

April 2, 2003

Kaveh Golestan



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BY JIM MUIR

Kaveh Golestan, 52, was the BBC's Tehran cameraman, working closely with correspondent Jim Muir since the BBC reopened its bureau there in 1999. The two had been on war assignment in northern Iraq for two months, working with BBC producer Stuart Hughes from London, when they were caught by a number of explosions in a minefield. Kaveh Golestan was killed and Stuart Hughes lost a foot in the blasts.

Looking back later on the hours that preceded any great personal disaster, they often seem to be laden with portents and omens. That was how it was for us, on what turned out to be that fateful Wednesday, April 2nd 2003.

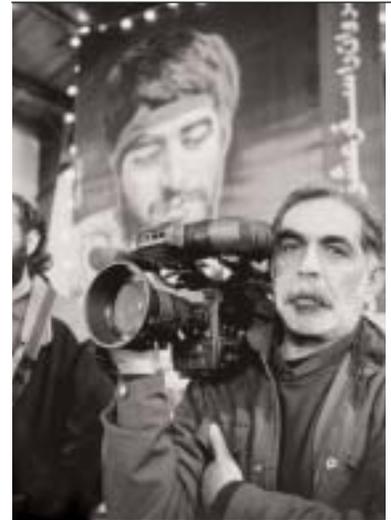
It was a bit of a lull for us, after a lot of hectic activity. The wider war in Iraq had been under way in earnest for nearly two weeks. But for us on the northern front, operating inside Kurdish-controlled territory, it had so far failed to develop into all-out hostilities on the long, ragged line which for more than ten years had separated the Kurds from government-controlled Iraq.

But there was certainly plenty going on, and we had been kept very busy. As soon as the war began, the Americans launched missile and bombing strikes on a pocket of hills and mountains near the Iranian border controlled by the Ansar al-Islam, a radical Islamic faction deemed by Washington to be linked both to Saddam and to al-Qaeda.

Wiping them out was a priority and an article of faith for the US, and also for the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), the Kurdish faction that controlled most of the surrounding terrain. So on Friday, March 28th, thousands of PUK peshmerga fighters stormed the Ansar enclave, with US Special Forces calling in air strikes to support the onslaught.

We covered that on the Friday - the back of the Ansar's resistance was broken in 12 hours of combat, and we were able to film at their former stronghold, Biara, now overrun by peshmerga.

Then we turned south to the front around Kirkuk, the vital oil city still held by Saddam's forces. They had got the message that the northern



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front was finally starting to happen - it had been long delayed by ultimately fruitless US efforts to persuade a reluctant Turkey to allow access.

So the Iraqi troops staged a sudden pullback to the outskirts of Kirkuk, abandoning miles of hill country, which we now roamed around for three days, trying to get the best pictures of the city that we could. Twice during those three days, we came under shellfire from distant Iraqi artillery, bracketing on positions which they had earlier abandoned and which we were now free to explore. On both occasions, we did what came naturally - we hurled ourselves behind any cover we could find, getting down as low as we could. It worked. We survived.

But those experiences encouraged in us an instinctive reaction, which was to prove fatal.

We edited our Kirkuk pieces for television and radio on Monday night. The next day was a quiet day for us - just a victory press conference at Halabja by the US Special Forces, to announce the end of the Ansar operation and the following day we were scratching round for something to do.

But we learned that the Iraqi forces had staged a similar withdrawal at Kifri, a small town on the extreme south-east edge of the Kurdish-controlled area, only about 100 miles north of Baghdad. Suspecting that peshmerga fighters were moving forward into the vacated areas, the Iraqis had shelled around Kifri, killing three people and injuring many more.

We had never been to that area before. It was as close to Baghdad as you could get, and might be a good springboard if the war developed into a race for the capital. It was worth exploring, even if there wasn't much by way of news. So we decided to go to Kifri.

Everything somehow seemed special that Wednesday, from the beginning.

I wouldn't say that I normally noticed Kaveh's physical appearance. During the three years that we'd worked together practically every day, he almost always wore his basic uniform: a black T-shirt and black jeans, in keeping with the minimalist, Zen-like tenets by which he led his life.

But that morning, he seemed different. He was wearing dark green jeans and a green fleece. He must have washed his hair, because he looked unusually fresh and fluffy. I noticed him. He seemed to be radiating energy and excitement.

When I talked to his mother Fakhri later in Tehran, she told me Kaveh had called her the previous day, and he was "dancing on the telephone" with pride about the work we'd done, and excitement about the stories still to come.

The drive down from Sulaymaniyah, the PUK's unofficial capital, where we were based, was special too. It was a perfect Kurdish spring day. So for the first time in the 59 days that Kaveh and I had been in northern Iraq, we stopped for a picnic, in the shade of a stand of eucalyptus trees. We didn't realise at the time that back in Iran, today was *sizda bedar*, the 13th day of the Iranian new year. All over Iran, millions of Kaveh's fellow Iranians would also be having picnics. To stay indoors on *sizda bedar* is to court bad luck.

Our driver Dana brewed tea - to which Kaveh was addicted - and we ate fresh cucumbers, tomatoes, bread, and tinned tuna. It was the kind of simple fare that Kaveh liked. He said it was the best meal he'd had since we arrived in Kurdistan. It was to be his last.

He was particularly talkative, and we laughed a lot, as we always did. Our spirits were soaring. We all felt that we were doing good work, perhaps our best.

Together with our producer Stuart Hughes, who'd joined us from London, we felt we were a journalistic guerrilla unit, lighter, more mobile and flexible than the more heavily-armed platoons from the other networks.

But Kaveh was reflective too, his mind clearly working on the experiences we were going through, and his own identity and relationship with those events. He was excited about the prospect of covering the anticipated fall of Kirkuk.

"I'm a war photographer," he said. "It's when I'm in situations like this, that I feel I'm really me."

At Kifri we went directly to the local PUK headquarters and joined a bunch of other news people and peshmerga on the roof, to get the lie of the land.

For the past ten years, Iraqi government forces had occupied a position we could see, just to the south-west of the town, atop a grassy rise. Two days earlier, the Americans had bombed the front line, and the Iraqis withdrew from that hilltop position and pulled their line back well beyond the ridge that runs from east to west a few miles to the south of Kifri. Their nearest positions were now out of sight, at least seven miles away.

The deadly Iraqi shelling the day before we got there had left everybody very nervous about more bombardments.

We needed a position to do some live TV broadcasts by videophone, and the hilltop position looked like a good location. The local PUK com-

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mander said it was safe, as the Iraqis were far off. He gave us a young peshmerga to guide us there.

In case we might be spotted and attract further shellfire, we took just one car, mine. I drove, Kaveh had the front passenger seat to my right. In the back seat, Stuart was on the right side, our Kurdish translator Rebeen Azad was in the middle, and our peshmerga guide was behind me on the left.

We drove to the edge of town and conferred with local people at the beginning of the rise leading up to the abandoned Iraqi position. There seemed to be no reason not to go ahead, though some colleagues who had started walking up on foot had felt exposed, became spooked and turned back halfway.

We drove up across the grass, following in the track-marks of vehicles that had gone before, and on to a path leading directly to the position. I was making to drive right up the path to the position and park in its lee - the Iraqis were way away on the far side. But our peshmerga guide said it would be safer to pull off to the left, where there was a grassy dip that would take the vehicle lower.

We had done the same thing at those other abandoned Iraqi positions above Kirkuk in the previous few days. So I drove down to the left a few metres into the dip and stopped. We all started getting out, eager to get set up and start broadcasting.

Suddenly there was an explosion. Part of the blast caught the left side of my face and left me dazed and with my ears singing. My immediate thought was: How could they have spotted us and hit us so accurately from so far away? They must still be in the position.

Instinctively, I did what we had done before - to try to find something to get behind or below. I ran around the left side of the car to the back, and threw myself on the ground.

As I did that, there were two more explosions, then silence. It all happened in two or three seconds. Then there was dust everywhere, and we were all shouting.

Stuart was shouting. "I'm hit, I'm hit!" Rebeen was shouting. "It's a minefield, it's a minefield!"

I got up and found Stuart, around to the right of the car. He was hopping on his left foot. His right foot was badly hurt, the heel ripped off, bones exposed. It looked as though it had been cleanly guillotined.

He was not bleeding badly and I knew he would survive if he got the right treatment. I opened the back of the car and got him in. I told him, "You've been hurt, but you'll be all right. You've done the course. I know

you'll be all right. I promise you." I tried to arrange him so he couldn't see his foot.

Stuart was very brave and remained completely conscious throughout, reassuring us that he was OK.

By then I had realised Kaveh was missing. I shouted: "Where's Kaveh?" Rebeen, who had not even had time to get out of the car as he was in the middle, shouted: "He's over there, to the left. He's dead."

I looked over to the left, and there was a body lying about ten metres away in a dip, covered with dust. I said: "That's not Kaveh." It looked like an old body left behind by the Iraqis.

But I approached, and as I did, I realised with horror that yes, it was Kaveh. He was lying on his front and looked as though he had fallen asleep. He looked peaceful. I said: "Kav, Kav?"

But looking down, I could see it was hopeless. His upper half was intact, but everything below was obscenely shattered. He had already gone. It was as though his lower half had melted into a pool of blood.

I felt an immediate pang of guilt. I had driven Kaveh all the way from Tehran in my car, and into a minefield.

Kaveh Golestan, whose rich, complex life I knew so well and had shared intimately for three years, who had given so much to so many, who had taught and encouraged a generation of Iranian photographers, lay dead beside me, and I was still alive.

I repeated one obscene word over and again. I thought, if we could only rewind the tape by just a few seconds, we could stop this absurd nightmare.

There was nothing for it. I dragged Kaveh up and over to the car, and Rebeen helped me pull him in to the back seat, and cradled his head on his lap. I thought there might be some miracle way that he might be saved. I drove backwards along the line we had come in on, and raced down the hill to where people were waving us towards an emergency clinic just around the corner.

Stuart was rushed in and given emergency treatment, some injections, then loaded into an ambulance with Rebeen, and raced off to hos-



pital in Sulaymaniyah. As he was carried past he asked me to call his girlfriend Aileen and tell her he loved her, and managed to give me her number from his palm pilot.

His Thuraya mobile satellite phone had been broken in the blast but colleagues from Reuters, who had rallied to the clinic when they heard the news, lent me theirs. Aileen took the news calmly but I knew there was nothing I could say that would stop her worrying, even though I promised her repeatedly that Stuart would be all right.

But for Kaveh it was all over. He was lying outside on the clinic's concrete ramp where they had pulled him out of the car. I asked if there was anything they could do, and they shook their heads. I felt his pulse one last time and there was nothing there.

They took him inside and the next time I saw him he was shrouded in an open plywood coffin. I had to sign forms and answer questions for his death certificate. Then, with Joe Logan from Reuters keeping me company, I drove through the dark up to Sulaymaniyah behind the ambulance with Kaveh's body in it, and the aftermath began.

Only later was I able to piece together what had happened, with the help of our translator Rebeen, who was the only one who could actually see and understand what was going on; and of Stuart, who was treated by a US Special Forces hospital in Sulaymaniyah, then evacuated to RAF Akrotiri in Cyprus, and then to England where, five days after the incident, surgeons amputated his right leg below the knee.

Because of everything that had happened before, all five of us who were there assumed that when the first blast went off, we were being bombarded. It was not an intellectual assumption but an instinctive one. There was no time to think.

Even Stuart, who triggered the first explosion when his right foot hit a mine as he stepped down from the car, thought it was shellfire. He crouched behind the rear wheel for cover. According to Rebeen, our peshmerga guide, who ran off up the hill, was shouting, "Hawen! Hawen!" - "Mortar! Mortar!"

Kaveh obviously had the same instinctive reaction. He ran around the front of the car and down the hill to the left to get to lower ground. But this time he was not escaping a bombardment, he was running deeper into a minefield. The two blasts which caught me as I ran round to the back of the car were Kaveh stepping on one mine, and falling onto another.

The mines had obviously been laid long before, probably when the Iraqi troops first established that position ten years earlier. They were covered over with the grass that carpeted everything during those brief

spring weeks. The surgeons at the US Special Forces hospital who treated Stuart told me: “We pulled half a field of grass out of his foot.”

In the few weeks that followed, at least 80 more people were killed stepping on mines along the old front line in Iraqi Kurdistan, including children and shepherds.

In retrospect of course, it seems blindingly obvious that there was a mine danger. We were aware of the notorious general menace of landmines. But on that particular day, in that particular location, in those particular circumstances, the impression we and those around us had, was that the active and present danger was from shelling.

That was what conditioned the circumstances that led us into the minefield, and the way we reacted when the explosions began. But the real danger was not coming at us through the air. It was lying silent under our feet.

In such situations, there are always a hundred “if onlys”. We have plenty of ours. Tracing back over what happened, there was a hideous inevitability to it, a concatenation of circumstances which need not have been, but were.

Fate, chance, random happenstance decreed that once we were in the minefield, Kaveh should lose his life, Stuart should lose his foot, and I should survive unscathed. It could just as easily have been a different combination. I will not call it luck. Survivors of such traumas do not feel lucky, not at all.

At the end of the day, the only conclusion is that war is a risky place. You can do your best to reduce that risk. But the most obvious danger may not be the real one. The only way to eliminate the risk altogether, is not to be there.

Two days before the disastrous end of that fateful trip, while Kaveh was editing our Kirkuk piece, I called in for a chat with Barham Salih, the urbane Prime Minister of the PUK’s part of Iraqi Kurdistan.

As soon as I walked in, he said: “I’m not saying anything about the content of your stuff, but the images you’re producing are fantastic.” Those images were Kaveh’s. That’s what he was about.

Long after the storm and drama of our pieces were forgotten, Kaveh’s images remained. It might be a father burying his year-old daughter who died in the night outside a refugee camp in Afghanistan. Or the look on the face of a child waiting with her tin dish in the cold outside a food kitchen.

Kaveh Golestan was much more than an award-winning photo-journalist and war photographer turned TV cameraman. He was the gentle

and ever-giving guru and master to a whole generation of Iranian photographers and documentary film-makers.

It was a fitting tribute that most of the dozens of photographers who swarmed around his funeral in Tehran on the Sunday after his death, were his students. The hundreds of photographs taken that day must all have been shot through tears.

His old comrade Farnoud, who had broken the news to Kaveh's mother Fakhri, was in the bottom of the grave laying him to rest in the Islamic manner, but could not resist taking his own shots of the jostling mass of lenses pointed down at him - just as Kaveh himself would have done.

It was as though everybody wanted to take away a small piece of Kaveh for consolation. Many were desolated by his loss. "Who is there to take my pictures to for an opinion?" asked one sobbing photographer. "He was the only one." Another was so hysterical with grief that he threw himself on the grave as the earth was being shovelled in.

Kaveh was born in 1950 in Abadan, south-west Iran, where his father Ebrahim was working as a photographer and documentary-maker with the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. His mother Fakhri is a talented ceramic artist. With both parents deeply involved in the worlds of politics, journalism and the arts, it was no wonder

that Kaveh took to the camera at a very early age.

After his primary education at the Ravesh e Noh and Alborz schools in Tehran, he was sent to Millfield public school in Somerset, England, in 1963.

"He was not a good student", says his wife Hengameh. That was putting it mildly. He was more than a bit of a rebel, and was proud of the distinction of being expelled from England's most expensive boarding school. But not before he had won the school race - he was a good runner - only to find the local newspaper could not cope with his name and printed it as Kevin Goldstein. He retained a keen eye for such quirks. Among his personal effects was the menu from the Tower Hotel in Erbil offering such choice items as Chiken Skyloop (escalope), Cow Sandwich, and Chiken Creem Chap.

After completing his formal education more successfully in Brighton, Kaveh hitch-hiked back to Tehran in 1970. There he dabbled in painting, music and documentary-making, before taking to photography, travelling around the country working on industrial and agricultural

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themes. It must have been this period that gave him the strong love for rural and traditional Iran which was so evident later in his life. It also gave him his wife Hengameh, herself a photographer, who was his constant companion and collaborator in those early years.

By the time of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, Kaveh had become well established in the world of news photography, working for agencies and for Time magazine, which eventually employed him.

Many of the pictures he took at the time have become the classics, including the first and last images of Ayatollah Khomeini after his return to Iran: descending from the aircraft after the dramatic flight from Paris, and tumbling from his coffin during the tumultuous funeral scenes ten years later. Kaveh is also credited with the only portrait of the Ayatollah that shows him smiling.

It was the 80s which defined Kaveh as a chronicler of conflict: eight years of war with Iraq, during which he was constantly back and forth from the front line, including Halabja in 1988; and the uprising among the Iranian Kurds, with whom he spent much time and whose repression he documented. As Hengameh and their son Mehrak had moved to London in 1984, he also spent time covering the Northern Ireland troubles for Time.

In 1991 Kaveh was back with the Kurds, this time in northern Iraq, where they had risen up against Saddam Hussein in the wake of the first Gulf war. This provided a watershed moment for him. After photographing the Kurds executing captured Ba'athist prisoners, he laid his stills cameras down and never worked as a photographer again.

He gave his cameras away to his students - for by now he had started teaching photography at university. Images were to remain at the centre of his work, and he turned to film, making a documentary for Channel 4 on the plight of Iranian intellectuals called "Recording the Truth". This did not go down well with the authorities and Kaveh was grounded under house arrest for two years.

Back in action, he became cameraman for APTN (the Associated Press Television News), though his stint for them was disrupted by another fall from grace after he produced heart-rending pictures of children chained to their beds in a psychiatric hospital. He joined the BBC's Tehran bureau as our cameraman shortly after we reopened it in 1999.

"His camera crossed the officially sanctioned borders, to the dislike of some," wrote a prominent reformist MP, Ahmad Pournajati, who as deputy minister restored Kaveh's press credentials in 1993 and who left a major parliamentary debate to attend his funeral.

Pournejati wrote: “Golestan told me, ‘I am neither an ideologue, nor a political activist; photography is my profession, my art. For me, photography is a tool for the reflection of reality, just as I portrayed the revolutionary events, or the scenes of war. I cannot manipulate reality, whether ugly or beautiful.’ We remember him: his art was not a reflection of reality, it was reality itself.”

Kaveh’s images spoke to the hearts of people. As to the man himself, he also won the hearts of many with his gentle and generous courtesy and his impish humour. Despite his part-English education, he remained a committed and passionate Iranian with an unquenchable thirst to explore his own homeland.

Kaveh’s restless energy led to involvement in many projects, usually promoting and encouraging young Iranian photographers. At the time of his death, he was excitedly exploring the possibilities of the new technology and digital photography.

Among the many tributes he gathered, Kaveh was proudest of the Robert Capa award. Kaveh did not want to die, but if he had the choice, it might indeed have been to go as Robert Capa himself went in Indo-China in 1964, treading on a landmine.

When I first met Kaveh at the Islamic summit in Tehran in 1997, when he was working for APTN, I was immediately struck by two vibrant qualities which were constants in his complex personality: an enormous generosity of spirit, manifested in a gentle and welcoming courtesy and an immediate eagerness to help, far beyond the call of any duty.

Nobody who has ever seen Kaveh at work in the field could fail to be aware of his extraordinary energy: jumping, climbing, pushing, running, whatever it took to get the best view, the best angle, the best image.

Only after the most prodigious exertions did he ever show signs of fatigue - the ubiquitous Farsi phrase *khasteh nabashi* (“don’t be tired”) seemed irrelevant in Kaveh’s case. He was always looking for something new to explore, some new project to throw himself into. Even after an exhausting day of filming, a night of editing and feeding, and another day of work, he would still spend half the next night exploring the Internet or examining the possibilities of some new piece of equipment.

As for helpfulness, I can never remember anybody asking him for help and getting less than the full Kaveh treatment. He would drop everything and leave no stone unturned until he had provided everything that was requested, and usually a lot more besides. Kaveh was constantly giving to others: supervising and advising his students on their theses, giving critiques and advice to colleagues on their work, giving his time to

the photographers' syndicate, initiating projects which allowed so many young Iranian photographers to express themselves and win the recognition of which he was so proud.

But as I got to know Kaveh better in the years that followed - and especially the last three years of total, intense professional partnership - I became aware of many of the other aspects that made him such a unique person, one whose irreplaceable loss is grieved by so many people who all feel they have been deprived of something very special and close to them.

Kaveh cared. Some of our best work was not in the realms of politics but of people, and in this, Kaveh's compassion and humanity shone like a beacon through the images he captured.

Often he achieved that, not by standing behind the camera and filming as a detached observer, but by spending time quietly and patiently gaining the trust and confidence of the subjects before pointing the lens. He was engaged; his subjects sensed his sympathy and opened up to him.

When we did a story about runaway girls, he spent hours talking through their problems with them before lifting the camera; and several days at the bus station, until he captured that telling image of a tiny beggar girl running away when officials approached her. "Revolutionary patience," he used to call it.

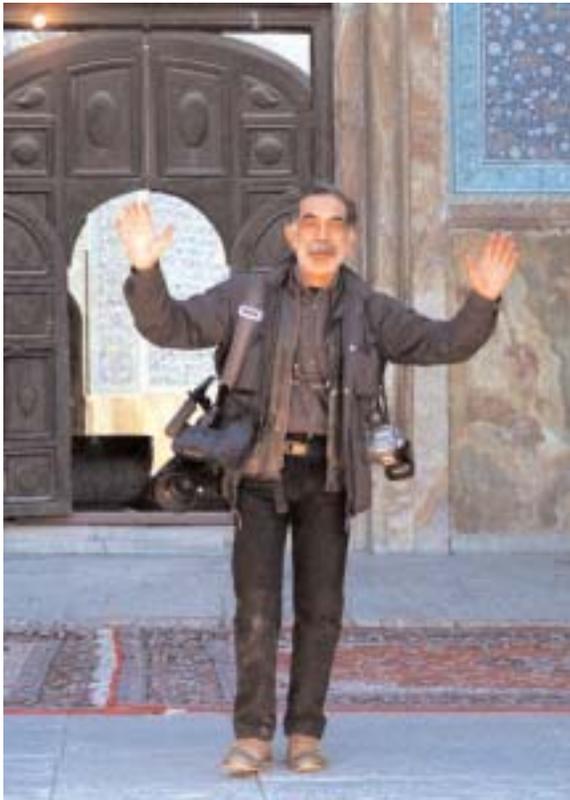
When I think of all the work we did in western Afghanistan just after the fall of the Taliban, it is again the human moments and images that remain foremost in my memory, and probably that of many others, and I know for sure they meant the most to Kaveh himself.

There was the burial of one-year-old Senobar in a tiny grave dug by her father in the barren ground next to the Maslakh refugee camp near Herat, where she had died of exposure during the cold night while her shivering parents waited for the world to wake up to their plight. Later the same day, Kaveh caught heart-rending images of other refugee children waiting patiently with their tin bowls in the chilling cold outside a food kitchen.

It was during our Afghanistan trip that I also became aware of the quiet courage and cool-headedness with which Kaveh could react to a crisis.

Long before it actually happened, the news agencies and the BBC were all reporting that the Taliban were already pulling out of Kandahar, so we set off from Herat in the hope of witnessing the fall of the city.

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The reports were wrong, and to our horror, we ran into a village full of Taliban, who pounced on us and pulled us out of the car.

My mouth went dry with quiet terror, as I could see all too clearly what this might mean. But Kaveh remained completely calm and controlled, chatting in a friendly way with our captors, soothing the atmosphere, charming the Taliban commander to whom we were taken. Luckily for us, the leader was also distracted by the same news reports that had led to our predicament, and ordered his men to let us go, which they did with some reluctance.

One of Kaveh's proudest achievements was being granted the Robert Capa award in 1979 for his pictures from the Iranian Revolution. In 2000, an exhibition of Capa award winners was entitled "Inhumanity and Humanity" - a title which sums up the two major themes that dominated Kaveh's own work and obsessions.

For, in addition to his compassion and humanity, Kaveh clearly had an ultimately fatal attraction to inhumanity, in the shape of the wars and conflicts which he spent so much time covering. It took him with me to Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban, and to northern Iraq in the two months which led up to his death.

I felt that during that last, fatal, trip, Kaveh was somehow returning to his essence, re-defining himself. On that last day, when he said - despite the fact that by now he was a video cameraman - "I am a war photographer", he also made other statements with which Stuart and I took issue, such as: "War is great!"

We witnessed his passion for war, and for being in the thick of it, on the previous Friday, when peshmerga and US Special Forces eliminated the Ansar al-Islam in the mountains of north-east Iraq. We spent some time trying to get to the battlefield, and were finally stopped by a peshmerga checkpoint which absolutely refused to let us through, saying it was too dangerous. Kaveh went quite crazy, and had to go and sit by himself for some time to cool down. He just had to get to the battle.

Working with Kaveh was not always easy. He was a perfectionist, and when he fell short of being perfect, he felt it most keenly himself. That means that he resented criticism and did not take it well. “I’m my own harshest critic, and I don’t need to hear it from you,” he told me during our last fight late one night in Kurdistan. Because he was so sensitive, it was sometimes hard to say things, but they had to be said. We fought, and a better understanding always emerged.

At the time of Kaveh’s death, he was more excited about our work than ever before. That’s why people who say, “He wanted to go that way,” are wrong. He didn’t want to go at all. There were so many images still out there, waiting to be captured.

All this may explain the huge, irreparable loss we face with the disappearance of Kaveh the colleague. But Kaveh the friend, the human being, will be missed even more.

That rare gift of his, generosity of spirit (inherited, I am sure, from his remarkable mother Fakhri), communicated itself instantly to all he met, made them feel they were special to him, and made him special to them.

Travelling with Kaveh was a unique experience - he had an abundance of stories and information. Surely, he must have known more about the history of photography in Iran than anyone else alive. Kaveh was my most important window onto Iran. His passionate love and enthusiasm for his homeland, its complexities and intricacies, inspired and kindled a fascination in me and in many others; for us, he embodied the essence of Iran.

Kaveh is now at peace, and life will of course go on. But ours will not be the same without him. He was unique and irreplaceable.

Many smaller things bring home our daily loss. We miss the energetic squeak of his rubber-and-canvas boots as he marched briskly into the office every morning. The quiet, seductive drone of that unique, soft voice of his. The wheezy cackle as he erupted into laughter at the latest quirk to catch his whimsical sense of humour. The ascetic, minimalist perfection of the flowers or other objects he used to bring. The zen-like calm with which he always used to greet the latest crisis: “It’s all right.”

As I knelt beside Kaveh’s shattered remains in the minefield, I knew that this time, it would not be all right. That such a complex life could be brought to an end with such ridiculous, senseless simplicity was incomprehensible, and it remains that way.

Kaveh was buried in the little cemetery at Afjeh, a village in a mountain valley above Tehran which he loved and where he often spoke of ending up (though he didn’t mean this). The graveyard is surrounded by cherry orchards which blossomed a few days after the funeral, and there was

still snow on the mountains towering above. Nightingales fill the crisp air with their enchanting, wistful melodies. It is an idyllic spot.

Kaveh's nephew Mahmoud planted an olive sapling at the head of the grave. It will eventually shade the simple slab of rough-hewn red marble, which now lies over the spot where Kaveh was interred. The inscription has his name and dates, and adds: "Killed while recording the truth" - a reference to the Channel 4 documentary which cost him two years of his professional life. .

To thank Afjeh for allowing her to bury her only son there, Fakhri, who spent much of her life caring for orphans, adopted the village school and is endowing it with a library and some equipment, and having it redecorated.

Now, some time on, no day goes by that I do not remember Kaveh or miss him in some way: his companionship and humour, his ideas and enthusiasm, his professional precision and drive, his friendship. The horror of his loss is almost as fresh as the day it happened.

Nothing can repair the irreparable blow of a life cut short in its prime. But the way many people responded to this traumatic tragedy was hugely comforting and very moving.

We journalists are supposed to be a hard-nosed, cynical bunch. But I was devastated by the generosity and warmth of colleagues when we arrived back in Sulaymaniyah that dreadful night. Everybody in the press corps seemed to have dropped everything to help us.

Our Kurdish hosts also rose to the occasion. Hero Ibrahim Ahmad, wife of the PUK leader Jalal Talabani, was waiting to comfort and help me, and set in motion the complex arrangements for me to cross the border back to Iran with Kaveh's body the following morning. Kurdsatt, the PUK's international TV station, waived its satellite transmission fee when Robin Denselow of BBC Newsnight did a live tribute to Kaveh that night.

Iranian officialdom allowed me and Kaveh's coffin to cross the border less than 24 hours after the accident. Back in Tehran, many senior Iranian officials attended the funeral and/or some of the many commemorations held in the following days, including Vice-President Mohammad-Ali Abtahi, and Hashem Taleb, President Khatami's special representative.

Iran also moved swiftly to issue visas for two senior BBC managers, Adrian Van Klaveren and Sara Beck, in time for them to come out for Kaveh's funeral. To them had fallen the sad and difficult task of going round to Hengameh's flat in London to break the news to her and their son Mehrak. She at first refused to believe it. But she told me later how much she appreciated what Adrian and Sara had done, and how well they



did it. In this and the other ways it dealt with the crisis - only one of several arising from the war - the BBC got it right.

Some of my most emotional moments were with colleagues from the Iranian press, who generously allowed me to share their grief. At the tumultuous funeral (http://www.kargah.com/golestan_funeral/index.htm), the burly Farnoud kept an eye out for me, and dragged me to the front whenever I was in danger of being pressed out by the crush. The bond of bereavement embraced many other Iranian colleagues, reinforcing my belief that at times, journalism is more of a nationality, an international brotherhood, than a mere profession.

One of my biggest fears from the outset, selfishly, was that Kaveh's family would blame me for taking him away to war and bringing him back dead. That fear began to disperse when I got through to Mehrak and Hengameh on that first night, on a bad mobile phone connection, standing at the roadside outside the US military hospital in Sulaymaniyah. They had wanted to hear what happened from me at first hand before they would really believe it.

Meeting up with them in Kaveh's house in Tehran two days after Kaveh died, was charged with emotion. Through our tears I told Hengameh how often Kaveh had told me how much he loved her, which was true; and Mehrak, how proud Kaveh was of him, which was also true.

Although at the time of his death they were living in different countries and often did not see one another for long stretches of time, the bond between them was incredibly strong and almost spiritual. They were constantly on the phone to one another. Hengameh was Kaveh's most reliable critic. She was shattered by the loss. Mehrak, now 19, found strength in helping his mother get through the hard days and worse nights.

I had of course met Kaveh's family before: Hengameh and Mehrak, Mama Fakhri, Kaveh's sister Lily, her sons Mani and Mahmoud, and her daughter Sanam, all very special people in their different ways. Through the mourning process, which continues and will never end, it has been my

huge privilege to be embraced in their grief, so that we have all helped one another, strengthening bonds that will now always be there.

That generous embrace included Stuart, now lying in a hospital bed in England fighting to save his foot. It was deeply moving to me that even as they were burying their beloved Kaveh, the family were thinking and worrying about this Welshman whom they had never met; while he, on the day of the funeral, was thinking of these Iranians, in their grief and pain, while preparing himself for his second trauma, the amputation of his right lower leg, the very next day.

Stuart's response to his double trauma has been magnificent and inspiring. From the start of his trip to northern Iraq, he began feeding his daily thoughts into a weblog (<http://stuarthughes.blogspot.com>), and he has kept it up ever since, documenting his struggle all the way. Check it out. It will make you laugh and cry. It is always trenchant, sometimes sad, often hilarious and irreverent, and has helped make Stuart justifiably something of a celebrity. He has used that shamelessly to promote anti-landmine charities and other good causes. Stuart's ambition is to come to Tehran one day to visit Kaveh's grave at Afjeh. I'm sure he will.

"I don't think Kaveh's here," said Mama Fakhri, gesturing towards the grave, as we sat in the Afjeh cemetery one day. "I think he's there." And she pointed up into the mountains which surround Afjeh.

Kaveh lives on in many other ways. Still struggling to come to terms with her loss, Hengameh has already been active in organising exhibitions of Kaveh's photographs. Mehrak has been busy too, finalising the website which Kaveh was working on at the time of his death: kave-

"I don't think Kaveh's here," said Mama Fakhri, gesturing towards the grave, as we sat in the Afjeh cemetery one day. "I think he's there." And she pointed up into the mountains which surround Afjeh.

hgolestan.com. Some of his work can also be found on www.kargah.com and www.iranian.com.

Family, friends and colleagues in Tehran have set up a Kaveh Golestan Foundation, to sponsor prizes and grants to continue the mission of encouraging young Iranian photographers to which Kaveh gave so much of his life (details are available on the kavehgolestan.com website). And in northern Iraq, where he died, the Kurds are planning to set up an artistic and cultural centre in his name.