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## Gambling Life and Limb: Humanitarian Hazards

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# Gambling Life and Limb: Humanitarian Hazards

Noncombatants, specifically journalists, war correspondents and humanitarian workers take extreme risks and make serious sacrifices while operating in conflict areas around the world. Despite being non-combatants, such individuals are often at the forefront of danger and share the risk of bodily harm with those on the front lines. This article discusses some of the recent casualties suffered by noncombatants in conflict and post-conflict regions.

On 23 October 2010, *New York Times* war photographer João Silva became a double below-knee amputee after stepping on an anti-personnel mine in Afghanistan a mere 300 meters (984 feet) from the U.S. base he had left earlier that morning.<sup>1</sup> Embedded with a unit of U.S. infantry and an accompanying minesweeper team, Silva was traveling through an area near Arghandab when he accidentally detonated a mine, reportedly no bigger than a can of floor polish. In addition to Silva, three U.S. servicemen were injured in the incident and received concussions from the blast. Within seconds, field medics rushed to Silva's aid and, fortunately, were able to prevent an excessive loss of blood, securing the photographer's survival. Following his injuries, Silva was flown to Kandahar Air Field, the joint American/NATO base in the region, for surgery before being sent to Bagram Air Base near Kabul and then on to a hospital in Germany. Doctors at Kandahar credited Silva's survival to the rapid response of the soldiers from the unit in which he was embedded.<sup>2</sup> Upon receiving treatment in Germany, Silva spent time at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C. (U.S.), for rehabilitation.<sup>3</sup>

Known throughout the world as one of the top war photographers, Silva could be considered a legend. He belonged to the well-known "Bang Bang Club," a name primarily associated with four photographers active within the townships of South Africa during the Apartheid period in the early 1990s. Silva and his colleagues gained popularity through their coverage of the violence during that period. One of only two surviving members of the group, Silva has worked in Afghanistan, Iraq, southern Africa, the Balkans and the Middle East.<sup>4</sup> Bill Keller, Executive Editor of *The New York Times*, noted that Silva continued to shoot photos even after the landmine detonated under him. In response to the incident, Greg Marinovich, the other surviving member of the South African group with whom Silva wrote the book *The*



British war photographer Giles Duley lost three limbs to an improvised explosive device in Afghanistan. Photo courtesy of Hastings Observer Group/a friend.

*Bang Bang Club*,<sup>5</sup> said Silva is "the most talented and courageous contemporary conflict photographer. Bar none."<sup>6</sup>

This past February, British photographer Giles Duley lost three limbs to an improvised explosive device while traveling with U.S. troops near Sangsar in Kandahar province in Afghanistan. Having been in the country for less than two weeks shooting photos for Camera Press, Duley was accompanying U.S. soldiers when he triggered an explosion. While he did not suffer any internal injuries, both of his legs were severed—one

above the knee and the other below—along with his left arm below the elbow.<sup>7</sup> After being flown to Kandahar Air Field for amputations, Duley was flown back to the U.K. to Queen Elizabeth hospital in Birmingham for further treatment.<sup>8</sup> Prior to the injuries he received in Afghanistan, Giles Duley spent time as a fashion and music photographer before turning his attention to humanitarian work. In addition to working for Camera Press, Duley worked for *Médecins sans Frontières*. His photographs have been featured in *Rolling Stone*, the *Sunday Times* and *Vogue*.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, Duley won the 2010 *Prix de la Photographie Paris* for his photograph of a southern Sudanese woman delivering a baby.<sup>7</sup>

After spending 110 days in the hospital, Duley was sent to a military rehabilitation facility at Headly Court for physiotherapy.<sup>9</sup> He explained that the use of prosthetic legs "takes 260 percent more effort than walking with normal legs"; as a result, physiotherapy is intensive and activities include rowing, swimming and weight lifting.<sup>8</sup> Despite having suffered a triple amputation, Duley has vowed to return to work, stating that he has received hundreds of e-mails encouraging him to come back once he has recovered. In addition, Duley told reporters he had actually vowed that his injuries would not prevent him from returning to his field of work.<sup>9</sup> In fact,

Duley stated that he was "incredibly lucky," and that, while he survived thanks to the "brilliant" efforts of the U.S. troops, another person who suffered nearly identical injuries a week later did not live.<sup>9</sup>

Amid fierce fighting in the streets of Misrata, Libya, Tim Hitherington and Chris Hondros were killed by a rocket-propelled grenade in a firefight involving Libyan rebels and pro-Qaddafi



Brian Carderelli (center) was killed by insurgents while documenting humanitarian aid in Afghanistan. Photo © The Carderelli Family

forces on 20 April 2011.<sup>8</sup> Tim Hitherington, a British citizen, was well-known for co-directing the Afghan war documentary *Restrepo*, nominated for an Oscar.<sup>9</sup> Chris Hondros was an American with a distinguished career, known for winning the Robert Capa Gold Medal for war photography.<sup>9</sup> Documenting the conflict of the Libyan civil war, Hitherington and Hondros were photographing frontline combat and were not

An unintended consequence of this requirement for security is that insurgents may perceive both armed personnel and unarmed noncombatants as hostile.

wearing protective gear when they were struck by the blast of the RPG. Allegedly, customs officials have attempted to stem the flow of protective jackets and helmets into the country from neighboring Egypt,<sup>10</sup> and this may have played a part in why the two were not

wearing it. Along with Hitherington and Hondros, Cornish photographer Guy Martin and American photographer Michael Christopher Brown were also present and suffered injuries.<sup>11</sup> Hitherington and Hondros were not the first journalists to be killed in Libya. In March 2011, two Libyan nationals, Ali Hassan al-Jaber and Mohammad al-Nabbous were killed.<sup>12,13</sup>

The tragedy surrounding these events is a testament to the danger faced by correspondents allowed to accompany combat units into areas of the world plagued by conflict and violence.

While these individuals risk life and limb to provide an objective view of the human suffering that most of the world cannot possibly witness themselves, so too do humanitarian workers sacrifice safety and security to serve conflict areas in desperate need of aid.



### Humanitarian Workers

On 8 October 2010, the death of U.K. citizen Linda Norgrove brought attention to the vulnerability of humanitarian aid workers in Afghanistan, a tragic outcome of one of many kidnappings involving humanitarian workers in the country.<sup>14</sup> An increase in violent encounters between aid workers and militant groups reveals a fading distinction between the occupying force and those involved in humanitarian aid, a division the Taliban does not honor. Deaths among aid workers have noticeably increased in recent years: in 2002, a total of 85 workers were killed, whereas 225 aid workers were killed in 2010.<sup>15</sup>

Although many nongovernmental organizations remain financially independent from state entities, many contract with U.S. government agencies such as the United States Agency for International Development.<sup>16</sup> From an insurgent perspective, this alignment links humanitarian aid workers and security

forces together, increasing their vulnerability. Notably, in order to receive grant funding from USAID to operate in conflict zones—mainly in Afghanistan and Iraq—NGOs are required to work in tandem with the U.S. military, effectively removing the appearance of a nonpartisan organization.<sup>17</sup> An unintended consequence of this requirement for security is that insurgents may perceive both armed personnel and unarmed noncombatants as hostile. If seen as an instrument of foreign militaries, aid organizations lose impartiality and legitimacy with the local people, and humanitarian workers, along with foreign security forces,

are considered legitimate targets.

Alternatively, insurgents don't always look for legitimate reasons to target humanitarian aid workers as evidenced by recent

events. Delivering much-needed medical aid to rural parts of the country, a group of 10 humanitarian workers, including six Americans, one Briton, one German and two Afghans, were accused of being Christian missionaries and American spies when Taliban insurgents robbed and murdered the team in the Sharrun Valley of northern Afghanistan on 5 August 2010.<sup>17,18</sup> Returning to Kabul from a venture deep within the



Brian Carderelli  
Photo © The Carderelli Family

Nuristan province, the team of humanitarian workers was “on an optometric expedition,”

according to Dirk Frans, director of the International Assistance Mission, the Christian aid group to which the workers belonged.<sup>19</sup> Those who were murdered included Briton Dr. Karen Woo, who was engaged and scheduled to return home for a wedding, Dr. Tom Little, an American optometrist who had been working in the country for four decades, and James Madison University graduate Brian Carderelli of Harrisonburg, Virginia (home to JMU's Center for International Stabilization and Recovery).<sup>18,19</sup> Dirk Frans responded to the accusation that the team consisted of missionaries and spies stating that it would be “against the laws of this country and the rules of our organization.”<sup>17</sup>

Elsewhere in the world, humanitarian aid workers in Sudan face dangers as the army of southern Sudan, the Sudan People's Liberation Army, has been accused of looting and harassment. In response to these claims, high-ranking Sudanese officers have stated that organizations would be expelled if such accusations become too harsh.<sup>20</sup> Humanitarian agencies have reported roughly 120 interferences with the delivery of aid in 2010, and top U.N. relief coordinator Valerie Amos is pressuring the southern-Sudanese administration to protect aid workers, stating the violence against aid workers is unacceptable.<sup>21</sup> A spokesman for the Sudanese Army acknowledged that workers belonging to a group known as Tearfund had been beaten and detained by the Army's soldiers, stating that workers had been supporting opposing parties.<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, Somali aid workers and journalists have been increasingly targeted. Conflict involving the Transitional Federal Government and Somali militias in opposition to the TFG has created a dangerous work environment for Somali journalists. In 2008, Amnesty International reported that journalists have been targeted specifically in an effort by each side to suppress coverage of the violence.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, Amnesty International pursued several cases in which humanitarian workers were killed and found that, in the majority of the 46 cases studied, workers were deliberately targeted with the intention of suppressing known human rights violations.<sup>22</sup>

### Deminers

Hardly free from the dangers faced by journalists, photographers and humanitarian workers, deminers have become increasingly subject to the risks involved in their efforts to clear landmines and being targeted by insurgents. In fact, the U.N.-affiliated Mine Action Coordination Center for Afghanistan reported that 17 deminers were killed in 2010 while another 35 were injured and 73 abducted.<sup>23</sup> Demining vehicles often resemble vehicles used by security forces, therein attracting opportunistic attacks on behalf of insurgent forces. This tactic has led to fatalities caused by misidentifying deminers as targets; however, deminers are also targeted delib-

erately. In several incidents, insurgents seemed interested in maintaining certain areas as mined, on account of having emplaced mines themselves or because they benefit from security forces being unable to use the area. As a result, insurgent forces have attacked and killed NGO deminers intentionally.<sup>23</sup> Alternatively, deminers have also been killed by IEDs, which can be construed as either purposeful or accidental as IED victims are often targeted indiscriminately.

### Conclusion

While many areas of the world desperately require humanitarian support, there are those who will stop at nothing to stifle the flow of aid or silence those who report on the harsh realities in these areas. Alternatively, there are also those who risk life and limb to provide much-needed support to these areas, be it through aid or through publicizing situations that would otherwise go unnoticed to the majority of the world. Without the dedication and vigilance of these individuals, scores of desperate populations will continue to suffer and their cries for help will not be heard. ♦

~Blake Williamson, CISR staff

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## In Remembrance: Shingairai Chimuriwo-Tichawangana

Shingairai Chimuriwo-Tichawangana, affectionately called “Shingie” by friends and colleagues, died at The Avenues Clinic in Harare, Zimbabwe early in the morning on 16 March 2011. Her death was the result of injuries obtained during a car accident the previous night. The accident, which occurred while Shingie was traveling home from a work function, was caused by a drunk driver who failed to yield at the intersection of Enterprise and Ridgeway roads in Harare.

At 30 years old, Shingie was the youngest employee of the Norwegian People's Aid office in Zimbabwe. She started working part-time with NPA in the 1990s and in 1993, traveled to

Bergen, Norway to study in a year-long program for her master's degree. She returned to Zimbabwe in 2001 and became NPA Zimbabwe's Program Coordinator in 2004. Shingie was passionate about promoting justice and equality, and her work at NPA involved empowering women, children and the poor of Zimbabwe.

A memorial service was held at Celebration Centre in Borrowdale at 10 a.m. on 18 March 2011. Following the service, Shingie was buried at Glen Forest Cemetery. She is survived by her husband, Fungai James Tichawangana. ♦

~Dan Baker, CISR staff



Aid awaiting distribution in Libya.  
Photo courtesy U.N./David Ohana.

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