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Nothing but the Truth

Anna Politkovskaya



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NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH

SELECTED DISPATCHES

*Translated from the Russian by Arch Tait
With a Foreword by
Helena Kennedy*



Harvill Secker
LONDON

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A Russian Diary

She represented the honour and conscience of Russia, and probably nobody will ever know the source of her fanatical courage and love of the work she was doing.

Liza Umarova, Chechen singer

FOREWORD

‘Go to where the silence is and say something’
Amy Goodman, *Columbia Journalism Review*, 1999

In early 2005 I was invited by PEN, the organisation devoted to the promotion of literature and freedom of expression, to present an award to Anna Politkovskaya. I was delighted to have the opportunity of meeting her as I knew her work and greatly admired her courageous opposition both to the Chechen conflict and to President Putin’s authoritarian regime. Her fearlessness in the face of grave danger made her one of the few international journalists whom human rights activists and lawyers held in awe.

My tribute to Anna saluted her uncompromising coverage of the horrors which had befallen the people of Chechnya; it recalled the torture and terrifying mock execution to which she had been subjected by Russian troops for documenting the atrocities perpetrated against the civilian population. Likewise, her reports of the 2002 Moscow theatre siege and its bloody denouement, and her resolute defiance of threats from the state authorities and other shady operators within the Russian political firmament.

We owed her a debt of gratitude for helping the West reach a far better understanding of the emerging landscape in post-Soviet Russia and for shining a clearer light on the true nature of the occupation of Chechnya, a brutal conflict wilfully misrepresented as Russia’s private front in the war on terror. No democracy is worthy of the name if freedom of the press is curtailed or writers and journalists are crushed; yet here was a writer who – at great personal risk – defied state intimidation and speak truth to power.

* * *

Anna received the reward with good humour and humility. As this collection of her writing shows, the reach of her journalism extended far beyond coverage of individual cataclysmic events. She frequently lifted the veil on more systemic inhumanity which did not attract as much international interest. Her tenacious investigations involved dogged correspondence and days sitting in court. Her coverage of the case of ‘The Cadet’, for example, reveals her staying power and commitment to reporting long trials which might have defeated others. Sergey Lapin – The Cadet – was a member of the Russian military in Chechnya believed to be responsible for many of the ‘disappearances’ of Chechens dragged from their homes, never to be seen again. He had a reputation as a torturer and extra-judicial killer but despite efforts to bring him to trial was able to manipulate the legal process by intimidation and covert influence. It was Anna’s belief that the courts’ failures to deliver justice must be documented and that it was the role of the press, on behalf of those who had suffered at his hands, to demand transparency and accountability. She had met the wives and mothers of The Cadet’s victims, heard their stories and knew he bore responsibility. Her fight for them helped lead to his eventual conviction.

After the award ceremony we sat drinking wine and talking politics. Anna painted a haunting portrait of Putin’s Russia, a country governed by an administration which bore many of the hallmarks of Stalin’s; here was a land whose own secret services suppressed civil liberties and where fear stalked universities, newsrooms and every corridor in which democracy might have flourished.

Anna had been on the receiving end of death threats delivered over the telephone and posted on the internet. Articles had been published defaming her, she had been treated with derision and social ostracism to the extent that some former friends and colleagues avoided contact for fear of becoming tarnished by association. She spoke with sadness about the toll on her private life, the effects on her family and children. Yet her isolation and aloneness, instead of diminishing her, appeared to have become a source of determination and strength, as though she had crossed some Rubicon and was now beyond ordinary conceptions of fear or courage.

Shortly before the prize-giving she had been poisoned as she flew to Rostov-on-Don to cover the Beslan hostage crisis. Armed terrorists were holding over a thousand school children and adults captive, a siege which ended in massive loss of life. But Anna was never to arrive; as we sat into the night she described the episode with terrifying vividness. How she had made telephone calls to colleagues which must have been intercepted. How she had boarded the plane and accepted a small cup of black tea before take-off only to awaken in a hospital ward. Despite ourselves, we tend to nurture the fragile hope that heaping international honours upon those who make a stand, who defend freedom of expression, justice and liberty, affords them some cloak of immunity from retribution, however powerful, lawless or vengeful their enemies. In Anna's case such optimism was ill-founded.

She was shot dead on 7 October 2006, news which came like a physical blow. Yet whatever driving force gave her the strength to persist had stayed with her until the end. She was a truly exceptional woman, whose bravery in confronting oppression is her legacy to the world and remains a source of inspiration for us all.

I remember taking leave of her the night of the award and asking whether she might not think of leaving Russia, at least temporarily. She held my hand, smiling, and said, 'Exile is not for me. The way they win.'

Helena Kennedy C

~~Anna rang me at the hospital in the morning, before 10 o'clock. She was supposed to be coming~~ visit, this was her day, but something had come up at home. Anna said my second daughter, Lena, would come instead, and promised that we would definitely meet on Sunday. She sounded in a good mood, her voice was cheerful. She asked how I was feeling and whether I was reading a book. She knew I love historical literature and had brought me Alexander Manko's *The Most August Court under the Sign of Hymenaeus*. She had not read it herself. I said, 'Anya, it is difficult for me to read. I have to read every page three times because I have Father before my eyes all the time.' [Raisa Mazepa's husband had died shortly before.] She tried to calm me, 'He didn't suffer. Everything happened very quickly. He was coming to visit you. Let's talk about the book instead.' I said, 'Anya there is an epigraph on page 179 which really moves me. It is so much a part of us, so Russian.' I read it to her. 'There are drunken years in the history of peoples. You have to live through them, but you can never truly live in them.'

'Oh, Mum,' she replied, 'put a bookmark there, don't forget.' I asked my daughter who the author of the epigraph was, and she told me about Nadezhda Teffi, a famous Russian poetess. Then she said, 'Speak to you tomorrow, Mum.' She was in a very good mood. Or perhaps she was in a bad mood and was just pretending everything was fine in order not to upset me.

I was always very worried about her. Shortly before I went into hospital we had a talk. She was preparing an article about Chechnya, and I simply begged her to be careful. I remember she said, 'Of course I know the sword of Damocles is always hanging over me. I know it, but I won't give in.'

Raisa Mazepa (Anna Politkovskaya's mother), *Novaya gazeta*

23 October 2000

SO WHAT AM I GUILTY OF?

[This article was found in Anna Politkovskaya's computer after her death and is addressed to readers abroad.]

'Kovernys', a Russian clown whose job in the olden days was to keep the audience laughing while the circus arena was changed between acts. If he failed to make them laugh, the ladies and gentlemen booed him and the management sacked him.

Almost the entire present generation of Russian journalists, and those sections of the mass media which have survived to date, are clowns of this kind, a Big Top of *kovernys* whose job is to keep the public entertained and, if they do have to write about anything serious, then merely to tell everyone how wonderful the Pyramid of Power is in all its manifestations. The Pyramid of Power is something President Putin has been busy constructing for the past five years, in which every official – from top to bottom, the entire bureaucratic hierarchy – is appointed either by him personally or by his appointees. It is an arrangement of the state which ensures that anybody given to thinking independently of their immediate superior is promptly removed from office. In Russia the people thus appointed are described by Putin's Presidential Administration, which effectively runs the country, as 'on side'. Anybody not on side is an enemy. The vast majority of those working in the media support this dualism. Their reports detail how good on-side people are, and deplore the despicable nature of their enemies. The latter include liberally inclined politicians, human rights activists, and 'enemy democrats', who are generally characterised as having sold out to the West. An example of an on-side democrat is, of course, President Putin himself. The newspapers and television give top priority to detailed 'exposés' of the grants enemies have received from the West for their activities.

Journalists and television presenters have taken enthusiastically to their new role in the Big Top. The battle for the right to convey impartial information, rather than act as servants of the Presidential Administration, is already a thing of the past. An atmosphere of intellectual and moral stagnation prevails in the profession to which I too belong, and it has to be said that most of my fellow journalists are not greatly troubled by this reversion from journalism to propagandising on behalf of the powers that be. They openly admit that they are fed information about enemies by members of the Presidential Administration, and are told what to cover and what to steer clear of.

What happens to journalists who don't want to perform in the Big Top? They become pariahs. I am not exaggerating.

My last assignment to the North Caucasus, to report from Chechnya, Ingushetia, and Dagestan, was in August 2006. I wanted to interview a senior Chechen official about the success or failure of an amnesty for resistance fighters which the Director of the Federal Security Bureau, the FSB, had declared.

I scribbled down an address in Grozny, a ruined private house with a broken fence on the city outskirts, and slipped it to him without further explanation. We had talked in Moscow about the fact that I would be coming and would want to interview him. A day later he sent someone there who said cryptically, 'I have been asked to tell you everything is fine'. That meant the official would see me, or more precisely that he would come strolling in carrying a string bag and looking as if he had just gone out to buy a loaf of bread.

His information was invaluable, and completely undermined the official account of how the

amnesty was going. It was conveyed to me in a room two metres square with a tiny window whose curtains were firmly drawn. Before the war it had been a shed, but when the main house was bombed its owners had to use it as kitchen, bedroom and bathroom combined. They let me use it with considerable trepidation, but they are old friends about whose misfortunes I wrote some years ago when their son was abducted.

Why did the official and I go to these lengths? Were we mad, or trying to bring a little excitement into our lives? Far from it. Open fraternisation between an opposition-inclined gatherer of information like me or another of my *Novaya gazeta* colleagues and an on-side government official would spell disaster for both of us.

That same senior official subsequently brought to the sometime shed resistance fighters who wanted to lay down their arms but not to take part in the official circus performance. They passed on a lot of interesting information about why none of the fighters wanted to surrender to the regime: they believed the Government was only interested in public relations and could not be trusted.

‘Nobody wants to surrender!’ The pundits will find that hard to believe. For weeks Russian television has shown dodgy-looking individuals declaring that they want to accept the amnesty terms and that they ‘trust Ramzan’. Ramzan Kadyrov is President Putin’s Chechen favourite, appointed Prime Minister with blithe disregard for the fact that the man is a complete idiot, bereft of education, brains or a discernible talent for anything other than mayhem and violent robbery.

To these unholy gatherings squads of journalist-clowns are brought along (I don’t get invited). They write everything down carefully in their notebooks, take their photographs, file their reports, and a totally distorted image of reality results. An image, however, which is pleasing to those who declared the amnesty.

You don’t get used to this, but you learn to live with it. It is exactly the way I have had to work throughout the Second War in the North Caucasus. To begin with I was hiding from the Russian federal troops, but always able to make contact clandestinely with individuals through trusted intermediaries, so that my informants would not be denounced to the generals. When Putin’s plan of Chechenisation succeeded (setting ‘good’ Chechens loyal to the Kremlin to killing ‘bad’ Chechens who opposed it), the same subterfuge applied when talking to ‘good’ Chechen officials. The situation is no different in Moscow, or in Kabardino-Balkaria, or Ingushetia. The virus is very widespread.

At least a circus performance does not last long, and the regime availing itself of the services of clownish journalists has the longevity of a mouldering mushroom. Purging the news has produced a blatant lie orchestrated by officials eager to promote a ‘correct image of Russia under Putin’. Even now it is producing tragedies the regime cannot cope with and which can sink their aircraft carrier, no matter how invincible it may appear. The small town of Kondopoga in Karelia, on the border with Finland, was the scene of vodka-fuelled anti-Caucasian race riots which resulted in several deaths. Nationalistic parades and racially motivated attacks by ‘patriots’ are a direct consequence of the regime’s pathological lying and the lack of any real dialogue between the state authorities and the Russian people. The state closes its eyes to the fact that the majority of our people live in abject poverty, and that the real standard of living outside of Moscow is much lower than claimed. The corruption within Putin’s Pyramid of Power exceeds even the highs previously attained, and a young generation is growing up both ill-educated, and militant because of their poverty.

I loathe the current ideology which divides people into those who are ‘on side’, ‘not on side’, or even ‘on the wrong side’. If a journalist is on side he or she will receive awards and honours, and perhaps be invited to become a Deputy in the Duma. Invited, mind, not elected. We don’t have parliamentary elections any more in the traditional sense of the word, with campaigning, publication of manifestos, debates. In Russia the Kremlin summons those who are irreproachably on side, who salute at the right times, and they are enlisted in the United Russia party, with all that entails.

Today a journalist who is not on side is an outcast. I have never sought my present pariah status and it makes me feel like a beached dolphin. I am no political infighter.

I will not go into the other joys of the path I have chosen: the poisoning, the arrests, the menacing by mail and over the Internet, the telephoned death threats. The main thing is to get on with my job, describe the life I see, to receive visitors every day in our newspaper's offices who have nowhere else to bring their troubles, because the Kremlin finds their stories off-message. The only place they can be aired is in our newspaper, *Novaya gazeta*.

What am I guilty of? I have merely reported what I witnessed, nothing but the truth.

Published in a special issue of *Soyuz zhurnalistov*, 26 October 2006

1. Should Lives Be Sacrificed to Journalism?

A QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE 'TERRITORY OF GLASNOST' PROJECT

Circulated to journalists, editors, and columnists of *Novaya gazeta*.

1. *Surname and first name, or pen-name:* Politkovskaya, Anna.
2. *Topic of specialisation:* Anything of interest to our readers.
3. *Your professional credo, or motto:* What matters is the information, not what you think about it.
4. *What is your first priority as a journalist?* To provide as much information as possible.
5. *What do you think about the times you live in, the people, the country?* The people are remarkable; the country is Soviet; the times are another Time of Troubles.
6. *What do you find most difficult to write about (and which story most illustrates that)?* O times.
7. *What do you most enjoy writing about (and story)?* People.
8. *Why and for whom are you doing your work?* For people, and for the sake of people.
9. *How do you rate the work of those in power today who take decisions at the highest level and shape Russia's reputation both inside Russia and abroad (the President, government, judiciary, parliamentary deputies, and business elite)?* Management of the state extremely inefficient.
10. *How do you rate the willingness of people to regard themselves as representatives of civil society and to engage in open dialogue with the state authorities?* Not highly. There is too much fear in society and too little idealism.
11. *How do you rate the level of democracy and independence of the press? What do you think is happening in Russia to freedom of speech, and where do you personally obtain reliable information (not as a professional, but as a user)?* Freedom of speech is on its last legs. I only trust information 100 per cent if I have obtained it myself.
12. *What recent events do you consider to have been a landmark for yourself, the country, and society (positive or negative)?* For the country, the occupation of Ingushetia; for society, the same; for myself, the same.
13. *What do you see as the main problems facing Russian society?* The fact that most people think it will never happen to them.
14. *What qualities most impress you, and which most disappoint you, in public figures and ordinary people? (Give examples if possible.)* I admire openness and sincerity. I am nauseated by lying and people who think they are cunning.
15. *Which politicians, economists, people in the arts and culture, and also private citizens could you nominate for Person of the Year, Hero of Our Times, or as iconic personalities in present-day Russia?* There are no heroes in sight. If we had one he would stop the war.
16. *How do you rate the quality of life in Russia? What factors should be taken into account?* Very low. The number of poor people is enormous and that is a disgrace.

17. *What can and should people (society), politicians, officials (the state), and journalists do to improve the quality of life in Russia?* Journalists should write; politicians should make fuss and not wallow in luxury; and officials should not steal from poor people.

FSB OFFICERS CARRY OUT ANOTHER OF THEIR SPECIAL OPERATIONS AGAINST NOVAYA GAZETA

The Editorial Team of *Novaya gazeta*

28 February 2000

As special operations go, this was a pretty dismal effort. For technical competence we award the Chekists three points, but for artistic merit, alas, zero.*

A statement issued by FSB representative Ilya Shabalkin claims that *Novaya gazeta* and its special correspondent Anna Politkovskaya are trying to exploit her assignments in Chechnya to 'resolve their financial problems and disagreements with certain foundations'. Shabalkin has declared that Politkovskaya's assignments are characterised by un-desirable sensationalism and are hindering the counter-terrorist operation in Chechnya. He also baldly asserts that these sensations are part of an attempt to persuade the Soros Foundation to write off a grant of \$14,000 which *Novaya gazeta* received for work in political hotspots.

Shabalkin claims that our newspaper has failed to provide the Foundation's Open Society Institute with an interim report, and that the Foundation has informed us in writing that it proposes to cease its financial support. Chekist Shabalkin additionally makes a particular point of claiming that Anna Politkovskaya lacked accreditation to work as a journalist in Chechnya.

All the pointers to a monstrous conspiracy are there: the link to American money, spreading disaffection among Russian troops on the orders of transatlantic fat cats, and absence of official permission to be operating in Chechnya at all.

The discovery of this plot against the Russian Federation was announced on all the main TV channels, distributed over the Interfax newswire, and gleefully published on the websites of the Effective Politics Foundation. It's a chore, but we have to respond. *Novaya gazeta*, like hundreds of other organisations, was awarded a grant, of \$55,000, by the Soros Foundation for the purposes of establishing a database of individuals who have disappeared without trace in Chechnya; to facilitate the release of prisoners and hostages; and to provide support to an orphanage and old people's home. It is worth remarking that, although the grant was awarded last year, we have been doing all this work since 1994.

Our colleague Vyacheslav Izmailov succeeded in freeing more than 170 kidnap victims. Through the efforts of *Novaya gazeta*, and particularly those of our columnist Anna Politkovskaya, dozens of old people survived two winters in an old people's home in Grozny. With the aid of the Interior Ministry we moved the old people, who had completely lost hope, back to their relatives. The Soros Foundation appreciated these efforts and offered financial support, which we were glad to accept.

Of the \$55,000 awarded, we have so far received only a first payment of less than \$14,000. The reason is quite simply that for three months we had to hide Anna Politkovskaya outside the borders of Russia. When it was confirmed that an assassination attempt was being prepared against her, the law 'On Protection by the State' was invoked until the suspect was arrested. She was granted a special

status which we are not at liberty to write about.

~~For these reasons our report was submitted in February this year. The Soros Foundation has no complaint against *Novaya gazeta*, and in the coming 12 months we will be receiving the remaining \$41,000, and will continue our work.~~

In the allegations of hype surrounding Politkovskaya's assignments, Chekist Shabalkin has excelled himself. It was not we, or Politkovskaya, but the Press Office of the Joint Military Command which on 9–10 February issued a statement claiming that Politkovskaya had left the Commandant's Office in Shatoy without informing the military. Politkovskaya had good reason to leave. The facts communicated to her by the Military Prosecutors were too serious not to.

We repeat that we issued no statements, generated no hype. That was entirely the work of the FSB using the Army as its mouthpiece. So who set the ball rolling?

The answer as to why the FSB got so exercised is to be found in *Novaya gazeta*, Nos. 11 and 12. Using evidence from the criminal case and interviews with Military Prosecutors, Politkovskaya proved with facts and documents to hand that the shooting of six civilians, including a pregnant woman, and the subsequent burning of their bodies had been perpetrated by special operations troops of Military Intelligence. It is a unique case. Thanks to the courage of the Prosecutors and the public naming of the suspects, 10 military personnel have been arrested.

The FSB makes no attempt to refute these facts in its statement: it simply ignores them. The FSB is not concerned that this crime inflames and aggravates the war. The FSB is merely concerned that Politkovskaya did not have the requisite accreditation.

Actually, she did, and we print it here. Come on, Chekists! You will need to do better than this when preparing your disinformation.

In order to implement their highly intelligent campaign, the Chekists used some of our journalistic colleagues as stooges. First the ultra-respectable *Vedomosti* carried an item to the effect that we had failed to provide a report to the Soros Foundation and that payment of our grant might be stopped. Why a serious business newspaper should suddenly start counting what by their standards is the smallest change in somebody else's pocket was baffling – until Shabalkin issued his announcement.

Statements were also distributed through Interfax, by then with our comments. At no point, alas, did our colleagues have qualms about printing private correspondence between *Novaya gazeta* and the Soros Foundation. You would think we were squandering taxpayers' money or the state budget.

How the correspondence was leaked is, however, a separate issue. One copy is in the possession of the Soros Foundation, and the original was received by *Novaya gazeta*'s editor through the post.

Neither the Foundation nor the editor of *Novaya gazeta*, needless to say, passed this to the press, so somebody has been intercepting our post, opening our correspondence, trying to monitor the newspaper's activity, and perhaps, also, the activity of the Foundation. It is gratifying to report that they found nothing more substantial than a delayed report.

As in our case, only the FSB's failures enable us to see what they are getting up to on taxpayer's money. As usual, they are trying to suggest a link between articles which tell the truth about the Chechen War and Western intelligence services, Western money, and so on.

The FSB likes to show how well informed it is about other people's affairs, especially when they are none of its business and not within its remit. So it is far easier for them publicly to point out problems in Russia which don't exist, than to find terrorists like Khattab or Basayev. Or perhaps it is Politkovskaya and our delayed reports which are preventing them from being able to do that. Perhaps this is how they justify their professional incompetence. The replies to these and other questions will, no doubt be obtained in court. Our lawyers are preparing to sue.

Don't be in too much of a hurry, Mr Shabalkin, to spoil your jacket by making a hole in it for the medal you hope to receive.

4 March 2002

First the Editor of *Novaya gazeta* requested that I, Special Correspondent Politkovskaya, should write an irate open letter to Mr Shabalkin. I thought about it and declined. Just too boring. Then the Editor said we needed to write an irate open letter to Shabalkin's boss, Mr Patrushev, who runs the FSB. I thought seriously about this but again declined. Someone who can't catch Basayev and Khattab with a team of many thousands is not of the slightest interest to me. He can't even make me irate.

Then write to Putin! But instead I wrote a letter to Major Nevmerzhitsky, Commander of the Reconnaissance of the Shatoy District Military Commandant's Office.

Major Nevmerzhitsky was a witness of the Shatoy tragedy – the murder and burning of the bodies of six civilians by soldiers of the Central Intelligence Directorate (GRU), which occurred on 1 January 2002 and was officially described by Khankala as an operation to capture the injured resistance leader, Khattab. It was this atrocity I was investigating during my February assignment in Chechnya. This so irritated the FSB that they embarked on the campaign of disinformation described above. Why did I address my letter to him? Because I felt like it.

Dear Vitaliy,

See what they have been getting up to while we were trudging the tracks of Shatoy! They are saying we did it for money. Army Headquarters in Khankala claimed as much, and it doesn't really matter whose vocal cords they used. You were running around in the mountains; gazing down on the murder scene in horror from a cliff, trying not to fall off; discussing for days who had killed whom and burned their bodies; having to face 28 orphans. That kind of work, according to Officer Shabalkin, has a dollar value.

Of course we have nothing to prove to each other, and could now just keep quiet. But you actually saw what happened at Dai and Nokhchi-Keloy, and on the road to Barzoy where the bodies of two soldiers and an officer whom the Shabalkins of this world have no interest in have been lying in the river for over two months. You know that this is not about dollars.

At first I was very angry and thought that if Shabalkin had been in our shoes he would have had a different tale to tell. Then I calmed down and started to feel sorry for the man. 'They' in Khankala have a hard life: they have to run around like servants whose masters are in a bad mood in the morning because their boots haven't been properly polished. It's really not that easy to talk about places you have never been to and things you have never seen, and to make it look as if you are doing a great job and do know everything that's going on. You and I would blow our brains out rather than jump through hoops like those but Shabalkin, poor sod, plods on. So we are more fortunate, having seen everything with our own eyes and not having to pretend. Although we are not happier when we think about what it is we have seen.

How are things in Shatoy? Have they given up sending helicopters from Khankala to catch wounded Khattabs? How is Victor Malchukov getting on, the Shatoy Military Commandant who long ago saw the reality of what is going on around him, a man with haunted eyes? It must be difficult for you. I have an easier time here in Moscow, deflecting the attacks of idiots. It's a piece of cake by comparison with the mountains.

Anna Politkovskaya

Around me my family are grim-faced. I am flying out to Chechnya again, only I won't be meeting with Vitaliy. I have other plans.

THE SAGA OF ANNA'S ASSIGNMENT IN SHATOY

14 February 2002

[On 11 January 2002, in what Army Headquarters officially described as an operation to capture the Chechen resistance leader, Khattab, soldiers of the Central Intelligence Directorate (GRU) murdered and burned the bodies of six civilians. Anna went to investigate.]

I take out the tape of my last assignment in Chechnya, and at the same time read through the newspapers and the news agency tapes.

Well, well. My colleagues seem to have been competing to see who could come up with the most unfounded stories. According to our esteemed Interfax news agency, I was detained on 9 February by the Shatoy District Military Commandant's Office during a special operation there because I did not have the necessary documents. It seems to concern nobody that there was no special operation in Shatoy, either immediately before, on, or after 9 February.

As I read on, the tone gets more caustic. It seems I escaped from the Commandant's Office and disappeared, thereby discrediting . . . I should be punished just where it hurts . . . The Press Office of the Joint Military Command in Chechnya fulminates that by my misconduct I have brought disgrace upon all journalists.

What actually happened was that on 8 February, the second day of my assignment, having made my way from Grozny to Shatoy, my first act, making no attempt at concealment, was to go directly to Sultan Mahomadov, the Director of the District Interior Affairs Office, and inform him of the purpose of my assignment: to investigate one of the most scandalous and tragic recent events in Chechnya, the extra-judicial execution and burning of the bodies of six civilians who were returning from Shatoy to their homes in the hill village of Nokhchi-Keloy on 10 January 2002. From the militia I went to the office of the District Administration and, as required, asked them to put a stamp confirming my arrival on my assignment papers. They duly did so.

From the District Administration I set off to the District Military Commandant's Office, to see the Commandant, Colonel Victor Malchukov. Why did I go to see him? Because, quite simply, I have known him for a long time, and respect his ability to talk to people in the villages, thereby resolving innumerable conflicts which arise between the Army and the civilian population.

We sat together and worked out a plan of how I could best do the job my newspaper had entrusted me with. The Colonel said that he had to fly to a meeting in Khankala the next morning, so alas there was a limit to the help he could give me.

My journalistic colleagues reported that I had been 'detained', and had 'escaped'. This was complete nonsense, although admittedly only in respect of 8 February, before the FSB piled in. By 9 February, it was already clear that the massacre near the village of Dai in Shatoy District by soldiers of the elite special division of the Central Intelligence Directorate of the Ministry of Defence had its roots, as people in Chechnya say, in Army Headquarters in Khankala.

At 11.00 a.m. on 9 February I had arranged an interview with Colonel Andrey Vershinin, the Military Prosecutor for Shatoy District, who is presently conducting a criminal investigation into the

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