



Flying far behind enemy lines in war torn Islamic Sudan has its risks -as this crashed aircraft in the Nuba Mountains demonstrates

Nightfall in the Nuba Mountains always comes as a welcome relief from the oppressive heat.

Much of our ministry in Sudan had been carried out in stifling heat which sometimes reached 58°C (136

During the day our eyes continually scanned the skies, the horizons, the bushes and the paths for any s

Unless one has experienced the heightened alertness and intense concentration of anticipating an attack, realising that every step could be your last – it is impossible to imagine or explain the fear and thrill of excitement, dread, exhilaration and adrenaline rush – nor how prayerful and

thoughtful one can become.

Before flying into the Nuba we had to be challenged: are you ready to die? Are you willing for this to be your last day on earth? And what if you're captured by the National Islamic Front government?

Tim, Delia and I were walking swiftly in the darkness across a valley with only the sound of soft sand crunching underfoot. Suddenly the unmistakable report of heavy weapons shattered the silence, tracers lit up the sky and shells exploded overhead. My first thoughts were that we had walked into an ambush and these were illumination flares going up. Then as more and more shells were fired and passed overhead we were relieved to conclude that we were not the targets!

For a few minutes we watched the explosions lighting up the sky. It was a spectacular visual reminder that we were far behind enemy lines in the midst of the longest war of the century. Since 1955 the Muslim Arab North has been trying to crush the Christian Black South.

Every night in the Nuba Mountains we heard gunfire. Each of the places we visited had been recently and repeatedly bombed. Sometimes we walked past burning fields and burned out homes.

One pastor related how Muslim raiders had recently attacked his village to steal their cattle. He had fought them off with a shotgun. Pastors at another village described how over 100 bombs had been dropped on their village in one month. Then over 140 more bombs were dropped on their village during an eight day period. Another pastor told of a single Antonov bomber that had repeatedly circled their small village for an hour dropping 16 bombs on them. Other villages had sustained casualties from artillery fire from nearby Arab garrisons.

Earlier in the week we had flown into the Nuba Mountains with 9 000 Christian books and Bibles in 7 languages. It involved flying 3½ hours into Central Sudan – illegally. The National Islamic Front (NIF) dictatorship that rules Sudan has declared Jihad (holy war) against the Christians in the Nuba Mountains. The official policy is tamsit (or combing) which is scorched earth. Everything necessary to sustain life in the Nuba is targeted for destruction. The NIF forces have burned down most of the villages in the Nuba Mountains. Most of the livestock have been stolen

or destroyed. Most of the crops have been burned down. Most of the churches have been burned down. Even wells have been poisoned. The Nuba are a people under siege. An island of Christianity in a sea of Islam.

Breaching the Blockade

As our aircraft came in to land we saw a crashed aircraft by the airstrip. It was another reminder of the risks of landing on such rugged terrain.

Many pastors from all over the Nuba Mountains had come to welcome us. Some had walked over 100 miles across enemy occupied territory to receive us. Most of the men I recognised from previous visits. They were delighted that we had not forgotten them, but had returned – as promised.

There was also much excitement over our cargo. After a previous mission to the Nuba I had organised reprints of Hymn books, prayer books, catechisms and Sunday School books in the five main Nuba languages: Otorro, Moro, Heiban, Kwalib and Krongo. Most of these books had been out of print and unavailable for many years. As soon as the pastors saw these precious books in their own languages they started to sing with joy. “In Frontline Fellowship God has answered the prayers of all of us with these books.” declared one pastor.



Rejoice also knowing that the 8 Gospel Books, 100 Messengers, 1 Bible and 100 Study Bibles are on their way to the Nuba Mountains.

We also transported in nearly a tonne of food – mainly sorghum, their staple diet. Because of the extreme

The human column swiftly picked up the cargo and we set off, each person carrying an average of 25 kg balanced on their heads, as we snaked our way up and down the rolling hills. The terrain was very dry. Everything was brown and yellow with no green visible. The last time I had visited the Nuba Mountains were resplendent in lush thick green vegetation. That was at the end of the rainy season. Just a few months of the dry season had changed everything dramatically. Most significantly to obtain water the women had to walk much further to find wells that weren't dry. And we were far more exposed to air attacks without much vegetation for cover.

As we trekked across the desolate landscape people came to see the strange foreigners. Some smiled broadly and shook our hands, some tried out the little English they knew in short conversations with us. Many just stared open-mouthed at us. We must have looked very strange.

They laughed at how much water we drank. I could go through 8 litres in a day and still feel thirsty! The average Nuban drinks 2 litres a day – and that mostly at dawn and dusk. Our water purification hand pump also attracted much attention. It would take us over an hour a day hand pumping just to purify enough water for us to drink. The local people have the physical constitution to be able to drink the murky water from the wells without falling sick, but foreigners like ourselves would fall violently ill if we imbibed the infected local water.

There was even more merriment over us rubbing sunscreen over our faces, necks and arms. Our one escort was almost paralytic with laughter as I rubbed the sunscreen onto the exposed parts of my skin. "You can laugh" I retorted with a smile, "but you've never suffered from sunburn like I have!" My skin is so fair that I've been described as "a sunburn waiting for somewhere to happen." On occasions I've been so sunburnt that my face has been covered in blisters.

As on all of our other outreaches, the purpose of this was to minister to body, mind and spirit. Food, seed, agricultural tools and medicines – for the body. School text books, black boards and chalk, pens and exercise books – for the mind. And Bibles, Hymn books, Christian books

and Gospel Messengers for the spirit.

My personal priority for leadership training was to present a Discipleship Training Course for 70 Bible students, evangelists and pastors in the Nuba Mountains. Some of these pastors walked over 200 miles (round trip) to attend this course!

Muslims Come to Christ

Numerous Nuban pastors related testimonies of Muslims in their communities coming to Christ: 8, 10, 20 and even 40 Muslims at a time would become Christians in response to preaching, the Jesus film and Gospel Recordings audio visual presentations. Six Muslims were known to have been converted in Kauda last year in response to the Jesus film. Ten were converted in Achurum, this year, through the Gospel Recordings presentation. Seven were converted, this year, in Tira through the Gospel Recordings presentations.

Steadfast Under Fire

One village nearby had been repeatedly bombed over the previous months, so on Sunday morning, Tim, Delia and I rose early and walked the 12 miles up and over a steep mountain to attend their church service. We were warmly welcomed with singing. The congregation packed out and overflowed the church building which, although it had been repeatedly targeted by the Arab bombers, still stood. Over one hundred bomb craters surrounded the church, but the building was still intact!

Far more important than the building, the congregation was enthusiastic in their worship. Their joy was infectious. Evidently the terror bombing campaign by the NIF government had failed in its attempts to devastate the vibrant Christian community. The purpose of our Sunday morning hike to this remote village was to encourage its beleaguered Christians to remain steadfast under fire. The local pastor told us that the people were very much encouraged to know that they were not alone, that they were not forgotten! However, their resilient faith and infectious joy under persecution may have encouraged us even more.

Shining Through

Delia created quite a sensation with her ministry amongst the women and children. They surrounded her and followed her, touching her arms and long straight hair and asking lots of questions. Several people said that she was the first woman missionary in the Nuba Mountains since the 1960's!

The women and children tend to be much neglected in Sudan. Because of the ongoing war and real dangers, the few missionaries who do come into Sudan are men. Culturally it is generally unacceptable for men to minister to women. So the little ministry that does take place is directed to the men. Meanwhile the women are walking many miles to carry water back to their villages, collecting and carrying the firewood, ploughing the fields, scattering the seeds, cultivating and harvesting the crops, preparing the food, and caring for the children.

When Delia offered meetings – just for the woman and children – the response was overwhelming. At first the men looked somewhat confused to be excluded from a “church meeting”, and a little lost to be without the women for a few hours. One old woman spoke fondly of the last woman missionary in their area – nearly forty years ago – and the great work she had done for them.

Delia had only just turned 20 years old. We celebrated her birthday in the field – with some ration packs and (in time honoured British tradition) with a cup of tea. Her tenacity and courage should be an encouragement to others to commit themselves to missionary training and service. And her example should also be a rebuke to those men who are too afraid to take the risks of serving Christ in a war zone.

Delia was converted to Christ on New Year's Day, 1998. Shortly after that, while working as an au-pair in London, she was shocked by the news of the terrible suffering in Sudan. Convinced that God was calling her to go and serve His people in Sudan she flew to Nairobi, Kenya. There she was robbed of all her money. Undaunted, she hitchhiked a ride on a charter aircraft up to Lokichoggio, the UN air base in Northern Kenya. From there she attempted to go into Sudan, perhaps on one of the UN C-130 air transports. However, at every turn she was frustrated. Finally someone suggested that if she wanted to get into Sudan she should return to Cape Town and join Frontline Fellowship! It seemed a long way to go to get into a country so close that she could actually see it, but there appeared to be no other way to reach this forbidden territory.

When Delia joined us she wanted to go into Sudan the next day. We laughed at her impetuosity, and put her to work in office administration during the day and street evangelism in Cape Town at night. Then we put her through numerous courses, outreaches and tests including St. Johns First Aid, Muslim evangelism, the Frontline Discipleship Training Course and various Field Worker camps and outreaches, including in KwaZulu. Despite her impatience to get into Sudan, Delia persevered through the prescribed training programmes until we deemed her ready for the field. By God's grace, Delia is now the youngest Frontline worker ever to be deployed in the field and also our first female mission worker in the Nuba Mountains.

What Makes a Missionary?

Of course a mission worker's training should not stop when they reach the field – in fact it must never stop. It takes an average of 2 years or more for a trainee field worker in Frontline Fellowship to qualify as a Field Worker. This training will include many courses such as: the Great Commission Course, Discipleship Training Course, Biblical Worldview Seminar, Muslim Evangelism Workshop, Evangelism Explosion III, First Aid courses, and participation in many outreaches including street evangelism, Muslim evangelism and Bible smuggling into restricted access countries. There are required reading lists, written assignments and practical tests. All of these are important components of a comprehensive programme to prepare effective missionaries for ministry in war torn, Muslim or Communist countries.

Frontline's selection and training procedure is fairly unique in its blend of intensive Biblical instruction and practical outreach within an apprenticeship programme.

Those who are easily upset by irritations, loss of sleep or unfair treatment and those who are moody and easily discouraged and depressed are not suitable for missions. Missionaries must be emotionally stable, and self disciplined.

In the mission field, relationship difficulties are often aggravated by high levels of stress, heat and cross-cultural frustration. The closeness of living, travelling and working conditions intensifies interpersonal conflicts. Missionaries tend to be strong-willed people, so potential clashes can undermine the mission team and projects. There are two major problems here: dependant people who need constant support and direction and sap the energy from a team;

and independent people who divert the team's energy as they pull one way and another to pursue their own agendas. Missionaries need to be inter-dependant (team players) relinquishing their own interests for the good of the team: Self-starters, self-reliant and self-sacrificing.

The harsh terrains, hot climates and primitive conditions of most mission fields require healthy and fit missionaries who can endure and be effective in adverse conditions. And who can cope with and recover from debilitating sicknesses.

It is amazing how many people volunteer for missions who have never done any ministry at home! It is essential for all missionaries to have extensive ministry experience at the home front before venturing into cross-cultural missions overseas.

Obstacles abound. Frustrations, disappointments and discouragement's are occupational hazards and part of our job description. Missionaries need endurance – a willingness and capacity to suffer hardships, discomfort, opposition and worse. Sacrificial service is more eloquent than many sermons.

Related Resources:-

[Faith under Fire in Sudan](#)
[3 Films on Sudan on 1 DVD](#)