

BUDENNOVSK TRAGEDY: CHECHNYA'S RICOCHET



Chechnya's war terribly ricocheted on June 14--hostilities with civilian victims started on Russia's territory for the first time. That happened in a town of Budennovsk, Stavropol Territory, with a population of 58 thousand; 220 kilometers from administrative frontier with Chechnya.

About 100 of uniformed fighters arrived to that town on June 14 around noon. They tried to capture several administrative buildings, and then most of them moved to a town hospital having captured several hundreds of residents as hostages.

Covering the situation in mass media displays that most companies tried to use the information of others making acknowledgments (to avoid liability for incorrect information). At the same time they tried to make their reports look real, which made the reports vague and numbers varied from each other. The chiefs of "forceful" structures (that's how we call Russian equivalents to FBI, Police, CIA, Army, etc.) who are guilty of letting those fighters in Russia, did their best to "reduce" the number of hostages.

Here is the version of what's happened according to one of the largest Russian papers *Izvestiya*:

"A worried patrol officer called to Budennovskiy GOVD (central police station) and reported: Two large trucks *KamAZ* without license plates accompanied by a unknown police car entered the town from southern side with no response to order to stop. The drivers were Chechens, they turned in location of a near-by village Praskoveya. The order from GOVD was to stop and search the trucks.

Chechens behaved themselves politely in Praskoveya. They stopped, said that their trucks were loaded with the bodies prepared for burial. However they refused to show the bodies. Then the police officers offered them to follow to GOVD, which was OK with the Chechens.

The report about such a strange procession worried a GOVD chief N. Lyashenko. He ordered to arm all the duty officers and to lock the basement with weapons.

The shooting started at 12.15 when the trucks stopped by the GOVD building. The gangsters killed the escort first, some of them managed to enter the building; in a few minutes they shot 8 officers and citizens in front of the building and in the hall. That was a lunch time--part of the officers were in the cafeteria. Having entered it, the Chechens captured several hostages. Most of GOVD staff locked themselves in their rooms or tried to fire back. The shooting continued for an hour. Then the fighters drew up the hostages and moved to a central square. They kept capturing people from near-by buildings and customers from stores on their way. (...)



By 3 p.m. the majority of the gangsters with 250 hostages including children and women captured the central hospital having chosen it as a major point of their location. Later on that day about 50 terrorists and 500 hostages remained in the hospital which was encircled by special forces regiments with tanks and helicopters."



In spite of the fact that the situation in the town was getting heated, *Interfax* agency reported the finish of the operation on June 14 at 6 p.m. The letterhead was: "A group of terrorists is out of Budennovsk. There are wounded among the residents". Actually, below are some lines from *Interfax* report: "Gangsters who have

captured several buildings in Budennovsk this morning are leaving the town in small group covering with the hostages". The prime minister of Russia V.Chernomyrdin was on a vacation at Sochi that time; his press secretary said that the prime minister was going to stay at Sochi till June 18. Just next day--June 15--the press secretary told that Chernomyrdin was returning to Moscow.

By the way, during his vacation Chernomyrdin had a working meeting with the leaders of Dagestan, Ingushetiya, Chechnya, Adygeya and other regions of Northern Caucasus. According to official data the subject of the meeting was discussion of political and economical problems of Northern Caucasus.

Upon finishing that meeting the prime minister had a nice talk with carefully selected journalists--he said that Russian government was concerned with those problems, too. A reporter of *Vesti* (a major news program on Russian TV) asked him about the possibility of spreading Chechnya conflict on other Russian territories. V.Chernomyrdin answered:

-No way. Listening to all those prognosis I get a feeling that somebody wants to continue this process. There will be no spread. Nobody will allow it.

When he was saying that he did not know about Budennovsk yet. Along with controversial information about the situation in the town it became known that terrorists used not only two 16-wheelers and fake police cars but two buses with Dagestan license plates.

Interfax reports of June 14 looked pretty strange, too. They reflected the police chiefs point of view, which is not trustworthy. For example here is an evening report: "Police forces dislodge gangsters who cover with civilians--women and children, from the town. The gangsters have captured about 2000 hostages. According to police reports most terrorists are dead. Some of them were captured and are being questioned".

The Ministry of Internal Affairs kept giving controversial information. First Deputy Head of it E.Abramov did not want anybody to believe in the scale of what was going on. He confirmed that "Dudaev's fighters are blockaded in the hospital. They have 300 hostages, 60% of those are hospital staff and patients including several pregnant women".

Mr. Abramov also told journalists that the names of terrorists' leaders are known to Army commanders in Chechnya; however, he refused to tell their names because their relatives could be used for negotiations. Later on he acknowledged that Shamil Basaev was not participating in Budennovsk incident. In a few hours we found out that Basaev who became famous during war in Abkhazia as a commander of Chechen battalion was the leader of terrorists in Budennovsk.

By the way the number of 300 hostages was kind of official on June 14. The first vice-prime minister Oleg Soskovets held a governmental meeting where he told that all regiments of all "forceful" structures were moving towards Budennovsk.

Soskovets notified that all North Caucasus airports would work for war planes only. All flights from Moscow to that region would be carried out upon personal permission of Ministry of Internal Affairs First Deputy Head.

During that governmental meeting Soskovets gave an instruction to reinforce protection of all strategic and governmental objects and children camping located on North Caucasus. All governmental agencies that contacted with operation in Chechnya were ordered to work 24 hours a day. Ministry of Defense got order to reinforce control over the situation in Chechnya, Ingushetia, and North Osetia (neighbor regions).

Minister of Health Care Eduard Nechaev communicated that a large group of doctors and nurses with all necessary supplies arrived to Budennovsk.

At the same meeting Oleg Soskovets informed that Moscow was in preparations, too. Guarding of governmental objects and subway got reinforced. Moscow police asked for 16 thousand officers from other regions for guarding and patrolling. The police also carried out several operations to prevent possible terrorist actions by Chechens engaged in criminal activity.

Duma charged its chairman Ivan Rybkin to make a statement in connection to Budennovsk assault. The idea of the statement was, according to I.Rybkin "to exclude any chance of racial conflicts in other Russian regions".

After an urgent evening meeting on June 14, the Government presented its deep condolences to the relatives of the victims.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs made up a declaration by next morning. It was related to B.Yeltsin's departure for "Big Seven" meeting. According to informational agency *Novosti* report Russian MFA reproached those Western politicians who disapproved Russian government for war in Chechnya. Below are some lines from that statement: "The crime in Budennovsk should open the eyes to those politicians abroad who did not manage to understand the real reasons of Chechnya's tragedy but chose a way of moral admonitions to Russia instead of actual help in struggle with separation and organized crime".

DAY TWO

JUNE 15



Budennovsk was just packed with soldiers the night of June 15. S.Stepashin, V.Erin, and N.Egorov arrived over there and placed themselves at the head of rescue operation. Their headquarters were in the building of GOVD, 2 kilometers away from the hospital. The major claims the terrorists put in were:

- to stop fighting in Chechnya
- to withdraw troops from Chechnya
- negotiations between Dudaev and Eltsin or Chernomyrdin

They also wanted to talk to journalists. The negotiations with Basaev's fighters got started on June 14, but there was no result. A 37-year old terrorist was firm in his demands. Apparently, representatives of federal government did not have the authority.

The next round of negotiations started on June 15, 7 a.m. Chechens confirmed their requirements: leaders of Russia start negotiations with Dudaev, and so on. A delegation of new official power from Chechnya arrived for negotiations, too.

Meanwhile local Cossack chieftain A.Maevskiy clearly announced that he was going to initiate expulsion of a "naughty nation" right after the rescue of hostages. Here is an extract of N.Gritchin's article in *Izvestiya*:

"I saw dozens of Chechen families that got conveyed to GOVD supposedly for the exchange of hostages on June 14 evening. Deputy minister of Foreign Affairs of the Chechen Republic M.Djamalkhanov told me later on that he saw hackneyed men from those families".

Russian war helicopters were flying over Budennovsk shooting at terrorists; armored carriers and other machinery were on the streets. The number of hostages was unknown because terrorists also captured staff and patients of maternity home and emergency station as well as those of several nearby organizations and local businesses. So, the approximate number of hostages was somewhere between 1000 and 2500 people. At that time the terrorists announced they would kill 5 hostages for every one of them wounded, and 10 hostages for every one killed. Budennovsk was like in a ring of police and Armed forces, there also was a plan to make up a "big ring" to "not let them out".

First Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs acknowledged that Budennovsk was encircled twice by Army, police forces, Federal Security Service, airborne division, special regiments "Alpha" and "Vega". War helicopters controlled the air, there also was lots of military machinery on the ground.

Deputy Minister of Nations and Regional Politics Andrey Chernenko acknowledged on June 15, that the terrorists got engaged into negotiations mostly thanks to "persons who arrived from Chechnya". First time they communicated by the phone, gangsters demanded Russian and foreign journalists inside the hospital. Authorities agreed to conduct such meeting if safety of journalists is guaranteed, besides that they wanted the meeting to be outside the hospital.

This persistence of governmental staff was worth lives of five hostages. Terrorists let the surgeon Vera Chepurina out to tell this to journalists and their "chiefs". By the way, the "chiefs" knew about this condition but they kept postponing journalists' meeting with the Chechens.

There was a huge stream of information on Budennovsk that day. Two reports applied to Dudaev's participation in this action. The data of *Novosti* agency was pretty laconic:

"Djokhar Dudaev says that no one of his armed structures got any order to initiate terrorist actions in Russia. According to his words "such actions may just discredit struggle for freedom of the Chechen people". Although some of his associates consider that action in Budennovsk might involve an unorganized group of his desperate comrades".

A.Chernenko persuaded reporters that Basaev tried to show his separation from Dudaev. At the same time the leader of terrorists insisted on his political claims. The situation in the town on June 15 was under control of army and police. Civilians got food supply. They could get around the town, but the suburbs remained deserted.

The precise information of casualties was received by noon. 17 civilians, 11 police officers, and one soldier. 56 civilians and 9 soldiers got wounded.

Before a report of Basaev's "press-conference" let's take a look at one detail: a reporter of newspaper *Rossiyskie Vesti* informed from the town that local authorities refused to cooperate and help to get in touch with the editorial office.

Finally 30 reporters managed to take part in the conference the hospital's hall. The last demand of terrorists was to get the journalists in by 8 p.m. Otherwise they threatened to shoot five people every half hour. Governmental staff could not deal with that; however, the bus was late.

Every one of those 30 reporters told the details of that unprecedented press--conference. Although some of them displayed obvious ideological amnesia (they could not recall where major points of terrorists' defense were). Other ones gave just one-sided view of Basaev's group position.

The most detailed information appeared in the newspapers *Izvestiya and Komsomolskaya Pravda* and also in the reporting of NTV company.

Here is an extract from Nikolai Gritchin's (*Izvestiya*) report:

"Shamil has shown his inflexibility. When the representatives of mass media did not show up by 2 p.m. as it was appointed, he granted delays twice but finally ordered to shoot five guys out of hostages. Two doctors--P.Kostyuchenko and A.Skvortsov--who came to the headquarters from the hospital around 7 p.m. told that. They also said: if media representatives don't get to the hospital by 8 p.m. 10 more hostages are dead. That is the gangster's ultimatum. Further delay was a crime.

The bus left the headquarters with a delay which was not explained by the leaders of the operation. The reporters got ordered to leave the bus at the last post, then they had to walk about one kilometer to the hospital. Doctors in white overalls lead the line. The main building of the hospital with furniture in broken windows looked pretty deserted.

Further N.Gritchin writes:

"When we got inside the yard the windows began to get opened. Fighters in camouflage uniforms aimed their guns at us. Then somebody ordered to stop. Terrorists started to search us and check our papers. Nurses and hospital attendants were watching us from some windows".

Let us pay attention at a detail noticed by a reporter of *Izvestiya* as well as NTV's one: "Before they had time to search one third of our delegation, we heard gun fight from the town. Bullets whistled above our heads. Terrorists started to fire back from the barricaded building. They let the crowd in, and locked the doors(...)

Then we walked up to the second floor where corridors were full of the sitting hostages(...) Our excursion gets interrupted with a sudden and furious exchange of fire. More broken windows, loud crying in the halls. We are laying on the floor together with the terrorists who cuss at Russians who promised not to shoot. When the shooting stops we urgently move to the basement. Several chairs are in the middle of it. The press--conference begins. The chairman is famous Chechen fighter No. 1 Shamil Basaev".

Almost complete verbatim report of the conference was published in *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, some of it got shown on Russian TV. That is what Basaev said that day:

-We have a little hope that some of you might tell the truth. We are intelligence--diversion battalion. We were not going to seize Budennovsk - we had another goal. We wanted to get to Moscow, to fight over there for a little while, and to see Russians bombing Moscow.

Our operation failed because of greediness and activity of patrol officers. We just did not have enough money to pay off this post. That is why they started to pick on us and offered to follow to GOVD. That is how Budennovsk became a city of hostages".

Then Basaev repeated his political claims as conditions of hostages' release. He mentioned a chance of killing groups of 5 or 10 people in case of storm.

"We are not intended to kill any of hostages. We just shot employees of federal organizations (we got enough of them) as an answer to snipers who killed or wounded our comrades. So, there is absolutely no intend to kill them. We'll not shoot at women and children--we are not maniacs. At the worst we'll make Russian army do it--if our claims are not satisfied. Let them come and storm. We are tired of watching how our women, old people, kids get murdered, our villages get bombed.

We were not going to kill anyone in Budennovsk. We were just taking hostages, but they started to shoot us behind our backs. Neither Dudaev nor Maskhadov sent us. We could no longer stay at Chechen villages--they got bombed; so we came to Russian villages".

Right after this statement he was asked some questions he agreed to answer:

-Have you contacted with the authorities during negotiations?

-No, neither Moscow's nor local.

-Who are the hostages?

-Citizens of the Russian Federation including Chechens. We have let foreigners go.

-How much did you pay to Road Police posts?

-From 100 dollars for everybody to 5,000 each.

-Your casualties?

-8 killed and 12 wounded.

-Will the Chechens continue revenging if you claims are not satisfied?

-We revenge because we could no longer stand it. I'm not saying about our relatives, friends, children, pregnant women, 65 thousand Russians who got murdered, about my brothers, two daughters, wife, sisters--11 of my relatives who got killed. Just give us our freedom".

Izvestiya's reporter explains:

"Shamil himself, according to his words, lost all his family when his village got bombed by vacuum-bombs. People asked fighters to leave the village--that's how he got an idea of trip to Russia with a major goal--to stop the war or die and kill as many Russians as possible".

Some more questions to Basaev:

-How about death?

-Man is mortal. We don't care when we die. What is important--how...

-Could you do the same in Moscow with your battalion?

-We could have seized the Kremlin in spite of 40 thousand guards under Korjakov's command.

-Why did you choose the hospital as your residence?

-In the beginning we wanted to fight downtown, but emergency doctors happened to be men of honor. They took wounded to the hospital, so we followed them 'cause otherwise Russians troops would have killed them.

As the data on the number of his fighters varied from source to source, Basaev explained that in the very beginning had had 210 people. As for the bribes to Road Police posts, the terrorist regretfully noticed: "When we got to Budennovsk, I had just 100 dollars in my pocket". So, he had to change his plans during the operation. He set the goal: to capture as many hostages as possible. However, when 20 of his people suddenly got injured he changed his mind and decided to follow them to the hospital together with the hostages. That was a breach of their unprecedented agreement--to not follow the wounded...

"...there were more casualties in his battalion later. In return Basaev ordered to shoot hostages. One of his men told that they made up a "filter camp" similar to Russian one in

Chechnya. People sentenced to death are chosen from soldiers and police officers. Basaev promises to not kill simple men. Although, he is intended to do it in case of storm".

As for the foreign hostages, Basaev explained he had set several Vietnamese and Turkish who were accidentally captured free. The Chechens--local residents were still in the hospital as well as other Russian citizens.

The reporters also broached that shooting in the very beginning. As N.Gritchkin writes in *Izvestiya*: "Basaev assumed that Russian troops were shooting at the journalists. The search and papers checking saved us. The fire was in the direction of the room on the second floor where the conference was intended to be held. One nurse got wounded, the same could have happened to any of us".

The meeting is over; we are on our way back.

"Shamil has left to make a phone call to Russian staff. We see a guy who looks like he is about 15 with a machine gun in his hands. He looks cheerful in spite of the wound. Several young Chechen women walk by. The face of one of them is covered by a mask. Actually they try to cover their faces. Most of them don't let to take their pictures... Finally we are allowed to go out. We slowly walk down the dark street until the order "Stop! Move in a line. Distance- 10 meters. Prepare your papers".

Some reporters will tell later that upon their return they got to answer questions of Federal Security Service and Police officers. Including the questions about the number of the hostages.

Late at night reporters of Komsomolskaya Pravda managed to catch up with a member of Federal Staff--FSS (see right above) chief Sergey Stepashin. He answered some questions concerning our meeting with Basaev.

-What are you going to do in the nearest future?

-We'll continue negotiations. The major goal is to save the people.

-When we got inside the hospital there was a gun fire. How can you explain it?

-We will investigate this case. I am positive these were not the snipers Basaev was talking about. This is clear.

-Do you know the room that was intended for the conference got fired upon?

-Yes, I do. The most interesting thing that our troops were not aware of any conference at all. As for those five people--have you seen the bodies? No. Me neither. Nobody have seen them. So it is not a subject of discussion.

I suppose there was no reason to ask him further questions concerning casualties after such statement. As well as other police chiefs. The warning concerning this topic was in such reporting:

"By order of Internal Affairs Department of Stavropol Territory journalists are denied access to any official information on what is going on in Budennovsk. So we have to rely on information from supplementary sources".

DAY THREE

JUNE 16



Friday did not bring any alterations to the situation with the hostages' release. The negotiations between Basaev and federal authorities' representatives continued every odd hour on a special phone line.

Vice prime minister Nikolai Egorov was urged to show up at a spontaneous rally of Budennovsk residents. He explained that the saving hostages' lives was the major goal. Government, he said, was ready to

pay any price for them. He assured that everything would be done to prevent further homicide. Including giving the terrorists an airplane to fly to any country that agrees to accept them. Besides that the government was going to pay any amount of money for their lives. However, none of these was in terrorists' claims so Egorov's explanations of difficulties in negotiations looked at least absurdly. As for the major claim--withdrawal troops from Chechnya, N.Egorov mentioned a possible solution: 1000 troops go back to Russia in exchange for disarmament of 1000 Chechen fighters. Free election in Chechnya can also be provided, as Basaev wants.

Egorov specifically pointed at the possibility of storm. So far as the majority of town's residents, particularly those who had relatives among the hostages, were against using military force for their release Egorov confirmed inadmissibility of such solution. This statement was heard by hundreds of people, reporters, representatives of "forceful" structures, and several Duma deputies. The intelligence informed that there were lots of TNT and gas tanks all around the hospital; 16 balloons with pressed oxygen were in the basement. If all this works there will be nothing to save.

At the same time Minister of Defense Pavel Grachev noticed that using force was the only acceptable solution in that situation. He said this in Moscow at a meeting with the reporters

N. Egorov was considering the possibility of storm in a conversation with the deputies of Duma who urgently arrived to Budennovsk-- Sergey Kovalev, Mikhail Molostov, Yuliy Rybakov, Valeriy Borschev, Alexander Osovets. Egorov once again confirmed that the storm was not intended. That was at 11 p.m.

DAY FOUR

JUNE 17

This day brought dramatic development to the situation in Budennovsk. There were two storm attempts that day. About 1000 hostages stayed at the main building of the hospital which got attacked by special Army forces.

The first reporting of Public Russian Television (PRT-major TV channel in Russia) was actually biased. Just after the facts got another interpretation in other channel's reports the directors of PRT had to make changes to their previous information and acknowledge the facts that were impossible to conceal. The following data was in one of Day News program on PRT: "The storm has begun at 5 a.m. It was continuing for hours and then stopped. According the Federal Staff information "we could no longer delay it because of actual threat to hostages' lives". The negotiations between the terrorists and their relatives, Duma deputies, Federal Staff representatives were vain".

By data of Stavropol GOVD 10 Chechens got killed and 5 heavily wounded during the storm. Several released hostages said that 70 terrorists still remained in the hospital. Russian authorities offered Basaev to freely leave Budennovsk in any destination of his choice using Russian air plane. He declined it. He also added that one hostage got killed by Chechens during the storm- he was not going to "fight with kids and women".

PRT reported at 4 p.m.:

"The cease fire continued from 9 a.m. to 2.30 p.m. In these hours special forces managed to release 150 hostages. The wounded also got removed from the zone of fire. As the eyewitnesses told the fire that started during the storm was not extinguished as it was informed before. Moreover it moved to the upper flours of the hospital. The hostages could just burn in the fire. That might have been a reason for another storm by spetsnaz (special purpose forces) at 2.30 p.m. Two explosions on the upper floors of the building and a sudden intense shooting preceded the storm ".

PRT reporter "did not pay attention" that the fire at the upper floors of the building happened because of the first unsuccessful storm: several missiles exploded over there. One could conclude (according to PRT) that our courageous anti-terrorist forces created the problem, and them "solved" it no less courageously (extinguishing fire and saving those who are not in danger to burn). ...That's weird-translator...

As for PRT's version of "liberation of 150 people" by spetsnaz, this was described differently by other sources. For example a radio station Moscow Echo (as well as several others) reported communicated that the real picture of "coming back from hell" shocked those who were observing it. The video reporting of this got shown on several TV channels: a line of women with babies and little kids in their hands walking away from the building. An NTV's reporter noticed: the women told that the terrorists treated them well, shared their food, even managed to get some chocolate for the kids. Being a hostage was really stressful for those women--they begged soldiers to stop shooting because that could just kill more hostages. All this got shown on NTV and Russian TV; however, PRT did not consider it worth showing.

PRT reported at 4 p.m. news: "The hostages who are still staying at the hospital, and town's residents demanded the prime minister Victor Chernomyrdin to arrive to Budennovsk and prevent further storms. This contains in a document received by *Interfax*, too. Every move of police and the Army takes away more hostages' lives. Further using force is a crime. The authors of the document think that the only way to release the hostages is carrying out negotiations. Otherwise, the relatives of those who are in the hospital promised to make up an alive shield between the hospital and the Army. The authors urged V.Chernomyrdin to come to Budennovsk. If he refuses he will be guilty of killing innocent people. "Victor Stepanovich, we await your decision till 4 p.m.", - these are lines from the statement".

Having quoted the document, Information Service of PRT noticed: "Prime Minister Chernomyrdin watches the situation in Budennovsk closely. As the sources in the government inform us, the secret meeting with a discussion of the situation in Budennovsk was held in Moscow. Chernomyrdin has given several recommendations and orders to the ministers. Nobody knows anything about the matter of those orders because the complexity of the situation requires so, says the same Source".

Later on that day (5 p.m.) PRT added "the situation in Budennovsk did not change cardinally in the last hour. The shooting has stopped by 3.15 p.m. after the second storm attempt. The representatives of Federal Government resumed negotiations".

The radio station Moscow Echo confirmed that "the storm of the building in Budennovsk was intended for that very day. Boris Yeltsin acknowledged this in Halifax today. He said that the first attempt was made by his order before he left. This decision got submitted to the chiefs of "forceful" structures, in particular to Minister of Internal Affairs Victor".

Victor Chernomyrdin appealed on Russian TV around 5 p.m. He said:

"I am persuaded that today even those who sympathy to Dudaev's regime, who disapproved war in Chechnya can see what is going on. Today I'd like to address to those who are involved in all this business. We got to stop (...)

I can tell you against that the organizers who have planned this action, this terrorist operation, they hoped to destabilize the situation at North Caucasus. They wanted to

stretch a bloody chain to the whole Russia. This will not happen! There will be blood chains and partisan wars in our country. The government have been going their best to put the things in the right order. Our representatives, commissioners, are in Budennovsk this moment. They are authorized to conduct negotiations".

At the same time the negotiations were continuing. The fire has stopped after the second storm. 154 hostages got released from the hospital (mostly women and children). The fire was finally extinguished.

The major Basaev's claim remained the same: Withdrawal troops from Chechnya. Although, NTV reported by 7 p.m. that "the terrorists has left just one claim--beginning of negotiations between the leaders of Russia and the Chechen republic Ichkeria".

A jurist center "Memorial" circulated a statement that Sergey Kovalev and other Duma deputies tried to meet with Sergey Stepashin, Victor Erin, and Nikolai Egorov. Those attempts remained unsuccessful. Sergey Kovalev and his colleagues supposed that meeting with Basaev might be a chance to release part of the hostages--in exchange for the deputies.

The refusal of Government representatives to meet with the deputies, in deputies" opinion just delays the negotiations. At 9 p.m. "Radio Russia" informed that Shamil Basaev agreed to carry on negotiations with Sergey Kovalev. He wants temporary cease fire in Chechnya and confirmations of Kovalev's authority from the Government. Gaydar tried to get in touch with Chernomyrdin to get a mandate for Kovalev, but unsuccessfully.

DAY FIVE

JUNE 18

Chernomyrdin has read a statement of the Government to Basaev on the phone. In return for the release of the hostages they promised to stop hostilities in Chechnya and start negotiations with Dudaev's commissioners. Besides that, Government agreed to provide terrorists with transportation and guarantee their safe return to Chechnya.

This talk occurred around 2 a.m. Basaev asked for some time to think it over. Chernomyrdin heard his voice again at 11.07 a.m. They confirmed their positions once again. The final talk happened at 3 p.m. Basaev complained of provocation. The reporters asked the Prime Minister to explain what the gangster meant.

Victor Chernomyrdin said:

-Shooting. As far as I understood shooting is basically going on at Chechnya. An it will be going on until our proposal is accepted and timing is arranged. I'm not going to issue any order before the major question is solved. Enough promises and talking. What we need is beginning and development of the negotiations. We do accept this.

A delegation authorized for the negotiations in Grozny has left a military airport "Tchkalovskiy" at 4.30 p.m. It included Deputy Minister of Nations Vyacheslav Mikhailov and Duma's deputy Arkadiy Volskiy who is the head of presidential committee on Chechnya. General Kulikov and the Head of Chechen Territorial Executive Power Branch Nikolai Semenov joined them in Grozny.

At that time in Budennovsk terrorists released 120 more hostages, mostly women and children. They also forwarded 4 heavily wounded and a body of "Alpha" squad fighter.

400 people got released from the hospital by 4.30 p.m. In return Shamil Basaev began to insist on Duma's deputies Borshev, Osovtsov, Rybakov, and Kovalev "trip" to Chechnya. Besides that he wanted representatives of local administration and journalists to join his group as hostages (one hostage per each of 127 fighters of his battalion). Another claim--a refrigerator for all bodies to go together with the buses for him and his men. The last one was--to leave in the morning only.

Keeping the agreement with Chernomyrdin, the Chechens began to release hostages in big groups. Meanwhile one more victim of this horrible tragedy appeared in Budennovsk. She was a German reporter Nataliya Alyakina. A car, she was driving in with her husband Gisberg Mrozek, got fired upon at one of Army block--posts.

The husband of a dead journalist told us:

- We were driving from Minvody (Russian city). Stopped at the post. They checked our documents and told us: "Have a nice trip!" We started to move slowly, lights on. When we covered 100 meters I heard two shots. Natasha leaned at me. Then she said: "They killed me. I am dying. I was shouting at the commander of that post: "Why? Why?" like other people do in this country. He just said: "That was soldier's mistake".

A commander of Army group in Chechnya General Anatoliy Kulikov had a talk with Victor Chernomyrdin at 5.15 p.m. The prime minister ordered to wait with the cease fire. As it was explained to the reporters "the cease fire at Chechnya is directly connected to time when Shamil Basaev starts to release the hostages who are still in Budennovsk hospital".

DAY SIX

JUNE 19

Victor Chernomyrdin carried on the next round of negotiations with Shamil Basaev on the phone, and also had a talk with Minister Victor Erin who stayed at Budennovsk till the evening.

The conversation turned to the simultaneous release of hostages and leaving. The buses for terrorists and their "volunteer hostages" did not appear at the arranged place at the arranged time the night before . The reasons of this are still unknown and are being

investigating. That is why the departure planned for June 18th night got wrecked. Basaev refused to go late. In his next talk to Erin, the prime minister was pretty harsh-re ordered to act "according to government statement" and provide the terrorists with Road Police services for escorting.

At the same time the prime minister charged Erin to conduct a careful check of all hospital facilities before Basaev's departure. "We got to be sure there's no bombs over there",--explained the prime minister. He also alluded "to try to set free all of them".

Chernomyrdin could not understand where did this hundred of people to join Basaev's group on their way to Chechnya (except for Duma's deputies and reporters) come from. Although, just a day ago the prime minister noticed: "Yeah right, if your wife and kids are over there and you get a real chance to save them you'll sure be willing to become a "volunteer hostage of escort".

After the final arrangements and orders V.Chernomyrdin had a conversation with the terrorists' chief. He promised to provide transportation as it was agreed before. In return Basaev noticed that the night before was the first night they spent rather quietly--there was no one "occasional" exchange of fire.

Besides talking to Basaev, Chernomyrdin also got in touch with the deputy Victor Kurochkin who (as well as a group of Duma's deputies) decided to go with the terrorists till the destination point--village Vedino. Upon talking to him the prime minister announced that the hostilities in Chechnya got stopped on June 18 and 8 p.m. Then he explained that the engineers got involved to check any possible bomb locations inside the hospital. "Our side is not intended to make up any official delays",--noticed the prime minister.

There also was a remarkable notice concerning Basaev: the prime minister supposed that the terrorist was not fully controlling his actions. As for the deputies who volunteered to join the battalion, they were allowed to use special communications service any time to inform the governmental agencies. Chernomyrdin told it to deputy Kurochkin during their conversation.

The route of the buses got worked out in Stavropol Territory Administration. Basaev has released 500 more hostages. An interesting detail: when the reporters and volunteer-hostages started to get on the buses they had to fill the following printed (!) form and sign it:

"I,(last name, first name, middle name) voluntarily join a gang of Shamil BASAEV and leave for Chechnya, being fully aware of the consequences of my decision..... (date).....(signature)".

Not excepting the absence of those forms was the real reason of a delay the night before, that's why the hostages spent one more night in the building. Basaev's fighters started to get out of the Budennovsk hospital and get on the buses at noon. Food supplies were

being loaded simultaneously. The Chechens refused to accept offered drivers, having said they would drive 7 buses themselves.

The column left Budennovsk hospital at 2.30 p.m., and stopped in a few minutes. The fighters demanded medicine and means of conveyance. So they left the town by 4 p.m.

Later on that night we received fragmentary information about the route of their motion. Russian authorities changed the route for several times during the moving; thus, the buses got stuck in the suburbs of Stavropol late at night.

The way through Stavropol- North Osetia- Ingushetia and entering Chechnya from west happened to be impossible. So the column turned east and moved along the border of Stavropol Territory towards Dagestan. They arrived at Dagestan next morning because of numerous difficulties on their way, they even had to cross some villages twice.

FINAL

JUNE 20

The data on column's route that we were receiving on June 20 was pretty controversial. MIA representative let us know the exact number of supernumerary passengers--the "alive shield" for the terrorists: 9 deputies, 16 reporters, and 114 volunteer hostages.

Having wondered all night long on the roads of Stavropol Territory, the caravan of buses and morgue- refrigerator has finally crossed the north-east portion of the border of Dagestan border and entered the town of Khasavyurt (15 kilometers north-east of Chechnya border) in the early morning of June 20.

Finally two correspondents of *Pravda* and *Izvestiya* Anatoliy Baranov and Valeriy Yakov managed to get in touch with Moscow radio station *Moscow Echo* by satellite phone. They told that the column was staying in Khasavyurt for the entire day. The buses got encircled three times by troops, war machinery and, police; a helicopter was flying above them.

The square where the buses were standing got surrounded by several thousand of city residents. The delay itself was caused by Basaev's desire to acquire guaranties of safe trip through Chechnya (as if to provide hostages' security) from Russian government or General Kulikov.

General Kulikov who was participating in negotiations with Dudaev's representatives in Grozny (in the building of OBSE mission) has left the meeting. Then Basaev, using the reporters of PRT and Russian TV, published the statement: he has decided to continue the way, so he will not be liable for anything that happens with the hostages. Later on the first vice prime minister Oleg Soskovets guaranteed gangsters whatever they wanted and circulated his statement, too.

The buses and the refrigerator has left the Dagestan town at 4.50 p.m. Two hours later they entered a Chechen village Zondak (Vedenskiy District). This was the arranged place for the final hostages release.

As for the hostages returning to Budennovsk, they would find out a lot of interesting things upon their return. The main one--there are still many mysteries in this story. For example, the number of the hostages who stayed inside the hospital is still unknown. Local authorities estimate the number of 2000. However the former hostages and hospital staff say there were some like 4 or 5 thousand of people inside.

The casualties is a secret, too. 114 bodies were delivered to morgues since June 14. Although, the eyewitnesses say that there are still many bodies remaining in the destroyed building. Probably this is the reason why the building and the yard of the hospital are encircled and carefully guarded by Army forces.

Local civilians suppose that the bodies will be secretly taken away from hospital territory and buried to cover the real scale of the tragedy as well as the exact number of those who died during the two storms by spetsnaz forces.

I suppose the relatives of the victims won't be satisfied with MIA chiefs' acknowledgments who expressed their sympathies and disproved the statements of other "forceful" structures chiefs. The MIA representative assured that the soldiers shot by order only--there we no accidental shooting.

Late at night on June 20 it became known the buses with the hostages had safely returned to Dagestan. They were going to spend a night in Khasavyurt. A total of 123 people came back from Zandak village. Some of them got off on the way to Chechnya. Three journalists stayed at Chechnya to observe further action.

VALENTIN ELISEENKO

Moscow

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