

# Gaddafi's death - who pulled the trigger?

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**SIRTE, Libya** — Disturbing images of a blood-stained and shaken Muammar Gaddafi being jostled by angry fighters quickly circulated around the world after the Libyan dictator's dramatic death near his home town of Sirte.

The exact circumstances of his demise are still unclear with conflicting accounts of his death circulating. But the footage, possibly of the last chaotic moments of Gaddafi's life, offered some clues into what happened.

Gaddafi was still alive when he was captured near Sirte. In the video, filmed by a bystander in the crowd and later aired on television around the world, Gaddafi is shown being dragged off a vehicle's bonnet and pulled to the ground by his hair.

"Keep him alive, keep him alive!" someone shouts. Gunshots then ring out. The camera veers off.

"They captured him alive and while he was being taken away, they beat him and then they killed him," one senior source in the NTC told Reuters. "He might have been resisting."

In what appeared to contradict the events depicted in the video, Libya's ruling National Transitional Council said Gaddafi was killed when a gunfight broke out after his capture between his supporters and government fighters. He died from a bullet wound to the head.

It said no order had been given to kill him.

Gaddafi called the rebels who rose up against his 42-years of one-man rule "rats," but in the end it was he who was captured cowering in a drainage pipe full of rubbish and filth.

"He called us rats, but look where we found him," said Ahmed Al Sahati, a 27-year-old government fighter, standing next to two stinking drainage pipes under a six-lane highway near Sirte.

On the ground, government fighters and the scenes of sheer carnage nearby told the story of the dictator's final hours.

Shortly before dawn prayers on Thursday, Gaddafi, surrounded by a few dozen loyal bodyguards and accompanied by the head of his now non-existent army Abu Bakr Yunis Jabr, broke out of the two-month siege of Sirte and made a break for the west.

But they did not get far.

France said its aircraft struck military vehicles belonging to Gaddafi forces near Sirte at about 8:30 a.m. (0630 GMT) on Thursday, but said it was unsure whether the strikes had killed Gaddafi.

Some two miles west of Sirte, 15 pick-up trucks mounted with heavy machine guns lay burned out, smashed and smoldering next to an electricity sub station some 20 meters from the main road.

They had clearly been hit by a force far beyond anything the motley army the former rebels has assembled during eight months of revolt to overthrow the once feared leader.

But there was no bomb crater, indicating the strike may have been carried out by a helicopter gunship, or that it had been strafed by a fighter jet.

"MY MASTER IS HERE"

Inside the trucks still in their seats sat the charred skeletal remains of drivers and passengers killed instantly by the strike. Other bodies lay mutilated and contorted strewn across the grass. Some 50 bodies in all.

Gaddafi himself and a handful of his men escaped death and appeared to have run through a stand of trees toward the main road and hid in the two drainage pipes.

But a group of government fighters were on their tail.

"At first we fired at them with anti-aircraft guns, but it was no use," said Salem Bakeer, while being feted by his comrades near the road. "Then we went in on foot.

"One of Gaddafi's men came out waving his rifle in the air and shouting surrender, but as soon as he saw my face he started shooting at me," he told Reuters.

"Then I think Gaddafi must have told them to stop. 'My master is here, my master is here', he said, 'Muammar Gaddafi is here and he is wounded'," said Bakeer.

"We went in and brought Gaddafi out. He was saying 'what's wrong? What's wrong? What's going on?'. Then we took him and put him in the car," Bakeer said.

At the time of capture, Gaddafi was already wounded with gunshots to his leg and to his back, Bakeer said.

Other government fighters who said they took part in Gaddafi's capture, separately confirmed Bakeer's version of events, though one said the man who ruled Libya for 42 years was shot and wounded at the last minute by one of his own men.

"One of Muammar Gaddafi's guards shot him in the chest," said Omran Jouma Shawan.

Another of the fighters who said he took part in the capture toted a heavily engraved golden pistol he said he took from Gaddafi as he was hoisted on the shoulders of his comrades.

Army chief Jabr was also captured alive, Bakeer said. NTC officials later announced he was dead.

Fallen electricity cables partially covered the entrance to the pipes and the bodies of three men, apparently Gaddafi bodyguards lay at the entrance to one end, one in shorts probably due to a bandaged wound on his leg.

Four more bodies lay at the other end of the pipes. All black men, one had his brains blown out, another man had been decapitated, his dreadlocked head lying beside his torso.

Joyous government fighters fired their weapons in the air, shouted "Allahu Akbar" and posed for pictures. Others wrote graffiti on the concrete parapets of the highway.

"Gaddafi was captured here," said one simply.

"THEY BEAT HIM, THEN THEY KILLED HIM"

From there Gaddafi was taken to Sirte where he and his dwindling band of die-hard supporters had made a last stand under a rain of missile and artillery fire in a desperate two-month siege.

Video footage showed Gaddafi, dazed and wounded, but still clearly alive and as he was dragged from the front of a pick-up truck by a crowd of angry jostling government soldiers who hit him and pulled his hair to drag him to the ground.

He then appeared to fall to the ground and was enveloped by the crowd. NTC officials later announced Gaddafi had died of his wounds after capture.

Someone in the crowd shouted "keep him alive, keep him alive," but another fighter cried out in a high pitched crazed scream. Gaddafi then goes out of view and gunshots are heard.

Further television footage showed what appeared to be Gaddafi's lifeless body being loaded into an ambulance in Sirte.

An NTC spokesman in Benghazi, Jalal al-Galal, said a doctor who examined Gaddafi when he arrived in Misrata found he had been shot in the head and abdomen.

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