

Pulitzer Board to Amend Records, Give Prize to Iranian Photographer

By EMILY STEEL

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More than a quarter of a century after an anonymous photograph of an Iranian firing squad won the 1980 Pulitzer Prize for Spot News Photography, the Pulitzer Prize Board has said it will award the certificate and \$10,000 cash prize to Iranian photographer Jahangir Razmi.

The board said it will revise its records to grant Mr. Razmi his prize and invite him to the awards ceremony in New York May 21 at Columbia University, whose journalism school hosts the prizes. ([Read the board's statement.](#))



Jahangir Razmi

The photograph that won the Pulitzer.

The identity of Mr. Razmi was revealed in a page-one article that appeared last Saturday in The Wall Street Journal, along with other photographs which he had kept hidden all these years because he feared for his safety. ([Read the article.](#)) The prize-winning photo appeared on front pages of newspapers throughout the world on Aug. 29, 1979, circulated by United Press International. The 1980 Pulitzer Prize for Spot News Photography was the only award ever granted to an anonymous recipient.

"It is always best if you can honor the individual responsible," says Sig Gissler, administrator of the Pulitzer Prizes. "The board feels this closes a historic gap, and it is very pleased that it can properly recognize a photographer who shot a very compelling, iconic photograph."

The Wall Street Journal article detailed how Mr. Razmi, who worked at the Iranian newspaper Ettela'at from 1973 to 1987, found himself an eyewitness to an execution of 11 men on an airstrip in Sanandaj in the Kurdistan province of Iran.



Through hundreds of interviews, the article constructed the events: that cleric Sadegh Khalkhali sentenced the men to death, that Ettela'at reporter Khalil Bahrami, paired with Mr. Razmi, knew the judge well, that the judge granted Mr. Razmi permission to photograph the grisly scene, that the chief Ettela'at editor Mohammed Heydari ran the photograph on the front page but withheld Mr. Razmi's name, that a UPI employee named Sajid Rizvi procured the photo and sent it abroad, and that UPI won the Pulitzer Prize as a result. It also detailed that Mr. Razmi, who was interrogated in Tehran's notorious Evin prison days after the execution, chose not to reveal his identity.



Jahangir Razmi with the Nikon camera he used to photograph an execution on Aug. 27, 1979.

In the very first days after the Shah fled Iran, and Ayatollah Khomeini, a radical Islamic cleric, returned to it and seized control, the state executed officials of the former regime. Hundreds more were executed in the ensuing months, including homosexuals, drug offenders and Kurds. A U.S. Senate resolution on May 17, 1979, declared the executions abhorrent. But it was only on Aug. 29, 1979, when the photograph of the execution in Sanandaj, Iran, ran on front pages around the world, that the methods of the regime were laid bare.

THE PAGE ONE ARTICLE

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- [Video: Joshua Prager details his quest](#) to track down the anonymous Pulitzer prize-winning photographer.

After reviewing Wall Street Journal reporter Joshua Prager's article, a Pulitzer Board committee conducted further investigations and decided to connect Mr. Razmi with the honor. Before amending its records, the board consulted international experts who said that once a story like this is published, official recognition can be helpful to the person's safety. "Our hope is that his country will take pride in his accomplishment and that his trip will take place without any problems," Mr. Gissler says.

Mr. Razmi told the Wall Street Journal earlier this week that he would be honored to receive his prize and attend the ceremony if Iranian authorities would grant permission.

The photographer, now 58, told Mr. Prager that part of him always wanted to step forward. He was disappointed when he first saw that his photo didn't carry his name, and weighted by his secret. "Without this picture," he said, "I wouldn't be anything."

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