

The centre of Misrata lies in ruins. Every street has been shelled, every house has been hit and every road has craters in it. It is a city engaged in such fierce fighting that it is hard to know which images to share, or what stories to tell, so extensive is the damage and the destruction. It is hard also to describe the feeling in a city that is torn between pride for its revolution and a sinking dread as the situation deteriorates.

Qaddafi has this city surrounded and besieged so resources are running low. The only access point is the port, and this too is now being shelled. We arrived ourselves in the dead of night on a boat laden with antiquated RPG's, grenades and ammo and missiles though against the heavy and advanced weapons of Qaddafi it will take much more to break his hold.

Walking around the streets it is impossible not to tread on bullets, mortar casings, rubble, broken glass or in blood. The bodies of Qaddafi troops lie rotting on the ground and the stench can be overbearing. Buildings crumble around you and bullet ridden or bombed out cars and tanks litter the city.

The sounds are as varied as the sights. Rockets, cluster bombs, mortars, heavy artillery, sniper fire, NATO planes and the eponymous Kalashnikov can be heard night and day alongside cries of Allah Akbar and sirens. The walls shake even in the basement that we are staying in but this has become such a constant that it's barely noticed. There's no rest and as the battle rages constantly, exhausted fighters are replaced by new ones either arriving at the port or from the 300,000 men who have stayed.

The two 'armies' are so close that it is never easy to know who is firing and it is easy to become caught in a crossfire. Each street is a mad dash to find cover and often you might only be a street away from Qaddafi's soldiers. However he has stopped short of sending in many ground troops preferring instead to bomb and shell while sending in small teams of snipers and soldiers. The reason for this is that Misrata is a city of small and complex dirt roads, which the rebels know like the back of their hands. This allows them to outmanoeuvre Qaddafi's own troops and surround them.

Much has been written in the media about the use of mercenaries, however there are as many Libyans fighting. Many are uneducated and so believe Qaddafi's propaganda, but they are also poor and offered so much money that they are obliged to accept. We have also been told that mercenaries have orders to shoot any defectors, and that many of their families are being held hostage in Tripoli.

There is much evidence also for mercenaries. One pilot who defected was asked to fly south and pick up a plane load from Chad. In another case, a truck was found full of Serbian fighters – 180 of them. However the biggest worry is that Qaddafi fighters have infiltrated the civilians who remain. Many military license plates have been found discarded, swapped for civilian ones, and so few streets checkpoints have been set up to identify anyone from out of town.