Why were you barefoot?**

- In that enclosed van it was very hot and I took my shoes off. I guess I took them off to put my urine into them so that, in my thirst, I could drink it. After that, I didn't put my shoes on again.

**Do you know what time it was when you came out from the van?**

- How could I know! I was simply running for more than thirty minutes without looking back so that I could get away from the place of shooting, thirty minutes or so before I sat down and could rest.

**Did you have an aim in mind as you ran or did you just run without knowing where to go to?**

- At the beginning, I just ran so that I could get to safety but once I was completely sure that I was far enough away I rested, I saw some lights in the distance and I decided to go towards the lights... because in the first place, fear had made me confused, I didn't know what to do or even what I wanted to do; it even seemed easiest just to go back to where I had been. I was in a desert and it was completely flat and barren but it had been filled with corpses. I was seeing dozens of pits and channels full of corpses that were still to be covered over with earth. Sometimes you would suddenly find yourself standing on earth that was partially covering corpses. In the distance, you could still hear the sound of shooting and of the bulldozers engines and even in that desert, you could see

some civilized place, God rescue me!" With this thought, I also encouraged myself to get a move on as long as I had strength in my body. It also came to my mind that movement would be safer at night. It seemed likely that when the day came a helicopter might circle around the plain. I was struggling with a thousand different thoughts; I said, "By God, they must be counting the bodies and they will know that I have run away, then in the morning by daylight helicopters will come to search for me and find me in this desert." So for this reason I was determined that whatever these lights were I had to go towards them. I took off my clothes and made myself naked and wrapped up all my clothes into my jacket. I also had a chain, I took that off as well.

#### **Why did you take your clothes off?**

- I realised that all my clothes were dark and black coloured and because it there was moonlight, I realised that I could be seen from a distance. I didn't have a plastic bag in my pocket, so I carried all my clothes. I had another shirt with me which I could change into but for now I carried it as well. I even took off my underpants and put them with the other clothes. I noticed that I still had that money with me that I had sown into my underpants which had not been discovered at the searches at Qadr Kerem, Chamchamal and Topzawa. At that time, I had hoped that one day it could be useful. As I undressed myself, I discovered that I had been wounded. At the time when they were shooting into the van, I had felt blood but I had assumed it was the blood of other people. Now I discovered that I too had been wounded. But God is merciful; the bullet had only grazed the skin and had not hit any bones. So in this state of being undressed I travelled for the rest of the night until daybreak. From time

black plastic bag that the wind had carried and it was stuck on some thorns, and the wind was now moving it from side to side. Believe me, as I was moving along to see what it was I had been terrified, absolutely fearful; but it was only a plastic bag!

#### **You said, "I saw some lights and I decided to go towards them." Who could say that this wasn't another place of executions, didn't you say that those places where they executed you had the lights of the vans and the bulldozers there...?**

- Oh, I was very afraid of that myself and so I didn't go up to the lights straight away without being sure that it wasn't a place of execution, only then did I go that direction...!

#### **How were you sure... or how did you know that it wasn't a place of execution?**

- First of all, as I was in the distance I thought that it was another execution place, but as I had already carefully studied the lights of the vehicles in use where people were being killed, I compared the lights that I now saw and realised that these lights were different.

#### **How were they different?**

- The lights of the vans and bulldozers were constantly moving but these lights were stationary.

#### **Were you not afraid to go towards these lights, they might have been military vehicles or installations?**

- How could I not be afraid. My life was extremely difficult and I could not do anything without some form of courage. I just didn't know what else to do. I thought that it would be best to try and get away from that place while it was still night. I said to myself, "If God wishes let me get to

a little rest before going towards the lights because I had come much closer to them by now.

While I was sitting there at the water side, a bird came and crowed out loudly over the water. Believe me, I had never heard such a crowing sound in all my life. I was very frightened by that crowing sound, my whole body quivered as if my skin had come alive for itself, that sound was very terrifying. When I heard that crowing, out of fear, I crouched onto the ground and lay on my chest, I wanted God to rescue me and protect me. After it had crowed, I heard the sounds of dogs in the distance coming towards the sound of the crowing, they seemed to me as if they were large wolves and they passed by following the sound of the crow. If it hadn't been for that crowing, these dogs would have had me - there was nothing that I could have done against them, I had no strength left in me. The dogs followed the sound of the crow, which tells me that this crow was in fact an angel that God had sent to deliver me. I had been very afraid of the dogs which would certainly have torn me to pieces. But God wanted to protect me and helps everyone in their need.

After the dogs had completely passed by and were not in the vicinity, my heart beat was still thumping wildly out of fear from these animals. When one is in fear and darkness, there is nothing more unpleasant than a loud sound coming unexpectedly. In this state of fear and trembling, I arrived to the source of the lights. I had been afraid that it might be military in origin but instinct had told me it was not so ... I thought, "This is just a large village." I entered into the settlement and while I was in the first row of houses, I decided to knock at one of the gates. Before knocking, I had looked into the courtyard of the

to time, I crawled along the ground. I kept saying to myself, "Two things are good: firstly, if I could get near to people to see who they are. Then if they are military or soldiers, I could lie down with my stuff in front of me to hide me." In this way, walking and crawling, I made it to the lights.

### **How far were the lights from you?**

- How could I know how far they were? It was completely dark out there and I had been moving ever since I had left the van, it took me the whole time to get towards the lights before daybreak. By God, I had taken only a few short rests but it had taken all my energy. If it had been the evening time, I might have made it quicker but it had been night and twilight. On top of this I was barefoot, and having realised that I had been wounded my morale was now much lower. The twilight was still dark when I reached a stream that had Date trees on the other side of it and on my side was the wilderness that I had just come through. First of all, I wanted to put myself into the water but I sensed that it was flowing too quickly for me. When I had arrived at the water, I put myself in feet first to check the water and having taken a few steps realised that the bed was dropping away quickly. I realised that if I lost my footing, I would be dragged away by the stream.

I came out again and went further along the bank and found a better place. Here I discovered that the water was coming to the bank in waves - it meant that it had to be a lot of water in order for it to come in waves. I drank a lot of water to quench my thirst and rested on the bank. My clothes were still bundled up within my coat, I wasn't thinking clearly enough to wash them but I was able to wash off all the blood and dirt on my body. I sat and took



- I felt that God had opened up the heavens for me and that he had placed it just there for me, it was like an angel for me!

**What did you reply when the man said, "Welcome?"**

- I said, "I would like you to help me; please give me a little bread and a cup of water because I am needy." The man who was standing there and looking at me then turned his head to look at their gateway, he said, "Please, come inside." As I looked into the courtyard, I saw two younger men holding long sticks. Suddenly a sense of fear came over me, I realised that they didn't know what I might want from them. I said to the man, "Friend, it seems that you don't know my intentions. Perhaps you are thinking that I am a thief or a murderer. I just want you to help me; just bring me the little bread and the cup of water to here outside the gate for me and I will be very grateful." Now the man repeated himself with a stronger voice, "Please, come inside." He went ahead of me and I followed him into the courtyard. I now realised that those two others with the sticks were the man's sons who had come behind him to protect their father as he went outside the gate.

I discovered that it was a large family as suddenly many younger girls and boys appeared who had been awakened from their sleep by the noise of our heartfelt greetings. They brought me inside the house and brought a paraffin heater, putting it in front of me. After only a little time, they brought some food to me: some of their evening meal that had been uneaten the previous night. They were all looking at me in my shoeless and slovenly state. I had my bloody feet stretched out in front of me, my clothes were torn and my neck and chest were naked

house and saw two people lying together on a bed there. I knocked at the gate and at the same time as knocking, called out softly, "Sahib bayt" (which means 'house-owner'). Then I heard a woman's voice saying, "Get up, that's the workmen who are going to work in Ramadi." I was very surprised because the woman had spoken in Kurdish and I said to myself, "By God's will, God has saved me, this is a Kurdish household."

Due to the fact that this woman spoke in Kurdish, I became more alert and looked at myself, I realised that I was still naked! I could see myself with the lights coming from the courtyard of the house. God is my witness that as I had entered the settlement, I had been so completely unaware of my state that I had forgotten to dress myself again. I quickly unzipped my jacket that held all my clothes and put my trousers and put on the unzipped jacket, I couldn't put on my shirt as it was covered with blood. I was in a hurry and couldn't dress nicely. By this time, the house owner had come to the gate and had opened it.

**Did he also speak Kurdish?**

- Yes, yes. The man of the house was Kurdish.

**As he opened the gate, what did he say in Kurdish?**

- He said 'fermu' (meaning, 'Welcome, come in.').

**What did it feel like for you ...when having been in that terrible situation of certain death and in that Arab desert where thousands upon thousands of Kurds had been killed... now by accident you were saved and could come to that Kurdish family?**

this unexpected and unkempt guest was. I realised that my continued silence was making them uncomfortable.

One of the sons who was sitting near to me, the one who had rolled up my jacket when I had entered the room and placed it under my shoulder, was obviously wondering where all this blood had come from that was on my clothes. Once the father had started the conversation, he pulled out my jacket and asked me what it was, he was lifting up my jacket for everyone to see the dried blood on it. God is my witness... their faces changed different colours as they looked at the coat! The father spoke up and said, "You must tell us the truth and if you don't tell the whole truth I will hand you over to the police."

I had been feeling that God had come to my rescue to deliver me back to my loved ones in Kurdistan; but when the man said this I lost my sense that God had come to rescue me and I was filled with fear and anxiety again. It seemed that I was doomed, that despite being delivered from the shooting in the van, despite being delivered by the bird from the dogs and that God had lead me through the wilderness to this kind family, now the father was threatening to take me to the police if I didn't tell the truth! I was very fearful; if I told the truth it might be worse and they would hand me over straight away to the police, but if I were to tell lies and they found out, wouldn't that be worse? Who was to say that this man wasn't a just and good man? If I were to tell the truth maybe they would take pity on me and help me to escape. I was thinking about this and decided that I had to place myself into God's merciful hands, tell the truth and leave the consequences to God. I said, "I have sworn to God to tell you the truth, but I also have a question for you." The

under my coat. I think that they had never ever seen anyone in such a terrible-looking state before!

As for myself, my body was stiff and my mind was in complete confusion. I just didn't know what to say or how I could explain my extreme situation. Would they ever believe me? Of if I was to explain to them, who could tell if this man wasn't belonging to the regime and might reveal who I am! I had hundreds of thoughts about what this Kurdish house might be here in the wilderness area of Iraq. I thought about what I should say to them should they ask me: what I was doing there, why I was barefoot, what I was doing on this roadway, where I was going to, where I came from... I wished to God that they wouldn't ask me.

I realised that they were a traditional family where it was the father who should do the talking; so none of the others dared ask me anything until he chose to start. They brought me some tea and after we had drunk it, the father of the house took some money from his pocket and gave me 17 Iraqi Dinars and asked me to bless their house by accepting this money. I accepted the money and then I gave it back into his hand. I explained that when I had asked for their help I hadn't meant financial help but that I needed another kind of help. The man was surprised and asked me what kind of help I was wanting. I explained to them that I was a stranger to this area and that I needed their help in giving me directions away from this area and to my home. So the man asked me where I had come from. It was very difficult for me, I was feeling weak and how could I speak with them all sitting there and looking at me? They all wanted to listen intensely to find out who

and he had brought them to this large township. He explained that all the people living in this large town were Kurds from Iran. He explained that we were close to Ramadi and that it was just like a large prison to them. They were only allowed to leave the township with specific authorisation papers and that they experienced many cruel actions against them. It was only as they told me their story that I could have hope for my situation again and I calmed down. I realised that they had experienced many much worse things than I had. I was feeling better but I still had an uneasy feeling why were they heating the oven.

Finally, one of the daughters came inside and said that the oven was burning strongly. It was as if she spoke with a loud voice and my heart was beating strongly from fear. The father told her to take the bloody coat and to burn it and she took it away to burn it. Then I realised that he had taken pity on me and was wanting to help me, I felt as if cold water had been poured on the heat of my emotions. For there could be no other reason for burning my coat covered with blood. He then arranged that they bring another set of trousers, another shirt and a pair of rubber shoes, the ones that we use in the villages for playing football, which we call 'Maradonas.' He said, "Hey, put these on and see if they fit you!" I tried them on and despite the sores on my feet, they fitted me well. He told his sons to set them aside for me and they were taken out to be placed at the door.

Then we spoke much more until the daylight came and he told me about how I could get out from the township and other things that I needed to know such as where I could get a bus and where the checkpoints were. I asked them

father answered, "Go ahead." I said, "This will be difficult for you as a family, if the government was to find out it would execute you all: I only ask you that what I tell you all will not be passed on to others." The man replied, "Don't be afraid, we are all one family here - here are only my sons and daughters and their wives and husbands."

Out of necessity, I began to explain the whole story: who I was and where I was from, where I had been captured and why they had captured us, what they had done to all those innocent people and how I had managed to escape and how I had come to arrive at their house. They were increasingly upset with the story, their eyes were widening and their mouths open at the terrible events. When the man had heard the whole story, he turned to his daughters and told them to go and prepare the wood-fired oven. He only said that and nothing else. All the people sitting around me were in complete silence. Then one or two of women also went out it seems to attend to the oven. For a time, I was terrified and in my heart I was regretting telling this story. In fear, I said to myself, "Why did I tell them that if the government knew it would execute all of you?" I was even afraid that this oven was being heated for me! It wasn't too far fetched to think that they would burn me away so that no-one could find out that I had come to this family. Then it came back to my memory how the army had taken all our items and how they had killed the people.

It seems that they became aware of my nervousness because suddenly the father began to tell the events of their lives: they were from Iran and had lived near to Qasri Shirin, when Saddam Hussein had occupied Qasri Shirin they had been unable to get away from Saddam's army

**Where did you think to go to with the bus?**

- To Ramadi.

**To Ramadi, why?**

- I just didn't know where this township actually was or where it was near to. According to what the man had told me, I realised that I was near to Ramadi. As he told me that I was near Ramadi, I actually felt glad.

**Why?**

- Because in 1987, my sister and her family had been deported to Ramadi and I had heard that they had deported many Kurds from Kirkuk to Ramadi. I was very glad because I thought, if they can help me to get to Ramadi then I will be able to get help from my sister's family and they will take me in.

**Had you ever seen Ramadi before?**

- No, by God.

**So how would you be able to find their house?**

- Well, I thought I could find out by asking people the way.

**Did you think to go alone to the garage?**

- No, by God. I didn't dare.

**So what did you do?**

- I stayed at their home until it was very late as the man was speaking a lot with me. It seemed that he had taken great pity on me but it was clear that he didn't dare do anything else to help me because he said, "There are wicked people among us here in the township. It would be bad if they knew that you had been here or if they saw me

many questions about the township, their life there, the other people who were living there and all the information that I needed to know. He gave me a lot of advice about how I should travel, how I should conduct myself in the bus. He also told me that because I was an Iraqi, I needed to be alert while staying here at the township: there were many wicked people living in the township. This family were truly a Godsend to me - they took me in during the night, fed me, gave me new clothes and shoes and they gave me new courage but they didn't do one thing, they didn't help me to get beyond the checkpoint.

**What checkpoint?**

- The checkpoint at the township.

**How did you know that there was a checkpoint; you hadn't seen it earlier?**

- Of course not, why did I need to see it? Haven't I told you that I had spoken a great deal with the master of the house and I had learned about it from him? He told me that they had erected a checkpoint for the people in the township and that whoever wanted to go out of the township needed to have authorisation papers. He mentioned that they themselves could only receive papers allowing them out for a maximum of eight hours and that daily the young men could go as far as Ramadi and work as labourers for that period of time only. He said that it was not possible for him to come with me because the township people would see him with me and the army would then handle him as it had me! But he gave me instruction how I could go to the mosque and to the garage.

- Yes. I went and began to wash my hands and face as for prayer. A young man came beside me and I swear to God that he had a whole bottle of after-shave scent on his body and he was wearing a purple silken headdress. He looked at me a little and, looking around himself, he asked, "Are you an Iraqi?" I answered him by saying, "No." Then he asked me where my home was? I mentioned one of the areas of the township that the father had told me. He asked me something that I didn't understand and I just replied, "Yes." It seemed that he accepted the answer. I then left that room because the young man had gone ahead of me and had begun bowing down in prayer and it came back to my mind that the father had mentioned about the wicked people in the town. I became fearful and I thought to myself, "By God, this guy has realised that something isn't right with me and it will be very difficult for me."

I had been very cheered up thinking about the fact that my sister's house in Ramadi was so close and that they would surely know that I was in the area and were expecting me to come to them ... but the appearance of this man with the purple headdress had unsettled me. Now, I realised that this was from God to protect me. Then I was thinking that, "By God's will, it is perhaps better if I hang around a bit and only try to travel on again when it is getting a bit darker." For this reason too, I changed my plans and didn't go towards the bus garage.

I started to wander around by myself in the township. After I had gone around for a time, I felt that I should approach one of the houses because there were a group of workers there working on it. But I was also fearful and didn't know what excuse I could give for going to the

with you. But there are some good people here as well and if you should go towards the garage, they would find you to help you."

### **So when did you leave the house?**

- Well, I don't know the exact time that I left but it was late morning.

### **Where did you go to when you left the house?**

- I went towards the mosque.

### **Why towards the mosque?**

- Well that father had advised me to go to the mosque and it was also near to the bus garage. I also thought that perhaps God would direct someone there to help me.

### **Was it not discouraging for you when you thought that that family had helped you so much and now you were on your own again?**

- No, that family had helped me a great deal and only God can pay them back for their great kindness to me. They were right to tell me not to go to the garage directly and they had given me many other useful instructions - about the areas of the township, about the different tribal families there, how to get to the garage, how to travel and about how the buses travelled to Ramadi. Of course, it was not nice that they had not acted according to Kurdish custom. According to our custom, they would have taken me and helped me onto one of the buses at the garage that would have taken me directly back to Kurdistan. But it was understandable that they had not acted like this: they seemed to be held back by the hand of fear.

### **Did you find the mosque?**

them what the sound of the siren meant. They told me that the siren indicated the arrival of key rations to the township and the siren told us to come and collect them. At this, I came back to my senses and remembered exactly where I was and I turned my thoughts to how I was going to answer those four workers so that they would believe me when they came in from their building work. How was I going to answer them, what excuse could I find to explain that I would need to stay there until the evening?

Soon after, I became aware that they were finishing off the work for the day. I could hear the noise of them as they washed their hands and the elderly man went out to them and said, "By God, don't go!" It seems that he was inviting them to stay for a meal. Then I heard that answered, "We are going." I prayed again to God, "God let them go and let me be here just with this house owner." God made it so that two of them left and that one of them stayed. This younger man came into the room and I was once again welcomed by the older man and the younger one, who was his nephew.

**How did you know that it was his nephew? Did you ask him?**

- No, I just realised it later on, I didn't realise it initially. Then when they had all sat down, that is their nephew, the father of the house, his wife and two older friends; they set out the meal and blessed the food. As I was the guest in the room, they asked me to start eating first. I put my hand to the meat and took for myself a roasted chicken leg. I wanted to put it to my mouth but, as God is my witness, what I saw before my eyes in my imagination was all my friends and fellow-sufferers from the past 24

house. I said to myself, "If they can give me shelter until it is dark, then it will be good that I can walk and go to Ramadi by foot." I decided to go towards that house. I prayed as I went towards them, "Dear God, you are completely just and you have saved me from death. I am going towards those workers; may you protect and deliver me." I looked at the men from far off, and one of them caught my attention, he looked like the twin brother of an acquaintance of mine, Kak Muhammed from Khalobaziani village. I didn't know whether it came from my prayers that God had made this man to look like my friend - it was as if God was indicating that I should go over to these men. I approached them and greeted them; I asked them if they were accepting visitors to the house. One of the men said that visitors were very welcome and that I should go inside.

As I went inside, I met an elderly couple with very neat clothing who were sitting there. I greeted them and sat down. They welcomed me and settled themselves down after standing up for me. We chatted a little together and it dawned upon me that it was just like being at my own home, I could begin to really relax. I fell into a kind of trance and in my imagination, I began to recall all the events of the past including my capture by the Kurdish mercenaries, my being held in captivity, the journey in the van and the terrifying sound of the bullets.

Suddenly the sound of a siren filled the air and I filled with such fear that I became breathless and was shaking at the sound. It seemed clear to me that the siren was because of me, they had discovered that I was in the township and this call was to find me! The elderly couple had seen how I had reacted to the siren and I had asked

spy." I was then aware that her husband stared back at her in a very angry fashion. Then he asked me again, "Dear friend, what's the matter that you are not eating?" I told them, "You can all eat, but I am unable." I promised them that once they had finished eating I would tell them what the problem was. They all stopped eating and remained where they were at beside the food. I asked the man who the people were, that were seated there. He replied that the older people were his father and mother, that the younger man was his nephew and that the woman was his wife. I asked them if it was alright if I spoke to them. He replied, "Please, be welcome to." I then said again, "Sorry, I'm not hungry, but you who have worked, please eat while I am speaking." Then I turned to the man of the house and asked, "What is your work?" He said, "I am the Mukhtar, the superintendent, of this township. If any strangers come to the township, they are sent to me for checking; and if there are any visitors, they should come to see me. If there are any who are just wandering around, people will bring them to me so that they can find out if I know them or not."

Well, I didn't quite know whether he was telling the truth or was he just saying this in order to find out what I wanted to say. However, it seemed to be God-sent that this man had revealed himself at this moment. So I told them in a brief manner everything that had happened to me - who I was, where I was from, how I was captured, what had happened to us and how I came to be in this collective town. After I had finished speaking about this, I said, "Can you please assist me? I am completely bound up to your discretion and your consciences. I am in your hands and whether you choose to kill me or spare me, I have only one request, please don't hand me over to the Ba'ath

hours - everything that had happened to them. It was as if a film was playing in front of my eyes! I saw like a picture of every single one of them that had been with me in the van and the different corpses that I had seen in the mass-graves. It must have been difficult for the others waiting to eat - they were all motionless and couldn't start before I had begun to eat. They were all looking at me - I was sunk in despair and they were all in despair with me.

They probably spoke with me or they tried to ask me what the matter was but I was unaware of anything that was going on around me. I just seemed to look at them and I could not speak with them. They were confused to know what to do - they just kept looking at me and at each other. Before this happened, I had been concerned about how I should answer their question about me; but now that I had acted like this, they must have been deeply troubled by me! The father of the house asked me why I was not eating and he kept looking back and forth at me and the meal, he probably thought that there was something unclean with the food. However, having checked the food that it was alright, he then asked me directly why I wasn't eating. I was displaying really bad behaviour for a guest. I tried to make an excuse and said, "I'm not hungry" but of course, I had already acted as if I was hungry by sitting down to eat with the rest of them and I had also reached out my hand to take food! I had even taken the food to my mouth as if to eat, so it was a lame excuse when I said, "I'm not hungry!" Then the older man said to ease my discomfort, "Well, it seems he's not hungry, he's a poor man."

Only one person spoke up after that, the woman at the other end of the dining cloth, she said, "He's the son of a

will not ask to see your papers, just greet them with your hand but don't look at them!"

So we set out from the house, and in order to get to the garage we had to pass the checkpoint. It seemed that the checkpoint was for checking people getting on the buses at the garage. On the way, the man wanted to give me money, but I told him that I had my own and thanked him for his generosity. As we arrived at the checkpoint, one of the guards was sitting on a chair. It seemed that he knew Kak Muhammed because as we lifted our hands to greet him he greeted us back and without any other questions, he simply motioned that we could go on. We passed the checkpoint. However, the sight of those military uniforms really caused me to panic and my heart was beating fast. I thought to myself, "If one of these could hear how my heart was pumping, they would know that I am being smuggled out!" As we arrived at the garage, there was only one bus standing there and there were no other passengers available to fill it!

#### **What kind of vehicle was it?**

- It was a blue minibus that took 18 people. Only the driver was sitting in it. Kak Muhammed told me that other people would be coming and would fill the bus and that I should be in the back seat. I asked him about the cost of the trip and how I should pay. He told me not to worry about it as he was going to speak to the minibus driver about my fare and also that he should let me off in the Kurdish district of Ramadi (called 'Hey Akrad'). I asked Muhammed whether the driver was a Kurd or an Arab. He replied that he was Kurdish and that I shouldn't worry. After that he went and spoke to the driver alone and then they returned together. After that, Muhammed returned

party. By God, I have had to tell you so that I have a chance of being delivered from this situation. I will forgive you if you kill me but if you are able to help me to get into Ramadi that would be a good deed before God."

After I had finished all this speaking, I realised that all of them were completely distraught, none of them wanted to eat anymore. Again the women spoke up, "By God, Muhammed, this man really is a spy!" God is my witness, her husband swore at her and sent her out of the room. He said to me, "Everything you have said is true and this regime is even crueler than what you have said. Now, what do you want from us?" I mentioned that I wanted to get into Ramadi. He wondered how I could be safe if I should come to Ramadi. I told him that my sister's house was somewhere in Ramadi and that if I could get into Ramadi; God would surely help me find her. He replied, "Good, you rest here and in the afternoon there is a bus going to Ramadi that, by God's Will, you can catch."

After this, the others finished their meal and then said their Islamic prayers. After this he took out a little paper and wrote down his name and the name of his tribe on the paper. He then mentioned that if I was to be held that I should mention that I knew this house and that the guards would bring me back here again. I then said that I knew that my arrest would cause them trouble too and that I would rather have the trouble fall on me alone. After this, the man drew a small map how I could get to the garage and how I could get past the checkpoint. As he mentioned the checkpoint, I felt a wave of fear coming over me. The man seemed to notice my fear and then said, "Don't be afraid, I will be with you when we arrive at the checkpoint. If you stand between me and my relative, then the guards



already paid for his seat, the rest of you hand me over your fares." After this I really calmed down because I realised that Kak Muhammed had arranged for everything just as he had said and that I would arrive safely in Ramadi. All of the passengers collected together their fares, it was a quarter of a Dinar for each one of them; but strangely to me they said that it was "Five Tomans" (the Iranian currency)!

**How many people were in the bus?**

- There were eighteen others, so I guess that all of the seats were filled.

**Who was sitting next to you?**

- I was the first person to get into the back seat. At the beginning, I was sitting there by myself but as the bus filled up four others joined me on the back row of seats.

**Did you pass through any other checkpoints?**

- I have told you that there was a checkpoint between the collective town and the garage - that it was necessary to go through the checkpoint to get to the garage.

**Did the bus immediately travel towards Ramadi?**

- As soon as the fares had been collected, it started towards Ramadi. I was sitting next to the window on the back seat. It was good that I could look out of the window so that others wouldn't try to talk to me but, at the same time, looking at the barren countryside just reminded me of the previous evening and all the mass graves that were in countryside just like it. I found myself thinking again about those deep pits and all the Kurds that were now buried in them, all my friends, all those mass graves, the soldiers that had shot at us ... it was this countryside that

back towards his home and I was left alone with the driver.

**What did he tell the driver about you?**

- I don't know because only he spoke with the man alone. However, he did say, "When you get back from Ramadi, come by my house as I have some work for you..."

**You didn't have any concern that he might have some bad intention for you?**

- How could I have had fear? He was a good man and he had only done me good. He only had to turn me out of his house when I was with him for me to have had no chance.

**When these people had left, did you speak with the driver about anything?**

- No, no. Kak Muhammed had told me to keep to the back seat and to not talk with anyone as people might have realised from my accent that I was not from that area. He told me that there were no other checkpoints along the way and that I didn't need to fear as God would surely bring me safely to Ramadi.

**How much longer did it take for the bus to fill up and leave?**

- Well the bus wasn't full when it left and it seemed to leave according to a certain timetable. As we got started something terrifying happened, we stopped at the checkpoint and the officer spoke with the driver. I thought that I was about to be captured and that I should try to make a plan for escape. However, I then heard the officer asking the driver to bring back tomatoes and other vegetables from the city for them. After that, the driver turned to the passengers and pointed to me, "He has

- I realised who it was as soon as he entered the bus.

**Are you really sure it was him? I mean, you were tired and distraught and you had seen someone in the collective town that you thought you knew but it wasn't the same person..?**

- There is a difference between seeing someone you think you know and someone you actually know!

**How many times had you seen Kak Faraj at Topkhane?**

- I had seen him many times before.

**Was he your friend?**

- Well, he wasn't my friend exactly because he was generally older than we who had sought shelter there, but I knew his brothers very well. Also, as we were hidden out in the countryside, it was more his brothers who were looking after the flocks of sheep...

**So, what did you say when you recognised him?**

- As he entered the bus, he called out "Peace be with you all." I immediately answered, "Let peace be on you, and come and sit next to me Kak Faraj." I pointed with my hand to the place between myself and the person sitting next to me.

**What did he say?**

- He didn't say anything; he just made his way towards me.

**Didn't you think it would be dangerous to answer in this way among all these people that you didn't know? What would they be thinking... especially as he**

was a just one huge mass grave! My mind seemed to be going crazy.

Suddenly, I saw somebody in the distance coming towards the roadside where we were about to pass. He was waving frantically so that the bus would stop. He was dressed in Kurdish clothes... I felt that he had been through the same experiences as me and he had managed to come to the roadside beyond the checkpoint. I could see his hand waving to us from the distance. I was becoming agitated; I fancied that the bus would pass him by without stopping! I wanted to shout out to the driver to make him stop to pick him up but I was afraid that to do so would reveal myself. It seemed to me as if I was the only one seeing the man in this empty wilderness. I began to pray, "God, make the bus driver stop for this man and pick him up!" God did it, he made the driver stop at the side of the road and wait for the man. After a short time, the door opened and the man called out "Salamu Aleikum" (the Arabic greeting meaning, 'Peace be with you all'). I slowly turned to look at the man and I believed that indeed he had been through the same experiences as I had. He had just come into the bus and then I realised who it was...

**Who was it?**

- It was Kak Faraj. Kak Faraj Topkhane.

**Did you know this Kak Faraj from before?**

- Yes. From the time that I had deserted the army and had sought shelter at Topkhane, I had seen him there. He was from that area.

**Did you know immediately that it was this Kak Faraj?**

- No, he didn't recognise me; or at least, he tried to pretend that he didn't know me.

**How did you know that he was pretending?**

- I asked him, "Do you know who I am?" Then slowly and carefully he answered back, "I don't know you." I told him, "I am Uzer." He replied, "Oh, Uzer!," and he let out a sigh of relief. But so that other people wouldn't take too much notice, I quickly took out a Quarter Dinar coin and gave it forward for Kak Faraj's bus fare. I said, "This is five Tomans, the fare for this passenger."

**Did you have that money?**

- Yes, I had one of those coins with me.

**And why did you say, "This is five Tomans?"**

- I didn't know how many Tomans there were for a Quarter Dinar and how much the bus fare was exactly. But as when we had started our journey, the passengers had all brought out Quarter Iraqi Dinar coins and they had said, "Five Tomans," so I thought it best to do the same, so that they wouldn't notice that I was actually an Iraqi national or that there was something unusual about the new passenger. I said, "This is Five Tomans," so that they would think that I was from their township.

**So when the bus started out from the township, didn't anyone speak to you and ask you for your bus fare?**

- Haven't I told you that Kak Muhammed, the Superintendent of the township, spoke with the bus driver and that he had pointed to me and said that I had already paid my fare? So no-one had spoken with me about paying the fare.

**came aboard after the checkpoint and that you obviously knew him?**

- Well my friend, in that barren wilderness and in my confusion, when an acquaintance came on the bus it would seem like an angel from God himself, how could I not call out to him? I wasn't in my right mind to know exactly what was good and what was bad. God had allowed it that one of my acquaintances should appear and that I could overcome something of my fear and confusion. Can you imagine how good it was for me in that circumstance that God should send a companion for me?

**Was there actually space between you and the person sitting next to you, that you could call to Kak Faraj that he should join you?**

- By God, no, the bus was full. It was simply out of my great joy at seeing someone I knew that I just called out to him without thinking! In fact it was good that I had done this. If I hadn't called out, then we would have created more suspicion as we tried to look at each other through all the passengers than we did by sitting next to each other.

**Could you make a space for Kak Faraj?**

- Yes, as Kak Faraj came towards me, I turned to my neighbour and asked, "Excuse me, please make some space for this passenger."

**Did he agree?**

- Yes.

**Did Kak Faraj recognise you?**

**Didn't all these other people have authorisation papers to be in the bus, wouldn't the police ask why you didn't have one of these papers?**

- I didn't expect them to speak in this way. Kak Muhammed had told me exactly what to say to other people and not to fear. He also said, "If they capture you, they will bring you back to the township."

**So probably this advice was good as far as Ramadi, but what had you prepared for beyond that?**

- I hadn't prepared anything. I was hoping that I could make it to my Sister's house in Ramadi and that they would save me.

**How far was it from the township and Ramadi city?**

- I don't know exactly, but it was roughly a half-hour to three-quarter hour journey.

**So you were with Kak Faraj for roughly half an hour in the bus?**

- By God, I don't know exactly.

**Didn't you say that it was only roughly five minutes after leaving the township that Kak Faraj came onboard?**

- Yes, yes. It was roughly five minutes after leaving the camp.

**Did you and Kak Faraj not speak about other things together on the bus?**

- Of course, of course. I told him about my sister's house; that we could go there together and then from there travel onwards together.

**Were you and Kak Faraj silent after this?**

- How could we be silent? I asked him what had happened to his brothers. He said that they were all gone!

**Did you know previously that Kak Faraj had also been captured like you?**

- No. I didn't know but when I saw him there, I knew that he had been through the same things as I had.

**How did you know?**

- Firstly, when I had seen him in the distance, he had the same clothes as a Kurd from the north. In this way, I knew that he was someone from our region. Also Kurds like us do not normally come down to this region near Ramadi. In addition, he appeared confused and the red plastic sandals on his feet were far too big for him. You just needed to look at him to see that he had been running away from death.

**So how did the other passengers not know that he was an escapee?**

- They probably did but they didn't want to be involved. Of course, they would not know what was happening in Kurdistan. But as someone like me who had been living in the same district until just 3-4 days previously and had been through the difficulties, I knew exactly what this person was doing there. He obviously wasn't there in that barren wilderness as a tourist?!

**At that time that you were on the way to Ramadi, what had you thought you might say if you were to be stopped by the police or army again?**

- I would have said that I was from this township of Iranian Kurds, just like the others in the bus.

**So, it seemed that the driver had intended to stop there on your behalf?**

- Yes, because Kak Muhammed had told him to let me off there.

**It seems that you showed yourselves together in the bus and now you both got off the bus together!?**

- It seems that we couldn't separate from each other as we were bound together in our both being strangers to the district and in our shared mental condition. In addition, I had told him that we could go together to my sister's house and go on from there.

**What did you do when you came out of the bus?**

- As we came out of the bus, we saw a boy selling cigarettes. He said to us, "You are Kurds!" and he was delighted to see that we were wearing Kurdish clothes. We were even more overjoyed than him and we quickly went over beside the boy. In fact, it was a group of young boys on the street who were selling the cigarettes. I asked them, "Where are you living?" There were a number of flats behind them and one of the boys pointed to one of the flats and said, "That's our home." I asked him if his father and mother were at home and he replied that they were. So I finally said, "Well, go and tell your father that we are coming to visit him."

**Do you say that or did Kak Faraj?**

- I said that.

**What did the child do?**

- He said, "Alas, if I go and tell him, these Arab children will steal all my cigarettes."

**Did Kak Faraj already know that you had a sister living in Ramadi?**

- No. How could he?

**Did he believe you when you said that your sister's house was there?**

- Why shouldn't he have believed!

**Well, according to an interview that I held with Kak Faraj, he mentioned that "When at first Kak Uzer told me about this I didn't believe him. I had thought that he had said this so that the other passengers wouldn't realise that we were strangers and that we were indeed living in that area."**

- Well, by God, I don't know if he believed me or not. But he has never told me that this was his thinking at the time. Indeed, even if he didn't believe me that was his right. Of course, we as Kurds from the Germian region wouldn't normally have relatives in Ramadi.

**Were there no checkpoints before you arrived in Ramadi?**

- No.

**When you arrived in Ramadi, what did you both do?**

- Just as we came to the outskirts of the city, the driver asked all the passengers whether they wanted to get off at the 'Hey Akrad' district. He mentioned, "This is the Hey Akrad district." He said this and stopped the vehicle at the side of the road. We both got off, I got off first and Kak Faraj followed me down.

- Well, because it was my sister's house that we were looking for and I knew their names.

**What was your sister's name?**

- Her name was Naeel.

**When had they arrived in Ramadi?**

- I have already mentioned that they had come to Ramadi in 1987. After their house in the village was destroyed, they went to live in Kirkuk but they had then been deported from there to Ramadi.

**After your greetings, did you ask about your sister or did the father of the house ask you questions, to find out who his visitors really were?**

- It was right in the middle of our greeting each other and wishing each other well that the man turned to Kak Faraj and asked him where we were from.

**Why did he direct the question to Kak Faraj? Was it because he was sitting directly beside him?**

- No, it wasn't because of that. Rather because Kak Faraj was quite a bit older than me it was natural that he should ask him first.

**How did Kak Faraj answer him?**

- Well, I didn't allow Kak Faraj to answer. I said, "Dear one, we are from the military township, that camp that is near to you. Sir, we have come to see you because we are butchers and today is Friday. One week ago, last Friday, we brought some meat to sell in the market. One family came to us and the man had brought his pickup truck, he said that he wanted to buy some meat but he realised he did not have any money with him. He said,

**What were these Arab children doing there?**

- They were also from that district, they were also living there.

**What did you do?**

- We said that we would look after his cigarettes until he came back.

**Did the boy leave to go home?**

- Yes. He left and we stayed beside the cigarettes waiting for him to come back and to see what his father would say. The boy then returned and told us that the father was waiting to welcome us.

**Was their house far away?**

- No, the boy was selling the cigarettes directly in front of their house. I guess it was a block of flats with three stories and their flat was on the ground floor. The boy could see us going towards his door and indicated to us that we should go in.

**You went in without waiting to be asked?**

- I told you that the boy had said we were being welcomed as guests.

**How did the man of the house welcome you?**

- Well, by God, as soon as we entered the house, the father of the house came towards us and welcomed us very warmly; he asked us to come in and brought us inside. Before we had come into the house, Kak Faraj and I had decided that I would be one doing the talking.

**Why?**

The tea wasn't even served when I asked the man if he could send someone with me to point out which house was theirs. The father of the house sensed my hastiness and asked us not to leave too early, that is until we had at least drunk our tea. Then he called out to his wife to hurry up with making the tea, this was how I discovered that she was making the tea.

Until they had served the tea, Kak Faraj had noticed my agitation at the tremendously joyful news. He decided to engage the head of the house in conversation. I noticed that he had asked the man what his work was. He answered that he was in the territorial volunteers' army. I thought to myself, "Hasn't God given me the wisdom to speak as I did to this man and not to reveal who we were and to mention the tragedy that we had experienced?" Who could tell what he might have done if I had spoken in this way? But it became apparent that he was also deeply disappointed with his work. He mentioned that it was a terrible drudgery about his work, "I have to travel six hours one way through the barren wilderness to arrive there, and there isn't any vegetation to give me shade." When he talked about the wilderness and the desert, a shudder went through my whole body and I was reminded of our terrible situation that we had been through.

The irony of the situation struck me: the government considers this land useless and yet they use it to put the Kurds into graves! I broke into their conversation and said that it was time for us to go. The man got up and brought us outside, then he called to his son selling the cigarettes to come and show us where Haji Hassan's flat was. He guessed that we didn't know the area so well and that his son could show us easily. The boy came with us

"I've left my money at home." He appeared to be a good man and so we gave him the meat and told him to come back this week and bring his money with him. We still need to find him to get our money. Then the house owner who listened to this story asked us, "Do you know the man's name?" I had intentionally told the story like this so that I could protect the family's identity. I answered the man, "Of course we know it. He is called Haji Hassan and his wife was called Naeel. They had two children with them one was called Sami and the other was Fuad. I named the two children as well because, by God's aid, it might help him to remember them.

**When you were telling this story was it just the father of the house who was sitting with you or were his wife and children there as well?**

- It was just the man and his wife there but the wife was elsewhere busy making some tea for us.

**So what did this man say in response to your information?**

- The man told me that the person I was seeking had his flat nearby behind this block of flats.

**How did you feel when you discovered that you were now so close to your sister's house, what with the fact that you and Kak Faraj had pinned your hopes of deliverance on find this house?**

- Well, first of all, I didn't want this family to see me overreacting in joy but I didn't know how to answer them. It had been more than one year since I had last seen my sister and her children but the idea that their house was so close was overwhelming, their faces came back into my mind and it was difficult to stop myself from shouting.

flats behind her. I asked her if she knew where they had gone to, I wondered if she knew whether they might have gone back to Kirkuk or to Hawler, the city where his father was. The old woman replied, "Dear child, how do I know where they have gone, maybe they are still here in the city?" So we just didn't know where they were - they were probably still in Ramadi, but where could they be in this city?

**Did she give you any more help seeing that you were strangers?**

- No, by God, she didn't say anything else.

**What did you do?**

- We said good-bye to her and we returned back to the main street. I asked Kak Faraj, "What shall we do?" Kak Faraj replied, "Well, we shall never find them. Let us call upon God to help us and go to the bus station and catch a bus to Baghdad and see what God will open up for us. So we called to a passing taxi that took us to the bus station.

**How were you feeling considering that you had trusted to stay with your sister and her family and now that you had no hope of finding them?**

- I wasn't too disappointed. God had already done so much to keep me alive and had sent so many signs and messengers of his mercy: so that now despite not finding my sister's house, if I had been alone and had kept looking, I would surely have found them.

**You say, "If I had been alone, I would have found it." But surely Kak Faraj was with you, why couldn't you look together with him?**

and from a distance showed us which flat it was saying, "That's their house." We sent the boy back and made our way to the house which he had pointed to.

I don't know what it was but there was a car standing there with four soldiers sitting in it each wearing red berets. Perhaps they had seen that we were strangers to the district but they stopped their car ahead of us. Suddenly it seemed as if we were about to be caught at the last moment between the two sets of flats. What a nightmare! I told Kak Faraj, "Don't look at them and let's talk and joke as if everything is normal." Somehow we managed to erase the confusion and fear from our faces and we kept walking towards the flat. All in all, they were only a few metres to walk but they seemed as if they lasted a very long time to walk them. God is my witness, it seemed that that walk took one or two full minutes to reach my sister's flat. It seemed we were walking the line between life and death. Finally, in that state of extreme fear, we arrived at my sister's block of flats and we didn't look around to see whether the car had already left or whether they were still watching us.

There was an old woman there dressed in Kurdish clothes and making wool with a spindle. The sight of her completely allayed my fears as if water was being poured upon the fire of my anxiety. We greeted her and she replied with a word of greeting. Then I asked her, "Dear Aunt, if it is no bother to you, please tell us which is Haji Hassan's flat." She asked us if these were the people from the Germian region. I reply, "Yes, and the wife is called Mrs. Naeel." She replied, "My son, it was roughly one month ago since they have moved out - this used to be their house." With this, she pointed to the lower of the



**Did you sit separately in the bus?**

- Yes, Kak Faraj sat at the rear of the bus and I found a seat at the front.

**How was it possible to find these seats free?**

- The seat at the front was already free, Kak Faraj started speaking with someone at the rear and someone must have made room for him to continue his conversation.

**Were there checkpoints on the road between Ramadi and Baghdad?**

- Yes, we came across a number of them. However, because there were some military police travelling in the bus with us, the bus was never held up or checked. So we arrived safely to Baghdad!

**How did you feel when you arrived in Baghdad safely?**

- We were very happy.

**What time was it when you arrived in Baghdad?**

- We didn't have a watch with us, nor did we ask anyone what time it was. However, it was late in the afternoon when we arrived.

**I have forgotten to ask you something specific, I mean, I had been waiting for the right opportunity. When you had arrived in Ramadi and had entered that first house, why did you say that you were butchers?**

- Well, I thought to myself that we had the smell of blood on us and to say this wouldn't raise any suspicion. I also said it as it was a good way of being able to ask for my sister's house.

- Well, it's like this. If I had been alone, I could have gone around searching for the house much more and without any other consideration except just finding their house. But Kak Faraj had said, "Even by asking questions of the people in this big city, how are we able to find them. We will just keep asking, keep searching and at the end, we will be picked up by the police. Going on to Baghdad would be better and we can also travel on from there." So from this, I considered that it would be indeed better not to hang around according to my will and take the risk of being captured. I was encouraged that Kak Faraj believed it was possible to get back to Kurdistan from Baghdad and that travelling on was preferable to staying here.

**What exactly did he say?**

- He said, "Friend, we have been saved from that camp, but there were a large group of people in that bus and who can say whether one of them knew about us and might try to inform the police." I agreed with his thinking and we were afraid that if we stayed the night, not having found my sister's house, we might be captured there. So we agreed that we must try to go further. As we arrived at the bus station, we heard one of the drivers calling out that there were four seats still free for the Baghdad bus.

**Was he calling out in Kurdish or in Arabic?**

- He was calling out in Arabic. But as we got on, I suggested that one of us should sit at the back and the other should sit towards the front.

**Why did you say that?**

- Because if we should be stopped at a checkpoint and asked to show our ID cards, one of us might still be able to escape and bring back news to the Kurds.

When we entered the bus, there were still no other passengers who had arrived. I began to feel afraid and felt that everything around us seemed to be an enemy; I started to look this way and that out of the windows. Then I saw an army officer approaching our bus, we still hadn't opened up our sandwiches and I spoke to Kak Faraj, "Kak Faraj, do you see that officer coming this way." He saw him and said, "Yes. What should we do?" I didn't know what to think, I felt that he could see us looking at him and could see the look of agitation on our faces, or was he just coming to check the bus? He came to the bus and looked at us once or twice in through the minibus window. I was giving close attention to him and then I said to Kak Faraj, "This is the same officer who was in the Topzawa buildings and came with us in the vans, I recognise him by his slim figure, his wheat-coloured skin and his light-blue eyes." We were very frightened and he seemed to sense our fear. He went around the minibus once or twice more and then came towards the door of the minibus! We were completely terrified at this. Kak Faraj said, "I think he is about to ask for our ID cards." I replied, "I think we've had it, our luck has run out." We didn't know what to do; we didn't have any possibility to run. He stood at the doorway and gave us another look, then putting his hand to the door, he closed it for us!

**Did the officer come into the bus?**

- No, he only came to the door and he closed the door with his hand.

**What did you experience as you were face to face with this officer who had done so many terrible things to you and now you saw him again at the bus station?**

**Where did you go to in Baghdad?**

- When we first got in from Ramadi, we arrived at the Alawi Bus Station. From there, we could catch a taxi to the Nahza Station.

**Did you know Baghdad well?**

- No, but I knew the names of the bus stations and Kak Faraj knew the city a little bit. When we arrived at the Nahza bus station, Kak Faraj said that it was still too early to travel by bus and that it would be preferable to travel when it was night. He also suggested that we should go to the Geylani mosque. For a time we discussed when it was better to travel and where to stay in the meantime, but in the end, we were both in agreement that it was better to travel back to Kirkuk by night and that we should go to the mosque as there was no better place to hide ourselves until after sunset.

**Did you know how to find the mosque or did you have to ask people for directions?**

- Kak Faraj knew the way and we arrived safely at the Sheikh Abdul-Qadir Geylani mosque. We stayed there until we thought it was safe to return back to the bus station. When we arrived back at the station, we asked where the buses for Kirkuk departed from. When we found the Kirkuk platform, we saw that a minibus was standing there and the driver was shouting out, "Kirkuk, Kirkuk." We spoke with him about how many other passengers had arrived. He said that we were the first ones but that others would come. We realised that we were hungry and we went to the station take-away shop and ordered two roasted meat sandwiches and took them back to eat them in the bus.

**He only closed the door! What else did he do?**

- He closed the door on us and then went over to the other side of the bus station where a detachment of troops were quartered. It was obvious that he wanted to bring the troops to arrest us. But as he went towards the guard house, we opened the door and escaped. It was then that Kak Faraj and I were separated from each other, and I didn't see him again until four years later. Despite the fact that the garage was well-lit, I chose to hide myself in the bus garage and went over to some other minibuses that I think were going to go to Hillah. For a time, I hid myself there. Then I realised that there were many troops at the garage and that they had begun to search the garage and were coming in my direction. As they came to where I was, I crouched down beside one of the bus tyres and pretended that I was urinating. God used this to save me.

However, I had a great fear that perhaps Kak Faraj had been captured and was being asked about my whereabouts. I cannot express just how fearful I was and how much my heart was beating, I really wanted to start searching for Kak Faraj but I knew that if I tried to search too much it might appear as suspicious behaviour! Finally I thought to myself, "It's no use, I shall take a taxi to Kirkuk." There was a car standing there at the station and I went to see if the taxi was ready to go, but when I arrived and asked I discovered that the driver was of Turkoman origin I didn't want to travel with him. I asked, "Are there no Kurdish drivers going to Kirkuk?" He asked me why. I said that I didn't have too much Arabic and would rather have a Kurdish driver to travel with. Just then a Kurdish man turned up in his car and after I had jumped in, we went around the bus station a little bit. I

- Well, I don't know what kept our hearts from halting altogether! We could never have guessed that we would meet that officer from Topzawa again while waiting in the bus. We felt like we were dying! Alas, it was so unpleasant to experience that the same officer who had given us so much misery and just three days before had sent us for execution, now stood before us again!

**Are you sure it was the same officer from Topzawa?**

- Truly, by God, I recognised him.

**How can you be sure?**

- My dear friend, I had seen him only three days previously, how could I not recognise him! He had the same slim figure, the same skin and eyes... it is as if I can still picture him now.

**How can say that he just looked like that officer from Topzawa?**

- No, it was him. I had been in one building at Topzawa and Kak Faraj had been in another one, yet we both recognised him.

**Do you think he recognised you?**

- We were very much in doubt and he must have doubted, but we had certainly been at Topzawa with him!

**Do you think that he was suspicious and came to have a closer look at you because you both looked so fearful and confused?**

- Whatever it was that caused his suspicion, he must have known that something was amiss with us, and so he closed the door of the bus on us!

sleep. He spoke a little bit more and it was clear that he didn't believe me. He said, "You are not right in the head." As he spoke with me, some tears came to my eyes and rolled down my cheeks. At this, the driver tried even more to find out what was troubling me.

Then I realised that if I didn't try to tell him, I would go crazy. I told him, "Sir, that which has happened to me would be enough to make anyone crazy. That which I have seen, by God, no-one has seen the likes of it before!" I started to tell him in a summarized fashion all the events of the past few days, but it was only a shortened version. As I was telling him about it, a convoy of vans appeared travelling in the opposite direction; they were just like the vans that they had used to take us for execution. I became agitated and blurted out, "These are the very same vans, they are full of Kurds and they are taking them all to kill them!"

It seemed to be that explaining all these things was taking a great weight off from my own heart and I felt that by talking about them the pain lessened for me. However, from his face and appearance, it was clear that he was deeply troubled. After a few more questions, he told me about a relative from the Ban Jabari village who had been detained and brought to Qadr Kerem and that they had received no further information about him. In fact, I had seen this man one or two times at the Topzawa military camp but he had not been transferred at the same time as me, I didn't know what had become of him. I told the driver that I knew him and had seen him, but the driver didn't seem to believe me. Perhaps he thought that I had told him this just to comfort him because he asked me,

said, "I have been separated from my friend in this bus station." But however much we tried, we didn't find him and I guessed that he had either escaped or had been captured.

Then I saw that the soldiers were beginning to stop the cars and ask the people for their ID cards. I was terrified that I would be captured, so I said to the driver, "I think my friend has already left, let's go." So we set off from the station heading towards Kirkuk. After a little time, the driver put a Kurdish music cassette into the player. Now, generally I love this drum and flute music very much, so much so that I had often listened to it before; but when he started to play it, as God is my witness, the music brought the events of the van, the shouting and the executions back into my memory. Then, one by one, the faces of my friends flooded back into my consciousness. At the same time as reliving the pain, I was pretending that I enjoyed the music.

The driver said something to me, but without thinking I simply replied, "Yes." Then the driver stopped the car and asked me whether I was crazy. Suddenly I came back to myself, I asked, "Why do you say that am I crazy?" He replied angrily, "Don't you realise what I was saying to you? You are speaking with yourself and you don't answer any questions." I replied, "No I am not, why should I lie to you?" He asked me whether I had the money for the ride and I put my hand into my pocket and pulled out the money. The driver wasn't convinced: he asked, "So what is your problem?" I answered that I didn't have any. He was so sure that I had some troubles and asked that if I had problems I should tell him and let him help me. I told him that I wasn't troubled, I just wanted to

- Yes, do you know how I discovered it. I said to him, "Sir, at your age, you have to be connected to a military group; you must be military or belong to the governmental militia, or the people's army or a peshmerga! He told me, "I am a gunman with Sa'eed Tahir Jabar's militia. Personally I don't like to be an armed militia member but I need to do it to protect my house, my children and my livelihood." Anyway, when we arrived in Kirkuk we took the road that went to his uncle's house. He knocked on the door and the uncle's wife came out to answer, he told her, "I would like to see my uncle, we have some work together with this friend." So the uncle came out and got into the car with us, we then travelled to the house of one of my relatives.

**So this driver and this older man were with you?**

- Yes, yes.

**So how did you dare take these influential men with you to the place where you were intending to hide?**

- Well, I had already taken my chance with the driver and he hadn't given me up to the authorities. I had said to him, "It's up to you; you have the sword in your hand. You have the power to help me or to cut off my head!" But he really was a good man. I wouldn't have dared take him to my relatives' house if I had thought he might do something wicked in the future.

**Did you see the driver again after he had taken you to the house?**

- Unfortunately, not. I would really have liked to have seen him again.

**Did you not try to see him again?**

"What was he wearing?" I told him what I remembered, what he looked like and what he was wearing.

The man said, "Okay, we are soon entering Kirkuk and we can go and pick up my uncle and then go on from there to your house, if you want? Please talk a little bit with this uncle because he is the father of the young man. He has been going around all the officers of the army and the Kurdish mercenaries, giving them money so that they would help him find his son. This young man was the only son of this uncle and he is in despair looking for him!" The taxi driver himself was very upset; he told me, "Sir, I myself am a member of the mobile regiment belonging to Sa'eed Tahir Jabar (a mercenary grouping) and I can't do anything!"

Just hearing him say that made my heart pound, I thought, "What will happen now that I have told him all these things?" He seemed to notice that I was upset and he said, "Don't worry, I can't make any great fortune by handing you over; don't be afraid, just don't tell other people about these things and don't mention my name that I have brought you back to Kirkuk. For myself, I will pretend that I haven't heard this, it will be like a stone on my head!" With all this talking backwards and forwards, I didn't know the time exactly but suddenly we had arrived in Kirkuk!

**What was the driver's name?**

- His name was Sa'eed Miheeyadeen belonging to the Jabari tribe.

**He told you that he worked with the mobile regiment?**

here and then try to come and see me. So for that reason, early the next morning, I left that house. I went to my brother's house there in Kirkuk and from there, they were able to secure an authorisation paper from one of the mobile regiments so that I could be brought to Hawler (also known as Erbil).

Prior to this, my father and his household had been deported from Kirkuk to Bineslaw; he had two houses one for my mother and one for my stepmother. However, I lived in such a way that for six months even my father didn't know that I had returned to that area. I was in hiding; only my mother and one or two of my siblings knew that I had returned. In fact, many of our relatives came and visited my mother to express their condolences that Uzer had been killed in the Anfal campaign.

There was one other thing that was precious to me: my uncle (on my mother's side) worked on the taxi route between Baghdad and Kirkuk, and Kak Ramazan, the one who had survived the mass graves, by chance travelled back in his taxi and my Uncle could bring him back safely to Kirkuk! It was through Kak Ramazan that this uncle could find out what had happened, he asked him specifically about some Jaff tribe people, "Do you know someone of the Jaff tribe called Uzer? He must have been captured as well." He answered, "He was in the same van as I was and I saw him die in front of my eyes." So this uncle explained to my relatives that he had brought someone back to Kirkuk that had witnessed my death, then the next day he and other relatives came and visited my mother and my sisters in Hawler to bring them comfort. They didn't even dare tell him that I was still alive! In this way, all my relatives believed that I had been

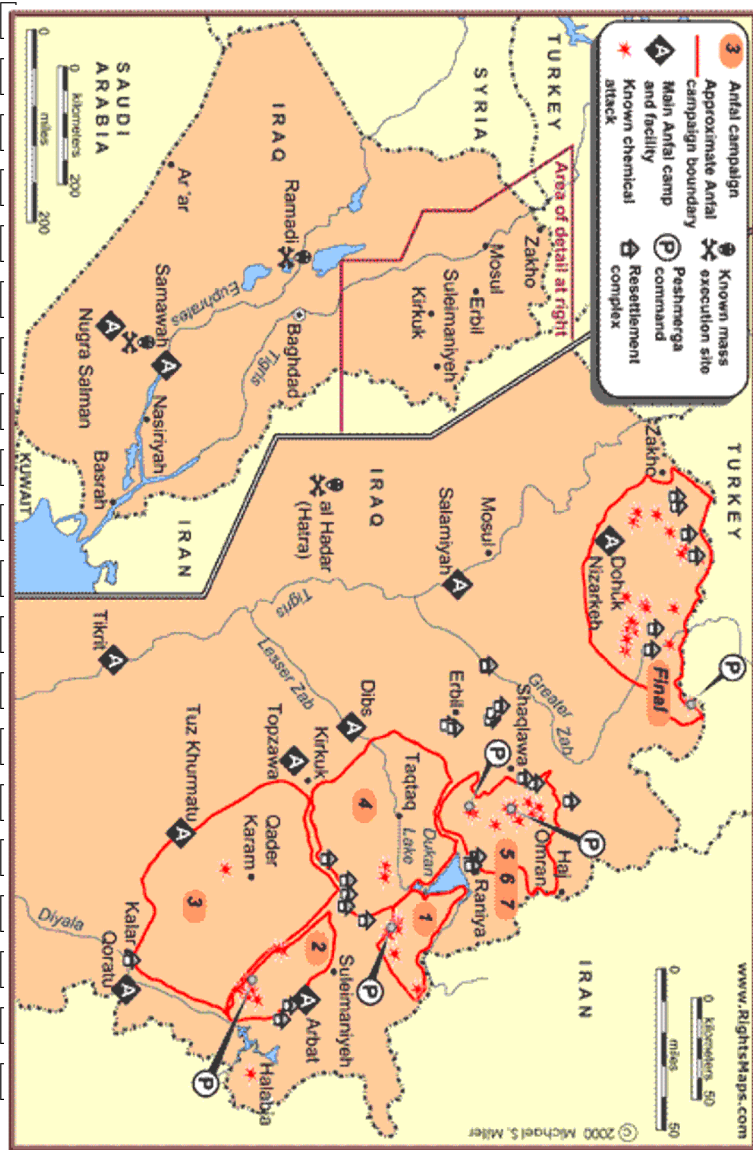
- Alas, in all the terrible events of 1991 he was killed near to Penjwin, so I was unable to see him again.

**What did you do at your relative's house? Did you stay there or did you go on somewhere else?**

- After we had all drunk tea together, the driver and the uncle left and I stayed at the house. It was at my relative's house that I explained to the older man what I knew about his son; that I had seen him at the prison at Topzawa, but that he was not taken at the same time to the barren wilderness where we were taken to. The driver asked me if he could do anything else for me or whether he could take me somewhere else. I thanked him and as he was leaving, he again advised me not to tell anyone else this story as long as Saddam Hussein was still in power. They left and I sat down again in my relatives' house. The television was switched on and on the local state channel there was a news item about the capture of traitors who had been taken to the police station at Qadr Kerem. They even showed our pictures from when we were at the Qadr Kerem police station. They said, "These are those who are working in collaboration with Iran and gave themselves up"... I even saw myself and my friends in those pictures!

**Did you see your own photograph?**

- Not only me, all of us who were sitting in that room were watching the pictures. I saw myself, Kak Salar and many other people who I recognised in the photographs. I also realised that all of these people had all been killed by the regime and if it should become known that I was still alive, I would be searched for and killed. I knew I would have to go into hiding and that no-one should know about me, even my relatives couldn't be allowed to know that I was



killed. I then stayed at home for eighteen months until a general amnesty was issued and I could give myself up. This was only a short time before Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and then after that the Kurdish uprising came about and we were all delivered from Saddam! After the uprising and the creation of the safe haven for the Kurds, I remained in Hawler until 1998 when it was possible for me to go to America.

**Kak Uzer, after the Kurdish uprising, didn't you try to contact or didn't you send someone to that camp of Iranian Kurds near to Ramadi to find out about those who saved you?**

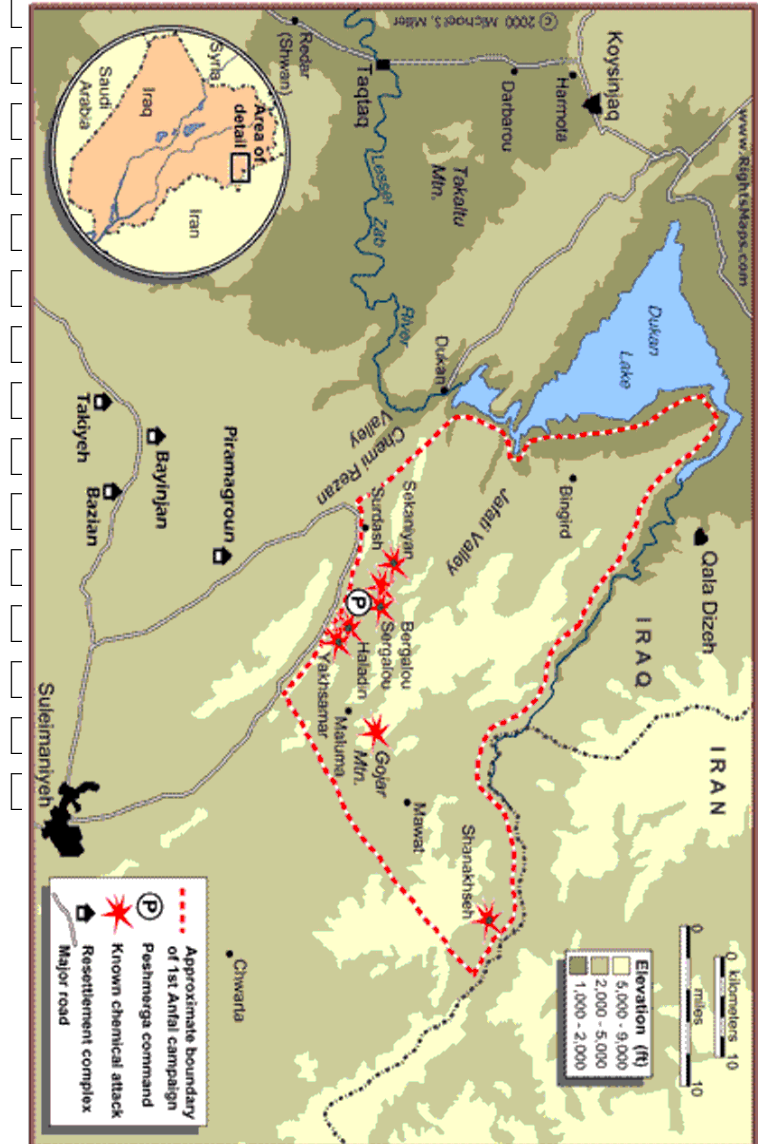
- Well, it was not possible. I was in Hawler and couldn't get to Ramadi.

**And after the American invasion in 2003?**

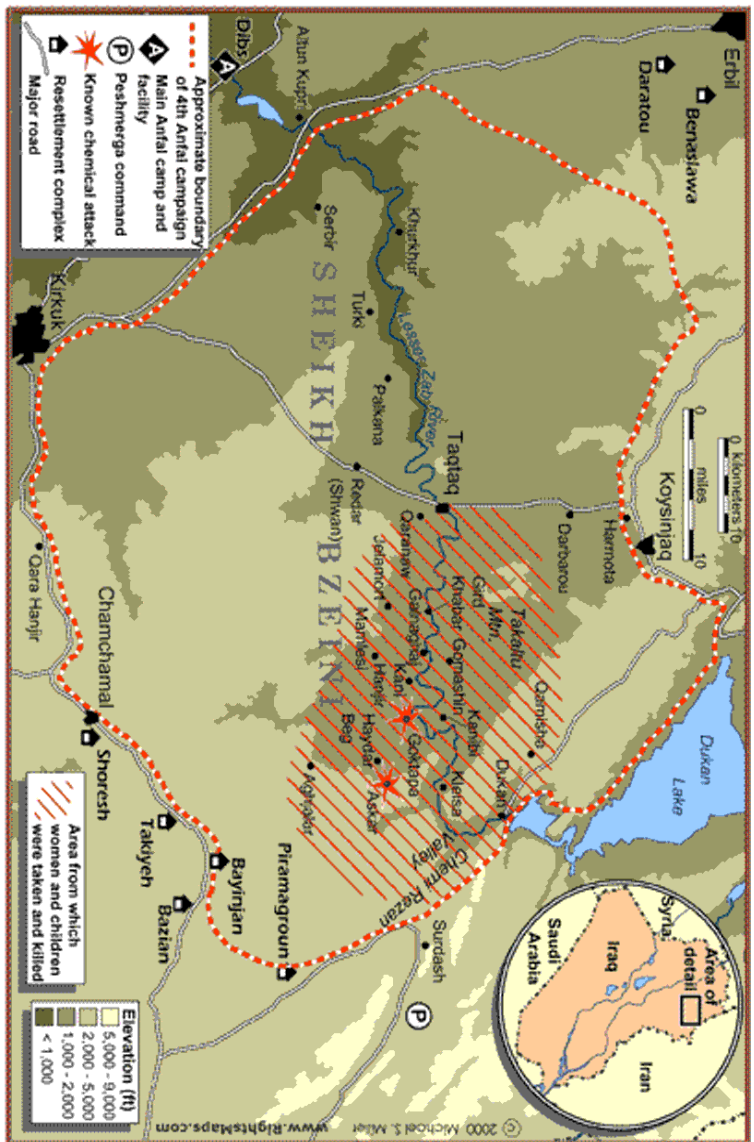
- Well, I really wanted to get in touch again but even after the American invasion, their area was subject to many terrorist attacks. Now I understand that the camp doesn't exist anymore and I don't know where these people are. If I knew, I would like to find Kak Muhammed.

**Would you like your story to be made into a cinema film?**

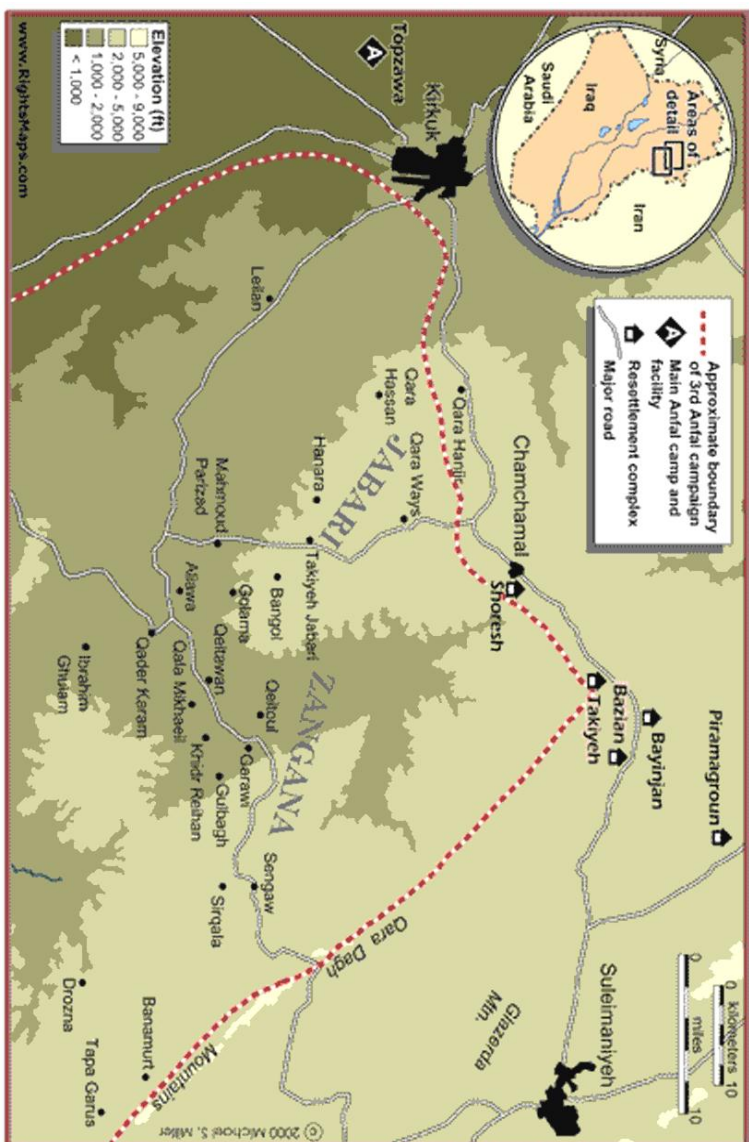
- Of course, by God, I would like that very much so that the whole world could see what I saw and that they could understand the extreme cruelty of Saddam Hussein, and how much injustice has been done to the Kurds.



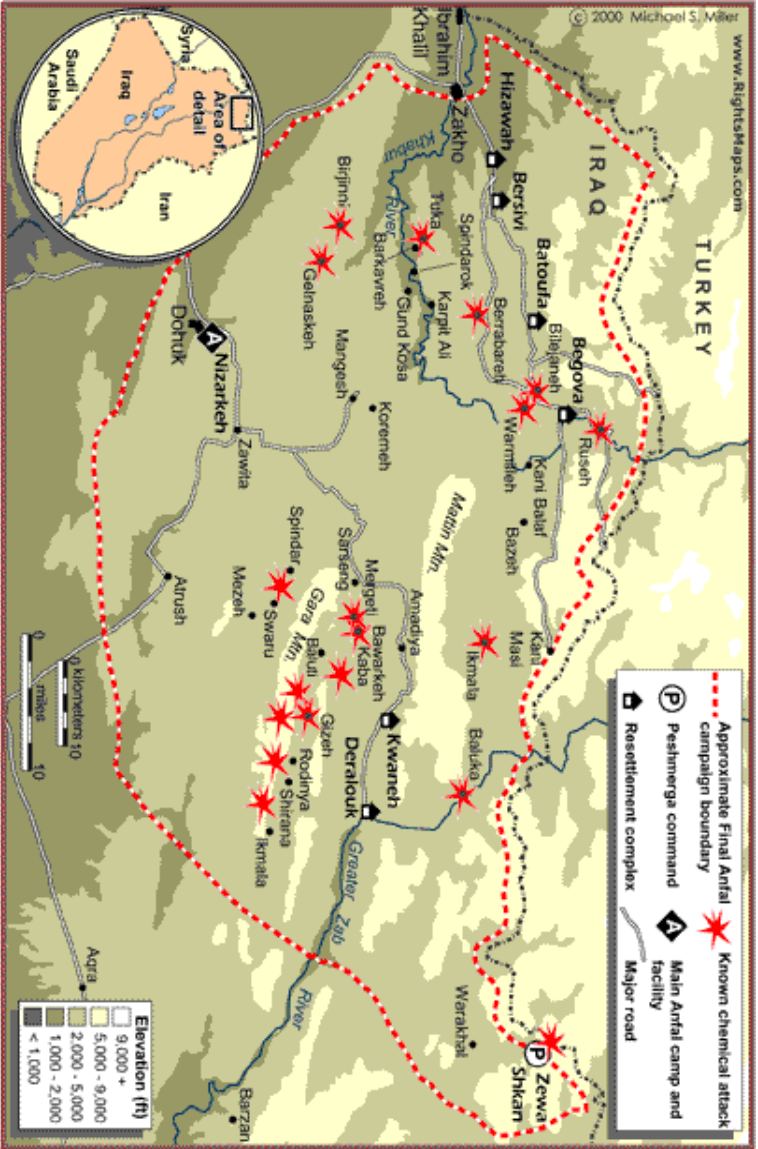
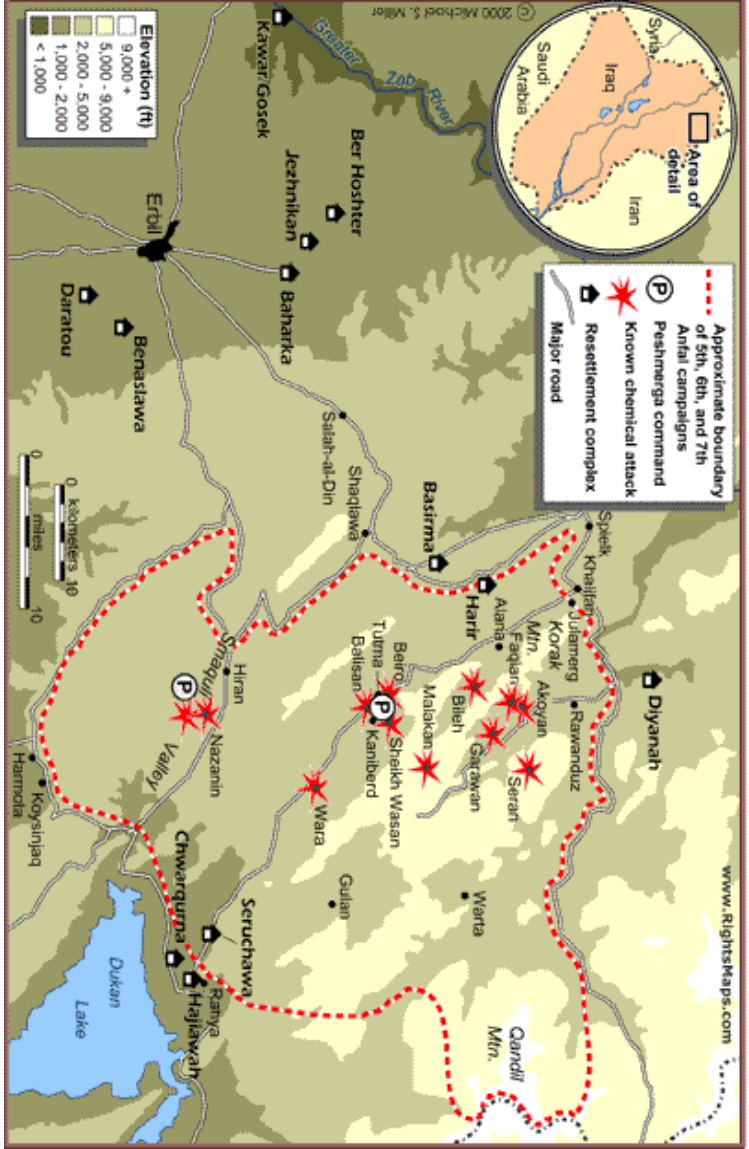


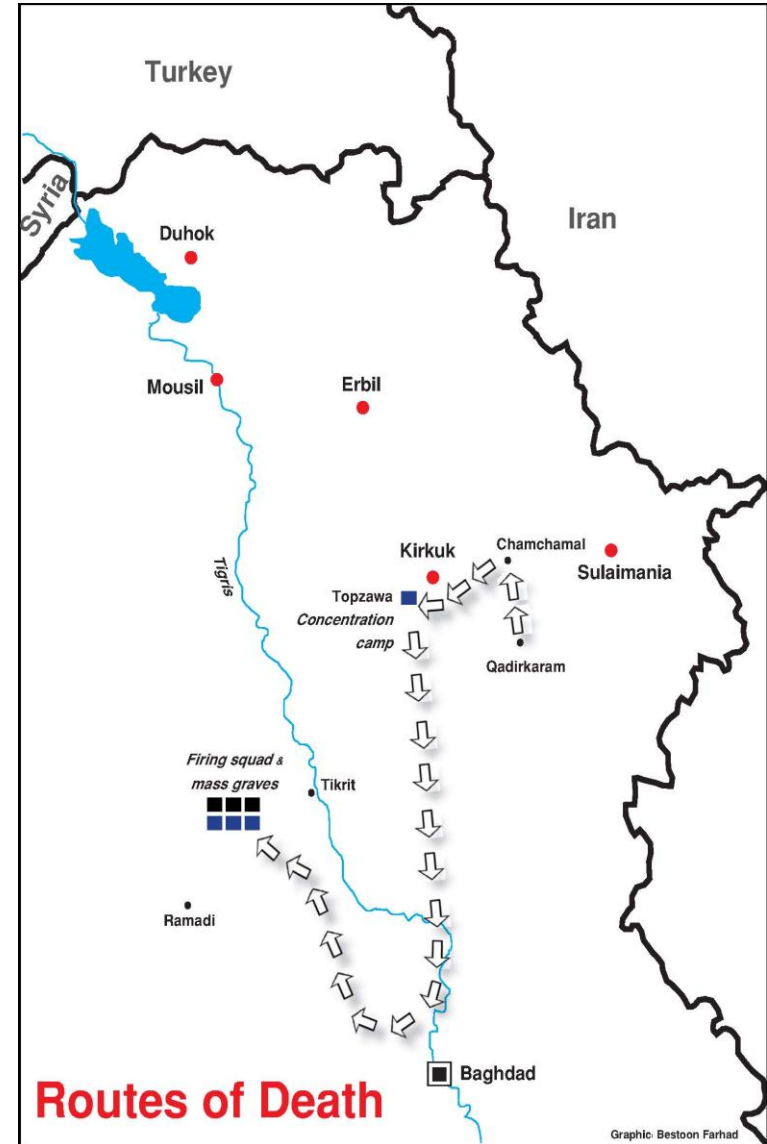


150



149







156



155



158



157

Abu Nawaf Group





162

161







166



165

