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Exclusive by Mark Willacy and Alexandra Blucher
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Witnesses say Australian SAS soldiers were involved in mass shooting of unarmed Afghan civilians



SAS soldiers are again being accused of unlawful killings of unarmed civilians in Afghanistan. (Supplied)

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Australian special forces killed up to 10 unarmed Afghan civilians during a 2012 raid in Kandahar Province, ABC Investigations can reveal.

Key points:

- Locals described the raid as a "mass shooting"
- Australian sources and Afghan witnesses confirm civilians were killed in the raid
- The Inspector-General of the Australian Defence Force will soon deliver findings on an investigation into alleged war crimes in Afghanistan

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The raid is believed to be the worst one-day death toll uncovered to date of alleged unlawful killings by Australian soldiers in Afghanistan.

Afghan witnesses and Australian sources have told the ABC that the Special Air Service Regiment (SAS) operation left a number of Taliban dead.

But both say civilians were also shot during the frenzied raid, including a group of unarmed villagers near a tractor.

Australian sources confirmed a number of civilians were killed that day, but could not determine the precise number, telling the ABC there were up to 10 suspicious killings with another five Taliban dead.



Sara Aw villager Rahmatullah said he saw Australian soldiers shooting civilians.(ABC News)

ABC Investigations has obtained a list of names of 11 civilians that the villagers of Sara Aw say were killed in the December 2012 operation led by Zulu 1 and Zulu 2 patrols of the SAS.

The SAS was accompanied by Afghan special forces known as the Wakunish.

"It was 11:00am, three [helicopters] landed," said farmer Mohammad Nassim.

"There were three Taliban in nomad houses [near the village]. They resisted and were killed. But then they killed other people — civilians.

"Civilians were terrified when the shooting started, because they were mass shooting people," he said.

Villager Rahmatullah confirmed that three Taliban were hiding in a nearby nomad hut.

"But no-one [from the village] knew they were there," he said.

"They started resisting [the soldiers], then people learnt that they were killed. The rest of [those killed] were all civilians. One was Mohammad Azam, my brother."

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Villagers killed while transporting onions



Abdul Qadus's brother was killed in the raid on Sara Aw village.(ABC News)

ABC Investigations has been told by sources that the Taliban fighters were killed by the Zulu 2 patrol and weapons were recovered.



The burial site of one of the men killed during the 2012 raid of Sara-Aw by Australian SAS soldiers. (ABC News)

But a number of civilians were then killed near a tractor in what appears to be a mass shooting.

This account is backed by villagers interviewed separately by an Afghan journalist engaged by ABC Investigations who travelled to Sara Aw.

Abdul Qadus says his brother Abdul Salim was driving the tractor when he was shot dead.

"At the time he was carrying a load of onions, he was taking them to the city. There were some other people with him as well," Abdul Qadus said.

"The two other people who were near the Taliban in the area, I saw them being shot and killed and they didn't have anything with them.

"Another one was my cousin who was sitting and packing onions when they shot and killed him there."

'They were shooting people intentionally'



Sara Aw local Mohammad Nassim saw the Australian special forces "mass shooting" villagers.(ABC News)

Rahmatullah was irrigating his field when the Australians jumped off the helicopters and engaged the Taliban.

"First, when the helicopters landed, they started with the Taliban. They also shot other people who were there as well. The tractor moved from the area because they were scared."

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He says the Australians came after them.

"[They] shot them at the tractor. They were shooting people intentionally. They were mass shooting," Rahmatullah said.

"Then some people busy with irrigation were shot, some were shot near the onions. Some people went in the tractor and they were shot in the tractor," Mohammad Nassim said.

ABC Investigations understands the Zulu 1 patrol was involved in the shooting at the tractor where at least five Afghans were killed and that some members of the SAS patrol were unhappy about what happened.

There were no weapons found on the victims after the shooting.

Abdul Qadus was wounded in the raid and later evacuated by the Australians.

"When I got injured, they took me to the Afghan National Army hospital at Kandahar airbase," he said.

"I was there two days and nights."

The Inspector-General of the Australian Defence Force (IGADF) has spent the past four years investigating rumours and allegations of war crimes committed by Australian special forces in Afghanistan.

Investigators are looking into more than 55 separate incidents of alleged breaches of the rules of war between 2005 and 2016.

More than 330 people have so far given evidence to the inquiry.

The IGADF report is expected to be delivered in the coming weeks.

When contacted for a response to this story, an Australian Defence Force spokesperson said: "It is not appropriate for Defence to comment on matters that may or may not be the subject of the Afghanistan Inquiry."

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