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**Inside the camp of the dead
from janine di giovanni in jenin refugee camp
The Times
April 16, 2002**

BASHIR died in agony. The hands of the 23-year-old Palestinian are clenched into tight fists, his body charred. He lies buried under rubble and cement, his head twisted towards the door as if crying out for help. His tomb is a wasted house that crashed around him after the Israelis tried to bulldoze it to make a road.

Next door, up a blackened stairway and across shards of glass, is the body of Ashran Abu Hadel, also 23. Someone tried to pull him out of the rubble but gave up. His arm lies straight out, as though he tried to push himself away from the cement as he lay dying.

Elsewhere in the Jenin refugee camp I saw bodies of men who were clearly fighters, replete with ammunition belts and other paramilitary trappings. Bashir and Ashran had nothing.

The refugees I had interviewed in recent days while trying to enter the camp were not lying. If anything, they underestimated the the carnage and the horror. Rarely, in more than a decade of war reporting from Bosnia, Chechnya, Sierra Leone, Kosovo, have I seen such deliberate destruction, such disrespect for human life.

This was not only a town of fighters, as Israeli soldiers told me. It was a town of women, children and old men, who have seen the camp grow into a warren of ramshackle homes over half a century. Amnesty International called for an immediate investigation into "the killings of hundreds of Palestinians", saying crucial evidence may be destroyed as Israel "continues to impede access".

Throughout the camp, which the Israelis called a production line for terrorists, there is the stench of death, of bodies that have been rotting in the sun for days. Everyone who survived the fiercest battle of Israel's Operation Defensive Shield has a terrible story to tell. They take your hand and lead you into their houses across bulldozed mounds of rubble including photo albums, clothing, toys and pillowcases. There, there are more bodies, burnt or twisted grotesquely, caught off guard by sudden death. Nothing prepares you for the smallness of a dead body.

The dead are everywhere. Kamal Anis, a labourer, leads us to an area called Harat al-