

The New York Times

# Attack on a Mall

BY TYLER HICKS

NOMINATION FOR THE 2014 PULITZER PRIZE  
CATEGORY 13: BREAKING NEWS PHOTOGRAPHY



The first shots rang out around noon — a long, angry burst of machine-gun fire, from inside an upscale mall in central Nairobi.

Tyler Hicks, staff photographer for The New York Times, had just returned from his own wedding in the States and was picking up some gifts around the corner from the Westgate Shopping Mall when he heard that something was happening. He ran over and saw people streaming from the entrance, and bodies. Using the small camera he always carries, he began shooting until his new wife could arrive with his Kevlar helmet and professional cameras. The Twittersphere was on overdrive. “Stay away from Westgate,” several tweets said. “Bank robbery underway.” But Hicks knew this was no bank robbery.

He ran inside. More dead people — sprawled in the food court, in front of the supermarket, by the cafe. Hicks did what he has done many times before, from Afghanistan and Syria to Libya and Congo. He found a way to navigate an extremely dangerous and confusing situation.

A band of Somali militants had stormed the mall, executing dozens of shoppers, including children, as part of their campaign to spread terror in Kenya. As one of the first photographers to arrive on the scene, Hicks attached himself to a team of plainclothes police officers as well as uniformed police and soldiers who began to comb every inch of the mall, pistols drawn. For all he knew as he took his first frames, ducking in and out of shops smeared with blood, the militants were still inside. In fact, they were.

For several hours Hicks photographed the fear, the death, the bravery and the grief. These photos, replayed countless times, became the images of this tragedy. Everybody in Kenya seemed to know his work. A few days later, after the Kenyan army had blasted the last of the militants out of the mall, Hicks managed to slip inside, past a military checkpoint.

His photos from that visit documented the devastation — the gigantic hole where a parking lot collapsed, the aftermath of fires and explosions. A smartly dressed mannequin, perched in a shattered shop window, bore silent witness to the place where so many people had been hunted down.

Hicks did not stop there. He tracked down survivors and loved ones. He attended funerals where little boys watched their mothers being slipped into the earth. All of these pictures show his sensitivity, his uncanny ability to know exactly where to be and when to squeeze the shutter to fully capture what people were feeling during the most trying moments of their lives.

Tyler Hicks has been among the most dedicated combat photographers in the world this past decade. He photographed the battlefields of Afghanistan and the war in Sudan. He was kidnapped in Libya; he was bombed in Gaza. He photographed the fighting in Syria.

Hicks’s work from places of mortal peril is unsurpassed. Someday museums will show retrospectives of his photography. We nominated him for the Pulitzer Prize in six of the past seven years. (He has been a Pulitzer finalist twice.) In 2007 and 2013 he earned two entries, from quite different contexts, and we’re doing so again this year: for these photos, and for his pictures a few months later on the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines.

His photos from the Westgate slaughter show his courageous commitment to getting the picture, no matter where it is, no matter what it takes. We proudly nominate Tyler Hicks for the Pulitzer Prize for Breaking News Photography.