

A joint Frontline Fellowship (FF) and Voice of the Martyrs (VOM) mission team to the Nuba Mountains was attacked by Government of Sudan (GOS) helicopter gunships on 4 March.

FF had been invited to join VOM on its first trip to the Nuba Mountains. VOM chartered the DC-3 aircraft and organised the relief packages of medicines, food and agricultural tools. FF supplied 1 500 Arabic Bibles (of which 680 were delivered on the first flight). Within 45 minutes of the mission team landing behind enemy lines in the war torn Nuba Mountains, two MI-24 Hind helicopter gunships came roaring over the airstrip.

Over 500 Nuba civilians had come to receive the relief aid and Bibles. There was much rejoicing and excitement. *"You're the first visitors we've ever had in this area. Nobody has ever brought us any aid before,"* they were told. They were still organising the aid distribution when the Muslim gunships came in low with twin 30 mm machine cannons blazing. As the crowd scattered, one bomb or rocket exploded in the middle of where the crowd had been. The gunships circled and made three strafing runs over the area. They systematically rocketed and shot wherever people were fleeing. Our team saw two Nuba women shredded by machine cannon fire.

More missiles were fired. Huge boulders were blown into pieces. As one MI-24 gunship came roaring across at tree top level with 30 mm machine cannons blazing, Steve could actually see the helmeted face of the pilot. The door gunner fired at Steve with a 14.5 mm machine gun. All around Steve the ground was churned up as he sprinted for cover. Bullets cracked and ricocheted alongside as he dived into a dry river bed and took cover.

As Scott ran towards the rocks, something seemed to trip him up and he fell heavily to the ground. Others later said that they clearly saw shrapnel from a missile fly right over him.

One terrified little boy was seen running and screaming as bullets literally churned up the ground all around him. Yet he ran through the gauntlet of flying metal and escaped unharmed. A pastor who witnessed it said that it was clearly a miracle of God's protection. Incredibly, only 2 had died in the vicious attack. Considering the vast amount of ordinance expended, it was hard to believe that so few had been hit.

Each helicopter made three or four attacks and left only when it seemed that they had fully expended all their ammunition, bombs and rockets.

Some SPLA soldiers then led the mission team up the mountain to a secure area controlled by the resistance movement. They explained that the Arabs had sent out a mechanised column of ground forces to wipe out our mission team, but the SPLA had ambushed them twice, delaying them effectively.

The local SPLA commander and a pastor welcomed our team warmly. They then organised their people to collect the scattered relief supplies and Arabic Bibles so that the distribution could be effectively carried out.

This was the beginning of an 8 day mission to the Nuba. During this time our missionaries saw GOS forces burning dozens of villages and amassed documentation and photographs of the systematic scorched earth "*combing*" policy of the Muslim government of Sudan, their terror bombings, slave raids and concentration camps.

For 3 consecutive days, from 21 to 23 February, GOS Antonov bombers had attacked the villages of Debri, Heiban, Ungurban and Buram counties. From 23 Feb to 2 March, GOS troops (transported by trucks and preceded by T-72 tanks and helicopter gunships) attacked the villages which had been bombed by the Antonovs. All the churches, schools and homes in these villages were set on fire and the livestock either looted or destroyed. On 28 February, nine Nuba women were kidnapped from a watering well at Kawkarya.

Everyday in the Nuba our team heard and saw villages being shelled by GOS artillery and bombed by GOS aircraft. The villages in Heiban country destroyed were: Toda, Elgoz, Nawli, Ere and Andreba (15 000 people displaced). The villages burnt down in Ungurban country included: Tendri, Teberi, Regafi, Kararya, Garoud El Hemid, Lopa and Lebies (25 000 people lost their homes in this scorched earth campaign). The villages burnt in Buram country were: Tabanya, Lado, Togodo and Romla (12 000 people were displaced from these villages).

When our missionaries asked the Nuba people what their needs were, they listed the following: Education (books and teacher training especially), Bibles and missionaries, clothes, anti-aircraft weapons, bore holes, food and medical supplies.

Our team walked over 120 miles, mostly at night, through the mountains and across valleys, between enemy garrisons and past burning villages to reach a secure landing strip in time for an evacuation by air.

Throughout their time in the Nuba mountains, our team was given the most gracious hospitality by the courageous and long suffering Nuba people and the local SPLA unit performed magnificently to protect and aid our missionaries. One FF team remains in Sudan for on-going ministry. Please continue to pray for them and for the suffering Christians of Southern Sudan and the Nuba Mountains.

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