

The prisoners' hands were bound with plastic ties. They were ordered to lie on their side, with their heads on piles of sand. All my guides were involved, saying they had held the legs of the prisoners while their throats were cut with bayonets. Every one of them denied killing any captives themselves.

'We burned some of the bodies before burying them in the sand,' I was told. 'I don't know how many were killed - as many as 1,000.'

Most died in the immediate aftermath of the end of the war last August. But sources say people were still being taken to Heaven Hotel earlier this year.

The bodies were buried in a gully across the sand from where we stood, explained my guides. Here, bulldozer tracks criss-crossed the area. The machines had been used to make large piles of sand and rocks to cover the bodies.

In blinding white sunlight, I scraped at the one of the piles of rock and sand. I found shoes, flip-flops and empty machine-gun cartridges near the surface. The men with me said this was a mass grave.

Later, I spoke to dozens of militia fighters. All told the same story: that Gaddafi fighters suspected of rape or particularly brutal killings were slaughtered here for their crimes.

Senior military sources in the city also acknowledged the existence of Heaven Hotel. Indeed, older, wiser leaders in Misrata were horrified when they learned soon after the war that the prisoners were being killed in such a manner.

They ordered that, in future, all executions had to be carried out with a single bullet in the head - rather than by holding the victims down and cutting their throats.

'After that, we always shot them,' another militia fighter told me. 'It was quicker and cleaner - better for everyone.'

Many of the victims were from Tawerga, a town 30 miles from here, where some 50,000 black Libyans once lived in happy co-existence with their neighbours in Misrata.

But since Gaddafi fell, the rebels have been targeting its black population in indiscriminate revenge attacks for the despot's deployment of thousands of African mercenaries recruited from outside the country against them.

Some Tawergans undoubtedly took money to join Gaddafi's forces. But vast numbers never joined in the fighting - and are being attacked simply because their skin colour is associated with Gaddafi's mercenaries.

Today, Tawerga has been ethnically cleansed of its black Libyans, and largely destroyed. Militia fighters regularly drive out there from Misrata to make sure none of the population have sneaked back in.

Signs bearing the town's name have been painted over. What remains of the shattered homes, shops and restaurants have been daubed with vile graffiti: 'Black dogs! No blacks.'

A group of 'freedom fighters' told me how they had ransacked the town, setting fire to buildings and attacking anyone they found. These men told how they repeatedly kicked a heavily-pregnant Tawergan woman in the stomach. One said: 'The woman was shouting as we kicked her: "I could be your mother."

'I told her my mother is not a black b***h,' he added.

Some 25,000 Tawergans have now been placed in 'refugee camps', which are, in effect, little more than prisons.

The people in these camps do not dare leave: Misrata militias scour the country for anyone from Tawerga and regularly kidnap and torture black Libyans suspected of helping Gaddafi.

And even in the camps, fortified with barbed wire and watched by armed guards, the refugees are not safe from the marauding militias.

In a series of attacks, fighters from Misrata have opened fire on camp residents, killing both men and women. The latest happened at a camp for 1,700 Tawergans in Tripoli this week, when men from Misrata in four cars attacked with guns.

So bad has the situation been that some want the Nato-backed rebels to be tried for war crimes. The tragic irony is that Britain, France and the U.S. imposed a no-fly zone and helped overthrow Gaddafi to stop him committing war crimes.

Medical charities now refuse to work in Misrata. They pulled out after accusing rebels of bringing torture victims in for treatment - only to take them back for more torture once their wounds had recovered sufficiently for their bodies to cope.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2170025/Back-bloody-anarchy-Andrew-Malone-revisits-Libya-finds-country-riven-torture-mass-murder-savage-vengeance.html>