

## Africa Overland Mission Update - July 2013

Dear Friends and Family

Greetings in the precious and wonderful Name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ!

We hope and pray that all is well with you at home.

***"And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the Day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ the glory and praise of God. - to"***

Philippians 1:9-11

### Mission Overview

We are now into our 5<sup>th</sup> month of ministry on this Africa Overland Mission and we are currently ministering in South Sudan which is the 5<sup>th</sup> country out of the eleven which we plan to minister in. We have already travelled more than 17,500km and have had to wade through an obstacle course of challenges. We have conducted a total of 210 meetings in Mozambique, Malawi, Tanzania, Kenya and South Sudan.

### Border Crossing

We had a very interesting border crossing as we crossed into South Sudan. The first thing which becomes very obvious is the fact that everybody drives on the wrong side of the road - they drive on the right-hand side of the road in South Sudan! Secondly, the customs officials were the most thorough that I have ever witnessed in all my travels in Africa. They off-loaded and opened almost every single box, trunk, and bag that we had in our rig. They wanted to see every book, CD, and DVD - even going to the extent of inserting the discs into their computers to investigate the content. After the Customs officials were satisfied that we were not carrying any contraband, the officer in charge of the border post came out and insisted that we be allowed to proceed without any further delays or inconveniences, because *"you can see that they are Christian missionaries."*

He pointed to the Christian flag that we had mounted on the front of our vehicle. We were congratulated for the work that we were doing as missionaries. All taxes were waived and we were sent on our way with their blessing.

## **Praise God**

God has been very good to us so far. Thank you for your fervent prayers for us. God has taken us through some very scary situations, tough challenges, severe breakdowns, and He has given us multiplied effective ministry opportunities.

## **Desperate Prayer Request**

Our last update to you ended with us urging you to pray for our protection, as we were about to travel through some pretty dangerous areas. Now that we have travelled through these treacherous gauntlets I can, with gratitude, report on how God has answered your fervent prayers.

## **Wrapping up in Kenya**

In Turkana we were able to screen the *Jesus* film four times and we conducted eleven meetings including a Great Commission Seminar and four outreaches.

## The Treacherous Gauntlet

Our research had informed us that we were on the verge of entering a very dangerous leg of our journey and that is why we had requested your urgent prayers. Whilst in Lokichogio our fears were confirmed as local missionaries told us of the terror that lay ahead of us.

## Dangerous Area ONE

There were three particularly dangerous areas through which we would need to drive. The first was a 45km section of very rough road still inside Kenya between Lokichogio and the border town of Nadapal. This is an area where bandits take advantage of slow-moving vehicles, shooting at and robbing the occupants.

## Armed Escorts

We were strongly advised to take armed escorts with us in the vehicle as we travelled from Lokichogio to Nadapal, which we did. As we drove slowly over the bumpy road our armed escorts with their automatic rifles loaded and ready, their alert eyes searching the shrubbery told us how bad the problem actually was. *"Yesterday someone was killed over there"* one of them said.

"

*Do you see those ditches there? That*

,

*s where they normally lie in ambush*

"

said the other

"

*I have seen many dead people here*

"

.

Broken windshield glass and debris lay on the ground as testimony to the terror of which we were told. We were glad to have the armed guards with us and were somewhat relieved when we arrived without incident at the border post of Nadapal.

## **Dangerous Area TWO**

The second area we were warned about was an area in South Sudan between Kapoeta and Torit called 'Camp 15'. This is an area where armed rebels led by a man called Yau Yau, from the Murle tribe, have recently been causing havoc. The SPLA soldiers have been trying to drive them northwards towards Ethiopia. We were warned emphatically of the dangers of this area.

## **Breakdown in the 'Red' Zone**

After entering into South Sudan we had two punctures before we reached Kapoeta. After having our tyres repaired in Kapoeta we cautiously proceeded towards the notorious 'Camp 15'. After sunset while it was still dusk, as we approached 'Camp 15' I started hearing a scratching noise coming from one of the rear wheels. Surrounded by drunks and suspicious-looking locals, armed with AK-47s, I stopped to inspect the noise at a nearby village (which turned out to be 'Camp 15'). We soon attracted a crowd of inquisitive on-lookers who were giving us the 'stare', so I decided to proceed to a safer area even though my inspection had informed me that the trailer's wheel-bearing had disintegrated. We drove on slowly, nursing the increasingly noisy bearing, for another 30km until we found a safer place to stop for the night and erect our tents.

## **Searching for Spares**

It took us more than four days to repair the damage caused by the inferior bearing. A replacement axle had to be purchased - and there was none to be found in the 'red' zone. I searched through Torit and Juba for three days before I found a suitable (but ruthlessly over-priced) axle. Then I still had to modify the wheel-nuts and acquire all the necessary fittings. All this time, Daniel was left alone looking after our trailer in the 'red' zone and I was anxious to get him out of there.

## **Dodging Bullets**

When we finally got back to the trailer after sunset, I was relieved to find that all was still OK. We started immediately to change the axles. There were some drunken men arguing with each other nearby as we worked. Most men in this area carry an automatic rifle and these men were no exception. Whilst we were hurriedly trying to complete the repair work, these drunkards started shooting at each other! Some of the bullets came real close to us as we heard them striking tin cans nearby. We quickly took cover behind the vehicle until things quieted down and then cautiously came out from our cover and completed the repairs as fast as we could. We breathed a sigh of relief and gave thanks to God as we drove out from there, heading towards Torit just before 22h00.

### **Dangerous Area THREE**

The third area we were warned about was on the last stretch between Juba and Torit. This is an area where bandits and robbers stop vehicles by shooting at them and then rob the occupants. There were reports that within the previous three weeks 19 people had been killed by bandits on this road alone.

Incidentally, in order to obtain spares from Juba, we had to drive through this area two times before finally crossing in again the third time towing our trailer.

### **Almost Targeted**

As we cautiously drove through this 'ambush alley', we saw evidences of other vehicles that had been recently shot-up and still lay derelict in the middle of the road. Soon after a mini-bus (which was approaching from the opposite direction) had passed us, we heard gunfire and as I looked in my rear-view mirror, I could see that the mini-bus had been stopped and the passengers were frantically disembarking from the vehicle. We gave thanks to God as we realised that we had passed through that ambush unharmed!

### **Juba at Last!**

We were very happy to have arrived in Juba and our anxious host was just as happy to receive

us. We had the privilege of conducting a two-day **Great Commission Seminar** where almost 200 people attended.

### **Moru Printing Project**

We headed for Yei where we met with the diligent staff of Sudan Literature Centre and discussed the progress of new Moru Hymn Book which Frontline Fellowship is in the process of printing as a gift to Moruland. We were very happy to see some progress, but much more needs to be done before it is ready to print. The only Moru Hymn Book in the area are the very well worn copies from the edition Dr. Peter Hammond delivered to the Churches in Equatoria in 1996.

### **Rough Roads**

The roads in South Sudan are mostly very rough with potholes often so large that huge trucks and lorries get stuck in them. On our way to Rumbek, we encountered some severe mechanical failures that forced us to turn back to Mundri in order to take dominion over these problems and start the repair process.

### **Repairs and Opportunities**

The trailer's chassis was cracked right through in two places and the vehicle's prop-shaft centre-bearing (carrier-bearing) was on its way out and was starting to make a terrible noise. This forced us to return to Juba to have the necessary repairs done. Once again, Daniel stayed with the trailer and had a very effective time of ministry at various schools and a Bible college in Mundri while Renee and I were away in Juba forcing our way to the top of these mechanical challenges that were trying to bog us down.

### **Financial Aid**

As you can imagine, these numerous, unexpected mechanical challenges cost us a lot more than we had initially budgeted for and were threatening to cut our Mission short in South Sudan, because our limited financial resources were almost depleted. God graciously supplied our need through the hands of generous sponsors who deposited funds into our bank account and we were able to do the necessary repairs and continue on our Mission as planned.

## **Military Mission**

We were very blessed to have been able to conduct Chaplains Training for more than 40 SPLA Chaplains in the Division HQ. Some of the Chaplains who participated were those who had been trained by Dr. Peter Hammond in 1996, and they still had their [Chaplains Handbooks](#) and

[Chaplains Prayerbooks](#)

! We also had the privilege of preaching to the entire Division at the general parade. This was certainly the highlight of our time in South Sudan so far.

## **Thank You**

Thank you to each and every one of you who remember to pray for us and who contribute of your limited and valuable financial resources to make our Mission possible. We would not be able to do this without generous supporters like you who give of your time and money.

## **The Top Team**

I am also particularly grateful for my amazing Team that I have with me out here in these harsh conditions. Renee and Daniel are doing a great work and our team is functioning very effectively with each member fulfilling their role with great efficiency. Renee is, no doubt, the best team-mate that I have ever had out in the mission field, and the most beautiful! Daniel and I enjoy amazingly tasty meals that Renee is able to make from, sometimes limited, resources. Daniel is a great help in the ministry as he has such a fiery passion for the Gospel and is immensely effective in assisting us to convey the message of the Great Commission during our seminars. Please pray for us that we will continue to enjoy good health and that we may continue to work well together.

Please continue to pray for us as we go out to the frontline to minister to soldiers. We are still traveling in areas where there are many insecurity issues.

May God continue to be your joy and strength.

In His service - and loving it!

Michael and Renee Watson

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