



Precious Stones Fuel Fight Against Taliban

Gem Expert Helps Northern Alliance Find Gems to Fund Its Battles



Gem expert Gary Bowersox and ABCNEWS' Diane Sawyer look at the precious stones he's pulled from Afghan caves. (ABCNEWS.com)

NEW YORK, Nov. 7 — Gary Bowersox has been called "a modern-day Indiana Jones," but his adventures in Afghan cave-mining have posed real-life dangers.

Bowersox, president of a private gem wholesale company, has spent much of his life venturing deep into the caves of Afghanistan, risking his life in dangerous terrain in search of treasure.

The rubies, emeralds, tourmalines and aquamarines he discovered in the country's rugged terrain can fetch tens of thousands of dollars each on the U.S. wholesale market. Bowersox has also transformed them into dazzling jewelry, often worth more than \$100,000 a piece.

Funding the Fight

While working as a jeweler in the late 1980s, Bowersox was searching for a new source of gems. He heard that some had been found in Afghanistan during the country's battles with the Soviets. Bowersox decided to contact Ahmed Shah Massood, who at the time was a resistance leader, repelling Soviet attacks on Afghanistan.

Massood had been looking for ways to fund the war against the Soviets when Bowersox traveled to Afghanistan in 1988. Bowersox suggested he teach villagers to mine their own caves for precious stones that he could sell in the United States.

During his expeditions, Bowersox traveled for a month at a time by horseback, climbing narrow paths to mountain caves, at altitudes as high as 14,000 feet. Using grenades, dynamite, and even crowbars, he and his team of local miners uncovered more than \$2 million in precious stones — emeralds, rubies and sapphires.

Disguised as a Woman

Bowersox sometimes wore an Islamic woman's head-to-toe burqa in order to sneak the gems across the Pakistan border.

When the Soviets withdrew in 1989, the coalition government that Massood was a part of was unable to hold onto power. When the fundamentalist Taliban swept into power in the mid-1990s, Massood was enemy No. 1. As the military commander of the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance, Massood used the gem profits for his new battle against the Taliban until he was assassinated days before the Sept. 11 attacks.

Though 61-year-old Bowersox hasn't been mining in Afghanistan since the summer, he told *Good Morning America* that he still sends profits to the Northern Alliance. Bowersox said he will continue to work with the villagers. "We'll go over and train in mining exploration," he said. "We are working on projects for the future and we believe this is a way to promote these people so they create an income, foreign exchange and taxes for their new government."

Because of his knowledge of the region, Bowersox has become a precious commodity himself. The U.S. Department of Defense has been using the gem expert and former U.S. army major as a consultant on the topography of Afghanistan. Bowersox won't reveal details of those conversations, but military officials have questioned him on issues such as the location of minefields that could be fatal to U.S. troops and their allies.

Bowersox said he hopes to get back to mining in Afghanistan by next summer. ■