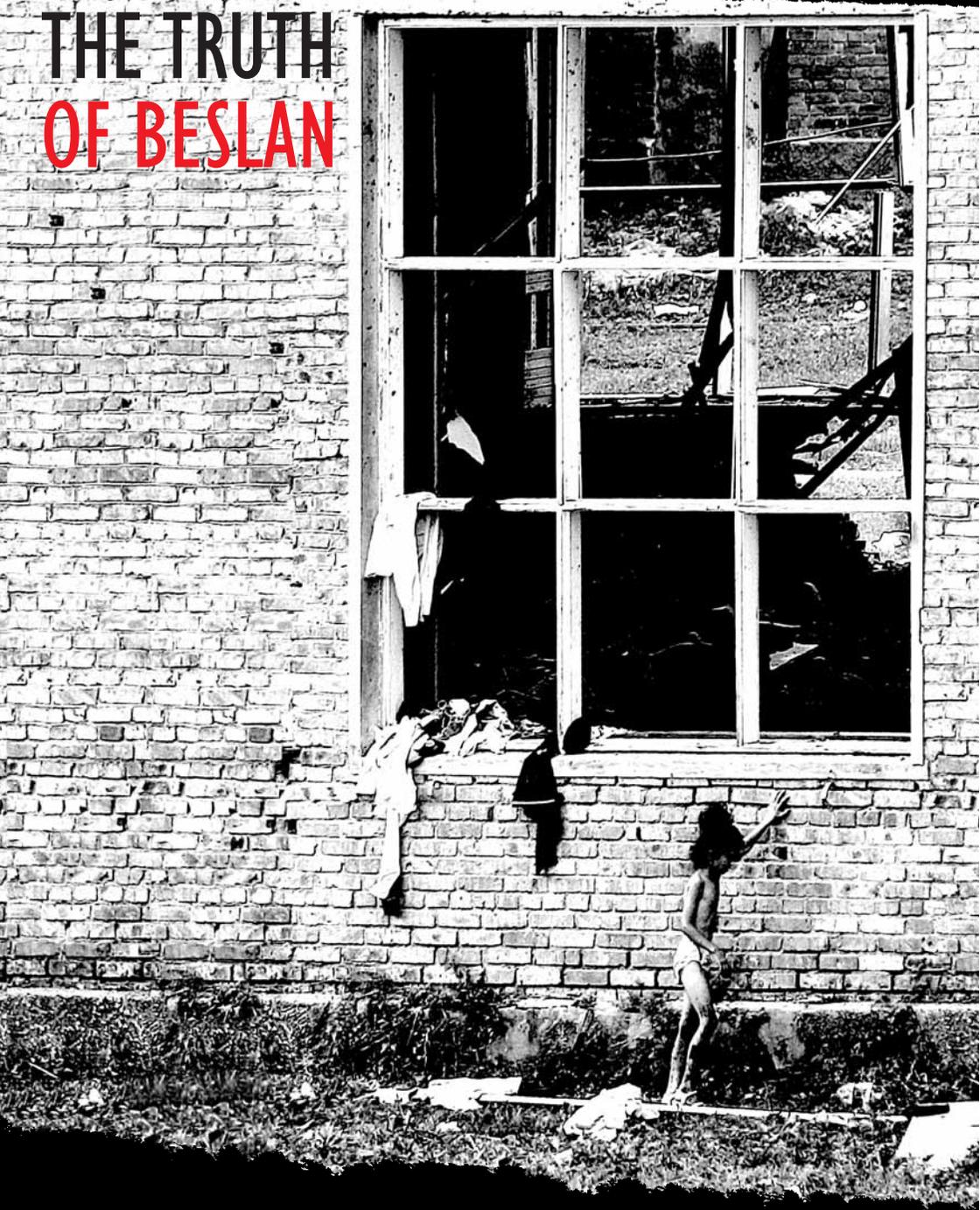


THE TRUTH OF BESLAN





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Beslan photographed from a satellite after the terrorist act

SCHOOL SEISURE

On September 1, 2004, in the North Ossetian town of Beslan, approximately at 9:20 a.m. terrorists took hostage a large group of schoolchildren and their parents who at that time attended a ceremony dedicated to the Day of Knowledge in the school yard.

Heavily-armed attackers arrived at the school in several groups. Shooting in the air, they herded the lost and frightened people into the school gym. A small number of people managed to escape. More than 1,100 people remained hostage, most of them children.

The terrorists placed the hostages in the school gym, right on the floor. The gym was overcrowded, so it was impossible to find a place to lie down or spread out one's legs.

The temperature outside was about 30 degrees Centigrade, so it was very stuffy in the gym, and the windows were closed.

The terrorists immediately mined the gym, surrounding it with tripwires, and attached improvised explosive devices to the walls and basketball hoops.

There were enough attackers and weapons to control the entire school building. Four or five gunmen always remained in the gym, with two of them holding their feet on the explosive devices.



NEGOTIATIONS AND HEADQUARTERS



September 2. Ruslan Aushev goes to the negotiations

In the first hours after the takeover, the terrorists handed over a note from the school building in which they wrote their contact number and their demands. The terrorists asked Alexander Dzasokhov (President of North Ossetia-Alania), Murat Zyazikov (President of Ingushetia) and Leonid Roshal (a famous pediatrician) to participate in the negotiations.

Murat Zyazikov did not come to Beslan during all those three days. Later he explained it by "an instruction from Moscow". A. Dzasokhov tried to get into the school alone, but an order came from Moscow to stop him by all means.

Dzasokhov managed to involve Ruslan Aushev in the negotiations who entered the school on September 2 and brought out 26 hostages: nursing mothers with infants. Besides, the terrorists gave Aushev a note with their political demands to President V. Putin concerning independence for Chechnya, withdrawal of Russian troops and war termination.

On September 2 Dzasokhov and Aushev managed to get in touch with Akhmed Zakayev who was located in London and had contacts with Aslan Maskhadov. Maskhadov who condemned the action, was ready to fly to Beslan and assist in hostages' release. He demanded to ensure his security upon arrival. Actually, by the morning of September 3 an

agreement about his arrival in Beslan was reached but by 1 p.m. the storming of the school began. Maskhadov could have been involved in the negotiations with the attackers even earlier: this was the plan of Anna Politkovskaya, a journalist with the Novaya Gazeta newspaper. But she was poisoned on board of an airplane on her way to Beslan.

For all the three days two headquarters actually operated in Beslan: one, the non-official one, was headed by the leader of North Ossetia Aleksander Dzasokhov. It was him and other Ossetian Government officials who tried to hold negotiations and involve different people, seek for any possible option to save the hostages. The main official operational headquarters was headed by the FSB General Valery Andreyev. Actual control was carried out by three FSB deputy directors, Generals Pronichev, Tikhonov and Anisimov. Analysis of these headquarters activities shows that from the very beginning these "force" headquarters were getting ready for the storming, not for negotiations. The course of events on September 3 after 1 p.m. proved this. Incompetent actions of the headquarters had a serious impact on the hostages and during the first days of the tragedy. Until September, 3 the headquarters, following the instructions of Dmitry Peskov, Deputy Press Secretary of

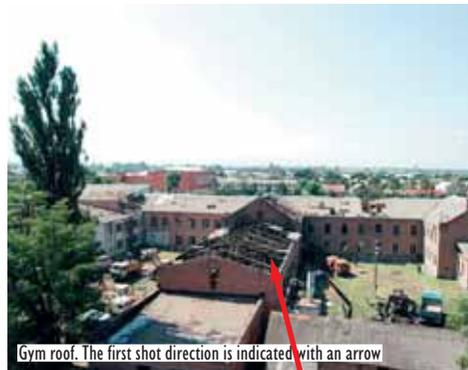


September 3. Sports hall an hour after the first explosions

STORM START

On September, 3, at about 11 a.m. Ruslan Aushev and Gutseriev who participated in the negotiations agreed on the removal from the school territory of the bodies of male hostages killed earlier.

At 12:55 p.m. a car with servicemen of the Ministry of emergencies (MChS) arrived to the school from the side opposite to the gym. They started to remove the bodies.



Gym roof. The first shot direction is indicated with an arrow



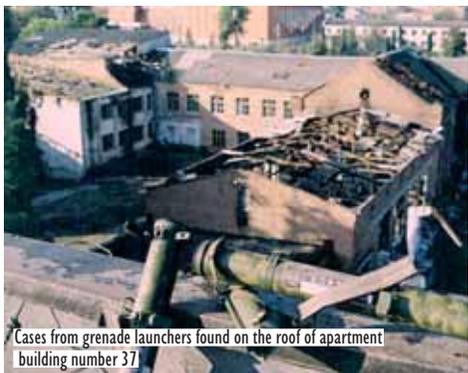
FIRST EXPLOSION

On 1:03 p.m. a powerful explosion was heard from the gym. The explosion was caused by the rupture of a thermobaric grenade from the grenade launcher system RPG-7V1 using TBG-7V grenades, the reactive offensive grenade RPO-2 or the reactive flame-thrower RPO-A. The shot was made from the five-storey building No. 37 in Shkolny Lane to the gym attic in the north-eastern corner adjoining the exercise-room. The shot broke through the roof and gym attic and the hostages saw a widening hole and then a fire quickly spreading round it.

Hostage Khanaeva A. A.: *"I was standing sideways near the wall. My daughter, she was standing as well, my son was sitting. I remember a flash. As if something flew in, do you understand: a sound, that very sound! There was a flash and I lost my conscience. Why did it explode and what was it? Now I am 300% sure this was provoked from outside. Nothing exploded inside!"*

Hostage Tsirikhova Z. M.: *"When the first explosion happened nobody expected it. It exploded when something flew in from outside. That huge one, like a ball – it flew in. A fireball. And that explosion and that nightmare!"*

Hostage Tomaeva L. A.: *"I could see: where the yard-side door was, on top, in the ceiling, a large hole appeared from a blast. And that hole was taking fire at a great speed!"*



Cases from grenade launchers found on the roof of apartment building number 37



Gap in the wall formed as a result of the second shot

SECOND EXPLOSION

The second blast in the gym sounded 22 seconds later. It was provoked by a shot from the five-storeyed building No. 41 in Shkolny Lane from RPO-1 (reactive offensive grenade) of fragmentation demolition action (TNT equivalent: 6.1 kg).

The shot destroyed the wall under the gym window facing the school yard.

As a result of the first blasts a large number of hostages died in the gym. Two terrorists who held their feet on pedals died, too.

Hostage Tusaeva E. Kh.: *"When I regained conscience dead bodies were lying over me."*

Hostage Dzebisova S. B.: *"Everything was ablaze, when I recovered dead bodies were under me. Dead bodies were also sitting on benches."*

Hostage Salkazanova V. U.: *"I took a look: my daughter's arm and skull flew off, her foot was completely fractured."*

After the first blasts some hostages managed to escape from the gym. The terrorists

mobbed about 300 threatened hostages to the main school building: to the canteen and other facilities. Many hostages wounded after the first explosions remained in the gym, they were weak, deafened, blocked by dead bodies or unconscious. They could not leave the gym. And the fire was gaining: the roof was on fire, fire started covering the walls and the floor. The explosive devices hung by the terrorists in the gym did not detonate. They started to explode from the fire, approximately an hour after first explosions.

Hostage Bigaeva S. T.: *"I wanted to jump out the window after the first explosion, but the second explosion caught me there: something fell over me. I do not know how long I stayed there, I think about two hours passed. And nobody was there! Nobody came to save us! They did not go inside! Then the militants told us, "Who is alive go to the canteen!" They repeated it several times. We did not want to go. But then they threatened to shoot us. And we went!"*

Hostage Kusaeva R. N.: *"With a corner of my eye I noticed that the roof was on fire. The militants stood up and cried, "Get up! Quicker, or you will be all dead". I stood up and walked."*

Hostage Sidakova Z. M.: *"We left the gym. Two undamaged bombs were hanging in the basket net. When I ran to the canteen I noticed that they did not explode. Where the roof was on fire there were explosives in the baskets that did not explode."*

Hostage Dzampaeva O. E.: *"Then the explosions were smaller. Just explosions, that's all. There still remained those bombs on both hoops."*

Hostage Kudzieva L. A.: *"When the second explosion broke out that militant Ibrahim told me to take the people out of the exercise room because the roof was on fire. I did not*



Second shot direction



RShG-1 rocket-propelled assault grenade

believe him. Then he took me to the gym and showed that the roof was on fire and could collapse. This was 30–40 minutes after the explosion. Then we left the exercise room trying not to step over corpses.”

Hostage Tsirikhova Z. M.: *“I moved to the corner with my dead son, closer to the exit. And sat on a dead woman there. Then I could see that something was burning over me. I looked there and saw that the explosives near the basketball net were on fire. When I saw that, I got so scared! I placed my son (dead) on that dead woman and ran to the coach room. I got inside, then two more women and a child got there. And “as soon as they entered there was another blast immediately. Then I got out, cleared my son and sat next to him again. On the dead woman.”*



FIRE

Immediately after the first shot at the gym roof the fire started to spread over the roof. As early as at 1:05 p.m. the headquarters received a message on fire outbreak in the attic.

The roof and the ceiling beams were on fire, burning beams and synthetic insulant were falling down. Fire engines tried to get to the fire but the head of the operational headquarters Tikhonov forbade them to do it.

In the burning gym there remained some hostages who were alive but could not leave the facilities themselves because of their wounds. Some hostages were saved from the fire and wreckage by volunteers and local residents but many remained inside.

Only 2 hours 20 minutes later the firemen obtained a permission from the operational headquarters to put out a fire. Approximately at the same time almost all the gym roof collapsed.

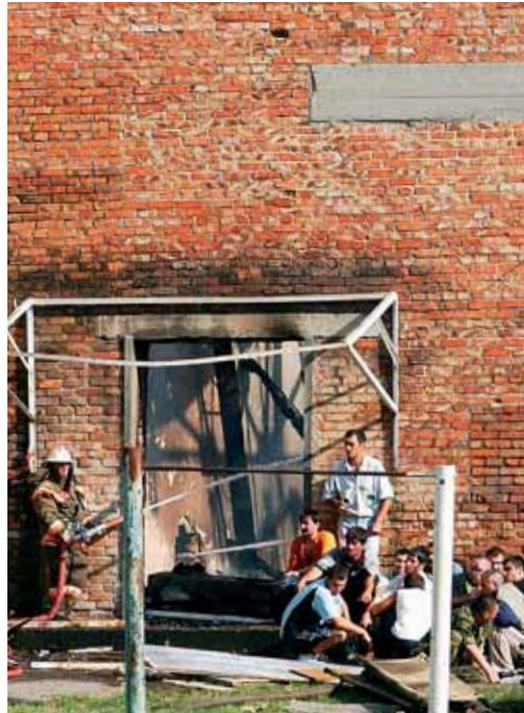
The fire in the gym was extinguished by 5:00 p.m. The next morning rescuers removed 116 burnt bodies of hostages, mostly children.

Eyewitness A. Dudiev: *“We entered the gym about 25 minutes after the blasts. The Special Forces arrived about 25–30 minutes later. Surely the roof did not fall immediately. When we entered the gym (through the exercise room) the roof started burning from the right corner. It was plastic: it was burning, falling. People, still alive, were watching themselves burning. But they could not even get out!”*

Hostage Zh. Dzboeva: *“When we were leaving the gym literally over dead bodies there was no fire! I wondered afterwards: how could it be that people were burnt? There were just twisted bodies, corpses, but no burnt ones. Wounded people also remained in the hall.”*



Local inhabitants rescue the wounded from the gym





SHOOTING AT THE SCHOOL



After the first blasts in the gym the terrorists took about 300 hostages to the main school building. Most people went to the canteen, others ran to the classes and to the school hall.

The firefight started immediately after the explosions. After 2 p.m. the Special Forces of the FSB Special Forces Center started shooting at the school using flame and grenade guns. At about 3 p.m. tank fire started. All that time there were hostages in the school together with the terrorists. They were looking out the windows, waving cloths and crying not to shoot. However, the shooting from both sides did not cease.

Hostage Kusaeva R. N.: *"With a corner of my eye I noticed that the roof was on fire. The militants stood up and cried, "Get up! Quicker, or you will all be dead". I stood up and walked. There was a massed intense fire. I was thinking where they were shooting from, why they were shooting at us. I had a feeling that the shooting was from the street. But I knew that terrorists were in the school building! So why was there that wild gunfire from the street? A terrorist told me, "Run, hide!" Me and my kids, we went to the canteen. There we immediately started to drink: people lashed to get water. I gave some to my children. The militants were telling us, "Run away, you can drink later!". And they took us to the school hall. Compared to the canteen, it was quiet in the hall. There were small children there as well. Somebody gave us some coffee and a can of condensed milk. So we sat there, and then*



Dining hall

some terrorists ran in again and told us, "This part of the building will be under fire soon. Get out of here!" We stood up again, took the children and ran away. On the first floor there were four terrorists. I remember one of them, a young man with a reddish beard and blue eyes, I told him, "Where are you taking us again? Are you going to kill us again?" And he replied, "Who is killing you? Don't you see who is killing you? We are not killing you, run and hide!" We were taken again to the canteen where I sat with my children near the window. Terrorists were trying to call someone: they would not stop calling! Then they started forcing people to stand up and put them on the windowsill, "Cry to your people not to kill you, for them to know you are hostages!" They showed us where to stand and took off the curtains. They made us waive those curtains. We all cried, "Do not shoot! There are children here! Do not kill us!"

Hostage Z. Sidakova: "There were shots from the street. When we were sitting under the window a woman with two boys crawled up to us.

Her face was covered with blood. She asked us to save her children: she already lost one boy in the gym, so she was asking to help her save those two. She put them under the table, then one militant told her to stand on the windowsill. I do not know why, but she did, and started to waive something, and immediately she was wounded and fell down. She said, "I think I am dying! I don't want my boys to see it!"

Hostage Khubulova S. B.: "Two terrorists ran into the canteen and started to cry: let someone take off a red blouse and start crying that there are friends here, that there are children here, so that they do not shoot at you". We were shot at from the Sport Complex, there were shots aimed at the very school, and that was not a machine gun, that was something else that made our heads explode. I do not know what it was, but that was no machine gun. They were shooting from something heavy, aiming right at the ceiling from the Sport Complex. The Special Forces saved us from the canteen: 3 soldiers jumped in."



Southern wing of the school which hostages moved from the gym to



Inside the southern wing

Eyewitness Edziev Kh. K.: "There were lots of shots, more than 3–4 from a tank missile. In response to that fire the militants shot from an AT hand weapon at the tank from the school. A grenade hit the tower superficially but the machine gun turned to the direction of DOSAAF (Voluntary Association for Assistance to Army, Aviation and Fleet) and got stuck. Together with the police officer from the

Pravoberezhny District Department we ran up to the tank, started to knock on the armour (the police officer used a gun). We demanded to cease the fire as there were hostages in the ground-floor windows of the canteen: I clearly saw a woman in the forth window from the right corner and a little girl in the next window who were waving some light cloths. There was no reaction from the tank crew."



NUMBER OF VICTIMS

During the terrorist attack of School No.1 5 men were killed. By the evening of September, 1 13 more men were killed: some of them were wounded as a result of an explosion inside the school (a female bomber was killed as a result of that explosion). By the first blasts on September 3, 18 people had been killed. On September, 3 as a result of explosions in the gym, shooting and fire, 312 people died. Among them:

- 116 bodies burnt during the fire were removed from the gym on September, 4;
- 77 hostages died mainly in the gym and in the adjacent facilities;
- 107 people died outside the gym, on the territory of the canteen, classes and school hall as a result of the school shooting from outside;
- While saving hostages, 10 soldiers of the Special Forces groups "Alfa" and "Vypel" died heroically, as well as 2 members of the Ministry of Emergencies.





Nurpasha Kulaev in the prisoner's box



One of the cars that the terrorists arrived in

NUMBER OF TERRORISTS

According to the official version, there were 32 attackers who seized the Beslan school. 31 were killed, one (Nurpasha Kulaev) was detained. The investigation stated that the attackers arrived at the school in a GAZ-66 vehicle and a car

However, this version is denied by the hostages themselves. Trying to reconstruct the picture of the attack according to the testimony of hostages and eyewitnesses, we can come to a conclusion that there were

several groups of attackers who approached the school from different directions. There were also several vehicles with terrorists. According to the calculations, the number of terrorists could reach 60–70 people.

It is interesting that former hostages did not find some of the militants who kept them in the school among the dead bodies. However, as only 31 dead bodies of the terrorists were found at the location, the prosecutor's office continues to insist on its version.

The General Prosecutor's Office has been investigating the act of terror in Beslan for more than three years, but so far it has not arrived at any conclusions. A single terrorist N. Kulaev was convicted, but the actions of the government officials belonging to the operational headquarters who allowed the carnage were not examined. No conclusions were made, nobody was punished.

The victims of the terrorists have been trying to get to the truth for three years already, but the Prosecutor's Office and the courts seem to be bullying the former hostages and those who lost their children, relatives and friends. The rights of the victims are constantly violated, the courts side with the Prosecutor's Office, while the latter covers their superiors. The system protects itself but nobody managed to protect the children. During their liberation the hostages were first shot from the grenade guns, then burnt and those who survived faced tank fire.

Sooner or later the history will return to the "Beslan issue" and all the guilty people will be identified and punished. Only an honest and objective investigation and acknowledgement of the bitter truth will guarantee to all Russian taking their children to school that no single FSB general will ever dare order to shoot at our children from flame guns and grenade guns. Only our mutual civil courage will allow us, sooner or later, to force the Prosecutor's Office and the courts to protect the rights of citizens, not those of bureaucrats and authorities. Only our civil audacity will enable us to replace a criminal bureaucratic system exhausting the country and common people. It is us, citizens, who must stop lawlessness and impunity.

To get more detailed information about the conclusions of the independent investigation of the Beslan terrorist act, see the report of Yu. P. Saveliev "Beslan: Hostages's Truth" published on the site www.pravdabeslana.ru. There you can also find verbatim records of the court sessions, materials of criminal cases, photo and video materials, different documents casting light on the circumstances of the Beslan tragedy.

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