

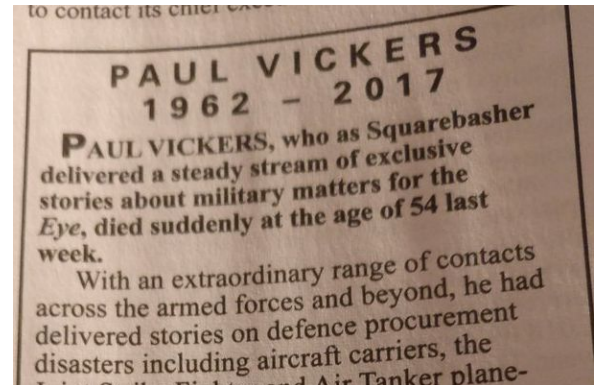
Death of a Journalist (and honest journalism)

by Anthony C Heaford, July 2022

Private Eye magazine's defence correspondent, Paul Vickers 1962 - 2017

In October 2017, just three months after I'd exposed Private Eye magazine's defence correspondent's clumsy lies intended to hide British military complicity in Afghan opium production, that correspondent 'died suddenly' aged fifty-four.

In 2015 Paul Vickers, writing for Private Eye magazine (PEM) under the pseudonym 'Squarebasher', had taken my first-hand evidence and testimony of British complicity in opium production then wrote a hatchet job full of lies, omissions and distortions intended to coverup senior army officers blatant criminality. PEM's editor Ian Hislop published the shameful article and then stood firmly by Paul Vickers' fictional article when I complained about its inaccuracies.



It took me two years to find the irrefutable evidence I needed to expose Vickers' lies, but I decided to test Hislop once more before presenting that evidence. Hislop failed my test miserably as he continued to stand by Vickers' hatchet job with a patronising and demeaning emailed reply to me. I responded in July 2017 by emailing PEM the irrefutable evidence of the lies Hislop had published; Vickers 'died suddenly' three months later, in October 2017. Hislop has remained incommunicado ever since. PEM has failed to publish a correction or retraction and Hislop has still not apologised for what amounts to his psychological torture of a British army Afghan veteran turned whistleblower - me.

AFGHAN OPIUM TRADE

What a lot of poppycock

THIS photograph, taken in May 2012 from a British-manned guard tower at Camp Bastion, the main UK base in Afghanistan and hub for military operations, shows a group of Afghans harvesting opium under the noses of watching soldiers.

One of the three core reasons originally cited by the Ministry of Defence for the deployment to Helmand, along with security and reconstruction, was the "containment of the opium trade by working with and developing the capability of the Afghan National Army".

And yet the British soldier who took this photograph and others told the *Eye* that he was advised by a senior officer "not to worry" about the opium-harvesting. His report was "one of seven" in his tower log that had remained unread. When he pointed out the pickers to another officer, the man claimed to be unable to see them and left "in less than a minute".

The Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police, both with bases attached to Bastion, paid as little attention to the opium

for farmers". It was feared that impoverished farmers might side with the Taliban.

But the policy of not destroying crops was confused at best. UK soldiers were often filmed by the media destroying opium crops; in the years 2006-09, £290m was spent by the UK on "eradication, support for farmers and pursuit of drug barons and traffickers". In Kandahar, though, ISAF was criticised for funding an Afghan radio advert in 2007 telling opium farmers their fields would not be destroyed by ISAF or the Afghan National Army. Production soared to 8,000 tonnes a year in 2008.

The MoD boasted in 2011 that "over 2,000lb (900kg) of heroin and two bomb-makers have been intercepted in Afghanistan with the help of the Royal Navy's Sea King helicopters – known as the 'eyes in the sky'". These helicopters were based at, er, Camp Bastion, a stone's throw from the poppy fields.

Alongside the official policy was an unofficial one ignoring Bastion's poppy farmers. The fields were controlled by

Opium harvesting, PROTECTED by British soldiers in April 2012

NATO's Camp Bastion perimeter defences

Anthony C Heaford, @mancunianquiet

Private Eye Magazine's 2015 torture of a British army Afghan veteran turned whistleblower

This poppycock story is a journalistic hatchet job of evidence of British military complicity in opium production that I passed Private Eye. Editor Ian Hislop and defence correspondent Paul Vickers then omitted the most critical parts, added blatant lies, and saturated my photograph so far as to be unrecognisable as opium harvesting. I exposed their lies in 2017; three months later Vickers 'died suddenly' and Ian Hislop remains Incommunicado.

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Background

During my Summer 2012 service with the British army in Helmand, Afghanistan I spent twenty-four hours protecting opium harvesting during a guard duty on the perimeter of Camp Bastion's airfield. My orders were to report any Afghan security forces entering the area where the opium harvesting was occurring; we were told the Afghan security forces were harassing the farmers there - farmers who were growing poppies & producing opium.

On exactly the same day 170-British soldiers were on Operation Shafuq, helping to destroy poor farmers poppy crops just fifteen miles south of where I was protecting the opium harvest on Afghan government land besides Camp Bastion. Operation Shafuq was a charade, a mission everyone knew had failed twenty-four hours before it'd begun when the Afghan units deployed to the operational area a day early, alerting any enemy there to the impending operation. But British officers still went ahead with the mission, risking soldiers lives for nothing more than a box ticking media event.

I reported my concerns about the opium harvesting and the implications to the security of Camp Bastion during that April 2012 guard duty but was mocked and ignored by my Battalion (4 Armoured CS Bn REME) second in command - a very senior officer. He and another officer reacted by laughing, pretending not to be able to see the five hectare poppy field in front of the tower and then running away whilst still giggling like schoolboys.

The American command were aware of the poppy fields and were considerably more concerned. Major General Sturdevant of the US Command later stated:

"We literally had poppy growing right up against the perimeter fence. That was another thing that Maj. Gen. Gurganus tried to take action on, but he wasn't able to accomplish that. It was because the Afghans had to do it. We weren't allowed to. The biggest external threat to the base came from there."

Major Sturdevant's statement was published by a British parliamentary inquiry, [in paragraph thirty-six linked here](#).

That external threat to the base manifested itself on 14 September 2012. Fifteen heavily armed Taliban breached our defences unseen, WALKED between our guard towers and then proceed to inflict the greatest material damage the US army had suffered since the Vietnamese Tet Offensive of 1968. Two US Marines were also killed-in-action during the attack - Lt Col Christopher Raible and Sergeant Brad Atwell. I'd been on guard duty seven days before the attack and had clearly seen our defences being probed and what appeared to me to be the preparations for an attack. I repeatedly reported my concerns on that guard duty but was repeatedly dismissed, being told:

"Don't worry, Mohammed Daoud controls this valley"

By April 2015, frustrated by the British military, parliament and government's refusal to investigate my allegations of the British army's duplicitous complicity in Afghan opium production and its contribution to the success of the Taliban's 2012 airfield raid, I attempted to become a public whistleblower. But instead of finding a [mischief of journalists](#) on my doorstep vying for my exclusive photographic evidence, I met a stoney silence from the mainstream media. And that's when I turned to PEm with my evidence and testimony.

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The PEm office responded by putting me in touch with their defence correspondent Paul Vickers who assured me he would tell my story. I told him about the 'Mohammed Daoud' who British officers said controlled the valley and guaranteed our security. I speculated that Mohammed Daoud might be the former governor of Helmand, but I was clear I had no evidence of this beyond my speculation.

PEm ran Vickers' article, but hidden away on an inside back page rather than as a cover story I thought it deserved. Vickers reported it was the former governor of Helmand who control the valley, later saying he'd confirmed this with two sources - an 'Australian and a Canadian'. Ian Hislop was happy to accept that incredibly vague confirmation but I remained very dubious. My doubts were eventually validated when I found [this report from by the US military](#) showing 'Daoud Mohammed' at a shura (meeting) on the land besides Camp Bastion. But instead of it being Helmand province governor Mohammed Daoud, the photographs showed it was Washir district governor Mohammed Daoud Noorzai.



August 2011: Washir district governor Mohammed Daoud Noorzai at a shura on the land he controlled besides Camp Bastion, accompanied by British, US and Afghan military officers

I had my conclusive, irrefutable evidence that Paul Vickers and Ian Hislop had concocted and published a pack of lies. Those lies were specifically intended to protect the British military from criminal charges over its absolute complicity in opium production from poppy fields that we not only secured but irrigated with water purified inside Camp Bastion too.

Conclusion

Private Eye magazine editor Ian Hislop and defence correspondent Paul Vickers produced and published an article intended to psychologically torture a British army Afghan veteran turned whistleblower (me), and to protect senior British military officers from prosecution for their complicity in the production of a Class A drug.

After their malicious and immoral journalistic corruption was exposed by me, PEm did not retract or correct [their original article](#) and failed to respond to further communications.

Three months after I had proved their guilt beyond all doubt, PEm defence correspondent Paul Vickers 'died suddenly'. It is my belief that Ian Hislop will have given Vickers hell after their clumsy lies were exposed by me, possibly destroying any professional credibility Vickers had left and effectively ending his career.

[Vickers was already a troubled man](#) and I suspect my actions to expose his corruption, and Ian Hislop's reaction, caused him to stop taking his asthma medication - something he knew would result in his untimely demise.

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Annex

PEm 2015 published article "What a lot of Poppycock":

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The Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police, both with bases attached to Bastion, paid as little attention to the opium crops as the British officers. The *Eye*'s source reports that both the Afghan police and army units billeted in the compound next to the crop were often "belligerent and obstructive", resenting any attempt to interfere. They mounted armed patrols around the fields.

Part of the reluctance of the Bastion command to deal with opium growers was enshrined in official policy. Despite the stated aims of the Helmand deployment, ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) soldiers, including UK and US forces, were not allowed to destroy opium (as noted by the UK defence select committee last year) "where there was an absence of alternative livelihoods

for farmers". It was feared that impoverished farmers might side with the Taliban.

But the policy of not destroying crops was confused at best. UK soldiers were often filmed by the media destroying opium crops; in the years 2006-09, £290m was spent by the UK on "eradication, support for farmers and



pursuit of drug barons and traffickers". In Kandahar, though, ISAF was criticised for funding an Afghan radio advert in 2007 telling opium farmers their fields would not be destroyed by ISAF or the Afghan National Army. Production soared to 8,000 tonnes a year in 2008.

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Alongside the official policy was an unofficial one ignoring Bastion's poppy farmers. The fields were controlled by Mohammed Daoud, Helmand's governor and someone the UK/ISAF wanted to keep on side. With him came the former governor, Amir Mohammed Akhundzada, who had previously been forced out of office by UK pressure after nine tonnes of opium and heroin were discovered in his brother's basement. Akhundzada became Daoud's deputy at the express wish of President Karzai, who insisted that Gordon Brown's government not interfere with public appointments. Karzai then removed Daoud as governor in 2006, but he continued to have a close relationship with the British.

Although there is no reason to suppose that Daoud knew of the poppy-growing,

the decision was taken by the army to leave Daoud's compound and the opium fields alone in order to maintain his power base and role as an intermediary between the UK and Afghan authorities. Alas, in September 2012 Camp Bastion paid a high price. In a night attack starting where the photographs were taken, the Taliban killed two US Marines and destroyed eight US Harrier ground attack aircraft.

In 2014, the defence committee inquiry into the incident said: "The failure to take concerted action to prevent [the poppy cultivation] increased the risk of surveillance and intelligence gathering by Afghan nationals which could have assisted insurgent planning for an attack."

The committee heard that half the guard towers on the perimeter that night were unmanned. What it didn't hear was that the other half were manned by members of the Tongan Defence Service who, according to a witness not called by the committee, had no night vision equipment.

Questioned about the empty watchtowers, Lieutenant General Capewell, who became chief of joint operations, suggested to the committee that "he who defends everything defends nothing". He accepted only that allowing poppy cultivation so close to the base was "a minor tactical error".

It was an expensive one. Alongside the lost lives, the US lost jets worth \$200m and was left exasperated at the UK's perceived laxity. Only the poppy fields remained untouched by the mayhem: they were, happily for Anglo-Afghan relations, undamaged.

NUMBER CRUNCHING

£7.5bn Personal fortune of Monte Carlo resident Stefano Pessina, who moved Boots the chemist to Switzerland for tax purposes and merged with US-owned Walgreens

700 Boots staff he is sacking in UK four months after warning that a Labour election victory would be "catastrophic" for business

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My 29 June 2017 email sent to PEm, clearly stating their error & my suggested resolution:

Heaford Anthony

CORRECTION

To: Strobes

Sent Messages 29 June 2017 at 15:12



Sir,

In your published report "What a load of poppycock" (June 2015) your defence correspondent said that 'the fields [where opium was grown under British protection] were controlled by Mohammed Daoud, Helmand's governor'.

I have now found contrary evidence proving this wrong, and showing that the Afghan who actually controlled these fields was Mohammad Daud Noorzai, the governor of Washir district, not Helmand's 2006 governor Mohammed Daoud. Whilst named as Daoud Mohammad by US forces during his escorted visits the fields and communities around Camp Bastion, a little cross checking confirms this is in fact Mohammad Daud Noorzai.

(sources: please follow the links in this report, listed under chapter heading "Mohammad Daud Noorzai and community engagement": <http://thequietmancunian.com/afghanistan/bastion-airfield-raid.html>)

I imagine both the US vagueness in their reports, and your defence correspondent's inaccuracy in his report, is due to an aversion to highlighting the fact that after the 2005 sacking of former Helmand governor Sher Mohammed Akhundzada (because of his links to opium trafficking and other illegal activity), in 2012 ISAF forces in Helmand had aligned themselves with the Noorzai tribe (who are linked to opium trafficking and other illegal activity).

I hope you will publish a correction of this point, or alternatively give me a full page and platform to report this story as it should have been done the first time.

Anthony C Heaford

07 July 2017 PEm editor Ian Hislop's patronising reply to me, FULL OF LIES:

Strobes -
Your letter
To: Heaford Anthony

Inbox - iCloud 7 July 2017 at 14:02

S

Dear Mr Heaford

Squarebasher replies:

I trust you and the dog are well!

Many thanks for your email of June 29th regarding the article published in the Eye – gosh!, two years ago now - about those Bastion poppy fields.

Thanks again for passing it my way; I think it's a good story and it looks as though you are still chasing it, which can only be a good thing, particularly in the light of the continuing fallout from Chilcott.

Re Daoud, the Helmand governor: If you remember, when I was researching the article I accepted your own recollections while you were at Bastion. I then chased up my own contacts to confirm what you had said and everything I have been told still convinces me that 'the Helmand Daoud' was indeed the 'man in charge' of the fields by the fence, as well as the ones in Shit Valley.

Rest assured that my own contacts (one Canadian and one Afghan) confirmed that what you originally told me was correct, so you were right first time. Don't worry, I check out every story in the same way, so it's nothing personal.

But clearly there's more to be discovered in terms of the whole drugs/UK Ops issue and I wish you all the best,

Hope this helps

Editor

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12 July 2017, my irrefutable evidence emailed to Ian Hislop & Paul Vickers:

From: Anthony Heaford <[REDACTED]>
Subject: Re: Your letter
Date: 12 July 2017 at 16:18:12 BST
To: Strobes <strobes@private-eye.co.uk>
Cc: Paul Vickers <[REDACTED]>

Sir

Thank-you for the source details of the published allegations against Mohammad Daud (aka Engineer Daoud / Helmand Daoud), the former governor of Helmand province.

This photo is the basis of my belief that it was in fact Daoud Mohammad (aka Mohammad Daud Noorzai), the Washir district governor (circled in photo) who controlled the land and settlements besides Bastion:

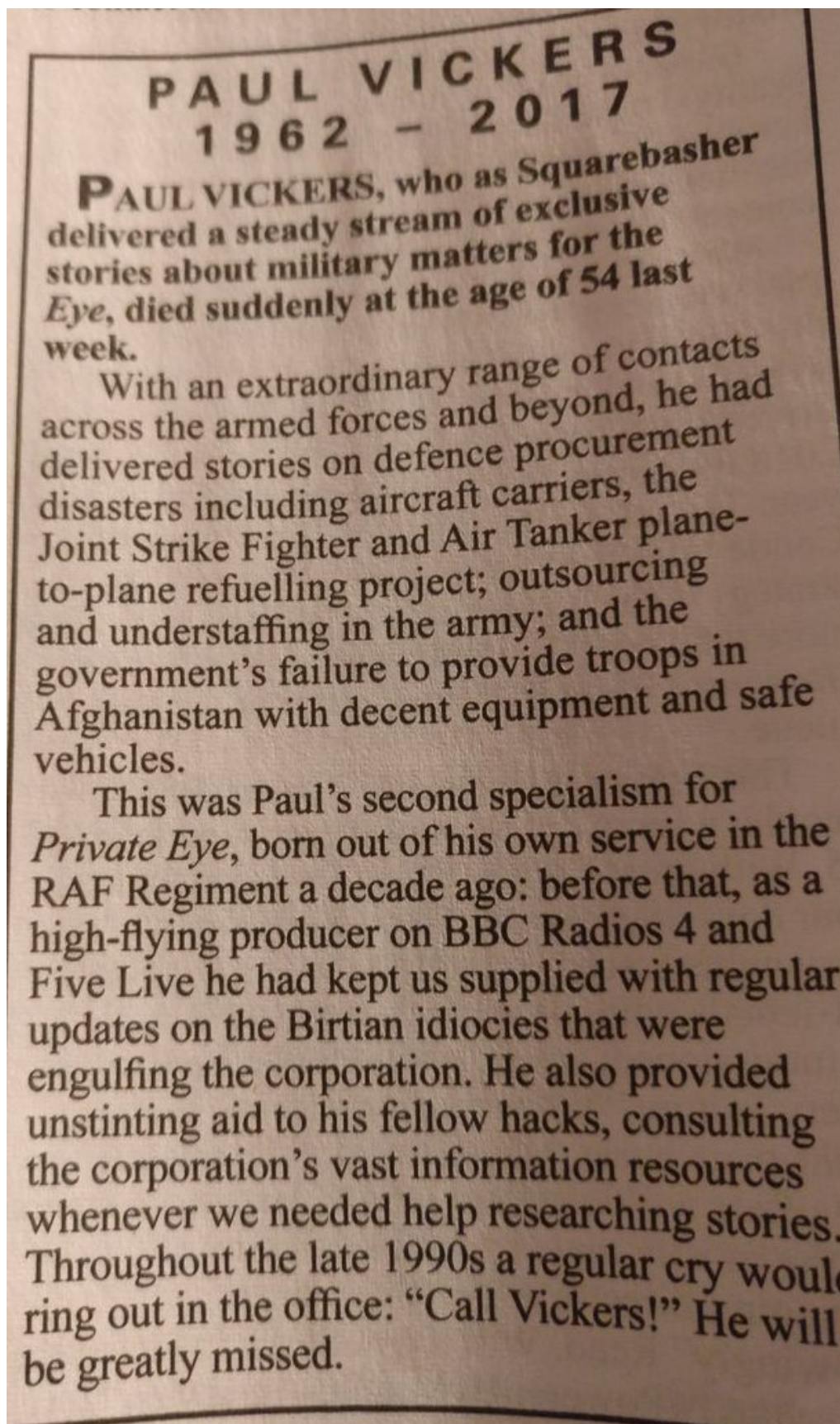


The paraphrased caption with this photo (published by the US Marines) reads:

US Marines provided transportation for Daoud Mohammad, the Washir district governor, and Afghan National Army soldiers, during shuras with local Afghans outside of Camp

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October 2017: PEm obituary for Paul Vickers:



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An informal obituary for Paul Vickers published on an anonymous military chat forum:

Oct 22, 2017

#103

Bad CO said: ↗

I met him a couple of times. Managed to hide the fact he'd been in the RAF Regt well.

Also quite a prolific poster on here.

Sad news.

RIP Paul

He'd been in some pretty hairy situations during his career as a journalist - and would complain about the 'wankers' on the BBC foreign desk who wouldn't let him report them: On one occasion in Kabul he was obliged to stab a chancer in the neck to avoid being lifted.

As with many journos who spend time in the arse-end he had demons and we would exchange occasional ramblings - his were beautifully descriptive. There was an unfortunate incident of magnificent proportions that was followed by an equally impressive bollocking. It was something that was to haunt him years later.

Paul was a founding member of the Frontline Club and some of his mementoes are in kept in glass cabinets at 'bullshit corner'. We never worked at the BBC at the same time as he took voluntary redundancy a few years ago due to the fact that he 'could see the writing on the wall'. He was well respected and admired by the big names here.

That said, He did once ask me to kick Alex Crawford in the hoop but I never found out what was behind the request.