

gold in a bank vault for safekeeping and even that had been looted.

My father was anxious to check on the school. I went with him. We found that the building opposite the girls' school had been hit by a missile but the school itself looked intact. For some reason my father's keys would not work so we found a boy who climbed over the wall and opened it from the inside. We ran up the steps anticipating the worst.

'Someone has been in here,' my father said as soon as we entered the courtyard. There were cigarette stubs and empty food wrappers all over the floor. Chairs had been upended and the space was a mess. My father had taken down the Khushal School sign and left it in the courtyard. It was leaning against the wall and I screamed as we lifted it. Underneath were the rotting heads of goats. It looked like the remains of someone's dinner.

Then we went into the classrooms. Anti-Taliban slogans were scrawled all over the walls. Someone had written army zindabad (Long live the army) on a whiteboard in permanent marker. Now we knew who had been living there. One soldier had even written corny love poems in one of my classmate's diaries. Bullet casings littered the floor. The soldiers had made a hole in the wall through which you could see the city below. Maybe they had even shot at people through that hole. I felt sorry that our precious school had become a battlefield.

While we were looking around we heard someone banging on the door downstairs. 'Don't open it, Malala!' my father ordered.

In his office my father found a letter left by the army. It blamed citizens like us for allowing the Taliban to control Swat. 'We have lost so many of the precious lives of our soldiers and this is due to your negligence. Long live Pak Army,' he read.

'This is typical,' he said. 'We people of Swat were first seduced by the Taliban, then killed by them and now blamed for them. Seduced, killed and blamed.'

In some ways the army did not seem very different to the militants. One of our neighbours told us he had even seen them leaving the bodies of dead Taliban in the streets for all to see. Now their helicopters flew in pairs overhead like big black buzzing insects, and when we walked home we stayed close to the walls so they wouldn't see us.

We heard that thousands of people had been arrested including boys as young as eight who had been brainwashed to train for suicide bombing missions. The army was sending them to a special camp for jihadis to de-radicalise them. One of the people arrested was our old Urdu teacher who had refused to teach girls and had instead gone to help Fazlullah's men collect and destroy CDs and DVDs.

Fazlullah himself was still at large. The army had destroyed his headquarters in Imam Deri and then claimed to have him surrounded in the mountains of Peochar. Then they said he was badly injured and that they had his spokesman, Muslim Khan, in custody. Later the story changed and they reported that Fazlullah had escaped into Afghanistan and was in the province of Kunar. Some people said that Fazlullah had been captured but that the army and the ISI couldn't agree on what to do with him. The army had wanted to imprison him, but the intelligence service had prevailed and taken him to Bajaur so that he could slip across the border to Afghanistan.

Muslim Khan and another commander called Mehmud seemed to be the only members of the Taliban leadership who were in custody – all the others were still free. As long as Fazlullah was still around I was afraid the Taliban would regroup and return to power. I sometimes had nightmares, but at least his radio broadcasts had stopped.