

Frontline Fellowship has succeeded in delivering the largest shipments of Bibles and Christian books yet to the suffering Christians of Southern Sudan. Despite military offensives in the Nuba Mountains and in Western Equatoria, Frontline Fellowship mission teams delivered over 18 000 Bibles, Hymn books and other Christian books in 13 languages to churches in these areas. This was accomplished in defiance of the Islamic Government of Sudan's (GOS) flight bans, the no-fly zones and the prohibition against Bibles enforced by the United Nations (UN).

The Frontline Fellowship mission outreaches to Sudan from February to April were an appropriate way to celebrate the 15th anniversary of our mission.

The logistics were complicated – involving 5 field workers, a truck, motorbikes, bicycles, several charter aircraft, boats and lots of walking in order to distribute over 18 000 Bibles and other Christian books, in 13 languages, to 6 different regions of Sudan.

The various trips into Sudan were difficult – travelling over some of the harshest terrain imaginable. The heat was stifling – with temperatures of 48°C being recorded in the shade in the Nuba Mountains. The roads were treacherous, we suffered one motorbike accident and one vehicle we were driving needed to be extricated out of a donga. The river crossings were challenging and much of my ministry inside Sudan was accomplished while sick. Scott and Miriam also came down with various illnesses.

The outreaches were dangerous as Sudan is officially an Islamic country and it is involved in a vicious war with the Christian South. We had to fly in no-fly zones, in defiance of flight bans, and behind enemy lines. Much of our chaplaincy ministry was completed at the battlefield. Our team to the Nuba experienced the warm welcome of the government of Sudan and have some of the Muslim tracts (shrapnel from rockets) as souvenirs of this apparently preferred Islamic method of communication!

There were many obstacles which needed to be overcome. After the considerable logistical and mechanical preparations in Cape Town, our team began the 7 000 km drive overland to Sudan. At the first border post, Steve and Scott were harassed and delayed for 23 hours by Zimbabwean customs officials who demanded a 60% duty (tax) on all the (free) relief aid, medicines and Gospel literature being transported to Sudan! By God's Grace our team stood firm and persevered and ultimately bypassed this bureaucratic obstructionism. They travelled

over some of the most challenging roads and passed some of the most magnificent scenery.

## Medicine for the Soul

Finally, the two Frontline Fellowship field teams to Sudan linked up and distributed over 600 Bibles and New Testaments to the war wounded Sudanese patients in the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Hospital in Lokichoggio. Over a year previously I had received permission from Geneva to distribute Bibles to the Sudanese patients at the ICRC hospital. On that occasion the patients had almost trampled me underfoot as they eagerly and desperately clamoured for their copy of the Word of God in their own language.

Several months later another Frontline Fellowship team had attempted to distribute more Bibles to new patients at the hospital. The ICRC officials explained that the Muslim government of Sudan had complained about the Bible distribution and therefore they could no longer allow it!

As we had some medical equipment to donate to the Red Cross Hospital we were allowed to drive into their compound. While Miriam went off to deliver the medicines, Elton and Scott let some of the Sudanese patients know where they could obtain Bibles. Within minutes Steve and I were besieged by an enthusiastic mass of one legged and one armed patients pleading for a Bible in Dinka Bor, Zande, Bari, Nuer, Latuka, Madi or English. We couldn't distribute the Bibles fast enough. The excitement of the patients was electric. Some of the tall Sudanese men were dancing (on their crutches), raising their newly acquired Bibles high and singing a hymn of praise.

A Dutch ICRC official came to investigate the commotion and was plainly upset. I explained to her that we had come to deliver some medical equipment and when the patients saw that we had Bibles in our truck they had requested their own copies. *"Well, of course they'd want Bibles!"* she exploded. *"They're all Christians these Sudanese – all of them!"*

This expatriate had a Hindu charm around her neck and was clearly hostile to the chosen faith of the Southern Sudanese. We were requested to leave.

The next day we drove into Eastern Equatoria to deliver 500 Bibles to the pastors of Toriet and Bor. At one church we found 12 pastors (representing more than 100 Dinka congregations) providentially gathered together. They warmly welcomed our teams and provided valuable research. Each of the pastors looked forward to returning to their congregations with the

Scriptures and books we had provided.

Shortly after we returned to Lokichoggio an official from the Red Cross Hospital tracked our team down and urged us to return with more Bibles! Those patients who had not received a Bible were most upset and their discontent had forced the ICRC official to make a list of how many more Bibles were needed in the various languages. Our team promptly returned to the hospital with a further 136 Bibles – this time by official invitation!

On the night before we flew into Sudan, Frontline Fellowship hosted a special supper for the representatives of Open Doors and Voice of the Martyrs. It was a great time of fellowship and another example of how mission groups need to communicate in order to be more effective. Throughout the last 15 years Frontline Fellowship has continuously strived to network and co-operate with other ministries. We have recruited and trained many workers for other missions. We have provided many photographs and research reports for other missions. We have often taken workers from other organisations into new areas and introduced them to our established contacts. We have organised vast quantities of Bibles and other Gospel literature for other ministries and engaged in many co-operative ventures.

One example of this inter-mission co-operation is how six ministries have had a part in the shipping of a 20 ton container of baby food to Sudan. Gerber donated the food, Christ For Humanity designated the consignment to Frontline Fellowship and arranged with International Christian Aid to ship the food container to Kenya. Voice of the Martyrs cleared the shipment through customs, Operation Nehemiah transported the consignment to Lokichoggio and there delivered it to our local representative. Now Frontline Fellowship needs to transport the baby food into Western Equatoria and see that it is carefully distributed to the displaced people.

As Steve and Scott prepared for their trip to the Nuba Mountains, Elton, Miriam and I loaded our charter aircraft with over 4 500 Bibles, Hymn and Prayer books and other Christian books. We also took with us an off-road motorbike, two mountain bicycles and equipment, tools and paint for the restoration of a hospital and field clinic. We took off early in the morning while it was still dark. It was an awe inspiring sight to cross the mighty Nile river shortly after sunrise.

There was an enthusiastic crowd to welcome us when we landed in Western Equatoria. There were embraces and lots of handshakes as we exchanged news and sorted out our cargo. The bikes soon came in very useful as we began our varied ministries in the town.

Civil, military and church leaders gathered for the official opening of the Medical Workshop where our Registered Nurse, Miriam, was to train 17 medical orderlies and nurses. Elton organised a team of cleaners, carpenters and painters to repair and restore the Hospital for War Wounded. Elton also painted the Chaplains' Office at the military base.

I conducted various chaplaincy services for the local SPLA unit and presented lectures on the Christian Work Ethic and Grace, Faith and Works. We also delivered boxes of Bibles and Christian books to local churches, the Bible College, the Chaplains' Office, and to the local police and prison.

## **A Thousand Tongues to Sing**

It was a privilege for us to deliver a thousand copies of the new Zande Hymn Book to the Maridi Diocese. On a later flight we delivered 2 660 Zande Bibles for the Yambio and Maridi Diocese.

Frontline Fellowship had also sponsored the printing of the new Moru Hymn Book and Moru Prayer Book. It was a special joy for us to deliver a thousand copies of the Moru Hymn Book and Prayer book to the pastors of Mundri Diocese. There was much rejoicing and many of the pastors publicly expressed their gratitude to those friends of Frontline Fellowship who had literally enabled "a thousand tongues to sing our great Redeemer's praise"!

We were shown some of the disintegrating remains of the only available previous Hymn and Prayer Books, which had been paperback. They had clearly been well used! The new Hymn and Prayer Books sponsored by Frontline Fellowship are tough, quality hardcover books – each stitched and bound by hand. These will last for a long time.

On Sunday we conducted 5 services – including a special children's service by the burnt out remains of the Episcopal church. The church building had been destroyed by a helicopter gunship attack.

We sorted out the medical supplies and equipment which had been donated by friends of Frontline Fellowship and visited the field clinic which had been established by a previous team.

Twenty-one field medics gathered for the Medical Training Course. Many of the medics had walked from the battlefield, several had walked for 3 or more days to participate in the course. Miriam dealt with Vital Signs, Infection Control, First Aid (Breathing, Bleeding, Breakage's and Burns), IV Fluids, Shock, Chest Wounds, Abdominal Wounds, Field Sanitation, Heat-stroke, Snake Bites, Injections and Medications.

Elton presented an evangelistic message to the medics and many of them responded by committing their lives to Christ. I contributed some discipleship lectures and Bible studies. On some nights we sat around the camp fire discussing a wide variety of medical and spiritual questions.

Half of the Medics had attended the First Aid Workshop which I had presented last year. Most of them understood English, however the course had to be translated into Arabic for those who struggled. They related how they have had to stitch up abdominal wounds with ordinary needles and thread – without any anaesthetics, pain killers, antibiotics or anti-inflammatories! It was good to entrust the boxes of medicines and equipment into the hands of these diligent, innovative and battle-proven medics.

At a special service attended by the local civil, church and military leaders, we presented medical textbooks and handbooks to those who had excelled in the course. Badges were awarded to all who passed the written examination. The commander impressed upon the men that they are the beginning of the new Medical Corps of the SPLA forces. They had a vital responsibility to train others to care for the wounded – whether civilians or soldiers, enemies or friends: *“You must present prompt and efficient medical care even for captured enemy troops. You are to be Christian medics,”* he said.

Straight after the formal conclusion of the course we drove the medics to the new clinic near the battlefield which Frontline Fellowship has helped restore. There we delivered the men with their medicines and held a dedication service for the Field Clinic.

## **Motorbike Mission**

While Miriam was conducting the Field Medic Training Course, Elton and I were travelling each day, often by motorbike, up to the Yei battlefield. There we conducted chaplaincy services and

distributed Bibles amongst the SPLA soldiers in the forward trenches.

It was an exhilarating experience to worship the Lord Jesus Christ with hundreds of enthusiastic soldiers as they joyfully raised high the newly acquired Bibles and books and cheered. The distinctive Christian flag with the red cross on the blue square on white flapped in the wind as the SPLA soldiers wholeheartedly sang songs of praise.

The commander stepped forward and raised his AK-47 assault rifle. The men chanted some slogan. Then he raised a copy of the Dinka Bor New Testament and the men cheered. As the commander lifted up a copy of Faith Under Fire in Sudan the soldiers cheered enthusiastically.

The commander expressed their appreciation for Christian friends who prayed and who spoke up for them in their struggle for survival. *“The Muslim government is trying to destroy the Church,”* he said. *“We are fighting for freedom of religion. We are not only fighting for freedom for Christians but for all people. Not even the Muslims enjoy freedom in Sudan. No Muslim is free to change his religion. We are fighting for freedom for both Muslims and Christians. Freedom to know the Word of God and to obey it.”* It was a special joy to proclaim God's Word to these people.

Unfortunately, I was sick with a fever for the last 2 weeks of this trip, but I could not let that interfere with the wonderful privilege of proclaiming the Word of God to such enthusiastic and receptive people. I just swallowed the medicines and kept pushing myself every day.

Sometimes we could hear the sounds of fighting as the SPLA exchanged gunfire with nearby government forces. On a couple of occasions we heard and saw Antonov bombers flying by. We met with soldiers who had deserted the government forces and come over to fight for the South.

Our ministry in the area coincided with a dramatic new offensive by the SPLA. In a series of bold lightning strikes the SPLA succeeded in capturing the strategic towns of Kaya, Yei, Lainya and Kajokeji. By the end of March the SPLA had liberated 24 towns and had killed, wounded or captured 16 000 GOS troops. They had also captured a vast quantity of weapons and ammunition, including tanks and anti-aircraft batteries.

The SPLA victories provoked the GOS to place a total flight ban on the area we were

ministering in. This presented potential problems for our flights which were bringing in other team members and the next shipments of Bibles. However, by the grace of God, every one of our varied flights (although all were illegal and risked being intercepted by the GOS airforce) succeeded in breaching the blockade against Bibles. By the end of March we had safely delivered over 11 000 Bibles and other Christian books in 13 languages to 5 regions.

Elton and I, and later Steve and Scott when they had returned from the Nuba Mountains, used the bicycles and motorbikes to good effect. We crossed rivers and fair distances to deliver boxes of Bibles and preach the Word in remote areas. It was on the return trip from one of these outreaches that Scott and I were injured as our motorbike came crashing down on a treacherous stretch of a rocky road. Scott now had cuts in both of his legs – one from the gunshot attack and the other now from the bike spill. I lost a chunk of meat out of my elbow and was bleeding profusely. I most certainly regretted not wearing my customary leather jacket that day! But we still had hours of travelling ahead of us that day, and the sun was going down so we just had to patch up and press on.

## **Breaching Blockades**

Following the completion of our chaplaincy, medical and Bible distribution work in Western Ekuatoria, Steve, Scott and Elton drove through Uganda to deliver other shipments of Bibles into Sudan. This required travelling with Ugandan military escorts who had to fight their way through various ambushes by the L.R.A. guerillas in northern Uganda. They successfully delivered a shipment to rejoicing Sudanese Christians and at the time of writing are busy attempting to get through a further shipment.

The recent SPLA victories have, at last, opened the road to Uganda for relief supplies and Bibles to be driven into Ekuatoria. The GOS stranglehold on Western Ekuatoria has been broken. The ban on Bibles will now be almost impossible for the GOS to enforce. However, the GOS surrogates in Northern Uganda, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) still threaten the life-line as they continue their reign of terror and ambush relief and mission vehicles en-route to Southern Sudan.

Dr Peter Hammond

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