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Photographers Recorded Mumbai Rampage in Stark Detail

By THOMAS FULLER

MUMBAI, India — When the gunfire started at Mumbai's main train terminal last month, Sebastian D'souza was well placed to respond.

From his office directly across the street, Mr. D'souza, the photography editor of the newspaper The Mumbai Mirror, grabbed his Nikon and two lenses and headed out into the blood-soaked night of Nov. 26. Peering from behind pillars and running in and out of empty train cars, he emerged with what may be the most recognizable shot of one of the gunmen.

"I was shaking, but I kept shooting," Mr. D'souza said during an interview at his office as he scrolled through his pictures of the attacks.

His photo of the gunman, Muhammad Ajmal Kasab, confidently striding through Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, formerly Victoria Terminus, carrying an assault rifle with one hand, has been printed and reprinted in newspapers here and flashed daily on television screens.

A month after the terrorist rampage that left 163 victims and 9 attackers dead, memories are blurring. Some witness accounts remain contradictory. But Mr. D'souza and another newspaper photographer, Vasant Prabhu, have millions of pixels of evidence that will remain part of the indelible record.

Their photos, some of them unpublished, provide detail and precision that is lacking from other witness accounts. They show brave attempts by police officers to stop the attackers. They also highlight the woeful inadequacy of the officers' weapons and thus help to explain how just 10 terrorists managed to hold a city hostage for three days.

Surprising in an era of camera phones and point-and-shoot pocket-size cameras, there are very few images from the attacks aside from those taken by Mr. D'souza and Mr. Prabhu, except for some grainy security camera images at the luxury hotels and one blurry photo of an attacker walking outside, taken from a newspaper office window by a photographer with The Times of India who was shot at but unharmed.

Mr. Prabhu, a photographer at The Indian Express, followed two police officers into the Taj Mahal Palace and Tower hotel and documented the room-by-room discovery of the destruction and killing there. He captured images of abandoned restaurant tables; there are half-eaten meals on plates, and shattered glass is everywhere. By the swimming pool, a Western couple clad in white are sprawled lifelessly near an ice bucket and some wineglasses.

Mr. D'souza and Mr. Prabhu, who are in their 50s, took their pictures at great risk to themselves. Several police officers whom they photographed were subsequently killed. Mr.

Prabhu said he invoked the name of Ganesh, a Hindu deity, for protection when he had to use a flash and risked being spotted by the gunmen.

Both photographers were tormented by the passivity of their jobs — recording the bloodshed without any power to stop it.

“I wanted to get rid of my camera, get hold of a gun and go after the terrorists,” Mr. Prabhu said. If the photographers had been looking through rifle scopes instead of camera viewfinders, some of the attackers might have been killed early on. Mr. D’souza, who tracked the gunmen for about 40 minutes until they left the train terminal, managed to find a better vantage point on the attackers than any of the police officers stationed there.

Witnesses have offered various accounts on the timing and duration of the attacks. Mr. D’souza’s pictures help resolve the issue. Some images show the train terminal clock, down to the second. A police officer is seen shooting his rifle at the attackers at 22:07:05. Another photo shows the same clock 20 minutes later. Mr. D’souza’s camera also recorded the times that the photos were taken.

A photo of Mr. Kasab, the gunman, that has not yet been published gives a slightly more detailed look at him. Mr. Kasab’s assault rifle appears to have two ammunition clips bound together with tape, allowing for longer intervals between reloading. He has the appearance of a college student, with a slightly floppy haircut, cargo pants and what appears to be a sweatshirt.

Mr. D’souza described the two attackers at the train station as cool and composed. “They never ran, just walked,” he said. “They were very accurate and didn’t waste any bullets.”

Mr. Kasab is in police custody as the lone survivor among the 10 known gunman. Nine others were killed by the police.

Both photographers’ images of the police show a stark mismatch with the attackers’ arsenal. Mr. D’souza photographed a police officer awkwardly firing his outdated rifle; he and all the other officers missed, Mr. D’souza said. Neither attacker appears to have been wounded at the train terminal during what was at least a half-hour rampage there.

Mr. Prabhu’s photos show two police officers in pressed khaki uniforms wearing formal wingtip shoes. Their pistols are drawn. Mr. Prabhu said he saw one officer fire three rounds in the direction of the attackers. But they were up against terrorists with assault weapons, grenades and other explosives.

In the train terminal, Mr. D’souza captured some of the surreal aspects of the attacks. He recounted that despite the nearly constant sound of approaching gunfire, a shopkeeper at a small bookshop spent minutes trying to close his metal shutter instead of just running away. The attackers shot the merchant; one of Mr. D’souza’s pictures shows the man slumped, dying, in front of his shop.

Mr. D’souza also tells of a woman in a sari who walked nonchalantly in front of the attackers, but was spared. “They didn’t even look at her,” Mr. D’souza said.

A man, possibly homeless, Mr. D’souza guesses, watched the attacks with his arms folded as if he were admiring a street performance.

It is still not clear why the attackers let some people live while others were killed on the spot.

“They were like angels of death,” Mr. D’souza said. “When they hit someone they didn’t even look back. They were so sure.”

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